

Elena Filipovic  
**A Museum That  
is Not**

01/19

One could say that everything begins and ends in Marcel Duchamp's studio. His first New York studio is perhaps best known from a series of small and grainy photos, some of them out of focus. They were taken sometime between 1916 and 1918 by a certain Henri-Pierre Roché, a good friend of Duchamp. Roché was a writer, not a professional photographer, clearly. He was the same guy who would go on to write *Jules et Jim*, arguably a far better novel than these are photographs. But their aesthetic quality was not really what mattered. Duchamp was attached to those little pictures. He kept them and went back to them years later, working on them and then leaving them out for us like his laundry in the picture. Or like clues in a detective novel.



Henri Pierre Roché, Marcel Duchamp's Studio, c. 1916-18.  
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Succession Marcel Duchamp. Courtesy Jean-Jacques Lebel.

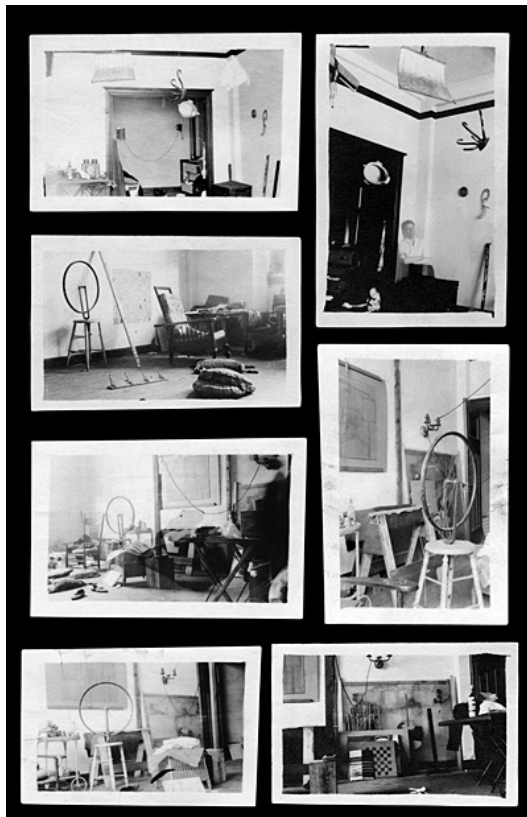
There isn't a single photograph among them that shows his studio (which was also his home, in this case) cleaned up. Duchamp's drawers are open, his shoes and pillows are strewn across the floor, dust has collected in the corners. The supposed cold conceptualist, the guy who

epilated his entire body because he seemed not to like the unkemptness of body hair (and requested that his partner at the time consider doing the same), the artist of the industrially produced readymades – lives in a pigsty.<sup>1</sup> This is not the first nor will it be the last of many Duchampian paradoxes. Still, Duchamp's sense of housekeeping and the dust that he bred in his apartment is not so much my point as is his arrangement of objects. While he might live with a mess, everything also *has its place*. The small photographs reveal that the shiny porcelain urinal on view is not in the bathroom (although there might be another one there), or even tucked in a corner – it's hung over a doorway. The disorder of the room might appear careless, except that a urinal simply doesn't get up there by accident. Duchamp's snow shovel is not casually leaning against a wall waiting for use – it is suspended from the ceiling. And his coatrack lies inconveniently and ridiculously in the middle of the room, nailed to the floor. Selected objects in chosen positions.

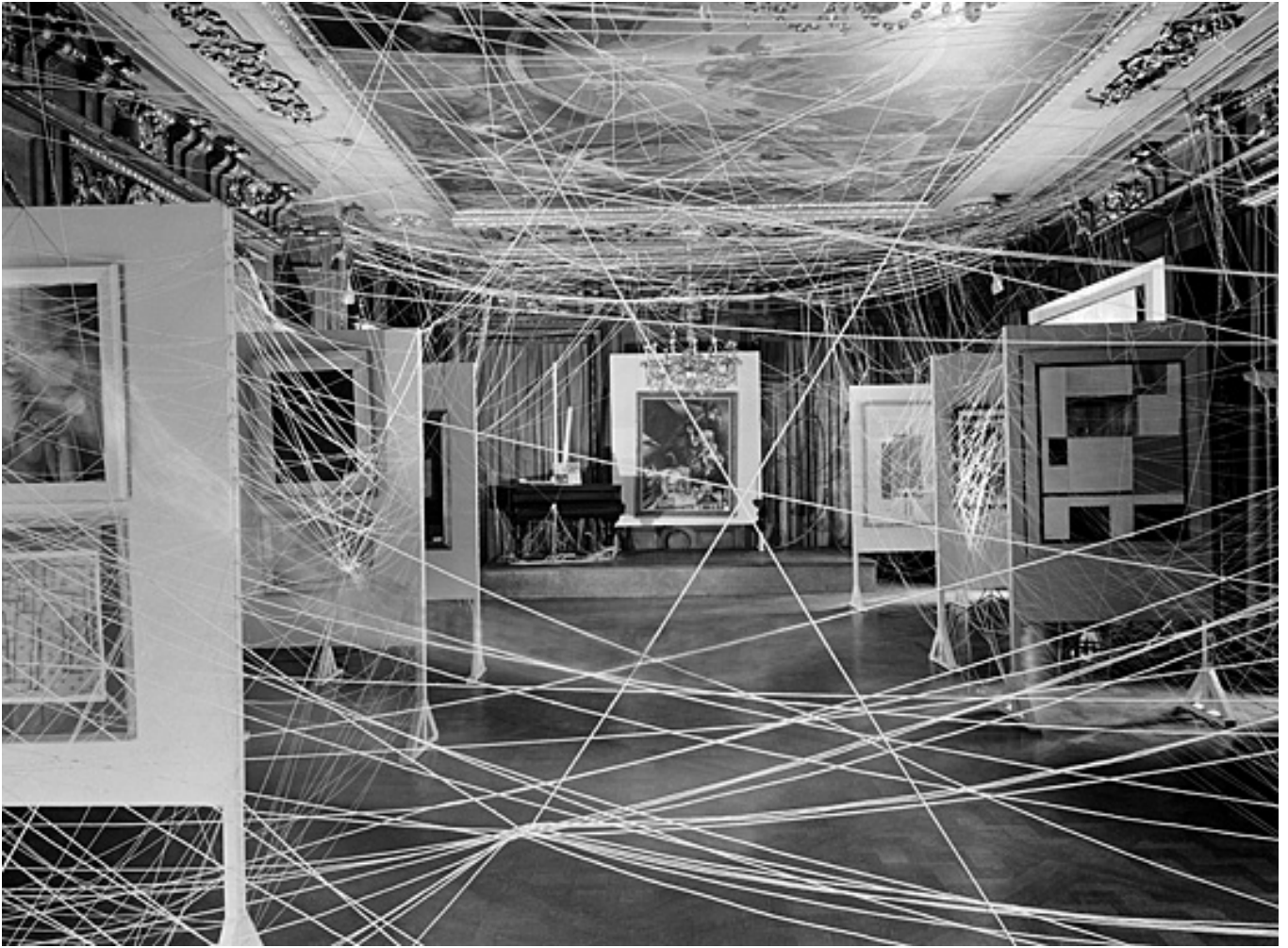
Remember, this is sometime around 1917, several years after the artist first started to bring everyday objects into his studio. Back then, he had a Paris atelier, which his sister cleaned up when the artist moved to New York, throwing the

first readymades into a dustbin, where she innocently thought they belonged.<sup>2</sup> A few years have passed since then and Duchamp is in a new city now. By this point, his utilitarian *things* already have a category name, a genre: “readymade.” Sure, Duchamp claimed that he had begun fiddling with them as a “distraction,” but already by 1916 he had decided to title each one of them. He had also begun to sign them, and to submit them to public exhibitions (even if that pretty much failed).<sup>3</sup> In short, *he treated them like works of art*, even as he repeatedly denied their artfulness.

Another indication that Duchamp thought of the readymades as more than mere *things* comes from these photos. The pictures show that these everyday objects are not – cannot be – *useful*. They were carefully arranged, displayed – indeed, *exhibited* – with their utilitarianism left undermined so that they became objects of contemplation and even of laughs, but decidedly not of use. In a way, then, the studio was the readymades' first “exhibition” space. Now, the studio wasn't an institution, but even if not exactly public, it was nevertheless a frequented space in which the objects were shown and could be read as artifacts that *meant* something. It was what Helen Molesworth rightly calls the



Henri Pierre Roché, Marcel Duchamp's Studio, c. 1916-18. Courtesy Jean-Jacques Lebel.



