

Luigi Bonotto:

"The magic of a Fluxus life"

A carpet of yellow leaves covers the entrance as a big unicoloured rug. "It's a bilboa ginko, a living fossil", he smiles greeting me. The rain falls down and its sound comes up from the path of raw stone. It's like entering an old farm building in the country. Under the porch a wooden loom. "That is the first one I started to weave fabrics and leather with. My story begins there, in the sixties".

We enter. The switchboard lies hidden between a huge work by Nam June Paik and a wall covered with at least thirty works by Ben Vautier. A young woman greets us nicely, behind her a big poster of "Sentieri Interrotti" ("Interrupted paths"), an exhibition about the Fluxus movement in Bassano del Grappa, year 2000. We are entering the building of Bonotto s.p.a.. A factory. A company.

"Odd". I turn around and see what I think is the administration office, hidden behind a long striped curtain. "Ah, another work of art.". I walk past a little golden mosaic pyramid. It reminds me of the Guggenheim Enterprise and Culture award. "In fact we won it ten years ago, back then nobody talked about culture and enterprise. It was the beginning for Italy. Now it may be handy to sell bags or clothes".

I start understanding. But we are still getting started. We walk up the stairs. Two little rooms open up in front of us. The factory is full of works of art. Everywhere. Hundreds, maybe thousands. Spread around. Hanging on the walls. Spoerri, Rot, Patterson, Metzger, Maciunas, Chiari, Forti, Friendman, Beuys, Cunningham, Brecht, Ayo... "You know, it is right they stay alive, that they are around us in our everyday life. That workers and executives walk past them. That they glance at them. With no

We find ourselves talking in a conference room. A huge crystal table covers a work by Milan Knizak, where everyday objects have been made fossils by painting them. "He was here so many times. Our relationships lasts since many years. He was minister for culture with Havel". The room is small and has walls of glass, and clothes are all around it. Those for which Bonotto is well-known in the fashion world as one of the bigs among "creatives" and innovators. He turns on a theatre piece by John Cage. Which lies there, among samples. Simply. With no arrogance or pretension. With the extraordinary normality of art. The same one that one finds by taking one of those fabrics in his hands. No matter which one.

"Our fabrics consist of a whole series of stratifications and sedimentations. Which we then cut, corrode, modify. We make them vibrate. Matter must be felt. It has to stand out. It must be dense. Strong. Unique. It must have history, deep roots to build a new contemporary project on. We want all our products to have this identity and this vision. They have to hand down the culture within them. The soul. This is fabric for us. And art, Fluxus in particular, influenced our way of thinking, of steering anything we do. It engages in everything and determines every process".

I listen. I can feel the passion behind his words. It's not the same old marketingoriented speech. Or the usual collector's or patron's cliché handed out in order to get social solidity or some more visibility. I now start understanding why Armani and Prada, Margiela and Paul Smith, Boss and Diesel choose Bonotto, made in Italy, by the town of Molvena, in the district of Vicenza, in the Veneto region!

Some years have passed since that meeting.

It's the first days of December. It's evening. Dinner time. I am with Luigi Bonotto in his house in Bassano del Grappa to talk about the exhibition which is the theme of this article. I find him in his buen retiro. A capsule he withdraws to in order to be in the peaceful company of Fluxus. A big table is full of a whole lot of sheets of paper printed with small icons of many of the thousands of works of the Bonotto's archive. It is on them that Luigi ponders and creates his curatorial geographies which will give life to the exhibition "CREATIVE R'EVOLUTION - 50 Years of Fluxus from the Archivio

Luigi is always full of life. Despite his mildness and discretion. It is like opening a living art-history book. Lived art history. For this is what Fluxus and Bonotto have been. Thirty years of sharing life. Rather than of collecting. Reciprocal love and esteem. Cooperation. The room is filled with works of art. Everywhere. From the doors to the windows and the walls. On the kitchen shelves. Everywhere lies a trace, a sign, a presence. "You know. They passed by. They lived here. They would stop by. We would work out pieces and situations. We would live together. And we would bring new projects to life. Any kind of project".

Luigi is an artist himself. He went to the Academy. His master was Vedova. Nothing is born out of nothing. "But the meeting with Fluxus widened my vision and perspective. I entered the dimension of continuous invention with Fluxus. And I never left it, because it has become my life. Of course I dedicated myself to the fabrics, which eventually became a industry, but that thing is inside of me. And it never got out".

He puts some Maciunas boxes on the table. The cult. "Once I was flying back from a trip and at the border I got held with a series of little boxes. I dare you explain to the man at the border office this was art! He thought it was drugs. Weird things. At the end he said: go, go. I met some strange people in my life, but you..." He owns many pieces by Maciunas. Little inventions that lie underneath the boxes on the table keep opening up. "Oh, look, here is the first Fluxus' poster, I have the one Beuvs corrected, look at the first book, look, look..."

