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DUCHAMP LIFE AND WORK

Press release

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Victor Obsatz
Portrait of Marcel Duchamp
1953
© Moeller Fine Art,
New York 2008



Exhibition

**Marcel Duchamp: a work that is
not a work “of art”**

**From 11.22.08
Until 02.01.09**

Open
Tuesday to Sunday from 11.00 to 19.00
Monday closed

Admission \$ 10,
Students \$ 6, Senior citizens \$ 3

Curator
Elena Filipovic

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Biography

● MD_Biography.doc

Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp was born July 28, 1887, near Blainville, France. In 1904, he joined his artist brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, in Paris, where he studied painting at the Académie Julian until 1905. Duchamp's early works were Post-Impressionist in style. He exhibited for the first time in 1909 at the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne in Paris.

His paintings of 1911 were directly related to Cubism but emphasized successive images of a single body in motion. In 1912, he painted the definitive version of *Nude Descending a Staircase*; this was shown at the Salon de la Section d'Or of that same year and subsequently created great controversy at the Armory Show in New York in 1913.

Duchamp's radical and iconoclastic ideas predated the founding of the Dada movement in Zurich in 1916. By 1913, he had abandoned traditional painting and drawing for various experimental forms, including mechanical drawings, studies, and notations that would be incorporated in a major work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23; also known as *The Large Glass*). In 1914, Duchamp introduced his readymades—common objects, sometimes altered, presented as works of art—which had a revolutionary impact upon many painters and sculptors. In 1915, Duchamp traveled to New York, where his circle included Katherine Dreier and Man Ray, with whom he founded the Société Anonyme in 1920, as well as Louise and Walter Arensberg, Francis Picabia, and other avant-garde figures.

After playing chess avidly for nine months in Buenos Aires, Duchamp returned to France in the summer of 1919 and associated with the Dada group in Paris. In New York in 1920, he made his first motor-driven constructions and invented *Rose Sélavy*, his feminine alter ego. Duchamp moved back to Paris in 1923 and seemed to have abandoned art for chess but in fact continued his

artistic experiments. From the mid-1930s, he collaborated with the Surrealists and participated in their exhibitions. Duchamp settled permanently in New York in 1942 and became a United States citizen in 1955. During the 1940s, he associated and exhibited with the Surrealist émigrés in New York, and in 1946 began *Etant donné*: 1. *la chute d'eau* 2. *le gaz d'éclairage*, a major assemblage on which he worked secretly for the next 20 years.

Marcel Duchamp died October 2, 1968, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France.

Source: Guggenheim Collection.
www.guggenheimcollection.org

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Marcel Duchamp. Life and work

● MD_Lifeandwork.doc (complete chapter)

Extracts from the chapter Life and work, by Hugo Petruschansky, in collaboration with Cecilia Iida and Clelia Taricco, from the Catalogue of the exhibition Marcel Duchamp: a work that is not a work "of art", FUNDACIÓN PROA, Buenos Aires, 2008.

(...)

"In late 1912, Duchamp observes an airplane displayed in the Salon de la Lo comotion Aérienne in ecstasy, and says to his friend, sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957): **"Painting is over. Who could make anything better than this propeller? Tell me, could you make something like this?"** The anecdote is a revealing one: the artist was beginning to give form to a personal, controversial conception of art. Years later he would say, **"I wanted to distance myself from the physical aspect of painting . . . to adopt an intellectual stance with respect to every artist's servitude to manual craft."** Duchamp decides to find a regular job and, thanks to Picabia's intervention, he finds a position as a librarian at the

Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève. There he consults tomes dealing with perspective and books on Greek philosophy, on Pyrrho of Elis' (365–275 B.C.), from whom he adopted the idea of the **"beauty of indifference."** This would be the founding principle for a body of work that would generate one of the most profound revolutions in the history of contemporary art, and that with the longestlasting impact. And so in 1913 he mounts a bicycle wheel on a stool and titles it **Roue de bicyclette** (Bicycle Wheel), his first readymade, although Duchamp would only begin to use this term two years later. This piece is part of a group of works characterized by little or no intervention on the part of the artist in making them. They are ordinary objects, chosen by the artist based on absolute "aesthetic indifference." As anonymous objects, without the imprint of an author, they endure a process of appropriation, de-contextualization and reinsertion into the art world, and they highlight the discrepancy between objects and the art context. Without realizing it, Duchamp was undermining the ideas that traditionally defined art, artists and their public. But at that moment, **Roue de bicyclette** came about as a diversion, **"watching that wheel spin was very relaxing, very comforting, a sort of opening up of avenues toward things far removed from material everyday life. . . . I used to enjoy it in the same way that I enjoy contemplating the flames in a chimney."**

(...)

