

# Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917

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Duchamp's *Fountain* has become one of the most famous/infamous objects in the history of modern art (Fig. 1). The literature on it—counting references imbedded in broader considerations of Duchamp's work—is staggering in quantity, and one might suppose that little more of consequence could be discovered. But an examination of this literature reveals that our knowledge of this readymade sculpture and its history is riddled with gaps and extraordinary conflicts of memory, interpretation, and criticism. We are not even able to consult the object itself, since it disappeared early on, and we have no idea what happened to it. Duchamp said Walter Arensberg purchased *Fountain* and later lost it. Clark Marlor, author of recent publications on the Society of Independent Artists, claims it was broken by William Glackens. Others reported it as hidden or stolen.<sup>1</sup> We do not even know with absolute certainty that Duchamp was the artist—he himself once attributed it to a female friend—and some of his comments raise fundamental questions regarding his intentions in this readymade. But most critics have not been troubled by these conflicting comments from Duchamp or by the lacunae in our knowledge. Some deny that *Fountain* is art but believe it is significant for the history of art and aesthetics. Others accept it grudgingly as art but deny that it is significant. To complete the circle, some insist *Fountain* is neither art nor an object of historical consequence, while a few assert that it is both art and significant—though for utterly incompatible reasons.

In light of these diverse viewpoints I shall attempt to reconstruct what we know about *Fountain* based on documents at the time of its appearance in 1917 and consideration of relevant historical circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

Given the remarkable interrelationships in Duchamp's work from beginning to end, an obvious risk is involved in any study that focuses on a single object. However, *Fountain* will not be entirely isolated from the rest of his *oeuvre*, and the results of this more narrowly focused study will contribute to the whole.

I am indebted to many individuals and earlier studies. Some of the information and ideas to be presented here are not new, but I have expanded that information, ordered, focused, and flavored it with a personal bias. Indeed, this study is the long-suppressed gratification of a desire which arose in the late 1960s when, as a young teacher, I found myself fascinated with the for-



Fig. 1 *Fountain*, 1917, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, copy negative from *The Blind Man*, no. 2, May 1917. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Archives.

mal properties of *Fountain* and convinced that Duchamp had achieved a fusion of visual and intellectual properties which made it a masterpiece in his *oeuvre*, rather than the amusing or offensive anti-art object it was often portrayed as at that time.<sup>3</sup>

*Fountain* entered the history of art in April 1917 on the occasion of the first exhibition of the American Society of Independent Artists. Conditions regarding the organization of that Society are germane to the story.<sup>4</sup> To a considerable extent the Society was a direct descendant of such organizations as the Eight, the 1910 Independents Group and the Armory Show—all were formed to provide exhibitions of American art outside the structure of the National Academy of Design and the offerings of conventional art galleries. From the outset, however, the Society of Independent Artists was distin-

guished by a contingent of French artists and the intent to be an ongoing organization modeled after the French Société des Artistes Indépendants. Duchamp was chief among those French artists, but Francis Picabia, Albert Gleizes and Jean Crotti played lesser roles. They had all arrived in New York in 1915, each in his way a refugee from the devastating war in Europe, each discovering that New York was a stimulating city where he could work again.<sup>5</sup>

Duchamp and Picabia lost no time in enlivening the New York art scene—Picabia with his radically new mechanomorphic portraits and Duchamp with his even more unusual work on the *Large Glass* and readymade sculptures that inhabited his apartment but were also exhibited for the first time.<sup>6</sup> Picabia, who had established a close friendship with Alfred Stieglitz and his associates during the Armory Show, gravitated toward that sphere of influence and participated actively in the Modern Gallery and the magazine *291*, activities supported by Stieglitz but directed by Marius de Zayas. Duchamp became more attached to Walter and Louise Arensberg, recent settlers in New York who made a lasting mark through their patronage of avant-garde literature, their stimulating late-night soirées, their outstanding collection of modern art, and their commitment to Duchamp.<sup>7</sup> The attorney John Quinn helped Duchamp too, although he was more important for other artists and authors whose careers had been disrupted by the war.<sup>8</sup> These collectors, patrons, galleries, and avant-garde magazines are an indication of the lively art scene in New York from 1914 to 1918, a stark contrast to Europe, where salons had been suspended, magazines disbanded, and many galleries closed. There was cause to think that while the Europeans were absorbed by the war, the time had come for America to assume leadership in art. Some modernists even hoped that the democratic traditions of America might make this nation more hospitable toward contemporary art.

Serious discussions were initiated in the fall of 1916, and the Society of Independent Artists was incorporated in December 1916.<sup>9</sup> The proclaimed democratic spirit of the Society was reflected in the officers and directors. William Glackens, an original member of the Eight, was president, and three other directors were either members or associates of the Eight—George Bellows, Rockwell Kent and Maurice Prendergast. Only John Marin came from the circle around Alfred Stieglitz, but there were also three women (Katherine S. Dreier, Regina A. Farrelly, and Mary C. Rogers), Walter Pach, who bridged several groups, and six men who frequented the Arensberg salon—Duchamp, Man Ray, John Covert, Joseph Stella, Morton S. Schamberg and Arensberg himself.<sup>10</sup> The initial notice of the Society released in January 1917 underscored the

great need . . . for an exhibition, to be held a given period each year, where artists of all schools can exhibit together—certain that whatever they send will be hung . . . For the public, this exhibition will make it possible to form an idea of the state of contemporary art . . .

The program of the Society of Independent Artists, which is practically self-explanatory, has been taken over from the Société des Artistes Indépendants of Paris. The latter Society . . . has done more for the advance of French art than any other in-

stitution of its period. . . . The reason for this success is to be found in the principle adopted at its founding in 1884 and never changed: "No jury, no prizes."

There are no requirements for admission to the [American] Society save the acceptance of its principles and the payment of the initiation fee of one dollar and the annual dues of five dollars. All exhibitors are thus members and all have a vote for the directors and on the decisions made by the Society at its annual meetings. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Encouraged by a surge in membership, the Society set an opening date for April 10, and committees were formed for such activities as publication, education, and installation. The educational aims of the exhibition were to be extended by public lectures and by a tearoom managed by Katherine S. Dreier with artists present to meet the public. Duchamp, who had become a major organizer for the Society, agreed to decorate the tearoom for Dreier, an artist and an activist in art and social issues, whom he had met at the Arensbergs'. He was also collaborating with his friends Henri Pierre Roché and Beatrice Wood to publish a magazine entitled *Blindman*, conceived as a forum for opinions and commentary on the Independents' exhibition.<sup>12</sup>

Arensberg served as managing director for the exhibition, and his apartment was the site of some important meetings.<sup>13</sup> Duchamp was head of the hanging committee—a task for which he proposed a democratic solution of installation by alphabetical order rather than by groupings according to size, medium or style. Walter Pach, who sponsored Duchamp's coming to America, was treasurer, and Arensberg's cousin, John Covert, was secretary. In that capacity, Covert was responsible for instructions to the artists, which are helpful in reconstructing the sequence of events for *Fountain*. Works were to be received on April 3–5, and installation was scheduled for April 6–9. In order to be listed in the exhibition catalogue, a white card—properly filled in—had to be received by March 28, and the same deadline was set for photographs from any artist who wished to exercise his right to one illustration in the catalogue.<sup>14</sup>

The special opening was set for Monday evening, April 9, followed by the public opening on April 10. As those dates approached, the public was peppered with press releases stressing the democracy, the vast size, and the importance of the exhibition—2500 works stretching over almost two miles of panels.<sup>15</sup> Although America's declaration of war on Germany usurped the headlines in early April, by all accounts the opening of the Independents' exhibition was a rousing success—save for one episode that generated a heated dispute among the directors and the resignation of Marcel Duchamp. In conflict with its stated principle of "no jury," the directors of the Independents rejected a sculpture, and, as reported in one press account,

Marcel Duchamp . . . the painter of "Nude Descending a Staircase" fame has declared his independence of the Independent Society of Artists, and there is dissension in the ranks of the organization that is holding at the Grand Central Palace the greatest exhibition of painting and sculpture in the history of the country.

It all grew out of the philosophy of J. C. Mutt, of Philadelphia, hitherto little known in artistic circles. When Mr. Mutt heard that payment of five dollars would permit him to send to the exhibition a work of art of any description or degree of excellence he might see fit he complied by shipping from the Quaker City a familiar article of

bathroom furniture manufactured by a well known firm of that town. By the same mail went a five dollar bill.

To-day Mr. Mutt has his exhibit and his \$5; Mr. Duchamp has a headache, and the Society of Independent Artists has the resignation of one of its directors and a bad disposition.

After a long battle that lasted up to the opening hour of the exhibition, Mr. Mutt's defenders were voted down by a small margin. "The Fountain," as his entry was known, will never become an attraction—or detraction—of the improvised galleries of the Grand Central Palace, even if Mr. Duchamp goes to the length of withdrawing his own entry, "Tulip Hysteria Co-ordinating," in retaliation. "The Fountain," said the majority, "may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition, and it is, by no definition, a work of art."<sup>16</sup>

The brouhaha over *Fountain* continued to spread for several weeks, and a few corrections and additions appeared in an account in Boston on April 25:

A Philadelphian, Richard Mutt, member of the society, and not related to our friend of the "Mutt and Jeff" cartoons, submitted a bathroom fixture as a "work of art." The official record of the episode of its removal says:

"Richard Mutt threatens to sue the directors because they removed the bathroom fixture, mounted on a pedestal, which he submitted as a 'work of art.' Some of the directors wanted it to remain, in view of the society's ruling of 'no jury' to decide on the merits of the 2500 paintings and sculptures submitted. Other directors maintained that it was indecent at a meeting and the majority voted it down. As a result of this Marcel Duchamp retired from the Board. Mr. Mutt now wants more than his dues returned. He wants damages."<sup>17</sup>

Despite the lively interest of the press, however, the public knew surprisingly little about *Fountain*. As revealed in these articles, Richard Mutt's true identity was unknown, and no one could have been aware that the sculpture was a urinal because it was not exhibited, did not figure in the catalogue, and was neither reproduced nor described other than by the general, innocuous term "bathroom fixture." *Fountain* was not reproduced until the second issue of *The Blind Man* in May 1917—one month after the conflict began—and it is not yet clear when it became more generally known that Duchamp himself was the artist. With so little available in the public record until publication of the all-important second issue of *The Blind Man*, the history of *Fountain* must be sought in contemporary letters and diaries and in subsequent recollections. Unfortunately, the files of the Society of Independent Artists are of no help. They contain no minutes of the relevant meetings, no formal statement regarding *Fountain* and no letters of resignation. All records except some heavy ledgers were apparently destroyed around 1930 by a fire in the studio of a member of the Independents, A. S. Baylinson.<sup>18</sup>

In a recollection shared with Arturo Schwarz almost fifty years later, Duchamp said the idea of *Fountain* arose in a conversation with Arensberg and Joseph Stella, and "they immediately went to buy the item."<sup>19</sup> The object selected was a porcelain urinal, presumably manufactured by the J. L. Mott Iron Works. Duchamp stated many years later that the pseudonym "Mutt" came from the Mott Works but was modified because

Mott was too close so I altered it to Mutt, after the daily strip cartoon "Mutt and Jeff" which appeared at the time, and with which everyone was familiar. Thus, from the

start there was an interplay of Mutt: a fat little funny man, and Jeff: a tall thin man. . . . And I added Richard [French slang for money-bags]. That's not a bad name for a "pissoitière."

Get it? The opposite of poverty. But not even that much, just R. MUTT.<sup>20</sup>

There seems to be no reason to question Duchamp's memory of this episode. "Mutt and Jeff" was a popular comic strip, and Mott was a major manufacturer of plumbing fixtures with a large showroom in New York that could have displayed urinals closely resembling *Fountain*—insofar as may be judged from roughly contemporary illustrated catalogues (Fig. 2).<sup>21</sup>

Again in conversation with Arturo Schwarz, Duchamp recalled that the urinal was selected shortly before the opening of the Independents—a claim that is supported by the fact that *Fountain* did not figure in the catalogue (it missed the March 28 publication deadline), and because no witness to date has recalled seeing it in Duchamp's apartment. It (or another urinal) was in Duchamp's studio at least briefly, however, because there exists a photograph with a urinal suspended from the ceiling along with the *Hat Rack* and *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (Fig. 3).<sup>22</sup>

*Fountain* next appeared in the context of installing the Independents' exhibition, and for this stage in the history, Beatrice Wood's diary and memories are crucial. During the week prior to the opening of the Independents, Wood was constantly in Duchamp's company, working with him and Henri Pierre Roché on the magazine *Blindman* and helping Duchamp with the installation of the Independents, a labor that occupied most of April 6–8. Her laconic diary entries record those activities and the first known mention of Richard Mutt and his exhibit:

Friday [April 6]	Work at Independents. Lunch Marcel Duchamp at Pollys. Home.
Sat. [April 7]	Independent. Dine Roche at Chinese Restaurant. Discussion about "Richard Mutt's" exhibition. Read Roche my articles [for <i>Blindman</i> ]. We work at Marcells.
Sun. [April 8]	All day at Independent. Lunch. Pach, Friedman, Duchamp, Arensberg . . .
Mon. [April 9]	Meet Roche at printers to see about Blind Man Magazine at 9—with him all day. Batik. Opening of exhibit. Later jolly crowd at Beaux Arts. <sup>23</sup>

Wood's later recollections provide a more vivid account of one of those days:

Two days before the Exhibition opened, there was a glistening white object in the storeroom getting readied to be put on the floor. I can remember Walter Arensberg and George Bellows standing in front of it, arguing. Bellows was facing Walter, his body on a menacing slant, his fists doubled, striking at the air in anger. Out of curiosity, I approached.

"We cannot exhibit it," Bellows said hotly, taking out a handkerchief and wiping his forehead.

"We cannot refuse it, the entrance fee has been paid," gently answered Walter.

"It is indecent!" roared Bellows.

"That depends upon the point of view," added Walter, suppressing a grin.

"Someone must have sent it as a joke. It is signed R. Mutt; sounds fishy to me,"

grumbled Bellows with disgust. Walter approached the object in question and touched its glossy surface. Then with the dignity of a don addressing men at Harvard, he expounded: "A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man clearly has made an aesthetic contribution."

The entry they were discussing was perched high on a wooden pedestal: a beautiful, white enamel oval form gleaming triumphantly on a black stand.

It was a man's urinal, turned on its back.

Bellows stepped away, then returned in rage as if he were going to pull it down. "We can't show it, that is all there is to it."

Walter lightly touched his arm, "This is what the whole exhibit is about; an opportunity to allow an artist to send in anything he chooses, for *the artist* to decide what is art, not someone else."

Bellows shook his arm away, protesting. "You mean to say, if a man sent in horse manure glued to a canvas that we would have to accept it!"

"I'm afraid we would," said Walter, with a touch of undertaker's sadness. "If this is an artist's expression of beauty, we can do nothing but accept his choice." With diplomatic effort he pointed out, "If you can look at this entry objectively, you will see that it has striking, sweeping lines. This Mr. Mutt has taken an ordinary object, placed it so that its useful significance disappears, and thus has created a new approach to the subject."

"It is gross, offensive! There is such a thing as decency."

"Only in the eye of the beholder, you forget our bylaws."<sup>24</sup>

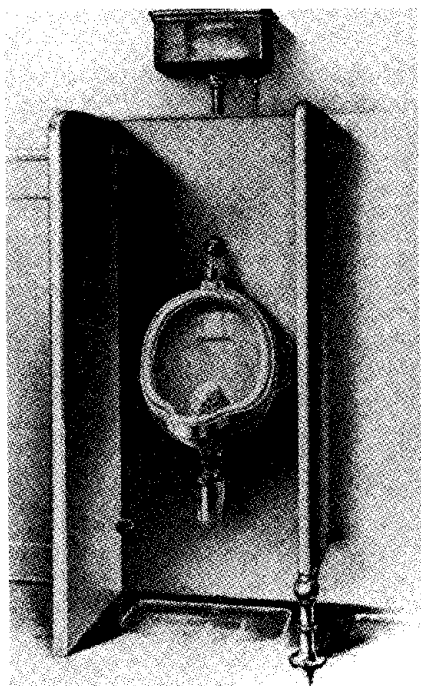


Plate 5385-A

Fig. 2 Porcelain lipped urinal, Panama model, from the J. L. Mott Iron Works, *Mott's Plumbing Fixtures Catalogue "A,"* New York, 1908. Courtesy, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Library: Collection of Printed Books.

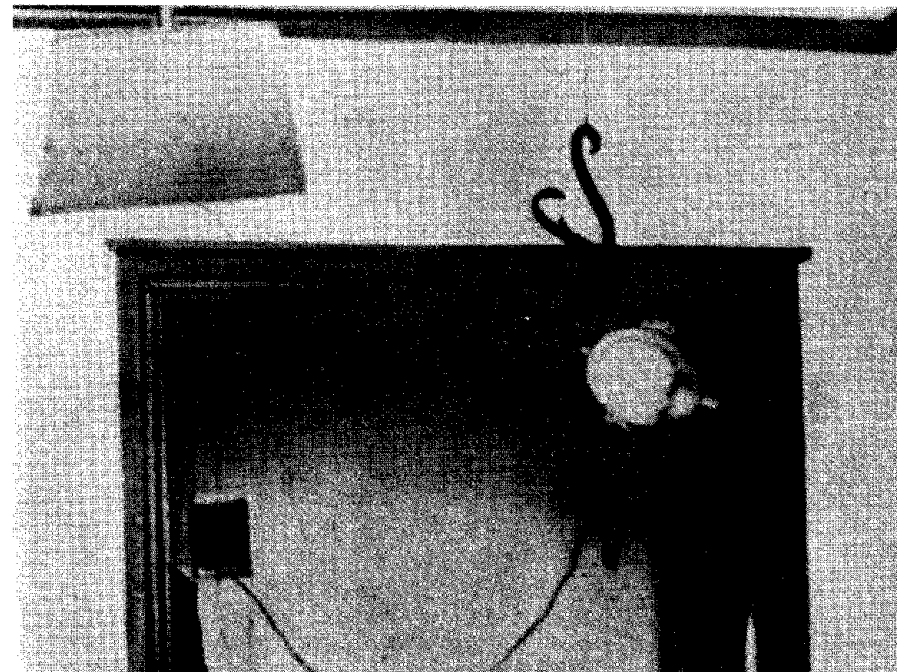


Fig. 3 Duchamp's studio at 33 West 67th Street, New York, 1917.

There was not time enough to assemble the entire board of directors, but a group of about ten was gathered to decide the issue and, according to a *New York Herald* reporter, a battle raged up to the opening hour of the exhibition on April 9, at which time "Mr. Mutt's defenders were voted down by a small margin."<sup>25</sup> On the face of it, that decision denied both the principle of "no jury" and the specific rules for exhibition mailed to all members, but there were grounds for suspending all of that in the view of the majority of the directors assembled. Statements quoted in the press and Beatrice Wood's memory coincide on this point: *Fountain* was not art and it was indecent. Unuttered but surely present in the decision was a concern for the reputation of the Independents in its debut before the American public.

Hostilities may have been suspended for what Beatrice Wood recorded as a spectacular opening and a "jolly crowd" later that night at the Beaux-Arts, but there should be no mistaking Duchamp's contempt for the action of the Society's directors. He resigned immediately and quietly took other actions that produced some of the few documents we possess. Those actions included initiation of the all-important second number of *The Blind Man* (May 1917) and two letters—one to his sister Suzanne in Paris and the other to Katherine S. Dreier.

Duchamp's letter to his sister on April 11 is most puzzling:

Raconte ce détail à la famille: Les Indépendants sont ouverts ici avec gros succès. Une de mes amies sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, avait envoyé une

pissotière en porcelaine comme sculpture; ce n'était pas du tout indécent aucune raison pour la refuser. Le comité a décidé de refuser d'exposer cette chose. J'ai donné ma démission et c'est un potin qui aura sa valeur dans New York.<sup>26</sup>

I see no reason to doubt the sincerity of Duchamp's earliest known statement on *Fountain*, which he described simply as "a sculpture" that "was not at all indecent." But what is not yet clear is why he claimed that the urinal had been submitted by one of his "female friends under a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt." Beatrice Wood—who should know—has always insisted that Duchamp was the artist. How then should we take this statement? As others have observed, it is likely that Duchamp concealed his identity in order to pose a test for the Independents that would not be compromised by knowledge that *Fountain* had been submitted by a director of the organization. But why did he mislead his sister in Paris? Was the account given to Suzanne merely a "white lie" to conceal his authorship, or might we have here an early appearance of Duchamp's female alter ego, Rose Sélavy, or might he have been telling the truth?<sup>27</sup> Was *Fountain* actually submitted by a female friend? And if, indeed, a female friend sent *Fountain* to the Independents, must that mean that she and not Duchamp was the artist who conceived, selected and altered the urinal—or might she have acted merely as the shipping agent whose participation kept Duchamp out of sight? The last possibility seems most plausible, but this point remains a mystery. Even if Duchamp simply had a female "shipping agent," who was she? Did she live in Philadelphia, since newspaper reports consistently identified Mutt as a Philadelphian? To date, no Philadelphia contact has been identified, but a New York friend was implicated in a letter from Charles Demuth to Henry McBride, the art critic of *The Sun*, during the first week after the opening of the Independents:

A piece of scultor [sic], called: "a Fountain," was entered by one of our friends for the Independent Exhibition now open at the Grand Central Palace.

