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By Katherine TWEEDIE

*Traces of man interest me very much, whether it's architecture or interiors or just a street or sign. There has to be a connection between nature and man in my photographs.* (GABOR SZILASI)

### EDITORIAL

By Andrée PARADIS

Our hundredth issue proposes to reflect the spirit of celebration produced by the duration of an experience and its fidelity to original objectives.

In the first issue, which appeared in January-February 1956, the body of editors, conscious of "the profound renaissance that is affecting not only the world of forms and colours but also and particularly the very spirit of the work of art", undertook to sustain, to foster the expansion of this climate that was in reality more revolutionary than renascent. This they hoped to do by establishing through the means of an art magazine a close contact between artists and the public; that is, between the producers and the consumers of the artistic object. This appropriately cultural rôle that *Vie des Arts* intended to play was directed toward all the elements of human culture. Gérard Morisset, the first director of the publication, conceived it in this way at the beginning: "Our magazine, therefore, will essentially be an organ of information, as wide and as complete as possible. All the artistic disciplines will have their part in it, those of the past as well as those of the present. Current trends will be the object of a careful and impartial study; because *Vie des Arts* is in no way directed against any group of artists but, rather, toward a greater comprehension of art. At the time when the rift is being widened between a certain art that is legitimate and a certain public which asks only to understand but does not always have the power to do so, it is not the moment for a more or less fruitless quarrel but, instead, for educational action. To make the work of art understood, to make it felt"

This was our line of conduct during the last quarter of the century, when we tried above all to adapt ourselves to the conditions of the technical system that defines our societies and that imposes on an art magazine the duty of being the mirror of modernity. There remains the liberty of confronting this modernity and re-establishing balances while attempting to escape the limits of an extremist intellectualization, responsible for varied orientations of the ways of creation. Among our functions is that of explaining the phenomenon more than supporting it, and we have above all sought to make of *Vie des Arts* as open tool of expression... a vehicle concerned with the primacy of the image.

To this delight for the eye that we have tried to make unending, we invite our readers for the hundredth time. As much as possible we have been vigilant to see that each article and each document shall be exceptional, and it is for this reason that we have entrusted the production of the cover to artist Pierre Guimond. Perfectly in tune with the sensibility of his period, he has admirably perceived the explosion of contemporary art; with collage and drawing he castigates the usual limits of the means of expression, clichés where non-sense abounds and he seeks to re-create wholly, with a great deal of imagination and humour, the image of another reality.

In conclusion, as prelude to the many events that will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Vie des Arts* in 1981, we are happy to announce the recent publication of the Index of the magazine for the years 1966-1976. A long and exacting labour undertaken by our colleague, Jules Bazin, this instrument of work will certainly be of use to the researchers who have impatiently been waiting for it. This Index casts light on the inventory of artistic activity that the magazine has produced in a decade.

One may wonder, "What next after the hundredth?" The same care, a ceaseless effort toward a better understanding of the creative experience and the most thorough vigilance in order not to allow to pass unnoticed the artist of to-day or of to-morrow for whom meaning is again linked to an idea of value.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

Probably no other photographer has worked so intensively in Quebec, tracing interior and exterior environments of rural towns, portraying people in their milieu which reflects choice, social class and taste. From Abitibi, Ile aux Coudres and Beauce to Rue St. Catherine, Montreal, the Texan Restaurant, Canada Cement and Bombay Boutique, we associate a human presence with the T.V.-inhabited interior and the flickering neon exterior. The recent exhibition at the Musée d'Art Contemporain presented four diverse but intrinsically related aspects of Szilasi's work. The introductory segment consisted of double images: a black and white portrait adjacent to a colour interior of the individual's living or work space. Subsequently, we were confronted with large portraits of intimate friends situated in somewhat anonymous backgrounds, a precise, formal sequence of photographs of St. Catherine Street and finally, the iconographic architecture of Abitibi.

In the early seventies, interiors and portraits were two individual and separate facets of Szilasi's documentary work centered in rural Quebec. In the first part of the exhibition, these two facets are joined, drawing a closer relationship between the individual and his environment. The juxtaposition is radical. Not only are the subjects different, but one photograph is in black and white, the other in colour, one has a relatively obvious grain structure, the other fine resolution.

Complementary and contradictory issues surface. Illusions of the photographic image fluctuate between imagined colour and given colour, between psychological and physical presence in the portrait and informative details relinquished by the interior. The two photographs interact. For example, the portrait of Cheryl Fleming presents an innocent-looking woman against a bookcase shelving a collection of dolls. Reinforcing symbolism. In the adjacent interior, a pink and yellow graphic whooshes across the wall, a pink velvet divan languishes in the centre of the room, plants flourish. The portrait contradicts the interior which illuminates the portrait. Innocence fades as the slit skirt moves farther up her leg.

