

Exposing the synergies between Fluxus and NFTs, and their value in the corporate world

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Abstract

In the last decade, Fluxus has been a major influence on the art world. Today, the use of blockchain technology has led to the development of new art forms through the advancement of NFTs (non-fungible tokens), which have the potential to democratise the art world in a way that Fluxus did not. This paper exposes the synergies between Fluxus and NFT art and discusses the current state-of-the-art industry in the context of Fluxus and NFTs and their impact on the corporate world. It also discusses how NFTs can help artists and organisations engage communities and help build stronger relationships with their customers and employees by allowing them to connect on a deeper level.

Keywords

Fluxus, NFTs, Concept Art, Corporate Art, Corporate NFTs

Introduction

Fluxus is a way of doing things, a tradition and a way of life and death; a community. Emerging from a community over 70 years ago, Fluxus gained its recognition in 1962. Some called it “the most radical and experimental art movement of the sixties” (Ruhé, 1979), and some said it is more than an art movement, a way of life that the community adheres to. Today, looking back at the Fluxus community, and exploring Fluxus artists and artworks, many more people feel that Fluxus was creating art based on radical and experimental processes empowered by the community, but few could say why.

It is crucial to remember that the Fluxus community were at the forefront of sixties avant-garde and asked common questions still relevant today: What is Art? What is art worth? Can anyone make art? Fast forward to the current days, and we see the emergence of the NFT (non-fungible token) movement. But is it an art movement? Or a way of life and death for the community?

While Fluxus pieces were often ephemeral pieces challenging to collect and codify, NFTs, on the other hand, are, in their very essence, traceable collectables digital artworks. But are artists and their artworks very similar characteristics?

Both movements are based on community involvement and rely on public support, both avoid traditional art methods by focusing on the process instead of the finished product, and both use symbolic imagery to criticize their current political situation.

The Fluxus movement was influential in the development of NFTs, as it explored the potential of using non-physical objects to represent value.

Discussion

George Maciunas, a Lithuanian native, wrote "The Genesis" and presented it at the Festum Fluxorum in Dusseldorf in 1963 as a means of encouraging the world to get rid of what he called "dead art." This included things like imitation and Abstract Expressionism. He wanted

art to reflect reality instead of being based on illusions; living art promoting not-art reality to be grasped by all people not only critics and art professionals.

The manifesto wasn't necessarily a philosophical statement, but a response to a last-minute request to present a form of manifesto at the performance, that "nobody was willing to sign" as Dick Higgins (1987, p.219) who was present at the festum Fluxorum notes. However, the manifesto's improvised nature, the discrepancy between the tone and the failure to launch, is in fact, in many ways, the genesis and the characteristics of Fluxus.

Originally intended by Maciunas, as a magazine promoting the work of young experimental artists, Fluxus soon became an organisational platform for performances in several European cities. The Fluxus movement and Fluxus artists were trying to democratise the art world, and their vision exhibits similar characteristics as the NFT's communities.

Fluxus has in a way, managed to elude definition or compartmentalisation over the years. Some characterised it as "the most radical art and experimental movement of the sixties" (Ruhe 1979, p.1) or "a singularly strange phenomenon in the history of the arts of the twentieth century" (Doris 1998, p. 91) or "an active philosophy of experience that only sometimes takes the form of art" (Friedman 1998, p. ix). Often described as the most radical and experimental art movement of the post-war era, Fluxus was an international network of artists, with an artistic philosophy that valued process over product; thus, many Fluxus works are simple and humorous.

With this desire also came another perspective from those that avowedly admire the closure-resistant spirit of Fluxus but nevertheless wish to define or ground it: "While we cannot help but applaud their efforts to democratise the art experience, we cannot but be somewhat aware that concepts such as "democratization" and "the arts" may well be mutually exclusive" statement voiced by art historian Ester Millan in the article "Fluxus and the Democratization of Art".

In her book *Fluxus: The Practice of Non-Duality*, Natasha Lushetich, journeys through a range of events, rituals, activities, objects, and systems of economic exchange to show how Fluxus

Operates as a practice of non-duality, with the most distinguishable feature perhaps being the discrepancy between simplicity and complexity, as astoundingly simple works are discussed in complex ways (Lushetich, 2014).

Maciunas, Higgins and Knowles's series of Fluxus publications and Fluxfests across the western Europe in 1962, and the cheap, mass-produced Fluxkits originally indented to form an ever-expanding library of modern performance art, all pieces of work that require community engagement, shares a lot of similarities with contemporary NFT collections, and NFT communities.

Fluxus created original and often surprising objects and social experiences, driving community engagement, and bringing about economic and social change by combining minimalism, poetry, conceptual art and music into an intermedia production that was mainly identifiable through the attitude towards art rather than through a specific distinct style, integrating life into art through the use of events sounds and materials.

Fast forward a few and a similar movement was born through the emergence of new technologies and a new form of community engagement. But are there synergies between Fluxus and NFTs?

While the Fluxus movement preceded the development of NFTs, both are relatively new; Fluxus began in the early 1960s, while NFTs have only been around since 2017. There are many synergies between Fluxus and NFTs. Fluxus and NFTs place value and emphasize process over the final product, and both can be used to create and sell unique works of art. Additionally, both are international in scope, and both Fluxus artists and NFT creators have been known to use humour in their work.

One key difference between Fluxus and NFTs is that Fluxus was primarily a physical movement, while NFTs are digital. This means that NFTs are more accessible to a broader audience; anyone with an internet connection can create or purchase an NFT. NFTs also have the potential to be more profitable than Fluxus art. While Fluxus artists often gave away their

work or sold it for very low prices, NFTs can fetch high prices on the open market. For example, an NFT called "Crypto Punks" recently sold for \$9 million (Hern).

With their combination of accessibility, international scope, and profitability, NFTs have the potential to democratise the art world in a way that Fluxus did not. NFTs could allow anyone, anywhere, to create and sell art without needing to go through traditional channels.

With the rise of NFTs and Crypto Art, Fluxus is worth investigating. The ultimate avant-garde movement of the 60s encapsulated the eternal question: what is art? Can anyone make art? In the Crypto industry, the rise of NFTs has reverbed this fundamental question. Just like the radical Fluxus art, crypto art is difficult to collect or own in the traditional sense, with both concepts removing art from the mainstream museums and a gallery's wall, working to overturn cultural conventions, revolutionarily declaring that art is for everyone, and art could be anything.

Half a century later, the Fluxus movement is still alive through contemporary artists who continue to practice the Fluxus values. From an art history point of view, we can trace the path from Dadaism to Fluxus to Andy Warhol's factory, to street art and notable artists like Banksy and reaching today with the NFT Crypto art movement.

In the true sense NFTs are not artworks, but a way of authentication and ownership validation, non-fungible tokens that exist on the blockchain and encoded as smart contracts. In the end, its software that facilitates the movement of goods and references said goods on a public ledger, but art happens to be the most traded good that sparked the rise of the NFT movement and the unique, quirky culture evolving with it.

When an artist's work is minted as an NFT on the blockchain, the artwork itself, usually a PNG or GIF image, is not actually uploaded to the blockchain, but instead, a metadata packet is uploaded in the form of a JSON file, while the metadata, the token, only points to the artwork storage area; the artwork file is stored somewhere else, like an IPFS, The Interplanetary File System, a decentralised storage protocol, hypermedia and file sharing peer-to-peer network for storing and sharing data in a distributed file system. Wikipedia's editors determined that

NFTs should not be classified as 'art' due to the technical aspects mentioned above, considering that reducing the artwork to its connected token flattens its creative merit. To provide a better understanding, an analogy would be framing the receipt from the purchase of a painting on the wall of a gallery calling it art. The NFTs, in the end, are a demarcation of ownership, proof of purchase and ownership rights on a transparent ledger. However, the boom in notoriety was due to artists that have put their inspiration into unique creations.

NFTs might not be artwork themselves, but certain artists and notable artworks only exist as digital creators and digital art as NFTs, relying on the principles of blockchain contracts to conceptualise value. Some artists, like Rhea Myers, created a body of work where the blockchain tokens are the artwork rather than an artwork file as a separate entity. A reflective contemporary example is her piece *Tokens Equal Text* (2019), consisting of composable and unique 32 ERC-998 tokens; each, in turn, owns four ERC-721 tokens. Strings of numbers were replaced by Myers with words to shape the metadata for each ERC-721, turning the contract itself into a work of art, playing with the infrastructure and calling attention to the infrastructure of NFTs.

Some artists like Danielle Shirley used NFTs to leverage the symbolic value, creating a code of conduct that decrees certain rights and protections for Black Trans people, stipulating that everyone who purchases a piece must abide by the terms and conditions set forth by the artwork *Terms and Conditions* (2021).

Other artists are using the new medium in various ways, from influencing the relationship between multiple artworks on the blockchain to creating dynamic paintings leveraging the functionality of tokenized art ecosystems, dreaming of new ways to control the contractual mechanics, an art form in its own.

Contemporary artists have explored their relationship with blockchain contracts for a few years. While the blockchain art scene is solidifying, some artists like Beeple, a digital artist, graphic designer and animator, and Pak, a Fluxus-inspired conceptual artist who uses non-traditional materials, have become veterans in this new unconventional art space due to their achievements, primarily sales numbers through auction houses but also their vast body of

work. One thing is agreed upon and accepted by all artists and the apparatus of the art world; blockchain and smart contracts are here to stay.

NFTs-producing artists depict a spirit like Fluxus artists, portraying themselves as explorers on the cutting edge of art and technology, challenging what art is and can be. The NFT movement, like the Fluxus movement, rejects art history; both value process over the finished product and focus on community engagement. At the same time, the culture around it criticises its respective political environments through satirical imagery and symbolism.

It can be argued that both NFTs, with their fixed and adaptable qualities and the Fluxus movement, aim to create a particular contract between the artwork and the artist, but most importantly, the participating audience at the intersection of art business and politics.