It was not exhibited. "The Independents," we are now told have a committee, —or jury, who can decide, "for the good of the exhibition. . . ."

If you think you could do anything with this material for your Sunday article we would appreciate it very much. . . .

P.S. If you wish any more information please phone, Marcel Duchamp, 4225 Columbus, or, Richard Mutte [sic], 9255 Schuyler.<sup>28</sup>

The telephone number given for "Richard Mutte" was the number for Duchamp's friend Louise Norton, the estranged wife of Allen Norton, the publisher of *Rogue*. Unfortunately, Louise Norton has not provided additional information about her role in the Richard Mutt affair, but Demuth's letter indicates that she was in the innermost circle and possessed special information which she probably used in her crucial article, "Buddha of the Bathroom," for *The Blind Man*, no. 2.<sup>29</sup>

Duchamp's other letter on April 11 was a simple statement of regret to Katherine S. Dreier that he would not be able to fulfill his promise to help decorate her tearoom at the Independents because he had "resigned from the board of directors."<sup>30</sup> This letter, however, provoked a reply on April 13, which contributes much to our knowledge of the events:

Rumors of your resignation had reached me prior to your letter of April eleventh. As a director of the Society of Independent Artists, I must use my influence to see whether you cannot reconsider your resignation. . . .

As I was saying to Arensberg, I felt it was of much more vital importance to have you connected with our Society than to have the piece of plumbing which was surreptitiously stolen, remain. When I voted "No," I voted on the question of originality—I did not see anything pertaining to originality in it; that does not mean that if my attention had been drawn to what was original by those who could see it, that I could not also have seen it. To me, no other question came up: it was simply a question of whether a person has a right to buy a readymade object and show it with their name attached at an exhibition? Arensberg tells me that that was in accord with you [sic] "Readymades," and I told him that was a new thought to me as the only "readymades" I saw were groups which were extremely original in their handling. I did not know that you had conceived of single objects.

I felt that it was most unfortunate that a meeting was not called and the matter discussed and passed upon by the Board of Directors; but I do feel that you have sufficient supporters with you to make it a very decided question whether it is right for you to withdraw. I hope, therefore, that you will seriously reconsider it, so that at our next directors' meeting I may have the right to bring forth the refusal of the acceptance of your resignation.<sup>31</sup>

Several points merit underscoring in this letter. First, Dreier claims that *Fountain* was "surreptitiously stolen." Second, she articulates what may be called the "plagiarism" or "originality" objection to *Fountain*, namely, that there is no "originality" to it, that a person has no right to exhibit a piece of plumbing that was merely bought as a readymade object and signed. The readymades in Duchamp's apartment had not distressed her this way. To the contrary she described them as "extremely original in their handling," but she saw those readymades as a group—a group which would have included the *Hat Rack* and snow shovel (*In Advance of the Broken Arm*) suspended from the ceiling, the coat rack (*Trébuchet*) nailed to the floor, and the *Bicycle Wheel*. In contrast to the grouping of those readymades in a private apartment, *Fountain* was a solitary item placed on a pedestal for the Independents. Finally she confirms that a vote on *Fountain* was taken among a group of the directors who, excepting perhaps only Arensberg and Duchamp himself, did not know the true identity of Mutt.

Duchamp, of course, was not persuaded to change his mind and the Richard Mutt affair was a tense topic at the next directors' meeting later in the month. To disarm the explosive situation, Glackens proposed a solution heartily embraced by Dreier as revealed in her letter to Glackens on April 26:

I want to express to you my profound admiration in the way you handled so important a matter as you did at the last meeting when it was at your suggestion that I made the motion, seconded by Mr. Covert, that we invite Marcel Duchamp to lecture one afternoon in our free lecture hall on his "Readymades" and have Richard Mutt bring the discarded object and explain the theory of art and why it had a legitimate place in an Art Exhibit. I was especially pleased because I said right along that I felt that if you had realized that the object was sent in good faith that the whole matter would have been handled differently. It is because of the confusion of ideas that the situation took on such an important aspect. I am very curious to see what the response will be, for with one stroke you cleared the atmosphere and will force Richard Mutt to show

whether he was sincere or did it out of bravado. I told Covert and Arensberg that in my judgment Richard Mutt caused the greater part of the confusion by signing a name which is known in the newspaper world as a popular joker. "Mutt and Jeff" are too famous not to make people suspect if their name is used the matter is a joke.<sup>32</sup>

Several statements in this letter also bear underscoring. Dreier provides the first recorded example of the "sincerity-of-the-artist defense" in this controversy. There was a "confusion of ideas," she says, largely due to Richard Mutt, because his name provoked association with Mutt and Jeff, popular jokers in a contemporary cartoon strip. If Glackens had only realized that "the object was sent in good faith," she is confident "the whole matter would have been handled differently."

The "sincerity defense" was linked to "respect for the artist." It is clear from the letter that Dreier still did not know that Duchamp was Mutt, but he had taken a stand for Mutt and that was significant. She concludes her letter to Glackens with these words:

I feel so conscious of Duchamp's brilliancy and originality, as well as my own limitation which cannot immediately follow him, but his absolute sincerity, in my judgment, would always make me want to listen to what he has to say. The very fact that he does not try to force his ideas on others but tries to let them develop truly along their own lines is in essence the guarantee of his real bigness.

Not precisely stated but implied in Dreier's letter was the fact that *Fountain* had been found, for Mutt was to be asked to bring it along with him. Circumstances regarding the finding of *Fountain* have not been documented, but clearly false are the claims that Glackens smashed it or that it disappeared soon after its rejection and was never seen again.<sup>33</sup> Other reports probably approach what actually occurred, that is to say, that several days after the opening of the exhibition, Duchamp (perhaps with Man Ray) searched for the missing *Fountain*, found it concealed behind a partition and removed it from the hall—with or without the flourish of Rudi Blesh's account, which has Arensberg demanding that *Fountain* be produced and signing a check for its purchase while Duchamp and Man Ray carry his purchase in triumph through the crowded galleries.<sup>34</sup>

The recovery of *Fountain* could have occurred as early as April 12 or 13, inasmuch as Beatrice Wood recorded in her diary for April 13: "See Stieglitz about 'Fountain.'"<sup>35</sup> According to Wood, it was Duchamp's idea to approach Stieglitz, and when *Fountain* was carried to his gallery sometime before April 19, the two men had a long discussion:

At Marcel's request, he [Stieglitz] agreed to photograph the *Fountain* for the frontispiece of the magazine [*The Blind Man*]. He was greatly amused, but also felt it was important to fight bigotry in America. He took great pains with the lighting, and did it with such skill that a shadow fell across the urinal suggesting a veil. The piece was re-named: "Madonna of the Bathroom."<sup>36</sup>

Stieglitz confirmed the commission in a letter to the art critic Henry McBride on April 19:

I wonder whether you could manage to drop in at 291 Friday sometime. I have, at the request of Roché, Covert, Miss Wood, Duchamp & Co., photographed the rejected

"Fountain." You may find the photograph of some use. — It will amuse you to see it. — The "Fountain" is here too.<sup>37</sup>

While McBride does not seem to have gone to 291 to see *Fountain*, Carl Van Vechten apparently did, and this author, music critic, and member of the Arensberg circle wrote to Gertrude Stein about the "object labelled *Fountain*" which had generated a scandal at the Independents:

This porcelain tribute was bought cold in some plumber shop (where it awaited the call to join some bath room trinity) and sent in. . . . When it was rejected Marcel Duchamp at once resigned from the board. [Alfred] Stieglitz is exhibiting the object at "291" and he has made some wonderful photographs of it. The photographs make it look like anything from a Madonna to a Buddha.<sup>38</sup>

References to Madonna and Buddha forms by Van Vechten and Beatrice Wood imply an anthropomorphic perception of *Fountain*, i.e., a simple, frontal form, the curvilinear profile of which suggests the head and shoulders of such images as those reproduced here (Figs. 4 and 5). Stieglitz himself corroborated the reference to a Buddha figure in a contemporary letter in which he remarked that *Fountain* had fine lines, that he had photographed it in front of a Marsden Hartley painting, and that his photograph suggested a



Fig. 4 Seated Amitabha Buddha, 8th century A.D. Nara, Japan.



Fig. 5 Madonna of the Seven Sorrows, 1518. Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany.

Buddha form.<sup>39</sup> We can, after all these years, identify the darkened, cropped and almost illegible painting in the background of Stieglitz's photograph, and it provides unexpected support for the aesthetic perception of *Fountain*. Stieglitz's choice for the background—Hartley's 1913 painting *The Warriors* (Fig. 6)—is dominated by a simple, symmetrical form similar to the shape of *Fountain*, the same shape employed as a frame for a seated Buddha in Hartley's 1913 painting *Portrait of Berlin* (Collection of American Literature, Yale University). Furthermore, it seems possible that even the subject of warriors going off to battle harbored references in Stieglitz's thought to Duchamp's conflict with the Independents.<sup>40</sup>

Stieglitz's letters and his photograph of *Fountain* are crucial documents—confirming the existence of *Fountain*, affirming the aesthetic argument first attributed by Beatrice Wood to Arensberg in the debate among the directors, and recording in memorable form a sculpture that did indeed vanish not long afterwards.

Stieglitz's photograph appeared in *The Blind Man*, no. 2 (May 1917), not as the frontispiece but clearly captioned "Fountain by R. Mutt," "The Exhibit Refused by the Independents" (Fig. 1). Facing the photograph were the most significant contemporary statements—an unsigned editorial entitled "The Richard Mutt Case" and Louise Norton's "Buddha of the Bathroom."<sup>41</sup> For the first time since the conflict had flared on April 9, a larger audience had the opportunity to see *Fountain* and to read something by way of explanation and defense of it. Even then a cautious decision was made to distribute *The Blind Man* by hand rather than risk any charge of pornography by sending it through the mail.<sup>42</sup>

The unsigned editorial, "The Richard Mutt Case," has been assigned to and/or claimed by different individuals. Evidently it was written by Beatrice Wood, although she, Duchamp, and Roché worked closely together, and there can be no doubt that it accurately represented Duchamp's thoughts and was approved by him, if not in part written by him.<sup>43</sup> It bears reprinting in full:

#### The Richard Mutt Case

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:—

1. Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.
2. Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.



Fig. 6 Marsden Hartley, *The Warriors*, 1913, with overlay. Regis Collection, Minneapolis.

This succinct statement is a brilliant rejoinder to the critics of Mutt and *Fountain*. The object itself is not vulgar or immoral. By implication neither is the act of presenting it in public, since bathroom fixtures—including men's urinals—were displayed to the public in plumbing shops whose owners were not charged with immoral practices.

Neither is *Fountain* a plagiarism, that is, an object lacking any original con-

tribution by the artist. The editors underscore the creative act of selection. The artist CHOSE it—and it is important to stress that our visual knowledge of *Fountain* depends upon photography, an art form created by artists who do not *make* their subjects but *select* them. Several authors have commented on Duchamp's keen interest in that very feature of photography, that is, the primary role of the artist's selection.<sup>44</sup> And no element of chance was involved in Duchamp's choice of the photographer who had done more than anyone else to establish photography as an art in America. Stieglitz's memorable photograph of *Fountain* is integral to every issue surrounding the Mutt/*Fountain* case—and raises knotty questions of authorship. Is the photograph we see essentially the work of Stieglitz, or of Duchamp, or their collaboration?

As indicated in the *Blind Man* editorial, the originality of Mutt/*Fountain* involves more than the important act of selection. Duchamp also *transformed* the object by an action that incorporated elements of place, name/title, and point of view (both visual and conceptual). He removed "an ordinary article of life" from the context in which one normally encounters it—men's room or plumbing shop—and sought to place it in a different context (an art exhibition) with a new title ("*Fountain*") and a new point of view (turned 90° on its back and isolated on a black pedestal) "so that its [former] useful significance disappeared" and he "created a new thought for that object." In brief, the urinal was substantially modified, although the final sentence of the editorial went further to imply that such transformation of the ordinary object is not always necessary, that some objects possess in themselves what is required to qualify as art: "The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges."

The "Richard Mutt Case" editorial was followed on the same page by Louise Norton's article entitled "Buddha of the Bathroom." Louise Norton was one of only a handful of Duchamp's friends with insider knowledge about the Richard Mutt case, and I submit that her article not only reflects the conversation within that group of friends but the concepts generated and accepted by Duchamp himself. I select four points in her article for special attention. She, too, addresses the criticism of originality:

To those who say that Mr. Mutt's exhibit may be Art, but is it the art of Mr. Mutt since a plumber made it? I reply simply that the *Fountain* was not made by a plumber but by the force of an imagination; and of imagination it has been said, "All men are shocked by it and some overthrown by it."<sup>45</sup>

She also deals with the question of sincerity raised in the press and in Katherine Dreier's letter. There are those, she observes, "who anxiously ask, 'Is he serious or is he joking?' Perhaps he is both! Is it not possible? In this connection I think it would be well to remember that the sense of the ridiculous *as well as* 'the sense of the tragic increases and declines with sensuousness.' It puts it rather up to you." Most important in this commentary on *Fountain* is the stress upon willed openness and ambiguity in Duchamp's work. It may be serious or humorous or both, and the effort of assessment is placed squarely on the viewer. In the final analysis, it is each individual—the artist and each spectator—who decides about art, and not a jury.

Also interesting in this section on sincerity is the reference to "sensuousness," which seems linked to the other two points I wish to stress in Louise Norton's article. Early in the article she dealt with the "vulgarity" argument, noting those jurors who "fairly rushed to remove the bit of sculpture called the *Fountain* . . . because the object was irrevocably associated in their atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort. . . . Yet," she added

to any "innocent" eye how pleasant is its chaste simplicity of line and color! Someone said, "Like a lovely Buddha"; someone said, "Like the legs of the ladies by Cezanne"; but have they not, those ladies, in their long, round nudity always recalled to your mind the calm curves of decadent plumbers' porcelains?

Louise Norton's comments represent the first *published* witness to the "pleasant" formal properties of the object itself—not a vulgar object but a form of "chaste simplicity . . . like a lovely Buddha!" For over fifty years such perceptions of *Fountain* have almost disappeared from the literature on Duchamp, but among Duchamp's close friends in 1917 that aesthetic response was the rule, not the exception.<sup>46</sup> We have already encountered the irrefutable evidence of Stieglitz and Van Vechten in addition to Beatrice Wood's consistent memory of Arensberg's remarks to George Bellows about a "lovely form . . . [which] has been revealed." Other witnesses include Roché, who wrote that when Marcel "submitted a porcelain urinal to the New York Independents, he was saying: 'Beauty is around you wherever you choose to discover it.'"<sup>47</sup> The same sentiment had been expressed a year before the Independents by Duchamp's friend Jean Crotti when he assured an astonished reporter looking at Duchamp's snow-shovel readymade, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, "As an artist I consider that shovel the most beautiful object I have ever seen."<sup>48</sup> When news of the Richard Mutt case reached Guillaume Apollinaire in Paris, he, too, associated *Fountain* with a seated Buddha and chastised the Independents for failing to recognize that art can ennoble and transform an object.<sup>49</sup> The Buddha-like form of *Fountain* is even more explicit in a cropped photograph recently discovered in the Arensberg papers at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Fig. 7). It is not known when, why, or by whom this photo was cropped, but the cropping clearly enhances the reference to a seated Buddha form.<sup>50</sup>

The pressing question at this point is whether these perceptions of a beautiful form, of Madonnas and seated Buddhas, were products of Duchamp's mind and eye or the response of his associates. In my opinion, they were Duchamp's own, but his perceptions were shared by others, and the complex questions of form, intent, and content have hardly been exhausted. Consideration of *Fountain* in the context of other work by Duchamp and several contemporaries will contribute substantially to answering those questions.

It seems advisable to begin with the acknowledgment that most commentators on Duchamp discount the visual qualities of *Fountain*, claiming instead that it is either deliberately anti-art or aesthetically neutral—and their arguments are based on Duchamp's own word. In the frequently quoted "Apropos of 'Readymades'" (1961) Duchamp stressed aesthetic indifference:



A point which I want very much to establish is that the choice of these "readymades" was never dictated by esthetic delectation.

This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste . . . in fact a complete anesthesia.<sup>51</sup>

More emphatic still was Duchamp's 1962 letter to Hans Richter, quoted in the latter's *Dada Art and Anti-Art*:

When I discovered ready-mades I thought to discourage aesthetics. In Neo-Dada they have taken my ready-mades and found aesthetic beauty in them. I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty.<sup>52</sup>

Such statements by Duchamp must be taken seriously. On the face of it, who would argue that a challenge to conventional aesthetics was not a part of Duchamp's intent when he submitted a urinal to the Independents—no matter the degree to which he transformed it? At the same time, I am convinced that such statements by Duchamp contain only a partial "truth"—even a misleading "truth"—which cannot be adequately assessed without taking his comments seriously enough to consider them critically and in context.

The two statements quoted above stress significantly different considerations, namely, aesthetic indifference and aesthetic challenge, and other comments by Duchamp enlarge our possible responses to the readymades still further. It is also significant that such statements about aesthetic indifference and aesthetic challenge emerge in Duchamp's interviews only in the late 1950s/early 1960s and respond to different conditions, which are explored in a perceptive article by Robert Lebel.<sup>53</sup>

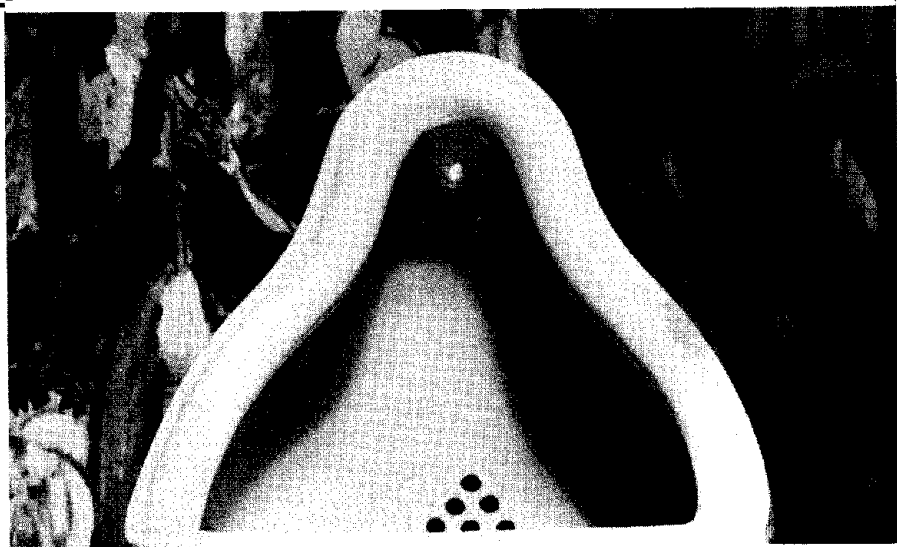


Fig. 7 *Fountain* (cropped), 1917, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

Turning from those late interviews back to the work of Duchamp that preceded *Fountain*, we find not aesthetic indifference but an *oeuvre* of extraordinary visual and intellectual rigor. And *Fountain* fits in that *oeuvre*. Far from being the product of an impulsive decision to challenge the principles of the Independents, *Fountain* seems to be expressive of its creator, related to other work by Duchamp and reflective of other art and the culture around him.

One event which must have contributed to Duchamp's concept of ready-mades was his visit to the 1912 Salon de la Locomotion Aérienne in the company of Léger and Brancusi. Léger later recalled that Duchamp "walked among the motors, the propellers without saying a word. Then suddenly he spoke to Brancusi: 'Painting is finished. Who can do better than that propeller? Tell me, can you do that?' He was very inclined toward precise things."<sup>54</sup>

Within a year Duchamp did, in fact, almost cease to paint, turning instead to studies for the *Large Glass* and to his first readymades. The early ready-mades selected in Paris, for example, the *Bicycle Wheel* and the *Bottlerack*, did not possess the sleek lines of airplane propellers, but neither of these two examples appears to have been motivated by visual indifference or anti-art.

