

# MICHAEL GALBRETH

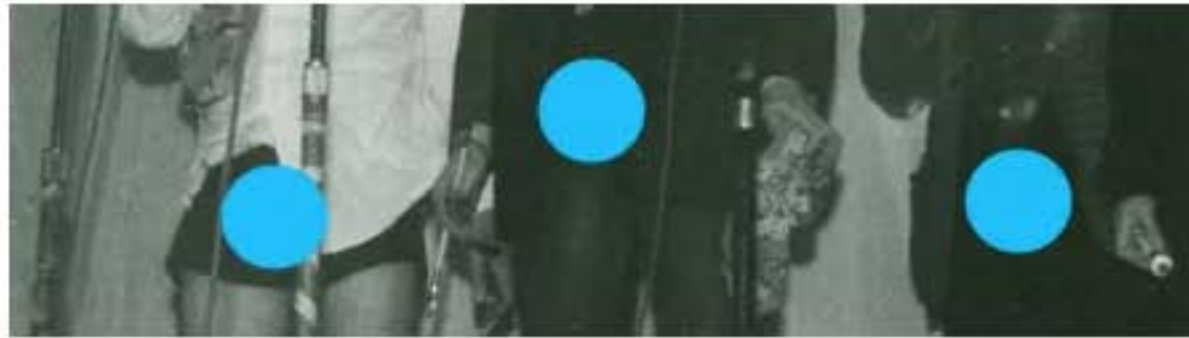
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## Another Kind of Blue

a longish, barely organized, marginally accurate, rambling, semi-recollection

or

How to Paint, Fluxus-style



### Prelude

The Art Guys had a blue period. It didn't last as long as Picasso's and it's not nearly as famous. There are no books, lectures, or college courses about it. Only a few hundred people have seen it or even know about it, and almost all of them have certainly forgotten about it, or tried to. In fact, The Art Guys' Blue Period lasted only one night and then for only a few minutes. It can't really be described as a period at all. "Moment" may be the most accurate term. But I can assure you, it was blue. Very blue.

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### Preface: I am not a painter

There's a funny phenomenon that has occasionally occurred when I find myself trapped in a small talk situation. (I'm not good at it.) As a way of getting to know one another, people often pose the question about occupation. One is, as they say, what one does. Almost invariably, this is how it goes:

Conversationalist: *"So, what do you do?"*

Me (fumblingly): *"Well, I'm what some people call an artist."*

Conversationalist: *"Really? What do you paint?"*

Me (fumblingly): *"Um... Well, nothing really."*

Then I have to somehow compress more than 40 years of god-knows-what into a 30 second sound bite. I have learned to do it, but it's not so easy. On top of that, I've had to back peddle and regrettably admit to actually painting, although I wouldn't call it *painting* painting.

Me (fumblingly): *"Well, on second thought, that's not exactly correct, you see, because there's [this](#), and [this](#), and [this](#)...And of course, there's [this](#)."*



Another conversation that occurs is when people ask us (The Art Guys), *"Of all the works you have ever done, which is your favorite?"*

Not Just Me (unfumblingly): *"Heaven's to Betsy! It can't be done!"* is our reply. *"They are all our little children that we birthed and foisted upon the world and we couldn't possibly choose our favorite. They are all masterpieces, each and every one!"*

This, the reader will be stunned to learn, is an utter lie. Now, I may not have favorites, and history will be the judge about any masterpieces, but there are nevertheless some very funny occurrences that The Art Guys have been a part of, or guilty of. And some are more memorable ones than others. The cream, or something, tends to rise. (Float?)

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## Part 1: Fluxattitudes

By 1991, The Art Guys had been collaborating for about eight years and word began to spread about our activities. We started to receive invitations to exhibit, perform, or lecture all over, including places outside of Texas. One day, we received a call from (as the saying goes) out of the blue inviting us to participate in an exhibition called [Fluxattitudes at The New Museum](#) in New York. The exhibition was co-curated by [Cornelia Lauf](#) and [Susan Hapgood](#), and if I recall, the call came from Cornelia. Susan was a curator at The New Museum then, but was on her way out (I think). Cornelia was an independent curator living in New York. Both were, and are, writers. Cornelia went on to explain the premise for the show and the reason we were invited. The idea was to present Fluxus art and artists while also including other (mainly younger) artists whose work somehow seemed "Flux-like" – that is, influenced by, derivative of, knowledgeable about, or otherwise at least vaguely associated with [Fluxus](#). It was a comparative historical show, with the curatorial goal to construct a link between original Fluxus artists and their work along with newer stuff by newer people.

"Okay, sure, that sounds like fun." We agreed that we would. Cornelia went on to explain the show in further detail.



Susan Hapgood (L) and Cornelia Lauf (R) at the opening of Fluxattitudes, The New Museum, September 26, 1992, 9:02 PM ET, 583 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, 40.725072, -73.997809 [photo retouched]



Fluxattitudes was first presented at the venerable "alternative space" [Hallwalls](#) in Buffalo, New York, in the spring of 1991. It seems to have been one of those situations wherein a terrific-yet-scruffy show is presented in an equally scruffy-yet-terrific art space, is then recognized by a more established art space (i.e. institution) where it is then picked up and re-presented with further embellishments and hoopla. I'm not exactly sure. From a distance, it seemed to be a show that developed organically and haphazardly, albeit enthusiastically. Sort of like Fluxus. The Art Guys were not a part of the Hallwalls version of Fluxattitudes. We were coming to the party late. It may have been that we were the very last artists to have been invited. If so, it would have been typical. Since The Art Guys have always functioned at the edge of everything, it has never surprised us to be part of either the last or first of anything. It has never deterred us, and we weren't deterred by this late invitation either. Rather, it presented an opportunity.

Along with the show, a catalog was produced for Fluxattitudes. But because we were not invited to be a part of the exhibition until early 1992, after the initial Hallwalls rendition, we were not included in it. Determining that [this aggression shall not stand](#), we somewhat forcibly ingratiated ourselves into the catalog. Or rather, we tried.