In 1970 when Knud Pedersen wrote about Fluxus and the relationship between art, business, and politics, he summed up the issues at stake quite well:

“Collaboration between art and business more than party games for limited companies. If the artist who sets it up remains an alien element, and if his idea is not treated seriously, it will become a party game, pure and simple. But if the artist is one of the company’s employees, or if he’s engaged to do his job as part of the company’s activities, the party game can become an art.” (Pedersen, 1970)

While both movements have a commercial aspect, now more than ever, NFTs have given artists leverage in reselling rights and new opportunities emerging through community engagement and the corporate world. Some artists see amplified success, giving meaning to work through the charged social environment around the artwork sold as an NFT, and the communities play a massive role in that.

NFTs offer several advantages to businesses. They are a secure way to store digital assets and can be used to track provenance. Additionally, NFTs can be used to create loyalty programs and reward systems. Given the many benefits that NFTs offer, it is not surprising that many businesses are adopting them.

The value of NFTs lies in their uniqueness. Because they cannot be replaced, they can be used to represent ownership of digital assets that are themselves unique, such as artwork or collectables. This makes them exceptionally well suited for use in the corporate world, where authenticity and provenance are important considerations.

Corporate art is a type of art created for or on behalf of a corporation. It can take many forms, from paintings and sculptures to installations and public artworks. The term "corporate art" can also refer to the collection and display of art by corporations, usually in their office spaces.

The value of art in the corporate environment can be seen in a few different ways. First, there is the value that art brings to a company in terms of its image and branding. A company associated with high-quality art is likely to be perceived as more sophisticated and upscale than one without any skill on its premises. This can be a valuable selling point for potential clients or partners. Fluxus has had a significant influence on corporate art. The focus on playfulness, experimentation, and blurring the lines between art and life resonates with many businesses looking to add creativity and innovation to their workplace. Another way to look at the value of art in the corporate environment is through the lens of employee morale and productivity. Studies have shown that employees who work in environments with well-chosen, thoughtfully curated artwork tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and more productive overall (Brewer, 2016).

And then there are the more concrete financial benefits of investing in art. These days, there are several ways to monetise art, from selling pieces outright to partnering with Fluxus artists or artists creating NFTs for concept art (and beyond) and as such, investing in art can be a way to generate additional revenue for the organisation.

Community engagement art is a type of art that involves the community in its creation or display. This type of art can take many different forms, but it can include elements of Fluxus and NFTs. Community engagement art can be a way to connect people with the arts, and it can also be used to raise awareness about important issues.

Art can play a significant role in fostering creativity in the corporate environment. A study found that employees with art in their workplaces were more likely to develop original ideas and better at problem-solving. The researchers believe this is because looking at art can help to stimulate the brain and get the creative juices flowing. (Smiraglia, 2014)

While NFTs are still in their early days, although no confirmed studies yet, there is already a growing interest in corroborating evidence that suggests they can have a positive impact on employee productivity.

NFT art can be used to support a wide variety of causes. For example, businesses can use NFT art to raise money for charities or to help promote environmental protection. NFT art can also be used to support social justice initiatives or help businesses connect with their local communities.

Conclusion

Fluxus artists sought to break down the barriers between high art and everyday life and to use simple materials and techniques in innovative ways. Fluxus art continues to exert a significant influence on contemporary art practice. Later generations of artists have taken up many of its ideas and techniques. The Fluxus movement was ahead of its time in many ways, but it was limited by the technology of the time. NFTs have the potential to fulfil the Fluxus vision on a global scale.

In conclusion, Fluxus and NFTs share many similarities, and NFTs offer several advantages to businesses as well. As the use of NFTs continues to grow, we will likely see more Fluxus-inspired artworks created using this new technology. There is a lot of potential for Fluxus and NFTs to work together. Fluxus artists could create artworks stored as NFTs, and businesses could use NFTs to increase creativity, productivity, responsibility and community engagement.

NFT art can play a significant role in the corporate world for several reasons.

Firstly, NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) are a new and exciting way to collect and display art. They are digital assets stored on a blockchain, meaning they are immutable and unique. This makes them ideal for businesses that want to collect and display rare or one-of-a-kind art pieces.

Secondly, NFTs provide a new way for businesses to engage with their customers and clients. By collecting and displaying NFT art, companies can show that they are keeping up with the latest trends and technologies. This can help companies to attract new customers and retain or reactivate existing ones.

Finally, NFTs offer businesses a new way to support the arts. By collecting and displaying NFT art, companies can help to promote and fund the artists who create it. This can positively impact both the local and global art scene.

Businesses can use NFT art to create unique and memorable customer experiences. By creating NFT art, companies can offer their customers a chance to interact with their brand in a new and exciting way. Additionally, NFT art can help companies to build stronger relationships with their customers by allowing them to connect on a deeper level.

Further research into this space could assess the qualitative and quantitative impact NFT art has on the productivity of the business, the creativity and engagement of employees, stakeholders, and partners, as well as the engagement and the impact of the organisation on the community through art-related social responsibility programs.

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