In Duchamp's earliest known reference to these two objects, he refers to them simply as "sculpture already made."<sup>55</sup> Duchamp's later comments on the *Bicycle Wheel* vary from interview to interview, but none sustain an anti-art argument. To the contrary, he told Arturo Schwarz:

It had more to do with the idea of chance. In a way, it was simply letting things go by themselves . . . to help your ideas come out of your head. To see that wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting, a sort of opening of avenues on other things than material life of every day. . . . I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace.<sup>56</sup>

Schwarz also elicited from Duchamp the acknowledgment that "the wheel must have had a great influence on my mind, because I used it almost all the time from then on, not only there, but also in the *Chocolate Grinder*, and later in the *Rotoreliefs*." Still more links to Duchamp's *oeuvre* have been suggested by other authors,<sup>57</sup> and to all those views I wish to add that the *Bicycle Wheel*—consciously or not—is effective from a visual or aesthetic perspective. Though composed of two distinct parts (the bicycle wheel and the stool), it exists as a well-proportioned whole, human in its scale and upright-ness and Brancusi-like in the dialogue between "base" and "object," which share such features as light, taut, open constructions based on circles and spokes. Could it have been merely by chance, convenience, or practicality that Duchamp selected such a stool for the "base" of the *Bicycle Wheel*? Can any more appropriate "base" be conceived for it—whether designed by the artist or selected from the world of tables, chairs, benches and whatnot?<sup>58</sup>

Duchamp's claims for visual indifference notwithstanding, some authors have persisted in perceiving the *Bottlerack* as an object of aesthetic merit that is also intimately linked to Duchamp's thought and work. Robert Motherwell proclaimed that "the bottlerack he [Duchamp] chose has a more beautiful form than almost anything made, in 1914, as sculpture."<sup>59</sup> Ulf Linde sees it as a "kind of torso" and has indicated convincing ties to the *Large*

*Glass*, while Schwarz—rightly, I think—has underscored “the phallic symbolism of this item” with its “multiplication of the erect phallus-like spikes,” which fulfill their function only when they have received and drained bottles.<sup>60</sup> The female element, merely implied by the missing bottles, may actually be central to this object in the form of the passageway through the core of the drying rack.

While there is no way to “prove” such interpretations of the *Bottlerack*, they are not implausible subjective views forced on the object. To the contrary, such interpretations are consistent with the basic themes and attitudes present in Duchamp’s art and notes from such major paintings of 1912 as *The Bride* and *The Passage of the Virgin to the Bride*, to the *Large Glass* and all works related to it. It is not possible here to explore those works and writings. I must instead rely on the knowledge of the reader and indicate that the themes and attitudes I have in mind include (1) the omnipresence of sexuality as a driving but unfulfilled or unfulfilling force—whether male and female are bound together, as in the *Large Glass*, or fused, as in the *Bottlerack*; (2) a love of irony, exhibited in the *Large Glass*, for example, by use of almost exaggerated reason, geometry and quasi-scientific/engineering procedures for seemingly absurd ends; (3) a use of mechanical forms (and manufactured objects) that simultaneously challenge conventional art, recognize the significance of machines and technology in contemporary life, and reinforce the elements of sexuality and irony—employing mechanical forms and procedures, for example, to deal with what are conventionally conceived as the most intimate male/female relationships; and (4) the stimulation of spectator participation via a mental image of the functioning of the *Large Glass*, or by spinning the *Bicycle Wheel* or placing a bottle on the drying rack.

The readymades are quite varied and certainly all of them do not conform to the concerns or elements described above—but *Fountain* does appear to fit those attitudes and, given the preceding course of Duchamp’s work for at least four years, the role of indifference or chance seems all the more remote in the selection of the urinal.

Urinals were not a sudden discovery or revelation to Duchamp in 1917. As early as 1914—in *The Box of 1914*—he had written: “One only has: for female the public urinal and one lives by it.”<sup>61</sup> The precise meaning of his comment is obscure, but it associates a female form with an object for a male function—an object, moreover, which involves injection of fluid from a male into a uterine-like shape. It is also tempting to think that the name of the Mott company appealed to him, but regardless of the plumbing manufacturer patronized, contemporary showroom photographs and sales catalogues indicate that Duchamp had choices in the Mott shop between a variety of urinals (Fig. 8), actual fountains, tubs, basins and fixtures of all kinds, some of which suggest anthropomorphic forms that would have been noticed by Duchamp. Many of those objects may be interesting to us today, but—insofar as I can see—few would have yielded to the transformation wrought by Duchamp in the urinal he selected. Later in his life Duchamp vigorously resisted the existence of a personal taste implied by my argument;<sup>62</sup> however, it seems to me that the issue is not so much one of personal taste but of a keen

eye and mind which perceive visual properties of very diverse sorts that are recognized as fulfilling aesthetic/intellectual needs. The difference may seem slight, but I think it is significant.

As photographed by Stieglitz following a long discussion with Duchamp, *Fountain* quietly exudes sexuality. A masculine association cannot be divorced from the object because the original identity and function of the urinal remain evident, yet the overriding image is that of some generic female form—a smooth, rounded organic shape with flowing curves. This perception of femaleness seems reinforced by Duchamp’s comment in *The Box of 1914* and by the photograph of his studio with a (the?) urinal suspended from the ceiling—“*le pendu femelle*.” *Fountain* also abounds in irony—not only in the male/female exchange, but as an object whose hard, chilly surface belies the sensuousness of the form. There is irony, too, in the function, which was changed from a receptacle for waste fluid to a dispenser, a fountain of life-giving water, or, in the eyes of Duchamp’s friends, a manufactured object whose function was transformed from serving the dirty biological needs of men to suggesting a serene seated Buddha or a chaste, veiled Madonna. Even the signature participates—scruffy in form in contrast to the pristine elegance of the urinal, and evocative not of Buddhas and Madonnas but of the popular cartoon characters, Mutt and Jeff.

Perception of Buddhas and Madonnas introduces a religious dimension which does not seem commensurate with Duchamp’s major concerns, and it may represent the views of Duchamp’s friends rather than his own intentions. It should be noted, however, that Duchamp did not censor those observations and that his larger concept of readymades includes all kinds of

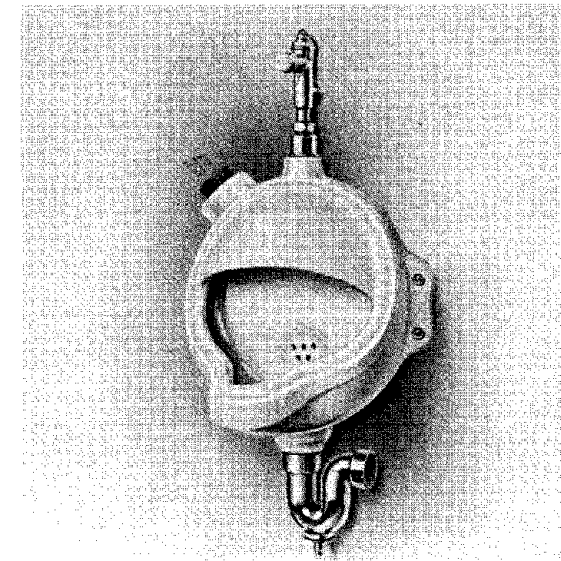


Fig. 8 Heavy vitreous-enameled urinal, 838-Y from the J. L. Mott Iron Works, *Marine Department Catalogue "Y,"* New York, 1902.

"givens" beyond the control of the artist – some of which point to the ultimate unknowns and/or mysteries of life which involve a spiritual dimension.<sup>63</sup>

That veiled, mysterious, iconic quality of *Fountain* is inseparable from the photograph, and the role of Alfred Stieglitz must be considered at this juncture. To what extent did he control the photograph – hence our image of the original *Fountain* – and to what extent did Duchamp influence Stieglitz's work? Curiously, no negative has ever been found in the Stieglitz estate and *Fountain* has not figured in publications on Stieglitz – while it always appears in publications on Duchamp. The absence of a negative for *Fountain* has been a factor in publications on Stieglitz, but it is also a unique, unexpected work in his career at that time, both as subject matter and as a commission. We know Stieglitz emerged from a lengthy discussion with Duchamp proclaiming the aesthetic virtues of *Fountain*, and it seems reasonable to attribute a significant role in the photograph to Duchamp. Yet, in the final analysis it remains a superb Stieglitz photograph. It was Stieglitz who elected to place *Fountain* in front of a Marsden Hartley painting with fortuitous visual and intellectual links. Stieglitz also chose to place *Fountain* exactly at our eye level, bringing it close, magnifying its presence, rotating it slightly on its axis to set up just a touch of tension, and lighting it from above so that it is dramatically isolated against its setting yet also softly veiled, moody and mysterious. Moreover, through his friendship with Picabia, Stieglitz was familiar with the symbolic use of common manufactured items in art, and during that very spring of 1917 he was championing a young photographer, Paul Strand, whose dramatic close-up photographs of common objects were to make a substantial impression on Stieglitz and photography in America. It is generally believed that Picabia and Duchamp were instrumental in the development of Strand's vision, but much is still unknown about the interchange of Duchamp, Picabia, Stieglitz and Strand. It is my hunch that Stieglitz's photo of *Fountain* will be a significant piece in that puzzle whenever it is worked out.

Whereas Stieglitz contributed to the iconic and vaguely spiritual appearance of *Fountain*, another artist, Brancusi, may be relevant for its sleek formal properties and sexual suggestions. The exhibition of Brancusi's sculpture at De Zayas's Modern Gallery during the fall of 1916 included both the marble and polished brass versions of *Princess X* (Fig. 9), which were purchased by John Quinn and Walter Arensberg respectively during 1917.<sup>64</sup> The brass version was exhibited at the 1917 Independents' exhibition and reproduced in the catalogue as *Princesse Bonaparte*.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, Duchamp was surely familiar with both sculptures. Brancusi's sensuous abstraction of the princess into a featureless face, long, curving neck, and full, rounded breasts was too abstract for most critics, although one was offended by the artist's sly incorporation of a phallic form:

We are not of the class that favors drapery for the legs of the piano stool, but phallic symbols under the guise of portraiture should not be permitted in any public exhibition hall, jury or no jury . . . America likes and demands a clean art.<sup>66</sup>

It is most unlikely that Duchamp missed the female/male fusion of forms in Brancusi's *Princess X*. Indeed – the distinctions between *Fountain* and *Prin-*

*cess X* notwithstanding – the affinities between these works are sufficient to raise the possibility that *Princess X* contributed to the conception of *Fountain*. The interplay of male object and suggestive female form has only recently emerged in commentary on *Fountain*, although the androgynous element of Duchamp's work is established in the literature for other objects.<sup>67</sup>

One further witness remains to be called to testify to the particular taste at that moment for objects – both manufactured and handmade – which are characterized by sleek, simple shapes that suggest anthropomorphic forms with sexual connotations. Picabia's mechanomorphic images changed significantly soon after he returned to New York in April 1917, just in time for the Independents' exhibition. The meaning of his earlier drawings had been keyed to the *function* of the machine forms that he employed, but his drawings of manufactured objects datable from April to June 1917 present suggestive forms and ironic titles similar to what we have encountered in *Fountain*. One of the drawings, *Ane* (*Ass or Donkey*, Fig. 10), represents the propeller of a ship, but its softly rounded blades, radiating from a central shaft with an orifice, evoke generic female forms – and the meaning of this "handmade readymade" seems to involve a risqué bilingual play on its title combined with the form, function, and location of the ship's screw from which it was copied.<sup>68</sup>

Regrettably, Picabia's letters at the time contain no reference to *Fountain* or to his own works, which I think reflect it and the interests of the entire

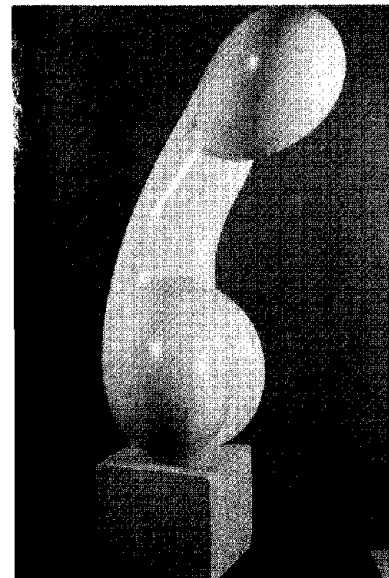


Fig. 9 Constantin Brancusi, *Princess X*, 1916, marble. Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Gift of Mrs. A. B. Sheldon.

