

ROBERT FILLIOU. *Genius without Talent*

MEDIA PRESENTATION: WEDNESDAY, 9 APRIL, 2003, 11.30 a.m.

Opening: 10 April 2003, 7.30 p.m.

Exhibition dates: 11 April – 24 June 2003

Guest Curator: Sylvie Jouval

Coproduction: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona - Museum Kunst Palast Düsseldorf - Musée d'Art Moderne Lille Métropole.

The **Robert Filliou. *Genius without Talent*** exhibition is an exploration of thirty years in the permanent creation of the French artist Robert Filliou (1926-1987) through over 170 works, which makes it his most complete retrospective to date.

Robert Filliou is still a great unknown, despite being regarded now as a cult artist and one of the most offbeat creators in the European art history of the second half of the 20th century. Enrolled by art history in the international and interdisciplinary movement Fluxus, close to *poésie concrète* and heir to Surrealism, the originality and conceptual wealth of his life and artistic career defies any kind of reductionist categorisation. It was in the sixties when the Rumanian actionist Daniel Spoerri introduced him to progressive artistic circles in Paris and he began to devote himself increasingly to art. He spent long periods in Düsseldorf, where he worked alongside artists such as Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers and Dieter Roth.

Endowed with a very subtle sense of humour, Filliou's works are marked by their extreme formal simplicity. They are nomadic, portable and precarious, and span a wide range of registers, such as poetry, drama, sculpture, cinema or performance. A defender of the small and the everyday, sceptical about grandiloquent pronouncements, a pacifist familiar with Buddhist thought, he affirmed innocence, the power of the imagination, freedom and intangibility as primordial human values.

Filliou considered that everyone carries a genius inside but the exercise of their talents prevents them from revealing and developing it. He placed more emphasis on artistic behaviour than on the object and preferred the term creativity to art. In his case artistic creation is a permanent, emancipating process which he calls "Permanent Creation"; it invites participation and may happen anywhere.

This exhibition is a coproduction by MACBA, the Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf (where it will be shown from July to November 2003) and the Musée d'Art Moderne Lille Métropole, in Villeneuve d'Ascq (where it will be shown from December 2003 to March 2004).

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11 April - 29 June 2003

**“Living, playing and loving belong to the sphere of genius;
the institution of the State, the police, factories and the family are,
though, the outcome of our talents.”**

Robert Filliou

The exhibition *Robert Filliou. Genius without Talent* covers thirty years of creative work by the French artist Robert Filliou (Sauve, 1926 – Les Eyzies, 1987) and comprises more than 180 works. This retrospective, the most complete to date of the artist, has been co-produced by the Dusseldorf kunst palast and the Musée d'art moderne Lille Métropole Villeneuve-D'Ascq.

Robert Filliou remains a great unknown, despite being regarded as a cult artist and one of the most offbeat creators of the second half of the 20th century. A member of the international Fluxus movement, the originality and conceptual richness of his personal and artistic career defy classification. Filliou's works are endowed with an extremely subtle sense of humour; they abound in wordplay and are characterised by their extreme formal simplicity and the poverty of their materials. They are nomadic, portable and precarious, and cover a wide range of areas, such as poetry, theatre, sculpture, cinema, video and performance.

Robert Filliou's youth was marked by the Second World War and his involvement in the French Resistance. In 1948 he moved to Los Angeles, where he studied political economy; later he was assigned to South Korea as a United Nations official. There he drafted a socio-economic reconstruction plan and discovered Taoism and Zen. After quitting his post in 1954, he travelled to countries like Egypt and Spain and began working on a new theory of values. For Filliou art was a vector of social change and freedom in opposition to dominant determinism and his intention was to communicate a new "art of living." During this period he began writing a book devoted to Charles Fourier, in which he set out the principles of his new poetic economics and his reflections on the workings of the system, which would materialise as *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, published in 1970.

