

COMPARATIVE EXHIBITION OF MULTIPLES ON VIEW AT HARVARD'S BUSCH-REISINGER MUSEUM

Unprecedented Presentation of Objects by Joseph Beuys, George Maciunas, and Fluxus Provides Insight into Radical Art of the 1960s in Europe and the US



Flux Year Box 2, late 1960s. Mixed media, 20 x 20 x 8.5 cm. Fogg Art Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore Fluxus Collection, Margaret Fisher Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/Bound & Unbound, M26448. Photo: Photographic Services © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (December 21, 2006)—The Harvard University Art Museums present *Multiple Strategies: Beuys, Maciunas, Fluxus*, an exhibition of nearly 200 works including printed and object multiples, photographs, and unique objects, at the Busch-Reisinger Museum from **February 24 through June 10, 2007**. This

pioneering exhibition stages a dialogue between the work of German artist Joseph Beuys and that of the loose international collective known as Fluxus, and in particular, its principal organizer George Maciunas, and examines the role of the printed or

object multiple in these artists' pursuit of an expanded notion of what art could and should be. Drawing from the significant holdings of Beuys and Fluxus in the permanent collections of the Busch-Reisinger Museum and the Fogg Art Museum respectively, the exhibition will offer a unique pairing of the two through a number of carefully considered thematic groupings and juxtapositions.

In the 1990s, the Willy and Charlotte Reber Collection, a rare, nearly complete assembly of multiples by Joseph Beuys, was acquired by the Busch-Reisinger Museum; and in 2005, the Fogg Art Museum acquired the Barbara and Peter Moore Fluxus Collection, a remarkable first-owner collection that places Harvard's Fluxus holdings among the most significant in North America. Fluxus and Beuys have each been the subject of numerous large-scale exhibitions

over the past few decades; however, this will be the first time any institution has mounted an exhibition specifically examining the relationship between the two bodies of work. Although objects from the Moore collection have appeared in other major Fluxus exhibitions, this will be its first public exhibition at Harvard.

Multiple Strategies: Beuys, Maciunas, Fluxus is organized by Jacob Proctor, Ruth V S Lauer Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Prints, and Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History of Art and Architecture. "These objects challenge us to think differently about art and to ask what role it can play in society, as well as to reconsider long-held, perhaps unquestioned, ideas about the relationship between art object, viewer, and institutional frame," said Proctor. "In different ways, both Beuys and Fluxus used their art to stimulate collective social and political engagement. I hope that this exhibition will not only challenge received wisdom and critical assumptions about these works, but also ensure that art maintains an active and critical role in the intellectual life of students. At the same time, viewers will see that there is a strong aspect of play, humor, and wit to these works."

The avant-gardists of the early 20th century launched a succession of assaults on the concept of aesthetic autonomy, perhaps the most devastating of which were Marcel Duchamp's "readymades." Duchamp developed the term readymade in 1915 to refer to found objects chosen by the artist as art. By suggesting that a preexisting, industrially produced object—such as his notorious *Fountain* (1917), a urinal that he turned on its side, signed "R. Mutt," and submitted to the first exhibition of the American Society of Independent Artists—could be considered a work of art simply by virtue of the artist's having designated it as such, Duchamp asserted that there was no longer a fundamental difference between making art and naming art. Considered scandalous during the time of their production, by the early 1960s many of Duchamp's readymades had taken the form of authorized, limited edition, handcrafted replicas and were considered valuable works of art that seemed to contradict their original intention.

In the 1950s and 1960s the term multiple came to be applied to a new type of art object that, while intended to be produced in numerous copies, fell outside the parameters of such traditional forms as printmaking and cast sculpture. Often fabricated using the materials and

techniques of mass production, these objects typically existed in very large, or even unlimited, editions. Unlike painting and sculpture, or even traditional fine art printmaking, the multiple engaged directly with the conditions of industrial production, mass communication, and an increasingly global economy.

For the artists of the international avant-garde known as Fluxus, the multiple presented a means to revive and reformulate the readymade's critique of aesthetic autonomy. Fluxus emerged in the early 1960s as a loose, collaborative effort to fundamentally redefine the terms of artistic production. The group coalesced around the Lithuanian-born American artist George Maciunas (1931–1978), who served as Fluxus's principal organizer, designer, publisher, and impresario. Fluxus sought to dethrone "serious" culture by creating objects and performances demonstrating that, as Maciunas said, "Anything can be art and anyone can do it."

Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) also looked to the readymade as he sought to bring art and life into closer proximity. But unlike Maciunas and the Fluxus artists, Beuys almost immediately distanced himself from the readymade's inventor. In a live appearance on German television in 1964, Beuys dramatically inscribed a large placard with the statement "The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated." Duchamp's readymades had signaled the obsolescence not only of traditional works of art but perhaps even of the notion of art itself. For Beuys, the readymade became part of a larger effort to reinvest artistic activity with metaphorical, ritual, and even spiritual significance.

Although they often differed in their choice of strategies, Beuys and Maciunas shared many of the same goals including using art as a means of realizing social and political change, recognizing the importance of collective action, and eliminating the boundary between art and life. The production of multiples played a key role these efforts, often acting as a mediator between the production of objects and a growing emphasis on artistic process and action unfolding in real time.

Beuys, for his part, referred to his multiples both as vehicles for the spreading of ideas and as anchors that encouraged people to make connections between objects and across media.

Maciunas began producing multiples as an extension of his activities as a publisher and initially conceived of the multiple as a challenge to conventional modes of cultural production and distribution, while his position and use of multiples became more complex and multifaceted over time. It is certainly true of both Beuys and Fluxus multiples that the significance of a group of objects is almost always greater than the sum of its parts. Various conceived as carriers of ideas intended to circulate through the world as absurdist send-ups of consumer products and as invitations to direct participation by the viewer, many of their works attempt to undermine the very concept of the art museum and the notion of aesthetic autonomy it implies.

“In addition to showcasing two important collections of postwar art, the ability of this exhibition to both perform and stimulate intellectual study makes it particularly appropriate to our mission of teaching and research,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “While the exhibition is drawn almost entirely from our collections, its potential for scholarship reaches far beyond our basic ability to showcase these works and extends to our role as a teaching museum. In posing questions, creating opportunities for dialogue, and offering comparisons to students, scholars, and the public, this exhibition points to the efforts of both Beuys and Maciunas to transform the ways in which art is exhibited and distributed.”

Featured Works

On view in the exhibition are significant works from Joseph Beuys, George Maciunas, George Brecht, and Robert Watts, as well as Marcel Duchamp, Yoko Ono, Chieko Shiomi, Alison Knowles, Claes Oldenburg, Ben Vautier, and many others. Particularly iconic works include an early example of the *Fluxkit* (1964). The *Fluxkit* was designed and produced by Maciunas as an ambitious effort to present the scope of Fluxus production in one container. Inspired by Marcel Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-Valise* (the Fogg’s c. 1961 copy of the *Boîte* is also included in the exhibition), the *Fluxkit* gathers its array of Fluxus editions and printed matter in a specially-modified briefcase. Also featured are other anthology editions *Fluxus 1* (1964) and *Flux Year Box 2* (late 1960s). The exhibition includes rarely-seen, often unique, maquettes and prototypes for editions. These objects are both compelling in their own right and offer a unique glimpse into the creative process. Examples include the collage maquette for Robert Watts’s 1962

SafePost/Jockpost/K.U.K. Feldpost, Peter Moore's 1967 *Venetian Blind*, and the aborted 1966 Claes Oldenburg edition *False Food Selection*. Also included in the exhibition is the rare first version of Chieko (Mieko) Shiomi's *Spatial Poem No. 1* (c. 1965), in a wooden box with densely packed paper flags arranged so that they nest together when the box is closed. Only a few examples were assembled in this way; the assembly was so painstaking and labor-intensive that even the notoriously meticulous Maciunas was stymied and resorted to placing the flags on a flat board for the majority of the edition. The selection and installation of objects in the exhibition highlights the interconnections between Beuys's multiples and his social and political activism. In addition to showcasing many lesser-known works, this emphasis offers new insights into such seminal Beuys editions as the *Felt Suit* (1970), *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee* (1969), *The Silence* (1973), *Evervess II I* (1968), and *Intuition* (1968).

Credit

Multiple Strategies: Beuys, Maciunas, Fluxus is made possible, in part, by the Friends of the Busch-Reisinger Museum.

Brochure

The exhibition is accompanied by a brochure, featuring 13 illustrations and an essay by curator Jacob Proctor.

Exhibition Programming

M. Victor Leventritt Symposium

Friday, April 13, 6:00 p.m.; and Saturday, April 14, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, lecture hall

Free admission; a reception will follow Friday evening's talks.

Between Object and Event: Beuys and Fluxus in Context

Speakers will include Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Harvard University; Thierry de Duve, Université de Lille 3; Hannah Higgins, University of Illinois, Chicago; David Joselit, Yale University; Pamela Kort, independent scholar; Mario Kramer, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Harvard University; Barbara Moore, independent scholar; Jacob Proctor, Harvard University; Julia Robinson, Princeton University; and Joan Rothfuss, independent scholar.

Gallery Talks

Busch-Reisinger Museum

Free with the price of admission

Sunday, February 25, 2:00 p.m.

Jacob Proctor, Ruth V S Lauer Curatorial Assistant, Department of Prints, and Ph.D. candidate, History of Art and Architecture

Sunday, March 4, 2:00 p.m.

Solveig Koebernick, 2005-2007 Michalke Curatorial Intern, Busch-Reisinger Museum, and Ph.D. candidate, University of Leipzig

Sunday, March 11, 2:00 p.m.

Matthew Jolly, graduate student, History of Art and Architecture

Saturday, March 24, 11:00 a.m.

Laura Muir, Charles C. Cunningham, Sr. Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum

Saturday, April 7, 11:00 a.m.

Brendan Fay, Agnes Mongan Curatorial Intern, Department of Photographs, and Ph.D. candidate, History of Art and Architecture

Sunday, April 22, 2:00 p.m.

Lanka Tattersall, graduate student, History of Art and Architecture

Saturday, May 5, 11:00 a.m.

Prudence Peiffer, Ph.D. candidate, History of Art and Architecture

Saturday, May 19, 11:00 a.m.

Lizzy Ramhorst, curatorial assistant, Busch-Reisinger Museum

Friday, May 25, 3:30 p.m.

Michelle Kuo, Ph.D. candidate, History of Art and Architecture

Saturday, June 2, 11:00 a.m.

Jacob Proctor, Ruth V S Lauer Curatorial Assistant, Department of Prints, and Ph.D. candidate, History of Art and Architecture

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprising of the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg Art Museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours: **Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.;** closed on national holidays.

General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Paid admission includes entrance to all three Art Museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks.

Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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For more information about these exhibitions or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

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