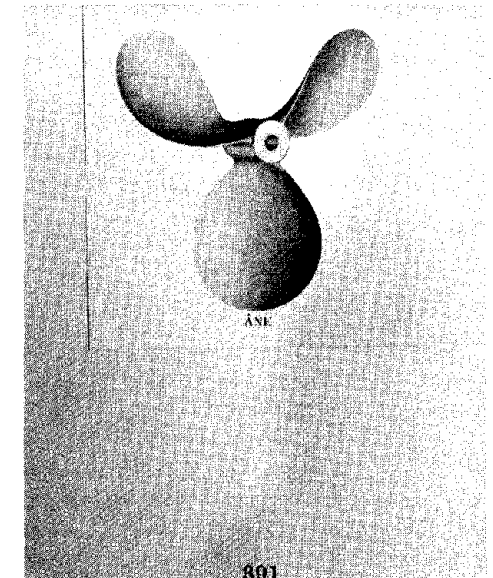


Fig. 10 Francis Picabia, *Ane* (*Ass or Donkey*), 1917, cover for 391, no. 5, New York, June 1917. Location of original drawing unknown.

circle around Arensberg and Duchamp. The situation is not unique. After May 1917, no references to *Fountain* have been found in the letters or records of anyone associated with the lively debate during April and early May of that year—not even in the records of Arensberg, who supposedly purchased it. It is almost as though all discussion of *Fountain* was deliberately suppressed. Moreover, the object itself disappeared again and has never reappeared. This second disappearance is doubly mysterious inasmuch as *Fountain* was supposedly then in friendly hands. Other than the few days it was available for viewing at 291, *Fountain* was never exhibited, and almost thirty years passed without a publication that included either significant commentary on it or a reproduction of Stieglitz's photograph.

This astonishing silence that descended upon *Fountain* precluded a discussion of issues it had raised, but those issues reappeared with a vengeance in the context of the tumultuous art scene of the 1960s. It was in the context of such controversial movements as junk sculpture, the "New Realism" of Europe, Pop Art, Minimal Art and Conceptual Art that *Fountain* again became a center of attraction. Different viewpoints of the readymades abounded, but those who proclaimed *Fountain* to be an object of anti-art or aesthetic indifference dominated critical opinion, obscuring and displacing the historical conditions of 1917. Duchamp himself confounded critical debate with conflicting comments on the readymades and the authorization of various replicas of them. Indeed the reemergence of the readymades in the 1960s and their critical reception is a phenomenon that merits a study of its own, and a secondary aim of this article is to offer a new perspective on that criticism. For over twenty-five years we have looked back at *Fountain* with eyes and minds shaped by conditions in the sixties and seventies. In this article I have sought to look at *Fountain* itself and the context in which it came into being. In that context neither Duchamp nor his friends said anything about anti-art or aesthetic indifference. Duchamp simply referred to *Fountain* and other readymades as "sculpture"; his friends—probably reflecting his attitude—spoke of pleasing forms with anthropomorphic associations. The comments and conditions of 1917 deserve to reenter our consideration of *Fountain*: they suggest that we should not ignore the visual properties of other readymades.

#### Notes

1. For the claims of Duchamp and Marlor see Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Belfond, 1967), 99, and Clark S. Marlor, "A Quest for Independence: The Society of Independent Artists," *Art and Antiquities* (March–April 1981), 77.
2. In conjunction with an exhibition of Duchamp's work, the Menil Collection in Houston will publish a modified version of this article as part of an extended text on the history and criticism of *Fountain* after 1917.
3. In the fall of 1972 a memorable group of students at Rice University confirmed these perceptions and encouraged this article. Those students were James Courtney, Dean Haas, Robert Hilton, Van Jones, William McDonald, Herta Glenn (Merwin), and Virginia Ralph. I dedicate this article to Herta Glenn.

4. For the most thorough and reliable account of the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists see Francis Naumann, "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists," parts I and II, *Artforum* 17 (February 1979), 34–39, and [April 1979], 49–53. Naumann has provided photographs, friendly criticism, and numerous references regarding the Independents' exhibition and *Fountain*. Special thanks are due for his unstinting generosity. See also Clark S. Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists. The Exhibition Record 1917–1944* (Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1984).

5. See the anonymous interview with these four artists in the *New York Tribune*, "French Artists Spur on an American Art," 24 October 1915, Section iv, 2–3. This interview has been reprinted in Rudolf E. Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada* (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), 128–35.

6. Duchamp exhibited two readymades at the Bourgeois Gallery, New York, *Exhibition of Modern Art*, 3–9 April 1916.

7. For an excellent account of the Arensbergs see Francis Naumann, "Walter Conrad Arensberg: Poet, Patron, and Participant in the New York Avant-Garde, 1915–1920," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 76, no. 328 (Spring 1980). I am also much indebted to Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, a graduate student preparing a thesis on the Arensbergs, and to Mrs. Elizabeth S. Wrigley, president of the Francis Bacon Foundation, Claremont, California.

8. Quinn's friendship and his efforts to secure employment for Duchamp are evident in Duchamp's letters to Quinn (John Quinn Collection, The New York Public Library). See also the catalogue for an exhibition organized by Judith Zilczer for the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., *The Noble Buyer: John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde*, 15 June–4 September 1978.

9. In Walter Pach's correspondence with John Quinn, the Independents' project is first mentioned on 9 October 1916, although it is clear that organizational work had begun earlier (John Quinn Collection, The New York Public Library). The certificate of incorporation dated 5 December 1916 is published as Appendix A in Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists*, 53–54.

10. The initial notice of the Society of Independent Artists, Inc., listed the directors as George Bellows, Homer Boss, John R. Covert, Katherine S. Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, Regina A. Farrelly, Arnold Friedman, William J. Glackens, Ray Greenleaf, John Marin, Charles E. Prendergast, Maurice B. Prendergast, Man Ray, Mary C. Rogers, Morton L. Schamberg, Joseph Stella and Maurice Sterne. Walter Arensberg's name was added to that list in the exhibition catalogue. A list published by Clark S. Marlor (*The Society of Independent Artists*, 58) includes the names of Arthur B. Frost, Jr., Albert Gleizes, Francis Picabia, John Sloan and Jacques Villon. The three French artists, Gleizes, Picabia and Villon, were added at Marlor's initiative because they were involved in the planning of the Society (letter to the author, 2 December 1986).

11. Announcement entitled "The Society of Independent Artists, Inc.," undated, in the Archives of the Société Anonyme, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

12. Roché, an author, private art dealer and friend from Paris, arrived in New York during November 1916. Beatrice Wood was a young actress who met Duchamp in September 1916 through the French composer, Edgar Varèse. Roché and Wood contributed most of the texts for *Blindman* no. 1, which is dated 10 April 1917 but seems to have appeared a few days later. Wood first recorded the Arensbergs' response to it in her diary on 16 April. For the relationships of Roché, Wood and Duchamp see Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself* (Ojai, California: Dillingham Press, 1985).

13. Covert wrote Katherine S. Dreier on 9 March 1917 to urge her attendance at an important meeting of the directors on 13 March in Arensberg's studio at 33 West 67th Street (Archives of the Société Anonyme).

14. These terms and others are specified in a "Notice to Exhibitors" (n.d.) mailed to artists over the names of William Glackens and John Covert at the latter's address, 20 West 31st Street, New York, N.Y. (Archives of the Société Anonyme).

15. For extensive clippings on the Independents' exhibition see Katherine S. Dreier's scrapbook, vol. I (1915-1917) in the Archives of the Société Anonyme. See also Francis S. Naumann, "The Big Show."

16. Unsigned review, "His Art Too Crude for Independents," *The New York Herald*, 14 April 1917, 6. Several contemporary references in the press to "J. C. Mutt" probably represent a simple error in reporting. Inaccuracies were compounded when an anonymous writer for *American Art News* confused *Fountain* with Beatrice Wood's entry *Un Peu d'eau dans du savon* and claimed it was signed "Jeff Mutt" (*American Art News* 15, no. 27 [14 April 1917], 1). More puzzling are several contemporary references to a painting entitled *Tulip Hysteria Co-ordinating* supposedly submitted by Duchamp to the Independents. No such painting has ever appeared, and no further mention of it has been found in documents relating to Duchamp and his friends. Naumann suggests it was a rumor circulated intentionally to mislead the public ("The Big Show," part I, 37 and 39).

17. Franklin Clarkin, "Two Miles of Funny Pictures," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 25 April 1917. No further mention of a damage suit has been found, but the identification of "R. Mutt" as "Richard Mutt" correctly reflects Duchamp's intention, and associations of R. Mutt with Mutt and Jeff were prevalent. Harry Conway ("Bud") Fisher's popular cartoon strip on Mutt and Jeff was carried in New York by *The World*.

18. Clark S. Marlor, letter to the author, 2 December 1986. A. S. Baylinson (1882-1950) was a Russian-born artist who became a student of Robert Henri and an early member of the Independents. The fire which destroyed his studio is frequently dated 1930.

19. Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979) 466.

20. Otto Hahn, "Passport No. G 255300," *Art and Artists* (July 1966), 10. Other accounts for the inscription "R. Mutt" have been offered. Jack Burnham claims it "is a pun or partial homonym for the German word 'Armut,' meaning poverty" ("The True Readymade?," *Art and Artists*, February 1972, 27). Duchamp rejected that interpretation, initially attributed to Rosalind Krauss (Otto Hahn, 10). Ulf Linde observed that "Mutt" is similar to a mirror reversal of *Tu m'*, Duchamp's painting of 1918 which includes shadows of readymades (Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde and Arturo Schwarz, *Marcel Duchamp. Ready-Mades, etc. 1913-1964* [Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1964], 63). Rudolf Kuenzli has suggested that "R. Mutt" could refer to "mongrel art" based on the association of "R" with the French word "l'art" and "Mutt" with American slang for a mongrel dog (conversation with this author, 24 September 1987).