He shows me the first publication of the group, made of envelopes. We stop at Yoko Ono. He laughs. The writing says: self-portrait. "Open it". A little mirror... Luigi organized the Yoko Ono exhibition in Italy, Treviso, in 2007. There is a special relationship between the two of them that lasts since many years. Made of cooperation, correspondence, production. Seeing them together is funny. Luigi is large. Tall, with a big head of white hair and deep eyes. She is tiny. Apparently helpless. Skinny.

Luigi has tons of anecdotes and stories. Of people known and met. He has the eyes of someone who has lived a lot. We go down to the "caveau". The works are lying on the floor. "I picked some for Barcelona, even some strong ones. That one for example is the work that created very strong political embarrass to Fluxus and that even caused its segregation. Because it was scary". You will see them displayed in Barça!

The room is full of works of art. It is like moving around in the basement of a big museum. Every work is catalogued by two filing clerks, hired expressly to take care of the archive. Before moving towards the garage he opens another room. "Here I keep the works I care the most about. I even got a security door to the room. But I never close it! Who is supposed to steal them?" He laughs happily. Even the garage is stuffed with works. Everywhere. "You see those chairs? I made one for each artist who came by or stays with us..". We hop on to the car to reach a restaurant. We didn't even take a glance at the other pieces of the collection in the house. Visual poetry. Another theme. There will be a next time. Luckily nothing is open. It's Tuesday evening. So we drive around in the suburb hills and talk.

Luigi is leaving tomorrow for the house of Ben Vautier in Nizza. "I'm bringing him with this car all the clothes he will write on for the exhibition in Barcelona. There will be more or less one hundred dummies. He is happy about the exhibition too. He has a very colourful house, the outer walls are full of his works. So full of writings. With him..."

With his work Luigi Bonotto gives us a big lesson, which becomes handy in times of crisis of visions like these. When everybody is inventing any trick just to sell some more t-shirts. Unfelt sponsorships are useless. There is no such thing as a art-industry relationship which is just based on a logo at the bottom of a poster. Or which is bought with a cheque. The endless plethora of invitations and events organized by companies of the fashion industry are most of the times showcases for clothes, but nothing else. And that's the reason why sooner or later they die. And the customer doesn't recognize them. A work made by art for art must trigger some daily processes. Bound to the lives of people. Made for the people.

"There is no use in hanging the painting over the desk of the boss. I loved Fluxus from the very first moment because it's a state of mind. A spirit. A way of reading and seeing. It is what helped me through every moment of my life. A lot even in my work. Every time I am with an artist I feel like new paths are opening up in front of me. It is like some things are clearer to me. It is like what was foggy would turn crystal clear". This is the reason why Luigi is Fluxus and has made of Fluxus his atypical collection-

You can read the excitement about leaving to meet Vautier in Luigi's eyes. About meeting the flux again. A endless flux. That has the good luck to be continued by the second generation, which has the big commitment of carrying on one of the biggest collections in the world. More than ten thousands works and documents in the archive. An international reference point for the most revolutionary art movement of the second half of the twentieth century. Passions, as experiences, are not transmissible.

But in this case there are the environmental conditions for the Bonotto archive to have in Giovanni and Lorenzo Bonotto the prosecutors of an extraordinary life. I am friends with the sons, too. The flux was transmitted. I tell you.

Dr. Cristiano Seganfreddo Vicenza, December 2008

of all. It lasted a month, with three, four, or five performances each week-end. The other festivals were smaller. The beauty of the Wiesbaden festival was that we had no worry for time - we could do many terrific long pieces that could not be fitted into other festivals."

In late 1964, after more than two years of international Fluxus concerts and some exhibitions, the first Fluxus anthologies in New York were packed. Maciunas had set up a workshop in his loft in Canal Street. Regarding "Fluxus 1" he stamped the envelopes with collected contributions of his Fluxus artists, secured them with three nuts and bolts, pasted an "accordion" with square, typographed name tags for the authors, and placed the hand-collated anthologies into wooden boxes. The end-products, also with "Flux-Kit" and later "Flux Year Box 2", the three major artists' anthologies published by Fluxus Editions, mostly went to the participating artists. Commercially, they were

Many Fluxus publications were to take the form of a "Game Box" with little flip-books, small bottles, and loose items in wooden compartments. The echoes of Duchamp's "Boîte en Valise" were highlighted by a number of cases for the "business man" who was willing to spend a little more. Everything published so far since 1964, the plastic boxes with works by individual artists, or George Brecht's "Water Yam" in a cardboard box (later on in a white plastic box), "Bottle-Events" or a "Suicide Kit" by Ben Vautier, was to be had for very few dollars. As far as the distribution process was concerned, a year after the first boxes and suitcases came out, Maciunas had praise for French artist Ben Vautier: "Popularity of Fluxus in Europe owes almost 99% to your effort."

Maciunas's early contacts with practicing musicians, composers, and artists he first met through La Monte Young and Yoko Ono in New York, motivated him to open a gallery of his own on Madison Avenue. However, already in 1961 when the hoped-for profits failed to materialize, he left for Germany. There, in a small apartment in Wiesbaden, he declared himself "Chairman" of the Fluxus movement, From 1962 on he wanted to attract avantgarde artists from Germany, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Great Britain, Eastern Europe, Japan, and the United States. He discussed many of the possible Fluxus pieces in his correspondence. These exemplary, minimalist events were and are, not only in his eyes, to nurture a new flourishing world art. It is still different from every other culture we know.

Dr. Thomas Kellein Director Kunsthalle Bielefeld

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

BREAD & BUTTER BARCELONA 21-23 JANUARY 2009



Ben Vautier Centre du monde





J'ecris ma vie partout J'ecris le temps qui passe





Ben Vautier I am just a gigolo waiting for you



0521: Nam June Paik – Robot

Ways of Fluxus

: credits

rooms and offices: art everywhere!

The funniest and most radical episode in twentieth-century art is the story of Fluxus. George Maciunas (1931-1978), its self-declared chairman, established strangely radical modes of presentation in its name. In his view, the bulk of conventional art business - museums, theatres, concert halls, opera houses, and publishers – should cease to exist. And Fluxus was to be so uncomplicated that it could be realised by anyone more or less anywhere.

Maciunas, who died at the age of forty-six, devoted his life to Fluxus. "The boy was playful and disobedient," wrote his mother, "he always wanted to be completely free." Not only as a boy, but in all of his adult life he was radical and revolutionary. A staunch opponent of personal enrichment, he came up with Spartan solutions for almost every life situation, developing his own subversive notion of art well before today's global networks and multi-million dollar art market became a reality.

When the Fluxus Festivals of "newest music" began in Wiesbaden in September 1962, German television was invited. A six-minute report was made. The journalists did their utmost to come up with polemic responses to all the different concert items. The artists were shown stoically entering the concert hall and again as they clapped. The piece being performed was "Clapping", by Joseph Byrd. After a brief glimpse of a piece by Jackson Mac Low, the speaker's voice declared, "Anything Dada can do, we have done longer." Following this, Benjamin Patterson's "Variations for Double Bass" were shown. The composer stepped onto the stage, secured the strings of his bass with clothes pegs, and screwed wooden ferrules onto his bow. Patterson then winded sticky tape around the top section of his instrument. Following this he leaned his double bass against the seat of a chair, before laying down some bread on the instrument which he then ate. With an air pump attached to a tube, the composer enticed sounds from the instrument's body. Towards the end of the piece, he dusted off his double bass.

Emmett Williams, who performed the "Four Directional Song of Doubt for 5 Voices" with Alison Knowles, Dick Higgins, Benjamin Patterson, Nam June Paik, and George Maciunas provided another example of Fluxus art. While Knowles repeatedly sang the word "never" at different pitches, Higgins countered with "no," and Paik persistently sneezed, Williams conducted evenly and with a fixed gaze. The tabloids reported with a reference to "'newest music' in the madhouse style." Dick Higgins, however, one of the twenty early Fluxus artists and performers, regarded the immensely long-winded aspect of the Festival as its essence: "The Wiesbaden Festival was the most ambitious

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When I first came to the Bonotto mill to discuss THE SOURCE project with Lorenzo Bonotto, I was astonished: in the centre of the entrance hall stood the "Robot" by Nam June Paik, and the wall behind it was covered with various works by Ben Vau-

Lorenzo and me discussed the fabric business, fairs, exhibitions and art, and quickly an idea was born: Fluxus at the BREAD & BUTTER BARCELONA! Some months later. I met with Luigi Bonotto, and the idea developed into a plan: CREATIVE R'EVOLUTION

tier and other Fluxus protagonists. And this continued through the Bonotto reception

- 50 Years of Fluxus from the Archivio Bonotto!

It took another eight months to realize this project, which unites one of the world's most important Fluxus Collections with Europe's leading tradeshow for Street and Urbanwear. Both, the collection and the BREAD & BUTTER BARCELONA, are based on the revolutionary idea of creating something inherently different and new, irrespective of beaten paths and traditional methods.

All expressions of contemporary culture such as art, music, and fashion, are finally sources for the ability to create and renew at the same time. They are an important and precious enrichment of daily life.

We are very proud to present CREATIVE R'EVOLUTION - 50 Years of Fluxus from the Archivio Bonotto, an outstanding art exhibition with numerous major Fluxus works, an exclusively created installation by Ben Vautier, and live performances by him and other protagonists of Fluxus - an art movement which was and continues to be revo-

Carsten-Oliver Voss

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BREAD & BUTTER and THE SOURCE proudly present an extraordinary exhibition during BREAD & BUTTER BARCELONA in January 2009: CREATIVE R'EVOLUTION - 50 Years of Fluxus from the Archivio Bonotto.

CREATIVE R'EVOLUTION

from the Archivio Bonotto:

- 50 Years of Fluxus