

FLANN

A N D F R I E N D S

*FLUXUS AND FRIENDS: Selections
from the Alternative Traditions in the
Contemporary Arts Collection*



*Curated by Estera Milman
The University of Iowa Museum of Art
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FOREWORD

The word *fluxus* has come to be identified with an international community of like-minded artists, composers, and writers who surfaced in the early 1960s and with the performances, objects, relics, actions, and publications that have since been generated by the group. There is some discussion as to whether Fluxus ceased to exist after 1978 when George Maciunas (the collective's primary chronicler and organizer) died or whether the phenomenon has continued into the present. There is also much disagreement as to who was, or who was not, Fluxus, and when. The current exhibition is composed around a core of works that undeniably fall within the Fluxus canon. In keeping with the authentic Fluxus tradition, additional pieces by a select group of "Friends" have also been included.

Fluxus works are, for the most part, unpretentious by design. They are accessible, although not always comfortable. However, without some understanding of the convictions that informed these works and of the contexts to which they responded, the exhibition's public will have access to but part of the story. The following essay is offered as a brief introduction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Foster with whom I share the directorship of Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts and who has long provided me with a sense of community.

Calligraphy on front cover from printer's proof for *Tout #7*, edited and designed by Ben Vautier, 1965.

Frontispiece: George Maciunas, *Fluxpost (Aging Men)*, Fluxus Edition, n.d.

Back Cover: Geoffrey Hendricks, *Picnic Garbage Vinyl Placemat*, Fluxus Edition, 1973.

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In her Sunday, June 16, 1968, article for the *New York Times*, critic Grace Glueck reviewed the *Flux Year Box 2*, a wooden multiple containing samplings of miniature works by many Fluxus participants of that period. After describing its contents and listing its contributors, she wrote: "*Flux Year Box 2* is produced by Fluxus, a loose knit collective of Happeners, Eventists, and way out musicians organized—

ing collage, and a way of life. That the phenomenon appears to resist definition is based, in part, on the fact that Fluxus changed its public face to suit its intentions, its specific context, and the purposes of its many diverse practitioners.

Moving freely from European concert hall to New York street, gallery to storefront,

ART	FLUXUS ART-AMUSEMENT
To justify artist's professional, parasitic and elite status in society, he must demonstrate artist's indispensability and exclusiveness, he must demonstrate the dependability of audience upon him, he must demonstrate that no one but the artist can do art.	To establish artist's nonprofessional status in society, he must demonstrate artist's dispensability and inclusiveness, he must demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the audience, he must demonstrate that anything can be art and anyone can do it.
Therefore, art must appear to be complex, pretentious, profound, serious, intellectual, inspired, skillful, significant, theatrical, it must appear to be valuable as commodity so as to provide the artist with an income. To raise its value (artist's income and patrons profit), art is made to appear rare, limited in quantity and therefore obtainable and accessible only to the social elite and institutions.	Therefore, art-amusement must be simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances, require no skill or countless rehearsals, have no commodity or institutional value. The value of art-amusement must be lowered by making it unlimited, mass-produced, obtainable by all and eventually produced by all. Fluxus art-amusement is the rear-guard without any pretention or urge to participate in the competition of "one-upmanship" with the avant-garde. It strives for the monostructural and nontheatrical qualities of simple natural event, a game or a gag. It is the fusion of Spikes Jones, Vaudeville, gag, children's games and Duchamp.

