9 AT LEO CASTELLI

CASTELLI WAREHOUSE
103 WEST 108TH STREET,
NEW YORK NY 10025
DECEMBER 4–28, 1968

GIOVANNI ANSELMO
JOSEPH BEUYS
WILLIAM BOLLINGER
RAFAEL FERRER
EVA HESSE
STEPHEN KALTENBACH
BRUCE NAUMAN
ALAN SARET
RICHARD SERRA
KEITH SONNIER
GILBERTO ZORIO

ORGANIZED BY ROBERT MORRIS

MARIO GARCÍA TORRES
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Information on the exhibition 9 at Leo Castelli is scarce. The show was held at what was then an unusual location—a warehouse—on the upper west side of New York, which previously had been used by Leo Castelli Gallery for storage. Organized by the artist Robert Morris, the show was open just a few hours a day for 15 days at the end of 1968, and not many people actually experienced it. Nevertheless, it sparked a decent amount of press and critical attention in the months that followed. 9 at Leo Castelli was organized around the Anti-Form theses that Morris had published not too long before. The exhibited artworks were related to process, the nature of materials, and the exhibition site. The artists listed on the invitation were Giovanni Anselmo, William Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Stephen Kaltenbach, Bruce Nauman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, and Gilberto Zorio. Their sculptures, installed on the bare floor and walls, were of an ephemeral nature.

The show’s original form, in its aftermath, continues to change. It lives in the realm of rumor, and in Morris’s head, in a mutable state—almost as something that never came to be—just as many of the works themselves also had variable dimensions. Even though the exhibition is generally regarded as highly important and a few documentary photographs do exist and have been published, the various written accounts do not coincide in their fundamental details—another intriguing coincidence that aligns, in a sense, with Morris’s ideas about new sculpture. The title has been reported differently in different publications, and it has been alleged that the work of two artists (Anselmo and Zorio) did not arrive in time for the opening. Morris has sometimes been listed as a participant, although in most accounts he denies it. Add to all this the fact that Morris has consistently refused to divulge much information about the show in the years since.

Other than listing the actual works in the show, then, this book focuses more on the venture’s ghostly presences than on hard facts. It also tries to elucidate what actually happened before and after the opening. It is said that Morris visited various studios while organizing the show. Some of the artists he saw didn’t make the cut; another whom he did invite, Joseph Beuys, also did not participate. In an interview republished here, Beuys explains why he did not take part, argues for a certain autonomy in relation to his peers, and expresses a distinct reluctance to be compared with American artists of that era. A recent interview with Rafael Ferrer is also published here, with the intent to shed some light on the lingering questions surrounding his participation. Even though Morris has consistently denied responsibility for the inclusion of Ferrer’s installation of leaves, the importance of that piece has been emphasized by many critics, and it was much talked about by the public.

In order to visually locate the tales described in the interviews, this book includes photographs of the space where the exhibition was held and some shots of its context, as they look today. Perhaps this publication could be considered a kind of catalog-after-the-fact for 9 at Leo Castelli. Given the contradictory and misleading reviews and the dearth of archival material, the exhibition will probably remain an “open case” forever. This book is one attempt to give it once again a public form, and to add another layer to its foggy narrative.

Notes

1. The show was open December 4–28, Tuesday through Saturday, 1–5 p.m.
4. Morris confirmed their participation in a 1996 letter to Virgilio Garza, whose research on the show is now part of the holdings of Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies. In his notes, Garza says that the reviews in the New York Times and Artforum did not mention or publish any images of these artists’ works. Garza’s research on 9 at Leo Castelli is the most complete I have come across while trying to put the facts of the show together. He collected the information as part of a student assignment in an exhibitions course. The show has been referred to as Nine at Castelli, 9 at Castelli, Nine in a Warehouse, Warehouse Show, The Castelli Warehouse Show, and Nine at Leo Castelli. This last was the title printed in the original invitation, and so it is the one the used in this book.
5. Ibid. In that same letter to Garza, Morris remarks, “I do not know if Rafael Ferrer’s exhibition was a ‘non-official entry.’ I suggest you ask him.”
Mario García Torres I am interested in talking about Anti-Form, and your spontaneous participation in 9 at Leo Castelli, and the interventions with Robert Morris in Puerto Rico. Before discussing sculpture, however, and the circumstances that led you to do the kind of work that is part of the discussion of Anti-Form, it would be interesting to discuss how you relate to those issues now, and back then. I was reviewing some of your publications and noticed the way you referred to your work. From early on you knew that the amount of work you could do was limited, but you were never interested in attaching yourself to, or maintaining, a particular style. I was captivated by your attitude of discovery. From the point of view of today, how do you remember that moment?

