

Joseph Beuys – “Beethovens Küche”

A photographic documentation by Brigitte Dannehl

A special exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus Bonn
in conjunction with the
Schloss Moyland Museum Foundation/Joseph Beuys Archives

2nd September – 18th November 2005



Joseph Beuys, Aktion „Brennender Gully“, 1969
Foto: Brigitte Dannehl, Köln, Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2005

On 4th October 1969 Joseph Beuys created a work known as “Beethovens Küche”, which existed only for a few hours in and outside his studio in Düsseldorf. The work in three parts was only recently rediscovered by the Joseph Beuys Archives/Schloss Moyland Museum Foundation and is now the subject of a documentary exhibition in the Beethoven-Haus Bonn, with photographs by Brigitte Dannehl. This research and exhibition project was prompted by the purchase of Brigitte Dannehl’s photos for the collection of the Joseph Beuys Archives, an organisation formed to index and expand the archive’s inventory, as well as to undertake scientific research into Joseph Beuys’ work.

Room 12

“Beethovens Küche” in the film “Ludwig van”

The complex three-part work “Beethovens Küche” existed only for a single day. The work was created for the film

“Ludwig van” by the Argentine composer Mauricio Kagel, who was commissioned by WDR Television to prepare a film for Beethoven’s anniversary year in 1970. The film includes a visit to Beethoven’s birthplace in Bonn, followed by a visit to an imaginary house belonging to him. The rooms of this house were created by various artists and in addition to Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, Dieter Roth and Stefan Wewerka worked on Mauricio Kagel’s project.

On the day of shooting, 4th October 1969, the whole of Beuys’ studio was turned into “Beethovens Küche”. Beuys created a substantial installation and also gave two short performances in front of the studio: “Brennender Gully” and “Totenmaske Napoleons”.

Apart from Mauricio Kagel’s film, the photographs taken by the Cologne graphic artist and photographer Brigitte Dannehl provide the only existing pictorial documentation of Joseph Beuys’ work “Beethovens Küche”. After being on display in Schloss Moyland Museum, they are now being shown in the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn, the original subject of Beuys’ work.

On the monitor by the window in this room you can watch an excerpt from Mauricio Kagel’s Film “Ludwig van” which shows “Beethovens Küche”

Room 7

Main themes of “Beethovens Küche”

The themes “music” and “kitchen” were not only specified for Kagel’s film, but they are also important themes which run through the whole of Beuys’ work. It was therefore only logical that he should take over the kitchen for the imaginary Beethoven House, through which the spectator is led by a guide in servant’s clothing.

Foodstuffs and kitchen utensils are to be found in many of Beuys’ works. In “Beethovens Küche” he employs among other things a sausage, a bone, a cooker and a saucepan. For Beuys, food represents a natural and vitally important source of energy, and, in the sense of his “Plastic Theory”, stands for a variety of transformational processes which take place during cooking.

Similarly, musical instruments played a central role for Beuys throughout his life. For instance he incorporates a long-play-

ing record with a sausage as the pick-up arm, as well as a toy trumpet, into his installation for “Beethovens Küche”.

Throughout his childhood Beuys showed an interest in music. He played piano and cello in the school orchestra, whose repertoire contained among others works by Ludwig van Beethoven. Musical structures and various instruments were incorporated into his actions from the early nineteen-sixties. However, there is no real evidence that Beuys had a particular affinity for Ludwig van Beethoven and his works, in contrast with his open appreciation of the music of Richard Wagner, Alexander Skrjabin, Erik Satie or John Cage. At the same time he did clearly show his great respect for Ludwig van Beethoven’s work as a composer when he remarked that he did not admire him for no reason.

The central element of the installation for “Beethovens Küche” is a volume, which contains piano sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven and which was given to Beuys as a present in 1961.

It lies open in the oven, which together with the bed upon which it stands, forms the nucleus of the installation. The piano sonata in D-major opus 10, no. 3 can be recognised.



Joseph Beuys, „Installation mit Bett, Herd und Hörnern“, 1969
Foto: Brigitte Dannehl, Köln, Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2005

The arrangement of the many objects in the installation was changed several times on 4th October 1969 and Beuys also relocated the volume. Propped up by his two works "The Horns 1962" and "Horn 1969", it is then open in such a way that the piano sonata "Pathétique" in C-minor opus 13 is visible.