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## Part 1, Chapter 2: Fluxus tributes



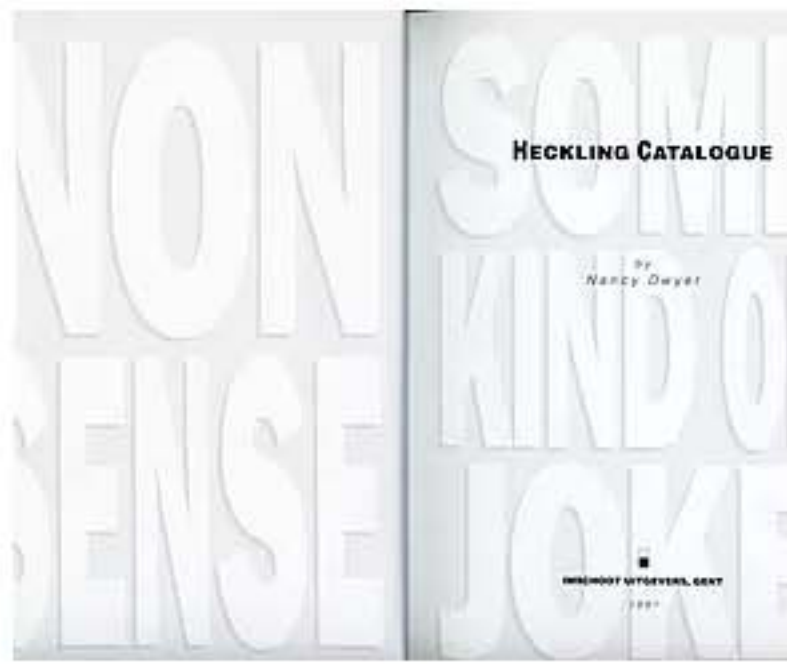
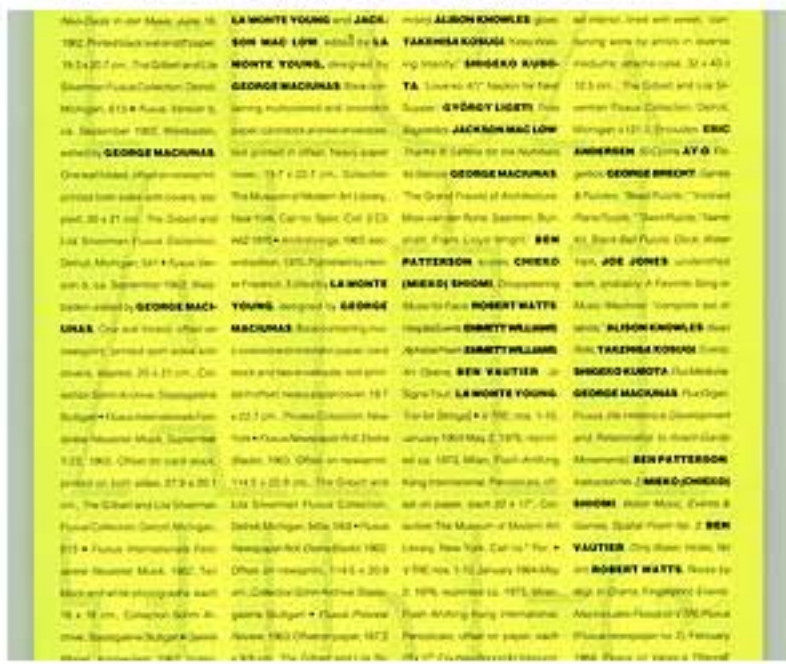
"If The Flucks Fux, Fuck Flux" (1988) framed pamphlet of the history of Fluxus by George Maciunas shot by 20 caliber Saturday Night Special; pistol, pamphlet, shell, slug in frame; 18 x 22 in.; private collection

There's a peculiar and often misunderstood and unappreciated aspect to the Fluxus attitude, and that's of paying tribute to others by insulting them. Often, Fluxus artists would acknowledge other Fluxus artists by making fun of them. They picked on each other in a derisively good humored way. The Art Guys got in on this act and also paid tribute to the Fluxus artists by insulting them. In 1988, we made a work called ["If The Flucks Fux, Fuck Flux,"](#) the title of which derives from an obscure George Brecht's declaration piece, "If the Flux fits, wear it." Our homage consisted of us shooting a [pamphlet of the history of Fluxus](#) (a rather rare and valuable object) with a 20 caliber "Saturday Night Special." We symbolically executed the whole goddamn movement thus simultaneously declaring our independence from it. It was our way of paying homage to some of our favorite art and artists, but at the same time, separating ourselves from them in a "your time is up, there's a new sheriff in town" sort of way. Our uninvited catalog entry, stepping on the toes of Nancy Dwyer, was done in this same spirit.

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Part 2: Fluxattitudes catalog



Fluxattitudes catalog, 1991-1992, co-published by Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, design by Nancy Dwyer 1/1

The [Fluxattitudes catalog](#) was a handsomely designed, though modestly sized, publication designed by the artist [Nancy Dwyer](#). This was Nancy's contribution to the show. The catalog was filled with the requisite essays by scholars and experts, and grainy black and white photos of famous Fluxus shenanigans, coupled with recent images of the goings-on at Hallwalls. What made the design really work were the somewhat insulting and derogatory ghostly text phrases that lurked behind the main text. All caps phrases like "NONSENSE," "LIES, LIES, LIES," "YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING," and "SAYS WHO?" scattered throughout served as an unwelcome to the reader. Nancy called it the "Heckling Catalog." I loved it.

Inspired by Nancy's concept, we designed our own contribution to the Fluxattitudes catalog, albeit an uninvited and unasked for addition, that served as a piece itself, just like Nancy's. We designed an insert for the catalog.



Fluxattitudes catalog with Art Guys insert, 1992, design by Don Quaintance 1/1

Since we were left out of the Fluxattitudes catalog, we wanted to be stuck in by sticking out - like a sore thumb. Our design was a one page (front and back) bogus mini-essay about The Art Guys. Our concept was that it would serve as an addendum and would come, appropriately, at the very end of the Fluxattitudes catalog. On the front of this insert, or what would have been page 61 in the catalog, was a ridiculous and nonsensical essay by a fictitious writer whom we named Corazon Pierce. The essay is mainly a cut-and-paste word collage from art magazine reviews. It made no sense and had no point. On the back was a photo of us at the conclusion of a performance work called "Huh?". This insert was designed by [Don Quaintance](#), with whom we worked on several projects and who later designed the catalog for our [1995 survey show at the Contemporary Art Museum Houston](#) called "[Think Twice.](#)" Our insert was formally identical to Nancy's design except for the obnoxious contrasting bright orange strip that made the insert stick out of the catalog like a bookmark. Although this undesired addition was at the very end, it was the first thing that one noticed. The last shall be first.



