

# BASTIAN

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'I am not normal... but that's actually OK'

**Gillian Anderson** on the delights of being a difficult woman

## Flashback

### Art dealer Heiner Bastian recalls his friend and mentor Joseph Beuys at the Venice Biennale, 1980



Heiner Bastian and Joseph Beuys, who worked together for almost two decades

THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS taken in the gardens of the Venice Biennale in 1980 when I was working with the German artist Joseph Beuys. He had been invited for the second time to the Biennale and was installing a very large work called *Das Kapital Raum (The Capital Space) 1970-1977*.

During the installation we were visited by Caroline Tisdall, the art critic. She asked us to sit down so she could take a photograph. When I look at her photo now, I see two people who have very deep thoughts about each other. I worked with Beuys between 1969 and his death in 1986, and we shared many visions about what art should be, and out of this came a deep trust and friendship.

I was 26, a poet, when I first met Beuys in 1969. He was giving a performance at the Academy of Arts in West Berlin, called *I Am Trying To Set You Free*. After a few minutes, some revolutionary socialist students stormed the stage and destroyed the piano, turning it over, breaking the legs, and wrecking everything that was on the stage. Afterwards most people left but I stayed behind with a few others and we started to talk to Beuys. That night, he said I should come and see him in Dusseldorf where he taught, which I did. Out of this meeting slowly developed a sort of companionship,

and I became his assistant and friend. I helped him prepare work and oversee the organisation of exhibitions, and we would have this wonderful dialogue, most of it about literature, German philosophy and the way a new art could be defined.

In this picture Beuys is in the outfit he always wore. He felt he should dress like somebody who works in the fields, rather than somebody who sits in a room addressing philosophical questions. So he always wore blue jeans, a fisherman's vest – which was made by his wife, and is folded on his lap here – a white shirt and a felt hat. Beuys served in a Luftwaffe bomber squadron in the Second World War – he was wounded when his plane was shot down over Crimea. He said he was then found by tribesmen who saved his life and who wrapped him in felt and fat to keep him warm. He told everyone he wore this hat as a sort of protection. (After the war, he studied sculpture at the Dusseldorf Academy of Art and began his career.)

**This photograph represents a very happy time for me – even though, the night before, all our tools had been stolen**

*Das Kapital* consisted of many different elements, including 50 blackboards of drawings and diagrams which were the result of a performance he gave in Edinburgh. In this, he explained his approach to an art rooted in humanism, and how to produce art after 1945 when Germany had committed this terrible crime of destroying almost an entire continent. It was very natural for him to think about art with this monstrous catastrophe in mind. His works were not monuments to happiness or solitude. They were about how progress is destroying the planet and most of his performances and installations carry the symbolism of this trauma.

This photograph represents a very happy time for me – even though, the night before, all the tools we needed for the installation had been stolen. Beuys had a great sense of humour so he told me we'd just have to improvise. I can't imagine what my life would have been without my friendship with him.

— Interview by Marcus Field  
Bastian gallery is opening at 8 Davies Street, London W1. The gallery's inaugural exhibition, Andy Warhol Polaroid Pictures, runs from 2 February - 13 April; [galeriebastian.com](http://galeriebastian.com)