

**Restating Artistic Value: Why do people pay 2,000,000 US.D. for a Urinal  
Signed by R. Mutt?**

by

Ioannis Zavoleas

M.Arch. Architecture  
University of California, Los Angeles, USA

B.Eng. Architecture  
National Technical University of Athens, Greece

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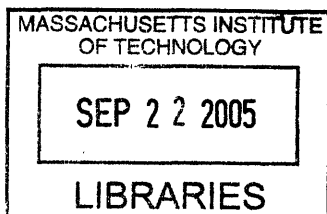
Department of Comparative Media Studies  
August 20, 2004

Certified by: \_\_\_\_\_

William Uricchio  
Professor of Comparative Media Studies  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Henry Jenkins  
Professor of Comparative Media Studies  
Chairman, Committee for Graduate Students



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# Representing, Replicating, Replacing. Dilemmas of Artistic Evaluation in the Media Age: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and Its Changing Artifactual and Artistic Status

Yannis Zavoletas Master's thesis, Comparative Media Studies

*"From a distance these things, these Movements take on a charm that they do not have close up—I assure you."  
(Marcel Duchamp, Letter to Ettie Stettheimer, 1921)<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William\\_Clark.html](http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William_Clark.html)

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how Marcel Duchamp's artwork *Fountain* has been reproduced and evaluated over time. The original piece was made in 1917 and was lost soon after it was created. *Fountain* has become renowned through its representations, descriptions, and copies and replicas of various scale; consequently, any later artistic critique was directed at the reproductions, rather than the original piece.

Considering the fact that the original no longer exists, *Fountain's* reproductions somewhat reflect the artistic aura of the original, especially when Duchamp was personally involved in their creation. *Fountain's* reproductions may be viewed as originally (re-)produced artworks on their own. This thesis studies the processes of artistic evaluation applied to *Fountain's* reproductions. *Fountain* is a special example for the following reasons: When it first appeared in 1917, it openly posed the question of whether objects mass-produced by manufacture can be given artistic value. Moreover, since *Fountain's* artistic evaluation has been attributed to the reproductions, *Fountain* extends the question of attributing artistic value to reproduced objects, to artistic value attributed to reproduced art, in turn also raising questions about the relationship between original and copy. Finally, the artistic evaluation of *Fountain* has changed radically over time, further

evincing the inherently ambiguous and subjective character of artistic evaluations, interpretations and debates.

In order to respond to these subjects, this thesis compares the documentary information we have about *Fountain*, from photographs to descriptions and replicas, in order to analyze how artistic interpretations of the reproductions have gradually qualified *Fountain's* artistic reputation. A close examination of these reproductions raises dilemmas in regards to *Fountain's* artifactual status, as these may also be extended to reconsider its characterization as a ready-made. This thesis highlights the dilemmas underlying the interpretations and evaluations about *Fountain* and questions any presumption of direct analogy or similarity between the original and the reproductions. It explains these presumptions as the outcome of mechanisms of artistic evaluation and support. These mechanisms express the art system, operating each time in order to promote, or to suppress, any artwork. Over time, new artistic standards were being introduced transforming the art system in which Duchamp's artwork would be artistically appraised.

## **Introduction: The Problem of Artistic Evaluation in *Fountain***

It is common that the evaluation of a given artwork changes over time. Marcel Duchamp's sculpture *Fountain* is an exemplary case. Duchamp made *Fountain* in 1917, the same year he submitted it under the pseudonym "Richard Mutt" to the art exhibition *The Big Show*, in New York, organized by the Society of Independent Artists. In spite of the "no jury" policy reflecting the general democratic principles of the organizers, *Fountain* was evaluated and rejected. *Fountain* has gradually acquired very high artistic significance and today, it is classified as one of the most important ready-mades. The original was lost soon after it was created; consequently, *Fountain's* artistic fame has gradually been established through replicas, copies and photographs. Today, *Fountain's* reproductions are included in private and museum collections worldwide and are also cited and analyzed in innumerable theoretical works and publications.

It is possible to offer an interpretation of *Fountain's* reproductions, as well selected "supporting moves," over the course of its historical passage. Supporting moves primarily include verbal, textual, photographic and three-dimensional documentations and representations, which first offered a defense regarding *Fountain's* legitimate status as a work of art after its rejection, as were

used later on to help, establish and direct its artistic reputation within the concurrent artistic framing. We may stress that with the exception of *The Big Show*, processes of artistic evaluation have been applied directly onto the reproduced *Fountains* and not to the original artwork. Retrospectively, we may examine processes of *Fountain's* artistic evaluation in relation to those of artistic production; moreover, we may view *Fountain's* reproductions as Duchamp's critical responses to the concurrent socio-cultural framing defining the general art world. The present study aims to weave a connection between processes of artistic production and evaluation in relation to the specific moment these take place; therefore, it becomes important to view creative and evaluative processes in close relation to the broader socio-cultural context and the art establishment of each time.

The relationship between the creative and evaluative processes of art may be traced back to the changing landscape of artistic creation in the early twentieth century. In response to the intense technological evolution, in the mid thirties Walter Benjamin speculated that in the capitalist-oriented cultural industry of the twentieth century, art would inevitably become a commodity, following the industrial and market rules of production and consumption.<sup>2</sup> In fact, over time

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<sup>2</sup> Especially with the technologies of print, photography and cinema, the mechanically reproduced art has gradually lost its authenticity. In the meantime, it compensates with its entry into the market and the gaining of a more democratic aspect. As Benjamin speculated, art's increasing participation and expression over the media that were then available has resulted in the gradual

Benjamin's speculations have gradually become a standard as people accept the reproduction and promotion of artwork through publications and advertisements, as well as with the development of various forms of artistic expression, designs, fashions and styles. Inevitably, art would follow the production trends dictated by the rules of market prevalence.

In this changing landscape, the distinction between "what is" and "what is not" considered to be art would become more and more obscure. Agents of art institutional filtering such as juries, critics, museums, directors, gallery owners and magazine editors, essentially decide what art is by managing, promoting and supporting art within the art establishment and more generally as a market commodity. As social theorist Pierre Bourdieu comments, "T(t)he opposition between art and money (the 'commercial') is the generative principle of most of the judgments that, with respect to the theatre, cinema, painting and literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is art and what is not, between 'bourgeois' art and 'intellectual' art, between 'traditional' art and 'avant-garde' art."<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu discerns that despite the changing of the art world, artistic standards may still be directed by art's institutional agents. Mechanisms of

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abandonment of the exclusive relationship between art and aristocracy and in its release toward the broader audience of the masses. Such power of art has proliferated over the circulation within the media networks. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Schocken Books, New York, 1969, p.225-236.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p.162.



artistic evaluation would preserve the segregation of art for the “elites” and art for the masses, further outlining art’s adaptation to the general market, and its subordination to the pyramid structure of social categorization.

We may further view the use of the earlier media of print, photography, radio, cinema and television as forms of institutional practices. The increasing use of the earlier media has precipitated the mechanization of artistic creation, promotion and distribution, completing integration of art within broader mass-production and marketing processes. Media may be viewed as general infrastructures of documentation, production, promotion and distribution of any sort of information, regardless of being artistic or not. Consequently, the increasing use of media further extends the technological belief that art may be comprehended as a collection of data too, being gradually homogenized relative to other sorts of information.

To earlier processes of artistic production and distribution over various media we may add those supported by the new media. Today, new media technologies and networks minimize past difficulties of artistic production and accessibility. Within the contemporary socio-cultural milieu, the burst of data flows in the informatic and telematic networks has also increased the circulation of art-related information, to levels that were unimaginable with the technologies of the recent past. Scholar Mark Taylor may be seeking a historical precedent, as he notes

that the proliferation of information flows within various networks signifies the transition from production and the manufacturing society – which Benjamin already addressed – to reproduction and the informational, economy-based, media-governed society<sup>4</sup> – effectively moving beyond Benjamin’s ideas into a new environment based on a hi-tech order.

Thus, we may be able to draw the evolutionary passage toward the mechanized production and reproduction processes of art, which have gradually merged with other processes of information creation and circulation. At least from a technological viewpoint – over the new media infrastructures and especially the Internet – information is emitted essentially directly, from the point of production and the creator to the point of reception and the user/audience. As we project such views onto the future, it seems that we are approaching the time when any sort of artistic and non-artistic information will be created, distributed and reached in a mediated format, as new media infrastructures will become an unlimited and directly accessible information asset.

Artistic creation may no longer be viewed as the isolated outcome of the artist’s activities happening in the studio, but, Bourdieu states, as the result of

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4 Mark Taylor notes: “The shift from a productive to a reproductive society marks the transition from a manufacturing to an information economy governed by new media.” Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA, 2001, p.66.

contributing acts between anyone involved in artistic production and promotion, including artists, producers, distributors, sponsors, critics and supporters, even audience.<sup>5</sup> To this direction, we may extend Benjamin's remarks on the intertwining roles of the audience and the artist. The expansion of the digital production-making tools has increased dramatically artistic production, gradually transforming the role of a rather passive audience toward a more critical interpreter and creator. We may also attribute indispensable contributive significance to those directly and indirectly involved in the circulation of the "artistic product." Moreover, the "construction" of the artist's reputation may even be more important than the act of art making. Artistic production involves not only the act of producing a work, but also the act of elevating any work as a work of art, and moreover the acts of "inventing," "discovering," or "producing" oneself as an artist,<sup>6</sup> as these ones acquire a creative sense and artistic significance too, so to speak. As theorist Howard Becker accounts, "every function in an art world can be taken seriously as art, and everything that even the most accepted artist

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<sup>5</sup> "Artistic work in its new definition makes artists more than ever tributaries to the whole accompaniment of commentaries and commentators who contribute directly to the production of the work of art by their reflection on an art which often itself contains a reflection on art, and on artistic effort which always encompasses an artist's work on himself." Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu mentions the art of producing the artist as part of artistic production by analyzing the construction of Duchamp as a painter (Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p. 244). We may extend Bourdieu's view to all other sorts of artists, as well as to the construction and support of any work as work of art. Such a view outlines the premise of the current thesis, which will follow how *Fountain* was constructed and established as a work of art within its concurrent artistic context.