It was all a bit of a clandestine effort as we didn't inform anyone of our intentions. Our plan was to bring the inserts with us to New York and to somehow get them into the catalogs. Without permission or coordination, this turned out to be almost impossible. The New Museum, perhaps as a way of protecting the integrity of Nancy's work and design, let it be known that our insert was not welcomed. As a consequence, very few of our inserts found their way into the catalog. The Fluxattitudes catalogs are now rare items. Any of them with our inserts are virtually nonexistent. The official institutional church doctrine-like anti-spirit toward Fluxus raised its head for the first time. It would not be the last.

### Part 3: The Big Game



The Art Guys, "The Big Game" (1992) wood and glass box mounted on steel base, collage, marbles, gun, 36 x 36 x 36 inches

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Our main, officially sanctioned contribution to the Fluxattitudes show was a jumbo-sized (we're from Texas, after all) Flux-like box game called, appropriately, "The Big Game." The Big Game was a large, four-sided, highly crafted combination over-sized [toy box game](#), (the kind you find in dime stores) and [manual tilting pinball machine](#). It was an interactive adult toy, so to speak, designed for as many as four players. Large handle grips were attached to the outside walls so that the player(s) could tilt the table in any direction, with or without the help or coordination of the other players. You either worked with, or against, your partner, making them either a collaborator or competitor. There was no goal, no winning or losing. It was activated by depositing a marble through a hole in the side. The marble would then roll around the flat surface, dinging into bells, until it eventually fell into one of several holes drilled into the surface. Like a pool table, the marble was returned through a slot after it disappeared through one of the holes. Adhered to the surface of the game were shooting range targets of a "bad guy" pointing a gun at the viewer. The holes into which the marbles dropped implied bullet holes. In the middle was an actual gun – a 20 caliber "Saturday Night Special" pistol – mounted such that it spun around pointing in various directions depending upon how the game was tilted. Stuck to the interior side walls were various bumper stickers advocating guns and gun ownership rights. We're from Texas, after all.

Doing a work like this – a meticulously crafted *thing* – was antithetical to what we were almost exclusively known for then. It wasn't what was expected of us for this show, which seemed perfect to us. Whatever people think you do or should do, do the opposite. That was our credo and modus operandi. Unless, of course, it wasn't.



# FluxAttitudes

The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York September 26, 1992-January 3, 1993

Organized by Susan Hapgood and Cornelia Lauf, Guest Curators

Exhibition installation by Rirkrit Tinawan

Catalogue and brochure by Nancy Dwyer

Participation of sixty-two artists

There are various ways to structure an exhibition about historical art, even art made during the last thirty years. There is the chronological progression, the connoisseur's choice, the great nations survey, the theme show, and the social history perspective—leading in turn to the discovery of the neglected Other—and the multicultural approach. We did not want to belittle any of these time-honored methods, adopted by Western museums from the Musée d'Orsay to The New Museum of Contemporary Art. But as the curators of this exhibition we believed the elusive Fluxus movement required another tack.

Organizing an exhibition about Fluxus along chronological lines seemed pointless, as did highlighting key individuals. A good number of supposedly Fluxus artists dispute both the term and their membership, defining their affiliation instead by the miles they'll drive to distance themselves from both. Nonetheless, museums throughout the world are presenting a variety of Fluxi, grappling with an amorphous, slippery character, force-fitting the institutional straitjacket onto an abundance of anti-institutional manifestations one might call the Fluxus movement. The general consensus of scholarly parasites claims that Fluxus was made by a loose-knit collective of artists who gathered some time in the early 1960s from the fields of music, performance, film and art. They pursued forms that were formless, events that could be repeated by anyone, and a battery of props that—unless perhaps in the annals of Zurich Dada—had few precedents for their economy of means, wit, mutability, and capacity for endless replication.

If one were to organize this exhibition chronologically with supposedly neutral documentation as a goal, where would one stake the precise beginning or end for

Fluxus? And anyway, who would hammer the stake? Here the mercurial figure of George Maciunas enters, the man who appointed himself custodian of Fluxus, the stake-driver and list-maker. Some time in 1962 he began to systematize the many events that often arose from ideas transmitted in the late 1950s by John Cage. Maciunas named the ever-changing group Fluxus and proceeded to feverishly package and promote the work of this diverse and gifted collective of people until his death in 1978—occasionally creating some art of his own along the way. If most agree that Fluxus officially began around 1962, when did it end? Some say it died with Maciunas, others say Fluxus lives to this day. With due respect to Maciunas, it was too arbitrary to doggedly follow his list and his dates.

After all,\* the idea of Fluxus was to democratize the making process, devalue the commodity status of the art work, and free people to think about art in an everyday kind of way, with more humor than reverence. So, as we see it, *FluxAttitudes* is a tribute to this spirit, not to the differences between the individuals, but to their commonality. It includes the work of figures historically associated with the movement, as well as contemporary artists whose work reflects a Fluxus approach. It celebrates sensibility over form, the living over the relic.

While the appearance of the exhibition, both its first venue in 1991, at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo, New York, and now at The New Museum, has mutated, its conceptual foundations have remained constant. In Buffalo, we integrated period Fluxus and post-Fluxus works of art with documentation, toys, and assorted books in an environment that blurred categorical distinctions, and always emphasized the viewer's interactive role. Throughout, we

have aimed to expose the unspoken procedures of curators and institutions. For The New Museum, we even suggested a theme: we asked artists to address the 1992 U.S. Presidential elections in their work. Participants were invited to contribute an interactive element to the exhibition: a score, a performance, an object, or an idea that directly involves the visitor. Each work in *FluxAttitudes* is assigned an insurance value of \$0, and information labels attributing specific works are once again eliminated. While these aspects caused some discomfort, we want to revive, momentarily, Maciunas's beliefs that art should be accessible to all, without commodity or institutional value, and that the individual ego should be suppressed in the interests of the collective. (Regarding his 1963 manifesto calling for a purge of bourgeois sickness, intellectual, professional, and commercialized culture—well, that wasn't so easy.)

There were various reactions to our invitation letter as the written responses on display indicate. Some artists refused to participate. Others did not answer. And then there is a list, a motley, glorious, seemingly infinite list of proposals for the visitor activated work you see, hear and make in these two galleries. And this entire project, we hope, in its eclecticism, arbitrariness, and disrespect for traditional notions of quality and framing, will have a democratic strength, lightness of touch, and Fluxness of attitude.

\*"After all" means we get the last word here.

Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood,  
Guest Curators  
© 1992

Fluxattitudes exhibition statement

Because of the politics of the day (George Bush was President, having succeeded Reagan), and because it was a presidential election year, the curators encouraged the artists to contribute works that were political. In a statement for the exhibition, the curators wrote:

*"...we suggested a theme: we asked artists to address the 1992 U.S. Presidential elections in their work. Participants were invited to contribute an interactive element to the exhibition: a score, a performance, an object, or an idea that directly involves the visitor."*

We thought that our "Big Game" fit this bill. Even so, we still weren't finished contributing to the show.



