

existence and what they can teach us about our own position in the world. “The essential function of Fluxus artworks is to help us practice life; what we ‘learn’ from Fluxus is how to perform as an ever-changing self in an ever-changing world—and that a sense of humor helps,” observes Jacquelynn Baas, founding director of the Hood and author of numerous publications including *Learning Mind: Experience into Art* (University of California Press, 2010). **Lynn Gumpert**, director of the Grey Art Gallery, adds: “We are pleased to host this important reassessment of Fluxus, which was, to a considerable extent, concocted by Downtown artists who would later become the denizens of SoHo Fluxhouses. A challenge in presenting Fluxus works today is to maintain the defiant and playful spirit in which they were made while, at the same time, safeguarding and preserving them for future audiences.”

Through its design and layout, *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* encourages interpretation and response. The works are arranged in fourteen categories framed as questions, such as “What Am I?,” “Happiness?,” “Health?,” “Freedom?,” and “Danger?” A handout with a plan of the installation allows visitors to proceed directly to the areas of most pressing interest to them. This approach derives from key premises underlying Fluxus activities: the dismantling of strictly defined borders between different media and between art and life. In particular, it incorporates strategies of George Maciunas (1931–1978), the Lithuanian-born pioneering member of what has now become known as the international Fluxus movement. Maciunas challenged the “high art” world and its attendant commodification of art objects. He conceived of art as part of the social process and created works that celebrated collaboration, the ephemeral, and the everyday—all infected with a touch of playful anarchy. Circumventing both conventional aesthetics and the commercial art world, Maciunas strove to empower both artists and viewers to engage with essential issues via a Fluxus approach to life.

Objects in the show address the thematic questions in various ways. The section on “Happiness?” includes Bici Forbes’s (now Nye Ffarrabas) *Stress Formula*, a vitamin bottle labeled, “Take one capsule every four hours, for laughs.” Inside are clear capsules with rolled-up slips of paper printed with humorous messages, suggesting that for us to achieve “Happiness,” jokes may be more effective than drugs. Other Fluxus artists seem to agree that happiness is something we make for ourselves, not the result of something that happens to us.

Integral to the exhibition are two Fluxus innovations: event scores and art-as-games-in-a-box, many of which, like *Burglary* (pictured above), were gathered into “Fluxkits” along with other ephemera. These were sold at intentionally low prices—not through galleries but via mail

order and at artist-run stores. The events were even more accessible. Sometimes consisting of just one word—such as George Brecht’s “Exit,” included in the section titled “Death?”—Fluxus events could be performed by anyone, anywhere, at any time.

The accompanying catalogue is conceived as an art self-help book that addresses the general public as well as scholars. Co-published by Dartmouth College and the University of Chicago Press, the volume includes an introduction by Jacquelynn Baas and essays by Baas, Fluxus artist Ken Friedman, and scholars Hannah Higgins and Jacob Proctor. *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* will also travel to the **University of Michigan Museum of Art** in Ann Arbor, from February 25 to May 20, 2012.

Concurrently on view with *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* is ***Fluxus at NYU: Before and Beyond***. Curated by **Julia Robinson**, Assistant Professor of Art History at New York University, with **Ellen Swieskowski** (NYU/CAS ’11), the exhibition features Fluxus objects as well as paintings and drawings by artists who preceded and postdate the heyday of Fluxus, but who share related concerns. Also included are documents, posters, scores, poems, and ephemera by concrete poets, minimal and conceptual artists, and composers who explore language, push the boundaries of music, and investigate notions of performativity. All objects are drawn either from the NYU Art Collection—which has important holdings in American art from the 1940s to 1970s—or from NYU’s **Fales Library and Special Collections**. Fales Library houses the renowned Downtown Collection, which is the world’s most extensive archive of books, journals, posters, and ephemera relating to the Downtown scene since 1970, and which includes the Judson Church Papers, Vito Acconci’s 0-9 archive, and the Stuart Sherman Papers. *Fluxus at NYU* will be on view in the Grey’s Lower Level Gallery and the lobby of the **Tracey/Barry Gallery**, on the third floor of Bobst Library. Complementing both *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* and *Fluxus at NYU*, and presented in conjunction with Performa 11, artist **Larry Miller** will create a special Flux gallery tour. Additional gallery talks and public programs will be announced at a later date.

Sponsorship:

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About the Grey Art Gallery:

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University's fine-arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City's Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on exploring art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art's environments.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

General Information:

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Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart>

Hours:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11 am–6 pm

OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday, and major holidays: Closed

Admission: Suggested donation: \$3; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge