

# Interview With Alison Knowles



*Knowles with Marcel Duchamp selecting colors at his 10th st apartment*

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Index

Introduction .....	3
The Interview with Alison Knowles by Ruud Janssen .....	4
Alison Knowles Concert .....	10
Alison Knowles is one of the founding figures of the Fluxus group. ....	10
Alison Knowles General Bio.....	11
Event Scores .....	14
Alison Knowles: Short Bio .....	18
Exhibitions and Installations .....	18
Awards and Residencies.....	19
Books.....	20
Performances .....	21
Selected Books and Magazines with Writing on and by Alison Knowles.....	22
Flux Generations .....	23
INDEX .....	34

## **Introduction**

With the Fluxus Heidelberg Center we are always looking for new developments in area of Fluxus. By chance I found the internet site by Alison Knowles. There was a link on that site where it was possible to ask for more details. So I did.

Because Alison also is connected to the roots of Fluxus and I am always looking for interesting persons to interview, I decided to start once again one of my Mail-Interviews. Most of the communication went by e-mail although we also did exchange some envelopes to exchange some other materials.

After the interview you can also find some of the sources I found before and during the interview. Sometimes in the interview the questions are guided by what the sources already thought me.

Enjoy reading this interview!

Ruud Janssen, Tuesday, 11 September 2007

## **The Interview with Alison Knowles by Ruud Janssen**

(question sent on 5-4-2006 by e-mail)

Ruud Janssen : Welcome to the interview. Before I start with an interview I always like to read through the biography of the person I am interviewing. Looking at such a career in Art I always wonder, do you still remember when you decided you wanted to be an artist?

(answer on 5-4-2006 by e-mail)

Alison Knowles : Yes, I remember well when I decided to be an artist. It was when my grandmother addressed me as one. She looked at my pencil drawing of an osprey's nest built in the cross wires of a telephone pole and hung it over the piano. I was six, maybe seven years old.

(question sent on 6-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : You graduated in 1954 from Pratt University. Looking back at this study, what did you learn there, or maybe a better question is: what didn't you learn there?

(answer on 11-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : My graduation from Pratt Institute was in 1956. I had transferred from Middlebury College in Vermont. Because my father was an English professor at Pratt I was able to enroll at no expense in the Art Department

In the night school for three years I was able to study painting with Adolph Gottlieb a recognized abstract impressionist at the time. He said very little to anyone, but spoke directly in front of the work to each person so it was a personal critical dialogue about art with each one of us. He made me feel I could be a great painter. at the time I intensely admired Helen Frankenthal, and had acquaintance with the work of Pollock. Franz Kline also taught in the class from time to time. During the day I studied graphic design and commercial layout. My best class in the day school was with the painter Richard Lindner. He was a philosopher and dedicated his thoughts to areas outside painting. We had discussions as a group. We also had an hour to draw together. His concentration drawing technique is really a mediation on time . We would draw for five minutes as slowly as possible with pencil on the paper, not taking our eyes off the subject. We began the class each week in this way. I learned very much from him and use this drawing technique with students today. What I learned there was that I am artist. What I should have learned there was that I am not a painter. However, in those days all artists were painterd.

(question sent on 13-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : In a text I read: "Alison Knowles is a conceptual artist doing performance art, installations, sound art and bookmaking". Quite a variety and definitely no mentioning of painting. It seems that after your formal

*The mail-interview with Alison Knowles by Ruud Janssen - 2007*

education some informal education took place. Is this somehow connected to the "New York Mycological Society"<sup>1</sup> ?

(answer on 13-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Oh yes, the mycological Society was led by John Cage, who along with my father is my teacher. We went on Sunday walks in Upstate New York near where John lived. We went by bus, Dick Higgins my husband and myself to spend time in the woods together, studying mushrooms and having the time while walking to talk to one another. I find walking together to be the best way to exchange ideas. John was always willing to talk to people proposing an idea or observation. We all became acquaintances and then friends. I knew of John through the New School course he gave in the late 50's and was eager to have some of that wisdom and daring rub off on me. As for painting, my attentions dwindled after a show at the Nonegon Gallery on 2nd Ave. in New York. My diverting to the New School class was gentle and then abrupt. I destroyed all my paintings in a bonfire behind my brothers country house. This is slightly distressing to me now, as they would be easily marketable in Italy.

However, this act of destruction on my part led me directly into the Fluxus family of friends and as I say, connections to the New School and George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Al Hansen and Allan Kaprov, among others. On our first Fluxus tour in '62 I began to write performance events. But perhaps that is another question.  
Ciao

(question sent on 21-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : When did you meet Dick Higgins for the first time?

(answer on 21-4-2006 by e-mail)



1

New York Mycological Society

Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of fungi, of which the vegetative growth is typically underground or in wood. Fungi serve a major recycling role in nature, breaking down dead trees and other organic material. Fungi also help nourish trees and other plants, thus playing a key role in the health of our forests. And yes, some fungi can also play a destructive role in nature by attacking living things such as trees. Most mushrooms are not poisonous and quite a few are very good edibles. But some are very toxic and a few are deadly! Unfortunately there are no simple foolproof rules to distinguish the edible from the poisonous. One must learn individual mushroom species if one plans on eating mushrooms. The most important point is that no one should ever eat unknown mushrooms! When in doubt, throw it out! Joining a mushroom club is the safe and fun way to learn about mushrooms and fungi. The New York Mycological Society is a non-profit organization of 150 members who share an interest in mycology (the study of mushrooms and fungi) as well as in mycophagy (the eating of mushrooms). The present NYMS was reincarnated some 40 years ago by the composer John Cage and a small group of other mushroom lovers and students. Mycology is mushrooming! (text from the NYMS - Site)

*The mail-interview with Alison Knowles by Ruud Janssen - 2007*

AK : I was invited to a party at 84 Christopher Street by a friend Dorothy Podber<sup>2</sup> and our friend Ray Johnson. It was Dick's apartment. I stayed for three days.

(question sent on 24-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : You talked in your previous answer about "*the Fluxus family of friends*". When was the word "Fluxus" first used in this circle of friends?

(answer on 25-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : These friends who did concerts together performed under the banner Fluxus. Simultaneously I would say we felt like friends rather than say a group of actors doing a play together. The term family may be my own invention but I like it. No way to put a date on this, but early on.

(question sent on 24-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : The term family is also an indication of how these times must have felt. It is interesting that Ray Johnson also belonged to this circle of friends. Some say he also belongs to the group of Fluxus people but I also read somewhere that Ray never considered himself a "Fluxus artist". How do you see this?

(answer on 27-4-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Ray Johnson was a mail artist, and founded the Correspondence School. He never travelled with us, or wrote pieces for performance that we could use. I have many memories of his work, always absurd and interactive.

(question sent on 27-4-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : Could you describe one of your favourite performances of the early days. If possible I will publish the original score with this interview. But I am more curious on how you think back of the piece you choose.

(answer on 28-4-2006 by e-mail, booklets on 6-5-2006 by regular mail)

AK : like "shuffle"<sup>3</sup> alot. It presents the group as a group entering and leaving the hall in a snake-like conga line. I would like to send you my pamphlet of early pieces called *By Alison Knowles*. It lists the event scores from this period. Please give me your mailing address.

*(On 6-5-2005 I received two booklets by mail. The first booklet: "by Alison Knowles", 1965, A Great Bear Pamphlet - New York. It contains a listing of 17 scores written by her. The second*

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<sup>2</sup> **Dorothy Podber** ran the Nonegan Gallery in the mid-1960s and she was associated with Black Mountain friends, the Mole People, the art world and the underworld. She is famous for shooting a stack of Marilyn paintings in late 1964, which she can she considered a performance.