George Maciunas, *Manifesto*, excerpted from a Fluxus broadside, 1965. Reproduced with the permission of Gilbert Silverman.

no disorganized—in 1961 by George Maciunas. . . . Though Fluxus's membership fluxuates [sic], it goes on dauntlessly producing—fluxfests, fluxfilms, fluxgags and fluxbooks." Since this definition was offered, Fluxus has been described as a kind of alchemy, an international tendency, fusion or crossover, a transformation of life into art, a liv-

shopping mall to underground press, Fluxus was an international artists's network, a consolidation of utopian convictions that surfaced simultaneously within mid-century art communities worldwide. Its lineage included experiments in open or alternative educational systems such as the Black Mountain College and the New School for Social Research; the innovative

works of artists like Yves Klein, Daniel Spoerri, and Jean Tinguely who were to become members of the Paris-based *Le Nouveau Réalisme*; the performance art and public spectacles of the Japanese *Gutai* Group; the compositions and theories of John Cage; and a resurgence of Western interest in Zen Buddhism. Its progeny includes contemporary intermedia works, correspondence art, book art, media and performance art. It is difficult, if not impossible, to approach the international phenomenon that was (and for some of its practitioners still is) Fluxus without some understanding of the tradition from which it emerged and the concerns by which it was informed. Despite the late George Maciunas's insistence on an anti-avant-garde or "rear-guard" posture, Fluxus can, in all probability, be called the last legitimate avant-garde of our century. As heir to this tradition, it responded to a series of crises experienced by artists in the 1960s. In keeping with the traditional means by which the early twentieth-century avant-garde attempted to effect its recurrent utopian acts of revisionism, participants in Fluxus proceeded to attempt to assault, charm, and liberate their public simultaneously.

The word *fluxus* was first associated with the activities of a particular group of artists when *Sneak Preview: Fluxus* was announced in Paris on July 3, 1962. Many of the American participants in this event had been involved in a June concert in Düsseldorf entitled *Neo-Dada in der Musik*. Dada was Fluxus's self-proclaimed great-grandparent. It is interesting to note that there are certain similarities between the pro-



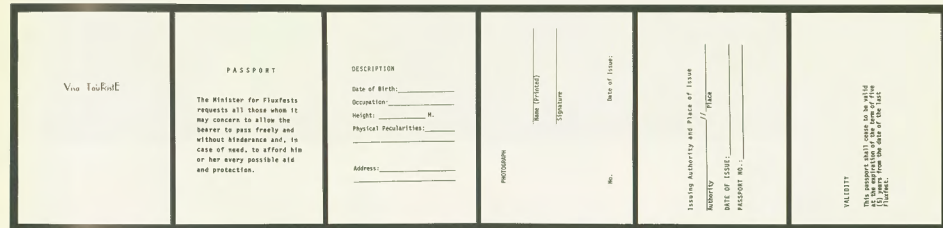
cess by which Fluxus came to be identified with an international post-World War II artists' collective and how the word *dada* came to represent the activities of its anti-World War I precursor.

The word *dada* was born in March or April 1916. Before the word was coined, many of the individuals who were to participate in Zurich Dada were already in residence in neutral Switzerland, drawn together not only by certain stylistic affinities evidenced in their work but also by a shared geographical displacement resulting from their antiwar convictions. Tristan Tzara, who served as Dada's most active propagandist, wrote the following in his "Zurich Chronicle 1915-1919": "A word was born no one knows how Dada-dada we took the oath of

friendship on the new transmutation that signifies nothing."¹ In 1921, Tzara defined Dada as being neither a school nor a dogma, but rather "a constellation of individuals and of free facets."² However, rumor has it that the word *dada* was originally intended to serve as a stage name for one of the performers at Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire, the location where the Zurich Dadaists first gathered. At the time of the inception of the word, there was some discussion of chance procedure and a dictionary. Rumor also has it that before Dada was taken up as a banner by the disparate communities of artists who were to participate in the historical movement, the word was proposed as a possible title for the first of the Zurich Dada publications, an anthology that eventually appeared under the title *Cabaret Voltaire*.³