Rafael Ferrer First of all, the art scene in New York in the 1960s was smaller. There were fewer galleries and a desire to historicize Abstract Expressionism. Minimalism and Pop were barely starting to gain attention as the beginning of a new moment. It was a period of excitement, with new opportunities that were not dependent on the art market. We started to use disposable materials in improvised spaces; only time determined our decisions. This all happened in a tiny world in close communication. I remember Robert Morris saying, “Critics are not necessary anymore because now everyone instantly knows about the important events.”
My use of leaves emerged from seeing the fall colors in the northeastern United States, specifically the suburbs of Philadelphia. The leaves anticipate the coming of the winter. They are driven by the wind, covering corners, obstructing and transforming the streets and sidewalks. Mounds of leaves create transitional forms. This annual process is beautiful. Then, in December, snow and ice invade the landscape. As a child, this seemed magical. Having been born on a tropical island, where the weather hardly ever changes, allowed me to appreciate in more northern countries the fall and the winter.

My work started to simplify and incorporate chance. Let’s say you have an iron plate, 10 feet long, 12 inches wide, and one-eighth of an inch thick. Then nail it to a wall that is 36 inches in height. The combination of gravity and the plate’s weight and thickness will create a curve. This aesthetic decision is the result of the properties of the materials. During that period, I was using rolls of cyclone fencing. I bought different-size rolls and unrolled them in the wind, thereby constructing multiple forms. One day, during the fall, I was in a park. I saw how the breeze played with the leaves; it took the leaves to my wires. That night before going to sleep, I concluded that the leaves were the most important element in my work—that their qualities were infinitely more exciting than the rolls of wire or anything else.

When Marcia Tucker invited me to participate in the 1969 Whitney Museum exhibition Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials, I asked Bob Morris to lend me a barrel of fat. I applied the fat to a 16-foot wall by rapidly moving my arms and using a scaffold to work from top to bottom. I repeated this process, throwing bundles of hay, which stuck to the wall due to the viscosity of the fat. I finished with a mound of hay created from the remaining hay blocks I had brought in for the project. For my other piece, to be located outside, I ordered 300 pounds of cubed ice, which the icemen placed in front of the museum entrance on top of a bed of Philadelphia leaves.

The idea that these types of pieces would become a style that would define my work never crossed my mind. From the beginning, I have understood art to be an infinite adventure; its future is full of possibilities. Change is the essence of life. The thought of imposing a style on myself was horrific. Without a doubt, consistency is an important factor for the market, but that is another thing.

MGT I understand that one of the principal arguments for this type of work is, first and foremost, to let the materials define their own form. How did you decide on the amount of material to use, and exactly how to place it? You were explaining the aesthetic quality of the leaves, but what about the fat and the ice? It seems like these decisions would have an impact on the attitude and the presence of each piece. One might say that the ice piece at the Whitney was more spectacular than the fat. I imagine that the leaves inside the white gallery at Leo Castelli had a powerful effect, as did the leaves in the elevator of Dwan Gallery and in the staircase of Castelli’s warehouse in 9 at Leo Castelli. If I understand correctly, the leaves in every exhibition were left there for the opening of the show. Were they important to you as a mutable performance element, or were you more interested in their final form?

RF I will answer with a chronology that may establish some type of order.

In the 1950s I began to paint on my own at Syracuse University. Then I studied at the University of Puerto Rico. I did paintings influenced by Giorgio de Chirico, Picasso. The paintings on canvas evolved into assemblages using wood, steel, tin, et cetera. In the 1960s, my experiments with assemblage led to welded sculpture. In 1966 I permanently moved to Philadelphia on a grant from the university. I continued with welded sculpture and I would commute weekly to New York to visit galleries and museums. I would stay at Jim Wines’s apartment and go to openings and art events. At the time, I was friends with Ivan Karp from Leo Castelli. Ivan was an early supporter of my work. Through Ivan, I met Allan Stone.

In 1967 I got a teaching job at Philadelphia College of Art. As I started to be influenced by Minimalism, my work became simpler. I began using chance to determine composition. That year I met Robert Morris at the opening of his show at Leo Castelli Gallery. All of my work then was three-dimensional. I was using the cyclone fence, and it was during this time that I made the realization about the power of the leaves. I photographed them, obliterating sidewalks and narrowing streets.

Robert Morris organized the exhibition 9 at Leo Castelli in a huge warehouse at 108th Street, near Columbus Avenue. The building was used by Leo Castelli Gallery for storage, and without fanfare it became the first “alternative” art space. It was too late for me to participate officially, though, since Morris did not know of my work with leaves in Philadelphia, but I saw it as a terrific opportunity and developed a plan.
I asked three of my students to assist me. We collected 87 bushels of leaves in large plastic bags and drove to New York.