<sup>3</sup> **#1 Shuffle (1961)**

The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, or through the audience. They perform as a group or solo: but quietly. Premiered August 1963 at National Association of Chemists and Performers in New York at the Advertiser's club.

Beginning in 1962 Alison Knowles wrote an important series of event scores (instructions for events carried out) which anticipate do it. These event scores were published in *A Great Bear Pamphlet* (1965) which included scores for *Shuffle #7*, 1967 ("The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, all through the audience. They perform as a group or solo...but quietly") and *Proposition*, 1962 ("Make a salad").

*The mail-interview with Alison Knowles by Ruud Janssen - 2007*

booklet: "MORE by Alison Knowles", 1979 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Printed Editions New York. "These pieces in MORE are the writings, spoken parts, poems and events from my environments of the 1970's. Given the opportunity to reprint MORE, I decided to leave out several of the shorter pieces in the first edition to make room for Three New Bean Events, The Shoemaker's Assistant, and Bean see also Bein. The collage preface that follows was made by Philip Corner." As a reaction I sent her some samples of previous mail-interviews that I published.)

(question sent on 6-5-2006 by e-mail, booklets on 7-5-2006 by regular mail)

RJ : Thanks for sending me the two booklets. I also looked on the Internet to find details about the performance "Shuffle". Online one only finds fragments of what it must have been. On you own site (url: [www.aknowles.com](http://www.aknowles.com)) also a lot can be found on what you did. A booklet fits more to the times these first scores were performed. I probably will use the booklets as illustrations for the finished interview. As I read in your biography you came in contact with computers in an early stage. I quote:

*"In 1967, Knowles produced The House of Dust poem, possibly the first computerized poem, which she produced with composer James Tenney following his informal seminar on computers in the arts held at her home with husband Dick Higgins in 1967".*

What does a computer mean to you nowadays?

(answer on 8-5-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Nowadays I use the computer for daily email contact and to sometimes send a picture for card or publication. I don't use it every day, and I am not a computer adept but it is a great tool we all agree. I do not use it to do artwork however. All my work seems to be tactile, touchable and musical sometimes (the beans falling down inside the paper) or performances where real people look at real people.

(question sent on 10-5-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : When you talk about performances where real people look at real people I am trying to visualize that. The bean performance is probably a superb example of where this happens. It also involves the musical element. I found a photo of one of those performances (I thought it was on the site located at: <http://www.4t.fluxus.net/> Where the 40 year celebration of Fluxus in France was documented. What I wonder is: Why beans?



(with this e-mail I sent the photo that is also besides this question)

(answer on 11-5-2006 by e-mail)

AK : beans are not usually used to make art or sound works so my position in using them for both is unique. It opens up the world of art to ordinary things such as edibles.

I discover rare information about beans in libraries all over the world. The first of my publications was the Bean Rolls published by Fluxus in the early sixties. The next was A Bean Concordance published

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by Station Hill Press in the 70's. I am always collecting new information and I find everyone has something to say on the subject. Also, I think it is healthy for artists to have outside areas of research besides their own world. I am leaving for Venice now so please hold the questions for a few weeks.

(question sent on 22-5-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : How was Venice?

(answer on 24-5-2006 by e-mail)

AK : Today Venice is rainy. I am here with a performance and exhibition through July 1st.

(question sent on 24-5-2006 by e-mail)

RJ : Could you tell me more about what kind of performance you did and what you exhibited in Venice? It is raining here too.....

(since I didn't get a reply in September, I resent the question again with attached the concept for the Mail-Interview booklet.)

(answer on ....-10-2006 by e-mail)

AK :

**Possible future questions and directions of Interview:**

- 40 years of Fluxus event in France.
- Is Fluxus still alive and kicking
- What is the essence of Fluxus
- What happens when a married couple is involved in art?
- The role of women amongst a large group of men.
- First object book
- First computerized poem
- Influence by John cage
- Art isn't finished (statement in expo brochure.)
- Her work in Netherlands / Germany
- Twin Daughter and her fascination about fluxus (Hannah wrote the book)
- Married, divorced, remarried (1960,,, 1970, 1984). Why?

(questions aren't asked because interview was stopped).

## **Alison Knowles Concert**

Born in New York City in 1933, Alison Knowles is a conceptual artist doing performance art, installations, sound art and bookmaking. Trained in painting, she studied with Josef Albers, Richard Lindner and Adolph Gottlieb. Alison Knowles maintains a loft in New York and a studio in Barrytown, New York.

Alison Knowles presents Fluxus and environs, a Fluxus concert at the preview of Return to Sender. This performance will be filmed and screened throughout the exhibition.

## **Alison Knowles is one of the founding figures of the Fluxus group.**

She has recently performed and exhibited at the Drawing Center in Soho using beans and paper as acoustic materials. Her sound sculptures in paper have taken her to Germany, Italy and often to Japan. Among her several books are: Bread and Water, Event Scores, and Footnotes.

## **Alison Knowles General Bio**

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Alison Knowles was born in New York City in 1933. She is a visual artist known for her soundworks, installations, performances, publications and association with Fluxus, the experimental avant-garde group formally founded in 1962.

**Formal and Informal Education:** After briefly attending Middlebury College, Knowles studied with Joseph Albers and Richard Lindner and graduated from Pratt University in 1954. With John Cage and Dick Higgins, she joined the New York Mycological Society, frequently hunting for wild mushrooms around New York City from the late 1950s-60s. During this time a close and fertile exchange of affection, food and ideas developed between Knowles and Cage. Also significant, if informal, in 1968 Knowles designed and screen printed the last known edition with Marcel Duchamp, a reprint of his *Couers Volants* for the Something Else Press.

**Book Objects:** As a founding member of Fluxus, Knowles produced what may be the earliest book object, a can of texts and beans called the *Bean Rolls*, in 1963. In 1967, Knowles produced *The House of Dust* poem, possibly the first computerized poem, which she produced with composer James Tenney following his informal seminar on computers in the arts held at her home with husband Dick Higgins in 1967. In addition to many performances based on the *House of Dust*, one quatrain of Knowles's *House of Dust* poem was built as the *House of Dust* public sculpture; "a *House of Dust* ion open ground lit by natural light, inhabited by friends and enemies." This quatrain-sculpture would move from a ILGWU housing project in New York City, where it was arsoned in 1968, to the new Cal Arts Campus in Burbank California in 1970, where she taught briefly. A sound installation for the *House of Dust* sculpture was produced by Max Neuhaus.

In 1967, she expanded the scale of her book projects with the *Big Book*, an eight foot tall book of environments organized around a spine. This book opened at the Frankfurter Buchmesse and continued touring through Europe. After the first *Big Book* was destroyed, Knowles produced a second large-scale book, *The Book of Bean* in 1982 with the help of Franklin Furnace. Some pages of this book can be found at Museo Bostell in Estramadura, Spain. This was followed by a smaller book of tactile languages called *A Finger Book of Ancient Language* in 1985 that has seven eleven inch high pages all in Braille and was shown at the Lighthouse for the Blind in New York. Three examples of this books were made and exists in private collections. Knowles has also produced and written several books of experimental text and poetry.

**Loose Page Sculptures:** Beginning with the Bean Rolls, the Big Book and the House of Dust, Knowles has engaged in thirty years of experimentation on the sculptural potential of the book. One part of the book, the page, has engaged her since 1982. Loose Pages (1983), originally produced in collaboration with master paper maker Coco Gordon, consisted of pages made for each part of the body, the human spine taking the place of the standard book's. In other page sculptures, the visitor stands in the page, physically entering it with one or another body part. Mahogany Arm Rest (1989), and We Have no Bread (No Hai Pan) (1992), invite the viewer to engage directly with their four and five meter page formats respectively. Since 2000, Knowles has been producing sounding objects, most recently Bean Turners, using beans and paper which are both pages and instruments.

**Events and Performances:** Events are a minimal form of performance score invented by George Brecht in John Cage's historic class in Experimental Composition at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1958. Many Fluxus performances take this reduced means of performance, which is often a deceptively simple instruction. For example, Knowles much discussed "The Identical Lunch" (1969) is a score based on her habit of eating the same food at the same time each day "a tunafish sandwich on wheat toast, with lettuce and butter, no mayo and a cup of soup or a glass of buttermilk." This meditation on the everyday was also explored in a book by her friend, composer Philip Corner, who originally suggested to her that this habit might be scored as an event. Other often performed Events by Knowles include Make a Salad (1962) most recently performed at the Baltimore Museum of Art "Work Ethic" exhibition and The Wexner Center (2004) and Shoes of Your Choice (1963) which invites the audience to talk about their shoes and to tell the stories they evoke. Knowles has produced more complex performances that often involve the use of ubiquitous objects such as beans, which evoke a world culture of sustenance, and shoes, a nearly universal clothing item. These performances utilize the Cagean compositional devices of indeterminate performance and chance operations and include The Bean Garden (1976), The Shoemaker's Assistant (1977), Paper Weather (1986), and Loose Pages (1986-present).

**Sound:** Distinct from her Events and live performances, Knowles has been active in sound since the late 1960s. In 1968 Knowles designed and co-edited John Cage's Notations a book of visual music scores for the Something Else Press. The book and exhibition with performances will occur at the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt, Germany (2005). Her Bean Garden (1971), consisted of a large amplified platform covered with beans that were sounded underfoot by visitors to Charlotte Moorman's Annual New York Festival of the Avant-Garde. In addition to many other radio broadcast performances, Knowles's interest in the effects of resonant sounds produced by beans and hard surfaces was explored extensively in a series of four radio programs hosted by the progressive

German station West Deutscher Rundfunk, whose director, Klaus Schöning was a friend and supporter of Cage's work and the work of artists associated with him. In 1982, Knowles was awarded the prestigious Karl Sczuka Award for best radio work from WDR for her sound work *Bohnen Sequenzen* [Bean Sequences]. The last of these radio plays was based on a series of prints by Knowles. This last radio play was produced in collaboration with Joshua Selman and titled *Bread and Water* (1994).

**Prints:** In 1960, Knowles began producing silk screen paintings shown at the Judson Gallery. She changed direction as her interest in performance and objects developed. He joined the Fluxus group. From 1963 until the middle 1970s, print functioned for Knowles as an expression of other process-based concerns. In 1963, she collaborated with Cage students Robert Watts and George Brecht in the Scissor Brothers Warehouse show, normally called BLINK for the bold word that appears in the center. This eighteen inch square printed painting consisted of three images chosen at random, one by each artists. The image appeared on everything from canvas to bathing suits and hair brushes. These were sold for random prices at a special sale at the Rolf Nelson Gallery in Los Angeles. These works were not presented as art but rather as a flea market. She would collaborate again with Brecht on a book in 1983 on a publication called *The Red, the Green, the Yellow the Black and the White* (Brussels: Editions Lebeer, 1983). In 1973, Knowles produced the *Identical Lunch Graphic*, which showcased many of her friends and Fluxus colleagues consuming the *Identical Lunch*. The prints includes a Starkist logo, indicating corporate sponsorship, which was withdrawn when it was determined that she might be a spy from the competitor, Bumblebee! Beginning in 1978 Knowles published limited print runs of found and manipulated graphic materials with Italian publishers Francesco Conz and Editions Pari & Dispari, Rosanna Chiesi.

Recent experiments with light sensitive chemicals have produced photographic prints on paper and cloth, which are then manipulated by hand. The most sustained of these was the *Bread and Water* cycle of palladium prints and cyanotypes, which in turn generated a sound work and book. In these later works *Bread* has replaced beans as a universal form of sustenance and myth. In 2000, Knowles began casting flax paper to make musical instruments. The *Bean Turner*, *Rattles*, *Wings* and *Drums* use beans for sound with the aid of text, toys and silence.

**Prizes:** In additon to numerous teaching engagement and minor awards, Knowles has been acknowledged for her profound contributions to contemporary artistic practice in the form of a Guggenheim Grant (1967), NEA Grants (1981 and 1985), a collaborative New York State Council on the Arts Grant (1989), a *Dokumenta* Professorship at the *Kunstakademie Kassel*, Germany (1998), the *College Art Association Lifetime Achievement Award* (2003), and *Annonymous was a Woman Grant* (2003).

## Event Scores

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Event Scores, involve simple actions, ideas, and objects from everyday life recontextualized as performance. Event Scores are texts that can be seen as proposal pieces or instructions for actions. The idea of the score suggests musicality. Like a musical score, Event Scores can be realized by artists other than the original creator and are open to variation and interpretation.

Following scores are taken from BY ALISON KNOWLES from A GREAT BEAR PAMPHLET (1965)

Click on a title when available to see the documentation.

### **#1 Shuffle (1961)**

The performer or performers shuffle into the performance area and away from it, above, behind, around, or through the audience. They perform as a group or solo: but quietly.

Premired August 1963 at National Association of Chemists and Performers in New York at the Advertiser's club.

### **#2 Proposition (1962)**

Make a salad.

Premired October 21st, 1962 at Institute for Contemporary Arts in London.

### **#2a Variation #1 on Proposition (1964)**

Make a soup.

Premired Nov 9th, 64 at Cafe au Go Go in NY.

### **#3 Nivea Cream Piece (1962) - for Oscar Williams**

First performer comes on stage with a jar of Nivea cream. The performer massages hands in front of the microphone. Other performers enter one at the time. They make a mass of massaging hands and leave one at a time following the first performer. [click here](#) to listen to a recording from Fluxsweet concert at [Harvestworks](#) organized by Taketo Shimada  
Premired Nov 25, 62 at Alle Season Theater, Copenhagen at Fluxus Festival.

### **#3a Variation #1 on Nivea Cream Piece**

Large quantities of Nivea Cream must be available, at least one large jar per person. The performers enter and each lathers up his arms and face, then his colleagues, in a fragrant pig pile.

### **#4 Child Art Piece (1962)**

The performer in a single child, two or three years old. One or both parents may be present to assist him with a pail of water or a banana etc. When a child leaves the stage the performance is over.

Premired at the Fluxus Festival, Staatliche Kunstakademie, Dusseldorf on Feb 3rd, 63.

**#4a Variation #1 on Child Art Piece (1964)**

Exit in a new suit.

Premired June 27th, 64 at Fluxus Concert, Carnegie Recital Hall, NY. This variation was written for the NYC performance when the Society for the Preservation of Cruelty to Children forbade the performance of Child Art Piece in its original form.

**#5 Street Piece (1962)**

Make something in the street and give it away.

Premired in Aug, 63. #9 and #11 are really variations on this piece.

**#6 Shoes of your choice (1963)**

A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone if one is available and describe a pair of shoes, the one he is wearing or another pair. He is encouraged to tell where he got them, the size, color, why he likes them, etc.

Premired Apr 6th, 63 at the Old Gymnasium of Douglass College, New Brunswick, NJ.

**#7 Piece for Any Number of Vocalists (1962)**

Each thinks beforehand of a song, and, on a signal from the conductor, sings it through.

Premired May 11th, 1963 at Hardware Poet's Theater, NY, during the Yamdays.

**#8 Performance piece #8 (1965)**

Divide a variety of objects into two groups. Each group is labeled "everything." These groups may include several people. There is a third division of the stage empty of objects labeled "nothing." Each of the objects is "something." One performer combines and activates the objects as follows for any duration of time:

1. something with everything
2. something with nothing
3. something with something
4. everything with everything
5. everything with nothing
6. nothing with nothing

The Alison Knowles T Dictionary is a graphic performance of this piece, which uses words as one group of objects and image as the other.

**#9 Color Music #2 (1963)**

Print in the streets.

1st movement: orange

2nd movement: black

3rd movement: blue  
Performed on Canal street, NY, in 1963.

**#9a Variation on Color Music #2**

As performed on Canal street, NY in 1963.  
Same as above except that white, aluminum, and cerise were used.

**#9b Color Music #2 (1963) revised version**

Print in silkscreen on the pavements and streets of a city. This piece is dangerous. Have some ready excuses such as "This ink is water soluble."

**#10 Braid (1964)**

The performers, usually two, find something to braid, hair, yarn, etc., and do so.  
Premired Apr 11th, 64 at Fluxhall, in NY.

**#10a Variation #1 on #10 ("String Piece," 1964)**

Tie up the audience.  
Premired May 30th, 64 at Fluxhall in NY.

**#11 Printing Piece**

This piece is officially deleted from Alison Knowles canon. What happened was that on May 30th, 1964 at Fluxhall in NY Alison Knowles silkscreened images on any and all objects, animate and inanimate, which were brought to her for imprinting. It was felt to be too close to #5.

**#12 Simultaneous Bean Reading (1964)**

Using the Alison Knowles Bean Rolls and six to eight performers, unroll the rolls over the audience and start reading aloud. Have the audience join in. A single performer goes among the other performers with scissors, cutting out large sections of the rolls. This performer determines the length of the performance.  
Premired Nov 16th, 64 at Cafe au Go Go, NY.

**#13 Composition for Paik (1964)**

Select a platform, or any large square or rectangular area that is set apart, or raised above the room. Measure this area, using Paik as assistant, finding its center. Then drop a plumb line to this point from the ceiling. Find the center of this distance and mark the string with chalk. Build Paik a platform up to this point so that he may sit there for the duration of the performance.  
Premired Nov 16th, 64 at Cafe au Go Go.

**#14 Chair piece for George Brecht (1965)**

Locate an empty chair, before the performance, in the center of the center aisle, equipped with reading light and a book. If nobody has taken this seat by intermission, one of the other performers should do so.  
Unperformed.

**#15 Wounded Furniture (1965)**

This piece uses an old piece of furniture in bad shape. Destroy it further, if you like. Bandage it up with gauze and adhesive. Spray red paint on the wounded joints. Effective lighting helps. This activity may be performed with one or more performers, and simultaneously with other events. Premired July 19th, 65 at Cafe au Go Go, NY.

**#16 Giveaway Construction (1963?)**

Find something you like in the street and give it away. Or find a variety of things, make something of them. and give it away. Premire date unknown. Note: this is a variation of #6.

**#17 Color Music #1 (1963) for Dick Higgins**

List your problems from one to five.  
For each problem list the best solution you can think of.  
For each problem also list a color.  
Whenever the problem arises in your mind, think first of the best solution, and if you cannot act upon it immediately, switch to concentration on the color until an absolute necessity intervenes.  
Premired 1963 at 423 Broadway, NY.

**#18 Play Paper**

DVD of Pulp Friction by George Quasha may be projected through Onion Skin Score which is made on site or rolled out for the length of the stage. Performers have acquainted themselves with the nature of the score and the nature of the instrument chosen.  
3 or more performers each with his/her instrument steps into the projected light over the onion skin score one after the another walks the number of steps his/her first name. Each performer proceeds into the light when the previous one has waked stopped and his/her sound at the score. Each performer waits until the previous performer has made his/her sounds at the score.  
The performers proceed around the score with a slow walk counting the paces of his/her name.  
e.g. Thomas is 6 paces. A pace is one in and out breath.  
Premired at the Drawing Center, NY, 2001

## **Alison Knowles: Short Bio**

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### ***Exhibitions and Installations***

2004 "**IN-FLUX**", **Marygrove College**, Detroit, MI.

2004 "**October Leaves Falling**", Exhibition and Performance **DuPage College**, Chicago, IL.

2004 "**Do-It-Yourself Fluxus**", group, interactive installation at **ART INTERACTIVE**, Cambridge, MA.

2003 "**By Way of Correspondence**", solo, exhibition of new paper and cloth works at the **Galerie Beim Steinernen Kreuz**, Bremen, Germany.

2001 "**Paperweather**", with Larry Miller, The Drawing Center, May NYC.  
"**Frijoles Canyon Live**" Odense Fluxus, May, Denmark

2000 "**Footnotes**", solo, Emily Harvey Gallery, Oct. NYC.

1999-2000 "**The American Century**", group, Whitney Museum, NYC.

1998-1999 "**Seachange**", solo, Emily Harvey Gallery, NYC; Caterina Gualco, Genova, IT; Jacques Donguy, FR.

1998 **Solo retrospective** at Frauen Museum, GER.

1998 "**Out of Actions**", group, Museum of Contemporary Art, LA.

1997 **Fluxus** Performance and workshop, Queensland Art gallery, Brisbane, AUS.

1997 **Performance workshop** Documenta X, Kassel, GER.

1995 "**Indigo Island**", solo (retrospective + catalogue). Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, GER; Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw, POL; Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde, DK.

1992-1995 "**In the Spirit of Fluxus**", group, Wexner Center, US., EU., Japan, Korea.

1990 "**Seven Indian Moon**", solo, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, NY.

1984 Residency. **Shion International Paper Mill**, Japan.

1983 "**The Book of Bean**", Venice Biennale, Venice, IT. **A Finger Book** installation (FR.GER.,NYC.)

1970s-80s **West German Radio**. 4 Radio plays(GER.FR.NYC.)

1970-73 Directed **Print and Performance Lab**, Cal Arts,CA

1969 "**The Big Book**",Frankfurter Buchmesse,GER,DK, Guggenheim Museum NYC,

1968 "**Notations**" Book with John Cage at Something Else Press

1967 "**Coeurs Volants**", silk-screen print collaboration with Marcel Duchamp, NYC.

1967 "**The House of Dust**", Poem with Jim Tenney, NYC. and Cal Arts, CA. Symposium (2003), U.C. Davis, with Doug Kahn

1960 **Judson Gallery**, NYC. Silkscreen paintings on canvas.

1958 **Nonagon Gallery**, NYC. Abstract paintings.

### ***Awards and Residencies***

2003 **Anonymous was a Woman** Award

2003 **College Art Association**, Lifetime Achievement Award

2002 **Womens Studio Workshop** Residency, Rosendale, NY.

1997 Workshop, "**Documenta X**", Kassel, GER.

1996-97 **Documenta Guest Professor**, University of Kassel, Kassel, GER.

1993 **Richard Florsheim Grant**, "Bread & Water" book.

1991 Residency, **Banff Centre**, Banff, Alberta, Canada.

1990 **Sommerakademie für Bildende Kunst**, Salzburg, Austria.

1989 **NYSCA Grant**.

1984 **DAAD Residency Grant**, Berlin, Germany.

1982 **Karl Sczuka Award**, West German Radio (WDR).

1981 **NEA Residency Grant**, Franklin Furnace, NY.

1968 **Guggenheim Fellowship**.

### **Books**

2004 "**Book Symposium**", SUNY, New Paltz, NY.

2003 "**Tamashi**", with Amanda Degener, Cave Paper, MI.

2001 "**Footnotes**", Granary Books, NY.

1995 "**Bread and Water**", Left, Hand Books, NY.

1993 "**Spoken Text**", Left Hand Books, NY.

1990 "**Seven Indian Moons**" Left Hand Books, NY

1983 "**the red, the green, the yellow, the black, and the white**"(edition of 20) with George Brecht. Editions Lebeer-Hossmann, BEL.

1980 "**Natural Assemblages and the True Crow.**" Visual Studies Workshop Press, NY

1977 "**Gem Duck**", Pari & Dispari. Reggio Emilia, IT.

1975 "**Women's Work**" Unpublished Editions, NY.

1973 "**The Identical Lunch**" Nova Broadcast Press, CA.

1970 "**Journal of the Identical Lunch**" Nova Broadcast Press, CA.

1968 "**The House of Dust**" Gebr. Konig Verlag, GER. "**Notations**" with John Cage. Something Else

1965 "**The Four Suits**" (the T Dictionary) Something Else Press. NY. **By Alison Knowles**" Great Bear Pamphlet Something Else Press.

1963 "**The Bean Rolls**" Fluxus Publications, NY.

## **Performances**

2005 **Commencement Performance / Lecture**, Maine College of Art, Maine

2005 **Performance**, Muthesius Kunsthochschule, Kiel, Germany

2004 **Performance**, Waygood Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, England

2003 "**Paper Sound**", with Taketo Shimada, Dia Foundation Bookstore, NYC, NY.

2003 "**Fluxus Performance**", The Phipps Center for the Arts, Hudson, WI.

2002 **Fluxtour 2002**, June. Museum of Modern Art, Strasbourg; Museum of Modern Art, Marseilles; Menagerie Music Center, Paris. with performers: Eric Anderson, Alison Knowles, Ben Patterson, Ben Vautiers and others

2001 "**Shoe String Song** and **Onion Skin Song.**" Feb. performed at Galerie 400, Chicago. Scores exhibited from John Cage **Notations**

2001 **The Drawing Center**, NYC. three performances, with co-performer Larry Milller. exhibition and catalogue.

"**Celebration Red for Al Hansen**". Dec. 8 performance for "Beck and Al Hansen: Playing with Matches", Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, TN.

2000 **Words As Music**. group, 3 city concert tour. "Frijoles Canyon".

1999 **In the Footsteps of Fluxshoe**, lecture & performance, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.

**The American Century**, group, Whitney Museum, NY.

**Performance residency**. Dartington College, Devon, UK.

"**Celebration Red**", Printed Matter Books, NY.

"**Autoredonna**." contemporary women artists, IT.

1998 **Malsch**, installation, Munich butcher shop, group.

**Ceci, Cannellini & Farro**, solo, Caterina Gualco Gallery, IT.

1998 **Do It**. "Celebration Red." Kunsthalle Ritter, Klagenfurt, GER. 1 year world tour. Independent Curators, NY. Curator: Hans Ulrich Obrist.

1960-90's **Fluxus** performances and installations, USA, EUR., Asia.

**Selected Books and Magazines with Writing on and by Alison Knowles**

2004 **The Sculpture of Indeterminency**, by Julia Robinson, Art Journal,

2004 **Alison Knowles at Gahlberg Gallery**, by Julia Robinson, College of Du Page

2004 **Art as Spiral Practice**, Performance Art Journal, curator: Bonnie Maranca

2002 **Artscene**, by Ellen Pearlman, Brooklyn Rail

2001 **Drawing Center Catalog**, Drawing Papers #20

1995 **Cadavre Exquis**, Catalog Essay for Uli Marchsteiner, Barcelona, Spain

1991 **La Taverna Di Auerbach**, Rivista internazionale di poetiche intermediali "Paper Weather", ed. Giovanni Fontana

1991 **Sitting Quietly Doing Nothing, a memory of Robert Filliou**, Pompidou retrospective, France

1989 **Archivio Della Grazia di Nuova Scrittura**, ed. Ugo Carrega, Milano

1989 **Satori: Coco Princesse**, with Brian McHugh. eds. Gary Green and Pat Sims

1988 **Untitled Graphic**, High Performance (10th anniv. issue)

1987 **Fluxus**, White Walls, ed. Ken Friedman

1986 **Assembling**, ed. Charles Doria, Assembling Press

1986 **Technicians of Sacred**, ed. Charles Rothenberg, 2nd edition, University of California Press

1976 **Ausgabe**, ed. Armin Hundertmark

1968 **The Big Book**, by Bill Wilson (photos: Peter Moore), Art in America

1956 B.F.A honors grad from Pratt Institute, Bklyn.NY.

1933 Born in New York City.

*This curriculum vitae is selected entries from the long version (Long version is available upon request, akijan@earthlink.net)*

## **Flux Generations**

**Art Journal**, Summer, 2000 by [Janet A. Kaplan](#), [Bracken Hendricks](#), [Geoffrey Hendricks](#), [Hannah Higgins](#), [Alison Knowles](#)

This intergenerational conversation between Fluxus artists and their children was held on November 6, 1999, on the occasion of a concert/performance memorial for the late Fluxus artist Dick Higgins at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, organized to coincide with Part II of *The American Century: Art and Culture, 1950-2000*. The participants included Alison Knowles (Dick Higgins's wife) and their daughter Hannah Higgins and Geoffrey Hendricks and his son Bracken Hendricks. It was moderated by Janet A. Kaplan.

Kaplan: What do you see as key tenets of Fluxus?

Knowles: I've always thought of Fluxus as remarkable for its offering of collaboration with so-called ordinary people as well as Fluxus artists.

G. Hendricks: The whole aspect of the family spirit, the generational interaction, the collaborative and performative quality, the sense of play, of impermanence, which is about focusing on the moment, so that things can be ephemeral, the playing down of ego. There were certainly conflicts and rivalries in the group, but basically we are an amazingly harmonious bunch.

B. Hendricks: Also, in this performance and collaboration, dialogue is central, and establishing a forum to examine experience. Rather than producing products, it creates a context to think about action and to play with the processes of creation, communication, and investigation. It's a methodology, like the scientific method. It sets up a process for engaging questions of what and how and why you make and do things. You're destroying the object nature of the objects to think about the underlying questions that are imbedded in them. To say anything too definitive is destructive to the spirit of it, because there's a subtlety of interactions and connections between people or particular moments. Fluxus asks, "If you change the context or the perception of things, what does that do?" It's setting yourself up to learn from, look at, and play with the experience, to discover. It's less about the product than about the process of getting to the product.

G. Hendricks: Not wanting to pin it down is interesting. Fluxus has strong links to Zen Buddhism. Back in the 1950s there was a feeling that it was, in a way, really wrong for these books to be coming out about Zen, because it was contrary to the spirit of Zen. The minute you pinned it down with writing you were in a way destroying it or missing the essence of what it was about. I think this is also true with Fluxus.

Higgins: I think that explains many of the problems of articulating Fluxus. It's important to avoid rigid positions. I've been trying to think about what words might define Fluxus, and things come to mind like veins, currents, fluid metaphors. It's in the name of Fluxus,

but it's lost on most writers who write about it, who tend to want to understand fluidity only as against structure, and then the fluid form only exists as a kind of negation.

Kaplan: Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurist performance activities seem to have shared a similar spirit of exploration, of breaking down boundaries, of looking to process instead of product. They have an elaborate history in modernist thought. Yet, there was relatively little coverage of Fluxus at the time, and it certainly isn't part of the standard art history walk-through. What do you see as different about Fluxus from those precursors? Do you see it as part of a continuum?

Knowles: My Fluxus involves performance as its major ingredient. There is no problem making links to Filippo Tomaso Marinetti or the Caf[acute{e}] Voltaire as earlier performance groups. However, Fluxus is a very loosely associated group of friends without a political direction who are nonjudgmental of one another. Remember, Kurt Schwitters was not avant-garde enough to be in the Dada group because he had a Christmas tree! That's so absurd. Fluxus would never take a stand like that, probably because there wouldn't be agreement on whether a Christmas tree was necessarily bourgeois. Phil Niblock hung his Christmas tree upside down from the ceiling one year! Very avant-garde.

G. Hendricks: During the Avant-Garde Festival in Central Park in 1965, I dumped flowers in the middle of the conservatory pond and came out with police lights on me. Then, over the loudspeaker Charlotte Moorman asked me to come and perform Schwitters's class-struggle opera. Schwitters was incorporated right into the whole thing. Dick Higgins published the Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck and was very interested in the roots of Dada in relation to Fluxus.

Higgins: The question of whether Fluxus is an avant-garde comes up again and again among the artists. I remember at the Copenhagen Fluxus in 1993, with Geoff and Eric Andersen and my mother, it wasn't a shouting match, but there was a strong sense of investment in taking the position that Fluxus is or is not an avant-garde movement. I wouldn't describe Fluxus as avant-garde in the traditional sense. At a certain point, it was a useful short-hand. But it gives a false sense of containment and control over the group. Party politics implies a kind of directionality that is necessary for destroying the bourgeois order. Fluxus is more anarchistic. If it has a political implication, it's an atomizing of the world, getting so close to things that their connection to other things tends to dissolve and materialize at the same time.

Knowles: Yes. Fluxus allows there to be discussions at this fundamental level, this "view of world" level. Trying to define Fluxus means engaging first of all in what it means to seek a definition. This process makes a boundary that limits investigation. Then other squabbles arise concerning the promotion of George Maciunas, or what is the place of the Canal Street Fluxus as opposed to German Fluxus. These are all attempts to make boundaries in order to define. I remember wonderful evenings at the Canal Street Fluxus.

Kaplan: It's fascinating that you are all so interested in the placements of Fluxus in history.

G. Hendricks: History was part of the game because George Maciunas, wherever he fits in here, was certainly central, but how and where does that centrality function? George made a huge chart of the history of amusement, performance, and so forth going back to Roman times.

Higgins: The moment when an artist begins their intense involvement with this group has a lot to do with how they understand themselves in terms of that constellation. Maciunas was no doubt a central figure; he was out there rallying people to the cause, and people came in through contact with him. Those people have tended to have a more political sense of the group, because he was a Lithuanian ex-patriot living in Europe and the United States with a very specific political agenda in mind for this group. Artists who came in through contact with John Cage, on the other hand, are going to have a more Zen or experiential sense of the group, which also has a place in Dada, but not in the way I think Dadaism was misunderstood in the 1960s. The question of avant-gardism, etc., I think has a lot to do with when you're asking the question and of whom and when they joined the group. Dadaism was something else in Germany. Artists active in Europe prior to Maciunas getting there, came at it from the experimentalism of Karlheinz Stockhausen and notions of serialism and that kind of alternative structure. And that just gives you three of the positions, and even within those three, there are sub-groups. Geoff has a sense of the centrality of Maciunas, but he's not the defining figure because these people continue to work together. Collections make the mistake of terminating their collecting policy with the year Maciunas dies, which is absurd, because these people are still active. It's been twenty-five years since Maciunas died, and they still collaborate. It's not like they just get together for museum shows.

Knowles: John Cage's experimental music composition class is very important because Cage's definition of experimental was that "when you begin the piece, you don't know what it will be like at the end," which in terms of musical compositions knocks down the whole developmental approach to composition. The freshness of his experimental approach kicked off this group to be able to face an audience and do a piece in which the outcome of the piece was not known in advance. I can't mention Cage clearly enough in terms of his influence. Maciunas, for me, falls into a space of almost being used by these concepts, balancing them out with his own absurdities, clown-like ways, and interesting personality.

G. Hendricks: George Maciunas himself recognized the centrality of Cage, and in his charting was saying how all you have to do is chart the travels of Cage and you see the dissemination of these ideas that then sprout and become part of this network that becomes Fluxus.

Knowles: Cage brought in the concept of joy and revolution.

B. Hendricks: Cage's definition of experimental music is a distinct contribution. How does this relate to Dada's and Surrealism's range of influences? I'm thinking of The Somethig Else Press Book Dick's 100 Amusements and his drawing on Victorian parlor games and vaudeville. Through all this, they are looking to a whole range of creative expressions and community processes outside of the art historical tradition. Within experimentation, not knowing where you're going and the process of Fluxus creation, there's a sense that Fluxus has a place within art historical tradition, but also a freedom to playfully draw from any tradition, bringing it in and weaving together the many threads.

Knowles: This is a very nice place to speak about theater. If you have, say, an Ibsen play, you've got to have the jug with flowers in it because that's part of a whole tone for that scene when the woman walks by in the velvet dress with a particular pitcher. But in Dick's performance of George Brecht's Drip Music, I remember myriad pitchers used to pour water from the top of the ladder. The specific pitcher doesn't really matter as long as it pours the water and makes a drip.

B. Hendricks: This also embraces the arbitrary definition of what is and what isn't the performance. Hannah and I and all of us Flux kids have discussed the arbitrariness of the definition between life and art, and I know this triggers other heated debates like politics and the definition of Fluxus. But the pitcher that's used to pour off the ladder is also the pitcher at home that's used to serve orange juice in the morning. This blurring of a continuum of relationship to materials, to experience, to definition of performance opens up a kind of creative freedom, and brings the essence of art back closer to daily living.

Higgins: That is also different from Dada or Surrealist performances where those things were from daily life but removed somehow and never allowed to enter unsigned back into that life. A Duchampian readymade gets signed. It's changed and removed. But these things would come back. We need the pitcher again, oh, then what are we gonna move the orange juice into because there's a performance tonight? Questions like that came up over and over again.

Kaplan: Why do you think that there's a great flurry of interest in Fluxus now?

B. Hendricks: Thirty years ago, Fluxus was more jarring. I think there's been a bit of a change of what these statements mean in the society at large.

The Fluxus spirit is more permeated throughout the culture within the contemporary world today. So people are more familiar with this vocabulary. That creates an interest in turning back to look at what was going on thirty years ago.

Higgins: In many of the memorial Fluxus events, there are times when the Fluxus artists come together in terms of their current work, and there are times they come together in terms of their past work. Those are very different moments. When Ren[acute{e}] Block organizes Fluxus in Germany, it's usually in terms of their current work. They're invited

to come together as a group of artists active today. Usually in the United States when they're brought together, it's in terms of the past.

Kaplan: If Fluxus spirit has permeated a lot of parts of our culture now, does that mean it is not as radically outside as it was? By now I've seen many things that feel like they've pushed those boundaries in a lot of ways coming from many directions. And do you think there are elements of Fluxus potential that have not yet been realized?

Higgins: Yes. Fluxus people are thinking with hands and taste and smell and sound, and they're using parts of the brain that are uncharted in the West, or for which the West has no regard. Philosophically, we think of words as facts in the West, and whether we think of them as facts in a stable sense or in an unstable sense, we imagine somehow that we've conquered reality when we use different kinds of words or jarring types of words or deconstructed words or fragmented systems, and those are all nevertheless words. When I think about Zen, it's very much about thinking outside of a verbal framework, including a fragmented one. There's a possibility for thought in all these other sensory zones.

B. Hendricks: I think this ties into the experience of being children of Fluxus and why all of us have identified it as something we need to grapple with. We were part of the creative process, and part of our child identity and our child's way of comprehending the world was appreciated, embraced, and bolstered. So it's a question of what was the art, what wasn't the art, what was the history, what wasn't the history, what was really going on in those experiences, and was it where the light was shining or was it what was happening outside the light? These questions are very rich. A piece of what Fluxus can contribute is the elevation and the real connoisseur's appreciation of things that are trivial or small or not embraced or empowered. It's finding that beauty is much more accessible and that meaning is much more present, so there's this kind of opening and liberating experience to it.

Knowles: In that vein audiences in the concert hall are met not only as a group, but very often they're met by the performer stepping down off the stage, walking up to an individual in the audience, and confronting him with the question whether he's going to run his hand through those beans or take that apple.

G. Hendricks: The idea of crossing boundaries is very germane. It links up with Dick's term *intermedia*, which is about perceiving the idea of the object, the performance, whatever boundary exists and being able to see over it and that this doesn't have to exist as a boundary. Fluxus was opening this up, and its significance is about how it links up to the other changes that were going on in terms of women's liberation, gay liberation, black liberation, and world concepts of art. Not this Eurocentric white product, but something that embraces all the world.

Higgins: As far as I know, Fluxus is the first or maybe even the only major movement to have members who are black, white, Asian, Hispanic, male gay and straight, female gay and straight. It was truly open in a time before identity politics would again make that

impossible. Now movements tend to be gay or straight or black or white. We can learn from Fluxus about an expanded sense of humanism.

G. Hendricks: Fluxus is about internationalism, the idea that in a certain way we're nomads. We travel and we connect up with people of similar minds and then things grow out from there.

B. Hendricks: There's a piece of that expanding that is more spiritual or philosophical--of expanding from art and through life, through experience. That which is valuable in art is abundantly present in a lot of situations. Harvesting that and allowing that to be the art is also crossing the defined boundaries within one's own life, as well as globally within the community. In my own self-discovery and career definition, I went to art school and then ended up studying government. I work as a bureaucrat in the federal government now, and I see that as very much linked in a continuum of engaging issues, engaging the construction of meaning, engaging how one puts oneself in relationship to the world, to action, to creation. It comes from my being steeped within this Fluxus perspective from birth. This seems to me a legitimate medium to continue being an artist, and it doesn't need to be something separate and relegated. I don't say that to be glib. I really do believe that this is a continuum of the artistic process.

Kaplan: I read a quote that said, "Fluxus's goal was the journey but alas it became art." Do you feel a disappointment about that, the idea that once it enters the museum it's got a vitrine over it? What does it mean to have Fluxus at the Whitney as part of the American Century exhibition? To have it codified, archived, museumified, humidified, protected, insured, and all that goes with that kind of institutionalization? Yet you want Fluxus there because you want it in history. You want it known and recognized and acknowledged and positioned within the larger conversation of the twentieth century.

Knowles: The object in the museum is only based on an idea of finding an orange and squeezing its juice out and letting it dry and putting a little sound in it. So if I do that as an idea and it ends up in the Whitney, I'll just turn around and make another one.

Kaplan: So it serves like a time capsule in a way? Or like a vestige?

Knowles: It's a version of a piece of which there could be multiple versions. My Fluxus prefers multiples to unique objects.

Kaplan: So do you see that orange dried out with the sound in it now in some ways as a little rebellious moment in the context of the Whitney?

Knowles: Yes, I do.

Kaplan: Because they think they've archived the one.

Higgins: As a point of rebellion, it's within the context of a museum that the negative side of this tends to get privileged. It's when it is placed next to a large canvas that it becomes just a little squished orange that makes a little noise when you squeeze it.

Kaplan: Which, of course, no one gets to squeeze anyway.

Knowles: In a recent Los Angeles show, my contribution, *Gentle Surprises for the Ear*, placed objects on a long slab of a table, each object having a tag with sound possibilities attached. The curator, Paul Schimmel, agreed not to have a vitrine over it. But I discovered that in our minds, there's always a vitrine covering an art object. You don't even have to have a physical vitrine. No one played with the objects. I might have gone with the show, sat by the table, and made the sounds available to the public.

B. Hendricks: Once, when arriving at Frankfurt airport, we ran into Ben Vautier. We walked to the center of this huge atrium and almost bumped into him. I was wearing a big dark tweed jacket that had a bright white hole in the elbow, Ben said, "This is unacceptable. This is a beautiful formal jacket, but it's worn. You can't wear it in high society places." So he signed my elbow "Ben" on the hole. He said, "Now I'm transforming this object into something beautiful." So my jacket had then become a piece of art, and I had to make a decision. It was my only jacket. Do I save it as a piece of art, or do I keep it as a jacket? I felt that the appropriate thing to do, the Fluxus thing to do, would be to keep wearing the jacket and allow my elbow to wear a hole through the "Ben." It felt to me at that moment that the best way to engage the spirit of Fluxus was to embrace it as art and also embrace it as utilitarian and continue to wear it and not to make it into a relic. Although sometimes it seemed like everything else was made into a relic, our childhoods and homes were filled with relics of performance as well. Later on, I was at a museum, and there was a time capsule that Ben Vautier had made that said it was to be opened and destroyed at a certain date. All these games and toys were to be taken out of a box and played with--that was the piece. I think the day had passed, and I was really struck that the museum had purchased the piece and was displaying it, but they hadn't honored his intent for the work to be ephemeral and time-limited: that it's art now, but it's also going to be destroyed. What happened to the artwork and how these actions moved into history was always very real and very alive for me, and I became angry at the tension and how to resolve it. Do you canonize these things that are democratic? Do you take things that are accessible and make them precious? I grappled with that. I think that's a piece of the rebellion, too. Now I've made peace with it. Fluxus as it was happening is different from Fluxus in museum collections. They are both valid. I don't have to be angry. I can let them co-exist.

Higgins: I am reminded of the thirteen-year-old boy who had been part of a thirty-person dress brought through a supermarket. People asked him what he was doing, and he said, "being Fluxus." You had this sense that his life had changed. People throw this around as if it's some small event in a life, but it's profoundly transformative.

B. Hendricks: I also remember a big elaborate event at Rosanna Chiessi's in Cavriago, Italy, going on with lots of performances, and Phil Corner was sitting off to the side, quietly scraping and tapping on pipes, making music. But it was inaudible unless you got very close to him. It was easy to ignore as you walked past. There was something really important in that simplicity. He was offering instruction in how to listen. It was not about being a virtuoso. I think that's very important. I also remember an avant-garde festival in Cambridge where Alison was giving out pieces of trash with little tags on them. She had walked up and down and collected discarded objects. And she gave me a little broken buckle that I kept for many years. You were to put it on the table and look through the buckle and whatever you saw in the frame was the artwork. The notion was of something disposable that provides a frame for perception and the experience of looking.

Kaplan: I also see a deeply political aspect, separate from engagement in actual street politics, about all of this. I know that's an area of definitional difference, but ...

B. Hendricks: I think you will find that different people mean very different things by the word politics.

Higgins: My mother may say that politics is not the point. I think for some artists it is. Geoff tends to function on a more political plane. Others don't.

G. Hendricks: George's whole thing was going after the ego and the institution, and I think if that lesson is still listened to, supporting issues where the institution is being challenged should continue to get the support of the spirit of Fluxus.

Kaplan: Bracken and Hannah, as the second generation, you seem to be expressing a sense of celebration at being so lucky to have had Fluxus parents. But, for me, looking from outside, I could imagine that there was a co-opting or pre-empting of certain childhood prerogatives--your parents were doing it, so how did you get to do it? How does a Flux kid rebel against parental authority?

B. Hendricks: One of the things that was a hallmark of being a child in this environment was being allowed to do things that were dangerous, that a lot of parents would protect their children from. I remember once when our parents were at Shea Stadium figuring out where they were going to put their performances for the Avant-Garde Festival, we were running under the bleachers. We had Shea Stadium to ourselves, with no adult supervision. It was amazing. There was a magnificence to it and an awe in the face of it, a real perception of danger and an insecurity that was there for all of us as well. When I say all of us, I'm thinking of Clarinda and Mordecai Mac Low and Robin and Rebecca Moore and Hannah and Jessie Higgins and Tyche and myself. We were all in New York. We grew up together. But we've all had to struggle with how do you create appropriate structures and how do you embrace formal straight culture by choice? What pieces of it do you pick and choose? It's a creative process. My dad being gay is as much a part of that as my dad being a performance artist. I got married at the age of twenty-three or

so. What is the form we want to create? Outwardly it appears to be conventional, but it is actually much more of a creative act. For me it was to choose not to focus on being an artist right now, and instead to work for the government. Both Mordecai and Clarinda studied hard sciences, and I know they struggled with similar issues. Building a solid, dependable career was important for them, but this background also gave us choices that a lot of kids don't see. Mordecai is now an astro-physicist, and Clarinda does molecular biology and AIDS research. But she is also a dancer and performance artist. And I think Mordecai's relationship and engagement with science is done very creatively. You are free to build structures with the awareness of freedom. There was also real pain in being a child with a full appreciation of and intelligence about diversity in an environment that didn't accept difference. We lived in the suburbs in Massachusetts, which is politically liberal, but was socially quite conservative in many ways. To deal with being from a gay family and doing performance art--there wasn't a language at that point for it when I was in fourth grade and going to New York for the weekend to perform. My father did an event called Education of a Boy Child, which was a beautiful piece, transferring information and teaching in this open-ended process within a gallery, where we had branches, sticks, saws, shoes, grain, paper, pens, bells, and beds. We built things. And I gave my father a haircut and shaved his beard. It was a powerful act to cut my father's beard. This was a very rich overlaying of images, and a direct experience of generations and ritual. Then to go back to a more traditional environment where there was no context for this sort of thing was frightening. The sexual politics are also very important here, because it was an experience of growing up closeted. This part of my background that I understand, accept, embrace, and love is fundamental to who I am, but society didn't at that moment have a place for it. So it's a poignant pain.

Kaplan: Part of being a parent is the requirement to establish boundaries. You talked about safety issues. Even though you were allowed to run around Shea Stadium, I'm sure there are things they wouldn't have let you do had they noticed you were doing them. Definitionally, parent/kid is about here's a box: can I get out of it? No matter how big that box is. So it's fascinating to think about what was left for you to try.

B. Hendricks: A big piece of my relating to my father's artwork has involved rebellion. Trying to engage artistic issues as the child of an artist is very complex and loaded. But as I made peace with it, I found that I have drawn a large piece of the vocabulary of what I want to work with from my father's vocabulary. I itemized a bunch of things a minute ago: bells, hair, dreams, the moon, the sky, and roots. My father uses these materials to engage nonverbal thought. One thing that I got out of Education of a Boy Child and growing up with my father was learning how to think with my hands. I learned about tools and the earth from my father. In a lot of complex ways, I carry all of that with me in my creative and my professional work, and as my tradition.

Higgins: I can't speak for other kids, but I know that as teens, my sister and I both did bad things to ourselves. That's the way a lot of teens rebel. It certainly wasn't an intended thrust toward the parents. You couldn't shock them. But you could hurt them. Now we're in our thirties, so rebelling in this sort of adolescent sense is, I hope, gone. My

life now with my children is very different than my life with my parents. In many ways, it's much more conservative. I'm married to an advertising executive. I'm tenure-track at a university. It's all about functioning effectively within systems, which is not so unlike Bracken's choice. To be engaged within those systems was probably not an avenue available to most Fluxus artists. I know my father tried desperately for years to get an academic position. He really wanted to teach, but there wasn't a university that would hire him. He was too weird, too outside the structure. People wanted the idea, but they didn't really want the person in there with that idea.

Kaplan: They wanted a visiting moment.

Higgins: Yes, but they didn't want the temperamental personality. About your question, how do Flux kids rebel? I think the next question is how does the art world rebel in a post-Fluxus era? And the answer is that it absorbs its own rebellion, and the fastest way into the museum now as a young artist is through the use of vanguard antics of those many different kinds. When my mother was talking about how she feels about being in the museums, she's very Zen about it. I'm kind of angry about it. The poverty of Fluxus artists for me is a very real problem. There are entire generations of young artists profiting from virtually indistinguishable techniques, when there's a whole generation of people who can't afford an operation. That happened, you know, to Takako Saito, you can't afford your hysterectomy, and you've made a contribution like this? I think there's something fundamentally wrong with that. And I think it has something to do with aligning Fluxus with this historic model of the avant-garde. Not looking at it for what it is and then allowing other generations to use it without crediting it. I think it's criminal. I think there is a kind of ethics to history that has been lost. That with this poststructuralist notion of all history as discourse and all of it as positional, the notion of getting to the information and actually saying you think something is true is unfashionable and almost impossible. There is a constellation of events, the production of key works that have affected and transformed the art world, and to not credit people because it is history, or the notion of a kind of a fixed point in history, is unfashionable is a lot of the reason these artists have suffered, because the younger generations of artists haven't had to acknowledge where they get their sources. Children and grandchildren of Fluxus artists have been able to capitalize on ideas that made life hard for our parents. It's painful. Al Hansen's grandson Beck is a rock star. Al was in poverty. He gave his life to a set of ideas, and my father, too. I would have hoped this art world, which in name supports these ideas, could find a way to help these artists survive, and it doesn't. They continue to struggle. How does a Fluxus child rebel? I would say, they rebel by surviving.

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Hannah Higgins is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her book *Fluxus Experience* will be published by University of California Press in 2001. She continues writing articles, and curating exhibitions in the tradition of experimental art. With her twin sister, Jessica, she is co-director of the Estate of Dick Higgins.

Alison Knowles is a conceptual artist doing sound art, graphics, installations, books, and performance art. She is an original member of the Fluxus group, a Guggenheim fellow, and has exhibited her work most recently in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object* (The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) and *The American Century: Art and Culture, 1950-2000* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York).

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## INDEX

### A

Adolph Gottlieb, 4  
Allan Kaprov, 5

### B

Baltimore Museum of Art, 12  
Bean Rolls, 7, 11, 12, 16, 20  
Bread and Water, 10

### D

Dick Higgins, 5, 7, 11, 17, 23, 24, 33  
Drawing Center, 10

### E

Event Scores, 2, 10, 14

### F

Fluxus Heidelberg Center, 1, 3  
Franz Kline, 4

### G

Germany, 9, 10, 12, 13, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26  
grandmother, 4

### H

Helen Frankenthal, 4  
*House of Dust*, 7

### I

Italy, 5, 10, 30

### J

Japan, 10, 18  
John Cage, 5, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21, 25

### K

Klaus Schöning, 13

### M

*Marcel Duchamp*, 1, 11, 19  
mycological Society, 5

### N

New York Mycological Society, 5, 11  
Nonegon Gallery, 5

### P

performances, 6, 7, 11, 12, 21, 26, 30, 32  
Pratt University, 4, 11

### R

Ray Johnson, 6  
Richard Lindner, 4, 10, 11

### S

Spain, 11, 22

### T

telephone pole, 4

### W

Whitney Museum of American Art, 23, 33