

London

Joseph Beuys

HAUSER & WIRTH LONDON

196A Piccadilly

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An intimate look at the beginnings of Joseph Beuys's artistic practice, the ten works on paper in this exhibition reveal some of his initial experiments with material and form. In the earliest drawing, *Akt* (Nude), 1952, made just one year after Beuys finished his studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, he portrays a classically proportioned, undressed female figure posed in profile. Her body is hunched and bent, as if from the weight of the chlorinated iron that Beuys used to make his marks. He employed the burnt-orange metallic paste again in *Kalkteingebirge* (Limestone Mountains), 1956, and added milk to depict the nebulous landscape. Prefiguring his iconic installations and performances, Beuys aggressively activates each surface in these works and creates tangible tension. In particular, *Rosen* (Roses), 1957, and *Frau/Tierschädel* (Woman/Animal Skull), 1956–57, echo conflicting and unstable media—watercolor and brown paper, oil and turpentine—in their fragile compositions and subject matter. Red and pink roses, apparently torn and scattered across the page, bleed into shades of brown and yellow. Likewise, the woman and animal skull are threateningly intertwined and fade into darkness, while starkly contrasting with the warm and robust female figures in some of the other works on view here. *Untitled*, 1966, the latest work in the show, is the most visceral. Depicting a nude female figure stretching across a narrow piece of paper, Beuys has curiously covered her feet and hands with short pieces of tape. Seemingly affixing the lithe figure to the bare surface, he also fitted the paper across a sheet of zinc. Such juxtapositions are enigmatically replicated in Beuys's subsequent works, which pair immutable energy with a cold and equalizing frame.



Joseph Beuys, *Akt* (Nude), 1952, pencil and chlorinated iron on paper, 7 3/16 x 7".