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Duchamp's quotes

● MD_Quotes.doc

Readymade

“Un ready-made (rire), c'est d'abord le mot inventé que j'ai pris pour désigner une œuvre d'art qui n'en et pas ne. Autrement dit, qui n'est pas une œuvre faite à la main. Faite par la main de l'artiste. C'est une œuvre d'art qui devient œuvre d'art par le fait que je la déclare ou que l'artiste la déclare œuvre d'art, qu'il y ait aucune participation de la main de l'artiste en question pour la faire. Autrement dit, c'est un objet tout fait, qu'on trouve, et généralement un objet de métal... plus qu'un tableau en général”.

Source: *Changer de nom, simplement*. Interview de Marcel Duchamp à la Radio Télévision canadienne, le 17 juillet 1960. Entretien publié dans la revue FIN, n°5, juin 2000, pp. 8-15. .

“... c'est une des réinstallations de l'objet dans un nouveau domaine; ainsi le sèche-bouteilles qui ne porte plus de bouteille et qui devient une chose que l'on ne regarde même pas, mais dont on sait qu'il existe, qu'on regarde en tournant la tête, et dont l'existence a été décidée par un geste que j'ai fait un jour...”

Source: Quote of Marcel Duchamp en Alain Roussel, *Le Ready-made ou la fausse réconciliation de l'art et de la vie*, Septiembere 1973, en Duchamp et Apres, Opus Internacional, no. 49, marzo 1974, Paris, p. 89.

La peinture

“...Je considère la peinture comme un moyen d'expression, et non comme un but. Un moyen d'expression entre bien d'autres et non pas un but destiné à remplir toute une vie. Il en est ainsi de la couleur qui n'est qu'un des moyens d'expression et non le but de la peinture. En d'autres termes, la peinture ne doit pas être exclusivement visuelle ou rétinienne. Elle doit intéresser aussi la matière grise, notre appétit de compréhension. Il en est ainsi de tout ce que j'aime : je n'ai jamais voulu me limiter à un cercle étroit et j'ai toujours essayé d'être aussi universel que possible...”

Source: Extraits d'entretiens Duchamp, Marcel avec J.J. Sweeney, Le Nouveau Clarté, novembre 1968, en A P'ART. Vade retro pintura!, “Marcel Duchamp et la peinture”, p. 3 .

“En France, il y a un vieux dicton qui dit : « Stupide comme un peintre ». Le peintre était considéré comme stupide, mais le poète, l'écrivain, comme intelligents. Je voulais être intelligent. Je devais avoir l'idée d'inventer. Ce n'est rien de faire ce que ton père a fait. Ce n'est rien de refaire un autre Cézanne.

Dans ma période visuelle, il y a un peu de cette stupidité du peintre. Toute ma période avant le « Nu descendant l'escalier » était de la peinture visuelle. Après je suis venu à l'idée. J'ai pensé que la formulation des idées était une manière de me débarrasser d'influence”.

Source: A P'ART. Vade retro pintura!, “Marcel Duchamp et la peinture”, p. 3.

“Le langage est une erreur de l'humanité. Entre deux êtres qui s'aiment, le langage n'est pas ce qu'il y a de plus profond. Le mot est un galet très usé qui s'applique à trente-six nuances d'affectivité. On ne dit jamais rien d'intéressant. Le langage est commode pour simplifier, mais e'est un moyen de locomotion que je déteste. C'est pourquoi j'aime la peinture : une affectivité qui s'adresse à une autre. L'échange se fait par les yeux”.

Source: Otto Hahn, *Entretien Marcel Duchamp*, L'Express, Juillet 23, 1964, pp. 22-23.

Boîte-en-valise

“...Encore une nouvelle forme d'expression. Au lieu de peindre quelque chose, il s'agissait de reproduire ces tableaux que j'aimais tellement, en miniatura et sous un volume très réduit. Je ne savais comment m'y pendre. Je pensais à un livre, mais je n'aimais pas cette idée de la boîte dans laquelle toutes mes œuvres se trouve-raient recueillies comme dans un musée en réduction, un musée portatif, et voilà pourquoi je l'installai dans une valise...”

Source: “A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp”, filmed interview with James Johnson Sweeney. Showed in the Arensberg exhibition rooms, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1955.

The creative act

[...] Millions of artist create; only a few thousands are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity.

In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius ; he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Art History.

I know that this statement will not meet with the approval of many artists who refuse this mediumistic role and insist on the validity of their awareness in the creative act — yet art history has consistently decided upon the virtues of a work of art through considerations completely divorced from the rationalized explanations of the artist.

If the artist, as a human being, full of the best intentions toward himself and the whole world, plays no role at all in the judgment of his own work, how can one describe the phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the word of art ? In other words how does this reaction come about ?

Source: Duchamp, Marcel, *Le processus créatif*, Envois L'echope, Paris, 1987.