does can become support work for someone else; furthermore, in many arts it is not at all clear who is the artist and who are the support people.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, artistic creation may be viewed as the aggregate of broader sets of actions and information exchange, being subordinate to our general understanding of human communication experience,<sup>8</sup> as philosopher Vilem Flusser remarks. From a different viewpoint, human communication may be perceived as the result of a dynamic form of mutual interchanging, where each part may consist of an enriching resource for the other.<sup>9</sup> In this interactive context, any sort of artistic

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<sup>7</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London, 1982, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> As Vilem Flusser suggests, art may be used as a metaphor to introduce a more homogenized approach of human communication activities: “Human communication is an artificial process. It relies on artistic techniques, on inventions, on tools and instruments. ... People do not make themselves understood through ‘natural’ means. ... Communications theory is not a natural science, but rather is concerned with the human being’s unnatural aspects. ... Only in this sense is it possible to call man a social animal, a *zoon politikon*. If he has not learned to make use of the instrument of communication (i.e. language), he is an idiot (originally: a ‘private person’). Idiotism, incomplete being-human, shows a lack of art.” Vilem Flusser, “What is Communication?,” in *Writings*, edited by Andreas Strohl, translated by Erik Eisel, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA / London, England, 2002, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> As Mark Taylor points out, “information is not limited to data transmitted on wireless and fiber-optic networks or broadcast on media networks. Many physical, chemical, and biological processes are also information processes. This expanded notion of information makes it necessary to reconfigure the relation between nature and culture in such a way that neither is reduced to the other but that both emerge and coevolve in intricate interrelations.” We must view such interrelations as a complex mutual collaboration towards any kind of praxis. Taylor also notes their constitutive character: “Instead of reducing nature to culture, or culture to nature, what is needed is a way of understanding the complex dynamics that render them mutually constitutive. ... H(h)umanists and scientists must find ways to talk with and learn from each other.” Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, p.4, 60.

Manuel De Landa also remarks that the interchanging modes of all acts, form aggregates of structures involving the birth, life and decay of world phenomena: “We live in a world populated by structures – a complex mixture of geological, biological, social, and linguistic constructions that are nothing but accumulations of materials shaped and hardened by history. Immersed as we are in this mixture, we cannot help but interact in a variety of ways with the other historical constructions that surround us, and in these interactions we generate novel combinations, some of which possess emergent properties. In turn, these synergistic combinations, whether of human

influence and exchange becomes part of the broader interaction of information and activities, constituting human experience around the globe.

Consequently, artistic creation may be viewed as the outcome of processes and activities occurring around, and connected together through, the artistic product. When studying artistic creation, we need to view it as the reflective outcome of broader productive, evaluative, and distributive structures of the social framing of art. Being adapted into the context of art, the collective of these structures makes up the art system. The art system could be viewed as a complex mechanism, virtually encompassing any form of artistic framing, creation, management and institutionalized support, within society.<sup>10</sup> Any personal involvement in artistic production, circulation, promotion, interpretation and evaluation, also acquires significance as part of the art system. Moreover, the art system is not an isolated mechanism, but reflects society and is built upon the existing social structures. Being responsible for the support of art, meanwhile the art system holds the

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origin of not, become the raw material for further mixtures.” Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, Swerve Editions/Zone Books, New York USA, 1997, p.25-6.

<sup>10</sup> “The appearance of this new definition of art and of the role of the artist cannot be understood independently of the transformations in the field of artistic production. The constitution of an unprecedented ensemble of institutions for recording, conserving and analyzing works (reproductions, catalogues, art magazines, museums acquiring the most recent works, etc.), the growth in personnel (full-time or part-time) dedicated to the celebration of the work of art, the intensification of the circulation of works and of artists, with the great international exhibitions and the multiplication of galleries with many branches in various countries, etc. – everything combines to favour the establishment of an unprecedented relationship between the interpreters and the work of art. The discourse on the work is not a simple side-effect, designed to encourage its apprehension and appreciation, but a moment which is part of the production of the work, of its meaning and its value.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p. 170.

power of its main function, namely to decide whether to attribute artistic value to a work and where to apply its mechanisms of support; essentially, to respond to “what is” and “what is not” art, giving the institutionalized definition of art at a given moment. With its mechanisms of artistic production, evaluation, promotion and support, the art system decides for the artistic value of any artwork, essentially restating its response to the questions about what art is, what art might have become, and what those involved in the art system, approve art to be.<sup>11</sup>

The art system is prone to preserve its general functioning of institutional control and filtering of art. However, with information being accessed directly from the source with the new media networks, former methods of institutional control become less efficient – a fact that often necessitates the development of new forms of control in regards to accessibility, circulation and the general management of information. Although the traditional mechanisms of institutional control over art are still very much in use, with the proliferation of information

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11 In essence, the question about art is first addressed by the artwork. Bourdieu views the artwork as a reflection on art, also expressing the artist's opinion about art (Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p. 170). We might view the Ready-made, for example, as an open question in regards to whether manufactured products can be attributed artistic value. In this approach, any form of expression can potentially have artistic value. By bringing up examples of ready-made production, as well as pop art, from Marcel Duchamp to Andy Warhol, Mark Taylor states: “if an industrially produced object is a work of art, the question is no longer, ‘What is art?’ but is, ‘What is not art?’” (Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, p.8).

This brings up the significance of the role of the art system, which has the power to decide after the artist whether a view about art expressed by a work has a place within the artistic field.

over new media infrastructures, any objective of totalized control is practically becoming unfeasible, as it would also be against the philosophy developed around the new media practices. Within the new media landscape, it becomes necessary to reconsider the potentially opposing tendencies of free circulation of information, to any functioning of control and institutional filtering of the art system.

Returning to *Fountain*, we may further interpret its reappearances and reproductions, along with the differences in its artistic evaluation, as Duchamp's continuous contestation about art, the mechanisms of artistic support and the general functioning of the art system. Specifically, we might view *Fountain* as an "intruder," who kept entering any institutionally or intellectually established artistic settings, challenging and aiming to disrupt fundamental presumptions about art in regards to originality, decency, seriousness, class, or appropriateness. Over time, *Fountain* demanded and won the embrace of the art system. For such an approval, Duchamp's role was decisive, not only in the making of the original and of the reproductions, but also about his choices regarding to where to submit the piece, where to publish photographs and articles of it, how to install it, and also whether to present it under his own name, or "Richard Mutt's." Additionally, we may view *Fountain's* reproductions as a series of collaborative interactions and responses between the artist and those deciding to promote, or suppress, a work of art. In each moment, actions and decisions were made about *Fountain* by

those involved in its artistic evaluation and support, including art-exhibition committees, photographers, artists, magazine editors, critics and other art-related people and groups. Each was exercising its role of power as part of the art system, essentially applying artistic judgments about the significance of the work. They would not only attribute artistic value to *Fountain*, or decide for its artistic status, but to a certain extent they would also set up conditions and direct the way *Fountain* should be, in order to be accepted by the art world.

The creative and reproductive processes underlying *Fountain* are as significant to its being as its critical evaluation. Specifically, *Fountain* made its first public appearance in front of the board of directors of *The Big Show* in 1917, where it was rejected. In this historical passage, *Fountain* was later reproduced, photographically documented and copied under Duchamp's supervision. Information about *Fountain* was carried over different media and expressions, from (1) a photograph of the *Fountain* copy taken at the influential photographer Alfred Stieglitz's studio in 1917 – a few days after the original was rejected from *The Big Show* – (2) to verbal and textual descriptions accompanying the aforementioned “Stieglitz photograph” for *Fountain's* artistic defense at the second issue of the *Blind Man* art magazine in 1917 – a monthly periodical issue dedicated to support the Society of Independent Artists' general democratic beliefs – (3) to miniature models made in 1938 for Duchamp's art project *The Box in a Valise* (1941) – a sort of three-dimensional portfolio including miniatures



of Duchamp's work – (4) to some copies in physical scale – one produced in 1950, another in 1953 and a third in 1963 – and (5) finally to eight replicas commissioned for the 1964 exhibition, in the gallery of Arturo Schwarz in Milan, when Duchamp supervised their making to be exhibited with replicas of his other ready-mades, with some drawings and sketches shown in the exhibition catalogue.

First, we are going to analyze *Fountain's* documentations from a phenomenological point; that is, how *Fountain* has appeared, been represented or reproduced over time, as well as its artistic classification as a “ready-made.” Then, we are going to present the different historical and social contexts of *Fountain*, and also relate its artistic evaluation and classification to the concurrent context. Finally, we are going to trace how new artistic standards and evaluating principals have been set up and have gradually transformed the art system in order to embrace *Fountain*. Comparing documentary material about *Fountain*, such as descriptions, exhibitions, representations and interpretations, raises a number of dilemmas. Moreover, a comparative study of different artistic evaluations of *Fountain* over time demonstrates that the changing of artistic standards is in fact directed by those who manage and represent the institutional forms of the art world. Consequently, it becomes important to present the artistic standards in relation to those who direct them. Dilemmas of *Fountain's* representations, artistic evaluations and classification as a ready-made may lead

to define potential limitations and also significant similarities of art evaluation mechanisms over different historical periods and social contexts.

## **Facts about *Fountain*: The Original and Its Reproductions**

### **The Problem of Artistic Evaluation in *Fountain***

The original sculpture *Fountain* first appeared in front of the Society of Independent Artists' board of directors, in order to be shown at the art exhibition *The Big Show*, in New York, in April 1917. From documentary information we know that *Fountain* was mainly composed of a standard lavatory urinal, coming directly from J. L. Mott Iron Works Company, a manufacturer of plumbing equipment. Duchamp signed the piece directly onto the urinal, using the pseudonym and date "R. Mutt 1917," to preserve the anonymity of the artist, given his personal involvement with the Society (Duchamp was one of the founding members and among the organizers/directors of *The Big Show*).

In an unexpected stroke of fate, in spite of the policy that would not allow the show organizers to evaluate submissions, *Fountain* was nonetheless refused for display. Some felt it was indecent, unoriginal, possibly a joke and also breaking both social and artistic taboos.<sup>12</sup> The directors gathered over an emergency

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<sup>12</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), pp. 126 and 128-9.

meeting that took place “an hour or so before the private opening on April 9,”<sup>13</sup> to decide whether such an “indecent” object could be publicly exhibited along with other artworks. They solved the problem by officially declaring: “The *Fountain* 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>14</sup>

The original *Fountain* disappeared and thereafter, Duchamp made a series of reproductions for various artistic occasions, such as art exhibitions and publications. Duchamp created the first reproduction of *Fountain* a few days after the rejection of the original from *The Big Show*. That copy was exhibited in a private art show at the “291” gallery, the studio of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz in New York, where it was photographed. The “Stieglitz photograph” was first published in the second issue of the *Blind Man* magazine in May 1917. Copies of the Stieglitz photograph and of the *Blind Man* second issue still exist. Duchamp was one of the three editors of the magazine, along with Beatrice Wood and Henri-Pierre Roché. The first issue in April 1917 coincided with the opening of *The Big Show*. The second edition in May featured a defense of *Fountain* by the three editors, presenting the Stieglitz photograph and two articles, “The Richard Mutt Case” and the “Buddha of the Bathroom.” Later on,

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<sup>13</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), p. 182.

<sup>14</sup> Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 212.  
See also online source: <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/4aa/4aa142.htm>

Duchamp reproduced or supervised copies of *Fountain* several times, in the scale of the original, as well as in miniature scale. The most important reproductions of *Fountain* were created in 1964, when Duchamp made eight replicas for the scholar/collector Arturo Schwarz, in order to be displayed along with other ready-made replicas of his work at the Schwarz Gallery in Milan.

The artistic value attributed to *Fountain* over time has been very different. The artistic value of *Fountain* was established from being essentially zero at *The Big Show* in 1917 and later the artwork ended up being regarded as one of the most prominent sculpture pieces in the history of modern art. Moreover, the artistic value of *Fountain* is not attributed to the original since it was lost soon after it was created, but to its reproductions. Today, the market value of each of the reproductions made in 1964 reaches 2,000,000 USD.<sup>15</sup> The establishing of a close relationship between the market value and the artistic value of an art product is the dominant view today. However, we must keep in mind that such a relationship is in fact a social construction, dictated by the common assumption that art ought to be viewed as a commodity, thus being subjected to the rules of the market. Considering its initial rejection from *The Big Show*, *Fountain's* later fame does not merely raise a case of different artistic evaluations, since what was considered to be art in 1917 has been significantly different from subsequent

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15 In 1999, one of the *Fountains* was sold by Sotheby's for 1,762,500 USD.<http://french.chass.utoronto.ca/fcs195/dadaism.html>

definitions; it shows that radically different artistic judgments have great impact on determining art to be a product as well as an investment.

Additionally, we may link the artistic evaluations of *Fountain* to the differences with which it has been made. *Fountain* first appeared as an original sculptural work for *The Big Show*, then as a copy of the original, presented in the Stieglitz studio, as a photograph taken in the same studio and as a main theme in the *Blind Man* where the Stieglitz photograph was also presented along with two articles, with all three of these versions appearing in 1917. *Fountain's* later appearances include two photographs of the interior of Duchamp's studio, showing the artwork hanging from the lintel of a doorway together with other ready-mades, taken sometime between 1917 and 1918. Also, in 1938 a large number of three-dimensional miniature copies was made for Duchamp's artwork *The Box in a Valise* of 1941 and later series of copies, drawings, sketches and photographs were presented, with most important ones the eight replicas of 1964, for the Schwarz gallery exhibition. Consequently, since the original is lost, the *Fountain* reproductions have been generally treated and evaluated as if they were artworks in and of themselves.

A brief overview of *Fountain's* history shows that the differences among the critiques of its various reproductions may be explained primarily by actions of people and venues that supported each new reproduction, as well as to

information made available with each work. Specifically, the rejection of 1917 may be explained by the fact that *Fountain* was seen as a sharply polemical piece, challenging established notions of art, in a witty manner. Ever since then, the alteration of *Fountain's* artistic significance was possible for various reasons, often occurring simultaneously. One reason is the large amount of publicity that focused on the rejection of the original *Fountain*, starting from its defense at the *Blind Man*. Another is that Duchamp was part of a powerful art-related social network, including his involvement with the *Blind Man*, and also his relationship to some key members of the art establishment at different times, such as Louise Norton, Alfred Stieglitz, Katherine Dreier, Walter Arensberg, Pierre Cabanne and Arturo Schwarz. We may also note that Duchamp's active involvement in presenting a defense of *Fountain* and more importantly the later disclosure that he, being an already famous artist, was behind the unknown name "Richard Mutt," added artistic significance to the piece; and vice versa, the more *Fountain* was debated in art circles and attributed artistic significance, the more famous Duchamp would become, and the more his other work would increase its value. In a similar way, the value of the *Fountain* reproductions is significantly higher when they are accompanied by the information that Duchamp was personally involved in the production process, as if these are carrying some of the aura of the original.

Therefore, we might view the attributing of artistic significance to *Fountain* as manifested through a series of actions and art-related information – being separate ones from those directly related to the actual art-making process – increasingly linking the artwork to its broader socio-artistic context and the art establishment. It becomes important to follow the actions around the artistic evaluations of the *Fountains* and show that the artistic value attributed to artwork is socially constructed along with support and promotional mechanisms. Since several actions are responsible for so many diverse critiques over time, then it becomes challenging to relate these actions and critiques using one method of artistic evaluation that has been able to produce such different outcomes, yet remain consistent.



## **Analysis of the Artifact: Dilemmas Between the Original and Its Reproductions**

We are going to examine the critiques of *Fountain* in relation to any documentary information about the artwork. Starting from the first appearance, there is no photographic evidence of the original. As noted, any of *Fountain's* later evaluations have been automatically applied to its reproductions. Then, we need to analyze these critiques in comparison to descriptive information about the original and also to the information of the reproductions and later interpretations.

The information about the original and how it was submitted for *The Big Show* is quite ambiguous. In one source we find that "a white porcelain urinal appeared on a black pedestal in the storeroom."<sup>16</sup> Another source notes that *Fountain* was delivered by a female friend of Duchamp, probably Louise Norton.<sup>17</sup> A different version of the story says that "this object [the urinal] was delivered to the Grand Central Palace, together with an envelope bearing the fictitious Mr. Mutt's six-

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<sup>16</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.72.

dollar membership and entry fee and the work's title: "Fountain."<sup>18</sup> Beatrice Wood also described "walking into one of the exhibition's storerooms and finding two members of the board of directors of the Society, Walter Arensberg and George Bellows, in the midst of a furious argument, with the 'glistening white object' on the floor between them."<sup>19</sup>

It was not known for some time what happened with the original piece. For years, a general presumption was that it disappeared or was destroyed after being rejected. However, Duchamp's later interview around 1966 shortly before his death (in 1968) with Pierre Cabanne, illuminates the facts. Duchamp said: "the *Fountain* was simply placed behind a partition and, for the duration of the exhibition, I didn't know where it was. ... After the exhibition, we found the *Fountain* again, behind a partition, and I retrieved it!"<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, we do not know the exact time that two photographs showing a urinal hanging from the lintel of a doorway (**fig.1**) at Duchamp's studio were taken.<sup>21</sup> It must have been either after Duchamp got the original *Fountain* back, after May 1917, or even later, as late as in 1918, as Henri-Pierre Roché indicated in his diary that he

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<sup>18</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.181.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.181.

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp: With an Appreciation by Jasper Johns*, translated by Ron Padgett, Da Capo Press/Thames and Hudson, 1971, p.55.

<sup>21</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.68, 74-5.

personally "photographed all the corners of Marcel's studio"<sup>22</sup> just before Duchamp departed to Buenos Aires.

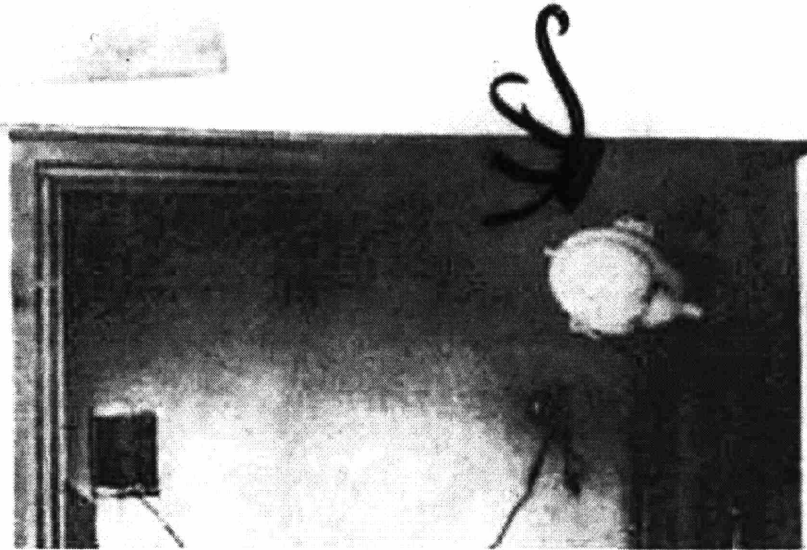


fig. 1:  
Duchamp's  
studio in 1917,  
with the urinal,  
hanging with  
other ready-  
mades.

We also know that the Stieglitz photograph (**fig.2**) was taken at Alfred Stieglitz studio when *The Big Show* was still open (it ended in May 6), sometime between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1917,<sup>23</sup> as Stieglitz agreed to photograph *Fountain* upon Duchamp and Beatrice Wood's request. Thus, the *Fountain* shown in the

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<sup>22</sup> The information about the exact time that these photographs were taken, is given by personal communication with art historian and Duchamp specialist Francis Naumann.

<sup>23</sup> On April 13, 1917, Beatrice Wood noted in her diary that she had gone with Duchamp to "see Stieglitz about 'Fountain'," and six days later, on April 19, 1917, Stieglitz sent a letter to the noted art critic Henry McBride, inviting him to stop by the gallery and see his photograph of the rejected object. Francis Naumann, *The Blind Man: Alfred Stieglitz Photograph of R. Mutt's Fountain*. Forthcoming publication at the catalogue of the exhibition called "Stieglitz and his Circle," at the Renia Sofia and the Musee d' Orsay in Fall of 2004.

