



ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF MARCEL DUCHAMP'S *FOUNTAIN*

ECKE BONK — PIERRE CABANNE — WILLIAM A. CAMFIELD — THIERRY DE DUVE — MARCEL DUCHAMP
 MARSDEN HARTLEY — WALTER HOPPS — ULF LINDE — HEINZ HERBERT MANN — HELEN MOLESWORTH
 HENRI-PIERRE ROCHÉ — ARTURO SCHWARZ — ALFRED STIEGLITZ — BEATRICE WOOD

AN EXHIBITION BY STEFAN BANZ AND CAROLINE BACHMANN

Marcel Duchamp had, at the beginning of April 1917, submitted *Fountain* for the First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists at the Grand Central Palace in New York under the pseudonym R. Mutt. The object was excluded from the exhibition by the persons responsible on the grounds that the submitting of a urinal as a work of art was not just a joke but also vulgar, immoral and plagiarizing.¹ Duchamp himself had no influence over the verdict despite the fact that he was a member of the organizing committee and had been responsible for the exhibition concept (the hanging of the exhibits in alphabetical sequence). The decision not to show R. Mutt's urinal was, moreover, a serious infringement of the regulations:

There are no requirements for admission to the 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. The principle of "no jury—no prizes," precluding special advantages to any individual, any group or any tendency, the offices of the body (presidency, secretaryship, etc.) are purely administrative.²

It was on account of this dubious decision that Duchamp and a number of his friends resigned from the committee³ and sharply criticized the controversial incident—under the headlines "The Richard Mutt Case" and "The Buddha of the Bathroom"—in *The Blind Man No. 2*, a self-published art journal.⁴ The only surviving testimony to Duchamp's first *Fountain* version is Alfred Stieglitz's now famous photograph, which Duchamp had commissioned him to take for this publication. It shows the "urinal"—dated and signed with the pseudonym R. Mutt—standing on its back on a pedestal in front of Marsden Hartley's painting *The Warriors* (Oil on copper, 121.5 x 120.5 cm, 1913, Museum of Fine Arts Boston). The initial "R." in the signature stands for Richard, or we may construe it to mean "rich art" or even "art just for the rich" and hence something deplorable, simply "mutt."

In their artists' homage to *Fountain*, a major work of the 20th century, Caroline Bachmann and Stefan Banz explicitly address the enigmatic and paradigmatic game that Duchamp played with the various versions of his Readymades—and especially with *Fountain*. Astonishingly, it was a game that the established art world has to this day failed to acknowledge.

Duchamp's "urinal" remained hidden behind a partition for the duration of the First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917 before suddenly disappearing for good. Nobody knows what

actually happened to this most famous of all Readymades. Later, in 1934, Duchamp had a miniature replica made for his *Box in a Valise*. A lot of time went by before a second, true-to-scale version of *Fountain* made its appearance, namely at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1950. This new “urinal” was obtained by the gallery owner on Duchamp’s behalf and its design was not at all like that of the original version that Duchamp had obtained from Mott Works Ltd. Thus it was that a completely new object suddenly represented Duchamp’s original Readymade. And this was also the very first time that a work representing another work was regarded by everybody as the work itself. Even today, most people who visit the Philadelphia Museum of Art and marvel at Sidney Janis’s version believe that it is in fact Duchamp’s legendary Readymade of 1917. And it is precisely this circumstance that is the starting point of Bachmann’s and Banz’s exhibition *One Hundred Years of Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain*:

On the lower level of the KMD, the only surviving document of the first ‘original’ version of *Fountain*, namely Alfred Stieglitz’s famous photograph for *The Blind Man, No. 2*, has been rendered three-dimensional to the scale of 1:20. The theme addressed here by the two artists is not only the unusual juxtaposition of Marsden Hartley’s now famous painting with Marcel Duchamp’s best-known Readymade (this was probably staged by Stieglitz himself) but also the questions implicit in the various versions of *Fountain* both as to the difference between the original and the copy and as to the consequences, especially in terms of content, if a work has been “technically reproduced” or “executed by hand”: hanging on the wall is a miniature reproduction of Hartley’s painting *The Warriors*, painted in pastel on wood, while in front of it stands a miniature replica (modeled in FIMO, a modeling compound based on a phthalate-free PVC plasticizer) of a urinal from the firm of Mott Works Ltd mounted on a white wooden pedestal.

For the upper level of the KMD the artists have painted—again in pastel on wood, but to a scale of 1:2—eight publications that in their eyes are seminal works on Duchamp’s *Fountain*:

P·B·T (Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood, and Marcel Duchamp [Totor]), *The Blind Man, No. 2*, In-House-Publication, 33 West 67th Street, New York, May 1917.

Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde, Arturo Schwarz, *Marcel Duchamp: Ready-made etc. (1913-1964)*, Galleria Schwarz, Milan, et Le Terrain Vague, Paris, 1964.

Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp*, Éditions Pierre Belfond, 4, rue Guisarde, Paris, 1967.

William A. Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, Introduction by Walter Hopps, The Menil Collection / Houston Fine Art Press, 1989.

Thierry de Duve, *Résonances du readymade*, Duchamp entre avant-garde et tradition, Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 3, place d’Assas, Nîmes, 1989.

Die Grosse Schachtel de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy, Inventory of an edition by Ecke Bonk, Schirmer/Mosel Verlag, Munich, 1989

Heinz Herbert Mann, *Marcel Duchamp: 1917*, Verlag Silke Schreiber, Munich, 1999.

Helen Molesworth (ed.), *Part Object / Part Sculpture*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH / Penn State University Press, University Park, PA, 2005.

Besides such questions concerning the difference between “original” and “replica” and between “printed” and “hand-made,” the artists also address through their works the question concerning the relationship between painting and sculpture as it affects our perception of art, for the book covers, painted on wood, stand like sculptures in the exhibition space. Above all, however, Bachmann and Banz clearly demonstrate how fundamentally important the influence of art-historical and theoretical reception is for the impact of Duchamp’s *Fountain* on the development of art in the 20th and 21st centuries.⁵

NOTES:

¹ “Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion, this article disappeared and never was exhibited.” Author unknown (but probably Marcel Duchamp himself), “The Richard Mutt Case,” in: P·B·T (Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood and Marcel Duchamp [Totor]), *The Blind Man, No. 2*, May 1917, self-published, 33 West 67th Street, New York, p. 5.

² See the foreword of the exhibition catalogue accompanying the exhibition First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, New York 1917, unpaginated (p. 6). See also “By-Law”—Sections 4 & 5—in Clark S. Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists, The Exhibition Record 1917-1944*, Noyes Press, Park Ridge, New Jersey, 1984, p. 81.

³ “DUCHAMP RESIGNS. Futurist Painter Leaves Independent Artists’ Society. Mild excitement was caused at the headquarters of the

Independent (sic) Art exhibition in the Grand Central Palace yesterday by the resignation of Marcel Duchamp from the society.

“The society’s policy is to accept all works of art submitted by members, but the directors found it necessary to reject a work submitted by a Philadelphia sculptor who masqueraded under the pseudonym of “J.C. Mutt,” (sic) as the contribution was evidently intended as a practical joke upon the society and not in the best of taste.

“Mr. Duchamp, who is famous as the author of the celebrated “Nude Descending a Staircase,” disagreed with the committee that rejected J.C. Mutt’s (sic) sculpturesque “fountain,” holding that nothing should be barred from the show that pretended to be a work of art, whether technically so or not. When overruled by the majority Mr. Duchamp resigned.” [Henry McBride?], in *The New York Sun*, April 11, 1917, p. 6.

⁴ Unnamed author (Marcel Duchamp), “The Richard Mutt Case,” and Louise Norton, “The Buddha of the Bathroom”, in *The Blind Man*, No. 2, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 5–6.

⁵ The detailed information on the history of Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* given in this press release comes from Stefan Banz himself and has been essentially sourced from his following publications: *Eilshemius: Peer of Poet-Painters*, JRP|Ringier, Zürich 2015, and *Louis Michel Eilshemius und sein Einfluss auf Marcel Duchamp*, Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna 2016.