

David Petersen Gallery

Scrub, Cacti, and Some Tree

Ryan Foerster, Lukas Geronimas, Jo Baer, Pati Hill, Laurie Anderson, Stanley Broun

Alison Knowles, Robert Filliou, Ben Patterson, Chrysta, Kishio Suga

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Who among us hasn't wanted to castaway to the paradise of a deserted island? Find me someone who has never thought of owning a seemingly floating plot of land completely surrounded by endless water, as distant from the world's realities as is the farthest star, and you'll have found a liar. This isn't meant to judge, I get it, life's not always easy, sometimes it is downright difficult, and at its worst, unforgivingly cruel. Entire airline marketing campaigns have taken advantage of this over the years, selling seats to travelers seeking some sunny peace and quiet in the Bahamas or South Pacific. But we aren't just talking about vacation, this is the real deal, pack your bags, sell the house, sell the car, sell the kids if you're really hardcore. This is forever, an island all your own. Dreams do come true.

By 1969 it must have felt like the world was rushing to its end. Maybe that's how you feel today. Violence here, violence there, violence pretty much everywhere, the 60's began with the Eichmann trial revealing to the world the true horrors humans can inflict upon other humans even from the comfort of a government office, and ended with the police murdering Fred Hampton in his apartment in Chicago's West Side because they couldn't stand a black man feeding breakfast to black children, or, more dangerously to J. Edgar Hoover, uniting activists with the Rainbow Coalition. Horrific wars and desperate riots, one assassination after another, if the 1960's didn't make you want to disappear as far as possible from its burning inferno, if your conscience and consciousness could no longer tolerate the demonstrations and the trials and the massacres and the serial killers, if you were mad as hell and just couldn't take it anymore, well, you might have wanted to go ahead and find yourself an island. Maybe that's how you feel today.

And in 1969 George Maciunas set out to do just that. A Lithuania-born American artist whose parents fled to the US to evade Russian capture, Maciunas wanted to purchase Ginger Island, a creature-shaped refuge in the British Virgin Islands. While this may sound both absurd and, frankly, about the most privileged thing someone could do at the end of an absolute shitshow of a decade, he intended to transform the place into a Fluxus Colony for other artists whose work prioritized process over product and were looking to abandon their Soho studios for 276 acres of scrub, cacti and some trees. One helluva escapist fantasy, but could you really blame him for giving it a shot? And what if he had pulled it off? Imagine fifty years later an autonomous artists' cooperative that had solved its water, electricity, and sanitation needs, not to mention farming and a food supply, health and childcare, and maybe someone got around to building that dock.

Alas, this venture never became more than a business plan. The more I think about Ginger Island, it's probably for the best. We will never know if Maciunas and his cohort of artists were able to realize a Fluxus utopia, or descended into a disastrous Lord of the Flies situation, or if Maciunas was just a real estate developer in artist's clothing. It's easier to raise the dead than get out of a timeshare. Maciunas's work isn't even in this show, although his spirit is everywhere. Just look at what we've done to the place, and we're only getting started. There's plenty of art, past, present and future, a path upon which to take it all in, and we planted a tree out front. I think George would have liked that quite a bit.