In the 60s Filliou chanced to meet Daniel Spoerri, who introduced him to the progressive artistic circles of Paris. At that time Robert Filliou was working on one of his basic ideas, the notion of "permanent creation." Creativity, a term he preferred to art, has the ability to emancipate the innate faculties of the individual by means of innocence and imagination. His notion of creativity posited the invention, the idea, along with its implementation, although Filliou paid more attention to the experience, to the act, than to the formal artistic quality arrived at. He considered that genius is an a priori attribute of human

existence, but that most people are too preoccupied with exercising their talents. “Permanent creation” is a process which calls for participation and may occur anywhere, as he demonstrated in his work *L’Immortelle Mort du monde* (1960). Defined by him as “visual poetry,” this is a collage-text inspired by Daniel Spoerri’s principles of “dynamic theatre” and “autotheatre,” into which Filliou introduces random, playful structures and which is presented in the form of a poster.

In the early 60s Filliou also did events in the street, alone or in collaboration with Emmett Williams, and he was one of the precursors of “action poetry.” We encounter an example of this in *Galerie Légitime* (1962), a hat converted into a travelling gallery and full of tiny objects created by him or by such other artists as Benjamin Patterson and Georges Maciunas, which Filliou presented directly to the audience in the street. This exhibition contains a facsimile that enables the public to make a paper hat of its own.

In 1963, with Joachim Pfeufer, Filliou planned the *Poïpoïdrome*, a centre of “permanent creation” consisting of an installation with various elements, in which the public’s participation is fundamental. Later, other presentations would take place, such as *Poïpoïdrome à espace-temps réel-Prototype 00* (1975) and *Hommages aux Dogons et aux Rimbauds*. This was a space of interchange between Western and non-Western cultures whose minimum optimal system is defined as a table and chair. In 1965 the need to share and exchange ideas led him to open *La Cédille qui sourit* with George Brecht, conceived as an international centre of “permanent creation,” a Fluxus-style school-cum-workshop in which humour, detachment, goodwill and participation were fundamental. With no teachers or students, they invited other artists and created games, poems and puzzles that they sold by post and which would become the forerunners of mail art.

Due to his precarious economic situation, Robert Filliou quit the South of France in 1968 for Düsseldorf, where the art world was more disposed towards contemporary praxis. There he managed to exhibit many of his ideas, thanks to the collaboration and friendship of artists like Dieter Roth and Joseph Beuys, and he maintained a close relationship with Marcel Broodthaers' circle. This was when he developed a system that identified art with the world, *The Eternal Network / La Fête permanente*, in which he shared with Fluxus the idea that each activity is part of a much greater network, which led him to consider notions like the avant-garde or anti-art to be irrelevant and to seek the collaboration of different disciplines vis-à-vis a single proposition. In 1969 he created a "conceptual tool" with infinite possibilities, the *Principe d'équivalence: bien fait - mal fait - pas fait*. The equivalence of the idea (yet to be done), the model (done well) and the mistake (done badly) denotes a combative attitude towards the problems of production, reception and perception of works of art.

In 1970 Filliou announced "to the governments of Europe which have confronted each other so often in war" the creation of a joint committee, COMMEMOR, for the exchange of war memorials between countries, a work he integrated into *A Contribution to the Art of Peace*. The following year he installed himself in the rooms of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which he baptised *Territoire de la République Géniale* (1971), a project that invited the public to create its own territory, its own "republic" where human genius could develop unchecked. From 1976 onwards Filliou analysed the mode of communication in itself, as can be appreciated in the series *Telepathic Music*, in which the influence of John Cage is visible, or in *Towards an International Sign Language* (1978), in which he proposed a sign language founded on intuition for UNESCO.



Filliou's experiments with cinema, beginning with George Brecht and Bob Guiny and their *Movie Re-Invented / Hommage à Méliès (prochainement sur cet écran)* (1968), continued from 1977 onwards with video in Canada. In these he investigated the illusion of interactivity and feedback with the spectator. In the 80s he worked on such pieces as the *Briquolages* series (a play on the words *brique*—brick—and *collage*, which go to form the French word for DIY, *bricolage*) and *Eins. Un. One...* (1984), an installation consisting of thousands of coloured dice with a one on all six faces. In the last years of his life he retired to a Tibetan monastery in France.

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