21. The main plant of J. L. Mott Iron Works (founded 1828) was located in Trenton, New Jersey, but it had outlet stores from coast to coast, including major showrooms in Philadelphia and in New York at Fifth Avenue and 17th Street. See the J. L. Mott Iron Works catalogues, *Modern Plumbing for Schools, Factories, etc.*, New York, 1912, and *Marine Plumbing, Catalogue "M,"* New York, 1918. Naumann has identified an outlet at 718 Fifth Avenue, probably the same location ("The Big Show," part I, 39).

Those rare catalogues were made available to the author by courtesy of Mr. Francis

Kelly, recently retired from J. L. Mott, and Laurie H. Sullivan, president of the company, which now specializes in marine plumbing products.

Unfortunately, no company museum or cemetery of old products exists, but among the few remaining catalogues urinals like the one chosen for *Fountain* are illustrated in Mott's *Marine Department Catalogue "Y,"* volume II (New York, 1902), 58, and Mott's *Plumbing Fixtures Catalogue "A"* (New York, 1908), 417. The latter example (Fig. 2) was first reproduced in George Basalla's excellent article, "Transformed Utilitarian Objects," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Winter 1982), 194. The 1902 model is described in the catalogue as a "Heavy Vitro-adamant Urinal, 12 x 15 inches, with nickel-plated supply valve, with key stem and 1 3/4 inch nickel-plated trap" arranged for a continuous flush and retailing for \$11. Although several of the wall-hung urinals have shapes compatible with *Fountain*, few models have flushing rims and ears or lugs for attaching the urinal to the wall which resemble those features on the urinal selected by Duchamp.

22. This seldom-noted photograph was reproduced in an article by Nicolas Calas, "Cheat to Cheat," *View* 5, no. 1 (21 March 1945), 20. It appears also in Robert Lebel's *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Paraglyphic Books, 1959), pl. 84.

The apartment in the photograph is the one at 33 West 67th Street occupied by Duchamp from October 1916 to August 1918. Although this photograph could conceivably have been made after the Independents' exhibition, it is curious that no mention of it has ever emerged in interviews or the correspondence of Duchamp's closest friends, including Arensberg, Beatrice Wood, Louise Norton, Man Ray, H. P. Roché and others. Duchamp said he lost track of *Fountain* after the Independents. If this photograph was made around late March or early April 1917, then a more precise date can be attributed to *Hat Rack*.

To date, the original photograph and identity of the photographer have not been found.

23. I am indebted to Francis Naumann who pointed out the existence of Beatrice Wood's diary and made his copy available, and to Beatrice Wood for her permission to quote from it. Punctuation and spelling in the diary have been retained.

24. Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself*, 29-30. Beatrice Wood is the only eyewitness to this event who has published an informative account of the argument between Bellows and Arensberg. She has, in fact, contributed several accounts, published and unpublished, which vary in some details but remain consistent in the essentials. The earliest version known to this author appears in Wood's letter to Louise Arensberg on 10 August 1949 in the Beatrice Wood Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., roll no. 1236, frames 989-90. A similar version, transformed into a dialogue between Bellows and Arensberg, was sent to this author in June 1962. Another version substituting Rockwell Kent for George Bellows was published by Francis Naumann, "I Shock Myself: Excerpts from the Autobiography of Beatrice Wood," *Arts* 51 (May 1977), 134-39.

25. Anonymous review, "His Art Too Crude for Independents," *The New York Herald*, 14 April 1917, 6.

26. Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, 11 April 1917 (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). This letter and others from Duchamp to his sister and his brother-in-law, Jean Crotti, have been published in English translation with commentary by Francis M. Naumann, "Affectueusement, Marcel," *Archives of American Art Journal* 22, no. 4 (1982), 2-19:

Tell this detail to the family: The Independents have opened here with immense success.

One of my female friends under a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, sent in a porcelain urinal as a sculpture; it was not at all indecent – no reason for refusing it. The committee has decided to refuse to show this thing. I have handed in my resignation and it will be a bit of gossip of some value in New York (p. 9).

27. Images of Duchamp's female alter ego, Rose Sélavy, first appeared in 1921, but an androgynous element has been attributed to Duchamp's earlier work as well, most notably by Arturo Schwarz, "The Alchemist Stripped Bare in the Bachelor, Even," in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 81–98.

28. Charles Demuth to Henry McBride, undated (c. 10–14 April 1917), Archives of Henry McBride, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. The "e" added to Mutt in this letter could possibly have been intended to suggest a female identity or, if associated with the "R" of R. Mutt, *Mutter*, the German word for "mother."

Either Morton Schamberg and/or Charles Sheeler could have served as the Philadelphia contact since both lived there and were friendly with Duchamp. However, no documents have yet been discovered to link them to the Richard Mutt affair.

29. Schuyler 9255 is the number listed in the 1917 Manhattan telephone directory for Mrs. Louise McC. Norton. She and her husband were co-editors of the avant-garde magazine *Rogue*. They separated in 1916 and she later married Edgar Varèse, but during 1916–17 she was one of Duchamp's closest friends. In several interviews and letters this author was not successful in eliciting new information regarding *Fountain* from Louise Varèse.

30. Marcel Duchamp to Katherine S. Dreier, 11 April [1917]; Archives of the Société Anonyme.

31. Katherine S. Dreier to Marcel Duchamp, 13 April 1917; Archives of the Société Anonyme.

32. Katherine S. Dreier to William Glackens, 26 April 1917; Archives of the Société Anonyme. These quotations are from a carbon copy. The Archives also contain the letter in a typed form with changes made in ink.

33. The claim that *Fountain* was smashed by William Glackens stems from Glackens's son, Ira (*William Glackens and the Ashcan Group* [New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1957], 187–88), who recounts Charles Prendergast's story about a problem posed for the Independents' executive committee by the submission of two works, Duchamp's *Fountain* and a "tastefully decorated" chamber pot by an unnamed artist. According to Prendergast, William Glackens solved the problem by dropping the "disputed 'objet d'art'" and breaking it. Although it is not clear if the broken item was *Fountain* or the chamber pot, Clark S. Marlor claims that Glackens broke *Fountain* ("A Quest for Independence: The Society of Independent Artists," 77). Marlor quotes the Prendergast story again in *The Society of Independent Artists*, 5, as one version of what happened to *Fountain*, but he believes that to be the accurate version (letter to the author, 2 December 1986).

34. Rudi Blesh, *Modern Art USA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 79. Discrepancies in Duchamp's own memory of the event have clouded specific points. In a late interview with Pierre Cabanne (*Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp*, 98), he mistakenly recalled that *Fountain* was concealed behind a partition "pendant toute la durée de l'exposition, [et] je n'ai pas su où elle était."

35. Beatrice Wood, unpublished diary, 13 April 1917.

36. Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself*, 30.

37. Alfred Stieglitz to Henry McBride, 19 April 1917, Archives of American Art, McBride Papers, microfilm roll 12, frame 445. To date no McBride response has been found to the letters of Demuth and Stieglitz, suggesting perhaps the reluctance of even sympathetic critics to engage issues raised by *Fountain*.

38. Carl Van Vechten, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913–1914*, edited by Edward Burns (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 58–59. This undated letter is attributed to April 5, apparently on the basis of events in the life of Van Vechten and his wife, the actress Fania Marinoff. Though April 5 is plausible in that context, it conflicts in the context of Stieglitz, and in my opinion the letter must date after April 13. This recent edition of the Van Vechten-Stein correspondence was brought to my attention by Francis Naumann.

39. Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O'Keeffe, Archives of Georgia O'Keeffe, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Restrictions on these archives, recently placed at Yale, preclude access to this letter. Owing, however, to the forthcoming publication of this letter in the selected correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe, Sarah Greenough and Juan Hamilton graciously informed me of some of its contents and authorized a brief paraphrase. I am grateful to be able to indicate some points in this important document. Stieglitz was also led to think that the urinal had been submitted by a young woman, probably at the instigation of Duchamp.

40. When informed of the Marsden Hartley reference, Francis Naumann identified *The Warriors*. I am grateful for his quick eye and for permission from the present owner of *The Warriors* to reproduce it with a diagram indicating as accurately as possible the portion of the painting covered by *Fountain* as photographed by Stieglitz. The shape of *Fountain* cannot be made to fit on a standard, frontal reproduction of *The Warriors* without distortion, indicating that the camera lens, the urinal and the painting were not aligned in parallel planes when Stieglitz made the photograph. Diagram by James Tiebout.

41. In her diary Beatrice Wood records the appearance of *The Blind Man*, no. 2, on 5 May 1917.

42. Beatrice Wood has described this event in her autobiography, *I Shock Myself*, 31–32. The initials on the cover refer to the three editors, P [Pierre Roché], B [Beatrice], and T [Totor or Duchamp]. Because Roché and Duchamp were not American citizens, they asked Beatrice to stand alone as publisher. She accepted, but her father was appalled by the magazine and warned her she might go to jail if such "filth" went through the mail. She consulted Frank Crowninshield, editor of *Vanity Fair* and supporter of *The Blind Man*. Though they could not understand the reaction of Beatrice's father, they decided not to risk bad publicity for such distinguished backers as Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney and distributed *The Blind Man* by hand.

43. Beatrice Wood claims she wrote this editorial (*I Shock Myself*, 31). In response to questions posed by Serge Stauffer (*Marcel Duchamp, Die Schriften*, vol. 1 [Zürich: Regenbogen-Verlag 1981], 280) Duchamp said that "The Richard Mutt Case" was by the editors of *Blind Man*. Alice Goldfarb Marquis thinks Arensberg was probably the principal author (*Marcel Duchamp: Eros, c'est la vie. A Biography* [Troy, New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1981], 164).

44. Comments to this effect were made by Duchamp in an unpublished interview with Peter Bunnell in 1961 (letter to the author, 5 August 1986). Jean Clair in *Du-*

*champ et la photographie* (Paris: Editions du Chêne, 1977), 69, refers to the readymades as three-dimensional "snapshots."

45. Louise Norton, "Buddha of the Bathroom," *The Blind Man*, no. 2 (5 May 1917), 5-6.

46. A generation ago, one had to search diligently for passing mention of the visual properties of *Fountain*. More recently, unequivocal comments on the aesthetic properties have been made by such authors as Kermit Champa ("Charlie Was Like That," *Artforum* 12, no. 6 [March 1974]); William Tucker ("The Object," *Studio International* [February 1973], 66-70); and Alice Goldfarb Marquis (*Marcel Duchamp: Eros, c'est la vie*, 155-56).

It is not known who initiated the association of *Fountain* with a seated Buddha, but Asian art was important for some of Duchamp's friends and acquaintances. Beatrice Wood knew Ananda Coomaraswamy, who was in New York in April 1917 (Beatrice Wood's unpublished diary, entry for April 28), and Stieglitz's former associate Agnes Ernst Meyer had begun collecting Asian art with the encouragement of Charles Lang Freer.

