

The Fluxus art collective's irreverent approach to publishing

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The collective's newspapers published between 1964 and 1979 are being gathered and reprinted in a new publication that illustrates the artists' sense of humour.

By Megan Williams

Every so often, a movement is born in response to the structures of the art establishment. In the early 1900s, there was Dada. In the 1960s, it was Fluxus. Founded by George Maciunas, Fluxus was an international collective of artists and performers that was loosely formed but broadly shared the same criticisms of both commercialisation and the art world.

Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys, and Ray Johnson were just some of the artists who passed through the proverbial doors of Fluxus. Works ranged from publications to sculptures to events, known as 'happenings', and the movement also created live-work spaces for artists known as Fluxhouse Cooperatives.

These works were often presented or referenced in the Fluxus Newspaper, which was published sporadically over the course of 15 years. Maciunas had originally been planning a different incarnation of a Fluxus periodical that was going to follow a more traditional editorial format. Yet the Fluxus newspapers that were eventually published took a far less conventional direction.

Rather than an anthology of essays, the first edition of the newspaper "had become virtually an anthology of printed art pieces and flat, or flattened, objects", according to the George Maciunas Foundation. Maciunas designed all but two of the 11 editions, while the contents were created and curated by the Fluxus Editorial Council for Fluxus – a formal title for what was actually an informal, ever-changing group of editors.

All 11 editions are being reprinted together in one publication, whose cover – a reproduction of the original front page of the first issue in 1964 – introduces the Fluxus Editorial Council with a poised photograph of moustachioed, suited men, presumably dredged from a historic archive and repurposed by the collective for comic effect.

The art direction and tone of the newspapers reflect the collective's embrace of humour and eccentricity which was remarkably prescient considering today's remix culture. This includes the use of contrasting typefaces, headlines appropriated for comic effect, and meme-like

image treatments, including a photo of Maciunas superimposed on a portrait of the Pope announcing the death of the 'Fluxus Pope' – that is, Maciunas – in the final edition in 1979, which serves as a kind of homage to the group's founder.

The newspapers featured artworks by over 60 artists, and was also used to announce the creation of Fluxkits – cases filled with objects such as artworks, games, essays, and multiples (multiple editions of the same piece of art). These follow in the footsteps of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, but were designed to be a more collaborative endeavour in terms of their composition and their use. They were conceived as artworks in themselves that were completed by the audience.

Despite the anti-commercial philosophy of Fluxus, the newspapers were used to promote and sell Fluxkits as well as other Fluxus works through advertisements, order forms and pricelists. This created an interesting tension when interspersed between other artworks and visuals mocking commercial communications, foreshadowing the kind of self-mocking advertising that's become popular in the last ten years.

As Boston Art Review noted in 2011, "They were not afraid, that is to say, of internal contradiction. 'Fluxus encompasses opposites,' declared one member of the group, George Brecht. 'Consider opposing it, supporting it, ignoring it, changing your mind.'"

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