

India to get first taste of German Fluxus art

Take a sheet of paper. Shake it, rumple it and tear it. Place the act in the context of creative art, installations, short texts and theatre. You get a free-flowing genre of inter-disciplinary art called Fluxus art, an exhibition of which will be held here this month.

For Indians, bred on conventional art formats like paintings, sculptures and installations, Fluxus may seem a tad difficult to understand. Experts describe it as a spiritual experience which recontextualises traditional forms.

'It is an intra-media discipline which makes new sense of conventional meanings. The form fuses visuals, music, technology and performance arts into one creative enterprise,' said Rajeev Lochan, director of the National Gallery of Modern Arts (NGMA).

The NGMA is hosting the first-ever exhibition of Fluxus compositions from Germany in a show titled 'Fluxus in Germany from 1962-1994: A Long Story with Knots' beginning May 15. The 20-day show will close June 4.

This unique art form developed in the US and [Europe](#) in the early 1960s largely as a recoil to the horrors of the two world wars. In Europe, the art form flourished in nations that took part in the world wars. In the US, it began as an experiment by composer John Cage who was exploring artistic frontiers beyond music in his compositions such as 4'33'. The ripples of the Fluxus movement were also felt in faraway Japan.

Fluxus (the Latin for 'flow') art speaks of liberation from the textbook confines of artistic expressions and comments on a gamut of issues, which are at times anti-establishment but tinged with humour and irony.

The official beginning of the Fluxus movement, involving a group of artists from all domains of art, can be traced to the Fluxus festival in Weisbaden in Germany in 1962. It was pioneered by Lithuania-born artist George Maciunas.

The high point of the NGMA show will be a live performance by avant garde American Fluxus artist and musician Ben Patterson on its opening day.

Patterson will perform his Fluxus music, a genre of simplified scores that use everything from the Morse Code, sundry tapping and thumping on a flat surface, primal sounds made by the Bantu pygmies of Africa, improvised rhythm and string instruments, intoning sounds of leaping frogs and recitation to transcend the borders of structured music.

The performance, a live Fluxus component, will set off the cache of 300 art works ranging from invitation cards, graphic works, rare film footages, prints, photographs and installations by Fluxus masters.

'Fluxus draws heavily from music and visual arts,' Patterson said Tuesday at a gathering at the NGMA. The artist is one of the early Fluxus pioneers, who was part of the group that George Maciunas had cobbled together for the Weisbaden show.

The artist, who started his career as a symphony orchestra musician in Canada, New York and later in Germany took to Fluxus Art when he realised that only 50 percent of the bass music that he played was reaching the audience.

'I was doing so many things at the same time. Following the conductor, listening to other musicians, doing technical work and reading the score. In the process, I realised that half of what I was playing reached the audience. So I decided to free music from its restricting formats,' Patterson told IANS.

It was the inspiration for some of his early seminal works like the 'Paper Piece' and 'Double Bass Variations' that set the Fluxus movement on course.

'Each musician had five sheets of paper with simple instructions that they had to perform. Shake, break, tear rumble and crumple. The instructions, of course were open to interpretations. The sound that it created made the music,' Patterson said. 'The audience was free to participate.'

Fluxus arts thrive on the Fluxus boxes, rectangular cardboard or plastic boxes that contain the Fluxus kit, name tags and simple instructions like 'steep a piano in the water of a pool, play some music of F. Liszt on the piano (an instruction conceived by Japanese artist Cheiko Shiomi in 1963)'. The boxes themselves are works of creative assemblage art.

'One of the most popular promoter of Fluxus art was Beatles sensation (late) John Lennon's wife Yoko Ono. She used to organise Fluxus concerts in the loft at her home that drew several leading Fluxus artists including pioneer George Maciunas. Some of John's music has also been incorporated into Fluxus compositions,' said art historian Peter Kloser, who was also present at the NGMA.

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