My instructions for The Three Leaf Pieces were: Aim to deposit leaves anonymously. If confronted by resistance, move fast and repeat: “Philadelphia Leaves.” Prevent at all costs action becoming publicity stunt à la the Cannes Film Festival, drop brassiere starlet!

#1
57th Street, Dwan Gallery, Fischbach, and Tibor de Nagy. One person with a janitor uniform delivered four bags of leaves to the top floor of Dwan Gallery. I also carried three bags in the public elevator to the top floor. Then I met with the students, who gave me their additional bags. I proceeded to rip all the bags, stuffing them under my jacket as leaves covered me up to my head. The elevator began to go downward and stopped. As the doors opened, two people waiting for the elevator stared at the leaves spilling out. Then the door closed. The sequence repeated itself twice. Finally I arrived on the ground floor. Ron Miyashiro, an artist friend, took a photograph. The janitor appeared: “Hey, hey, what are you doing?” I moved fast and got in the back of a pickup with my three students and Ron Miyashiro.

#2
We drove to 4 East 77th Street to Leo Castelli Gallery. Two of my students went up with four bags of leaves. Ron was already inside the gallery. I went to the front door and let them in. Ron took photos of my students ripping up their leaf bags and making a mound surrounded by a beautiful show of Cy Twombly’s paintings. Ron heard the gallery secretary saying, “Oh my, they delivered this piece to the wrong place, it should have gone uptown.”

#3
We drove to 108th Street and proceeded to fill a staircase at Castelli’s uptown space with the remaining leaves.

Marcia Tucker’s invitation to participate in Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials came about as a direct result of all this. To return to your question, my use of materials such as leaves, ice, hay, and grease had to do with their unexpected presence in places where they would be strange.

This displacement is wonderfully present, for instance, in the paintings of René Magritte. I never had any interest in what is now called performance. My half-brother, José Ferrer, is an actor. I know the world of the theater very well. Performance art is ill defined. I have always avoided spectacles. The instructions I gave to my colleagues involved in The Three Leaf Pieces were to avoid interaction and to move away rapidly. The work would stand alone, silently. I admire David Hammons enormously. One winter he did something truly magical: He sold snowballs on the street.

MGT I have always thought that Hammons’s work is incredible. It is intriguing that you mention it as subtle. Can you comment on your experience in the Anti-Illusion show, and the photograph of you outside the Whitney?

RF That picture was taken moments after the ice blocks were placed on top of the leaves. My outfit is interesting. I used to be a musician. I dressed with a flair you may be familiar with—like a musician on the scene in Latin America. In the 1960s the uniform of the avant-garde in New York was overalls, jeans, and dirty boots—proletarian attire. I would use that style for the daytime, but for the Anti-Illusion opening I dressed like a super-fly musician. The piece on the fourth floor announced in a high voice, “The Greaser Strikes.” The avant-garde elite were not comfortable. I started to understand that the avant-garde was a clique with curious restrictions, similar to those of the WASP clubs.

Racism among the elite of the avant-garde in North America is still an issue that is repressed. Today, it is totally different. In my book called Drawing I used the phrase Glandular Aesthetics to describe the way in which curators and critics decide with prejudice in favor of art that is young and deals with gay issues. This describes 80 percent of what you see in a given month in Chelsea, New York. I also perceive it in the Hollywood of the 1930s and ‘40s, where producers used the casting couch to determine the possible fame of starlets.

MGT I remember a sentence by Robert Morris that was printed in one of your publications. It said something like, “I do not want you to be preoccupied with your nationality, or your place of origin.” I imagine this might have impacted you in some way.
On two occasions, Robert Morris traveled with me to Puerto Rico. The dean of the university in Mayagüez, José Enrique Arrarás, asked me to be his New York art scene contact. During our first trip, the three of us met up a couple of times. We concluded that Morris should spend time in the region to study it deeply and plan a series of events. For our second trip, we planned a couple of events in which both of us would participate. I decided to use an exhibition space at the university to continue doing my work with improvised materials. In the bigger space inside the gallery, I used galvanized iron sheets (which are used for roofs in the tropics), blocks of concrete, sand, rolls of grass, light bulbs (with their wires), and a series of found objects, such as rabbit cages and the boxes that shoe-shine guys use to carry their materials. Morris planned a series of events to take place on different areas of the campus. This university is an engineering school, so you can imagine the reactions of the students, who were not familiar with any type of art. And this was during the Vietnam War, which gave a sense of refinement to our events.

1
While a member of a band was playing the drums, others painted the trunks of palm trees with their same color of the trunks.

