



Peers of Fluxus

The roots of a Fluxus sensibility preceded Maciunas and his definitions of what Fluxus should be. The artists, poets, and composers who shaped this sensibility embraced the intersection of their creative backgrounds and in the process produced a flexible and cross-disciplinary art form. Fluxus artist Dick Higgins recognised this quality of Fluxus as intermedia. And he appreciated the combined use of found objects, sound, image, text, and performance as a means for new possibilities between artistic disciplines. Another methodology attributed to Fluxus was the invention in 1958 of the event score by chemist turned Fluxus artist George Brecht. Derived from his scientific appreciation of experimentation, Brecht considered the event score as both object and action. Adopting the form of a simple set of instructions, an event

score such as Brecht's *Drip Music* (1959) read as follows: "For single or multiple performance. A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel." Embodying the democratic spirit of Fluxus, event scores could be posted as a letter or passed between friends to be re-produced and re-interpreted anywhere. The benefits of these new forms of artistic production allowed for the first truly global network of both male and female artists. As a result of these possibilities Fluxus remains in flux and inspiring. Its unbridled potential charged the Fluxus artist Emmett Williams to declare, "Fluxus has not yet been invented."

Image: George Maciunas, portrait of Dick Higgins, Lette Eisenhower, Daniel Spoerri, Alison Knowles, and Ay-O for the *Fluxus Street Events* in New York, Spring 1964

The Dream of Fluxus Events & Activities 2008/09

To provide an opportunity for discussion, participation and engagement with *The Dream of Fluxus*, BALTC has programmed a series of public discussions, performances, and events.

EXHIBITION TOUR AND PANEL DISCUSSION WITH FLUXUS COLLECTORS

Monday 24 November 2008 / 13:30-16:30 / FREE
Historical Fluxus works are increasingly acquired by public and private collections. To discern the ways in which these collections guide our understanding of art history and particularly the contested history of Fluxus, BALTC has arranged a free public tour of the exhibition followed by a discussion led by some of Fluxus's primary collectors.

Pre-booking is essential for this event. To reserve a place please call 0191 478 1810 or email events@balticmill.com

EXHIBITION WALKTHROUGH WITH BALTC CURATOR ROBERT BLACKSON

Thursday 11 December 2008 / 18.15-19.00 / FREE
BALTC Curator Robert Blackson will lead a conversation and walkthrough of *The Dream of Fluxus*. Meet on Ground Floor

Pre-booking is essential for this event. To reserve a place please call 0191 478 1810 or email events@balticmill.com

FLUXUS-INSPIRED PERFORMANCES

Thursday 29 January 2009 / FREE
Thursday 5 February 2009 / FREE
Thursday 12 February 2009 / FREE

To celebrate this historical exhibition BALTC has commissioned Newcastle-based artists Ginny Reed, Sally Madge and Joel Fisher to perform new works inspired by *The Dream of Fluxus*. These performances are free to the public and will take place in the galleries.

NO BOOKING REQUIRED. Please visit www.balticmill.com/fluxus for performance times.

THREE STAR A LA CARTE

Sunday 15 February 2009 / 18:30-23:00 / Level 1 Performance Space

To mark the end of *The Dream of Fluxus* and to provide our audience with a true flavour of the diversity and absurdity of Fluxus, BALTC will be staging a rare performance of Knud Pedersen's *Three Star a La Carte*. The guests are served performance-pieces at small tables. Compose your own Fluxus meal from the menu-card. Historic and contemporary Fluxus works by over fifteen artists adopt the framework and selection offered by a conventional café.

Although booking for *Three Star Ala Carte* is free, spaces are limited and we strongly recommend that you book your table in advance. To make a reservation please call 0191 478 1810 or email events@balticmill.com

FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more about Fluxus and other exhibitions you can speak to a member of BALTC Crew; visit Quay on Level 2 – BALTC's drop-in home for learning; use BALTC's Library on Level 2; visit BALTC Library & Archive online database at <http://archive.balticmill.com>

BALTC PODCASTS

Subscribe (free of charge) to BALTC series of audio and video podcasts at www.balticmill.com/podcasts

FREE DAILY GUIDED TOURS

From Monday 1 December this exhibition will be included in the Daily Guided Tours at 11.00 and 16.00 (except Thursdays when the 11.00 tour is replaced with a Building & History Tour, priced £4.00). Meet at Information Desk, Ground Floor. No booking required. Not suitable for groups of more than ten people.

GROUP VISITS

Groups can visit BALTC independently or take advantage of the opportunities available through BALTC Learning. For more information about guided tours for groups, artist led workshops, teachers' professional development and teaching resources visit www.balticmill.com/learning



Artists whose works feature in *George Maciunas, The Dream of Fluxus* include: Genpei Akasegawa, Eric Andersen, Ay-O, Jeff Berner, George Brecht, Gieseppe Chiari, John Chick, Jack Coke's Farmer's Co-op, Robert Filliou, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Henry Flynt, Geoffrey Hendricks, Hi Red Center, Dick Higgins, Alice Hutchins, Joe Jones, Per Kirkeby, Jane Knizak, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Takehisa Kosugi, Shigeo Kubota, John Lennon, Carla Liss, George Maciunas, Jackson Mac Low, Larry Miller, Peter Moore, Olivier Mosset, Claes Oldenburg, Serge Oldenbourg, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Jock Reynolds, Willem de Ridder, James Riddle, Takako Saito, Paul Sharits, Tomas Schmit, Mieko Shiomi, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, Yoshi Wada, Robert Watts, Emmett Williams, and La Monte Young.

BALTC would like to thank Jon Hendricks, curator of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit.

Text written and compiled by Robert Blackson assisted by Katharine Welsh, Ben Jones and Matt Carter.

BALTC

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Image: Students of Robert Watts and Geoffrey Hendricks performing *Street Cleaning Event* by Hi Red Center, Grand Army Plaza, New York, 11 June 1966

THE DREAM OF FLUXUS GEORGE MACIUNAS 25 November 2008–15 February 2009

Works from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit



The Dream of Fluxus

The funniest and saddest episode in twentieth-century art is the story of Fluxus. George Maciunas (1931-1978), its self-declared chairman, established strangely radical modes of presentation in its name. In his view, the bulk of conventional art business - museums, theatres, concert halls, opera houses, and publishers – should cease to exist. And Fluxus was to be so uncomplicated that it could be realised by anyone more or less anywhere. All Maciunas's endeavours were directed towards creating a culture that was fairer and aesthetically more viable. The first hurdle was to defeat the bourgeois, baroque manifestations of the prevailing culture.

Maciunas, who died at the age of forty-six, devoted his life to Fluxus. "The boy was playful and disobedient," writes his mother, "he always wanted to be completely free." Not only as a boy, but in all of his adult life he was radical and revolutionary. A staunch opponent of personal enrichment, he came up with Spartan solutions for almost every life situation, developing his own subversive notion of art well before today's global networks and multi-million dollar art market became a reality. In an interview not long before he died, impoverished and in miserable circumstances he dryly summed up the outcome of the Fluxus movement, laughing, "We came out to be a bunch of jokers."

Dr. Thomas Kellein, curator of *George Maciunas: The Dream of Fluxus*. Dr. Kellein is the Director of Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany.

Image: George Maciunas, photograph for the label of Shigeko Kubota's *Fluxmedicine*, Fluxus Edition, 1966



Foundations of Fluxus

Fluxus is often historically regarded as a global network of influential and vibrant artists who share a unique, if not united, aspiration to revolutionise the avant-garde. Through the introduction of concept art, mail art, intermedia, and radical performance practices, Fluxus pioneered an aesthetic appreciation for the everyday. By intentionally confusing the boundaries of how and when an artwork could begin or end, exiting a room, making a salad, or ending a war were transformed into performative works of art.