Stieglitz photograph is most likely a copy, not the original work.<sup>24</sup> It is not known whether Stieglitz understood that Duchamp was the artist behind the “Richard Mutt” name at the time when the piece was exhibited and photographed in his studio. As art historian Francis Naumann suggests, Duchamp and Wood would have only told Stieglitz that they planned to use the photograph for a publication devoted to a defense of Richard Mutt’s rejected submission.<sup>25</sup> So they did, as the Stieglitz photograph was published in the second issue of the *Blind Man* (fig. 3), in which it appeared slightly cropped from top and bottom. The Stieglitz photograph gives significant information about *Fountain* and has been more widely used than any other document as reliable reference for the making of its later reproductions; therefore we are going to examine it.

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth to note that Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp’s biographer, claims that the Stieglitz photograph was taken probably a week after *The Big Show* (See Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.183). If we follow the events, especially the fact that the photograph was published in the *Blind Man* May 1917 edition, we conclude that the photograph was rather taken when *The Big Show* was still open and the depicted *Fountain* is not the original one.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Naumann, “The *Blind Man*: Alfred Stieglitz Photograph of R. Mutt’s *Fountain*.” Forthcoming publication at the catalogue of the exhibition “Stieglitz and his Circle,” Renia Sofia/Musée d’Orsay, 2004.



fig. 2: The Stieglitz  
Photograph, 1917.

In the Stieglitz photograph, *Fountain* is placed against the background of Marsden Hartley's painting *The Warriors* (1913). There are also meticulously elaborated lighting effects, reflections and shadows. In the Stieglitz photograph the background and lighting have a significant impact. The urinal casts a smooth shadow onto the pedestal, looking like a veil or an anthropomorphic curve.<sup>26</sup> We do not know for sure that Duchamp himself was involved in arranging the

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<sup>26</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.129.

photographic setting. As Beatrice Wood recalls, “he took great pains with the lighting, and did it with such skill that a shadow fell across the urinal suggesting a veil.”<sup>27</sup> However, as Francis Naumann remarks, Wood’s memory on these kinds of details was not always precise, and when she wrote her autobiography, she allowed herself to embellish a story slightly, especially if it made the narrative more interesting.<sup>28</sup> We can only attribute to Duchamp with certainty the choice to bring the *Fountain* copy to Stieglitz and persuade him to photograph it, thereby passing this controversial artifact (and the many questions the photograph forces its viewers to ask, which we are about to explore) through the lens of America’s most venerated spokesman of modernism.<sup>29</sup> We are going to examine the elements that are present in the Stieglitz photograph, their artistic intention in the photographic composition as well as in relation to the original *Fountain*.

By viewing the Stieglitz photograph we can distinguish between elements belonging to the original *Fountain* and those not originally included. Since the first *Fountain* was supposed to be placed in the exhibition setting of *The Big Show*, the background painting and the lighting effects of the Stieglitz photograph would not have been considered to accompany *Fountain* for *The Big Show* installation.

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<sup>27</sup> See Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.183.

<sup>28</sup> This information is given by Francis Naumann in personal correspondence with me.

<sup>29</sup> More information on the influential role of Stieglitz in art will be available in the catalogue of the exhibition “Stieglitz and his Circle” that will open at the Renia Sofia and the Musee in the Fall of 2004, with Naumann’s contribution.

Instead, they were used as supporting elements for the Stieglitz photograph and probably the exhibition installation, being artistically manipulated in the photograph to produce an aesthetic effect and a general artistic feel. Specifically, we may observe that the painting used as backdrop and the anthropomorphic shadows created with the special manipulation of lighting, are elements widely recognizable as artistic. Juxtaposing the basic *Fountain* with such artistic elements encourages viewers to include the artwork within a different artistic gaze. Moreover, we may observe that the left and right margins of the urinal are exactly equal in the photograph. Then, the urinal is symmetrically placed in the photographic composition. The urinal is also shown in an almost frontal position, with a minor rotation to the left. Such a positioning indicates the urinal's natural placement, nevertheless remaining frontal. From these basic observations we can deduce that the Stieglitz photograph is not a random snapshot, but a meticulously staged one, resembling that of a portrait, where *Fountain* is given an artistic charm, so to speak.

Before proceeding to any further analysis of the Stieglitz photograph, it is interesting to point out that later interpretations of *Fountain* acknowledged the general artistic feel of the photograph in terms of its staging and, in turn, applied it to the artwork. An example is the first documented interpretation of *Fountain* in the "Buddha of the Bathroom" article, presented in the second edition of the *Blind Man*, along with the Stieglitz photograph (**fig. 3**). The article notes: "the smooth

white curves of *Fountain's* shadows form like a simplified nude but with visual references to both the Buddha and the Virgin Mary.”<sup>30</sup> The description of *Fountain* in the article clearly resonates with the general artistic feel of the Stieglitz photograph, as this photographic portrait strongly initiates viewing *Fountain* as artistic. *Fountain's* positioning in front of the painting suggests that these two elements are related. Since the painting is an abstract one, then the photograph invokes *Fountain's* connection to abstract art. Furthermore, the smooth anthropomorphic shadows invoke a relationship to artistic photography, especially those with generally nude subjects. It is clear that the “Buddha of the Bathroom” article was influenced by the Stieglitz photograph, to the point that it connected *Fountain* to abstract and erotic art, further creating interpretations that enhanced the claim to its artistic significance. We may therefore view the Stieglitz photograph as a rhetorical act, which succeeded stating that *Fountain* be viewed as art.

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<sup>30</sup> The description and the question is taken from Louise Norton’s article “ Buddha of the Bathroom” that accompanied the picture of the reconstructed Fountain for the Blind Man magazine. Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, 130.





photograph was taken while the show was still open. Therefore the *Fountain* of the Stieglitz photograph was made with different elements than those of the original piece.

For an overall evaluation of the Stieglitz photograph, we must also note that the composition was clearly designed for the two-dimensional medium of photography. The information a photograph is able to convey about a three-dimensional object – in this case the urinal object and any other elements of art installation that are present in the Stieglitz photograph – is far more limited than viewing directly the actual three-dimensional work, as the viewer would be able to move around it spatially, effectively “re-composing” it. Consequently, many questions that may be raised by any two-dimensional representation, result from the medium’s inherent limitations and characteristics, to which Stieglitz and Duchamp were most likely very much aware of and also challenged with that photograph. Such a realization makes any attempt of deciphering the information of the photograph much more elaborate; thus an analysis of it might also raise issues that are reflective of the medium’s ability to convey under subjective filtering any information that it carries. In the case of *Fountain*, and since the work is overloaded with information that is prone to subjective and highly equivocal interpretations, attempts to decipher their meaning become directly challenging and enriching for the experience of looking at the Stieglitz photograph, as also indirectly with the artwork *Fountain*, even though such attempts might not

necessarily lead to clearcut interpretations about the meaning and artistic value of either the photograph or the artwork.

With these in mind, we may proceed to further analysis of the Stieglitz photograph. Apart from the lighting effects and the background painting, the Stieglitz photograph shows the urinal, the signature, the pedestal and the art inscription hanging from the left handle of the urinal. We are going to analyze how all the elements of the Stieglitz photograph are composed and related to each other in the photograph, as well as to *Fountain*. The urinal is rotated ninety degrees from its functional position. As noted before, it is symmetrically positioned in the photographic composition and nearly frontal, which gives some sort of symmetry in the photograph. The urinal is signed with the name and year “R. Mutt 1917.” It is also placed on top of a white box/pedestal. The art inscription bears the title “Fountain,” the pseudonym “Richard Mutt” and a fake address; this is the only legible information from the photograph.

By comparing the Stieglitz photograph to the two others taken at Duchamp’s studio showing the urinal hanging from the lintel of a doorway, the presence of the pedestal raises some suspicion. In the two photographs taken at Duchamp’s studio, the urinal is hanging from above; in contrast, in the Stieglitz photograph, the urinal has been placed onto a pedestal. Descriptions about *Fountain’s* submission to *The Big Show* say that the artwork was sent onto a black

pedestal.<sup>32</sup> Apparently, in the making of the *Fountain* in the Stieglitz photograph, Duchamp did not consider the color difference of the pedestal to be important and did not direct Stieglitz to use a black one. However, what is immediately striking in the photograph is that the urinal is clearly placed asymmetrically onto the pedestal. This is different to the way any artwork would be normally placed onto a pedestal; that is, centered.

Additionally, the way the art inscription is hanging from the left handle of the urinal resembles more of a temporary tag as for submissions to art exhibitions. This is clearly not how an art inscription or labeling would formally appear in an exhibition setting, where it would be positioned in more clear view either onto the pedestal, or close to the artwork, probably somewhere on a wall behind it or onto a separate stand. The art inscription shown in the photograph resembles the one with which the original *Fountain* was submitted to *The Big Show*, as it bears all the necessary information. Then, the art inscription was remade intentionally for the setting of the Stieglitz studio. Therefore, the off-centered placement of the urinal onto the pedestal and the special way the art inscription is placed onto the work together create the suspicion that the presence of these two elements and their equal manipulations in relation to the artwork might be intentional acts of the

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<sup>32</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, 126-7. Apparently, Duchamp did not consider the color difference to be important.

artist or the photographer. In other words, in the photograph, Stieglitz or Duchamp or both, deliberately manipulated the pedestal and the art inscription.

In the examining of this intention, we are going to address the artistic significance of the pedestal and the art inscription in relation to the other elements composing the photograph: the urinal, the “R. Mutt 1917” signature, the background painting and the lighting effects. Specifically, we are going to investigate whether any connection exists between the artistic intention surrounding the placement of the pedestal and the art inscription to the elements included in the original artwork *Fountain* – the urinal and the signature – and also to those ones that apparently do not belong to *Fountain*, which may be viewed exclusively as elements of art installation (i.e. the background painting and lighting effects).