2
Morris used a jackhammer to try to insert a stone covered with military hats into the trees.

3
The last event took place at sunset. We carried rockets and different types of fireworks, which we started to light up. The sound and the light from the explosives caused a great commotion and anxiety among the students. They started to get angry and threatening. With the help of a friend, we lit up the rest of the explosives and left the place before a riot started. Morris never understood the screams, but I translated to him the urgency of our escape. Morris’s original proposal included various other projects that were never realized. The university personnel were afraid of doing them after what happened with the explosive project. In a diplomatic way, they informed us that they were not able to get all the required materials.

Months later, in Philadelphia, Morris invited me to lunch, to talk. We went to a restaurant in New York’s Chinatown. He more or less said, “I wanted to tell you that you have nothing to do with Puerto Rico. I don’t want to see you concerned with that. You are different from the people down there.” I started laughing because I thought his message was absurd. Even now, telling you the story, I do not know the meaning of his words. I have never met an Anglo-Saxon who was not strange, which I always figured had to do with the Protestant conflicts of that culture. Then add the pathology that we all carry in different ways. Morris does not share my resentment of the elite of that time. He is perplexed by the “tropical” attitude.

Anyway, I mentally archived his words until the day I heard a totally different response from another artist. I was working on an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, which coincided with a retrospective by Lucas Samaras. Samaras is Greek, from Macedonia, and his work is layered with references to that culture. We had a delightful conversation; he liked to use cryptic, somewhat aggressive phrases. I asked him, “Do you believe in psychology?” He replied, “What else is there?” The night of our openings, I asked him, “What do you think of my show?” He said, “Put more Puerto Rico into it.”

By the time of the Anti-Illusion show, Morris had already published his text on Anti-Form. What was your attitude toward it? Were you concerned about how your pieces were defined, or that they would or wouldn’t be seen in relation to a sculptural discourse?

My attitude was energetic and enthusiastic. I remember writing or saying at one point, “The problem is not what to do, rather where to do it, and how.” By that I meant that the environment was full of possibilities for unsolicited and unexpected actions that had a cryptic impact. For example, preparing a rubber attachment that would connect one’s penis to a rubber tube the length of a pair of pants, and the other end of the tube would be tucked into one’s socks. Wearing this piece, one would visit selected offices, banks, and public spaces, and when no one was looking take the tube out of the socks to urinate. One could do this while reading the paper, or giving an envelope to a secretary. Then, anyone who later discovered the puddle would just warn another, “There is a puddle of water here.”
The critical voice is always late to appreciate change. That is why rumor, “word of mouth,” is more effective to promote events. All of my artworks are driven by the impulse to create actions that surprise because of their unexpected nature: leaves in a room, ice in a salon, “water” puddles in an office. I have always refused to define them. I consider it unnecessary. I am deciding that what is absurd is marvelous, and that is what’s important.

MGT Some confusion has always existed over whether your leaf piece was or was not part of 9 at Leo Castelli. My understanding is that critics have insisted that the piece was part of the show. How did you see it then?

RF There was confusion. I did not realize the impact that The Three Leaf Pieces would have. It was reviewed in the Village Voice by John Perrault. Marcia Tucker’s invitation to the Whitney was followed by invitations to work in exhibitions in Europe such as When Attitudes Become Form and Op Losse Schroeven. Philip Leider’s review in the New York Times did not recognize my participation. This was in turn satirically mentioned by Carter Ratcliff in his essay for the catalog for my exhibition DESEO.

In Marcia Tucker’s recent autobiography, A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World, she mentions two of my works at the Whitney. In the context of the first one she describes me as “a young artist from Puerto Rico.” In the second mention, she says “I was also able to show artists whose work I found extraordinary but who hadn’t had the attention they deserved simply because they weren’t white like 1,2,3,4,5 and Rafael Ferrer.” Here you have the words of someone I met, who treated me with great generosity and respect, and never manifested a racial problem toward me.

The issue of racism is a curious one. One feels it, perceives it, and is affected in a particular way. In the worst of cases, it implies inferiority. During my education and life I never perceived this inferiority. On the contrary, from early on, my experience with gringos was that they were dumb. Gringos can live without understanding the complexities of other cultures and ethnic groups. When I was a musician in the 1950s, my intimate friends were blacks, whites, mulattos, Cubans, North Americans, and others.

MGT Your show at Leo Castelli Gallery was in 1970, right?

RF Yes, Leo Castelli offered me a show at the 108th Street warehouse. He commented on the beauty of my leaves in the Twombly show and said he’d left them there until the end of the show. Also at this time, I participated in exhibitions in Europe, showing essentially transient works—what are now called installations. This continued in the United States. Again, I never considered myself as developing a style to be faithful to. Rather, I came out of what I had just done with curiosity, and welcoming difficulty. From early on, I loved Francis Bacon’s thought, “Art is a game, but you have to complicate it.”