Decades later, during the height of what was then euphemistically referred to as the "involvement in Viet Nam," another generation of artists swore an oath of friendship around a new banner: Fluxus.⁴ Like Dada, Fluxus was not intended to provide an identity for the community; the word was originally to serve as the title for an anthology of their collected works. As was the case for Dada, Fluxus was taken directly from the dictionary; however, unlike the World War I non-sense word, the Viet Nam era transmutation was chosen precisely because of what it did signify: "flux (fluks), n. [Of., fr. L. *fluxus*. fr. *fleure*, *fluxum*, to flow . . .] 2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to or treating with flux . . . 7. Chem & Metal. a. Any substance or mixture used to promote fu-

Flux Year Box 2, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1968.
Contributors: Eric Andersen, George Brecht, John Cale, John Cavanaugh, Willem DeRidder, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Shigeko Kubota, Dan Lauffer, Fred Lieberman, George Maciunas, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Ben Patterson, James Riddle, Paul Sharits, Bob Sheff, Stan Vanderbeek, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, and Robert Watts.



Ken Friedman and George Maciunas, *Visa TouristE* (Passport to the State of Flux) 1966/77.

sion . . .⁵ Dada soon conquered the World War I Western art world and eventually provided the primary paradigm for subsequent avant-garde activities in our century. Fluxus, also, quickly united a generation of artists who, although scattered throughout the world, collectively questioned the myth of artistic privilege and shared the conviction that art activity must be withdrawn from its special status as rarefied experience and be resituated within the larger realm of the everyday experience of everyman. Fluxus has come to be indentifiable through its language works, its minimalist performance pieces, its street events, its concentration on the everyday activity, its publications, object games and event kits, its relics, and through its personae, *die Fluxus Leute* (the Fluxus people).⁶ Fluxus was (is) a fusion of all of these things but, perhaps more importantly, Fluxus

was the coalition of an international "constellation of individuals" into a conceptual community, a country whose geography was a figment of the communal imagination, whose citizenry was transient and, by definition, cosmopolitan.

It has been said that the poet Tristan Tzara was "Dada's most ardent spirit."⁷ It has also been said that he was "one of the first to grasp the suggestive power of the word Dada" and that he proceeded to work "indefatigably as the prophet of the word," wrapping, pasting, addressing, bombarding the French and Italians with letters, slowly making himself the "focal point."⁸ As Dada's most active impresario, Tzara's successful international propagation of the word was elemental to the eventual ascendancy of the concept as a paradigm for subsequent twentieth-century avant-gardes. In a simi-

lar fashion, George Maciunas was Fluxus's most ardent spirit. Maciunas, who has been called the "commissar" of Fluxus,⁹ was the collective's most active propagandist and chronicler and provided the catalyst, the substance used to promote fusion, the flux, as it were, around which the community itself coalesced. From the early 1960s until his death in 1978, he wrapped, pasted, constructed, published, addressed, bombarded; he organized concerts and feasts, developed diagrams, composed lists, and otherwise chronicled the series of acts and events of which the movement was composed.¹⁰ Maciunas provided Fluxus with its public face, its identity. He also provided the community with its name.

NOTES

1. Tristan Tzara, "Zurich Chronicle 1915-1919," trans. Ralph Manheim, in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, (New York and Toronto: Oxford Univ., 1965), p.224. For a discussion of how the coinage of the word was essential to an awareness by members of Zurich Dada of their own group identity, see Richard Huelsenbeck, "En avant Dada: A History of Dadaism," trans. Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, 1951), pp.21-47. For an amplification of the subsequent ramifications of this process upon perception of early twentieth-century American modernism, see Estera Milman, "Dada New York: An Historiographic Analysis," in *Dada/Dimensions*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 165-86.

