

Joseph Beuys

7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks), starting 1982

In 1982 Joseph Beuys began his action/installation of *7000 Oaks* at the seventh edition of the contemporary art show *Documenta* (held once every five years in Kassel) and it was only finished, symbolically, by his son Wenzel at the next *Documenta* in 1987, one year after the artist's death.

In reality this is a **temporally undefined piece** since its duration is programmed for only as long as the final surviving tree of the 7000 mentioned in the title. Potentially this work could last until the end of the current ecosystem.

On March 16, 1982 Beuys planted the first oak tree in the centre of the Friederich Square in Kassel, right in front of the *Friedericianum*, the building that traditionally hosts the main section of the *Documenta* show.

The action originates from the following system: 7000 prism-shaped blocks of basalt coming from Kassel's mining area were unloaded in the parking lot of the city square. Each new oak planting had to be accompanied by one of the blocks, therefore the space occupied by the stones would be freed over time, depending on the pace at which the trees were planted.

Private collectors bought the stones, thereby financing the planting of an oak tree in Kassel. This city is **an extremely symbolic place** since it used to be the centre of arms production for all of Germany, a fact which caused it to be razed to the ground during the Second World War.

Through this work, Beuys speaks of the need for a new and lasting **alliance between man and nature** but also of the need to eradicate wars and to **turn destructive energy into building for society**.

Today all the oak trees have been planted and the basalt blocks put in place.

At the basis of *7000 Oaks* there is a concept of **transformation**, an aspect that concerns both time, expressed symbolically through the oaks growth, and space, which undergoes change as the trees develop.

The oak – a tree sacred to the Celtic culture to which Beuys often referred – grows roots which spread underground and also towards the sky, thereby becoming a symbol of the union between matter and spirit.

Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4 Joseph Beuys, *7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks)*, starting 1982. Oak trees, basalt blocks each measuring 120 cm circa. Kassel and other German cities. **These photographs** by Günter Beer show Beuys at the *Documenta 7* exhibition.