### Double images

On another level, this shift exists with respect to the physical activity of the photographer. In most of the double images, there is a visual reference in the portrait to the interior: the corner of a chair, a telephone, a picture creeping in on the edge. These visual keys reappear in the colour interior, their position relative to the frame changed, their tone amplified by colour. This shift in space and in time reflects the activity of the photographer and the moments of the portrait and the interior.

A more direct relationship to time surfaces in the carefully orchestrated sequence of these images. From age to youth to age, we are introduced to couples and individuals in rural and urban communities. The first images present older couples who display close physical contact, individuals who surround themselves with tangible reminders of their past. In the portrait of Andor Pasztor, a bureau covered with photographic memorabilia provides a context. The colour interior heightens detail: the photos hung with visible paper picture hangers, two digital clocks, one of them midway between 1:32 and 1:33, a radio. Next to him, Lola Lanyi in her housecoat stands at the entrance to her living room which has a proliferation of images of women: 5 or 6 paintings, a mask and the everpresent television set with a 525 line female. All these details signify the accumulation of goods over time, goods which are indicative of the individual's personal history. The interior adds to the exterior physical presence of the individual.

### Life-size

Subsequent images trace two teenagers and their paraphernalia: zappy wallpaper, magazine cut-outs of Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders and Farrah Fawcett-Majors. Young couples relax in their makeshift environments. Individual men, most of them artists, including the photographer himself, are scrutinized in their work place. Finally we are gently led back to an older couple and an edlerly woman from Lotbinière, flanked by a photograph on her wall which reminds us of Andor Pasztor, his photo memorabilia and the



beginning of the series. This is an attachment to everyday life, the couples and the singles, youth and age, unknown people with no public myths except what the photographs bring to the viewer.

The next sequence of large black and white portraits is more straightforward. But if the first set of images are contemplative, informative and encourage energetic involvement, the second group of portraits are more aggressive, confronting the viewer with life-size faces, mirror images minutely detailed. In the short introduction to the exhibition, Szilasi mentions that these people are intimate friends, that the images are not definitive portraits of the individual. True. Rarely, if ever, is a portrait definitive, for it records one moment in time, a moment shared by the photographer and the person photographed, a moment when the subject is aware of the camera and presents a persona to be viewed by others, a moment between two other moments which will never be repeated identically.

Like the double portraits, the organization of the sequence is important and sometimes contains gentle twists of irony. Two nymph-like girls are sandwiched between an older, heavily painted woman with pursed lips and a partially shaven, barechested miner from Noranda. The contrasts are powerful and unrelenting, reflecting a diversity of human expression. Another type of subtle irony appears in the portrait of Gilbert Marion and his son. Their resemblance is uncanny. Both adhere to the conventional look of the sixties, long hair and jeans. But there is one minor rôle reversal; the son sports a shirt and tie, the father a tee-shirt.

And finally in this tightly knit group, the portrait of Andor Pasztor, unlike the one in the first segment, but reawakening our memory of the previous image and illustrating the diversity of portraits at different moments in time. Eyes closed, mouth half open in song or speech, once again he stands in front of photo memories although their rôle is indistinct and indefinite. The most momentary of portraits signals the end of the sequence.

#### Order and disorder

The next two series, the facades of St. Catherine Street and the architecture of Abitibi, describe man-made but selectively unpopulated environments. St. Catherine Street is the more formally complex, relying on grid systems, flat planes, clarity of detail and light quality. The series starts in the west with the Restaurant Texan and moves through to the eastern part of the city, ending with the full figure image of Théâtre Denise-Pelletier. Although the sequence is linear, the viewer doesn't walk a straight line. As camera distance from the subject changes, an undulating rhythm is established, sometimes moving in on a fragment or pulling back to encompass the entire building. The details call attention to the order (or disorder, as the case may be) of the architectural structure, and to the neon lights, signs or representational drawings signifying commercial content. Framing determines this attention, for through careful selection of detail, the underlying order of the structure is revealed. For example, in the Supersexe/Palace Theatre image, the fragments of the two structures divide the frame, thereby setting up a comparison. The tin-ribbed, exterior surface of Supersexe shares the frame equally with the neo-classical columns of the Palace Theatre; sexy neon ladies compete with Clint Eastwood's "Escape from Alcatraz." Absurdities abound.

As one moves east, structures are photographed in their entirety, indicating a distance, an end to the series and establishing a link with the next group of images, all of which are frontal, full figure 'portraits' of indigenous Abitibi architecture. In an historical context, these two architectural series recall the work of Walker Evans, steady in their execution, studied in organization and specific in time and place. In another sense, they parallel the first group of double images. Surface qualities are stressed in the black and white St. Catherine Street photos; choice and combination of colours in the Abitibi images reveal cultural taste. The phenomenon of painted houses to counteract the long grey winter months and the vast expanse of snow-covered ground is reflected in the attention to colour. Each photo in the series is taken from the same position and distance, minimizing spatial and temporal shifts and accentuating changes in architectural form and colour. They present a sensibility particular to rural Québec.