John Schiff, Installation view of the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, New York, 1942.  
Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Paul and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother Alexina Duchamp, Courtesy of Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

readymades' "major site of reception."<sup>4</sup> That site of exhibition/reception was a place of annunciation, declaring: *this is not (only) a urinal*. This is the tale the little photos tell.

The studio should not be confused with an art institution, but I mention the latter because such institutions and their legitimizing function are of concern to Duchamp at precisely this moment. His now-famous 1917 submission of a urinal to the "unjuried" Society of Independent Artists Exhibition is refused by its art committee, probably the same year of the studio photos. He signs *Fountain* with the pseudonym "R. Mutt," so most onlookers don't suspect he is behind it, although anyone who paid attention in his studio could easily divine the truth. Most of the world doesn't know a thing about it though, until later.

"I myself will exhibit nothing, in accordance with my principles," Duchamp wrote unequivocally in 1918 to his friend and most fervent collector, Walter Arensberg.<sup>5</sup> The issue was whether or not Duchamp would show any of his own work in the Cubist exhibition that he was attempting to organize in Buenos Aires during his short stay there. The exhibition never materialized. Still, directing his collector-friend from afar, Duchamp added that Arensberg should not loan any of the artist's work for other

04/19

exhibitions being planned in New York at the time. Later, in a 1925 letter to another patron, Jacques Doucet, Duchamp would again speak of his distaste for exhibitions, saying, "All exhibitions of painting or sculpture make me ill. And I'd rather not be involved in them."<sup>6</sup> Such comments further clarify the artist's involvement with Dreier's ironically titled "corporation" for the first "museum of modern art," the Société Anonyme, Inc.; as Duchamp wrote adamantly to the American patroness in 1929, "I don't want to go back to America to start anything in the way of an 'Art' museum."<sup>7</sup>

Almost from the start, Duchamp maintained a shifting position between interest in and antipathy for institutions of artistic judgment and exhibition: salon, gallery, museum. Of course, there was his early history of salon participation and rejection, but he also served as board member and president of the hanging committee for the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York in 1917 (the same one that rejected *Fountain*) and, in that position, proposed hanging the works according to chance, alphabetically, beginning with the first letter selected from a hat. He also had a foundational role in the Société Anonyme, Inc. with Katherine Dreier and Man Ray in the 1920s,



Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise*, 1938-42.  
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and an explicitly curatorial role in Constantin Brancusi's exhibition at the Brummer Gallery in New York in 1933. Exhibitions and the questions of public display were far from unproblematic for Duchamp.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the commercial gallery and the museum would be, with increasing insistence over the years, important sites of intervention and critique for Duchamp. If the artist's 1917 submission of an inverted urinal to an exhibition or 1919 scribbling of a mustache and *L.H.O.O.Q.* on a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* seemed aimed at the epistemological givens of art, by the late 1930s Duchamp had decidedly turned his attention to the architectural contexts, classificatory systems, institutional protocols, and authoritative doxas of the gallery-museum. This "turn" might thus add another layer to the story of the lapsed painter, obsessive chess-player, frantic note-taker, "precision optician," occasional cross-dresser, and one-time librarian that "left" art-making in 1923, spent the rest of the '20s inventing optical contraptions and, throughout the '30s, seemed to be "vacationing" in his past through various exercises of repetition, reproduction, and collection. For, at a moment when the official spaces for the display of art were hailing themselves as rational, objective, and scientific, and at a moment when it was undeniable that the historical narratives which held up museums also held up belligerent nations, Duchamp's turn toward the idiosyncratic installation of exhibition spaces and his development of his own "portable museum" brought a recasting of the architectural, temporal, and discursive armatures of art and its institutions to the fore of his practice and it did not soon leave.

### Exhibition Making

At the end of 1937, Paul Éluard and Surrealist leader André Breton invite Duchamp to generate ideas for the International Surrealist Exhibition to be held at the fashionable Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris. Duchamp had contributed works to previous collective Surrealist exhibits, but the artist famous for his detachment never officially belonged to that movement or any other. Still, he agrees to take on the exhibition-designer role, which leads to the first of a series of collaborations with Duchamp as curator/designer of exhibitions that radically reconceive what the space of an art exhibition could look like.<sup>8</sup>



Anonymous, Visitors with flashlights at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, Paris 1938.

Duchamp's interventions are quite simple, but radical. In his official capacity as "générateur-arbitre," he turns the elegantly appointed eighteenth-century interior into a darkened "grotto," covering the ornate moldings, ceiling, and bank of lights with what he announces as "1,200" suspended coal sacks. He installs an iron brazier in the center of the main hall and hangs artworks on uprooted department store revolving doors. The ceiling undulates, the walls are blackened, and coal dust invariably falls onto the finery of the exhibition's guests.<sup>9</sup>

The coal sacks are what he is perhaps most proud of. In their inversion of interior and exterior, of up and down, the 1,200 sacks (Could there have really been so many? And why that excessive number?) initiate the unsettling of the architecture of the gallery that in turn inspires the other participating artists. The collaborative results are well-known: a faux urban landscape along the entryway (lined with fictive Parisian street signs and sixteen artistically "dressed" mannequins), a lake and four beds in the main hall, dead leaves and dirt covering the floors, a soundtrack of insane asylum cries and German marching music in the air, a danced simulation of hysteria, Salvador Dalí's snail- and rain-filled taxicab just outside the gallery, and near-obscure throughout. Perhaps more pointedly even than the Dada or Surrealist exhibitions that preceded it, this exhibition responds to the

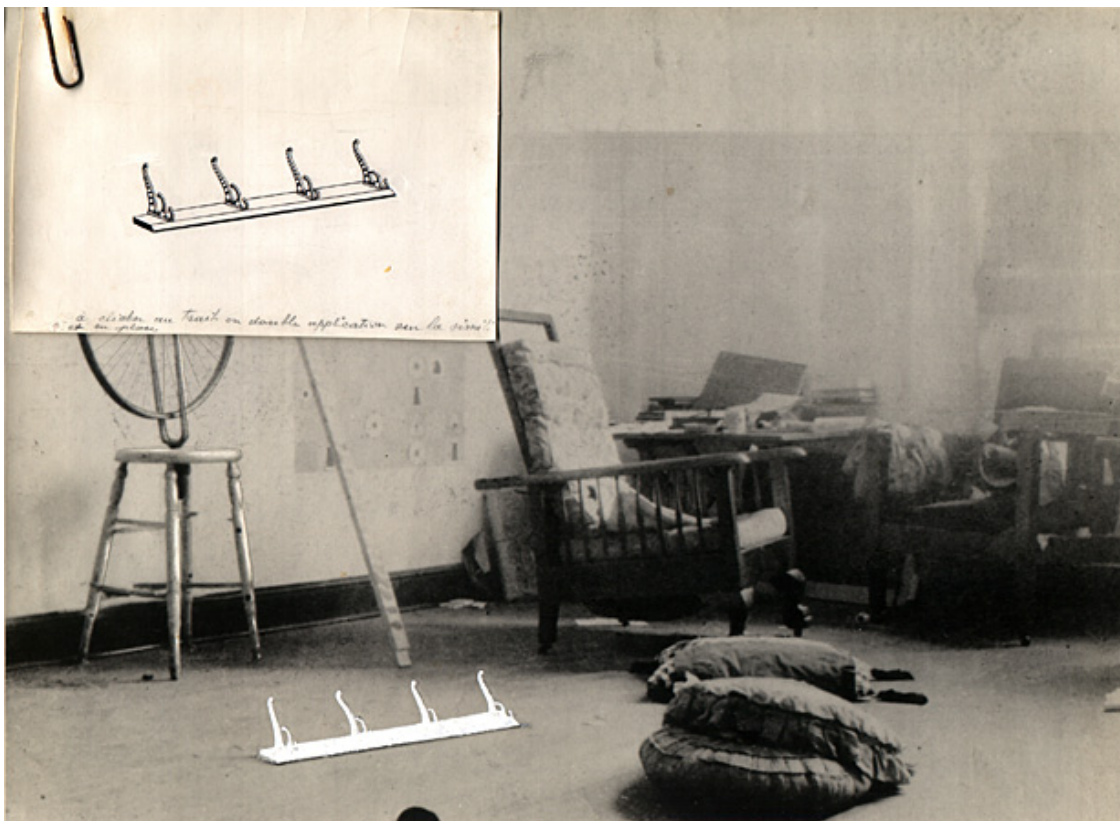
conventional space and experience of an art exhibition, constructing an elaborate answer to both on an architectural scale.

Just as significant to our understanding of the exhibition is an element that wasn't realized. As Marcel Jean recalls, "Duchamp had thought of installing 'magic eyes' so that the lights would have gone on automatically as soon as the spectator had broken an invisible ray when passing in front of the painting."<sup>10</sup> Duchamp's wish proved unfeasible, but Man Ray adapted the idea for the opening night, turning out the lights and handing out flashlights at the entrance so that visitors could use them to view the artworks "on display." The solution retained much of Duchamp's original intention: the viewers got close to the art, leaning forward to focus their hand-held electric lights – an act in distinct contrast to the notion of "proper distance," disembodied viewing, and the "enlightening" clarity of the traditional museum or gallery. Even in its adapted form, one notes a concern with perception and a continuation of that assault on visual autonomy that so interested Duchamp – from his efforts to contravene retinality to his "precision optics" experiments with motorized optical machines and spinning *Rotoreliefs*. At the newly organized modern museums and display

06/19

spaces, so in vogue in Paris in the 1930s, the spectator was choreographed to keep a safe distance, to look disinterestedly, and to forget his or her body. Duchamp, on the other hand, seemed to want to make explicit that vision's condition of possibility is the approach of the body – that vision is decidedly *corporeal*. For Duchamp, the interrogation of the autonomy of vision went hand-in-hand with a rethinking of that site so invested in maintaining it – the Cartesian exhibition space. It is perhaps in the context of his exhibition designs, therefore, that one best understands Duchamp's complex visual exercises and their centrality to his corpus – his persistent preoccupation with visuality questioned not only what and how we see, but, ultimately, what and how institutions of art *make us see*.<sup>11</sup>

Duchamp's experiments with space and display continued when, after the exodus of many of the Surrealists out of Europe during the Second World War, Breton called on him again, this time to install the first international Surrealist exhibition in the United States. Titled the "First Papers of Surrealism" after the application papers that most of the émigré artists faced upon entry into the US, the show was held in 1942 at the Whitelaw Reid mansion in



Marcel Duchamp, Manipulated photos of *Trébuchet* for reproduction in the *Boîte-en-valise*, 1941.  
© 2009 Artists Right Society (AGP), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Succession Marcel Duchamp

New York as a benefit affair for the French Relief Societies. Duchamp devised for it a simple, economic solution to work against the interior's gilded moldings, Italianate ceiling paintings, crystal chandeliers, and other opulent architectural details. Having acquired sixteen miles of ordinary white string for the installation, the artist engaged the help of several friends to erect a criss-crossed webbing (in the end, using only a fraction of his overzealous purchase).<sup>12</sup> The twine traversed the mansion's former drawing rooms, filled for the exhibition with paintings hung on portable display partitions (paintings being the overwhelming majority of what was on show). The tangled mesh did not cut off vision completely (it was the frustration, not the elimination of sight that Duchamp desired); nevertheless, the entwinement between and in front of so many of the things "on display" constituted a decided barrier between the spectator and the works of art.<sup>13</sup>

As in the 1938 *Exposition*, what was exhibited in 1942 was in fact a rethinking of viewing in the typical space of exhibition and of the body's implication in that experience, as much as the "art" itself. Several of the artist-participants were disappointed that spectators could not properly see their artworks. That was precisely the point. And it was not the only assault on the senses carried out by "First Papers": for the October 14, 1942, opening, eleven-year-old Carrol Janis showed up on schedule with several of his friends, running around, playing ball, and causing quite a scene at the exhibition. To the visitors' questions and complaints, the children replied as they had been instructed: Marcel Duchamp had asked them to come and play there.

### Portable Museums

Duchamp's role as exhibition prestidigitator in 1938 and 1942 had ephemeral effects. Yet some of the very same concerns found another manifestation – and a multiplied, permanent form – in the Duchampian project that the artist called *De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rrose Sélavy* (From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy), also known as *La Boîte-en-valise* (The Box in a Valise). Chronologically, the two projects overlapped, with the labor on the albums beginning several years before the 1938 Surrealist exhibition and continuing in the years after. Formally, the chaotic disorientations that characterized the 1938 *Exposition* and the webbed obstruction to vision of the 1942 "First Papers" could not have been more distinct from the unassuming air and seemingly ordered arrangement of the portable cases filled with facsimiles of Duchamp's works. But there was a measure of continuity: Duchamp's contribution

to the Surrealist shows responded to the art institution's inviolate and dignified space with an intrusion that exposed and shifted normative notions of display and the aesthetic experience proper to it; so, too, his encased retrospectives continued a reflection on the nature of art and the space of display, in their own way making explicit the terms and conditions of the art institution's overburdened authority.

Following the 1934 publication of the boxed facsimiles of the sketches and notes that document the conceptual development of *Large Glass*, Duchamp conceived another project, this one archival in nature. He wanted to document his lifework, to create an "album" (a "book," he described it several times in letters) of "approximately all the things [he had] produced."<sup>14</sup> By the end of 1935, the silent administrative labor that would be the cornerstone of the project had begun: Duchamp drew up lists of all his artworks and their owners; ordered black-and-white photographs of selected paintings, glass works, objects, and other unclassifiable productions; made cross-continental voyages to examine and record the titles, dates, measurements, and exact color shading of his works in public and private collections; and bought back or borrowed other pieces to make the required detailed notes. For most of the reproductions to be included in the *Boîte*, Duchamp opted for a complex and labor-intensive method of replication called the "pochoir" technique. He rejected the reproduction of works through color photography, in part, it seems, because the burgeoning technology could not yet faithfully reflect the colors of the original. But one suspects that Duchamp may not have employed such a method even if it had proved exact enough. After all, the artist eschewed other more frequently used and expedient processes including offset lithography (which he had used for the *Rotoreliefs*) in favor of the somewhat anachronistic coupling of collotype printing and pochoir coloring (he employed this method most extensively when making the reproductions contained in the *Boîte verte*).

Labor-intensive years passed. Simple mechanical reproduction be damned. As Ecke Bonk makes clear, to speak of the *Boîte* "reproductions," or even of Duchamp's other generic term, "items," hardly conveys the elaborateness of the handwork involved; the process was precise, painstaking, and often required more labor than the originals had.<sup>15</sup> There can be little doubt, this reproductive method as much as its ambivalent result – somewhere between the handcrafted and mechanically reproduced – is crucial to the subversive operation of the *Boîte-en-valise*.

07/19

e-flux journal #4 — march 2009 Elena Filipovic  
A Museum That is Not

Duchamp selected a total of 69 works to be reproduced and, in keeping with the magnitude of the edition he envisioned, he made as many as 350 copies of each item. He worked undauntedly, with the first few models completed around the time of his wartime migration to the United States, and a slow but steady trickle of more appearing during the subsequent decades. Although he envisioned an edition of 300 standard copies of the project, Duchamp also conceived of roughly 20 deluxe models (nearly all of these are housed in a brown leather valise), which are distinguished from the standard versions by containing a signed “original” work of art. These deluxe models, destined for friends and select patrons, were the first of the group to be constructed. Emblematizing the centrality of questions of artistic aura, authorship, and authenticity to the project as a whole, these deluxe “originals” and the reproductive process to which they bear witness smack of Duchamp’s rejection of both Romantic values and Enlightenment *Progrès* – his turn to a form of creation that relied neither on the mythology of the artist as troubled, inspired genius (he was, after all, “copying”), nor on purely industrial production and ready-made objects (this “copying” was hardly simple, automated, or

wholly mechanical). Thus, everywhere in the *Boîte-en-valise*, the aura of the unique work of art is laboriously underscored *and* effaced, elevated *and* ruined, such that, in the end, Duchamp offers a conflicted set of products that self-consciously limn the borders between the hand-crafted and mechanically reproduced, between original and replica, between dated artwork and contemporary interpretation, between auratic object and serial copy.<sup>16</sup>