First, we are going to show possible relation of artistic intention with the elements that belong to *Fountain*. It is noted in other studies of *Fountain* that the introduction of the urinal into artistic content is indicative that it must be read on a metaphysical level.<sup>33</sup> Especially the flipping of the urinal from the functional position that it would have in the lavatory context suggests that the object should not be viewed in regards to its primary function. The urinal’s positioning in

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<sup>33</sup> For example, the art historian Rosalind E. Krauss reads the presence of the urinal as follows: “Folded into that act of inversion is a moment in which the viewer has to realize that an act of transfer has occurred – an act in which the object has been transplanted from the ordinary world into the realm of art.” Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1981, p.77.

*Fountain* may be also viewed as functional as if it were on display on a store shelf,<sup>34</sup> a function that is nevertheless subordinate to the one in the lavatory.

Additionally, the use of the “Richard Mutt” pseudonym has already been explained as a way to preserve Duchamp’s anonymity. Duchamp disclosed in interviews that the pseudonym was coined by joining the names of the plumbing equipment manufacturer of the urinal “J. L. Mott Iron Works Company” and of the comic strip “Mutt and Jeff” that was popular at that time. Also, Duchamp explained that the initial “R” in the moniker “R. Mutt” stood for “Richard,” which in French slang meant “moneybags.”<sup>35</sup> The dating “1917” refers to the year that the original *Fountain* was made, clearly positioning the artwork in the specific timely moment when it was created. Such a play with words and symbols is very common in Duchamp’s work, either in text or in coining inscription phrases. It is known that Duchamp was inspired by his intellectual exchange with the poet and friend Walter Arensberg (a fellow member of the Society) who was passionate about cryptography.<sup>36</sup> Duchamp was influenced, Naumann observes, “to the point that many of his pieces are the result of an artistic collaboration, the direct product of their shared interests in exploring the potential for an interchange

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<sup>34</sup> Comment made by William Uricchio.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.184.

<sup>36</sup> It is said that when Duchamp bought the urinal, Arensberg was with him – along with Joseph Stella (see Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.181). It is therefore most likely that Arensberg knew who R. Mutt was and chose, along with Duchamp, to keep it secret from the rest of the committee.

between art and language.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Duchamp must have coined the name “Richard Mutt” after searching to find one with a double meaning, so that *Fountain* would be possibly recognized as a manufactured product and also as an artifact from popular culture.

We are going to interpret in an artistic manner the pedestal and the art inscription. The off-centered positioning of the urinal on the pedestal contradicts the pedestal’s primary function that would require the piece to be placed symmetrically onto it, to maintain stability. The observation that the pedestal is a rather narrow tall orthogonal column, further contradicts to its function, as the sustaining of the urinal onto it becomes almost problematic. Additionally, the way the art inscription is hanging from the left handle of the urinal is the way a temporary identifying tag would be placed when a work of art is submitted for artistic display. Such a placement is very common in cases when artworks are submitted for approval to art exhibitions, invoking more of an object-in-transition towards the art world.<sup>38</sup> If a submitted work is accepted to the art exhibition, then the temporary tag is taken away and replaced by a formal art inscription, which gives information about the artwork and is properly placed next to the work during the exhibition. In the Stieglitz photograph the art inscription invokes a

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<sup>37</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.66.

<sup>38</sup> This issue was raised in discussion with the professor Caroline Jones.

temporary art submission tag, or even a price tag,<sup>39</sup> but is certainly not a proper art inscription of the art show in the “291” gallery. Therefore, in the Stieglitz photograph the pedestal and the art inscription can be artistically related to the elements of the urinal and the “R. Mutt 1917” signature.

Second, we are going to show the artistic relationship between the pedestal and the art inscription to the background and the lighting, which, taken all together, form the elements of an art installation. Apart from being artistic referents, the use of a painting as a background for a sculpture artwork creates a compositional relationship between the two pieces. In the photograph the curves of the urinal are compared to the curves of the painting and in some way the urinal appears to stem out of the painting. This observation may be also made for the exaggerated shadow curves. The curved shapes of the painting, the urinal and the shadows create an organically related photographic composition. The curved shapes of the urinal are reflected onto the background and, themselves, cast shadows. The specific manipulation of these installation elements emphasizes the aesthetic character of the urinal’s shape and, in turn, the urinal acquires metaphysical significance.

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<sup>39</sup> This was indicated by my friend Stephanie Davenport.



In general, all the elements that are present in the Stieglitz photograph – regardless of whether they belong to *Fountain* or they are elements of art installation – are manipulated in ways that, taken together, would invoke a general sense of ambiguity. Manipulation is evident in the way the urinal has been rotated from its functional position to an upright position. Also, normally an artist signs an artwork in order to acknowledge authorship, but the use of a pseudonym conceals the artist's true identity. Dated here in this photograph as "1917," artwork *Fountain* is presented as if it were somehow bound to the specific timely moment. Dating became a common way of signing artwork, as a way of positioning it within the context of the time it was created, as opposed to presenting artwork without any apparent chronological reference. The pedestal still holds its functional use since it carries the urinal's weight, but the urinal's off-centered positioning is at odds with the sustaining function of the pedestal. The art inscription gives information about the artwork, however it appears as a temporary submission tag and not as a proper label. Similarly, the use of a painting as a background for another artwork refutes the established presumption that a neutral background would be more appropriate to support a foreground piece. Finally, the exaggerated use of lighting effects (shadows and reflections) produces shapes that cause associations with anthropomorphic shapes that clearly would not be raised with the mere sighting of a basic urinal.

In general, the way each of the elements of the Stieglitz photograph is present in it, is not consistent to what would be considered to be as “normal,” by any common functional sense. But something may be viewed as normal if it is in some sort a habitual repetition or established taste,<sup>40</sup> based on a presumed functional logic. Therefore, in the photograph, each element creates ambiguity because it is specifically manipulated to refute its presumed primary use.

Consequently, it is confusing whether each of the elements of the photograph should be viewed in a functional or rather an artistic way. This observation clearly reflects the main reason for *Fountain's* characterization as a ready-made, with the entry of a urinal or any other mass-produced object into the realm of artistic content, further invoked with the flipping of the urinal from its functional position. Additionally, the signature invokes the unconscious artistic role of a manufacturer of a mass-produced object of lavatory equipment and also whether a comic strip or any other expression of popular culture can be attributed artistic value. The signing with a pseudonym also raises questions of whether artistic value is attributed to a work merely given the information that the artist who made it is an art world celebrity. The idea that artwork is bound to the moment it is created

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<sup>40</sup> This explanation of taste belongs to Duchamp, as he stated in his interview with Pierre Cabanne:

“Cabanne: What is taste for you?”

Duchamp: A habit. The repetition of something already accepted. If you start something over several times, it becomes taste. Good or bad, it's the same thing, it's still taste.” Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp: With an Appreciation by Jasper Johns*, translated by Ron Padgett, Da Capo Press/Thames and Hudson, 1971, p.48.

attaches a time reference to artistic creation, a view that is different to the presumption that is also common, that artistic significance is timeless or changeless. The urinal's off-centered placement questions the pedestal's functional role as a supporting element of a work of art, also extending to a general questioning of whether art needs to be presented under any proper artistic signification in order to be viewed as such. The specific placement of the art inscription also raises questions of whether any object could be potentially viewed as art, or in a transitory stage to the art world. The inscription's resemblance to a price tag raises questions about the potential market and investment value of a work of art and in reverse, about the potential artistic value of a mass-produced or any object and therefore how such values are possibly related. Finally, the background painting and the lighting effects exaggerate the smooth characteristics of the urinal's shape, invoking interpretations of *Fountain* in relation to abstract and erotic art that otherwise would not have been stated.

By summarizing the observations of the Stieglitz photograph, we can conclude the following: first, all the elements of the photograph, the urinal, the signature, the pedestal, the art inscription, the background painting and the lighting effects are treated in such ways that they raise questions of their presumed functioning. Second, the elements of art's installation, the background, the lighting, the pedestal and the art inscription in the Stieglitz photograph, are artistically manipulated. We may also emphasize that the background and lighting do not

belong to the domain of the original *Fountain*. As for the other elements of the installation, there is nothing clearly indicating that a similar pedestal and art inscription were not parts of the *Fountain* that was submitted for *The Big Show*. On the contrary, there are related descriptions saying that *Fountain* was submitted on top of a black pedestal/box, and additionally, the art inscription imitates the one the original *Fountain* was submitted with. Seen in another way, it might be claimed that in the Stieglitz photograph, the background painting and the lighting effects have a particular medial status: they belong exclusively to the expressive domain of the photograph and of the two-dimensional composition, to which we may also attribute the almost frontal portrayal of the urinal and its symmetrical positioning in the photographic composition; they are medium-specific elements and do not belong in any essential way to the domain of *Fountain*. In contrast, the urinal and the signature belong exclusively to the domain of *Fountain*, while the pedestal and the art inscription are functionally subordinate to the sculptural work, lending direct support to its artistic presentation.

However, as it is shown in the photographs taken in Duchamp's studio, Duchamp also intended hanging the urinal. Further commenting the presence of the pedestal and of the art inscription, it is worth noting that when Duchamp used art installation elements of naming and support, in most cases he would integrate them in the core composition of the artwork. Similarly, the manipulation of the

pedestal and the art inscription in the Stieglitz photograph also show artistic intention. By comparing the Stieglitz photograph to the information we have about the original *Fountain's* submission for *The Big Show* and to the photographs taken in Duchamp's studio showing the urinal hanging, it is ambiguous whether the pedestal and the art inscription of the Stieglitz photograph are parts of original *Fountain's* core composition.

The claim that the pedestal and the art inscription are core elements of *Fountain* has not been addressed by any subsequent representations, analyses and reproductions, not even by Duchamp himself, when he created or supervised any of the replicas and the miniatures. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these two elements were never considered to belong to the artwork, that they were separate elements of the installation and that *Fountain* would be installed in various ways, depending on the situation – either roughly placed onto a pedestal or hanging, with or without any art inscription attached to its handle.

We are going to investigate the subject specifically by analyzing how *Fountain* was presented, copied, represented, described and interpreted, especially when Duchamp was involved himself in the related actions. We may also examine how *Fountain* has been described and attributed its artistic significance over time by Duchamp, as well as by others. Moreover, we are going to reconstruct the social and artistic contexts around the descriptions, representations and artistic

evaluations of *Fountain* and recall the artistic qualities that were attributed to the artwork each time in response to the concurrent art system and the artistic standards.

## Placing *Fountain's* Artistic Evaluations into Artistic Context

### Original *Fountain* and *The Big Show* in 1917

The first to evaluate *Fountain* was the board of directors of *The Big Show*. *The Big Show* was held at the Grand Central Palace in New York in April 1917 and was organized by the Society of Independent Artists. The Society was a group of American and European artists founded in December 1916, that charged nominal exhibition fees and established a mandate to “afford American and foreign artists an opportunity to exhibit their work independent of a jury.”<sup>41</sup> Marcel Duchamp was one of the Society’s founding members. The other founding members were William J. Glackens, George Bellows, Rockwell Kent, Maurice Prendergast (they organized exhibitions in 1908, 1910 and one in 1913 known as the *Armory Show*, which challenged the general views of no precedent or jury policy of academic authorities), also Katherine S. Dreier, Francis Picabia, Albert Gleizes, John Marin, Walter Pach, Walter Arensberg (the managing director<sup>42</sup>), Morton Livingston Schambreg, John Corvet, Man Ray, and Joseph Stella (a group of

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<sup>41</sup> See Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 210, where Naumann cites the Society’s “Certificate of Incorporation.” See also Francis M. Naumann, *New York Invades Dada 1915-23*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, USA, 1994, p.176.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.artnet.com/library/07/0794/T079485.ASP>. Original information source: The Grove Dictionary of Art: <http://www.groveart.com/>

Dadaists and their supporters<sup>43</sup>). The Society of Independent Artists was modeled after the French Société des Artistes Indépendants, a group founded in 1884 that exhibited until the First World War as a kind of institutionalized Salon des Refusés. The general philosophy of the Society of Independent Artists was to establish a new politics of artistic individualism and independence in the United States persistently identified with “anarchy” and “revolution.”<sup>44</sup>

*The Big Show* was the Society’s first exhibition. According to the rules, anyone who paid the required initiation fee of one dollar and an annual due of five dollars was allowed to submit up to two works. The Society would offer artists the opportunity to exhibit for this small yearly fee, regardless of style or subject matter. *The Big Show* was not only the largest exhibition in the United States’ history (about 2500 paintings and sculptures by 1200 artists) but one of the most controversial: its “no-jury” general rule, which precluded any judgment by the committee, often drew rigorous criticism. The exhibition started six days after the

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<sup>43</sup> Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 210.

<sup>44</sup> “The exhibitors of 1908 were labeled ‘revolutionists.’ The Independents of 1910 were called ‘insurgents, anarchists, socialists, all the opponents to any form of government, to any method of discipline’; and the Armory Show moderns were pilloried as ‘anarchic hordes’ intent on ‘disrupt[ing] and destroy[ing], not only art, but literature and society, too.” Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 211.



United States entered the First World War,<sup>45</sup> underlining the Society's dedication to democratic principles as part of a worldwide struggle for freedom.<sup>46</sup>

With the opening of *The Big Show*, the Society represented the world's hopes that in the United States something new was happening, a general feeling that with artistic freedom, the new world would also start a social revolution. From a social perspective, *The Big Show* was very radical; going back in 1917, we may invoke that the emergence of modernism was still recent internationally, being around for no more than a couple of decades. Art was remaining entrenched in the old cultural aristocracies, essentially consisting of the Society's main target. Society's revolutionary spirit was further expressed in the *Blind Man* magazine. The first publication of the *Blind Man* coincided with the opening of *The Big Show*, and declared: "Russia needed a political Revolution. America needs an artistic one."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Six days before the beginning of the Show, the United States declared war against Germany. Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> The Society's commitment extended to all of the arts; film screenings, lectures, poetry readings and concerts supplemented the exhibitions. Although none was as sensational as the first, exhibitions accompanied by catalogues continued on an annual basis under Sloan's long tenure as president from 1918 until 1944 when the last exhibition was held. Online source: <http://www.artnet.com/library/07/0794/T079485.ASP>.

Original information source: The Grove Dictionary of Art: <http://www.groveart.com/>

<sup>47</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.124.

Being a dedicated supporter of artistic freedom, Duchamp was actively involved in the Society's activities from the beginning. Not only was he among its founding artist members, he was also one of the editors of the *Blind Man*, and also head of the art installation committee of *The Big Show*. To give equal and objective opportunity to every artist, Duchamp took the rather unusual decision to arrange the works in alphabetical order, instead of using any qualitative criteria, such as medium or content. Such a decision raised objections by some members and participating artists.<sup>48</sup>

In such an intense climate, it would be expected that any expression of censorship to submitted artworks would acquire political significance, as Duchamp must have sensed. The moment *Fountain* was submitted, it incited strong reactions from the board of directors who essentially questioned whether a work like this could be ever accepted as art. The central anti-academy philosophy of accepting all works was easily mocked and some members took it upon themselves to remove *Fountain* from the exhibition just before the opening. Some felt it was indecent, unoriginal, possibly a joke and also breaking both social and artistic taboos.<sup>49</sup> It is said that "one member of the Society, George Bellows, supposedly became very angered and turned on Walter Arensberg

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<sup>48</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.123-4.

<sup>49</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.128-9.

saying: ‘Someone must have sent it as a joke. It is signed R. Mutt; sounds fishy to me... It is gross, offensive! ...There is such a thing as decency. Do you mean that if an artist put horse manure on a canvas and sent it to the exhibition, we would have to accept it?’ Arensberg (the managing director) responded with ‘I am afraid we would.’”<sup>50</sup>

Over an emergency meeting, *Fountain’s* supporters were outvoted by a small margin<sup>51</sup> and the directors refused artwork’s display. We might trace the significance of the related events from the series of debates that ensued. The rejecting decision caused rigorous objections from some of the board members. Duchamp resigned and it is said that Arensberg followed him.<sup>52</sup> Most viewed the rejection as a case of censoring artistic content. The second issue of *Blind Man* hosted *Fountain’s* defense, stating that it was “a sad surprise ... to learn of a Board of Censors sitting upon the ambiguous question, ‘What is ART?’”<sup>53</sup> In *Blind Man*, the Stieglitz photograph was presented along with two articles. “The Richard Mutt Case”<sup>54</sup> was a short unsigned editorial. It responded specifically to

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<sup>50</sup> [http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William\\_Clark.html](http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William_Clark.html)

<sup>51</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.126.

<sup>52</sup> See Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.182. Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.126-7.

<sup>53</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.128.

<sup>54</sup> The information we have for the exact author of the editorial is ambiguous. It is safer to assume that it expresses the beliefs of the three main editors of the *Blind Man*. Beatriz Colomina attributes it to Beatrice Wood. However, as Calvin Tomkins argues, its style and content invokes

the issues raised by *Fountain's* opponents and it also posed the question of whether the artist had freedom to express any opinion about art within the creative process. The other article in *Blind Man*, The "Buddha of the Bathroom,"<sup>55</sup> focused more on bringing forth aesthetic issues, primarily raised in response to the Stieglitz photograph, which appeared in both articles. *Fountain* was described as a "sly appeal to the visual purity of a machine aesthetic: 'To an '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.'"<sup>56</sup> The Stieglitz photograph was under the caption "The exhibit refused by the Independents."

The correspondence of the member of the board Katherine Dreier, illuminates the events around *The Big Show*. Dreier sent a letter to the Society president, William Glackens, to express her consent to "have Richard Mutt bring the discarded object and explain the theory of art and why it had a legitimate place in an Art Exhibit," thus forcing him to show "whether he was sincere or did it out of

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more of Duchamp's writing. See Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture and Mass Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996, p.180. Also, Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.185.

<sup>55</sup> Again, the information we get about the author is ambiguous. In this case, Ades, Cox and Hopkins and also Francis Naumann attribute "Buddha of the Bathroom" to Louise Norton, whereas Colomina attributes it to Beatrice Woods. See Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.127 and also Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture and Mass Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996, p.180.

<sup>56</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.129-30.

bravado.”<sup>57</sup> In the same letter, Dreier stated that the board invited Duchamp to lecture on the artistic value of his ready-mades.<sup>58</sup> She also wrote to Duchamp asking him to reverse his resignation from the Society, remarking: “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.”<sup>59</sup>

Art critics have attributed *Fountain’s* submission to Duchamp’s suspicions that even with the promise of unconditional participation and even though no rules were specified, if a work did not conform to the organizers’ ideas, it was subject to censorship.<sup>60</sup> For Duchamp, censoring artistic content was an expression of

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<sup>57</sup> [http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William\\_Clark.html](http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William_Clark.html)

<sup>58</sup> This is the quote from Dreier’s letter: “I want to express my profound admiration in the way you handled so important a matter as you did at the last meeting when it was [decided]...that we invite Marcel Duchamp to lecture...on his Readymades. ...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... [you] will force Richard Mutt to show whether he was sincere or did it out of bravado.” William Clark, “Katherine Dreier and the Société Anonyme,” in *Variant* issue 14, winter 2001, p.5.  
See also online source: [http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William\\_Clark.html](http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William_Clark.html)

<sup>59</sup> [http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William\\_Clark.html](http://www.variant.randomstate.org/14texts/William_Clark.html)

<sup>60</sup> In this interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp debates the fate of *Fountain* in The Big Show: “Cabanne: You were also among the founding members of the Société des Indépendants, and at the first exhibition you presented a porcelain urinal called ‘Fountain,’ signed by R. Mutt, which was rejected.

Duchamp: No, not rejected. A work can’t be rejected by the Indépendents.

Cabanne: Let’s say just that it wasn’t admitted.

Duchamp: It was simply suppressed.”

Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp: With an Appreciation by Jasper Johns*, translated by Ron Padgett, Da Capo Press/Thames and Hudson, 1971, p.54.

Also, about the censorship of the *Fountain*, read Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.128.

bigotry in America.<sup>61</sup> It is not surprising after all that *Fountain's* rejection was recorded in history as the "Fountain scandal." Issues of freedom and censorship were attributed extraordinary significance at the moment, also with the entry of the United States in the War. The "Fountain scandal" uncovered that suppressive and undemocratic tendencies were lurking behind the so-called liberating mechanisms of artistic support, founding in the provocative content of *Fountain* a blatant cause to be expressed. Some of the board members characterized *Fountain* as indecent, unoriginal and as a joke. Moreover, it was strongly debated whether the artist had to make a public statement in support of any artwork or even have someone else speak in its favor, and also whether anything an artist presented as an artwork could be viewed as art. The "Fountain scandal" proved that the Society of Independent Artists, in spite of their promises, their democratic, revolutionary and even anarchic proclamations, would abuse power when a work of art was different from their fundamental artistic assumptions.

Duchamp's motive for submitting *Fountain* may be further traced back to an event that happened in 1912. That year, he submitted the painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2* to the Salon des Indépendants in Paris. The Cubist-leaning committee rejected the *Nude*, because the style and theme were not considered to be typical ones in Cubist paintings. Duchamp felt that the real

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<sup>61</sup> As Beatrice Wood recalls Duchamp "was greatly amused, but also felt that it was important to fight bigotry in America." Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.183.

reason for *Nude's* rejection was essentially related to content. He strongly believed that censoring artistic content was not acceptable by any means. Thus, he developed distrust in any self-appointed avant-garde group; he withdrew from the pre-war Cubist circles and would not join any artistic movement again.<sup>62</sup>

The rejection of *Fountain* was based to the presence of a urinal and the fact that the name "Richard Mutt" was unknown to the artistic circles, thus creating confusion. Yet, the fact that the board invited Duchamp to lecture on his ready-mades means that this style was already known among the board members as a form of artistic expression<sup>63</sup> and that *Fountain* was an example of this style.

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<sup>62</sup> Duchamp participated in the Dada and then the Surrealist movements, yet only when he felt like it, detaching himself with perfect freedom. Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.49, 122.

As Naumann also notes, Duchamp read Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*, which marked his "complete liberation:" "Liberation from what, we may ask? Firstly, from the Bergsonian metaphysics of Cubism and paintings such as the *Nude Descending the Staircase No. 2* (1912). Duchamp never painted another Cubist work; instead he became increasingly preoccupied with conceptual productions that subordinated metaphysical and social norms, values, and dictates to the caprice of his personality. ... The American readymades, such as *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915) and *Fountain*, pursued the same end. Here Duchamp undermined the metaphysical aesthetics and socially imposed conventions that defined 'art,' replacing painting and sculpture with mass-produced objects and devoid of aesthetic deliberation and any trace of the creative process. The readymades were his Stirnerite revolt against the rules 'art' imposed on the individual. Negating the productive role of the artist and the very idea of aesthetic judgement, Duchamp brought the entire edifice of 'art' crashing down, much to the consternation of American art critics, who, already bemused by the nonproductive role of the 'artist,' furtively searched for qualities of 'beauty' that would at least make the act of choosing 'artistic.'" Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 212-3. It is worth to point out how Naumann includes *Fountain* in Duchamp's ready-mades. We shall see later, that there are reasons to reconsider such assumption, or at least, frame some of the values that are attached to the piece differently.

<sup>63</sup> Duchamp, in his dialogue with Pierre Cabanne, explains how the word "ready-made" first came to his mind: "The word "ready-made" did not appear until 1915, when I went to the United States. It was an interesting word, but when I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a "ready-made," or anything else. It was just a distraction." Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues*

Thus, the board of directors implicitly characterized *Fountain* as a ready-made as early as when they rejected it, even before the work was defended in the *Blind Man*; but this would be the least reason to include the work to an art exhibition as liberal as *The Big Show*. Therefore, as *Fountain* was already viewed as a ready-made, with its declaration as not a work of art Duchamp succeeded in showing that its rejection was an act of censorship. In the next chapter we are going to examine how *Fountain* was formally characterized as a ready-made later.



## ***Fountain's* Later Classification as a Ready-made**

Since 1917, *Fountain* has been classified as a very important ready-made, holding a prominent place in art history.<sup>64</sup> We may view *Fountain's* ready-made classification and also its comparison to abstract, erotic art, Surrealism, Dada and Pop art as a few of the many ways to give artistic meaning to the artwork in relation to various movements and styles, with some ways have been more significant than others. We may further compare issues of eroticism and abstract art that have already been attributed to *Fountain*, with ones that were mentioned in 1917 among the board members of *The Big Show*, but were proven to be insufficient to save the original work; namely, *Fountain's* resemblance to the ready-made style, art's increasing relationship to mass-production and to popular culture and also the shock value of art.

*Fountain's* classification as a ready-made is built upon the elements of the urinal and the "R. Mutt 1917" signature. These two elements are present in *Fountain's* early photographic evidence of 1917 and 1918, the Stieglitz photograph and the two ones taken in Duchamp's studio. They are also in the focus of *Fountain's* descriptions in the second edition of *Blind Man*. Moreover, they are present in the

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<sup>64</sup> For instance we might look at Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 2001, p.76-7.

miniature versions of the piece made in 1938 for the artwork *The Box in a Valise*, in the replicas of the same scale as the original produced in 1950, 1953 and 1963, and also in the eight replicas made for the 1964 Schwarz exhibition in Milan. Despite the differences of the medium, the scale and the slightly different urinal models, all representations consist of a urinal signed and dated as “R. Mutt 1917” (in the copy of 1963, the urinal was signed in type letters, thus further emphasizing the work’s manufactured-fabricated aspect through this style of signature<sup>65</sup>).

As it is noted before, *Fountain* evoked the ready-made style from the first moment it appeared in front of the board members of *The Big Show*. Such an assumption is based on the observation that the presence of the urinal complies with the general definition and principles of ready-made art. The ready-made is a “commonplace prefabricated object, which – with or without alteration – is isolated from its functional context and elevated to the status of art by the mere act of the artist’s selection.”<sup>66</sup> In principle, a ready-made is a mass-produced object that has been signed and sometimes inscribed by the artist. The basic concepts underlying a ready-made are: “Firstly, a concern to challenge by

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<sup>65</sup> The copy was made by Ulf Linde and is in the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm. See Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.226.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.299.

example contemporary assumptions about the nature of artistic creation. ...Secondly, a desire to expose the role of institutions and social groups in defining what counts as art. Thirdly, a fascination with industrially manufactured, and therefore usually anonymously produced, 'objects of desire.'"<sup>67</sup> A ready-made would be intentionally controversial, as it deals indiscriminately with both mass-produced, industrially manufactured, objects and the unique works by individual artists made specifically to question the presumed artistic and commercial value of both.<sup>68</sup>

Before we proceed to any analysis of *Fountain's* ready-made classification, we may note that the miniatures made for Duchamp's other sculptural work *The Box in a Valise* hold very different artistic significance than the rest of the reproductions. The miniatures are not "ready-made" objects (or, in other words, objects pre-made by a manufacturer), but they are clay copies, made specifically to be parts of a different artwork. The process of making these miniatures required a high degree of craft to emulate a urinal in reduced form. Moreover, the effect of this much smaller size is to cause them to depart from the profane "utility" of the standard-sized urinal; that is to say, all of the ambiguity created by the original, the replicas and the photographs showing *Fountain*, is lost in the

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<sup>67</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.152.

<sup>68</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.152.

miniature form. Duchamp created *The Box in a Valise* in 1941 as a sort of a three-dimensional portfolio, in which apart from a miniature of the signed urinal he also included miniatures of most of his other artworks. Besides stating that Duchamp considered the signed urinal to be a work of art, any other analysis of the miniatures or of *The Box in a Valise* would raise issues that are practically irrelevant to *Fountain's* ready-made classification. Therefore, for the purpose of examining *Fountain*, we do not need to analyze the miniatures or *The Box in a Valise*.

Duchamp was very much involved in the establishing of ready-made art. In fact, it was Duchamp who coined the term "ready-made" shortly after he came to New York in 1915.<sup>69</sup> He borrowed it from its use in the clothing industry: "ready-made garments were those that could be purchased off the rack, as opposed to those that were custom made."<sup>70</sup> In the lecture *Apropos of "Ready-mades"*<sup>71</sup> at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in October 19, 1961, he described how he

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<sup>69</sup> Duchamp arrived in New York in June 15, 1915 (Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999).

<sup>70</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.299.

<sup>71</sup> *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, Da Capo Press/ Oxford University Press, 1973, p.141-2.

The lecture can be also found online at the following link, along with the two pages in the second issue of *The Blind Man* magazine, which presented *Fountain's* defense:  
<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/visualarts/Duchamp-texts.html>

created his first ready-made in the United States, the piece entitled *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915):

“In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow shovel on which I wrote: ‘In Advance of the Broken Arm.’ It was at that time that the word ‘ready-made’ came to mind to designate this form of manifestation.”

The ready-made style describes a thread that is common to many of Duchamp’s artworks. Generally, his ready-mades might be viewed as his artistic response towards the trends of mass production and consumption. As Duchamp left France and settled in New York, he was astonished by the rhythm and spirit of the market in the daily metropolitan American life. Thus, critics say, in Duchamp’s ready-mades we may view “the American metropolis and note the encounter between this most refined European and a world both brutal but also more fertile and vigorous.”<sup>72</sup> Duchamp’s ready-mades were generally offering a view of mass-produced objects that was different from their primary functional one. By introducing a mass-produced object into the realm of art, the viewer is finally

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<sup>72</sup> The critic Alberto Boatto notes: “New York doesn’t only affirm the machine and the recent attention given to the object, but closely ties one to the other, laying bare the new reality by which the artist must be measured: the technical manmade reality, as well as the conventional linguistic characteristic, meaningful in and of itself – that is, already equipped with symbols and counter-symbols, which it carries within all its artificial aspects. It is not without reason that in New York Duchamp elaborates on the definition of ‘ready-made’ given to his particular object, just as the mass-produced products on sale in large stores are ‘ready-made.’” “Marcel Duchamp and the Avant-Garde,” in *ARTI* periodical edition vol.17, Athens, Greece, Nov-Dec 1993, p.124.

asked to look upon the act of the changing status from a mere functional object to an object of artistic contemplation. The ready-made would finally challenge the viewer to be more critical to any object of daily life. Looking at ordinary objects in a non-ordinary, critical way expresses Duchamp's broader vision about art. Such a way of viewing happens in an imperceptible mental field he personally calls "infra-mince."<sup>73</sup> For Duchamp, art's role would be to present a view of the object that would challenge any presumption uncritically attributed to it.