The effort here has been to analyze Szilasi's exhibition, to pay close attention to the structure and to extract a possible understanding of his photographic work. However, this article also reflects a critical stance. Extensive space has been given to the double images because, in my opinion, they are the strongest, most complex and captivating photographs in the exhibition. St. Catherine Street stands on its own as an entity separate from the first and at times exhibits exquisite formal control and beauty. The large portraits and Abitibi photos, however, seem subordinate, amplifying ideas which have already been initiated and explored in the exhibi-

tion and elsewhere. This does not mean that the exhibition suffers severely, but simply that there are relatively weaker points, given the strength and magnitude of many photographs.

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## TWO VERSIONS OF MOSES BY HENDRICK DE CLERCK

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By Myra Nan ROSENFELD

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has recently been given an important seventeenth century Flemish painting, *Moses Striking the Rock at Mara*, by Hendrick de Clerck.<sup>1</sup> This painting rejoins another version of the same subject by De Clerck which was acquired by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts ten years earlier, in 1969.<sup>2</sup> It is extraordinary for a museum in Canada to own two versions of the same painting by this rare Flemish artist whose works are now preserved mainly in churches and museums in Belgium. There are only twelve securely documented works known by Hendrick de Clerck. These two paintings are extremely interesting, since they were probably executed at different periods in De Clerck's life and thereby give us insight into the development of his style.

Hendrick de Clerck's *œuvre* is important, since it illustrates the tradition of Flemish late Renaissance mannerism that was to contribute to the development of the art of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Little is known of De Clerck's life. The places and dates of both his birth and death are unknown. He seems to have been active primarily in Brussels. His earliest known painting, a signed and dated triptych with the *Holy Family of St. Ann* on the central panel, was executed in 1590 for the Kapellekerk in Brussels.<sup>3</sup> Modern historians believed for a long time that Hendrick de Clerck was a student of Maarten de Vos (1532-1603). However, there is no reason to assume this, since Karel van Mander, who probably knew De Clerck, did not list him as a student of Maarten de Vos in his *Het Schilderboek* which was published in Amsterdam in 1618.<sup>4</sup> De Vos' mature style is quite different from De Clerck's early style, as we can see by comparing the *Holy Family of St. Ann* by De Vos which is signed and dated 1593,<sup>5</sup> to the above-mentioned 1590 *Holy Family of St. Ann* by De Clerck. Whereas De Clerck used very sharply defined, crisp triangular drapery folds, De Vos used much more fluid, curvilinear folds. Laureyssens has suggested that the two artists collaborated in the late 1590's, since one can find mutual influences in their work. In fact, in a *Holy Family of St. Ann* which De Clerck signed and dated in 1611,<sup>6</sup> he has adopted the more fluid drapery folds of De Vos. In 1606, Hendrick de Clerck was appointed court painter to Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella in Brussels, just three years before Rubens. It was while he was in the service of the court that De Clerck collaborated with Jan Brueghel I (1568-1625) and Denys van Alsloot (1570-1628) on a series of landscapes with classical figures.<sup>7</sup> De Clerck's last known painting, a *Descent from the Cross*, was executed in 1628 for the Church of Sts. Peter and Guidon in Anderlecht.<sup>8</sup>

The painting of *Moses Striking the Rock at Mara* recently donated to the Montreal Museum can be authenticated by a preparatory drawing which Hendrick de Clerck signed with his monogram "HDC" in the Cabinet des dessins of the Louvre.<sup>9</sup> The compositions of the drawing and painting are almost identical. However, in the final painting the figure of Moses has been moved from the middle ground to the background. Thus the focal point of the composition in the painting is not Moses, but a seated woman with two children who looks out at the spectator just left of the centre in the middle ground.

During the years between 1580 and 1620, Flemish painters were very much influenced by Italian art and continued a tradition that goes back to the fifteenth century. Earlier artists such as Hieronymus Bosch (active 1474-1516), Jan Gossaert (active 1505-1532) and Pieter Brueghel the Elder (active 1551-1569) went to Italy. The influence of Michelangelo, Titian and Tintoretto is found in the paintings of Maarten de Vos. Jan Brueghel I, another of De Clerck's collaborators, worked for Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, for several years, between 1592 and 1596.<sup>10</sup> Hendrick de Clerck, like the above artists, was also influenced by Italian art. It has been noted by several art historians that the woman who is the focal point of the composition in the middle ground of the recently donated *Moses Striking the Rock at Mara* shows the influence of the marble *Madonna* which Michelangelo executed for the church of Notre Dame in Bruges in 1501.<sup>11</sup> Other figures in the painting refer to works that De Clerck may have seen in Rome. The reclining woman in the left corner of the composition is a reversed version of the figure of Sappho in Raphael's *Parnassus* in the Stanza della Segnatura in



By Helen DUFFY

the Vatican (1508-1511). The woman carrying a pitcher on her head in the upper right section of the painting recalls a similar figure from Raphael's *Fire in the Borgo* in the Stanza dell'Incendio in the Vatican (1515-1517). Hendrick de Clerck probably also saw the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. A standing man in the center of the foreground recalls many of the *Ignudi* in Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling (1508-1512).<sup>12</sup>

We should now consider the relationship between the two versions of *Moses Striking The Rock at Mara* in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The oblong painting recently donated to the Museum is unsigned, whereas the octagonal painting acquired in 1969 has Hendrick de Clerck's monogram "HDC" in the lower right corner. The composition of the two paintings is different. Moses is the focal point of the composition in the octagonal painting. He is placed securely in the middle ground just to the left of the central axis. De Clerck has placed the figures along diagonals which cross in the centre just next to Moses. This central axis is further emphasized by the two small children drinking water out of a shell in the foreground. In the oblong panel, Moses is located in the background, off centre. As noted above, the focal point of the composition is the seated woman with two children to the left of the central axis. The composition of the oblong panel is based on an asymmetrical zig-zag which extends from the lower right corner to the woman with the children at the left and up to the woman carrying a jug on her head in the upper right section of the painting. We can see how De Clerck had a standard repertory of figures which he repeated often. The woman looking out at the viewer and the two children drinking out of a shell occur in both versions of *Moses Striking the Rock at Mara*, as well as in the 1590 *Holy Family of St. Ann*.

The two versions of *Moses Striking the Rock at Mara* are different in style and thus are most likely different in date. The earlier of the two paintings seems to be the octagonal version. Its triangular shaped folds and shimmering, crisp highlights reveal it to be closest in style to the 1590 triptych *Holy Family of St. Ann*. The deeper colours and more fluid drapery folds place the oblong version closer in style to the later 1611 version of the *Holy Family of St. Ann*. The oblong version was probably executed by Hendrick de Clerck in conjunction with a member or members of his studio, in contrast to the octagonal version which is a completely autograph work. This hypothesis would explain why the octagonal version was signed, and the oblong version was not. In 1590, at the beginning of his career, Hendrick de Clerck probably did not have a workshop. In 1610, when he was working for the court in Brussels, he probably was receiving more commissions and needed a large shop. The oblong version also reveals how the influence of Maarten de Vos appeared later in De Clerck's career, and thus supports Laureyssens' view that the two were collaborators rather than master and pupil.

Thus, the two versions of *Moses Striking the Rock at Mara* in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts by Hendrick de Clerck give us an opportunity to evaluate the development of the career of this rare but important artist.

1. I would like to thank Willy Laureyssens, Curator of Painting, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, and Roselyne Bacou, Curator, Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre, for their help in my research on these two paintings. This painting was acquired by a private collector in Canada from H. N. Bier, London. It was previously in the possession of Colnaghi, London.
2. Purchased from H. Schickman, N.Y., 1969; New York, Parke Bernet sale, No. 2819, March 12, 1969, No. 15; *Apollo*, March, Vol. LXXXIX, No. 85, March, 1969, p. CXXXV (advertisement, ill.); *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Annual Report* in M3, December, 1969, ill. cover; D. G. Carter, *Northern Baroque and the Italian Connexion, Apollo*, Vol. CIII, No. 171, May, 1976, ill. p. 48, fig. 1, p. 50. It is difficult to determine which of these paintings is mentioned in a 1670 sale in Antwerp. See: Charles Terlinden, *Henri de Clerck, le peintre de Notre-Dame-de-la-Chapelle*, in *Revue belge d'archéologie et de l'histoire de l'art*, XXI, 1952, p. 88, and J. Deuncé, *Kunstsvitvoer in de 17e eeuw te Antwerpen*, Antwerp, 1930, p. 87.
3. Willy Laureyssens, *Hendrick De Clerck's Triptiek uit de Kapellekerk te Brussel*, in *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, Vol. XV, 1966, No. 3, pp. 165-168; fig. 2, p. 167.
4. Laureyssens, 1966, No. 3, p. 165 and Karel Van Mander, *Het Schilderboek*, Amsterdam, 1618. Only a later source, A. A. Houbraken, *De Groote schonburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en schilderessen*, 'S Gravenhage, Vol. 1, 1718, p. 221, cites De Clerck's as a student of Maarten de Vos.
5. Laureyssens, 1966, No. 3, pp. 169-170; fig. 3, p. 168.
6. Laureyssens, 1966, No. 3, p. 171; fig. 5.
7. Laureyssens, *De samenwerking van Hendrick de Clerck met Denijs van Alstoot* in *Bulletin des Musées Royaux de Belgique*, Vol. XVI, 1967, No. 1-3, pp. 163-177.
8. Laureyssens, *Hendrick de Clerck's Kruisafneming uit de Sint-Pieters-Guidokerk te Anderlecht* in *Bulletin des Musées Royaux de Belgique*, Vol. XV, 1966, No. 4, pp. 257-264; fig. 1, p. 258.
9. F. Lugt, *Musée du Louvre. Inventaire général des dessins des Écoles du Nord, Ecole flamande*, I, No. 530 (19.877), p. 44, pl. XLIV.
10. *Jan Brueghel the Elder*, London, Brod Gallery, 21 June - 20 July 1979, Introduction and catalogue by Klaus Ertz, p. 9.
11. C. de Tolnay, *Michel-Ange*, Paris, 1970, pp. 34-36; ill. p. 35. I would like to thank Dr. Micheline Moisan and Robert Little for this suggestion.
12. S. J. Freedberg, *High Renaissance Painting*, Cambridge, 1901, Vol. I, pp. 121-122, 293-307; Vol. II, Pl. 161, Pl. 379, and De Tolnay, 1970, pp. 46-78; ill. p. 64.