2. Tzara makes this statement in his "mock authorization" of New York Dada, published in Marcel Duchamp's and Man Ray's periodical of the same title, Tzara, "New York Dada," *New York Dada*, April 1921, p.2. *New York Dada* was reprinted, cover to cover, in Motherwell, pp. 214-18. The appearance in 1951 of Motherwell's anthology and its second printing in 1967 should not be underestimated. It was through *The Dada Painters and Poets* that interested members of the post-World War II American art world acquired access to their historical precedent. Alongside the Fluxus group, another artist who was so influenced was Allan Kaprow, who participated in some of the events of the first grand Fluxus European tour and who could easily be included in the list of the movement's "friends." A manifesto by Kaprow is included with a number of Fluxus manifestos published as one of the famous *Great Bear Pamphlets*, considered to be some of the most authentic and illuminating records of Fluxus. See *Manifestos: A Great Bear Pamphlet* (New York: Something Else Press, Inc., 1966), pp.21-23.

3. Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, John Elderfield, ed., trans. Ann Raimés (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 63.

4. In an article that attempted to describe concept art as "world view" rather than as "art movement," Fluxus participant Ken Friedman wrote, "Filliou's marvelous *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* bore on its jacket a probing note by Jackson Mac Low condemning the war in Viet Nam. In the space the size of a file card, as much was said as has been said since . . . We marched in 1963 to protest what was then called 'the involvement' in Viet Nam." (Friedman, "Fluxus and concept art," *Art and Artists*, Special Fluxus Issue, October 1972, p.52.) In March 1966, Fluxus participant Wolf Vostell published a manifesto entitled "... Instead of Bombs . . . American Planes in Viet Nam . . . Should Drop . . ." (*Manifestos*, p.28.)

5. The catalog for *Fluxus Etc.*, an exhibition drawn from the

Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection and presented at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, in the summer of 1981, reproduces a negative reversal image attributed to George Maciunas (ca. 1963). The page is drawn directly from a dictionary and presents a standard definition of the word *flux*. The catalog also reproduces a number of Maciunas's Fluxus manifestos, one of which is also dated ca. 1963 and is composed of collaged snippets of this page juxtaposed against Maciunas's own definitions of words such as *purge* and *fuse*. "Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual,' professional and commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art.—PURGE THE WORLD OF ?—&EUROPEANISM!" See Hendricks, *Fluxus Etc.* (Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 1981), pp. 6 & 7. In 1970, Joseph Beuys amended this manifesto by substituting the word *Americanism* for Maciunas's *Europeanism*, rubber stamping it with the *Fluxus Zone West* imprint and signing the piece. (Ibid, p. 69.)

6. While recalling the first Fluxus grand European tour in 1962, Dick Higgins stated, "in connection with these festivals the newspapers and the media began to refer to us as 'die Fluxus Leute' (the Fluxus people), and so here we were, people from very different backgrounds—Knowles, Vostell and Brecht originally painters, Watts a sculptor, Patterson, myself and Paik composers, Williams, myself and Mac Low writers, and so on—here we were being told that we were the fluxus people." (Dick Higgins "Fluxus: Theory and Reception" [paper presented at *Fluxus: A Workshop Series*, Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts, The University of Iowa School of Art and Art History, April 1985], p. 8.)

7. George Ribemont-Dessaignes, "History of Dada," in Motherwell, p. 105.

8. Huelsenbeck, in Motherwell, p. 26.

9. Higgins, p. 8.

10. I am fully aware that by choosing to use the word *movement* in this essay I place myself in direct opposition to other individuals who have written about Fluxus. I have chosen the word quite consciously. (Scholars have long ago ceased to be self-conscious when applying the term to historical Dada which was, in reality, a great deal more than a "constellation of individuals and of free facets.") I ask that the word here be understood as both an act, process, or insistence on change and a connected series of acts and events tending toward some more or less definite end. The similarities between dictionary definitions for the word *flux* and the word *movement* (that is to say both as a moving, shifting, or act of flowing and in reference to bodily excretions) further suggest that had the word *fluxus* been origi-

nally chosen to identify the activities of the group, Maciunas might well have called it the Fluxus Movement in much the same way that Marcel Duchamp intentionally chose the redundancy Société Anonyme, Inc. as the title for the New York gallery that he founded with Katherine Dreier and Man Ray in the spring of 1920.

