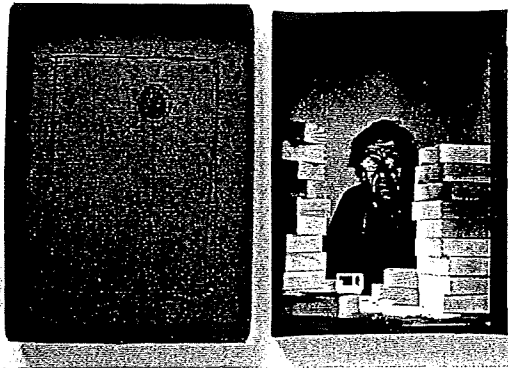


Robert Filliou

PETER FREEMAN, INC.

A notable Fluxus figure, the polymath Robert Filliou died in 1987; this presentation, Filliou's first overview in New York in more than a decade, is culled from his estate. My soft spot for Fluxus admitted, I nevertheless propose that much of his work fails to stir at this late date. Take, as but a single example, *Man Carrying His Own Sun on a String*, 1973. On the interior lid of a shallow, corrugated cardboard box—a preferred format of the artist—the artist's arrestingly homely bespectacled face peers out from a photograph; on the box's bottom, which here is positioned to the left of the lid, he has drawn a childlike pastel of the titular scene. Such coy infantilism seems a considerable devolution from the cloaked social comment once implicit to Fluxus work of barely a decade before.



Robert Filliou, *Man Carrying His Own Sun on a String*, 1973, cardboard box, black-and-white photograph, pastel, 17 1/2 x 25 x 2 3/4".

Of course, to speak of Fluxus is to recall an international cluster of individuals—*Artistes Sans Frontières*, as it were—whose highly disparate intentions intersected in a mission to extinguish art's sacred aura. Put off by the pretensions of high art and marked by dadaist inclinations, Fluxus aspired to works so humbly embodied, or so sophomorically droll, as to test and, in that sense, expand the very boundaries of what could even pass for art at all.

Granting such aspirations, Fluxus, as conceived and baptized by George Maciunas in his Fluxus Manifesto of 1963, was expanded through its global affiliations, pro tem agreements with the *Affichistes*, New Realists, neo-Dadaists, Zero Group, and the *École de Nice* crowd, among still others. Certain occasional participants, already recognized as big guns from the outset—Joseph Beuys, say, or Yves Klein—now loom even larger, especially when compared to Fluxus's more Ionescan, Theatre of the Ridiculous writer-artists: Filliou or Ben Vautier, for example. One is, in such instances, reluctant to admit the gravity deemed necessary to a conclusive body of work though, to be fair, it was gravity itself that Fluxus most resisted from the outset.

Thus figures such as Robert Filliou now appear lighter than they did when their art was bolstered by the background of a perceived enemy—particularly the United States, which had been “criminalized” for its role during the Vietnam misadventure and for its moral complicity in the imperialism then speciously attributed to the success of American painting. Such attitudes conferred upon Fluxus manifestations—even the more amusing ones, such as Charlotte Moorman playing her cello in her Nam June Paik television brassiere, or the Fluxus broadsides, dancelike directives, and joke-shop gewgaws—a pertinence, both slapstick and grim.

Among the larger works included in the present show is a suite of three photographs, made with Scott Hyde, each depicting an open left hand—Filliou's own, and those of his friends Bob Watts and Marisol. Inescapably, these images evoke the richly associative handprints found in prehistoric cave paintings at Pech-Merle or Chauvet in France, a reference that seems iconographic overkill. The timelessness of cave painting has been more credibly reenacted elsewhere, in Jackson Pollock's *Number 1A*, 1948, say, in which handprints mark the upper edge. (Though Filliou's death in a monastery in Les Eyzies, a town near Lascaux, does lend these photos a premonitory air.)

Prehistoric association may lend meaning to the broken brick and twine seen as a caveman's electrical box found in *Western Mandala*, 1989, but one among several broken-brick works. The piece is cartoonish and brash. Thus, in such readings, Robert Filliou is cast as Fred Flintstone at Home Depot. Maybe so, maybe not.

