

Press release, 15 Nov. 2018

New Acquisition for MMK Collection: Joseph Beuys's *Boxing Match for Direct Democracy*



The MUSEUM^{MMK} FÜR MODERNE KUNST is pleased to announce the acquisition of the work *Boxing Match for Direct Democracy* (1972) by Joseph Beuys for the museum collection, and thus a further enhancement to the group of works by the artist already in the MMK holdings.

On the occasion of the documenta 5 taking place in Kassel in 1972 under the artistic direction of Harald Szeemann (with assistance from Jean-Christophe Ammann), a boxing match was staged at the Museum Fridericianum on the last day of the exhibition. The contenders in this closing documenta action were Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) and Abraham David Christian (b. 1952), a young art student of Kassel. In 1972, Beuys – who had figured prominently in all documenta exhibitions from 1964 onward –, had moved his Düsseldorf information office of the *Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum* to Kassel for 100 days. He was in attendance at the office throughout this period, untiringly discussing the party system and the issue of direct democracy by referendum with the exhibition visitors. In this context he stated: “To engage in discussion is also an art form”, and in general he referred to “language as the first form of sculpture”. To Beuys, who always conceived of the museum as a venue for the ongoing exchange of views, the *Office for Direct Democracy* was his artistic contribution and the realization of his expanded concept of art as “social sculpture”.

The sculptor Abraham David Christian, likewise a native of Düsseldorf, had already challenged Beuys to a boxing match during a heated argument early on in the documenta 5. The match finally took place in the so-called *Thinking Room* by concept and nouveau realiste artist Ben Vautier at 3.00 pm on 8 October 1972. A classical boxing ring had been set up on a low platform at the centre of the room. The two opponents fought bare-chested, wearing boxing gloves. Christian also wore a leather head guard and a gumshield; Beuys remained unprotected except for the mitts. Before a large and enthusiastic crowd of spectators, he ultimately won the three-round match by scoring

the most points.

The sculpture that came out of this action – *Boxing Match for Direct Democracy* – consists of a display case made of zinc sheet, measuring just 40 cm in height at a width of 515 cm and holding the relics of the boxing match. It set precedents for the documenta works of Joseph Beuys, who like no other artist contributed to shaping this major art exhibition until 1986. The socio-political approach he adopted in the early 1970s can be regarded as a yardstick for all subsequent documenta exhibitions up to the very present.

In 1978, Beuys remarked as follows on the boxing match: "I'm a fighter in general. Of course, in an age like the one we live in, in which man is geared for true freedom, this fight has to be different from ever before in history. It has to be shifted entirely inward; it has to be a fight of ideas, of the mind. Every other fight is a senseless fight. If I fight a boxing match, for example, like at the documenta 1972, then it's a boxing match for direct democracy. In other words: a fight situation is played out for a few spectators. But symbolically, it expresses nothing other than this fight for a humane future." (Joseph Beuys in conversation with Gerd Courts, *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, 1978)

The MMK's Beuys holdings comprise the late work *Lightning with Stag in Its Glare* (1958–1985) as well as extensive series of photographs by Abisag Tüllman on the *Iphigenie/Titus Andronicus* action (1969) carried out by Beuys in Frankfurt, and by Hildegard Weber on the *Stag Monuments* (1986). Walter Cuntze's ten-minute film documentary *Boxing Match for Direct Democracy by Referendum* (1972), the Beuys print *Democracy is Funny* (1973) and the *Rose for Direct Democracy* (1973) are likewise in the museum collection.

This purchase for the MMK collection was made possible by support from the Hessische Kulturstiftung, Kulturstiftung der Länder, Ernst Max von Grunelius-Stiftung, Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung, ING, Deka and Freunde des MMK.

Press reception

The museum will present the new acquisition on Friday, 16 November at 6.00 pm within the framework of an evening event.

After welcoming addresses by Boris Rhein (Hessian Minister of Science and Art), Prof Dr Markus Hilgert (Secretary General of the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States), Eva Claudia Scholtz (Executive Director of the Cultural Foundation of Hesse) and Susanne Pfeffer (Director of the MMK), Dr Mario Kramer (Head of the MMK Collection) will give an introduction to the new acquisition.

Representatives of the press are cordially invited to attend the event.

In the current exhibition at the MUSEUM^{MMK}, the new acquisition will be on display until the end of March 2019.

Illustration

Joseph Beuys, *Boxing Match for Direct Democracy*, 1972, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2018, photo: Axel Schneider

Press photos

Press photos are available for downloading on our website at www.mmk.art/de/about/press/

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