

Fluxus

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Fluxus — a name taken from a Latin word meaning "to flow" — is an international network of artists, composers and designers noted for blending different artistic media and disciplines in the 1960s. They have been active in visual art and music as well as literature, urban planning, architecture, and design. Fluxus is often described as intermedia, a term coined by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins in a famous 1966 essay.

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History of Fluxus

Early Fluxus

The origins of Fluxus lie in many of the concepts explored by composer John Cage in his experimental music of the 1950s. Cage explored notions of chance in art, through works such as 4' 33", which influenced Lithuanian-born artist George Maciunas.^[1] Maciunas (1931–1978) organized the first Fluxus event in 1961 at the AG Gallery in New York City and the first Fluxus festivals in Europe in 1962.^[1]

While Fluxus was named and loosely organized by Maciunas, the Fluxus community began in a small but global network of artists and composers who were already at work when Maciunas met them through poet Jackson Mac Low in the early 1960s. Cage's 1957 to 1959 Experimental Composition classes at the New School for Social Research in New York City were attended by Fluxus founding members Jackson Mac Low, Al Hansen, George Brecht and Dick Higgins, many of whom were working in other media with little or no

background in music. Many other artists were invited by Cage to attend his classes unofficially at the New School. Marcel Duchamp and Allan Kaprow (who is credited as the creator of the first "happenings") were also influential to Fluxus. In its early days Fluxus artists were active in Europe (especially in Germany), and Japan as well as in the United States.

Fluxus encouraged a do it yourself aesthetic, and valued simplicity over complexity. Like Dada before it, Fluxus included a strong current of anti-commercialism and an anti-art sensibility, disparaging the conventional market-driven art world in favor of an artist-centered creative practice. As Fluxus artist Robert Filliou wrote, however, Fluxus differed from Dada in its richer set of aspirations, and the positive social and communitarian aspirations of Fluxus far outweighed the anti-art tendency that also marked the group.

In terms of an artistic approach, Fluxus artists preferred to work with whatever materials were at hand, and either created their own work or collaborated in the creation process with their colleagues. Outsourcing part of the creative process to commercial fabricators was not usually part of Fluxus practice. Maciunas personally hand-assembled many of the Fluxus multiples and editions. While Maciunas assembled many objects by hand, he designed and intended them for mass production. Where many multiple publishers produced signed, numbered objects in limited editions intended for sale at high prices, Maciunas produced open editions at low prices. Several other Fluxus publishers produced different kinds of Fluxus editions. The best known of these was Something Else Press, a book publishing company established by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins. Something Else Press was probably the largest and most extensive Fluxus publisher, producing books in editions that ran from 1,500 copies to as many as 5,000 copies, all available at standard bookstore prices.

Fluxus art

The art forms most closely associated with Fluxus are event scores and Fluxus boxes. Fluxus boxes (sometimes called Fluxkits or Fluxboxes) originated with George Maciunas who would gather collections of printed cards, games, and ideas, organizing them in small plastic or wooden boxes.

The idea of the event began in Henry Cowell's philosophy of music. Cowell, a teacher to John Cage and later to Dick Higgins, coined the term that Higgins and others later applied to short, terse descriptions of performable work. The term "score" is used in exactly the sense that one uses the term to describe a music score: a series of notes that allow anyone to perform the work, an idea linked both to what Nam June Paik labeled the "do it yourself" approach and to what Ken Friedman termed "musicality." While much is made of the do it yourself approach to art, it is vital to recognize that this idea emerges in music, and such important Fluxus artists as Paik, Higgins, or Corner began as composers, bringing to art the idea that each person can create the work by "doing it." This is what Friedman meant by musicality, extending the idea more radically to conclude that anyone can create work of any kind from a score, acknowledging the composer as the originator of the work while realizing the work freely and even interpreting it in far different ways than the original composer might have done.

Event scores such as George Brecht's "Drip Music", are essentially performance scripts that are usually only a few lines long and consist of descriptions of actions to be performed rather than dialogue. Fluxus artists differentiate event scores from "happenings". Whereas happenings were sometimes complicated, lengthy performances meant to blur the lines between performer and audience, performance and reality, Fluxus performances were usually brief and simple. The Event performances sought to elevate the banal, to be

mindful of the mundane, and to frustrate the high culture of academic and market-driven music and art. Other creative forms that have been adopted by Fluxus practitioners include collage, sound art, music, video, and poetry—especially visual poetry and concrete poetry.