If the very concept of the work of art and its authenticity is at stake in the *Boîte-en-valise*, so too are the institutions that judge, classify, present, and historicize the work of art as such. The condition of the *Boîte-en-valise* as a presentation case and a site of display confounds the boundaries between contents and context, container and contained. The *Boîte* internalizes (and in doing so it extends the operation of the readymade) the status of the art object in general, acknowledging that the “artness” of objects is determined by questions of classification, administration, presentation, and museality. One may even say that Duchamp understood his retrospective project as only having properly *begun* at the moment that it could no longer be the “book” he had once thought it would be, but instead the “museum”

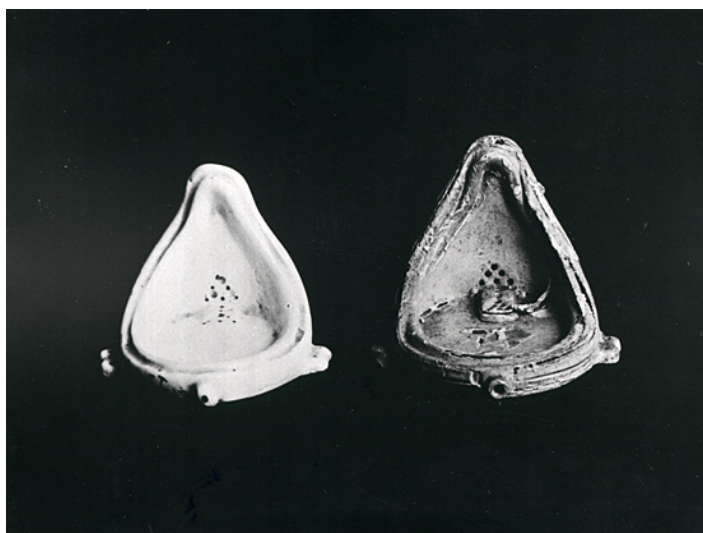


Willy Maywald, Marcel Duchamp's Rain Room at the 1947 Exposition International du Surréalisme, Paris 1947. © 2009 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

he would finally see it as.

This may help elucidate why, in a lengthy undertaking that spanned from 1935 (with his initial work on the reproductions) to 1942 (when the first few deluxe editions were complete), Duchamp repeatedly dated the “beginning” of the *Boîte-en-valise* to 1938.<sup>17</sup> The artist never explained the dating and no one pressed him on it. But, if we know that 1938 is too late to ascribe to the beginning of this retrospective project either in terms of conception or of work on its various reproductions, it does seem to mark the beginning of the conception of the album as a three-dimensional space.

The boxed form that Duchamp had used previously (on a small scale in 1914 and then later, in 1934, for the *Boîte verte*) contained scraps and photographic paper; they were boxes with loose and disordered contents which – however remarkable they were in revamping a notion of “literature” and the book-form – never emerged beyond the two-dimensional. Had Duchamp continued in this manner, he might very well have ended up with a mere loose-leaf collection of paper and celluloid reproductions in a box. (Indeed, by 1937, Duchamp had made a number of reduced-size copies of his paintings and pieces on glass, but he had also reproduced several three-dimensional objects, including the *Bottle drier* and *Why not Sneeze?* in two-dimensional photographic form for use in the album.) However, shortly after his work on the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in January 1938, Duchamp made a tiny object that arguably signaled a redefined conception of the “album” in his album project.



Marcel Duchamp, Papier maché reproduction and first porcelain cast of the miniature *Fountain* for the *Boîte-en-valise*, 1938.  
© 2009 Artists Right Society (AGP), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Succession Marcel Duchamp

In the early months of 1938, Duchamp replicated the contours of his store-bought piece

09/19

of plumbing entitled *Fountain*. More than twenty years after Duchamp’s defiant act of “selection,” the artist returned to the object for inclusion in his retrospective project. Rather than buying a new urinal and having it photographed as he had done two years prior to represent the lost original *Bottle drier*, and rather than reproducing one of those little Roché photographs that show the original urinal in the New York studio, as he would do a couple years later to represent *Trebuchet*, Duchamp instead (re)made the urinal, turning the memory of the *Fountain*’s curved industrial form into a crude miniature wire and papier-mâché sculpture.<sup>18</sup> The result was, as Roché described it in his diary, “a little masterpiece of humorous sculpture, the color of a boiled shrimp, with little holes that are so absurd yet done with such care.”<sup>19</sup> By the summer of 1938, the artist brought the object, absurdity and all, to a ceramicist (one of several artisans he would employ for the slow and complicated casting project) to make a mold and porcelain casts for inclusion with the two-dimensional reproductions of his artworks.

Duchamp’s modeling of the tiny object thus instituted a sculptural act never present in the lavatory-receptacle-turned-*Fountain*. Indeed, this act of sculpting reversed the very questions of authorship, technique, artistic touch, and aura posed by its readymade “original,” while paradoxically serving to put these notions even further into doubt. The reproduction of two other reduced-size three-dimensional objects (*Air de Paris* and *Pliant . . . de voyage*) would follow, but the papier-mâché construction of the urinal testified to something quite remarkable: Duchamp could no longer be thinking of his monograph either as anything like a typical “book” or as a simple “boîte” like the others. The reasoning is simple: the introduction of a three-dimensional object to the project entails a three-dimensional space to hold it. Therefore, even if he may not have yet determined the exact nature of the container for his reproduced artworks, in making the tiny sculpted model of the urinal – and, more importantly, in thus returning to the questions of institutionalization that the *Fountain* and its 1917 scandal ineluctably recalled – Duchamp seems to have decided that the container for his reproduced corpus should take on an architectonics of some sort, what would quickly become an *exhibitionary* configuration. And with that simple act, Duchamp effectively inserted *Fountain* – the readymade object that few even knew was by him – into his official oeuvre. More than twenty years after its original rejection and non-exhibition, it finally had an exhibition place – all the better to allow it to eventually enter (and shake) the museum and history.



Henri Glaeser, Installation view of Exposition International du Surrealism "Eros," Paris, 1959.



Marcel Duchamp, Door to *Étant donnés*, 1946-66.  
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Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

Describing the *Boîte-en-valise* to James Johnson Sweeney, Duchamp said:

Instead of painting something new, my aim was to reproduce the paintings and objects I liked and collect them in as small a space as possible. I did not know how to go about it. I first thought of a book, but I did not like the idea. Then it occurred to me that it could be a box in which all my works would be collected and mounted like in a small museum, a portable museum, so to speak.<sup>20</sup>

Art historian Benjamin Buchloh underscores the ways in which the work was true to that description:

All of the functions of the museum, the social institution that transforms the primary language of art into the secondary language of culture, are minutely contained in Duchamp's case: the valorization of the object, the extraction from context and function, the preservation from decay and the dissemination of its abstracted meaning . . . [With it, Duchamp] also changes the role of the artist as creator to that of the collector and conserver, who is concerned with the placement and transport, the evaluation and institutionalization, the display and maintenance of a work of art.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the work's retrospective grouping of objects, protective container, standardized labels, and various forms of enframement do suggest, precisely, an effort to invoke a certain museality. Yet, one should not ignore the highly ambivalent character of the *Boîte-en-valise* as a museum, of Duchamp as "conserver," the discontinuities in the stories it tells, and the fragilities in the structure it offers. One must ask what kind of museum, what kind of architecture, and what kind of history Duchamp's so-called museum *actually* presents?

Between "de ou par," Marcel and Rose, singular and plural, artisanal precision and serial reproduction, original and copy, lie multiple ambiguities, instabilities, and indeterminacies that are hardly accidental. For Duchamp's portable case of tiny wares performs its function precisely in its undecidability as a work "of art" in its own right, and, further, in its to-ing and fro-ing between invoking and refuting museum-ness.

With the *Boîte-en-valise*, Duchamp continues the effort begun in the *Box of 1914*, pushing his questioning of photography in new directions. The *Boîte-en-valise* uses photography for the most seemingly neutral, most inartistic of

means: reproduction (in this case, of works of art). Yet, Duchamp's anonymous "documentation" is here most often duplicitous, at once announcing and refusing its role as proof or as truth-bearer. And, given that some of the photographs "represent" artworks that, at the time of the making of the *Boîte*, were no longer extant, photography – and the unreliability that Duchamp builds into it – becomes the perfect tool and emblem for the ungroundedness of the copy.

