

The exhibition's title, *Eyes that Listen, Ears that See*, points to the most striking parallel in their work: both John Cage and Joseph Beuys radically changed conventional modes of perception in their respective practices. From the very beginning, Cage's compositional work was closely intertwined with the visual arts, while the acoustic played an essential role in Beuys's sculptural thinking. Their approaches were not limited to a purely aesthetic dimension but strived to transform human consciousness and inspire social change.

The earliest indication of Joseph Beuys's engagement with John Cage's oeuvre is the 1959 drawing *The Teacher of John Cage*. A year earlier, in 1958, Cage had given his groundbreaking lecture series on *Composition as Process* at the Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music: lectures that would mark the development of the philosophy of music, and which would become the most controversial event to ever take place at the Darmstadt festival. Fascinated by Cage's ideas, South Korean-born American artist Nam June Paik later stated about their first meeting: 'My life began one evening in August 1958 in Darmstadt. 1957 was 1 BC (Before Cage).'



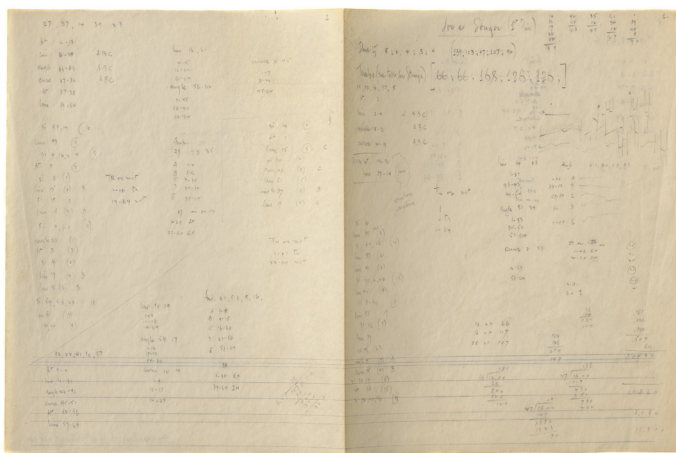
Reiner Ruthenbeck, *John Cage during his concert at FESTUM FLUXORUM FLUXUS*, at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, 2 February 1963., 1963. Photography.

Beuys in the 1960s. During this period, Nam June Paik became a mutual friend of both artists – and a frequent artistic collaborator.

In 1963, Joseph Beuys, together with George Maciunas and Nam June Paik, organised the *FESTUM FLUXORUM FLUXUS*. This two-day event took place in the auditorium of the Düsseldorf Art Academy, where Beuys was a professor at the time. Often overlooked in the historical accounts of the event, John Cage gave a concert which was documented in photographs by Reiner Ruthenbeck, on view in the exhibition. For Beuys, who performed his first-ever actions at the festival, *FLUXUS* provided decisive impulses for his burgeoning performative practice.

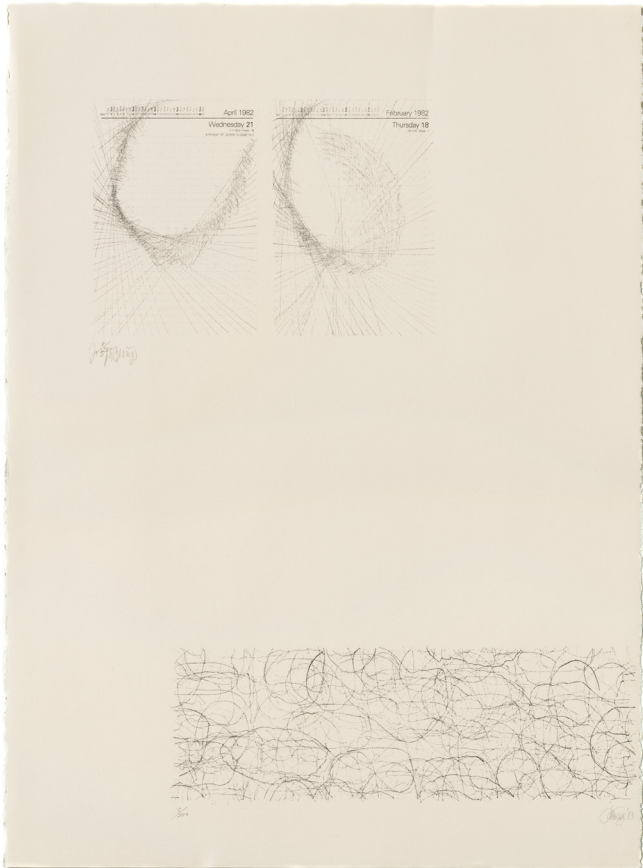
Two decades later, in the early 1980s, the artistic exchange between Joseph Beuys and John Cage intensified again. Both artists dedicated works to each other, including Cage's aforementioned birthday present to Beuys, and the drawing *Quanten* from 1945, which Beuys inscribed with the words 'to John Cage with love and admiration', before releasing it as a multiple in 1982.

In 1984, John Cage and Joseph Beuys created their only collaborative work, *Orwell-Sheet*, a print published by Nam June Paik as a multiple, in reference to George Orwell's dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The proceeds were intended to help finance Paik's international satellite TV 'installation' *Good Morning Mr Orwell* (1984), which would reach an audience of over 25 million viewers worldwide. *Orwell-Sheet* juxtaposes a motif from Beuys's *Words Which Can Hear* series with a drawing from Cage's



John Cage, *Music score For a Singer*, not dated. Pencil on transparent paper, folded twice, all sides written on inside and outside, 4 pages. 27.8 x 43.2 cm (10.94 x 17.01 in).