## Part 4 - An Evening In Flux

After we were invited to participate in Fluxattitudes, we inquired if there was to be an evening of performance as part of the exhibition. Theatrical works and music played an important part of Fluxus, and with us too. After all, many of the Fluxus artists were composers, and all were influenced by John Cage. A lot of Fluxus work is "scored" and formatted like music recitals. Although there were events planned for the opening night of Fluxattitudes at The New Museum, there was not a specific staged event scheduled for those pieces that were designed for the proscenium format.



"Sometimes music is music, and sometimes it's not." - Dick Higgins

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We were surprised, and disappointed, to learn that such a component would not be a part of Fluxattitudes. So many aggressions that would not stand! We therefore took it upon ourselves to rectify this gross oversight. We decided to contribute yet another unsanctioned element to Fluxattitudes by taking it upon ourselves to organize an evening of performance.

Our close friend, [Gene Pool](#) of [Grass Art Car](#) and [Beer Can Suit](#) fame, enthusiastically agreed to help us. Gene lived and worked in Brooklyn at the time, in the somewhat derelict Williamsburg neighborhood. (It's not derelict anymore.) Gene had a friend – Yvette Helin – who ran a small performance art/theater space/music venue called the Green Room where Gene often performed and served as the MC for various events. It was a tiny space, but it had a devoted local audience. And it was free and available to us. We had our venue.

Knowing only a couple of Fluxus artists, and long before the internet and email, it seemed like a daunting task to organize this event, but we were determined to try. I had met and hung out with [Phil Corner](#) in Philadelphia in 1987 during the [New Music America festival](#) when it was there. Phil was funny, highly intelligent (like almost all Fluxus artists), and very friendly. Before that I met [Ken Friedman](#) in Hartford in 1984. I was there visiting the alternative space, [Real Art Ways](#), and Ken was there doing an artist residency. I stumbled upon him setting up a video shoot in the black box performance space. In the middle of the room was a table with some fruit on it – some grapes, a watermelon, an apple. Ken asked me if I wanted to help and perform the piece. "Of course," I replied. He offered no instruction, or score, or guidance of any kind, as if walking into a black box theater to "perform" with a bunch of fruit was the most natural thing in the world. In the world of Fluxus, it is. That's how I met Ken Friedman. I have kept in touch with Ken ever since. Other than Ken and Phil Corner, I didn't personally know anyone who was in the Fluxattitudes show.



## An interlude: Mop Tsu Oh

In 1999, The Art Guys organized a show of Ken Friedman's work in Houston at Mop Tsu Oh. Mop Tsu Oh was a gallery in the mop closet at Houston's infamous [Notsuoh](#) (Houston spelled backwards) which is owned and run by the artist [Jim Pirtle](#). [Notsuoh](#) was originally conceived as a [coffee house/chess club](#), but it has morphed over the years and on any given night you may find performance art, punk rock, or a poetry slam. I have religiously met Jim there every week (almost) since it opened in 1996 to play chess. During these games and visits, we have often talked and joked about art galleries, art museums, and anything to do with art. It was during one of these conversations that the idea of Mop Tsu Oh was born. Jim and I laughed about formatting different art galleries in various parts of the bar including the mop closet, hence the gallery and name Mop Tsu Oh. The Mop Tsu Oh Art Center mission statement may help to explain things. Or not.

### *Mop Tsu Oh Art Center Mission Statement*

*Mop Tsu Oh Art Center is one of Houston's premier showcases of art, fine art, very fine art, performances, opera, musicals, dance, ballet, knik-knaks, riff-raff and bric-a-brac. Renowned worldwide for its innovative exhibitions and cleaning utensils, Mop Tsu Oh Art Center presents a distinctive and distinguished array of artists, performers and detergents. The Mop Tsu Oh Art Center (which derives its name from "retneC trA houstpoM", spelled backward) has more than 12 square feet of exhibition area with an adjacent performance arena. The space features a light system and 8 foot ceilings. Exhibitions, performances and clean-up are organized and presented by the Mop Tsu Oh Art Center's co-directors, The Art Guys. The Mop Tsu Oh Art Center is located in the heart of the No Tsu Oh Coffee House cleaning district which is located in the heart of downtown Houston which is deep in the heart of Texas at 314 Main Street ("No Tsu Oh" is Houston spelled backward). The Mop Tsu Oh Art Center is open 24 hours a day or by appointment. For information, call 713-555-1212. "*

[Jim and I](#) also conceived of "Between the Walls Gallery" which, unfortunately, has still yet to happen. Between the Walls Gallery was to be located in a narrow space – no more than a foot wide – in the wall that separated No Tsu Oh with the next door bar, Dean's. At the top of the wall was the opportunity to see down into the space. But because it was so dark between the walls, nothing was visible unless you shined a flashlight down into it. The idea was to drop art work down between the walls, then have visitors view the "installation" by looking down into it using flashlights. Because the space was inaccessible, there would be no de-installation of the art work. Instead, the next show would simply be thrown on top of the previous one, both covering it up and forming a layered exhibition history. We speculated that we would eventually close Between the Walls Gallery once the piled art work reached the top of the wall. Another gallery that we did realize was [Icetsuoh](#) which was a gallery inside of Jim's ice machine. That gallery lasted through an entire single exhibition, after which it closed when the ice machine broke and needed to be replaced.

Mop Tsu Oh only lasted a few years. But for me, a highlight was presenting the work of Ken Friedman. [Ken Friedman](#) is an exemplary figure in the Fluxus pantheon. Although he would not be considered a part of the early, original group (whoever and whenever the heck who and that is), he seems to have arrived as fast as he could. Like George Maciunas, Ken, more than any other in my opinion, has been the main caretaker and historian of the movement having written many essays and contributed in various ways to numerous exhibitions and catalogs. Ken worked with Dick Higgins at [Something Else Press](#).

To our surprise and delight, when Ken was invited to exhibit at Mop Tsu oh, he agreed. Working smartly, and to make it as easy and palatable as possible for himself and us, Ken suggested presenting one of his collections of [event scores](#) called "The Secrets of Nature." Ken sent us the text files via email. We formatted them, printed them, stuck them in a binder, plopped them on a music stand, and installed them in Mop Tsu Oh. This was Ken Friedman's show at Mop Tsu oh. The Art Guys (and I myself) have organized many shows and art events at many places all over Houston and beyond. This remains one of my favorites.





notsuoH and Mop Tsu Oh Art Center (click on the images for more information)

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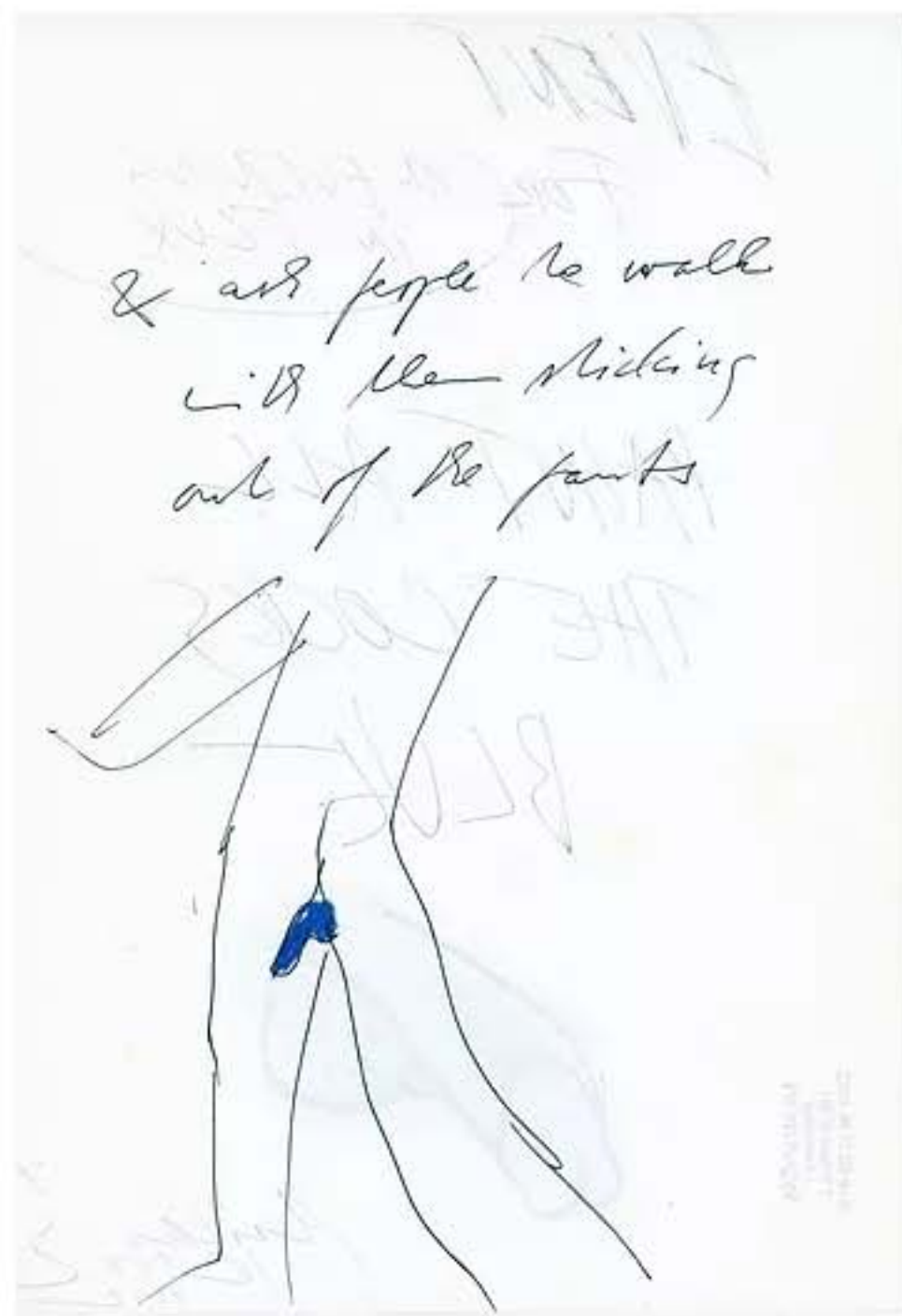
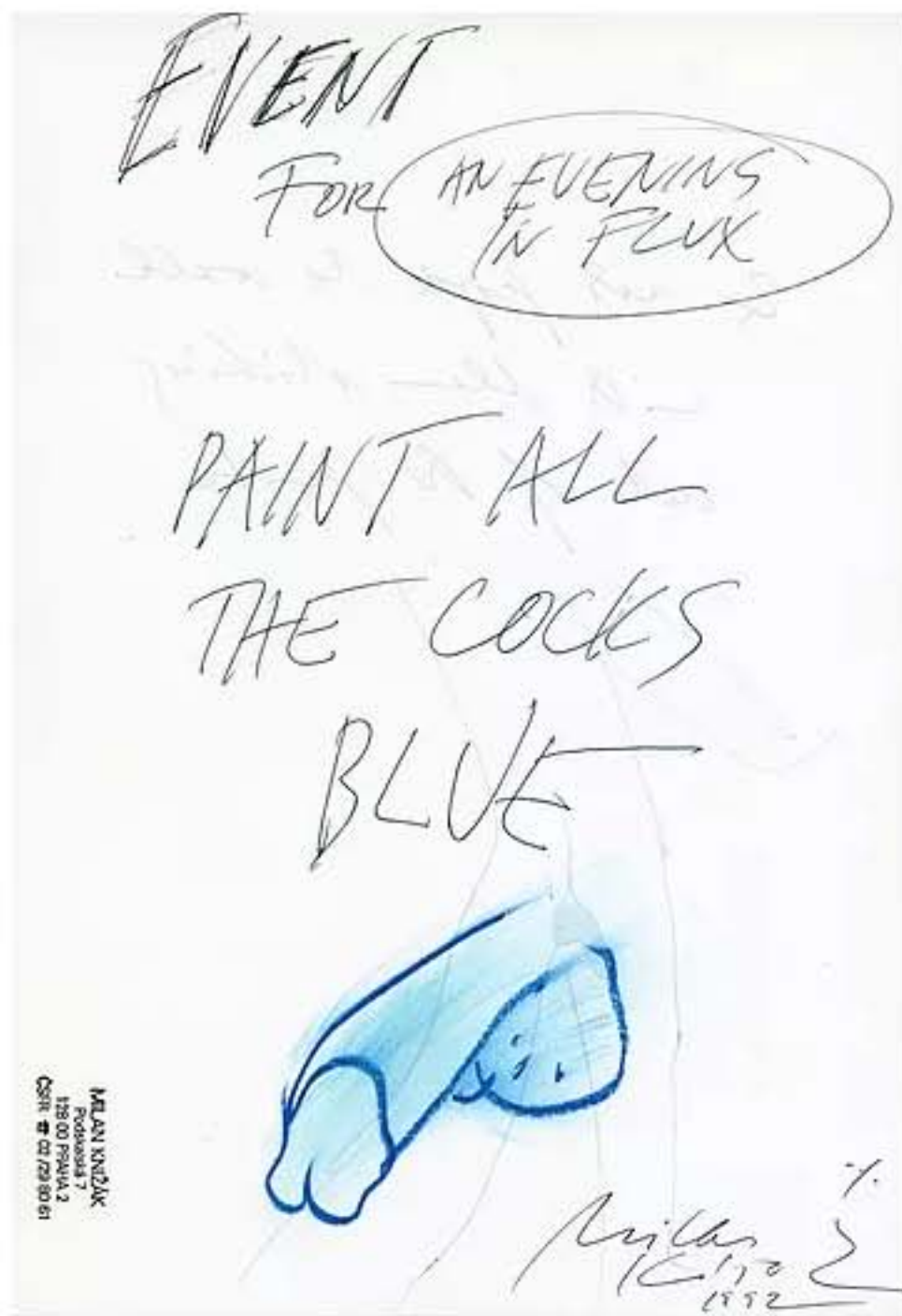
## Part 4: From Out Of The Blue

We called the performance event for Fluxattitudes that we were organizing "An Evening In Flux" and scheduled it on Friday, September 25, 1992, the day before the opening of Fluxattitudes which took place the following night. We invited anyone who was a part of Fluxattitudes to participate in "An Evening In Flux" but, as I shall explain, hardly any of the artists did.

Ken Friedman was the first Fluxus artist who agreed to participate in "An Evening In Flux." But because he lived in Norway at the time and couldn't even attend the Fluxattitudes show, he instead said that he would contribute a piece remotely and clandestinely by having a friend perform a work of his. Ken was wonderful, and he helped us get in contact with other Fluxus artists too. I can't exactly recall how it is that we were able to reach many of the Fluxus artists who were in Fluxattitudes, but I think that Susan Hapgood helped us the most by sharing phone numbers or addresses. I remember having a phone conversation with [Dick Higgins](#). I really like Dick's work and I wanted him to be a part of our performance night. After I explained "An Evening In Flux" to him, he insisted, like most of the other Fluxus artists with whom we spoke, that he only performed for a fee, which was more than fair. The trouble was, we had no money and couldn't pay anyone. I explained to Dick that the event was not an officially sponsored event by Fluxattitudes or the New Museum, that we were fellow artists in the show and that we were doing it ourselves. Even we weren't being paid. Although polite and understanding, Dick was firm in his position. It turns out he had other problems with the show. He didn't participate in it and didn't attend the opening night. Some of his work was included because you can't do a Fluxus show without Dick Higgins, and because there's plenty of Dick Higgins' work in the world, I assume that whatever was shown in Fluxattitudes was borrowed work. Realizing that Dick would not budge from his standpoint of not performing without getting paid, I gave up trying to convince him, but I was pleased just to have the opportunity to speak with him. We ran into this same problem with all of the other Fluxus artists we reached out to – no money, no playey. And it turned out that only three non-Fluxus artists who were in Fluxattitudes agreed to perform – [Marc Travanti](#), [David Wells](#) and [David Medalla](#). It was shaping up to be a pretty thin night. Then one day a few weeks before the show, we received an envelope in the mail.

The envelope was all marked up with international stamps and a return address from Czechoslovakia. It was from [Milan Knížák](#). Inside the envelope was a single piece of regular typing paper with drawings on both sides.





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On what we surmised was the front, was a title that also served as a directive: "Event for *An Evening in Flux*: Paint All the Cocks Blue," beneath which was a drawing of a blue penis, to reinforce, I suppose, just where the pigment should be applied, along with a signature, date, and address stamp. On the back the text continued, "& all people be walk with them sticking out of the pants" which was accompanied by another simple illustration of a torso in stride with a blue appendage. That was it.

Jack and I were fluent in Fluxus history and we both knew about Knížák and his work. So we were excited to receive this... suggestion, and to hear from Knížák. But what to make of it? What, who, and how should this be performed? It instructed that "all people" perform, but the main prop for it necessarily calls for just half of those people, give or take. In the style and spirit of many Fluxus ["event scores"](#), it was clear yet vague, leaving plenty of wiggle room, so to speak, for broad interpretation. Perplexed and undecided, we determined that "Paint All the Cocks Blue" must be performed. We just didn't know exactly how.

We arrived in New York a week before the opening of Fluxattitudes to hang out and visit, to assist with setting up our piece "The Big Game" at The New Museum, to attempt to stuff the exhibition catalogs with our addendum, and to see if we could meet some artists who might decide to perform in "An Evening in Flux." A few days before the show at The New Museum, we visited the [Emily Harvey Gallery](#) because they were exhibiting a [show of works](#) by Fluxus artists. This should not have been surprising since Emily only showed Fluxus artists. Emily's gallery was just a few doors down from The New Museum on Broadway. When we stopped by, Emily was there, as was [Eric Anderson](#), [Larry Miller](#), and [Ay-o](#). We introduced ourselves and extended an invitation to Eric, Larry, and Ay-o to participate in "An Evening In Flux."

Cold shoulders.

Eric was most vociferously against doing anything without getting paid, punctuating his reasoning with a "Don't you know who I am?" tone. Larry backed him up with an equally dismissive "Are you kidding me?" micro lecture. Our response was a sincerely disappointed, but polite, "Okay, then don't." We had no hard feelings. We were on their side after all. But we had made our commitment and the show was going to go on regardless if no one showed up or no one but us performed. We invited them to the event anyway, as audience members, just to see the show.

Grumbles. "Maybe."



Toward the end of our conversation, cheerful Ay-o wanted to give us a tour of a new installation by him in the basement of the building of the Emily Harvey Gallery. As I recall, it wasn't much of anything except a pitch black, self-guided tour through a hallway with only a handrail to guide you. It was the antithesis of the sparkly selfie-promoting LED playgrounds of that are popular these days in museums. Like Ay-o himself, it was wonderful.



(L. to R.) Alison Knowles, Larry Miller, Phil Corner, Eric Anderson, Ben Patterson, Ben Vautier performing "Silent Music" by Takako Saito, 2002

## Part Five - New Museum show and opening

Back at The New Museum, Fluxattitudes was shaping up to be a chaotic hodgepodge. It had all kinds of things – posters, ephemera, artifacts, do dads, do it yourself quirks, and a whole assortment of mishmashed meanderings. It was a Fluxus show, all right, and it had plenty of attitude. We helped The New Museum staff to unpack our "Big Game" and to quickly set it up. Unfortunately, it was relegated to an area in the back of the space. But fortunately, it was placed in the center of the room.



"Fluxattitudes," installation views, The New Museum, 1992

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The opening night of Fluxattitudes was a lively affair. It wasn't exactly raucous, but it was loud and noisy. The place was filled with people, almost shoulder to shoulder, as one might expect from a large group show, especially with exhibitors like these. There were performances and events throughout the evening. Speeches, cooking, kooky behavior being passed off as music (sure it is), studiously crossed-arm observances, laughs, confusion, and fun. There were art stars and nobodies, and everyone in between. Yoko Ono wasn't there, but people sat down at a little table to [mend her broken crockery](#) anyway. [Jackson MacLow](#), co-author along with [La Monte Young](#) of [An Anthology](#), the famous book of early Fluxus experiments, was there. I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet him. He must have had indigestion or just left an unfortunate phone conversation because he wasn't friendly to me and didn't seem happy at all. Dick Higgins, as he promised, was absent. Nor did I see his wife, Alison Knowles. George Maciunas couldn't make it as he was [indisposed](#).





opening night of "Fluxattitudes," The New Museum, September 26, 1992 (click on photos for more information)

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The rest of the night proceeded as one would expect an exhibition opening at The New Museum. There were lots of people, largely unknown to each other, wandering around, somewhat aimlessly, mysteriously drifting in and out of chatting groups without pardons, checking each other out more than the art. There wasn't enough free booze to re-inflate my now-flaccid expectation balloon. As openings go, I'd give it a "B" grade, and then only because it was at The New Museum in New York. Other than that...

The Fluxattitudes show at The New Museum is the only place "The Big Game" has ever been shown. It has remained in storage since.

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## Part Six: Kisses, Blue Paint, Lincoln, and a Motorcycle



An Evening In Flux, September 25, 1992, The Green Room, Brooklyn, New York, stills from video  
(L. to R.) Eric Anderson enters The Green Room, Gene Pool, Deborah Moore, Gene Pool and The Art Guys

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We – The Art Guys and **Gene Pool** – spent the majority of the day before "An Evening In Flux" preparing the Green Room for that evening's performance by moving and arranging chairs and tables, sweeping the floors, and generally straightening up the place. The space was loosely arranged into a sort of cabaret, nightclub, black box theater combo. Tables for various sizes and shapes, along with chairs were scattered throughout the room. A small raised platform at the far end of the room served as the stage upon which the performances would take place. The Green Room (not green, but indeed a room) was located in a smallish single story building space in the warehouse district of the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. Williamsburg was in the midst of a SOHO-like arts overhaul, being the newish go-to neighborhood for artists who couldn't afford Manhattan. Large empty warehouses were being flooded with artists and squatters. The Green Room was just down the street from Gene Pool's warehouse home/studio space. Its location, across the river and in a fairly remote part of Brooklyn, was not encouraging for a high turnout, but always stubbornly intrepid, we prepared as if there would be.



What we had in our favor was Gene. [Gene was notorious, if not famous, for his neighborhood shenanigans.](#) On top of that, he was the consummate promoter. Gene was well known for donning one of his suits made from human detritus – aluminum cans, [bottle caps](#), [wine corks](#), or even grass – and then riding around the area on his unicycle or performing one of his unique musical compositions while busking in a subway station. On top of all of his self-promotion, Gene organized collective events, performances, and exhibitions, the most well known being the [Crest Hardware Show](#), a group show that took place in a nearby Williamsburg neighborhood hardware store. When Gene promoted something, people paid attention.

Whatever promotion we did for *An Evening In Flux* worked. The place was packed. Just before the performances were to begin, there was a palpable buzz fueled by whatever alcohol was served. The three of us – The Art Guys and Gene Pool – played the hosts and emcees for the event, flavoring the evening with friendly banter hoping to encourage an atmosphere of inclusive comraderie. Accompanying us throughout the evening was our friend, the artist Deborah Moore. Deborah, a somewhat recent transplant from Houston, was a veteran of [Lawndale](#), [Commerce Street Artists Warehouse \(CSAW\)](#), [Chez Imbecile](#), the [Art Car Parade](#) and numerous shenanigans, provided the evening's music on accordion.

The Art Guys and Gene Pool set the tone with the first performance called "The Right Foot." In the spirit of the Fluxus attitude, it was a nothing little piece for pre-recorded voice, kazoos, and broccoli. The day before, we recorded ourselves as if we were introducing the evening live. At the beginning of "A Night In Flux," we played this pre-recorded introduction live over the sound system attempting to remember what we said and following along. Inevitably, it just looked like bad lip synching. It took a while for the audience to catch on. Some never did. I have no idea why we ate broccoli while playing the kazoos, as if anything that evening made any sense.



An Evening In Flux, September 25, 1992, The Green Room, Brooklyn, New York, stills from video  
(L to R.) Marc Travanti, Paul Sharits, Ken Friedman (and assistant), David Medalla, David Wells

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The rest of the night proceeded as one might expect an evening of Fluxus type works to go – spirited, diverse, disheveled and improvised. Up until the last minute we weren't exactly sure who was going to do what but it didn't really matter to us. [Marc Travanti](#), dressed conservatively in a suit and tie, performed some sort of judo exercise highlighted by ridiculous and somewhat perverse pelvic thrusts. [Paul Sharits](#) presented a couple of his stream of consciousness videos, [David Medalla](#) just got up a spoke for a short while about something I never really understood, and David Wells recited poetry from some books after which he attached small motors to them which made the books bounce around haphazardly on stage. Ken Friedman presented a piece called "Abraham Lincoln's Original Face." Ken could not attend as he was on his way from Tokyo to Oslo (or somewhere), so he recruited two friends to perform clandestinely for him as him. For the performance, a man impersonating Ken and dressed as Lincoln, complete with top hat and paper mask to obscure his true identity, slowly and silently walked onto the stage and sat down accompanied by a [Carol Merrill](#)-type "ta-da girl" holding a placard with piece's title. After "Lincoln" sat down, his assistant colored his face with a marker, whereupon he slowly and silently stood up and walked off. It was perhaps the most peculiar work of all.





An Evening In Flux, September 25, 1992, The Green Room, Brooklyn, New York, stills from video  
(L to R.) The Art Guys perform "Try To Cry," "Kiss Piece," and "Wrap Music"

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The Art Guys contributed three works for An Evening In Flux: "Try To Cry," "Wrap Music," and "Kiss Piece." This was the first time we performed Kiss Piece, a specific homage to Fluxus artist Emmett Williams' "Counting Songs," one of my favorite art works of any kind by anyone, among several hundred. The score of Emmett's piece is as follows:

*Emmett Williams, "Counting Songs" (1962)*

*Audience is counted by various means -- f.ex., performer gives a small gift (coin, cough drop, cookie, toothpick, match stick, etc.) to every member of the audience, counting each as he does so, or marks audience members with a chalk, or keeps track by pointing finger, etc.*

What I've always liked about Counting Songs is its directness. A task to accomplish is mapped out and then one simply does that task. There are no rehearsals and no do-overs.

Kiss Piece, our embellished interpretation of Counting Songs, involved going throughout the room kissing every single audience member. As simple as it sounds (and as it actually is) it is one of our more memorable performances as it tends to elicit strong reactions from the audience.



An Evening In Flux, September 25, 1992, The Green Room, Brooklyn, New York  
(L. to R.) Gene Pool and The Art Guys performing "Paint All The Cocks Blue" by Milan Knížák with assistance by Sasha Sumner and unidentified woman

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In what was supposed to be the conclusion for the evening, but turned out to be the penultimate piece, was Milan Knížák's "Paint All The Cocks Blue." The way we interpreted it for its "world premiere" was to announce the work, then, with our backs turned to the audience, Gene Pool and The Art Guys proceeded to paint our penises blue with blue tempera paint. Two women – Sasha Sumner, Gene's wife at the time, and another woman – uninvitingly volunteered their assistance, doing not much more than watching. After completing the instructions of the score and to rousing applause, we briefly unveiled our virtuosity to the audience in a very temporary painting exhibition, in what might be described these days as a pop-up show.

And this, dear reader, is where the story should have ended, and it would have, except for the excitement of a couple of audience members who requested to present one more impromptu performance...



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## (A very grand) Finale

Just before "An Evening In Flux" began, Larry Miller and Eric Anderson, the two Fluxus artists who we met earlier at the Emily Harvey Gallery, and who insisted they would not perform without being paid, showed up to watch the performances. They came after all! We were delighted.

Sometime during the course of the night, as the excitement and enthusiasm of the audience grew, Larry came up to me and requested to perform.

"Sure. You bet," I assured him. Not knowing his sudden change of heart, I didn't ask him why. I surmised that he got caught up in the energy of the night and didn't want to miss out. It didn't matter to me. I was just happy that he wanted to do something.

Larry shared his idea. He said he wanted to perform an old work of his that he had done just once before long ago in Europe. This would be its "Western Hemisphere Premiere"! (Everything always seemed to be some sort of premiere for Fluxus artists, and in actuality, it always was.) Larry explained that the work was very short and very simple. It was called "Motorcycle." For it, the performer was to bring a motorcycle onto the stage, start it, rev it for no more than 30 seconds, and then turn it off. End of performance. Simple. It would be somewhat formatted like a music piece, like many Fluxus performances claimed to be, however remotely they actually resembled music. Larry said he would perform the work and Eric would help with the performance acting as the conductor, instructing when to start the motorcycle and when to shut it off. The only problem was, Larry didn't have a motorcycle. Nor did Eric. They wanted our help as MC's to solicit among the audience as to who may have a motorcycle that could be used.

During a short pause between two performances, Gene announced to the audience that we were looking for a motorcycle to use for a performance. Did anyone have one? Silence. No one had a motorcycle. Head scratching...

Then Gene had an idea. As luck would have it, right next door to The Green Room was a motorcycle repair shop, and as further luck would have it, someone was actually still there that night. The problem was Gene knew them to be not particularly friendly. Undeterred, we trotted over to inquire. We found a few guys sitting around a TV, watching Ted Koppel, and drinking beer. The owner of the shop, Chuck, dressed in greasy gray workers overalls, listened. "Nope. No way," he replied. Dejected but unsurprised, we returned to the performance, still in progress, to deliver the news.

Larry wouldn't take no for an answer. He pleaded with us to return to Chuck and explain to him just how important it was. It was a Western Hemisphere Premiere, after all. We tried to explain that Chuck was pretty firm but regardless, we relented and returned to plead our request again.

Still no. And still, Larry would not give up. (This aggression will not stand!) Larry said that he and Eric would go and ask Chuck themselves, and off they marched. "Good luck," we thought.

Sure enough, a few minutes later Larry and Eric returned with triumphant smiles. They had convinced Chuck to help them on the condition that only Chuck would touch his bike, no one else would be allowed near it. That meant that Chuck would be the performer with Eric still acting as the conductor. Astounded, and somewhat confused about their apparent superior persuasive powers, we turned the floor over to them for what would be the final event of the evening.

Chuck guided his bike through the back door of The Green Room and positioned himself at the foot of the stage appearing a little flustered to be under the glare of a spotlight before a cheering crowd. He actually smiled. Larry climbed up on the stage and introduced the piece. Eric followed, and wandless, conducted the Western Hemisphere Premiere of "Motorcycle." With a quick start, loud rev, and a couple of false stops, the piece was over. Success! A grand success! It was the perfect Fluxus finale to a fine night. Larry and Eric could not have been happier.





An Evening In Flux, September 25, 1992, The Green Room, Brooklyn, New York  
"Motorcycle" by Larry Miller, still from video, Eric Anderson on stage on left conducting, Chuck on motorcycle, Larry Miller on far right

"But wait," we asked Larry, "How did you do it? What did you say to make Chuck change his mind and agree to let you use a bike, and even to perform himself?"

"Eric and I gave him \$50."

Pause. Silence. Smiles. Suddenly it was Jack and I who couldn't be happier. The exquisite irony was that after Larry and Eric insisted they would not perform without being paid, not only did they end up performing without getting paid, they were the only ones who paid to perform. So very Fluxus.

It remains one of my favorite stories.

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# An Evening In Flux



An Evening In Flux, September 25, 1992, The Green Room, Brooklyn, New York, selected performances  
To watch, click on the image above or [CLICK HERE](#) to watch on Vimeo

## Epilogue



"Paint All the Cocks Blue" by Milan Knížák  
second and final performance, [Heinen Theater](#), Houston, Texas, 1995  
presented as part of "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, and Something Blue"  
an evening of performance by The Art Guys in conjunction with the exhibition  
*The Art Guys: Think Twice* at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston  
(L. to R.) Jack Massing, Mark Bradford, Wayne Tilden, Bill Kelly, Michael Galbreth, Noah Edmunson