MGT What did you show at Castelli’s warehouse?

RF I divided the huge space into autonomous areas, each with a different reality. One large space had new corrugated galvanized sheets leaning all along the wall and laying on the floor. A small corridor of cement ran the length of the room, covered with peat moss. On top of the sheets were six-foot-long white neon tubes dividing the length of the room and supplying the only light. Alternating with every other neon tube were galvanized buckets full of water. The reality was perhaps of a strange dairy operation.

At the other end of the space was a completely dark room with a few scattered “trouble lights” providing minimal illumination. The floor was covered with peat moss and numerous slices of tree trunks and branches. The entrance was a narrow opening in the outside wall made of the same galvanized sheets. In the middle was a long, snakelike row of slices of sycamore trunks about 16 to 20 inches long, each sandwiching an issue of Artforum. Outside were six 300-pound ice cakes sitting on top of expanded steel pieces. Cases of rum from Rums of Puerto Rico accompanied large galvanized tubs with ice. A bunch of old friends came from Puerto Rico for the opening, literally taking over the scene.
Willoughby Sharp: Most of your catalog biographies state that you were born in Kleve, but you were actually born in Krefeld, weren't you?

Joseph Beuys: I was born in a hospital in Krefeld, but that was purely accidental. My mother was making a short visit to Krefeld and I was born in the middle of it. But at most I spent three days there. I have no relationship to Krefeld, or more precisely to the landscape, but I do have a relationship to Kleve. That is where my parents always lived and where I grew up.

WS: How long did you live in Kleve?

JB: Until 1961, when I was invited to be a professor at the Düsseldorf Art Academy.

WS: Then you attended school in Kleve?

JB: Yes, all my schooling.

WS: Is there an art academy in Kleve?
JB  No, I studied art in Düsseldorf. But I went to high school in Kleve until I became a soldier. At the end of 1947 I went to the Düsseldorf Art Academy and studied there until 1951. Then, after working for a while outside of Düsseldorf, I returned to Kleve.

WS  You worked in a studio?

JB  Yes, I rented a small loft in an old bakery and I worked under the roof.

WS  Who did you study with at the Düsseldorf Art Academy?

JB  Enseling and Mataré. Enseling was very academic. Mataré was better. Mataré was very dogmatic, but he raised issues that had to be considered. He thought that sculpture was basically ornamentation. This was a view to be contended with and of course we had great arguments. I had to reject his ideas but nevertheless it was necessary for me to confront them. That's the way you learn as a student, and some of his ideas weren’t totally uninteresting.

WS  That period must have been quite crazy. In 1951 much of Düsseldorf was still rubble and food was quite scarce. Was there any art then?

JB  There was none at all.

WS  What about Lehmbrock?

JB  Oh, Lehmbrock. He was a decisive figure during the war and I was very enthusiastic about some of his work. I once saw some Lehmbrocks in Kleve just before the war and they gave me my first real feeling of sculpture. But this was the only sculpture I was aware of at the time. I grew up in a small village during the Hitler period and never saw any modern art.

WS  What about medieval or Renaissance sculpture?

JB  Yes of course I saw photographs of these things. But I didn’t travel. I never got out of Kleve.

WS  You must have traveled as a soldier.

JB  Yes, I took part in the whole war, from 1941 until 1946. I was in Russia.

WS  What did you see there?

JB  Certainly not art! [Laughs] What can I say? I was a fighter pilot. I cannot talk about the war. There were dead people laying around, everywhere.

WS  Were you in Stalingrad?

JB  No, I was more to the south, in the Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Black Sea.

WS  And when the war ended?

JB  During the last year of the war I was stranded on the Western front. There were no more planes, no more fuel. When peace was declared I became a British prisoner of war.

WS  Did the war influence your decision to become an artist?

JB  Yes. Before the war I was a student of biology and mathematics, but this simply didn’t satisfy me. You could say it was an emotional decision, but when you examine it a few years later you can begin to analyze it.

WS  Tell me more about what you did in the early 1950s.

JB  When I set up my own studio in Heerdt, a suburb of Düsseldorf, I was very friendly with the poet Adam Rainer Lynen. And I worked in that room until 1961, when I went back to Kleve.

WS  When did you become aware of Marcel Duchamp’s work?

JB  In 1955, I think.

WS  I feel the presence of Duchamp in one of your earliest sculptures, Untitled, of 1954. Do you see the influence?
No, I don’t think Duchamp influenced it at all. It was influenced by life. The open form is like a barracks window, or windows you see in old industrial cellars.

So there’s an architectural reference. What is the cylinder in front of the open chamber?