47. H[enri] P[ierre] Roché, "Souvenirs of Marcel Duchamp," in Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 87.

48. Nicola Greeley-Smith, "Cubist Depicts Love in Brass and Glass: 'More Art in Rubbers Than in Pretty Girl!'" *The Evening World* [New York], 4 April 1916, 3. Reprinted in Rudolf E. Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada*, 135-37.

49. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Le cas de Richard Mutt," *Le Mercure de France*, 16 June 1918. Reprinted in "Echos et anecdotes inédits," *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, no. 6 (Paris, 1981), 15. Documentation by Pierre Caizergues. Roché probably mailed a copy of *The Blind Man* to Apollinaire. In a postcard of 8 May 1917, Apollinaire thanks Roché for receipt of *The Blindman*, that is, issue no. 1 of April (Henri-Pierre Roché Archives, in the Carlton Lake Collection of the Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin).

50. This photograph (4¼" x 7") came to the Philadelphia Museum with the Arensberg Archives in 1950. It is described by the associate curator of photographs, Martha Chahroudi, as probably a photograph from the original negative. It is on photographic stock consistent with the period but not really consistent with Stieglitz's photographs. At one time it was mounted on a page from 291, no. 3, May 1915. I am grateful to Ms. Chahroudi for making this information available, and to Naomi Sawelson-Gorse who told me of the existence of the cropped photograph.

51. Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades,'" talk delivered by Duchamp as a panel member of the "Art of Assemblage" symposium at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 19 October 1961. Published in *Art and Artists*, (July 1966), 47, and reprinted in *Salt Seller. The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (Marchand du Sel)*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). Duchamp made other comments on the readymades in dialogue with the moderator, William C. Seitz, and panel members Roger Shattuck, Charles R. Huelsenbeck, Robert Rauschenberg and Lawrence Alloway (unpublished but copyrighted transcript of the symposium).

52. Hans Richter, *Dada Art and Anti-Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 207-8.

53. Robert Lebel, "Marcel Duchamp maintenant et ici," *L'Oeil*, no. 149 (May 1967), 18-23, 77.

Among all the comments of those close to Duchamp in April 1917 I have found only one, never-quoted sentence which suggests something other than the dominant references to the aesthetic properties of *Fountain*. In *The Blind Man* (no. 2, p. 12), the poet Mina Loy concludes an untitled and rather enigmatic poetic commentary on Louis Filshemius with the seemingly unrelated sentence: "Anyhow, Duchamp meditating the levelling of all values, witnesses the elimination of Sophistication." That comment may refer to the primitivist paintings of Filshemius "discovered" by Duchamp at the Independents' exhibition, but it is tempting to associate it with *Fountain* as well.

54. Dora Vallier, interview with Fernand Léger, "La Vie dans l'oeuvre de Fernand Léger," *Cahiers d'Art* 29, no. 3, (1954), 140.

The Salon de la Locomotion Aérienne was held in the Grand Palais, Paris, 26 October-10 November 1912. Guillaume Apollinaire was expressing similar views at about the same time: ". . . Je pense que le style moderne existe, mais ce qui caractérise le style d'aujourd'hui on le remarquerait moins dans les façades des maisons ou dans les meubles que dans les constructions de fer, les machines, les automobiles, les bicyclettes, les avions." ("La Renaissance des Arts Décoratifs," *L'Intransigeant*, Paris, 6 June 1912). The date and circumstances of this event are not firmly fixed. See Dickran Tushjian, "Henry Adams and Marcel Duchamp: Liminal Views of the Dynamo and the Virgin," *Arts* 51 (May 1977), 103.

55. Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, 15 January 1916 (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), translated with commentary by Francis M. Naumann, "Affectueusement, Marcel," 5.

56. Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 442.

57. Some of the more interesting analyses have been published by Ulf Linde, "La Roue de bicyclette," in *Marcel Duchamp abécédaire* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 35-41; Jean Clair, *Duchamp et la photographie*, 64-74; and Craig Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the 'Large Glass'* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 102-3. For a summary and commentary on several viewpoints see Francis M. Naumann's catalogue *The Mary and William Sisler Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 160-65, and John Moffit's text "Marcel Duchamp: Alchemist of the Avant-Garde" in Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, 23 November 1986-8 March 1987, 257-71, ed. Maurice Tuchman.

58. Like many students of Duchamp, Harriet and Sidney Janis ("Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Artist," *View* 5, no. 1 [21 March 1945], 23) struggled with a dilemma, namely, their recognition that Duchamp intentionally disregarded esthetic results and their personal experience that "a high esthetic quality stamps all that he [Duchamp] touches. . . ." They concluded that this was "the result, not of intention, but of Duchamp's high degree of sensibility."

At the same time that Duchamp was transforming manufactured objects into readymade sculptures, his friend Brancusi was making furniture for his own studio which he chose to exhibit as sculpture/bases for his sculpture a few years later, most notably the *Bench* now in the Arensberg Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Intriguing parallels and differences between Brancusi and Duchamp are explored in the excellent article of Edith Balas, "Brancusi, Duchamp and Dada," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 95 (April 1980), 165-74.

59. Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1957), xvii.

60. For Linde's comment see Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde and Arturo Schwarz, *Marcel Duchamp. Ready-Mades, etc. 1913-1964*, 56. For Schwarz's comments see *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970), 449. Duchamp confirmed in a letter to Schwarz that his interpretation of the *Bottlerack* was correct, but as Schwarz thoughtfully observed to this author, "There are many different levels of meaning to every single symbolic object. My interpretation does not exclude other interpretations, it merely adds one little piece to the puzzle" (Letter to the author, 26 January 1987).

61. Marcel Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, 23.

62. In an interview with Katherine Kuh (*The Artist's Voice*, [New York: Harper & Row, 1960], 92), Duchamp said:

I consider taste – bad or good – the greatest enemy of art. In the case of the Ready-Mades I tried to remain aloof from personal taste. . . . Of course . . . many people can prove I'm wrong by merely pointing out that I chose one object rather than another and thus impose something of my own personal taste. Again, I say man is not perfect. . . .

63. In the interview with Katherine Kuh (*The Artist's Voice*, 90) Duchamp said:

The curious thing about the Ready-Made is that I've never been able to arrive at a definition or explanation that fully satisfies me. . . . There's still magic in the idea, . . . [a] man can never expect to start from scratch; he must start from ready-made things like even his own mother and father.

64. For Brancusi's exhibition at the Modern Gallery (New York, 23 October–11 November 1916), see Marius de Zayas, "How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York," *Arts* 54, no. 8 (April 1980), 107, introduction and notes by Francis M. Naumann.

65. The Society of Independent Artists, *First Annual Exhibition*, Grand Central Palace (New York, 10 April–6 May 1917), no. 167, and illustrated in the catalogue.

66. W. H. de B. Nelson, "Aesthetic Hysteria," *The International Studio* (June 1917), ccxxi–ccxxv.

67. Arturo Schwarz has written extensively on androgyny in Duchamp's work. For a concise account see his "The Alchemist Stripped Bare in the Bachelor, Even," *Marcel Duchamp*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 81–98. Kermit Champa has commented most cogently on *Fountain* in "Charlie Was Like That," 58:

What the *Fountain* finally constituted more than anything else was the brilliant discovery within the world of the Readymade and the everyday of the perfect Freudian symbol, flagrantly obvious and stimulating once it was discovered, but utterly untranslatable and, as a result, perversely pure. Phallic? Vaginal? It was a man-made female object for exclusive male functions. Yet, who could characterize it precisely?

The masculine assumption of female biological functions in Picabia's *La Fille née sans mère* (1915) and Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1917) are two contemporary works not specifically related to *Fountain* but relevant to broad themes of artistic production, sexual reproduction, machine products and god-like activity which set a context for Duchamp's contributions. See Katia Samaltanos, *Apollinaire: Catalyst for Primitivism, Picabia, and Duchamp* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), 72–73.

68. *Ane* was the cover for Picabia's magazine 391, no. 5 (New York, June 1917). For a discussion of these images in 391 see William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia*: (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 104.

## The *Tzanck Check* and Related Works by Marcel Duchamp

Peter Read

A long and varied series of works by Marcel Duchamp seems to indicate a deeply rooted fascination with the subject of hair: his newspaper cartoon on the art of the parting, *La Critique est aisée mais la raie difficile* (1910); *Peigne* (1916); *Apolinère enameled* (1916–17, where the reflection of the girl's hair is added to the mirror); *Tonsure* (1919, where Duchamp's star-shaped tonsure may refer to "La Tête étoilée," last section of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, and/or to the "head-light child," "a comet with its tail in front," in the 1912 text "The Jura-Paris Road"); *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919); *Obligations pour la roulette de Monte Carlo* (1924, where face and hair are covered with shaving foam); *Rose Sélavy, oculisme de précision, poils et coups de pied en tous genres* (1939, volume of puns); *Moustache et barbe de L.H.O.O.Q.* (1941, frontispiece for Georges Hugnet's poem, "Marcel Duchamp"); *L.H.O.O.Q. rasée* (1965); *Etant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage* (1946–1966, where the girl's pudenta are bare, perhaps shaved). Duchamp wears a wig as Rose Sélavy, a false beard as Adam in *Relâche*, and the list may be lengthened by inclusion of the hair's-breadth capillary tubes, attributes of the Bachelors, over which hang the razor-like scissors in the *Large Glass*.

This leitmotif, hair and its absence, may be symptomatic of a concern Duchamp mentioned in a letter to Jean Crotti in March 1919: "I was losing my hair some time ago but a powerful treatment of Yvonne's and a crew-cut seem to have saved it for a while."<sup>1</sup> This could also of course be a running joke with the balding Crotti, who crowned his 1915 wire portrait of Duchamp with a particularly bushy head of hair.<sup>2</sup> Certainly Duchamp's art, like certain poems of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, displays a particular sensitivity to the erotic qualities of hair, associated more particularly in his case with androgyny and adolescence, the growth of sexuality. Freud confirms the sexual significance of hair, but in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) writes: "To represent castration symbolically, the dreamwork makes use of baldness, hair-cutting, falling out of teeth and decapitation."<sup>3</sup> The symbolism of baldness and hair-cutting seems appropriate to Duchamp's work, and *Fresh Widow* (1920), because of its links with the guillotine,<sup>4</sup> is associated with decapitation. Significantly, given the connection decapitation/castration, this was the first work Duchamp signed using a female pseudonym, "Rose Sélavy." The teeth to which Freud refers may be represented by *Peigne*, and indeed the choice of this readymade dog comb was prompted by a note in *The Green Box*, dated September 1915: