

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

The Sensuous Immersion of Fluxus Sound Art

FluZUtic/FLUXUS MUSIC at Bob Rauschenberg Gallery is a sweeping, interactive presentation of artwork, instruments, and compositions.

Monica Uszerowicz November 22, 2017



Yoko Ono, "I LOVE YOU EARTH" (2017), billboard on Cleveland Avenue/Hwy. 41 (all photos by Kirsten Pettifor)

FORT MYERS, Fl. — Fluxus artist Philip Corner recently coined the word “fluZusic” to describe the weird whimsy of the sound projects that came out of the art movement. He came up with the term when speaking with Jade Dellinger, who has put together an interactive exhibit at Bob Rauschenberg Gallery — part of Florida Southwestern State College — focused mostly on Fluxus’ experimental music and sound. The playfully fitting term pops up in the exhibition’s title, FluZUsic/FLUXUS MUSIC, and the overall display is dense, fascinating, and often overwhelming. In this sweeping presentation, Dellinger misses very little.

In addition to artwork, instruments, and compositions, there are photographs and letters; there’s the metal pot that Captain Toby of the South Brunswick police force shot with a submachine gun, before precisely shooting at pages of sheet music to create a bullet composition — as requested by Dick Higgins for his series, The Thousand Symphonies. There’s a delicately slumped bag from John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s bagism performances sewn from their wedding night bedding (bagism involved draping an actual bag over the body; inside a piece of cloth one couldn’t be judged on the basis of one’s skin color, gender, clothing, or age). The show is a collector’s playground, and if you ask, no piece is without its own story — it took Dellinger years to source them all.

The term “Fluxus” first appeared in 1963 as part of a manifesto by George Maciunas, who demanded that the movement’s artists “purge the world of bourgeois sickness ... PURGE THE WORLD OF ‘EUROPANISM.’” It’s interesting to revisit the creative, innovative movement now, in the midst of what feels like a dystopia. For the show, Yoko Ono has created a billboard reading “I LOVE YOU EARTH,” in stark black on a white background, a few miles from the gallery.

There was a sensuous immediacy to Fluxus work, to its immersion and depth. For FluZUsic/FLUXUS MUSIC, founding member Alison Knowles created a newly commissioned piece, a 10-foot wide “Bean Garden” (an item not unfamiliar to her), and demonstrated how to use it on opening night. It is, essentially, a giant Juniper-wood

sandbox filled with 3,000 pounds of dry beans; guests are encouraged to sink in. The pit is soft and enveloping, thick enough to swim in; contact mics are placed underneath the structure, and it's weird and pleasurable to hear the warm, dry scratching of your own body.



Jone Jones, "Self-playing (hanging) Guitar" (1974), guitar, mini-motor with rubberband beater and electrical material, hand-assembled by the artist and presented in a custom-welded circular aluminum stand, 39 x 14 x 3-1/2 inches
(Pari&Dispari/Rosanna Chiessi Archivio, Reggio Emilia, Italy)

Nearby, there are dark guitars with string-plucking mechanisms; when activated, they emit a droning, melodic din. These are inventions by Joe Jones, a toy-maker and musician. You may have seen him before, in the gatefold for Yoko Ono's 1971 album *Fly*: Jones stands a few feet away from the group, posing with his automated instruments (this photo is on view at FluZUusic). He was endlessly inventive, building instruments that'd float away with helium balloons and music plants — a houseplant on a turntable that would trigger surrounding violin strings to play. At his Tribeca music store, he connected the door buzzer to noise machines hanging in the window, and random passersby could play by pressing buttons.



From left: A bag from Yoko Ono and John Lennon's "bagism" performances, the cover and foldout of Ono's 1971 album, *Fly*

given to her frequent collaborator, Nam June Paik. There's a vitrine filled with Moorman ephemera — including a 1974 photo of her [performing Jim McWilliams' "Ice Music for Sydney,"](#) "playing" a cello carved of ice that stung her naked body. Above, there's a wooden cello, and three canvas banners painted with cellos in blue, yellow, and green, each created by Moorman herself. They are stringless, almost amorphous, "placing you in the position of someone behind the instrument, like her," said Dellinger. I am grateful to Moorman for this, but it's impossible to know what she felt like: TVs on her breasts, performing while suspended from helium balloons, regarded more for her vulnerable nudity than her strange, enchanting genius.

My favorite piece at FluZUtic, though, was easy to miss, tucked away in a vitrine and surrounded by much more colorful items: a dried, dark shelf mushroom, the kind that grows on trees, scrawled with signatures (certain species are coincidentally known as "artist's conk"). Musician John Cage, who helped inspire so much of Fluxus, revived the [New York Mycological Society](#) in the 1960s. In 1962, he and a group of friends, including Knowles, hosted the first "Chanterelle Weekend" in 1962, where they found and signed the mushroom.

Cage was a true mycology enthusiast. Notes from his foraging adventures, framed on the wall, feel like poetry: "The strong misty scent...frogs and toads...mind is not mind...yet is not no-mind." Environmentalism wasn't a known component of Fluxus, but the fluid nature of the work allowed it to seep into other arenas, becoming both political act and art piece. This is why this art is useful to think about now. Ono's "I LOVE YOU EARTH" billboard is as irreverent as it is profoundly meaningful; fungi is fun, but it might save the planet. "A mushroom grows for such a short time," Cage once told an interviewer, "and if you happen to come across it when it's fresh it's like coming across a sound, which also lives a short time."

FluZUtic/FLUXUS MUSIC *continues at Bob Rauschenberg Gallery (Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Pkwy SW, Building L, Fort Myers, Florida) through December 9.*



FluZusic/FLUXUS MUSIC installation view at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery