

Fantastic Architecture: Vostell, Fluxus, and the Built Environment

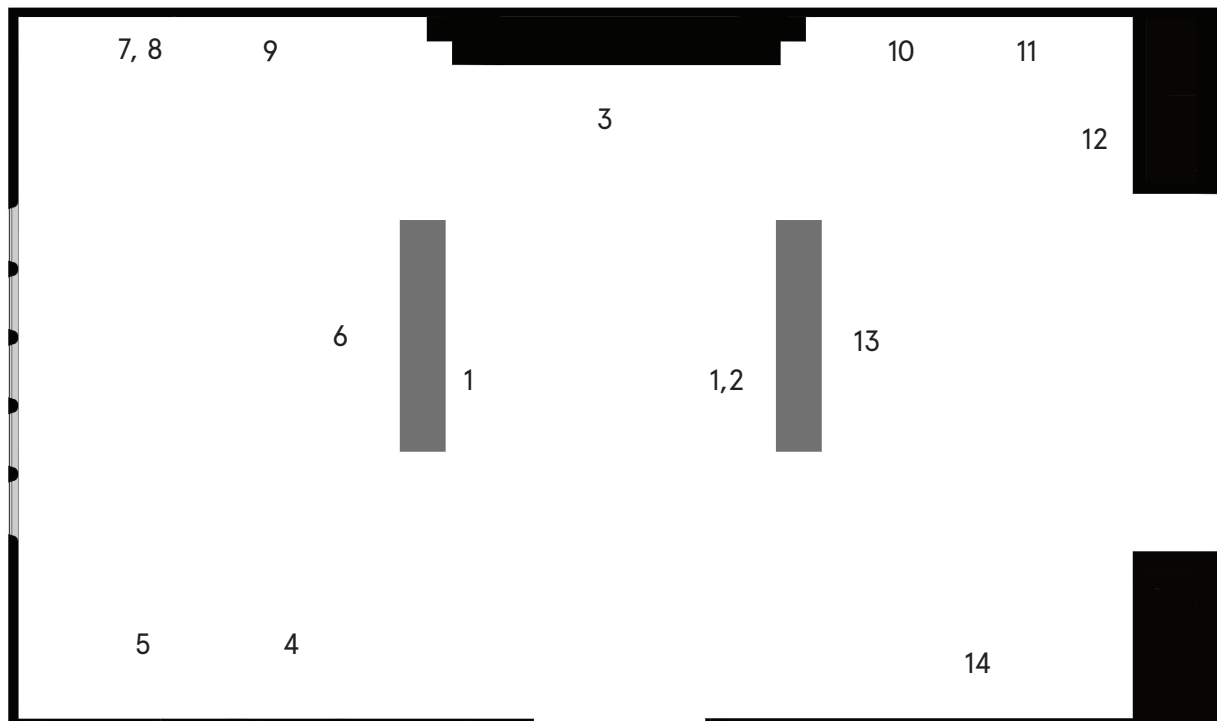
January 22 – March 17, 2017

Gallery Guide

Taking its title and inspiration from the seminal publication *Fantastic Architecture* (1970), edited by Wolf Vostell and Dick Higgins and published by Something Else Press, this exhibition presents various approaches to architecture, urban space, and the built environment within an international community of artists associated with Fluxus and conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s. *Fantastic Architecture* is presented in conjunction with the re-siting, following a major conservation treatment, of Wolf Vostell's *Concrete Traffic* (1970), a monumental event-sculpture in the University of Chicago's Campus Art Collection. The exhibition contextualizes *Concrete Traffic* in relation to Vostell's other related works from the period, including photomontage proposals for alterations to architectural and urban spaces and event scores for happenings intended for specific cities, as well as the work of his artistic peers and interlocutors. In Europe and the United States alike, the postwar period saw massive transformations of the urban landscape, the construction and expansion of freeway systems, and the rise of automobile culture, and artists of the time responded to these developments in a variety of ways. Like its eponymous exemplar, the exhibition embraces the porousness and intellectual foment of the experimental art world of the time, a context in which forms and concepts circulated among an international community of artists.