The Düsseldorf artist Joseph Beuys is beginning to emerge as one of the most interesting and controversial personalities of Germany. In Canada, where his work has yet to be exhibited in a museum setting ("A Space" in Toronto showed some of it a few years ago), his reputation rests on printed information, videotapes and the frequent discussion his ideas stimulate among artists who know about him or have met him in Europe. His name comes up in lectures on avant-garde art, advanced art, action art, performance art and sometimes in connection with sculpture and multiples. He represented Germany at the Biennale in Venice in 1976 and at the XV Biennale in São Paulo 1979. Also in 1979 he had an exhibition of his drawings at the Kunstmuseum Lucerne, Switzerland, and a retrospective at The Guggenheim in New York.

Beuys has reached an enviable height in his career. His sculpture, drawings, prints, chosen objects and multiples, room installations, action pieces and video performances attract international attention. Museums compete to show his work, to arrange retrospective shows and, often over the frustrated protest of patrons and taxpayers, purchase individual pieces for their permanent collections. The question of acquisition can lead to grave consequences for a museum director who has to choose between Beuys and the rich patron's firm opposition. One of the world's most outstanding private collections was auctioned off not long ago in London after the Kunstmuseum Basel lost its wealthiest supporters over such an issue. It can also lead to problems of a different kind. Two years ago, one of his chosen object pieces, "Bathtub" 1960 (private collection), was inadvertently used to cool beer during a political party gathering in the Leverkusen Museum where it was stored. No visible harm occurred but the owner sued and the court awarded \$US 94,000 damages.

Beuys is much in demand as a lecturer. After it was announced that he would attend the opening of his retrospective exhibition at The Guggenheim in New York, no fewer than thirty American universities sent invitations. He had to decline. He has become a myth, a distinction usually awarded to artists posthumously when the value of their contribution falls in line with the retrospective analysis of an epoch. Beuys the myth is easier to quote than Beuys the man who likes to call himself an "activator" rather than an artist. His world is like a labyrinth: One enters or one doesn't, but it's there in all its complexities and it cannot be ignored.

Beuys is important now because he sincerely tries to show others what he has come to know about himself. He transmits this knowledge through his work and his actions; through language which is for him indispensable as integral part of sculptural formations and, visible or not, becomes admissible within a plastic vocabulary. His capacity to express himself clearly, logically and willingly makes his philosophy accessible to people who may never have the opportunity to view his sculpture. It also may be acceptable to those who have seen and rejected it.

On all levels, Beuys communicates the belief in the creative thought of man as a spiritual being capable of extending his vision beyond the socio-political boundaries of his environment. His own exploration of the relation between reality and symbol, truth and hypocrisy, memory and thought process coincides with similar concerns outside Germany.

Much of what he advocates has been expressed at different moments in history by creative people similarly motivated, but in ways that met with considerably more resistance. It also corresponds to courageous efforts made by his predecessors, the artists and writers whose works were destroyed because they spoke of the same rights for individual freedom in the creative process. Beuys as a child had watched the public burning of books. Beuys attempts through his art and his public actions to provide insights into moral problems arising in politics, Christianity, education, ecology and other related fields. He has risen to prominence by saying the wrong thing at the right time and he has done it so consistently over the past twenty-five years that even his most steadfast adversaries give him credit for sheer endurance.

Although his philosophy and the anthropological symbolism he uses in much of his work are rooted in western European history or Eurasian mythology, the essence of his message can be read and interpreted as a universal though highly personal ideology. In his own country opinion is sharply divided between those who understand and support it and others who feel threatened by it. The fiercest opposition Beuys encounters comes from artists active in other fields, and from tradition-conscious historians and academics. The majority of the general public only feels bewildered. The stale



Picasso jokes are replaced now by the Beuys jokes.