It’s a steel gas container covered with plaster.

None of your works have bases?

Bases used to annoy me, even when I was in the academy. They are only an auxiliary means to help things stand up. They are like an artificial lawn. Just after I finished my first figures, I removed them from their bases because they disturbed me so much. It was only later that I recognized the base was an important element, perhaps the most important element. There are some sculptures that consist of nothing but a base.

One of your works in which the base is irrelevant was *The Needles of a Christmas Tree* of 1962.

That’s true. It was a Christmas tree that stood around here for two years. Eventually it lost all its needles and they laid all around it.

You moved to the Drakeplatz studio in March 1961, so that was your first Christmas here. Did you always see the tree as a sculpture?

Yes, I saw its beauty. But it was not only beautiful, it was also ugly. You may say a Christmas tree with needles is beautiful and one without needles is ugly. No. I wanted to have it, and we did, for a long time, until the worms destroyed it.

Oh . . .

Two years ago I created a political party for animals.

Do you have a lot of animals in the party?

It’s the largest party in the world.

Are you the leader?

I am the leader.

You’re crazy. [Laughter]

And therefore I am a very mighty man. Mightier than Nixon. [More laughter]

But he has all the insects.

I have all the insects.

They are not animals.

Insects are animals.

Where does the fat come in? To attract flies into the party?

The fat is in the room, the party’s meeting room. [Laughter] To make things clear, let me give you this statement concerning *The Art Pill* (1963) Vehicle Art:

The chief of the Stags could plug anywhere into the environment, whether on the inside of a room with flat, curved, or chaotic surfaces. Yes, even amorphous rooms gave him the energy to bake his cakes. He didn’t despair when at first he succeeded in producing only flat, unseemly pancakes, which shriveled up in the pan. On the contrary, he was encouraged in his determination since he had not lost faith in the effectiveness of *The Art Pill*. Nevertheless, some salutary byproducts resulted from his activity, namely art to be rubbed in, art taking the form of a salve, art in the form of a sausage, art to be cut into slices.

I assume, then, that you are the chief of the animals, and that this can be seen in your work *The Chief* of 1963–64, which you performed rolled up in a felt rug with a dead hare at each end and fat works in the corners of the room.
Yes, I speak for the hares that cannot speak for themselves.

Which you do literally by making noises that are amplified in the room and in the street.

The human responsibility to all living things.

I remember that you met Robert Morris before his Schmella show in fall 1964.

Morris visited me. I showed him all my works. I wanted to do The Chief with him. We arranged to do the work simultaneously. We wanted to start at the same second and then work for nine hours, me in Berlin, he in New York.

Did you do it?

Yes, I did it in Berlin. But he didn’t do it.

Why not?

I don’t know, but he didn’t do it. He left Düsseldorf after his show. I wrote everything down for him. I drew a sketch with the dimensions, gave him all the instructions with regard to space and all the elements involved.

There seems to be some similarity in sensibility between The Chief and some of Morris’s theatrical works, but I can understand why he might not have wanted to do it. [Beuys draws attention to some photos of his Fettecke, or fat pieces, which he calls Akzene] There must be a lot of action in these works for you. You did some Fetteckes as part of The Chief, didn’t you?

Yes. [Points to the photo of The Chief] Here is one. It is a transmitter, and I am also a transmitter. Both are sculptural elements. That is a very important concept for me. If I produce something, I transmit a message to someone else. The origin of the flow of information comes not from matter, but from the I, from an idea. Here is the borderline between physics and metaphysics. This is what interests me about the theory of sculpture.

Set III is composed of nine equal elements made of layers of felt topped by a rectangular plate of copper of the same size. They have a relationship to the room that is hard to define. They fill the space. I am not interested in the physical aspect of filling. I want the work to become an energy center, like an atomic station. It’s the same principle: transmitter and receiver. The receiver is the same as the transmitter, only in felt. It is totalization. The spectator becomes the program. The spectator, represented by the felt, equals the program. An identification of transmitter and receiver. Actually two elements, fat and felt, are closely related. Both have a homogenous character in that they have no inner structure. Felt is a material pressed together, an amorphous material, with an uneven structure. The same is true of the fat, and that interested me. But there is also the element of filtration—I worked with gauze filters before I worked with fat—and there is an element of isolation in it.

There is also a minimal element in your work, especially in Set III and Felt Corner (1963).

Yes, the idea of minimal is expressed in these works, but they are not Minimal art. It’s different. It overlaps. It’s minimal in the sense of something very reduced. But there is no direct connection in my work to Minimalism.
WS Has your teaching at the Düsseldorf Art Academy for the last eight years been an important function for you?

