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**Joseph Beuys**  
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## Guggenheim Museum-Hummel deal on hold as Milan courts consider besmirched Beuys works

Row over dubious drawings comes to US

**Jason Edward Kaufman**

31 October 1993

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The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum has been negotiating to buy a group of works by Josef Beuys from Viennese dealer Julius Hummel but controversy has erupted casting doubt on the authenticity of the seller's stock.

According to Michael Govan, deputy director of the Guggenheim, the museum has been seeking for more than a year to acquire a major collection of Beuys. "We did a survey of Beuys' works available worldwide", he states, "which led to our relationship with Julius Hummel, with whom we have an acquisition in process. We examined his entire collection", he continues, "and after consulting a number of specialists, we made known our interest in acquiring a certain group of Beuys' drawings and objects". After the acquisition was "in process", some of Hummel's wares were displayed in an exhibit earlier this year at the Accademia di Brera, Milan. Before the show closed, thirty-eight works - mostly drawings - were impounded by the Milanese magistracy

after critics stepped forth and denounced them as fraudulent (see *The Art Newspaper*, No. 29, June 1993, pp.1-2). Mr Govan is not at liberty to divulge the number or nature of items the museum was considering acquiring from Mr Hummel, nor whether any of them was directly implicated in the Milan case. He did admit, however, that a number of works have been brought to New York, though he did not elaborate on their relation to the disputed works in Milan.

Hummel maintains his holdings were executed by Beuys during visits to Vienna in the Sixties and Seventies. However, Berlin dealer Heiner Bastian, an intimate of the late German Conceptualist, impugns that the works were forged by Oswald Oberhuber, a former colleague of Beuys at Vienna's Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst, and former artistic director of the Nächst Sankt Stephan gallery which represented the artist in Vienna. Oberhuber, who himself loaned several Beuys installations to the Brera, claims he acquired the drawings directly from the artist and later sold them to Hummel, and he has signed a statement to that effect.

But there is corroborating opinion against the Hummel hoard. For one, Peter Raue, a lawyer for Mr Bastian and representative of Beuys' widow, Eva, is convinced of the falsity of the material in question. Lucio Amelio, a Neapolitan dealer and Beuys' specialist who knows the works only from the Brera catalogue, mistrusts the "inadequate" provenance and dating provided, and has trouble with what he calls the drawings' uncharacteristic "painterly quality". Hans Joachim Verspohl, a Dortmund academic who is compiling a catalogue raisonné of Beuys objects, writings, performances, and utterances, has examined reproductions of the drawings and concluded the signatures look wrong. He notes that drawings are the medium most often forged because of their saleability. The Milanese court is to appoint an expert who will decide whether the case should go to court.

"In any event", emphasises Mr Govan, "because of the way we structure acquisitions the Guggenheim is not in any danger of holding works that are deemed to be unauthentic. The process of acquisition takes a long time, and involves extensive negotiations and research. At this point we are waiting for more information". Whether or not the Hummel sale goes through, the Guggenheim is anxious to establish a Beuys collection. The museum mounted an important Beuys show in 1979, yet relatively few of his works are in America. Since beginning the Beuys acquisition campaign, the Guggenheim has purchased the installation "Terremoto" (1981), an assortment of more than forty drawings, and five "Vitrines" (case installations). Mr Govan says an even larger Beuys collection could enable the museum to improve its representation of the Sixties and Seventies, particularly in terms of sculpture and installations.

The scandal does not alter the museum's belief that Beuys is essential to a complete view of post-war art.

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