Reflecting its international network of artists, Fluxus began in many places from as many creative perspectives. The origins of this network have been traced to the absurdist and anti-art agenda of Dada, the teachings of John Cage at the New School in New York, the serial compositions of Karlheinz Stockhausen in

Image: George Maciunas, Portrait of products for Fluxus Editions, 1964

Germany, and the managerial talents of graphic designer, architect, and artist George Maciunas. Having invented the term Fluxus in 1961, Maciunas intended this word as the title for a magazine promoting Lithuanian culture. It would later be used to promote and describe the work of a loose-knit group of artists living in New York. Fluxus is now synonymous with not only this group of artists including George Brecht, Yoko Ono, La Monte Young, Nam June Paik, and Ben Vautier but also with any number of Fluxus pursuits including Fluxkits, Fluxfeasts, Fluxfests, and Fluxfilms. In 1962, Maciunas managed and promoted a series of Fluxus events across Europe. These groundbreaking performance festivals set the tone for countless Fluxus events that continue throughout the world in theatres, galleries, and on the street.

George Maciunas

The Maciunas family moved to the United States from their native Lithuania in 1948. For six years the family of four including George's sister Nijole, his mother Leokadja, and father Aleksandras lived in the suburban comfort of Levittown, New York. In 1954, George's father died suddenly from cancer. As an earnest if not financially misguided attempt to assume the role of family breadwinner, George began a series of small businesses including reselling antique musical instruments, trading in Russian caviar and French foie gras. It is illuminating to consider these failed business campaigns with a similar appreciation of Maciunas's financial aspirations for Fluxus.

From 1949 to 1959 Maciunas studied art history, graphic design, architecture, and music composition in New York and Pittsburgh. His subsequent encyclopedic knowledge of art

Image: George Maciunas, performing for the camera, New York, c. 1966



history enabled him to develop an often political and meticulous art historical lineage in which to insert Fluxus. Near the end of this educational training Maciunas began to establish himself as an organiser of the New York avant-garde. With support from his fellow Lithuanian émigrés Almus Salcius and filmmaker Jonas Mekas, Maciunas opened the AG Gallery in 1960. This ambitious and short-lived gallery on New York's Madison Avenue hosted exhibitions and performances by a range of young and influential artists including Yoko Ono, Ray Johnson, Walter De Maria, and La Monte Young.

To escape debt collectors Maciunas and his mother fled to Wiesbaden, Germany in 1961. Here, while maintaining his ties with artists in New York and working as an architect for the United States Army, Maciunas began to

organise a performative Fluxus Festival in 1962. This festival opened in Wiesbaden and travelled across Europe featuring a handful of Fluxus artists including Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, Ben Patterson, Wolf Vostell, Emmett Williams, and Maciunas himself.

Returning to New York in 1963, Maciunas continued to promote Fluxus through a mixture of political and commercial strategies. These included drafting a Fluxus Manifesto that promised to "purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual', professional & commercialised culture, [...] purge the world of 'Europeanism.'" Coinciding and somewhat conflicting with these sentiments Maciunas set up a Fluxshop from which Fluxus editions were affordably sold via mail order.

Image: George Maciunas, Portrait of Yoko Ono, 1961



One of Maciunas's greatest achievements was the creation of the Fluxhouse Cooperative. Between the years of 1966 and 1968 Maciunas put into motion a housing scheme that transformed rundown factories in the Soho district of Manhattan into affordable and cooperatively owned artist live-work lofts. As a result of Maciunas's efforts the district became flooded with artists and galleries – the effect of which is still apparent today.

In the 1970s Maciunas, who was plagued by illness throughout his life, retreated to a Flux Farm he envisioned as a "Post Cage Bauhaus Black Mountain College" in upstate New York. Although still an active organiser, his health gradually deteriorated and he died of cancer in 1978.