—Robert Pincus-Witten

Dara Birnbaum

MARIAN GOODMAN

How often has one sat on a subway next to a man sitting with legs spread wide enough to occupy two seats? He commands space by physical gesture alone—and women rarely adopt a similarly dominating pose. In Dara Birnbaum's mid-1970s video explorations of social conventions surrounding women's postures and self-presentation, she tests the long-accepted custom of “being a good girl and keeping your legs crossed.” Demure Birnbaum is not, in *Chaired Anxieties: Abandoned*, 1975, as she performs a sequence of movements in a simple wooden folding chair. With a fixed camera setup, the five-plus-minute work captures the artist entering a pose—presenting her crotch to the camera in a wide straddle so that it is centered in the frame, for example—and holding the position for an uncomfortably long moment. The effect is shocking.

What men can get away with, and women can't, is the subject of many of the works in the exhibition, including the most recent. *Arabesque*, 2011, is a four-channel video installation exploring the lopsided legacies of two virtuoso piano compositions: *Romanze 1*, Opus 11, by Clara Schumann, and, *Arabesque Opus 18*, by her husband, Robert. Birnbaum appropriates footage from YouTube of performances of each, and juxtaposes them with stills from *Song of Love*, a 1947 Hollywood biopic about the couple. It is no surprise that Robert's composition, featured in the film's sound track, outnumbers Clara's one hundred to one in contemporary online clips. As Birnbaum writes in the press release, “One could argue that the ‘Arabesque’ and ‘Romanze 1’ are equally excellent compositions.” Yet Robert's is hailed as a “masterpiece.” Why is this the case? Birnbaum goes on to expose the double shift that women artists, such as Clara Schumann, have frequently worked. “It was Clara who had to carry on when Robert went through his periods of depression and madness and eventually died,” Birnbaum points out. “She took care of the family (they had eight

Dara Birnbaum, *Chaired Anxieties: Abandoned*, 1975, still from a black-and-white video, 5 minutes 15 seconds.



children) and supported them through her playing." Clara was a roadie on Robert's gigs, while having to play her own shows and raise the kids too. With so much on her plate, she could not embody the role of tortured genius to which that era of Romantic music was so inextricably linked. Comparing Clara's neglected career to Robert's valorized one reveals the mechanisms by which women are traditionally excluded from the canon of historical value, and the logistics of caregiving and child care that make that devaluation so easy.

To counter these kinds of omissions, Birnbaum, in her early work, literally put herself back in the picture. In *Attack Piece*, 1975, she puns on the military lingo of "capturing" someone—in this case, capturing their image—by orchestrating a complex circuit of representation in which her own image is duplicated. The work consists of two facing projections of Birnbaum, filmed by male collaborators in 16 mm as she shot them with a still camera. The moving images depict her seated cross-legged on a grassy lawn, holding the camera to her eye, checking the settings, shooting and advancing the film. The still images from that camera are shown as a succession of slides. In her refusal to be the passive subject of the image—the model, gazed upon by men—she inverts traditional gender roles. She also adopts the role of artist twofold: as the producer of her own image—the motion pictures she asked to have made—and as the author of the photographs she produced in the process.

—Eva Díaz

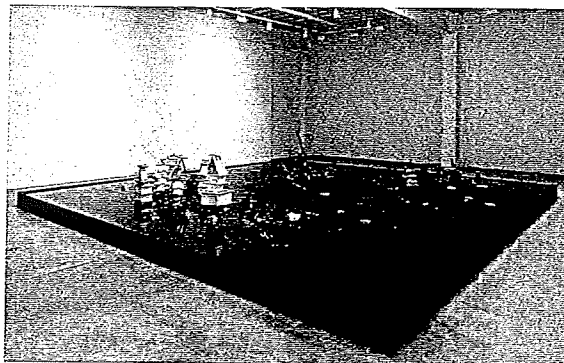
Peter Nadin

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE

Before he stopped exhibiting in 1992, Peter Nadin was associated with many of the leading protagonists in the New York art world of the time. He ran a studio/exhibition space whose first show was with Christopher D'Arcangelo, collaborated with Jenny Holzer, and showed at Richard Prince's short-lived gallery Spiritual America. But then he spent more than a decade "unlearn[ing] how to make art," during which time he worked as a farmer in upstate New York, and also taught a course at Cooper Union about biological theories of consciousness and their relationship to art-making.