Among its early associates were Joseph Beuys, Dick Higgins, Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell, La Monte Young and Yoko Ono who explored media ranging from performance art to poetry to experimental music to film. They took the stance of opposition to the ideas of tradition and professionalism in the arts of their time, the Fluxus group shifted the emphasis from what an artist makes to the artist's personality, actions, and opinions. Throughout the 1960s and '70s (their most active period) they staged "action" events, engaged in politics and public speaking, and produced sculptural works featuring unconventional materials. Their radically untraditional works included, for example, the video art of Nam June Paik and the performance art of Beuys. The often playful style of Fluxus artists led to their being considered by some little more than a group of pranksters in their early years. Fluxus has also been compared to Dada and aspects of Pop Art and is seen as the starting point of mail art. Artists from succeeding generations such as Mark Bloch do not try to characterize themselves as Fluxus but create spinoffs such as Fluxpan or Jung Fluxus as a way of continuing some of the Fluxus ideas in a 21st century, post-mail art context.

Fluxus since 1978

After the death of George Maciunas in 1978 a rift opened in the movement between a few collectors and curators who placed Fluxus in a specific time frame (1962 to 1978), and the artists themselves, most of whom continued to see Fluxus as a living entity held together by its core values and world view. Different theorists and historians adopted each of these views. It is common to find writers referring to Fluxus in either the past or the present tense. The question is now significantly more complex due to the fact that many of the original artists who were still living when the controversy arose are now dead.

Some scholars who study Fluxus argue that the unique control that curator Jon Hendricks (not the same-named jazz vocalist) holds over a major historical Fluxus collection (the Gilbert and Lila Silverman collection) has enabled him to influence, through the numerous books and catalogues subsidized by the collection, the view that Fluxus died with Maciunas. Hendricks argues that Fluxus was an historical movement that occurred at a particular time, asserting that such central Fluxus artists as Dick Higgins and Nam June Paik could no longer label themselves as active Fluxus artists after 1978, and that contemporary artists influenced by Fluxus cannot lay claim to be Fluxus artists. However, the influence of Fluxus continues today in multi-media performances.

Other historians and scholars assert that although Maciunas was a key participant, there were many more, including Fluxus co-founder Higgins, who continued to work within Fluxus after the death of Maciunas. There are a number of post-1978 artists who remain associated with Fluxus. Some were contemporaries of Maciunas who became active in Fluxus after 1978. While there is not a large Fluxus artist community in any single urban center, the rise of the Internet in the 1990s has enabled a vibrant Fluxus community to thrive online. Some of the original artists from the 1960s and 1970s remain active in online communities such as the Fluxlist, and other artists, writers, musicians, and performers have joined them in cyberspace. Fluxus-oriented artists continue to meet in cities around the world to collaborate and communicate in "real-time" and physical spaces.

Artistic philosophies

Fluxus is similar in spirit to the earlier art movement of Dada, emphasizing the concept of anti-art and taking jabs at the seriousness of modern art.^[1] Fluxus artists used their minimal performances to highlight their perceived connections between everyday objects and art, similarly to Duchamp in pieces such as *Fountain*.^[1] Fluxus art was often presented in "events", which Fluxus member George Brecht defined as "the smallest unit of a situation".^[1] The events consisted of a minimal instruction, opening the events to accidents and other unintended effects.^[2] Also contributing to the randomness of events was the integration of audience members into the performances, realizing Duchamp's notion of the viewer completing the art work.^[2]

The Fluxus artistic philosophy can be expressed as a synthesis of four key factors that define the majority of Fluxus work:

1. Fluxus is an attitude. It is not a movement or a style.^[3]
2. Fluxus is intermedia.^[4] Fluxus creators like to see what happens when different media intersect. They use found & everyday objects, sounds, images, and texts to create new combinations of objects, sounds, images, and texts.
3. Fluxus works are simple. The art is small, the texts are short, and the performances are brief.
4. Fluxus is fun. Humour has always been an important element in Fluxus.