JB It’s my most important function. To be a teacher is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration. If you want to explain yourself you must present something tangible. But after a while this has only the function of a historic document. Objects aren’t very important for me anymore. I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it. Thought, speech, communication—and not only in the socialist sense of the words—are all expressions of the free human being.

WS Would you say then that your goal is to make man freer and stimulate him to think more freely?

JB Yes, I am aware that my art cannot be understood primarily by thinking. My art touches people who are in tune with my mode of thinking. But it is clear that people cannot understand my art by intellectual processes alone, because no art can be experienced that way. I say experience because this is not equivalent to thinking; it’s a great deal more complex. It involves being moved subconsciously. They either say, “Yes, I’m interested,” or they react angrily and destroy my work and curse it. In any event I feel I am successful with my art. I touch people, and this is important. In our times, thinking has become so positivist that people only appreciate what can be controlled by reason, what can be used, what furthers your career. The need for questions that go beyond that has pretty much died out of our culture. Because most people think in materialistic terms they cannot understand my work. This is why I feel it’s necessary to present something more than mere objects. By doing that people may begin to understand that man is not only a rational being.

WS What can a sculptor do in this situation?

JB Sculpture must always obstinately question the basic premises of the prevailing culture. This is the function of all art, which society is always trying to suppress. But it’s impossible to suppress it. Now, even politicians are becoming aware of that. Art—its new concepts, schools, even revolutionary groups—now has a strong vitality throughout the world.

WS Slowly people are beginning to realize that the creative spirit cannot be subdued.

JB Provocateur, that’s it exactly. To provoke means to evoke something. By making a sculpture from fat or a piece of clay I evoke something. I ignite a thought within me—a totally original, totally new thought that has never yet existed in history, even if I deal with historical fact or with Leonardo or Rembrandt. I myself determine history, it is not history that determines me. Economic circumstances do not determine me, I determine them. Every man is a potential provocateur.

WS How does art improve life?

JB Art alone makes life possible—this is how radically I should like to formulate it. I would say that without art, man is inconceivable in psychological terms. There is a certain materialist doctrine that claims that we can dispense with mind and with art because man is just a more or less highly developed mechanism governed by chemical processes. I would say man does not consist only of chemical processes, but also of metaphysical occurrences. The provocateur of chemical processes is located outside the world. Man is only truly alive when he realizes he is a creative, artistic being. I demand an artistic involvement in all realms of life. At the moment art is taught as a special field that demands the production of documents in the form of artworks, whereas I advocate an aesthetic involvement from science, from economics, from politics, from religion, from every sphere of human activity. Even the act of peeling a potato can be a work of art. It is a conscious act.

WS Which artists do you feel close to?

JB John Cage. These concepts are not alien to him.

WS What about the new Italian sculptors such as Mario Merz, or American sculptors such as Richard Serra?

JB Yes, I feel close to them, because they are contemporaries. But not
that close, because I have a feeling that these things have already been done. Perhaps the reason I love John Cage and Nam June Paik more is because they are at the point of origin. Things have a certain reach. Beyond that everything is derivative. From that point of view most of the works at Bern [at the When Attitudes Become Form exhibition] were late works. I have been doing these things for a long time, and now I am questioning their value.

WS What do you think of the work of Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, and Keith Sonnier?

JB I don't know their work that well, but I spoke to Bruce Nauman at Bern.

WS Nauman's work shares a similar sensibility.

JB Yes, but I find it hard to define because I don't know his inner intentions. I place great importance on inner intentions. I don't know anything about Nauman's thought processes, but I can say that his work looks closer to my art than any other works do.

WS Then you don't often come into contact with the works of other artists?

JB I rarely go to exhibitions, and I hardly ever read art journals. If I happen to see one, I look at it, but my interest is not so great that I follow these things daily. I am more interested in the developments of thoughts. I am not at all interested in where other people use elements of my work.

WS Do you feel the same about Robert Morris?

JB Yes, but I was bit surprised when Morris started working with felt. But I couldn't say more. Last year Morris invited me to participate in an exhibition he was arranging. I couldn't do it.

WS The Castelli warehouse exhibition in New York?

JB Yes.

WS Why didn't you participate?

JB I didn't think it was necessary.

WS Did you not have any work?

JB No, I didn't have anything at the time that I could have given away. Karl Ströher had just bought all my work [about 300 pieces], but I guess I could have made something for it. I just didn't feel like it. Later some people told me it was a good thing I didn't participate, because the exhibition wasn't really all that good.

WS That's not true. It was one of the best shows of the year.

JB All right. Then it was a mistake that I didn't send anything, but one cannot do everything.

WS I see you have a great reluctance to do exhibitions.

JB Yes, I was always extremely reluctant, because for me an exhibition is something that is already dead. It is something I only allow myself to be forced to do. I will only do an exhibition when there is absolutely no way out.

