

The Fluxus Newspaper

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By Jennie Waldow

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The Fluxus collective, a sprawling nexus of international artists organized and championed by the Lithuanian American artist George Maciunas, produced a dizzying array of scores, performances, poetry, objects, and intermedia beginning in the 1960s. Their often humorous works were alternatively minimal and baroque, ranging from one-sentence instructions to determinately complex multipart festivals. As the Fluxus Editorial Council, a changing group of artists published eleven issues of *The Fluxus Newspaper* (1964–79), which contained advertisements for projects and publications, text pieces, and announcements for future events and documentation of past ones, all carefully interspersed with the odd, eclectic found images that constituted Maciunas’s signature style as a graphic designer. Primary Information’s handsome re-publication reproduces all eleven issues, allowing contemporary readers to encounter the ambition and innovation of the Fluxus project in an accessible, consolidated format.

In the introduction to *Mr. Fluxus*, an oral history of Maciunas’s life, collective member Emmett Williams writes that Maciunas was “a clown and a gag man par excellence, and at the same time a deadly revolutionary.” This duality comes across in the newspapers’ confluence of entertaining mock headlines, announcements for a formidable number of programs, and event scores both ironic and poetic. The first page of *Fluxus Newspaper #1*, published in January 1964 and reproduced as the cover of the new facsimile, demonstrates this variety, featuring the headlines “All Telephone Numbers Have Been Changed” and “Floor Wears Out After 192 Years”; a notice for “street events, demonstrations, concert hall events, film, music, wrvr radio program, exhibit tour, environments, bazaar, auction, feast, lectures, etc.etc.etc.etc.etc.etc. [sic]”; a listing for Fluxus editions priced from 1 dollar to 40 dollars; and historical photographs and illustrations, some tangentially related to articles and others seemingly chosen for their eye-catching strangeness. Though they were published at irregular intervals, the newspapers’ very existence conveys Maciunas’s exhaustive zeal as the coordinator and promoter of Fluxus, collecting artworks by contributors such as Ay-O, Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Philip Corner, Robert Filliou, Dick Higgins, Ray Johnson, Joe Jones, Alison Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Dieter Roth, Mieko Shiomi, Ben Vautier, La Monte Young, and Marian Zazeela.

A key element of the newspapers' appeal is Maciunas's skill as a graphic designer. The Fluxus "style" he created is deliberately miscellaneous, incorporating multiple fonts and found images into a pleasing hodgepodge. His wide-ranging references reflect his study of art history, architecture, musicology, and graphic design at the Cooper Union, the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, academic training that spanned eleven years. Many of his found graphics hark back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, in the manner of a Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalogue. In an advertisement for Fluxus items for sale in *newspaper #5*, Maciunas incorporated appropriated illustrations of boxes, trunks, and instruments that correspond to listings for such experimental works as Robert Watts's *Eggkit* and Alison Knowles's *Bean Rolls (as CANNED BEAN ROLLS)* (both 1963). The dated, familiar aesthetic of the imagery contrasts with the boundary-pushing nature of the artworks, but it also underscores the origin of Fluxus in the materials and actions of everyday life. Maciunas designed the first nine newspapers of the eleven published, though his style as a designer is seemingly emulated in the last two, and the constancy of his approach served to unite the enormous number and diversity of artworks produced under the Fluxus banner.

His essential status within the Fluxus group is indicated by the final newspaper from March 1979, a tribute to Maciunas following his death from pancreatic cancer in 1978. Featuring recollections by Ken Friedman and Henry Flynt; Peter Moore's photographs of Maciunas's "Flux Wedding" to Billie Hutching; the program from *The Flux Funeral for George Maciunas*; memorial artworks by Wolf Vostell, Mieko Shiomi, Jon Hendricks, and others; and the insertion of his name into articles such as "Man Gives Birth to Gorilla Twins," the issue serves as a summation of his irreverent ethos and adventurous life. Despite the Maciunas-centric nature of the publications, readers of *The Fluxus Newspaper* need not possess an encyclopedic knowledge of the artist or Fluxus itself to appreciate its relevance to experimental art, underground magazines, and graphic design. With its streamlined look and chronological organization, the facsimile edition makes the previously separate issues available for comparison and expands their circulation significantly beyond libraries and archives. In presenting the complete run of newspapers in one attainable volume, *The Fluxus Newspaper* fittingly advances Maciunas's promotional project in the present day.