

Henry Flynt (b. 1940) has been working since 1959 on an all-embracing, transdisciplinary project involving different areas of knowledge and fields of study. In so doing, this project transcends and critiques art's overall terms of reference.

In his essay *Concept Art*, first published in "An Anthology" edited by La Monte Young and Jackson McLow in 1963, Flynt coined a term which has become a permanent fixture in art since the 1960s. Flynt's first works actively called *concept art* were realised as early as 1961. Nevertheless, Flynt's concept diverges from the various different artistic methodologies normally subsumed today under the generic catchall phrase *Conceptual Art*.

Flynt was a member of the Marxist Workers World Party from 1963 until 1967 and was politically committed as an author and activist. In 1964 in conjunction with George Maciunas, he instigated the *Action Against Cultural Imperialism*. The initiative led to pickets on 29 April and 8 September of the same year in protest against performances by the German composer Karl-Heinz Stockhausen in New York on account of his disparaging comments about jazz. Prominent avant-gardists – among others, members of the Fluxus circle – also took part.

A classically trained violinist, Flynt himself has been composing music since 1959. Alongside performances of his own works that derive from New Music, but soon were to incorporate the structures of jazz, free improvisation and popular idioms, such as hillbilly and blues, he performed as a musician in a number of his own bands. In September 1966, he stood in for John Cale on violin at a handful of Velvet Underground concerts.

Re-emerging as an artist once more in the 1980s, Henry Flynt took part in a series of exhibitions for which he reconstructed a number of older works. However, merely to label him an 'artist' would severely limit the aspiration, sheer range and thematic scope of his project.

Accordingly, Flynt's systematic activities as a theorist, mathematician, economist, artist, composer and musician far transcend the remit and competencies of an art institution. Indeed, they do so all the more because Flynt, to this day, radically challenges the concept and the premises of art in his theoretical and practical works, subjecting them to a fundamental critique.

We at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf are all the more honoured that Henry Flynt has agreed to work in conjunction with us on this partially retrospective exhibition project. The project will be supplemented further by a detailed documentary component and, in addition, Flynt will develop new works on site for the occasion. It will be Flynt's first ever museum-

based exhibition.

Lectures and both filmic and musical performances will extend the scope of the exhibition proper, which in any case can only show a small section of this unique project. It is also essential to point out that as diverse and wide-ranging as Flynt's activities appear to be, his methodological approach could not be more absolute. In his philosophical and mathematical inquiry, as well as in his artistic work, Flynt devotes himself determinedly to the foundation and boundaries of human cognitive faculties – but also to the social arrangements that underpin cultural concepts.

For an art institution, such as the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, a complex project of this kind is simultaneously a welcome opportunity for self-scrutiny. Indeed, in a period of profound social change, it is perhaps more than appropriate than ever to ask what an art institution can realistically achieve, that is to say, what is the institution 'art' itself able to do.

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