

If we wish to reignite the process of social imagination, and thus the very possibility of systemic political change in the direction of greater emancipation, we must be able to think of a space that allows such recognition, beyond the smoothing waves of the current reality-system.

Federico Campagna (2018, 192)¹



01 Dec 2021 – 18 Mar 2022

BEUYS OPEN SOURCE

Participating artists include:

Carla Åhlander, Mikael D. Brkic, Dan Coopey, Rafael Pérez Evans, Laura Ní Fhlaibhín, Johanna M. Guggenberger, Steph Huang, Daniel Huss, Susanne Kriemann, Elisabeth Molin, Joel Tomlin and Abbas Zahedi.



belmacz

Belmacz ■ 45 Davies Street • London W1K 4LX ▲
+44 (0)20 7629 7863 ■ gallery@belmacz.com •
www.belmacz.com

Born, May 12, 1921; lived forever after, January 23, 1986.

Joseph Beuys was and continues to be a somewhat contentious figure. Typecast as a capital 'A' *Artist* — a self-anointed, genius, on the brink of divinity — Beuys also fulfills the criteria of a *maverick*: someone who is unorthodox and independently-minded.

Today, when applied to an individual, this term connotes a leader, or at least, some kind of dynamic figurehead — a politician perhaps? Indeed, in an age of... well, you know... those unorthodox (uncouth) and independently-minded (nationalistic) character-istics associated with the leaders of certain nation-state seem to recall those criticisms too easily thrown at Beuys, the *maverick*. Specifically, how shock and spectacle came to foreground a persona, in turn diminishing any political work. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (2011; 559) sketches the parallel nicely when he describes Beuys' practice as one with a radical orientation, one that pushed towards a new beginning, but one that did not allow for the necessary mourning of a recent past.²

Lest we forget Beuys' *politic*: that construction of life he aspired to set in motion. Rooted in the mythos of magic, of art, and of various cultural expressions, Beuys' vision (whether we see this as 'good,' 'bad,' or are indifferent to it) shifted boundaries. *Soziale Plastik* (Social Sculpture), The Free International University, the Organisation for Direct Democracy, and the commitment to 'city forest-ation instead of city administration' are some of the name-checkable political projects that could be cited as evidence for *the new beginning* Beuys was looking to create. Here, through modes of assembly, active participation was caressed as a way to "reshape society and history."³ In other words, it was through the sculpting of human relations that Beuys' sought to enable a shift in our reality-system. What was perhaps lacking in Beuys' philosophy of participation, however, was an understanding that reality transcends politics, and any conflagration of the two too easily ends up as cultural propaganda.⁴

Now on the 100-year anniversary of Beuys' birth, what could be gleaned from the politic he wished to establish? Is there a way to transcend the dichotomies of identity politics and cultural propaganda apparent in most maverick social enterprises (those associations that reverberate with conceptions of Beuys' as *the* artist / shaman / politician / professor)?

Not an exhibition in homage, *Beuys Open Source* treats the legacy of Joseph Beuys as something of a publicly accessible data set. Working with this twenty-first century metaphor involves seeing the *Artist* not as a political figure but as someone with far more social sway in our contemporary age: the startup CEO. That is, the founder of something innovative; the boss with skittish determination; the convener of bodies, who together can defy normalcy to materialise fantasy. Here, we are reminded that epistemologically both mysticism and symbolism — two words steeped in Beuysian associations — have common roots in that which is collectively agreed, believed, and followed.

Taking the project of assembly as a catalyst, *Beuys Open Source* intends to act as a site of fabulation; a (non)ground for speculative conversations; an open-plan office of sorts, where Beuysian 'source code' can be mined, traded, and debated anew. As an exhibition built with prefiguration as a conceptual core, the artists brought together each embraces the potentials of differing *materials* and *moments* — from found objects to folk-law — constructing around these rich narratives, falsies, and conspiracies; in turn, the artists (together and/or alone) echo the *Geist* of Beuys' without the spectacular ultimatum of *the* new beginning.

¹ Federico Campagna (2018). *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*. Bloomsbury. London.

² Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, in Hal Foster et al. (2011 [2016]). *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. London. Thames and Hudson. p 556–561.

³ Peter R. Kalb (2013). *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*. London. Laurence King. p 29.

⁴ Federico Campagna (2018). *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*. Bloomsbury. London.

I Like South America and South America Likes Me

On the occasion of *Beuys Open Source*, a subterranean satellite, curated by Dan Coopey will unpack in Belmacz's lower ground space. Titled *I Like South America and South America Likes Me* this exhibition within an exhibition sees echoes in the societal schisms that fuelled Beuys over-acclaimed performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) and contemporary divides in the Brazilian socio-political state. Rather than an appropriative strategy, *I Like South America and South America Likes Me* gives impetus to Brazilian artists, foregrounding their thinking around that which could be learned from Beuys' ideas of artistic healing.

In a similar performative echo, each of the works included in *I Like South America and South America Likes Me* will be brought to the UK in Coopey's carry-on luggage. A gesture alluding to the UK's own divisions of people.

Artists include:
Bruno Baptisteli
Anderson Borba
Paloma Bosquê
André Felipe Cardoso
Janina McQuoid
and Yuli Yamagate.