Curated by Jacob Proctor

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Works in the exhibition:

1. Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell, eds. *Fantastic Architecture* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969). Five examples.
2. Wolf Vostell, *Berlin and Phenomena* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966).
3. Rosemary Mayer, *Proposed Street Work*, 1969. Typescript on paper. Courtesy Southfirst Gallery, New York, and the Estate of Rosemary Mayer.

Facsimile editions of all three of the above are available for examination at the front desk.

4. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Projet du Mur Provisoire de Tonneaux Metalliques (Project for a temporary wall of metal drums), Rue Visconti, Paris VI, 1962*. Cardstock folder with black-and-white gelatin silver photograph and carbon typescript text on paper. Collection Barbara Moore.
5. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Packed Tower, Spoleto, Italy, 1968, 1970*. Nine offset printed cards. Collection Matt Saunders.
6. Shigeko Kubota, *George Maciunas With Two Eyes 1972, George Maciunas With One Eye 1976, 1994*. Video, 7 min., sound.
7. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #8, Amsterdam (Art & Project bulletin 22), 1969*. Offset on paper. Private collection.
8. Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece 106: London (Art & Project bulletin 68), 1973*. Offset on paper. Private collection.
9. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #2, New York City–Seattle, Washington, 1969, 1970*. Nineteen offset printed sheets. Private collection.
10. Jim McWilliams, *Poster for the 11th Annual New York Avant-Garde festival, 1974*. Offset on paper. Private collection, New York.
11. Jim McWilliams, *Poster for the 13th Annual New York Avant-Garde festival, 1977*. Offset on paper. Private collection, New York.
12. Jim McWilliams, *Poster for the 10th Annual New York Avant-Garde festival, 1973*. Offset on paper. Private collection, New York.
13. Paul Karalus, *Vostell und andere, oder Lippenstifte für Vietnam (Vostell and others, or Lipsticks for Vietnam), 1969 (excerpt)*. 16mm film transferred to video, sound. Courtesy of the Wolf Vostell Estate.
14. Allan Kaprow, *Pose. Carrying Through the City. Sitting Down Here and There. Photographed. Pix Left on Spot. Going On, 1969–1970*. Nine offset printed cards. Private Collection.

Notes on works:

Christo and Jeanne-Claude

On the evening of June 27, 1962, Christo (b. 1935) and Jeanne-Claude (1935–2009) closed off a narrow Parisian street with an “iron curtain” comprised of oil barrels. The barricade obstructed much of the traffic of the city’s Left Bank. The artists did not alter the industrial colors of the oil barrels, leaving the brand names and the rust visible. Conceived in October, 1961, the work was a protest against the Berlin Wall, which had been built in August of 1961. The idea of an improvised barricade was also a response to the Algerian War protest demonstrations and barricades that were taking place in Paris at the same time. Rue Visconti is one of the narrowest streets in Paris. Since the sixteenth century, many illustrious tenants lived in the houses of the Rue Visconti, such as Racine, Adrienne Lecouvreur, Delacroix, and Balzac.

In July 1968, in conjunction with the Festival of Two Worlds, an annual music and opera festival in the small mountaintop town of Spoleto, Italy, Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped two civic structures—a medieval tower and a baroque fountain at the market place—in white woven polypropylene fabric and rope. The tall square tower, standing like a shrouded sentinel at one end of a medieval causeway, was one of the first landmarks on the road winding into Spoleto. In the main piazza in the center of town, the Wrapped Fountain struck a more festive note, its silhouette resembling a baroque church façade. Both wrappings remained up for three weeks, the duration of the festival.

Shigeko Kubota

In this portrait of Fluxus founder George Maciunas (1931–1978), Japanese video artist, sculptor, and performance artist Shigeko Kubota (1937–2015) pays homage to a mentor and fellow Fluxus artist. Maciunas is widely credited as the animating force behind the initial transformation of New York’s SoHo neighborhood from a light industrial zone into an artists’ district. Among other activities, Maciunas converted dilapidated loft buildings into collective live-work spaces known as Fluxhouse Cooperatives. In Kubota’s video diary, she observes Maciunas as he tours SoHo buildings with Fluxus artists and friends, including Nam June Paik, Barbara and Peter Moore, and Yoshi Wada. Part of a series of free Flux-Tours of the neighborhood, here each artist discusses a building in his or her own language. The second part of the tape documents Fluxus artist Ben Vautier’s 1976 opening at New York’s Guggenheim Museum, an image of which (altered by British pop artist Richard Hamilton) appeared on the cover of *Fantastic Architecture*. The title of the work refers both to an event in which Maciunas was badly beaten, leaving him blind in one eye, and to the picture-in-picture video effect in the tape itself.

Douglas Huebler

In his *Location Pieces* and *Variable Pieces*, Douglas Huebler (1924–1997) combined short written statements with other materials, most often maps and photographs. The statements contain a description of a structure or system devised by Huebler, which would be enacted through the marked-up maps and photographic documentation. The photographs were sometimes taken by the artist, sometimes by others. In these works, the urban environment serves as a matrix, a zone of encounter between an artistic concept, proposal, or system, and the outside world. Central to Huebler’s project was the tension between the photograph as an allegedly neutral document—an idea deeply rooted in the history of photographic discourse—and its critical as well as aesthetic potential.

Rosemary Mayer

In her eight-page-long *Proposed Street Work*, Rosemary Mayer (1943–2014) imagines redirecting the mail sent to one complete New York city block to the opposite side of the street via a meticulous scheme involving the postal service's change-of-address cards. The work was originally published in the seminal journal *O to 9*, edited by Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, but unfortunately only as an abbreviated two-page excerpt. Like Sol Lewitt's *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* and other works of the period, Mayer's *Proposed Street Work* depends on following the system of relations to their ultimate completion, with a result that is simultaneously logical and utterly absurd.

Jim McWilliams

Between 1963 and 1980, the groundbreaking artist-musician-curator-impresario Charlotte Moorman (1933–1991) produced a series of fifteen more-or-less annual avant-garde festivals, held mostly in New York City. A consummate networker with a magnetic personality, Moorman engendered a strong sense of community among hundreds of artists, filmmakers, dancers, poets, musicians, and festival audiences. Over the years, these festivals migrated from traditional performance venues to public spaces, freeing artists from the constraints of concert halls and museums, and creating important precedents for future large-scale, urban art exhibitions. Beginning in 1966, artist and graphic designer Jim McWilliams (b. 1937) served as official designer of the Avant-Garde Festivals. He designed twelve of the fifteen festival posters; their distinctive, eye-catching graphics reinforced the importance of each year's site as well as the avant-garde nature of the events themselves.

Paul Karalus

On October 2, 1969, Wolf Vostell (1932–1998) began construction on his first "event-sculpture" *Ruhender Verkehr* (Stationary Traffic), just outside Galerie Art Intermedia in Cologne, Germany – three months prior to the making of *Concrete Traffic* in Chicago. Consisting of an Opel Kapitän completely encased in concrete, Vostell made the sculpture with the assistance of a structural engineer and another sculptor who had trained as a mason. West German filmmaker Paul Karalus documented the stages of the sculpture's production, including its unveiling on October 13, 1969, where Vostell can be seen planting a parking meter next to the sculpture. A part of Karalus's film *Vostell und andere, oder Lippenstifte für Vietnam* (Vostell and others, or Lipsticks for Vietnam), the footage initially aired on WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk), a regional public-broadcasting company in West Germany.

Allan Kaprow

Starting in the 1950s, Allan Kaprow pioneered the theory and practice of environmental and performance art, coining the term "Happenings" to describe a new form of performance event. Kaprow's work often attempted to blur the boundary between art and life, and over time his happenings evolved from tightly scripted events into looser structures involving more everyday activities. *Pose* documents a two-day performance where Kaprow and his friends walked around Berkeley, California carrying chairs. Pictures were taken periodically and left on the sites where they were sat upon.