Any work by Beuys when reproduced out of context looks bizarre, even irrational; any journalistic word-by-word account of his performance pieces reads like the scenario for a play whose dramatic problems haven't been worked out.

The direct physical confrontation between viewer and object creates a unique rapport. Fat, felt, fur and leather or malleable stuff like industrial blanketing and felt produce predictable reactions and Beuys' initial intention was to use it in order to provoke the shock effect as a base for discussion about the potential of sculpture and culture: what does it mean, what is it all about and how does it relate to language? What are production and creativity? In fact, the artist challenges the public to ask the archetypal question which every child throughout the history of mankind has asked: "What are you doing, mister?"

Fat in itself is a banal and perishable substance, not associated with art (except for the culinary arts and the butter sculptures built by cordon-bleu chefs) and in Beuys' hands it becomes the "Social Sculpture". He uses it to give shape to intended forms; he uses it for symbolic purposes; and he uses it to initiate a confrontation. Fat as a primary energy source is an ingredient very basic to survival. The early Beuys pieces in the '50s related to the deprivation of supplies in wartime when fat became scarce and therefore precious, when butter or lard was more important than money. Felt goes back to the nomadic tribes who fabricated it thousands of years ago, and it has remained in use ever since as an effective insulating and heat-preserving material.

Beuys uses these materials in their raw state, unadorned or artificially coloured. The dull grey and brown is meant to evoke a colourful world within the viewer through an anti-image. This concept is based on the phenomenon of complementary colours: look at a red light, close your eyes — watch how it changes to green. Beuys strongly rejects any suggestion that he ignores the colour factor. Through an anti-image he offers an entry into a transcendental and spiritual world which is implied but not given as a visual sensation.

In the mid '60s prominent theologians in Europe began to take the nature of Beuys' ritualistic approach to creation very seriously and saw in his transubstantiation process the symbolic revelation of the Eucharist. (The artist's own religious feelings are outlined in the text and interview of the 1979 catalogue "Traces in Italy" published by the Kunstmuseum Lucerne, Switzerland. Not yet translated from its original German.)

It is regrettable that Beuys' warmth and genuine feeling for life are overlooked in the effort of understanding his work intellectually. The quality of his wit tends to get lost in the translating and editing of his interviews into other languages. His sense of humor and occasional self-parody runs like an undercurrent through anything he does. His use of fat, for instance, also implies a pun in the direction of the way in which 'fat' is used in language, a joke which isn't shared by the fastidiously clean visitor who happens to wander through a museum and discovers the corners in a gallery thickly padded with lard.

Beuys' philosophy goes beyond what he calls the "little pseudo-cultural ghetto" of the art world. Though he stresses his lack of interest in the manipulation of the art market, there is also no recorded objection from him that at least one big American conglomerate corporation collects his major sculptural works.

His dealer René Block was able, after much persuading, to win him over to the idea of the "multiple" which began to find popular appeal fourteen years ago. Beuys made his first "usable" multiples in 1968, which were to include the "Everess Club Soda" bottles with water you might like to drink; the "Sled" which can be used in wintertime; and the "Intuition" box with pencil line and handwritten addition, of which more than 10,000 have been sold since. The sled was also used as a component in the humorous installation piece "The Pack" 1969, in which twenty of them are shown pouring out of the rear end of a Volkswagen bus, each one with its survival kit of rolled up blanket, flashlight and a lump of fat.

Now the catalogue raisonné of his collectibles is published in book form. Unlike Andy Warhol in the United States, Beuys isn't concerned with creating stunning and colorful mass-market art. His multiple doesn't aim at decorating an executive suite or adorning a coffee table in a luxury setting. It is anathema to the "beautiful" and "aesthetically appealing" object. A rough totalling of his 1975 output comes to more than 2158 signatures by the artist on a variety of surfaces, from paper, metal and polythene to cobblestone (basalt), glass and LP records. These multiples are essentially fetish objects or reliquaries imbued with the symbolic significance of some intrinsic bond between owner and originator. Antenna, memory prop, anchor — Beuys likes to refer to it also as a cross-connection between people who relate to his cause and to the meaning of his oeuvre. In the artist's own words, quoted in the 1970 catalogue,

published by the Kunstmuseum Basel: "When someone sees my things, I appear".