Fluxus artists

Fluxus artists shared several characteristics including wit and "childlikeness", though they lacked a consistent identity as an artistic community.^[5] This vague self-identification allowed the group to integrate a varied group of artists, including a high number of women. The possibility that Fluxus had the most female members of any Western art group up to that point in history is particularly significant considering that Fluxus came on the heels of the white male-dominated abstract expressionism movement.^[5] However, despite the designed open-endedness of Fluxus, Maciunas insisted on maintaining unity in the collective. Because of this, Maciunas was accused of expelling certain members for deviating from what he perceived as the goals of Fluxus.^[6]

Many artists, writers, and composers have been associated with Fluxus over the years, including:

- Eric Andersen
- John Armleder
- Ay-O
- Joseph Beuys
- George Brecht
- Allen Bukoff
- Joseph Byrd
- John Cage
- Giuseppe Chiari
- Philip Corner
- Jean Dupuy
- Robert Filliou

- Henry Flynt
- Ken Friedman
- Al Hansen
- Beck Hansen
- Geoffrey Hendricks
- Dick Higgins
- Ruud Janssen
- Joe Jones
- Allan Kaprow
- Bengt af Klintberg
- Alison Knowles
- Takehisa Kosugi
- Philip Krumm
- Shigeo Kubota
- George Landow
- Vytautas Landsbergis
- György Ligeti
- Jackson Mac Low
- George Maciunas
- Gustav Metzger
- Larry Miller
- Charlotte Moorman
- Yoko Ono
- Genesis P-Orridge
- Nam June Paik
- Willem de Ridder
- Terry Riley
- Dieter Roth
- Carolee Schneemann
- Litsa Spathi
- Daniel Spoerri
- Yasunao Tone
- Cecil Touchon
- Ben Vautier
- Wolf Vostell
- Yoshi Wada
- Robert Watts
- Emmett Williams
- La Monte Young

Scholars, critics, and curators associated with Fluxus

- Simon Anderson
- Charles Bergengren
- Mark Bloch
- Rene Block

- Ina Blom
- Walter Cianciusi
- Bertrand Clavez
- Francesco Conz
- Peter Frank
- Adrian Glew
- Emily Harvey
- Jon Hendricks
- Hannah Higgins
- Judith Hoffberg
- Jill Johnston
- Henry Martin
- Jonas Mekas
- Jadis Mercado
- Estera Milman
- Kathy O'Dell
- Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz
- Julia Robinson
- Harry Ruhe
- Owen Smith
- Kristine Stiles
- Karen Moss

Major collections and archives

- Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art, University Library and University Art Museum, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
- Archiv Sohm, Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany
- Archivio Conz, Verona, Italy
- Artpool, Budapest, Hungary
- Emily Harvey Foundation, New York, New York, and Venice, Italy
- Fluxus Archive Klaus Groh, Edewecht, Germany
- Fluxus Collection, Fluxus West in England Papers, Tate Gallery Archives, The Tate Gallery, London, England
- Fluxus Collection, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
- Franklin Furnace Archive, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
- George Maciunas Memorial Collection, The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA
- Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Foundation, Detroit, Michigan, and New York, New York, USA
- Jean Brown Archive, Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities, Los Angeles, California, USA
- TVF www.artvideo.tv The Endless Story of FLUXUS vol. 1 - 27 and more to come.Gent.Belgium

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See also

- Gutai group

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Notes

1. [^] *a b c d e* Rush, 2005, p. 24
2. [^] *a b* Rush, 2005, p. 25
3. [^] Smith
4. [^] Higgins
5. [^] *a b* O'Dell, 1997, p. 43
6. [^] Oren, 1993, p. 8

External links

- Fluxus Performance Workbook (<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/fluxus.htm>)
- Subjugated Knowledges—exhibition catalogue (<http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/atca/subjugated/cover.htm>)
- Fluxus Debris! Art/Not Art (<http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/>)
- Ken Friedman: Forty Years of Fluxus (<http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/kfriedman-fourtyyears.html>)
- Fluxus.org (<http://www.fluxus.org/>)
- Fluxlist (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fluxlist/>)
- Fluxlist Europe (<http://fluxlisteurope.blogspot.com/>)
- The Fluxus Blog: Contemporary and Historical Fluxus (<http://www.digitalsalon.com/weblog/>)
- Fluxus Museum in Potsdam, Germany (<http://www.fluxus-plus.de/>)
- Archives of The Fluxlist (<http://www.mail-archive.com/fluxlist@scribble.com/>)
- Fluxus Heidelberg Center (<http://www.fluxusheidelberg.org>)
- The Copenhagen Fluxus Archive (<http://www.fluxus-archive.dk>)
- FluxFilms (1962–1970) in MPEG format (<http://www.ubu.com/film/fluxfilm.html>)
- The Fluxnexus (<http://www.fluxnexus.com/>)
- Archivio Bonotto, Fluxus - Zaj. Poesia Visuale, Concreta e Sonora (<http://www.archiviobonotto.org/>)

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