For Duchamp, reproduction was not ever an affair of practical publicity or dissemination and never a mere mechanical process. Neither was it a simple replica of something but, rather, a displacement – a temporal and perceptual shift. Duchamp's involvement in photography gives the impression of play and lack of seriousness, but in almost every instance, he uses photography (either his own or that of his conspiratorial accomplice, Man Ray) to literalize its deceptive dimension. From the barren landscape suggested by the layer of dust covering the *Large Glass* in Man Ray and Duchamp's collaborative photo *Élevage du poussière* (*Dust Breeding*, 1920) to the numerous images of Duchamp in drag as Rose Sélavy or Belle Haleine in Man Ray's glossy portraits, the photograph is the recurrent site of contradiction, deception, visual troubling: *what you see is not what you see*. The *Boîte-en-valise* reproductions based on photographs, in particular, refuse credibility: the image of the *Bottle drier* shows false shadows, images of a hat rack and bicycle wheel are retouched and hardly hide the fact, and the strange plaster-and-photographic representation of *Why Not Sneeze?* stands resolutely between the second and third dimensions. Dissolving distinctions between the real and the illusory, the index and the reconstituted referent, these "items" thus resist fixing the boundaries, properties, and functions of the works on which they are based.

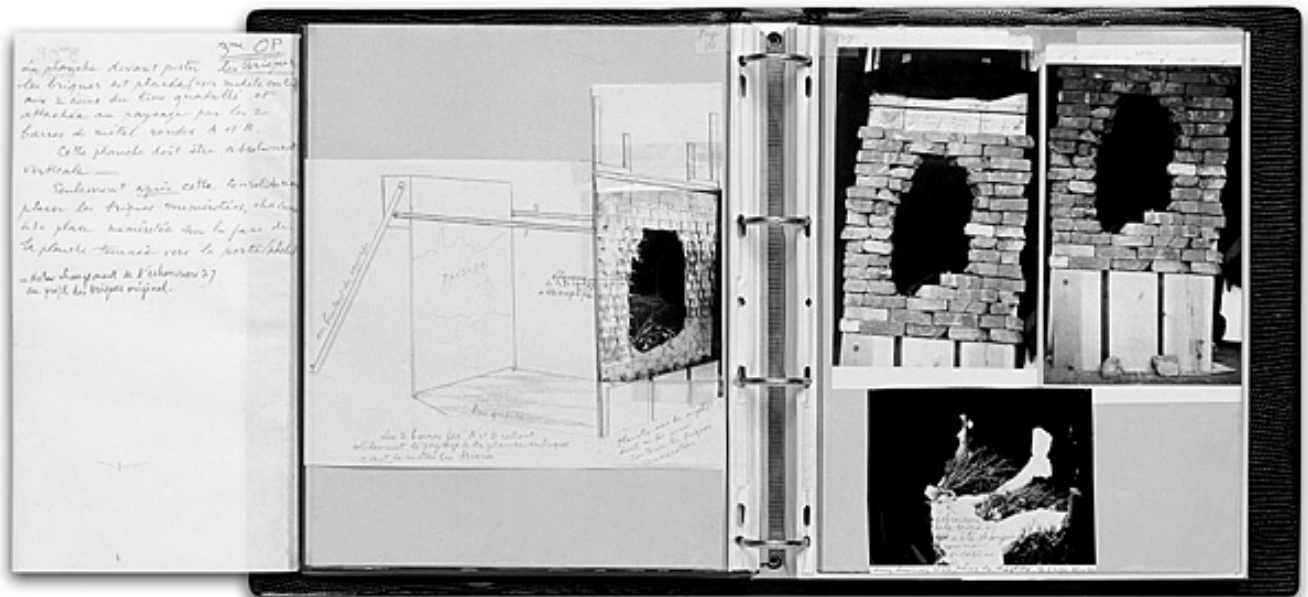
In 1940, the artist turned to one of those little photographs of his New York studio. He enlarged the image and completely covered over the object that was the explicit subject of the reproduction: in this case, the ready-made coatrack he had nailed to the floor and entitled *Trebuchet*. After whitening out the object, Duchamp made a line drawing of the coatrack in which he exactly replicated the photographic detail he had covered over in white. Then, through a time-consuming and careful process of hand coloring, collage, and repeat printing, he turned the newly drawn *Trebuchet* into an element of the photographic "document." He later employed variations of this process with the suspended snow shovel, the hat rack, and the bicycle wheel. The result, a new order of the image – neither

11/19

e-flux journal #4 — march 2009 Elena Filipovic  
A Museum That is Not



Marcel Duchamp, Interior view of *Étant donnés*, 1946-66.  
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 Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art



Marcel Duchamp, Manual of instructions for *Étant donnés*, 1946-66.  
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 Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

fully photographic, nor fully documentary, nor fully other – introduced a perceptual slippage that hardly fools anyone, betraying as it does its lack of verisimilitude and uncomfortably declaring its incongruousness.

Why would Duchamp go to so much trouble? Why so meticulously and exactly redraw an element already clearly visible in a photograph? If photography was for so long seen as emulating painting, the father of the readymade effectively reverses this relationship, adding to his museum's contents a hand-drafted element that shuttles between categories and media, between artful facture and documentary evidence. The privileged status of the photograph as guaranteed witness of the actuality of objects or events it represents (a direct transcription of the real) long made the photograph part of a regime of truth. As Duchamp works to undermine truth, he shatters assumptions about both the reality of the photograph and the real in the photograph. The *Boîte's* reproduction of *Trebuchet* thus reiterates on the level of representation what its participation among the other reproductions produces through its organization: the "portable museum" shows us the fiction of representation in the so-called systems of truth. As with the carefully simulated notes of the *Boîte verte*, the *Boîte-en-valise* reproductions reflexively acknowledge the incapacity – indeed, the impossibility – of the visual to deliver its promise of certainty or authenticity. That the photograph has a central place within Duchamp's museum is no coincidence. The failure of illusion to work in the *Boîte-en-valise's* photographic/drawn forms tethers photography to a critique of the museum, exposing and upsetting the way in which the museum and history typically construct and present their "evidence."

If the readymade had shown that the artwork and the commodity could meld into near indistinction, Duchamp's production of over 320 copies of his own "museum" suggests that, in his opinion, there was no institution more invested in denying this than the modern museum. For Duchamp, the transformation of art into merchandise is a different program from either the Art Nouveau or even the Bauhaus agenda in which the utilitarian and the aesthetic are to be subsumed. Duchamp's is a gesture without pretense to heroism: there is no claim of bringing art to the masses (whatever Apollinaire joked about his friend's role), no effort to make anything that holds the least bit of functionality, no making beautiful of the everyday. If there is something dysfunctionalizing about the usurping of a real toilet to claim it as a work of art, there is something wantonly reckless in reducing its size, in making it toy-like, and casing it up with other items (typewriter cover, comb, bottle drier . . .)

that in the end serve as nothing so much as placeholders for the "real" once-useful things to which they refer. Thus, insofar as the readymade is seen to expose the tensions between the commodity and the art object, between the serial and the collectable, between the ordinary and the exhibition-worthy, the *Boîte* grafts this ambivalence even more emphatically onto the very specific components that make up the museological, including institutional architecture, presentation technologies, chronological sequences, explanatory labels, and so forth. And, the serial multiplications of Duchampian boxes claim that the museum and industry, and the museum and the commodity, have something profoundly in common. The artist's archive is perfectly packaged as a product in a neat box (the most precious examples of which included convenient suitcases with locks and handles), whose purchase is made easy with a "bulletin of subscription" and whose descriptive inscription ("This box contains 69 items") not only blurs the distinction between art object and luxury product, but also claims for the artist the roles of producer, distributor, curator, architect, salesman, and historian.

There is something decidedly amiss in the *Boîte-en-valise's* curatorial/archival system. The information on labels, the wall text, the exhibition title, the overall organization: Duchamp understood well that this apparatus determines how and what we see. And so he played the museum's game – his way. The grouping of works follows no perceptible logic of chronology, medium, or theme; the selection is unjustified (why those sixty-nine items in particular?); the scale of miniaturization is variable. Yes, the labels accompanying each piece employ a standardized typeface and bear the typical classificatory information (title, technique, size, place and date of production, collection or location), but in Duchamp's hands, this vital aspect of a museum's authoritative narrative is deployed to parody curatorial techniques and question the validity of systems of classification. The information on Duchamp's museum labels refers to the "original" works (extant or not), whose sizes, dates of manufacture, and locations are distinctly at odds with the reduced dimensions and posterior reproduction of the specimens on offer in the *Boîte-en-valise*. Knowledge is unstable; information is contradictory; logic is defied. Duchamp marshals the seemingly empirical nature of the archive and museum – and their various classificatory systems – in order to loosen our grip on knowledge and question what is really possible to know about the ideas or objects before us.