Beuys' use of himself as a performer is a force in itself. As a narrator of myth and reality he adopts a primitive form of ritual in which the unconscious mental activity guides the unfolding of a visual imagery. Like the spokesman of a tribe or the Celtic storyteller of a preliterate society he holds his audience spellbound. He reveals himself in the process of a slow pace action, using chosen symbols as a code. His basic symbols — such as the hare, the elk, the staff and the cross — become metaphors for thought and implication. They relate to certain experiences in his life which were to become significant in a much wider context and they form a consistent leitmotif in the artist's work. Beuys developed this form of ancient behaviour intentionally. He believes that in a world where everyone tends to behave and speak rationally, it becomes necessary for a kind of shaman or enchanter to bring about change and development. His performances affirm the fact that the aura surrounding the personality of an artist is an inseparable element of his presence. The degree of his sincerity and spirituality has to hold the balance, which could tip abruptly to the very opposite of the scale to mere showmanship and mock ritual.

In the area of the chosen symbol and the implied symbolism of its representation in Beuys' work verbal information becomes important. The artist's personal interpretation of his symbols differs from a wide range of other possible interpretations and associations the viewer may be familiar with. The frames of reference are uniquely the artist's own and correspond to the sum total of his own past which left an indelible mark not only on Beuys the artist, but on a whole generation of his contemporaries. If he is referred to as a shaman, a high priest, a messiah, a guru, a revolutionary, a counter-revolutionary, a Eurasian medicine man, one still has to accept him above all as a political moralist. In order to understand his uniqueness it is necessary to know some biographical details about his life and the circumstances which brought him to his present place in the world.

Joseph Beuys was born on May 12th, 1921 in Krefeld near Düsseldorf. He grew up in Kleve (or Cleves) close to the Dutch border. The land is flat and has been a historic battleground for many centuries. From the Romans to Napoleon and to the Second World War; from Henry VIII who married Anne of Cleves for political reasons to Richard Wagner who based his opera "Lohengrin" on the massive castle "Schwanenburg" in Cleves, the region is permeated with legend, myth and local superstition.

Beuys grew up among hardworking people who had little time for art and higher politics. His family ran a flour and fodder business. They were strict Catholics and Joseph was their only child. Left very much on his own he developed early a great interest in botany and in literature, particularly Nordic history and mythology which were to lead him later to the Scandinavian writers and philosophers. Like any child growing up during the depression years he felt his parents' worries but could not share them. He began to think of himself as an outsider at home and at school. Like everyone else he joined the Hitler Youth and dreamt about a future dedicated to studies in medicine or the natural sciences. In his autobiographical references, childhood and adolescent recollections become a key to understanding his later work and the iconography of his symbols.

In 1940 the nineteen-year old Beuys joined the Luftwaffe and was trained first as a radio operator, then as a dive bomber pilot. He was stationed in southern Russia, the Ukraine and the Crimea and it was in that region that his plane crashed, hit by Russian anti-aircraft fire. He was saved by a tribe of Tartar herdsmen who discovered him among the wreckage of his JU 87 and applied the first aid care still practised in primitive northern settlements — the covering of the patient's body thickly with animal fat before wrapping it in blankets to keep warm near the fire. Beuys slowly regained consciousness after many days. Within the hut the pungent odors of damp felt, tallow and fat merged in his mind with the miracle of his return to life, with the ancient rites to which he owed his survival and with the dream images his subconscious mind had retained in early childhood. During the war, Luftwaffe pilots were sent to southern Italy from time to time to test aircraft weapons. In the Gargano mountains, close to the Adriatic sea, Beuys was to discover a world infinitely more fascinating than the target shooting exercises he was ordered to conduct. He set out on his own to explore. High up in the hills the quiet life of the farmers had changed little over the centuries and he found fragments of a distant past embedded in clay and rock. It was here that he became involved in questions of a more philosophical kind about his future purpose in life. He began to feel deeply about the Mediterranean history and the arts which were linked to it. (Out of such thoughts grew a vast number of delicate drawings and works on paper which were shown in the spring '79 at the Kunstmuseum of Lucerne, under the title "Traces in Italy".)



The wartime experience as a collective trauma of mass manipulation of people and human rights left him with a lasting mistrust of authority, bureaucratic power and political manoeuvring. He returned to Kleve from a British prisoner-of-war camp at Cuxhaven in 1946. Encouraged by his family and friends in the arts, he began to study sculpture as well as scientific subjects. The first manifestation of his success as a maker of religious images were roughly carved gravestones from '49 until '51.

A new future was gradually opening up for him and with it the growing awareness of a freedom in the arts, freedom as a primary condition for the expression of thoughts and concepts which could not be communicated in any other way. He entered the Düsseldorf Academy as a student. In 1961 he was appointed professor of sculpture at the same institution. In 1972 he was dismissed from this position. The main reason was Beuys' disregard for the "numerus clausus" (restricted entry), a clause of German educational law. His class totalled over 400 students, 142 of whom had been rejected by other faculty members. Beuys started legal proceedings against the Ministry which lasted for years and became a cause célèbre in Germany. His position was clear and firm: if there are those who wish to learn and those who wish to teach, then the State acts repressively if it prevents them coming together. (Germany's art schools are notoriously overcrowded; an aspiring student has to apply to several academies before he might, with luck, gain entry.) The work of Beuys in the '70s is heavily influenced by this battle with bureaucracy. He was supported by his students who held demonstrations, initiated strike actions, and brought their work to the entrance of the Düsseldorf Academy where Beuys held seminars in the street. (In 1978 he finally won his case in the supreme court. Though his teaching contract ceased to exist, he regained the use of his studio at the Academy and he is authorized to continue to hold the title of Professor.)

In the spring of '73 the first steps towards the founding of a Union for the advancement of a "Free International College for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research" were taken and Beuys proposed himself as its "founding rector". The first outline for FIU (Free International University) was given in a manifesto drawn up by Beuys and the Nobel Prizewinning writer Heinrich Böll as a co-founder in '72. For Canadians who are not familiar with the post-war development of Germany the following extract from his manifesto might help to make the setting clear: "... The founders of the school proceed from the knowledge that since 1945, along with the brutality of the reconstruction period, the gross privileges afforded by monetary reforms, and crude accumulation of possessions and an upbringing resulting in an expense-account mentality, many insights and initiatives have been prematurely shattered. The realistic attitude of those who do survive, the idea that living might be the purpose of existence, has been denounced as a romantic fallacy. The Nazi's "Blood and Soil" doctrine, which ravaged land and spilled blood, has disturbed our relation to tradition and environment. Now, however, it is no longer regarded as romantic but exceedingly realistic to fight for every tree, every plot of undeveloped land, every stream as yet unpoisoned, every old town centre, and against every thoughtless reconstruction scheme. And it is no longer considered romantic to speak of nature. In the permanent trade competition and performance rivalry of the two German political systems which have successfully exerted themselves for recognition, the values for life have been lost." ... This is the voice of a generation who went through the traumatic experience of a nation that turned from political fanaticism to aggressive denial of guilt, and went on to replace the lost spiritual values with out-and-out materialistic greed.

Düsseldorf today, with its Kunsthalle, its slick galleries, its modern Art Academy and the wealthy art patrons represents one of the monuments to the "economy miracle" in this sector of the Rheinland, the Ruhr mining valley. It is difficult at present to recall that in this capital of the richest territory in the Federal Republic in the immediate post-war period, you could pay for admission to a theater with a lump of coal. The phenomena of Düsseldorf would never have happened without the dynamic contribution of its artists. Without them it would in all probability have become just like any other prosperous industrial city in Europe.

If Düsseldorf's artists in the 19th century exerted a great influence on American landscape painting in the Hudson River region, their activities in our time again connected with the American art world soon after the end of World War II, but this time they did not emigrate to do so. Instead of falling into the academic stagnation which trapped the British art scene during that period, they turned to techniques by which new artistic concepts could be realized. Structural problems replaced concerns for compositions. The man-nature-technology relationship had to be updated. The question of

urban problems, sociological processes and the threat of an upsurging materialism became urgent. Germany became suddenly the place where such experiments could be conducted and the Americans were quick to realize its potential. Artists like Rauschenberg, Oldenburg, Kline, Morris, Brecht among others came. Influential groups like "Zero" and "Fluxus" spread a network of international contacts among artists working in the fields of conceptual and performance art. The Happening grew simultaneously with Neo-Dada, minimal art and, in Italy, "arte povera". Art outside the aims of the "finished" object became an instrument for expressing the stark need in the electric age to come to grips with the implied prophecies for the future. The consistency in Beuys' conduct throughout these periods becomes increasingly important because, in his career, it is now possible to trace the step-by-step development of such art. It is the artist's personal pursuits which makes them unique and relevant to our time.

Any artist who outgrows the local esoteric circles of devotees and reaches an international audience of people ready to look, listen, debate, accept or reject, carries an enormous weight of responsibility. He has to defend standards and at times refrain from speaking his mind in deference to the sensibilities of others. Supporters and opponents are quick to detect any flaws or deviations in his conduct.

The significance of Beuys' actions affects directly and indirectly the future conduct of artists outside Germany. It isn't a question of success or failure, of a break-through or a fizzing out of the lime-light. The question is far more serious: Where are the boundaries today, in our western world, for the idealistically motivated super star of the arts?

Beuys the artist could easily profit from his established reputation and go on indefinitely producing works which are eagerly bought up by collectors and museums, feeding the profits into his project for the Free International University. No matter what he does in the future, it cannot diminish the credibility of his past achievements. The artist, activist and political moralist Beuys might eventually reach the stage the late philosopher Bertrand Russell arrived at when he said at the age of eighty-nine: "I must, before I die, find some means of saying the essential thing which is in me, which I have not yet said, a thing which is neither love nor hate nor pity nor scorn but the very breath of life, shining and coming from afar, which will link into human life the immensity, the frightening, wondrous and implacable forces of the non-human."

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