

Creative Living

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More in Sec. F



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Fluxus

Breaking the barriers to artistic freedom

By Corinne Abbott
staff writer

THREE THINGS to do this year: Go to the Fluxus exhibit at Cranbrook. Take the catalog home to read. Finish the catalog and go back again.

These four lines would look more like Fluxus art if they were handwritten along the edges of typed sheets of paper. This kind of casual, informal approach to art was part of the movement which began in the 1950s and directly affected much of the art we see and hear today.

Only Fluxus art, cryptic edge-of-the-page instructions say things such as "try to grow mushrooms on this page," "read this page about to your family on Thanksgiving Day" or "think of five interesting things to do with the next five pages."

"Fluxus Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection," organized by The Museum of Modern Art and now at the Cranbrook Museum through Oct. 5, is at the very least bewildering, at the very most compelling and enlightening.

JON HENDRICKS, curator of the Silverman collection who organized it along with Olive Phillipot, director of the MOMA Library, was here to install the exhibit. He said, "The movement started in 1951. Few people realized something important was going on, but it was very ephemeral, very fragile."

The name was chosen by George Maciunas, a New York-based small publisher who intended to put out a quarterly by that name. That quarterly, Phillipot says in the catalog, "might have provided a very interesting overview of a culture in flux."

While Maciunas was plagued with money problems and poor health and

couldn't carry out all of his plans, his leadership did foster events and happenings in many parts of the world that would effect change.

He explained in his "Manifesto" and letters to friends how Fluxus would "purge the world of dead art . . . abstract art, (and) illusionistic art . . ." In its place would come concrete art such as the ready-made objects of Marcel Duchamp, the ready-made sounds of John Cage and the ready-made actions of George Brecht and Ben Vautier.

Fluxus, he said, was against the art object and the artist who sold it and made a livelihood . . . "against the artificial separation of a performer from audience, or creator and spectator, or life and art . . ."

What then did these artists stand for, this group which, in addition to Brecht and Vautier included Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Henry Flynt, Daniel Spoerri and La Monte Young and a host of other free spirits?

They wanted to replace art with functionalism, to rid all forms of art of illusion, to reestablish totally natural sights and sounds and to get everyone involved. That might mean kicking the piano on its underside rather than manipulating the keys into waltz form or considering a rotten tomato at leisure rather a painting of a perfect one.

EVEN NOW, YEARS AFTER, some of minimalist happenings seem outrageous — concerts where the same chord was held for hours; the Fluxfest advertising "12 Big Names" which treated the audience to 12 names flashed on a large screen; and four performers putting on masks in front of an audience and remaining perfectly still until the audience laughed.

Yet many of the Fluxus publications — books, posters, music, instructional sheets with graphics —



Jon Hendricks, curator of the Silverman Fluxus collection, is one of the main reasons why it is extant and is becoming a significant part of contemporary art history.

strange and minimalist as most of them are, remain aesthetically pleasing. They stand impressively as functional art within the context of the philosophy of the movement.

Some of the plans for festivals such as the one for Wiesbaden, Ger-

many, included in the catalog, show how comprehensive Maciunas and company intended it to be.

His plans for publications and happenings, whether or not they ever materialized, are in themselves works of art of historical significance. Many of the concerts and happenings are documented on tape and film, and in Europe they often drew huge crowds — testimony to a hunger for change and new thinking.

The movement is generally dated at 1951-1978, a few feel it is still going on.

Hendricks said, "Fluxus ended 10 years ago. It had a need for being. Maybe it has a need for being now, but it would carry with it all the baggage from before."