Nadin's recent exhibition at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, his first commercial show in almost twenty years, sought to bring together these apparently diverse preoccupations. It featured a pop-up farm store selling "honey, maple syrup, tisane, coffee, pâté, rillettes, and eggs." It hosted evening events such as a "young farmer panel" and a discussion about hydro-fracking. Copies of a stylish old-fashioned newspaper, *The Bugle*, were available for the taking, with articles about farming, food, and art. But there was also an imposing, more traditional exhibition, made up of paintings, sculptures, and an installation. Several of the materials in these works are also derived from Nadin's farm, however. Beeswax, honey, walnut paint, and cashmere give life to the accretions, splashes, and blotches in his vigorous abstract paintings; rough-hewn hemlock trunks serve as tall, totem-pole-like pillars supporting arrangements of boxes and free form terra cotta shapes in the room-filling assemblage *The Bo'sun's Chair*, 2011; six thousand pounds of low-grade honey serve as the base of the installation *The Raft*, 2011, which also includes a ham.

No Farms, No Food. You Are What You Eat. The slow, sustainable, organic, local food movements attract in part because they are premised on going back to basics. In analogous but more mystical terms, Nadin has said that he "moved on from representing consciousness to trying to embody it. To paint the experience, not the objects, of the underlying process of consciousness itself." But *The Raft*, the pièce de résistance of the exhibition, works quite differently. The viscous contents of the twenty-square-foot vat, made from hickory wood, smell rich and deep



Peter Nadin,
The Raft, 2011,
honey, terra-cotta,
wood, twine, bank
run, wax, and ham,
24' x 24' x 9½".

throughout the space. In spite of Nadin's turn away from figuration—the bananas, crosses, and human figures that populate his earlier canvases—*The Raft* has a back-to-the-land poetry that suggests its own kind of literalism. (It is interesting to note that the artist cites Hudson River School painter Thomas Cole as an influence.) In atmosphere and arrangement the work evokes the shallows of a bend in a Catskills river, even with the constructions of flotsam and jetsam—small, birdhouse-like shelters, damaged terra-cotta pots, and a little raft of sticks tied together with twine supporting the ham. One might, moreover, see the almost-black pool itself as a kind of riposte to the engine oil that makes up the dystopic sublime of Richard Wilson's *20:50*, 1987. This is realer, scrappier, more organic.

The half-dozen eggs I bought from the farm stand for three bucks, meanwhile, were packaged in a carton on which handwriting proclaimed DIVERSIFIED FLOCK. BRIGHT YELLOW YOLK. They tasted good, and looked extraordinary, in shades of brown, white, and blue. While Nadin insists that "a carrot is not a work of art," the surprise of seeing farm produce for sale in a gallery pointed to the strangeness of the various frames and discourses being brought together here. And while it's not unfair to suggest that the gallery-going audience may also be interested in the problems of groundwater pollution resulting from natural-gas exploration, it was difficult not to feel that art, agriculture, food, and the nature of consciousness are cakes that are hard to have and to eat in a single sitting—especially in a white cube. For all the desires of which it spoke, this exhibition shied away from exploring the fissures their divergence creates.

—Alexander Scrimgeour

"Hasta Mañana"

GREENE NAFTALI

"Hasta Mañana," ABBA's 1974 Swedish hit, barely cracked the charts overseas. But the sappy tune's tale of a summer fling that never fully blossomed—and the attendant pain of losing, pleasure of forgetting, and indifference one needs to move on—remains universal. Though the organizers of "Hasta Mañana," a group show at Greene Naftali, may not have had this song in mind, the doleful dirge is nonetheless a fitting anthem for the contemplative yet spirited exhibition. Employing current modes of art production and an up-to-the-moment perspective, the five artists on view use the past to inspire soulful, empathic takes on digital technologies. A sense of handcraftedness upends technophilic idioms, revealing a sensitivity to what once was.

Ken Okiishi, not one to shy away from anachronistic practices, communes with one of his idols in his photographic series *David Wojnarowicz*