The impact of John Cage's performances went far beyond music into the visual arts and art theory. Excerpts from the single existing tape recording of these lectures can be experienced within the exhibition as a complementary sound layer. Regarded as a pivotal moment in the history of music, Cage's presence in Darmstadt was also the initial spark for the *FLUXUS* movement in Germany, which became an essential point of contact between Cage and



Joseph Beuys and John Cage, *Orwell-Sheet*, 1984.
Offset on laid paper. 76.5 x 57 cm (30.12 x 22.44 in).

Ryoanji cycle (1983). A selection of works from both of these remarkable series is shown in the exhibition alongside *Orwell-Sheet* itself. The delicate and dense works on paper highlight the artists' respective understanding of language and communication; for both Beuys and Cage, experimenting with language was a key concern in their practice.

For Joseph Beuys speaking and thinking were a form of sculpture, and he understood sound and language as material. He stated: 'Language is particularly sculptural in that it involves movement. So what the mouth does with speech; this is also real sculpture – that you can't physically see, but the air is moulded, the throat is moulded, the mouth articulates [...] The ear must be seen as a three-dimensional organ. Thus, I come to the logical conclusion that the ear is more capable of perceiving plasticity than the eye. The eye [...] grasps the form, but the ear picks up what is intrinsically sculptural. For me, thinking is sculpture.' In Beuys's concept of *Social Sculpture*, words provide a means for change. *Words Which Can Hear* conveys his insistence on the two-way operation of the sender-receiver relationship: 'Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow.'

Cage's *Ryoanji* series exemplifies his so-called 'visual language of indeterminacy.' Inspired by the Zen rock garden in Kyoto, these drawings were created with the use of so-called 'chance operations'. True to his credo: 'acceptance instead of composition' he opened the compositional process, allowing random events to function within a pre-determined structure. What Cage called 'purposeful purposelessness' was in effect a radical renunciation of all intentionality, the abolition of any imposed order and hierarchy, and the disempowerment of the composer. For Cage, who was also a prolific writer, this meant: 'The demilitarisation of language: a serious musical concern.' Language was to be liberated from its purely utilitarian function by freeing it from its hierarchical syntax.

For both Joseph Beuys and John Cage, it was essential that all senses and materials weighed equally in their artistic processes, including speaking and listening, sound and silence. This exhibition retraces – through an exploration of their work apart and together – the central concern that they shared: that of overcoming the distinction between art and life.



Joseph Beuys, *Untitled (Words Which Can Hear)*, Undated (c.1975).
Pencil on calendar pages, 15 sheets framed together.
Each sheet 12.7 x 9 cm (5 x 3.54 in).



Reiner Ruthenbeck, *Joseph Beuys (r.) and John Cage during Cage's concert at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, 2 February 1963.*, 1963. Photography.

About the artists

Joseph Beuys was born in 1921 in Krefeld, Germany. In 1961 he was appointed professor of monumental sculpture at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, where he became an inspiring and charismatic figure for an emerging generation of German artists. During this period, he became a member of the newly founded *FLUXUS* Group, an international network of artists from nearby Wuppertal. In the 1970s, his activities became explicitly politicised. He founded the Free International University (FIU) for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research, as well as the Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum, and later became involved with the German Green Party. His monumental retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1979 established Beuys's international reputation. Since the artist's death in 1986, his work has been shown in numerous museum exhibitions around the world, including at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. A varied programme of exhibitions, performances, lectures and events marked the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth in 2021.

Widely considered the most influential composer of our time, **John Cage's** (1912-1992) inventive and unorthodox approach revolutionised contemporary music. His influence extended across a range of artistic spheres, encompassing visual art and dance.

In 1930, after extensive travels in Europe, he began to study music in the USA under Richard Buhling, Adolf Weiss, Henry Cowell and most importantly, Arnold Schönberg. He later on studied Zen Buddhism with Daisetz Taiatro Suzuki, which became a major influence on his compositional thinking. Cage is largely credited with the establishment of experimentalism in music in the 1950s, he was a great inspiration for conceptualist artists and *FLUXUS* in the 1960s. One of Cage's most significant contributions to music was his use of chance operations, epitomised by his piece *4'33"* (1952), in which performers do not play their instruments for the duration of the piece, drawing attention to the ambient sounds of the environment as part of the music. This work challenged conventional notions of music and silence, radically pushing the boundaries of what could be considered musical performance.

Throughout his career, Cage was a prolific writer and lecturer, sharing his ideas with a broader audience. He had a profound influence on several generations of artists and maintained friendships and collaborations with influential figures in these various fields, including Marcel Duchamp, Merce Cunningham and Robert Rauschenberg. From the 1940s onwards, he taught at the Chicago School of Art, at Black Mountain College and at the New School of Social Research in New York. In the academic year 1988-89 he gave the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures at Harvard University. Cage received numerous prizes and awards for his work, among these an Honorary Doctorate at the California Institute of the Arts (1986) and the Kyoto Prize awarded by the city of Kyoto (1989). John Cage died in New York in 1992.

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