WS That explains why you have only shown two or three times during your 10-year association with Alfred Schema.

JB Yes, I keep on refusing to exhibit until someone like Schema convinces me that it's an absolute necessity.

WS Is this a reaction against materialism in general or is it due to the fact that there are more demands on you today than there were in 1967?

JB Both. People are becoming more demanding. They are getting sharper. I was glad when Ströher took everything away. Things have to be somewhere, and I have never wanted to collect my own things. I like my empty walls best.

WS You've been working for 20 years, and it's only recently that people have begun to appreciate what you have accomplished.
This is a fairly recent development. For 10 or 15 years people mocked me and said “Beuys is crazy.”

WS Yes, I remember when I first visited Düsseldorf in 1957, no one except one or two artists defended you. Things have changed now. What do you think about your present situation within the context of art?

JB I think the crux of the matter is that my work is permeated with thoughts that originate not in the official development of art but in scientific concepts. You know, to begin with I wanted to be a scientist. But I found that the theoretical structure of the natural sciences was too Positivist for me, so I tried to do something new for both science and art. I wanted to widen both areas. So as a sculptor I tried to broaden the concept of art. I have had one idea that I have obstinately worked with. Actually it’s a problem of perception.

WS Perception?

JB [Long hesitation] In the simplest terms, I am trying to reaffirm the concept of art and creativity in the face of Marxist doctrine. The Socialist movements in Europe that are now strongly supported by the young constantly provoke this question. They define man exclusively as a social being. I wasn’t surprised by this development, which led to the confused political conditions not only in Germany but also in America. Man really is not free in many respects, but he is free in his thinking, and here is the point of origin of sculpture. For me the formation of the thought is already sculpture. The thought is sculpture. Of course, language is sculpture. I move my larynx, I move my mouth, and the sound is an elementary form of sculpture. Man hasn’t thought much until now about sculpture. We ask, “What is sculpture?” and reply, “Sculpture.” The fact that sculpture is a very complex creation has been neglected. What interests me is the fact that sculpture supplies a definition of man.

WS Isn’t this rather abstract?

JB My theory depends on the fact that every human being is an artist. I have to encounter him when he is free, when he is thinking. Of course, thinking is an abstract way of putting it. But these concepts—thinking, feeling, wanting—are concerned with sculpture. Thought is represented by form. Feeling by motion or rhythm. Will by chaotic force. This explains the underlying principle of my Fettemcke. Fat in liquid form distributes itself chaotically in an undifferentiated form in a corner. These are parallel concepts that correspond to the emotions, to what could be called soul.

WS Is it difficult to decide to execute a work now?

JB Hmm. The question is if it is important to make sculpture now. I often question the necessity of doing it. The more I consider the problem, the more I think that there are only a few things that I need to make. I want to try to only do those that have some importance. I have no interest in production as such. I am interested in making works neither for commerce nor for the pure pleasure of seeing them. It is getting much harder to make things. But one is forced to translate thought into action and action into object. The physicist can think about the theory of atoms or about physical theory in general. But to advance his theories he has to build models, tangible systems. He too has to transfer his thought into action, and the action into an object. I am not a teacher who tells his students only to think. I say, act; do something. I ask for a result. It may take different forms. It can have the form of sound, or someone can do a book, make a drawing or a sculpture, I don’t care. Although I am a professor of sculpture at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, I accept all forms of creativity.

WS How do you think future historians will judge your contribution to art?

JB I am not at all interested in being placed on a value scale: “almost as good as Rembrandt,” “as good as Rubens or Goya.” After I am dead I would like people to say, “Beuys understood the historical situation. He altered the course of events.” I hope in the right direction.

This interview was first published in Artforum, December 1969, pages 40–47.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni Anselmo</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steel, cotton, and water</td>
<td>Dimensions variable</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Bollinger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rafael Ferrer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eva Hesse</td>
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<td>Double sheets of latex stuffed with polyurethane, 4 units, each 78 x 40 in.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Augment, 1968</td>
<td></td>
<td>Latex on canvas, 19 units, each 78 x 4 in.</td>
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<td>Aluminum with mirrored bottom</td>
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<td>Bruce Nauman</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Alan Saret</td>
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<td>Painted chicken wire</td>
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<td>Richard Serra</td>
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<td>Richard Serra</td>
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<td>Molten lead and wire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Sonnier</td>
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<td>Fabric and string</td>
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<td>Keith Sonnier</td>
<td>Mustée, 1968</td>
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<td>Latex, flock, and string</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Sonnier</td>
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<td>Lead, steel, and water</td>
<td>Dimensions variable</td>
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COLOPHON

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