11. "Transcript of Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas by Larry Miller, March 24, 1978," reprinted in *Fluxus Etc./ The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, ed. Jon Hendricks (New York: Ink & New York, 1983), p. 13.

12. Ibid., p. 16.

13. Hendricks, 1981, pp. 360-70. Jon Hendricks lists two other events that preceded the July 1962 *Sneak Preview: Fluxus* in his Fluxus performance chronology. They are the *Kleinen Sommerfest* (June 9, 1962, Wuppertal-E) and *Neo-Dada in der Musik* (June 16, 1962, Düsseldorf). Although Maciunas participated in both of these concerts, the word *Fluxus* was not used until the July event in Paris. I have included all the concerts that followed *Sneak Preview: Fluxus*, even when Fluxus does not appear in their titles, to illustrate, among other things, how quickly the word captured the European public's fancy.

14. Higgins, p. 7.

15. Personal interview with Alison Knowles, Iowa City, May 3, 1985.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. During the interview, Knowles stated that America "did not need" the issues that informed the Fluxus European tour. "America was always, you know, patting itself on the back, they had their new art form going, but we could have the street. We kept alive on the street. We opened these little store fronts. We'd sell the objects that George was always making. Or the rest of us could have the Canal Street Fluxus Open Saturday nights. How many people? Four, five people, maybe seven people."

18. Higgins, pp. 16-17.

19. These terms appear in the videotaped interview of George Maciunas by Larry Miller, in Maciunas's Fluxus manifestos, and in an illuminating letter that Maciunas wrote in 1963 to an unidentified prospective new member in which he outlined his position on Fluxus. The letter is reprinted in Hendricks, *Fluxus Etc./ Addenda II, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (Baxter Art Gallery, California Institute of Technology, 1983), pp. 165-67.

20. Friedman, "Explaining Fluxus, or, Puissance de la Fluxus," *White Walls*, Special Fluxus Issue, Spring 1987, p. 29. Friedman closes his piece with the words, "I proclaim Fluxus, I celebrate your opportunity to choose, I invite."

FLUXUS AND FRIENDS

Exhibition Checklist

Descriptive titles are denoted by quotation marks. Titles given by the artists are italicized.

- Gabor Altorjay, *Kurzschlussobjekt*, blue plastic cube with electrical cord, Vice-Versand, n.d.
- Eric Andersen, 182550 — 182949/1st, August 1971—co, boxed concept works, Edition Hundertmark, ca. 1971.
- Eric Andersen, "Four untitled multiples," concept works in clear plastic boxes, 1852 edition, n.d.
- Ay-O, *Finger Box*, object cube, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1964.
- G. Baruchello, *TV Highlights*, concept work and miniature photographs in envelope, Vice-Versand, ca. 1969.
- Joseph Beuys, *cosmos and damian (originalgrafik — serie 7)*, artist's postcard, edition staack, n.d.
- Joseph Beuys, *name ist gleich adresse (originalgrafik — serie D)*, artist's postcard, edition staack, 1974.
- Joseph Beuys, *Postcard by Joseph Beuys*, ("Fluxus Zone West" stamp by Joseph Beuys, "Fluxus West" stamp by Ken Friedman), two versions, artist's postcards, Edition Hundertmark, n.d.
- Joseph Beuys, *ruined by state (originalgrafik — serie D)*, artist's postcard, edition staack, 1974.
- Don Boyd, "Fluxus West leather envelope," correspondence art, 1977.
- George Brecht, *Deck by George Brecht/A Fluxgame*, boxed artist's playing cards, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1966.
- George Brecht, *Games and Puzzles/Name Kit (Spell your name)*, boxed event kit, Fluxus Editions, ca. 1965.
- George Brecht, *Nut Bone (a Yamfest Movie)*, flipbook, Fluxus Edition, n.d.
- George Brecht and Ray Johnson, *Sendings*, correspondence art, n.d.
- George Brecht and Robert Watts, *Delivery Event (Yam Festival Part 5)*, concept work, n.d.
- Café Au Go Go Presents, poster for *Monday Night Letters* arranged by Robert Watts and George Brecht and Assorted Night Riders by Alison Knowles, 1965.
- Monte Cazzara, *Dada is Everywhere*, correspondence art, 1971.
- Monte Cazzara, Untitled, cardboard letters in plastic, 1971.
- John Chick, *Flux Food*, boxed assembling, Fluxus Editions, ca. 1969.
- Jack Coke's Farmer Coop, *Find the End/A Fluxgame*, boxed object, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1969.
- Wolfgang Feelisch, *Fluxus Keeps Left!*, miniature, 1970.
- Robert Filliou, *concept not conceived*, artist's postcard, ca. 1971.
- Robert Filliou, *Fluxdust collected by Robert Filliou*, boxed sweepings, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1968.
- Robert Filliou, *Madame, [M]ademoiselle, [M]onsieur*, artist's postcard, Arrocarría Editions, 1976.