Ultimately, Duchamp meets the museum's desire for precision with irony and approximation, its desire for totality with a fragmentary story, its desire for encyclopedic coverage with "à peu près," its desire for system and order with a volatile taxonomy, its desire for the original with an ensemble of copies, and its desire for linear history with caesura, delay, and ungraspable logic. Whereas monumental armatures and visual primacy, taxonomies, and clear chronologies constitute the foundational givens of the museum, Duchamp orchestrates the destabilization of museal spaces and the reorganization of display logics. He constructs approximate retrospectives of reproductions in unstable structures.

With the *Boîte-en-valise* the artist creates a museum without walls, without a secure location, without "authentic" works of art, that is, a museum with only the most tenuous hold on museum-ness. But, he neither recuperates nor obliterates the museum through his project; rather, he subjects its idea, rules, and operational givens to a series of questions and pressures. And herein lies the core of the artist's multiple self-narratives: through a combination of seeming order and randomness, the original and its reproduction, the museal and the commercial, and the auratic and the ordinary, the *Boîte-en-valise* offers an ambivalent model of the artist as producer and an even more conflicted model of the museum as truth-bearer.

"Can one make works that are not 'of art'?" Duchamp scribbled to himself one day in 1913.<sup>22</sup> And then, quietly, decades later, he hinted at another, not unrelated, set of questions: Can one make a museum that holds works that aren't (works) of art? Can a museum be a work of art? Can one make more than 300 works that are museums? Is a box filled with works of art, then, a museum? Is it a museum if it doesn't have walls? Can one make a museum that is *not*?

A museum that is not. With its tentative structure, Lilliputian dimensions, and wobbly frame, the *Boîte-en-valise* defies the stability and rootedness so typical of the museum; it works against the impenetrable façade and transcendent spaces of the museum as modern temple for heroic works (and what could be less heroic than a miniature, thin, plastic version of the *Large Glass*). The instability of Duchamp's little exhibition armature comes at least in part from the negotiation of its form – an unstable, unbounded structure with a collapsing frame, sliding panels, moveable parts, and an endlessly reconfigured exhibition space – so unlike the static, solid, and stable architecture and terra firma of the museum. To expose the "works," one needs to unfurl the framework; to view them all, one needs to handle the pieces and reorganize

the display.

Much of a museum's architecture is precisely in the service of the visual management central to the functioning of the museum-machine. One of the defining functions of the museum, as historian Donald Preziosi has elaborated, is that it "situates all objects within viewing spaces that evoke and elicit a proper viewing stance and distance. Artworks are spaced, arranged, and composed so as to permit the taking up of proper stances: positions for the subject."<sup>23</sup> As if countering this supremely *visual* institution, Duchamp's portable museum cannot be seen outside the performative operation incited in his "museum visitor." The miniaturization of the individual works grounds viewing in bodily experience – in the handling of objects; in the opening and closing of lidded compartments; in the rubbing of fingers across the black creased folders of reproductions; in the sliding and movement of "glass" works; in the invitation to touch the palm-sized urinal, glass ampoule, and typewriter cover. In short, Duchamp inscribes the viewer's body in museum "looking." The *Boîte's* implicit mobility and manipulability is made even more emphatic (and problematic) when inserted into an actual museum where it becomes, like the rest of a museum's objects, immobilized, protected, and *untouchable*. The *Boîte-en-valise's* summons to touch thus reveals a set of sustained preoccupations that expose the ocularcentrism of the spaces for public display.

If, as historians have noted, the artist's aim in his early optical experimentation is "to corporealize the visual," one might say that it was the gallery and museum that most upheld the disembodied retinal impulse of Modernist painting for Duchamp.<sup>24</sup> The tactile, mobile mode of looking demanded by the *Boîte-en-valise* (like the darkened, disorienting, twine-traversed, or pulsating installations for the Surrealist exhibitions) shatters a Cartesian relationship between body and vision, observer and object and, in so doing, exposes the institutional constructs that condition subjects, organize looking, and manage attention. To seriously consider the *Boîte*, then, is to recognize the way it undermines and redirects the purely visual, the way it insists on the libidinal and corporeal as both *matière* of and point of access to the museum. In its undoing of the symbolic structural frame of the museum, the *Boîte* holds a germ of the project that would preoccupy Duchamp until the end his life.

### A Real Museum Exhibition

Duchamp spent the last two decades of his life secretly building an elaborate erotic tableau vivant entitled, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau,*

2° *le gaz d'éclairage*, which only became known to the public (and even to many of the artist's closest friends and family) after his death, when the artwork entered the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Arguably one of the twentieth century's most unusual and enigmatic artworks, *Étant donnés'* display in a museum is central to its very functioning.<sup>25</sup>

The viewing experience of it begins *outside* the work, in the *enfilade* of rooms and pictures that precede it and in the approach to the small white space adjoining the main gallery filled with Walter and Louise Arensberg's collection of Duchampian works (and the *Large Glass* which had previously been in Katherine Dreier's collection). One enters a white room, at its end a battered Spanish door with eye-holes that reveal (for those who dare to look) a broken brick wall behind which one spies a diorama of a nearly life-sized naked female body covered in pig skin. She lays atop a layer of dead twigs and holds aloft a gas lamp – all set against a pacific, photorealist background of sky, mountains, waterfall, clouds, and light. The background's vast expanse is a partially hand-painted photomural with fake waterfall light effects (hardly Caspar David Friedrich's sublime), and the nude – a failed, strangely unnatural body – rejects any claims to virtuosity. By deploying the museum's most familiar genres – the idyllic landscape and the reclining nude – but with a mix of hyperrealism and strangeness, pornographic explicitness and utterly un-arousing awkwardness, Duchamp keeps the viewer from being seduced by the very “tableau” that the painterly tradition seems to be inviting us to behold. At the same time, in order to do so, he deploys photography to deceptive ends – one last time – and on a grand scale: what you see is not what you see, indeed.

The return to figuration and to a seemingly material (rather than conceptual) production for an artist so critical of the retinal impulse of painting was disappointing – considered an erroneous anomaly – to many of Duchamp's close friends and critics when the installation was first made public. And yet, rather than either an incongruity in his oeuvre or a *return to order*, it might be read as the perfect culmination of a lifetime of persistent concerns and, as such, a biting commentary on the visual and the institutions that implicitly uphold it.

Constructed from 1946 to 1966, the installation came on the heels of the long production of the *Boîte-en-valise* and overlapped with Duchamp's work on the design of a number of different display and exhibition spaces. In retrospect, the latter especially seem to serve as testing grounds for the questions he was quietly pursuing: There was his window display for the

Gotham Book Mart in 1945, with its half-dressed mannequin with a faucet attached to her leg, a kind of “bride” behind glass purveying running water and already materializing different elements of the *Large Glass* into a three-dimensional tableau. There were his ideas for undulating fabric exhibition walls and a room dripping with water for the 1947 Exposition International du Surréalisme in Paris, which not only slyly portended the “chute d'eau” of *Étant donnés*, but radically refused typical exhibition protocol, falling as it did on an artwork (in this case, none other than *The Impossible*, a sculpture by Maria Martins, Duchamp's lover and major muse for *Étant donnés*). He conceived an enigmatic peephole viewing-device that was built into the wall, entitled *Le Rayon Vert*, quietly pointing to the artist's interest in peeping, illusion, and visual troubling. (The exhibition was also importantly accompanied by foam-breast-lined catalogue covers he designed, requesting that onlookers “Please touch”). There was also his experimentation with heaving, “breathing,” vaginal interior velvet walls for the 1959 Exposition International du Surréalisme around the theme of “Eros,” where the labyrinthine, explicitly corporeal interior space of the gallery, lined in pink and green velvet, announced the decided imbrication of eroticism and display. And one could mention still others – each reconfiguring conventional exhibition spaces and the means by which visitors experience the looking central to an exhibition's mission.<sup>26</sup>

Duchamp's development of *Étant donnés* also overlapped with a less spectacular but no doubt influential task: in the late 1940s, Walter and Louise Arensberg enlisted Duchamp to carry out the negotiations with potential museum spaces to which the couple could entrust their art collection (which included the most substantial existing collection of Duchampian works). The artist met with several museums and finally with the Philadelphia Museum of Art for the display of the extensive collection of art. Letters and sketches sent to the Arensbergs in California so as to help them with their decision-making from afar attest to Duchamp's intimate involvement with the entire process. In 1951 Duchamp drew several sketches that convey the proportions and layout of several possible exhibition galleries in the museum.<sup>27</sup> Measured with precision and drawn to scale, the plans include the famous galleries where the Duchamp works are held to this day, including the small adjacent room, measured and marked as well, in which, unknown to anyone then, *Étant donnés* would be housed just over a decade later (unknown, yes, but it is striking that Duchamp knew this space as well as he did – with an architect's precision – one can't help speculate

that in its final years, he worked on his construction with exactly that space in mind). The Arensberg collection was installed in 1954 with Duchamp directing the placement of each of the works – a regular museum curator, you might say.

In the years that followed, Duchamp devised a mind-boggling apparatus to accompany and constitute *Étant donnés* and its resting place in a museum. The experience of the work is entirely circumscribed by the fact that it is in an art museum – no negligible detail – and yet the question is rarely posed amongst critics as to how exactly to read the effort that went into securing its place there. Yet shouldn't we imagine that part of the "oeuvre" that is called *Étant donnés* is the invisible web of legal and administrative aspects that mimics the museum's own constructs in complex ways: the secret sale of the work in the 1960s to trusted friend William Copley and his Cassandra Foundation which would officially "own" the work upon Duchamp's death; the arrangement for the donation of the work from the Cassandra foundation to the Philadelphia Museum of Art immediately after his death (this charitable transfer increasing the chances of the acceptance of this final, provocative installation into the museum that held the majority of his oeuvre); the construction of an elaborate instruction manual for the reassembly of the installation in its final institutional site; and the interdictions on how and when to photograph the work? Thus in 1969, from the grave, Duchamp "curated" one last show. His postmortem delayed-release installation appeared one day in a small dark room of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where it was permanently installed adjacent to the rooms in which he had already set up so many of his pieces.

For nearly fifteen years after it opened to the public, one couldn't simply "see" the *Étant donnés*. It wasn't supposed to exist *as an image*. An official museum decree prevented reproduction by the public and the Philadelphia Museum of Art did not itself release any photos of the piece.<sup>28</sup> *Étant donnés* was not itself if it wasn't viewed in person and in its specific museal context – two aspects of the work that are lost in a photographic reproduction. It was important to Duchamp that the work not be reproduced but he knew this possibility wouldn't last forever, so he left very specific instructions in his manual and built an opening into the structure to allow for the ideal photographic position in the event of the (unavoidable?) necessity of reproduction. Once reproduced, he wanted it to represent as accurately as possible what the spectator actually sees. Duchamp also went to considerable lengths (such as using

black velvet to line the back of the Spanish door and cover sides of the structure from the front door to the broken brick wall) to ensure that the viewer would not be able to see in by any other way than the two eye-holes provided. What is at stake is the particular *experience of Étant donnés* – an experience untranslatable into a two-dimensional form outside of its architectural and institutional context, and outside of a certain performance on the part of the spectator.

The instruction manual that Duchamp left to the museum in order to ensure the most "approximate" reassembly of the work in its new location tells this story too. A strange artifact-album composed of dozens of pages of handwritten, numbered instructions, and over a hundred pasted, cut, and collaged photographs, it provides considerable evidence for reading Duchamp's project.<sup>29</sup> For the very last page of images in the album, Duchamp paper-clipped a series of photographs in which the camera stands in the place of his and also the imagined spectator's eyes. He framed and reframed the scene, with the splayed female body more or less covered by the bricks, and he added bricks here and there, first penning them in, then adding them to the actual construction. He was experimenting, imagining what it would be like to be a viewer. But if the manual is to aid the museum in its job of reconstruction, why include all of these shots – the incorrectly aligned along with the final views – details, in short, not necessarily useful for the reassembly of the installation? What seems at stake in these final images is not so much the conveyance of information about the scene itself, but the conveyance *to the museum* of his sense of the utter importance of minutely controlling what the viewer would see, and how this work would perform that.

Looking at the manual, we see what is behind-the-scenes, that fragile architecture Duchamp constructed to be administered and maintained by the museum, but not accessible to sight. The manual shows it: Duchamp cobbled together a bizarrely functional object from materials at hand, an incredible structure held together with Scotch tape, with clouds made of cotton, dangling electrical wires attached with twist ties, a homemade waterfall-light machine encased in a Peek Freans Biscuit box – in short, nothing like the seamless corners, pristine environment, and stability of the museum. He drew the whole installation for them, with the precision of an amateur architect – sharp, measured lines to show his strange and fragile architecture, all gangly and awkward. What perversity to make the museum attend to it, to make it tiptoe around the hanging wires and crumbling bricks, to fret that a piece of

Duchampian tape might come unstuck. Where, after all, does this artwork begin and end? He left that for the museum to mull over.

In perception as in architecture, a threshold marks the point of transition, the passage toward or away from the perceptible, into or out of a place. Architecture, one might say, constructs *and is constructed by* the threshold, a necessary limit that articulates interiority *contra* exteriority. For there can be no architecture without interiority (that would be a monument) and no architecture without exteriority. Considered in these terms, *Étant donnés* follows a decidedly anti-architectural logic, offering an elaborate behind-the-scenes structure whose visible “front” is a weathered, exterior door found *inside* the museum that should logically lead vision *outside* the museum, but instead brings it past a broken brick threshold giving way to an illusionistic idyll, purportedly *outside* but so unconvincing, that it is very clearly *inside*.<sup>30</sup> But inside *what* exactly? A structure of thresholds, *Étant donnés* explores the limit of architecture, the limit of the museum, site-ing itself precisely where the architecturally defined opposition between interior and exterior crumbles.

*Étant donnés* might have begun with a question that was at the same time a contradiction: how to open up a hole in the museum, a hole that was also a frame for viewing, a hole that was also architecture? *Étant donnés*, so informed by Duchamp’s previous installations (of which his studio was the first exhibition space) and the *Boîte en valise* (another, albeit miniature, space of exhibition), defined, with these other works, a lifelong project in manifest opposition to architecture’s stabilities – a project to pressure the rational, authoritative space of the museum; a project to visualize the promise and limits of the aesthetic in face of art institutions. But make no mistake, Duchamp was not interested in eradicating the museum. Instead, in multiple gestures, Duchamp evoked and contravened that archetypal structure of modernity, the museum, in order that we begin to see the way it makes us see.

### Postscript

I should end here. *Étant donnéés* was an end, in many senses of the word. So this will be a postscript of sorts. Duchamp constructed his elaborate secret work over twenty years. The question one might rightly ask is: *How did he do it in secret?* How did he manage for no one to know about the installation and his labor on it? After all, hiding it for twenty years from friends and family is no small undertaking. The answer is that he set up a decoy, another exhibition of sorts. To do so, he rented a second studio. In one studio he was building his gangly nude and her

brick house, and in the other, he sat around, receiving friends, guests, groupies, chess mates.<sup>31</sup> He gave interviews there. He told them all that he was doing nothing, that he had given up making art. Of course it wasn’t completely true, since, even if one didn’t know about the secret project, there were all sorts of objects being “released” in those years: all those book, store window, and exhibition designs – which are hardly “nothing” – many of which in fact point to ideas developed in *Étant donnés*, not to mention the series of erotic objects made directly from the parts or casts of the secret installation, each enigmatic form serving as a key sent out into the world for an as-yet invisible door.

Still, anyone who came to the “public” studio saw no signs of production or artistic activity. And, you see, that too was an exhibition of sorts, since Duchamp could simply have gotten rid of the public studio altogether and received visitors at home. But Duchamp wanted to have, just next door to the secret studio, a public studio in which he could show – literally *exhibit* – that he was *doing nothing*. He fooled them all. When he died, nearly none of them knew about the secret work – not his closest friends, not the interviewers, not even Arturo Schwarz who was just then going to press with *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*.<sup>32</sup>

There, it seems, was Duchamp’s last lesson, and yet he had been saying it all along, almost as if he had written it on his studio walls, from nearly his first to his last: *Pay attention. The way things are exhibited matters.*

x

This essay first appeared in a Portuguese and Spanish version in the exhibition catalogue *Marcel Duchamp: A work that is not a work “of art”* curated by the author and held at the Museu de arte moderna in São Paulo and the Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires (2008-2009).

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18/19

e-flux journal #4 — march 2009 Elena Filipovic  
A Museum That is Not

1  
On Duchamp's studio in relation to his readymades, see Helen Molesworth, "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades," *Art Journal* 57 (1998): 50-61.

2  
Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, 15 January 1916, in *Affectionately Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis Naumann and Hector Obalk (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 43.

3  
Duchamp did try to expose them in a more public manner: there were two readymades that he hung in the umbrella-stand area at the entrance of the Bourgeois gallery in New York in April 1916, which went totally unnoticed, and then, a year later, there was the ill-fated submission of *Fountain* to the Society of Independent Artists Exhibition, where it remained completely hidden behind a partition and subsequently lost.

4  
Molesworth, "Work Avoidance," 50.

5  
Duchamp to Walter Arensberg, 8 November 1918, in *Affectionately Marcel*, 64.

6  
Duchamp to Jacques Doucet, 19 October [1925], in *Affectionately Marcel*, 152.

7  
Duchamp to Dreier, 11 September 1929, in *Affectionately Marcel*, 170.

8  
The 1936 *Exposition Surréaliste d'Objets*, held in the Parisian apartment-gallery of African-artifact dealer Charles Rattan, was an important precedent for the Surrealist movement's thinking about the presentation of art. The 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* remains, however, the beginning of a striking extension of this concern and the first real Surrealist recasting of the space and architecture of display. Surrealism's ideological concerns influenced the tenor of the displays in which they were involved, thus the treatment of these exhibitions here is by definition partial, focusing as it does mostly on Duchamp's role.

9  
Among these are the three who provide the most thorough descriptions of the event by its participants: Georges Hugnet "L'exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," *Preuves* 91 (September 1958): 38-47; Marcel Jean, with the collaboration of Arpad Mezei, *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste* (Paris: Seuil, 1959), 280-89; and Man Ray, *Autoportrait*, trans. Anne Guérin (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffort,

1964), 205-6; 243-44.

10  
Jean, *Histoire*, 281-82.

11  
Whereas someone like Robert Delaunay grounded his color researches in the precise exploration of the scientific laws of Hermann von Helmholtz or the writings of Michel-Eugène Chevreul and his "Law of the Simultaneous Contrast of Colors," Duchamp's sensory explorations – even in their most seemingly (mockingly) scientific moments – were more about looking in its dense ideological, institutional, psychological, and physico-erotic dimensions, aspects largely ignored by his artist-contemporaries. In her sustained work on Duchamp's optic games, Rosalind Krauss has, extending the analysis of Jean-François Lyotard, underlined the ways in which the artist's vision experiments and optical illusions work to "corporealize the visual," offering themselves as counters to those very notions of good form and pure opticality central to aesthetic Modernism. See, in particular, Krauss, "The Im/pulse To See," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 51-75; and Krauss, "The Blink of an Eye," in *The States of 'Theory': History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 175-199. See also Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs D'Uchamp* (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

12  
Duchamp speaks about the exhibition preparation, the string purchase, and the spontaneous combustion of the first webbing of string in his interview with Harriet, Sidney, and Carroll Janis, 1953. Typescript, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Duchamp Archives; and see also: Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 86.

13  
One might read the exhibition's particular orchestration of vision and the positioning of the visitor as an instance of Duchamp's on-going exploration of perception and the manipulation of looking, brought to spectacular culmination in his final artwork, *Étant donnés*.

14  
Duchamp to Katherine Dreier, 5 March 1935, in *Affectionately Marcel*, 197.

15  
No understanding of Duchamp's monographic project is complete without recourse to Ecke Bonk's exacting and invaluable study. Bonk, *The Box in the Valise* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

16  
For a discussion of the way this interest traverses Duchamp's entire oeuvre, see Francis

Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999).

17

In the first monograph on the artist, Duchamp and Robert Lebel list two places and two dates for the *Boîte-en-valise*: 1938 (Paris) and 1941–42 (New York); cf. Lebel, *Sur Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Trianon, 1959), item no. 173. Likewise, in his interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp dates the *Boîte-en-valise* “from 1938 to ’42,” Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 79. This dating is repeated in the catalogue for Duchamp’s first American retrospective in Pasadena in 1963 (entitled “By or of Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy,” like the Duchampian work on which the exhibition was in part modeled), and has become the standard dating in most Duchamp studies since.

18

For reproduction in the *Boîte-en-valise*, Duchamp included Man Ray’s photograph of the second store-bought bottle drier (1936), which was subsequently lost, as the first had been (and as was the case with so many of the quotidian objects-cum-readymades). Duchamp did, in fact, have both the famous Steiglitz photograph and the photograph of the urinal dangling from his studio doorframe in his possession during his preparation of the *Boîte*.

19

H. P. Roché, from the letters and unpublished documents housed in the Roché archive of the Carlton Lake Collection in the Harry Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin. Cited in Bonk, *Box*, 204.

20

“A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp,” filmed interview with James Johnson Sweeney, conducted in the Arensberg rooms at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1955. Cited in Dawn Ades, *Marcel Duchamp’s Travelling Box* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982), 3.

21

Benjamin Buchloh, “The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers,” in *Museums by Artists*, ed. A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 45.

22

From the notes assembled in *À l’infinif* (The White Box), reprinted in *Duchamp du signe*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 105.

23

Donald Preziosi discusses the optical impulse of the museum in “Brain of the Earth’s Body,” in *Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1996), 107.

24

Krauss, “Im/pulse,” 60.

25

A forthcoming major exhibition, the first ever, about *Étant donnés* curated by Michael Taylor at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (August–November 2009) promises to reveal hitherto unknown material, studies, and related pieces for an artwork that has, perhaps aptly given its origins, remained shrouded in a certain amount of silence and secrecy since its inauguration.

26

While I suggest here that the exhibitions should be considered vital sources of influence and preparation for Duchamp’s production of *things* (whether the *Boîte-en-valise* or *Étant donnés*), I want to in no way further art history’s too common tendency to privilege object production over ephemeral installations. I don’t believe that tangible objects were the endpoint of Duchamp’s thinking about the artwork and instead want to insist on his exhibition-making as an artistic practice in itself which, not surprisingly, catalyzed shifts in his thinking about the potential form and meaning of objects, and vice versa.

27

For a discussion of Duchamp’s relationship to the Arensbergs, see Naomi Sawelson-Gorse’s “Hollywood Conversations: Duchamp and the Arensbergs,” in *West Coast Duchamp*, ed. Bonnie Clearwater (Miami Beach: Grassfield Press, 1991), 25–45.

28

The agreement between the Cassandra Foundation and the Museum stipulates that “within or adjoining [the] Museum’s collections of works by Marcel Duchamp, in a setting especially designed for the purpose of housing the same . . . For a period of fifteen years from this date, [the] Museum will not permit any copy of or reproduction of *Étant donnés* to be made, by photography or otherwise, excepting only pictures of the door behind which said object of art is being installed.” See “Agreement between the Cassandra Foundation and the Philadelphia Museum of Art,” located at the Philadelphia Museum and reproduced in Mason Klein, *The Phenomenology of the Self: Marcel Duchamp’s Étant donnés* (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1994), appendix.

29

Duchamp actually composed two instruction manuals, an earlier one that was seemingly a rehearsal or preparation for the later version (which the Philadelphia Museum of Art reproduced in facsimile in 1987).

This double, concerted effort is remarkable, suggesting how important it was for Duchamp that the museum understand not only exactly how to reinstall the piece, but also that the museum understand that it was being *directed* by the artist – so that it is not only the eventual visitor, forced to lean and peep in order to see, but also the museum itself, that must perform as the artist pre-scripted (Art history will one day come to recognize the manual as an artwork in its own right, in line with Duchamp’s various boxes of scribbled notes).

30

Craig Adcock once said of *Étant donnés* that it “has no exterior. It has only an interior, from which you look at another interior.” Adcock, *Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1991), 342.

31

André Gervais traces Duchamp’s various moves and shifting studio spaces during the construction of the massive installation in his “Détails d’*Étant donnés*” *Les Cahiers du Mnam*, n. 75 (spring 2001): 82–97.

32

*The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Arturo Schwarz (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1969).

19/19

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A Museum That is Not