

WHAT BECAME OF MIKE HOWARD

“To this day many persons ask me whatever became of that artist that I showed who did those paintings of dogs and bear hunts.” – Michael Walls, 1982.

In 1993, the prominent collector, Jason Rubell, curated a solo show of Howard’s paintings at the Jason Rubell Gallery in Miami. The same year, Howard’s daughter Mimi was born and he stayed at home to raise her as well as devote time to his seven grandchildren. He has shown only a few times since, but has produced a consistent group of work, including 700 small paintings and ceramic plates. He bought a house in 1993, in Alabama and it gradually turned into a museum. Influenced by Don Judd.

Over the past two years, Howard has returned to large canvases, focusing intensely on painting sensational death scenes – murders, overdoses, assassinations and violent accidents. As he puts it, “I am capturing contemporary tragedy in the tradition of Manet, Goya, Delacroix and Gericault. My inclinations are similar to Romanticism in nineteenth-century France and pre-1954 Phenix City, Alabama.

This theme in his work began with the passing of his mother, shortly followed by the compelling experience of visiting the site of Trotsky’s death site in Mexico City with his daughter and is perhaps influenced by his own advancing age. The initial two subjects, John F. Kennedy in Dallas and Martin Luther King in Memphis, were based on film documents of the events. The details of subsequent subjects were imagined based on textual descriptions: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Michael Stewart, Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon and John F. Kennedy Jr. Howard calls this blending of historicity and artistic license “Docu Drama / Fake Realism”.

HISTORY OF HOWARD

Howard's continuous pursuit and interest in performance art and art as an exploration of space, comes from his affiliations with the Fluxus movement and his artistic comrades whom he met while teaching drawing and painting at Rutgers University. Geoff Hendricks, Bob Watts, Al Hansen and Leon Golub were friends and influences.

While working for Don Judd and attending The Whitney Museum Independent Program, Howard performed his first Fluxus event in 1970 ("Approved"), which entailed the artist performing a series of weight lifting poses for the crowd while donning bikini shorts. Trisha Brown was in attendance during a performance and soon invited Mike to perform with her dance troupe.

In 1973 Howard performed in a Fluxus event at Rutgers University with other students & faculty including Geoff Hendricks and Sid Sachs. The artist grew a red beard and painted a version of Van Gogh's "Wheatfields." The performance involved Howard pulling out a revolver loaded with blanks and shooting himself in the stomach upon completion of the painting. Special effects included ketchup covering the artist's shirt as well as some of the audience.

In 1975 dealer Michael Walls gave Howard his first gallery show in New York. Howard passed around an L.L. Bean cover asking nine other artists to paint their own versions. Michael Walls exhibited the paintings in one room. In another room there were four large-scale bear hunting scenes painted by Howard. In 1982 Michael Walls recommended Howard to the studio program at P.S. 1.

In his letter of recommendation, Walls wrote "with the exception of a small number of superb artists such Malcolm Morley and Neil Jenney, Michael was one of the first painters in New York to work in a manner that combined a tough and rambunctious conceptualization, strong social commentary, and an approach to the handling of paint that was both gestural and diagrammatic. The paintings made a deep and lasting impression on the large number of young artist who frequented the gallery at that time – including such persons as Julian Schnabel, Richard Bosman, and Martin Silverman. To this day, many persons ask me whatever became of that artist that I showed who did those paintings of dogs and bear hunts. "

Howard went on to show with Gracie Mansion Gallery and staged a project entitled "Win a Trip to Paris Sweepstakes". The show concluded with the artist and dealer spinning a carnival wheel to determine the sweepstakes winner.

Howard, Gracie and Sur Rodney dispensed assorted gifts including a motor scooter, color television, dinner for two, and airline tickets to Paris. Gracie Mansion sold 100 paintings in one week as raffle tickets and the money that was made from the sales was spent on prizes. The recently deceased artist Al Hansen was present and purchased a painting in hopes of winning a trip to Paris. Hansen unofficially deemed the show a Fluxus event despite his disappointment in not winning a prize.

FLUXUS

The following is lifted from wikipedia.

Some scholars who study Fluxus argue that the unique control that curator Jon Hendricks (not the same-named jazz vocalist) holds over a major historical Fluxus collection (the Gilbert and Lila Silverman collection) has enabled him to influence, through the numerous books and catalogues subsidized by the collection, the view that Fluxus died with Maciunas. Hendricks argues that Fluxus was an historical movement that occurred at a particular time, asserting that such central Fluxus artists as Dick Higgins and Nam June Paik could no longer label themselves as active Fluxus artists after 1978, and that contemporary artists influenced by Fluxus cannot lay claim to be Fluxus artists. However, the influence of Fluxus continues today in multi-media performances.

Other historians and scholars assert that although Maciunas was a key participant, there were many more, including Fluxus co-founder Higgins, who continued to work within Fluxus after the death of Maciunas. There are a number of post-1978 artists who remain associated with Fluxus. Some were contemporaries of Maciunas who became active in Fluxus after 1978. While there is not a large Fluxus artist community in any single urban center, the rise of the Internet in the 1990s has enabled a vibrant Fluxus community to thrive online. Some of the original artists from the 1960s and 1970s remain active in online communities such as the Fluxlist, and other artists, writers, musicians, and performers have joined them in cyberspace. Fluxus-oriented artists continue to meet in cities around the world to collaborate and communicate in "real-time" and physical spaces.

Artistic philosophies

Fluxus is similar in spirit to the earlier art movement of Dada, emphasizing the concept of anti-art and taking jabs at the seriousness of modern art. Fluxus artists used their minimal performances to highlight their perceived

connections between everyday objects and art, similarly to Duchamp in pieces such as *Fountain*. Fluxus art was often presented in "events", which Fluxus member George Brecht defined as "the smallest unit of a situation". The events consisted of a minimal instruction, opening the events to accidents and other unintended effects. Also contributing to the randomness of events was the integration of audience members into the performances, realizing Duchamp's notion of the viewer completing the art work.

The Fluxus artistic philosophy can be expressed as a synthesis of four key factors that define the majority of Fluxus work:

1. Fluxus is an attitude. It is not a movement or a style.
2. Fluxus is intermedia. Fluxus creators like to see what happens when different media intersect. They use found and everyday objects, sounds, images, and texts to create new combinations of objects, sounds, images, and texts.
3. Fluxus works are simple. The art is small, the texts are short, and the performances are brief.
4. Fluxus is fun. Humour has always been an important element in Fluxus.

Fluxus artists

Fluxus artists shared several characteristics including wit and "childlikeness", though they lacked a consistent identity as an artistic community. This vague self-identification allowed the group to integrate a varied group of artists, including a high number of women. The possibility that Fluxus had the most female members of any Western art group up to that point in history is particularly significant considering that Fluxus came on the heels of the white male-dominated abstract expressionism movement. However, despite the designed open-endedness of Fluxus, Maciunas insisted on maintaining unity in the collective. Because of this, Maciunas was accused of expelling certain members for deviating from what he perceived as the goals of Fluxus.