The horns which Beuys mounted on the wall of his studio evoke a picture of the ear trumpets upon which Beethoven became dependent due to his progressive deafness.

In the showcases in the centre of the room objects from the Beethoven-Haus collections are on display which can be linked with the central themes of Joseph Beuys' work: documents concerning Beethoven's attitude towards Napoleon and towards his own deafness, ear trumpets belonging to the composer and editions of Beethoven's piano sonatas which Beuys incorporated into his installation.

Hermann Joseph Abs Chamber Music Room

"Beethovens Küche" on 4th October 1969

"Beethovens Küche": The Action "Brennender Gully"

In Kagel's film "Ludwig van", the 3½ minute film sequence on "Beethovens Küche" begins with the action "Brennender Gully". Flames are seen shooting out of the gully in the yard in front of Joseph Beuys' studio. Only the flames are to be seen in the film, whereas with her photographs Brigitte Dannehl has also documented Joseph Beuys' preparations. The action is finished when Beuys smothers the flames with the lid of a saucepan. This lid also provides the link to the installation of "Beethovens Küche".

With the picture of flames blazing out of the earth Beuys conjures up a number of references to human, cultural and spiritual history. For instance the discovery and conscious use of fire enabled man to create warmth and light and to prepare food. The communal hearth was a meeting-place which facilitated social development. For Beuys warmth is a physical and spiritual entity which is a vital feature of his theory of "Social Sculpture". The regenerative power of fire and flame plays an important role in Beuys' visions of a changing society.

"Beethovens Küche": The Installation

For "Beethovens Küche" Joseph Beuys created in his studio a four-part installation and also made arrangements of objects, some of which he changed during filming. The centre piece of the installation is a wooden bed on which lie objects such as the "Acoustic Filter 1962", the "Silent Gramophone 1962 II", the "Horns 1962" and an oven containing a volume of piano sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven. All these objects are connected with music and the kitchen. This is also true of the objects arranged on the floor and hung on the studio walls.



Joseph Beuys, Action "Totenmaske Napoleons", 1969
Foto: Brigitte Dannehl, Köln, Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2005

"Beethovens Küche": The Action "Totenmaske Napoleons"

In the action which closes "Beethovens Küche", Joseph Beuys appears with his face hidden by a plaster-cast of Napoleon Bonaparte's death mask and uttering his accustomed "Ö, Ö" sounds.

The use of Napoleon's death mask provides a link not only to the French Revolution, but also to Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven saw Napoleon as one of the most important executors of the ideals of the French Revolution and wanted to dedicate his Third Symphony in E-flat major ("Eroica") to him. When Napoleon crowned himself emperor, Beethoven revoked the dedication in disappointment over the change of political course.

The French Revolution with its cry of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" played a fundamentally important role in Beuys' artistic work. Through Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical theory of "threefold social order", the principles of the French Revolution found their way into ideas for social reform as expressed in Beuys' "Social Sculpture" and "Broader Concept of Art". At the same time, with the "Ö, Ö" sounds as used in many of his performances, he is clearly formulating his critical stance towards a non-reflective, bourgeois appreciation of music.

"Beethovens Küche" as part of the complete works of Joseph Beuys

Forms of artistic expression such as "actions", installations, showcase displays and the arrangement of objects are central to Beuys' work and are all to be found in "Beethovens Küche". At first glance it would appear that in using the themes of kitchen and music Beuys is following guidelines specified for the film "Ludwig van", but upon closer examination it becomes clear that these themes are deeply rooted in his work as an artist. For instance warmth, fire, eating and cooking, victuals, music and the French Revolution in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte are recurring concepts in Joseph Beuys' art.

"Beethovens Küche" is undoubtedly an important integral part of Joseph Beuys' Œuvres of the late Sixties and early Seventies and through this exhibition and its catalogue can now be recognised as such.

Dr. Bettina Paust

(Director of the Joseph Beuys Archives /
Schloss Moyland Museum Foundation)

Beethoven-Haus Bonn

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until 31.10.2005: Mon-Sat 10-18 hrs, Sun 11-18 hrs

from 1.11.2005: Mon-Sat 10-17 hrs, Sun 11-17 hrs

www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de