- Robert Filliou, *Optimistic Box No. 3 (so much the better if you play chess)*, miniature chessboard box, Vice-Versand, n.d.
- Albert M. Fine, *Piece for Fluxorchestra*, boxed performance sci Fluxus Edition, ca. 1967.
- A. M. Fine, *Spoon (for Fluxus)*, ink on board, 1967.
- fluxus*, letterhead, (printer's proof for *tout #7*, edited and design Ben Vautier), 1965.
- Flux Year Box 2*, boxed collaborative multiple, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1968. Contributors: Eric Andersen, George Brecht, John Cale, John Cavanaugh, Willem DeRidder, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Shigeko Kubota, Dan Lauffer, Fred Lieberman, George Maciunas, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Ben Patterson, James Riddle, Paul Sharits, Bob Sheff, Stan Vanderbeek, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell and Robert Watts.
- Fluxrelc*, ecology necklace belonging to Milan Knizak, n.d.
- Fluxrelc*, hair from Yoko Ono haircutting event, 1966.
- Fluxrelc*, plastic Buddha on a string purportedly belonging to June Paik, n.d.
- Fluxrelc*, plastic canister filled with black silk from a Nam June performance, 1971.
- Fluxrelc*, rock with holes used as a candelabra in conjunction with Watts Rocks, 1967.
- Fluxrelc*, "Stradivarius" (a copy) broken during a Fluxus performance, n.d.
- Fluxrelc*, "Stradivarius" (a copy) purchased by George Maciunas use in Fluxus concerts, n.d.
- Ken Friedman, *Decade*, relief sculpture, ca. 1979.
- Ken Friedman, *Flux Clippings*, unfinished multiple (empty), Flux Edition, ca. 1969.
- Ken Friedman, *Fluxpost Commemorative Issue (Fluxpost West, 1965-74)*, artist's stamps, 1974.
- Ken Friedman, *Friedmanswerk*, assembling in wooden box, Edit Hundertmark, ca. 1970.
- Ken Friedman, *Homage to Kirk de Goyer (Sock of the Month C)*, concept work, 1978.
- Ken Friedman, *Killed Book (In response to a killed book by Milan Knizak)*, book object, 1970.
- Ken Friedman, *open and shut case/Fluxcourt Box*, boxed concept work, Fluxus Edition, 1969.
- Ken Friedman, *cover of (Parts of) The Fluxus Saga, Part Two*, art book, Fluxforlaget, 1987.
- Ken Friedman, *Pay all your bills by (con in a can)*, assemblage, 1968-1971.
- Ken Friedman, *SDS Black Power Day (icon in a can)*, assemblage, 1968-1971.
- Ken Friedman, Untitled, visual poem, 1967.



Cover. George Maciunas, *Intestinal Design Apron*, Fluxus Edition, ca. 1973.