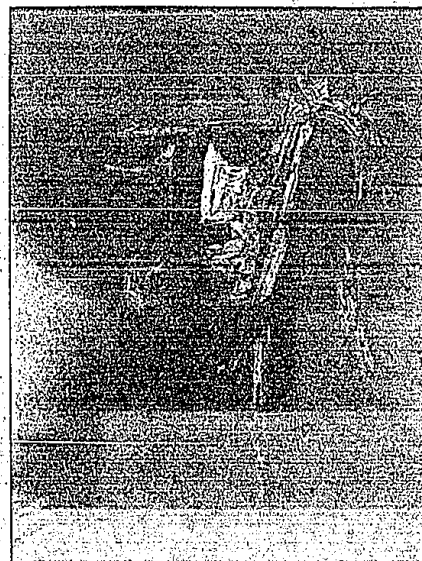
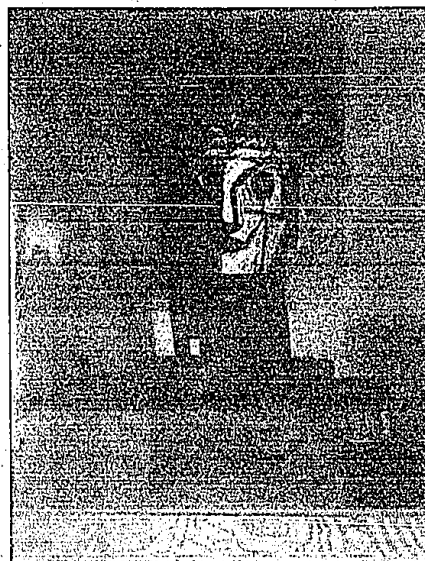
Fluxus didn't rid the world of object-art or artists who make their living creating some and that's probably just as well. What they did do was open the way for acceptance and enjoyment for many, more forms and shapes of artistic expression and experience.

Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 500 Lone Pine, Bloomfield Hills, is open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday.

Staff photos by
Dan Dean



"Violin in Bird Cage" by Joe Jones, 1965 was made by the artist for a special Fluxus event. The metal bird cage contains a plastic violin, battery, motor and equipment to create a sound from the strings, albeit not as sweet as Isaac Stern.



Collector remembered blue

Gilbert and Lila Silverman's Fluxus collection came into being through a strange series of coincidences and a fine collector's eye.

Silverman, a Southfield resident and well-known builder/developer, said, "As you know, I have an interest in way-out or avant garde art. In 1970, I bought a painting in Tokyo by Geoffrey Hendricks, 'Sky and Two Pairs of Pants' with a very unusual blue."

Then, eight years later when he was walking the streets of the Soho district of New York City, he spotted a street vendor selling plastic and painted bags of the same blue. "I want up to him and said 'Those bags have got to be by Geoffrey Hendricks' and he said yes."

Silverman said he bought out the whole show. The vendor was Brian Buczy, "a very good artist," who grew up in Detroit and died last year.

From Buczy, he found out that Geoffrey's brother, Jon, ran a small gallery next door. He met the artist who told Silverman the bags were being sold (\$2 each) to raise money for a medical fund for a George Maciunas.

Silverman said the bags "were very interesting — like Dada — but I couldn't afford Dada." He found Jon Hendricks was selling Fluxus art "and I started buying. I told myself, 'I'm in on the ground floor. I could

end up with the biggest collection in the world.' And he did.

The traveling exhibition is a way of broadening knowledge about this elusive, but important, art movement. Silverman said people will say they are aware of Fluxus, but admit they really don't know what it is.

He said he and his wife have enjoyed collecting it, they particularly like the idea of the traveling exhibition which helps people understand what it's all about.

The traveling exhibition is a way of broadening knowledge about this elusive but important art movement.

— Gilbert Silverman

Scanga comes with color

Strong color and design are very much a part of the works by Italo Scanga through July at Susanne Hilberry Gallery, 555 S. Woodward, Birmingham. The multi-talented artist, who once lived and worked in the family business in Garden City, recently received two awards from his alma mater, Michigan State University. One was the 1989 Distinguished Alumni Award. A book on the artist, published in Italy, will soon be available at the gallery. Shown at immediate left is a painted wood head done about two years ago. The other is a earlier. Also in the gallery are a large group of small monoprints and large paintings. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

Staff photos by John Stormzand