The ready-made style became known among the artistic circles in New York in 1915. Despite the intellectual context and the revolutionary relationship that it introduced between the viewer, the artwork and the surrounding world, the ready-mades often faced intense resistance about whether they could be considered as artworks. Objections were based on the seeming easiness and the absence of artistic labor in their creation.<sup>74</sup> To this, we may also add the indiscriminate questioning of the artistic value of mass-produced objects with minor or no artistic intervention and also of the unique works by acclaimed artists.

Information from the Stieglitz photograph assisted significantly *Fountain's* artistic classification as a ready-made. The photograph shows the urinal with the "R.

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<sup>73</sup> Christina Petrinou, "Marcel Duchamp Pinxit," in ARTI periodical edition vol.17, Athens, Greece, nov-dec 1993, p.128.

<sup>74</sup> It was often commented that the production of a ready-made required the technical skills of a child. Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.152-3.

Mutt 1917” signature. Elements of art installation and support that are also present in the photograph are the background painting, the lighting effects, the pedestal and the art inscription. Their manipulation shows some artistic intention by Stieglitz and possibly by Duchamp. The background painting and the lighting effects aided in building up *Fountain’s* artistic reputation but cannot be viewed as parts of the sculpture piece. In contrast, it is not clear whether the pedestal and the art inscription be viewed as parts of *Fountain*. Such an ambiguity points to important dilemmas about *Fountain’s* artifactual status. As we shall see, such dilemmas acquire more significance by comparing *Fountain’s* reproductions to Duchamp’s general creative guidelines of his ready-mades.

In the next chapter, we are going to compare the main characteristics of the ready-made style to documentation of the original *Fountain* and the reproductions. We are going to examine the mechanisms of artistic evaluation applied to the reproduced *Fountains* that gave the work its ready-made classification. A comparative study of artwork’s main composing principles with Duchamp’s descriptions of his ready-mades may illuminate how *Fountain’s* reputation was built up gradually. In the meantime, it may aid to respond to the questions concerning any differences between the original and the reproductions. We are going to focus on the artistic evaluations of the original *Fountain* for *The Big Show*, of the copy of *Fountain* shown in the Stieglitz photograph – original

artwork's most important early reproduction – and also of the replicas of the Schwarz exhibition in 1964 – *Fountain's* most important later reproductions.



## **Mechanisms of Artistic Evaluation over the *Fountains***

### **Artistic Contexts around *Fountains***

*Fountain's* rejection from *The Big Show* was based on the fact that the presence of a urinal within artistic content was provocative. From Duchamp's later interviews, we may also attribute significance to the fact that the board of directors did not know the name "Richard Mutt" under which *Fountain* was submitted. Duchamp explained that he kept his involvement as *Fountain's* creator a secret because he was in the board and, to some, it might seem as a conflict of interest. Had Duchamp chosen a less provocative mass-produced object, revealed that he was the artist, or explained any artistic significance of the work, *Fountain* would have likely been approved.

Given the actual circumstances, Duchamp said that he would have been surprised if the board accepted *Fountain*, as he revealed much later in his interview to Pierre Cabanne. The "no jury" policy of *The Big Show* emerged as the perfect setup: with *Fountain's* submission Duchamp would face the Society with its own limits to accept unconditionally any artistic form of expression, as they promoted. Duchamp's actions right after the jury's decision further justify such a claim: that is, he did not do anything that he could to increase the chances that *Fountain* be accepted. Instead, he kept Richard Mutt's identity a secret, he refused to give a lecture on his ready-mades as he was asked to, he

did not provide any other artistic justification about *Fountain* and he resigned from the board. For Duchamp, *Fountain's* rejection, although it happened in an artistic context, it had broader social and political implications, ones that he expressed out loud with the polemical tone of *Fountain's* later defense in the *Blind Man*. The fact that *Fountain's* rejection was recorded in history as a scandal, certainly satisfied Duchamp.

The political implications that the "Fountain scandal" raised might be traced in the general political situation worldwide and the First World War. The directors' decision against *Fountain* reflected weaknesses deeply embedded in their beliefs. However, proving that their decision was wrong from an artistic point can be counter-fought and remains a subjective opinion. The truth remains that the rejection came out of a slim majority and that still, *The Big Show* is the biggest and the most revolutionary exhibition ever made in the United States and probably worldwide. In the face of *Fountain*, the directors' proclamations about freedom of artistic expression must have been in great conflict with the almost certainty that someone was making fun of them, of art in general, as well as of the exhibition and the audience, thus likely feeling that they had to stand up for and protect them all.

Instead, deeper significance of the "Fountain scandal" might better be traced by comparing how *Fountain* was treated in the different contexts it was presented.

Specifically, one may focus on the implications of *Fountain's* different evaluations over time: how was this made possible, how could a piece like *Fountain*, one that was viewed as being so inartistic once that even made the directors of *The Big Show* reject it, be ever accepted afterwards and further establish such an immense artistic reputation. An immediate response to this would be that the artistic standards are in constant change; as Becker acknowledges, “much of the running dialogue of artists and other participants in art worlds has to do with making day-to-day adjustments in the content and application of standards of judgment.”<sup>75</sup> Because of the radical difference of artistic evaluation of *Fountain* over time and moreover – perhaps more importantly, as similar examples are not uncommon – because of the publicity and the significance that its rejection acquired, *Fountain* provides as an exemplary case to investigate how radically the artistic standards change, and along with them, the artistic contexts being matters of consensus by which art is defined.

Similarly, we may view that *Fountain's* gradual building up of fame happened along with the changing of the artistic standards and the gradual transformation of the artistic context and the general art world. The change would start almost immediately after the rejection and when *The Big Show* was still open, as *Fountain* was reproduced, exhibited and presented, initially with the artist's

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<sup>75</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London, 1982, p. 156.

identity still disguised under the pseudonym. Then, *Fountain* could potentially be viewed as art in 1917, as it was, in the private meetings for the *Blind Man* second issue and in the Stieglitz studio, as well as certainly later, with *Fountain's* broad artistic recognition. Between the contexts in which *Fountain* was presented, we may observe a difference, which was preserved by Duchamp. In the context of *The Big Show*, Duchamp did not provide any artistic justification about *Fountain*. In contrast, in the other contexts and shortly after, he directed *Fountain's* artistic support in various ways, also taking advantage of his connections with the right people, having them act in favor of the work, as, besides Duchamp, also Beatrice Wood, the editorial group of the *Blind Man* and Alfred Stieglitz promoted the artwork. For the changing of the artistic standards and the transformation of the artistic contexts in which *Fountain* was presented, Duchamp directed the actions of a broader group of art-related people.

Later on, *Fountain* and Duchamp would be linked to new movements with general “anti-art” philosophy – primarily Dada – aiming to shatter any artistic tradition. Such groups would become increasingly famous and consequently would add fame to their members and their works. In other words, the differences of *Fountain's* artistic evaluation must be related to the changing of the landscape of the art world, which embraced gradually artistic experimentations and philosophies that destabilized the traditional artistic foundations. Duchamp was also a very significant part of this change and over time, an increasing number of

people and activities would update the broader artistic setting into which works like *Fountain* could be artistically appraised – including new artistic movements, critical interpretations, magazines, publications and galleries. By analyzing the series of Duchamp's actions in *The Big Show*, outside of it and later on, we may claim that if the board accepted *Fountain*, Duchamp would not have only been surprised, he would have also been disappointed: he wouldn't be able to set in action his designated steps towards *Fountain's* artistic recognition, and moreover, his artwork would not have acquired its publicity and probably its later fame.

In an attempt to explain the different evaluations of *Fountain* over time, our primary concern becomes to link the increasing artistic reputation of both *Fountain* and Duchamp to the transformation of the art establishment. We are going to respond to questions concerning the development of new artistic standards, providing new artistic contexts. Bourdieu points directly to Duchamp and to *Fountain* to ask related questions about any presumption building up our general understanding about art, also reflecting established artistic norms:<sup>76</sup>

“What makes a work of art a work of art and not a mundane thing or a simple utensil? What makes an artist an artist, as opposed to a craftsman

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<sup>76</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p.290.

or a Sunday painter? What makes a urinal or a bottle rack that is exhibited in a museum into a work of art? Is it the fact that it is signed by Duchamp, a recognized artist (and recognized first and foremost as an artist) and not by a wine merchant or a plumber? But is that not simply replacing the work-of-art-as-fetish with the 'fetish of the name of the master' of which Benjamin spoke? Who, in other words, has created the 'creator' as a recognized producer of fetishes? And what confers its magic efficacy on his name, whose celebrity is the measure of his pretension to exist as an artist? What makes the affixing of his name, like the label of a famous designer, multiply the value of the object (which helps to raise the stakes in attribution disputes and to establish the power of experts)? Where does the ultimate principle reside of the effect of nomination or of theory (a particularly appropriate word since it is a matter of seeing, *theorein*, and of giving to be seen) – that ultimate principle which, by introducing difference, division and separation, produces the sacred?"

We may respond selectively by following the transformation of the artistic context around *Fountain*. Specifically, Becker explains the genesis of new theories when existing ones fail to give adequate account:<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London, 1982, p. 145.

“New theories, rivaling, extending, or amending previous ones, arise when older theories fail to give an adequate account of the virtues of work widely accepted by knowledgeable members of the relevant art world. When an existing aesthetic does not legitimate logically what is already legitimate in other ways, someone will construct a theory that does.”

An impact to Becker's comment would be that the differences in the artistic evaluation over time is the outcome of the absence and later the development of specific artistic standards that would project adequate artistic significance to it. Thus, behind the rejecting decision of *Fountain* we may address those artistic qualities of the artwork that were characterized as negative, as behind *Fountain's* later artistic recognition we may address those artistic qualities that established its reputation. Consequently, from the two different circumstances, we may explain how each artistic context promoted selectively some artistic qualities over others.

We are going to examine how the different contexts functioned. First, by examining the context of *The Big Show*, we may point out the general “no jury” rule. *Fountain's* critical standing and radical departure from previous artistic presumptions challenged the limits of what could possibly be perceived as art, thus causing the breaking of that general rule. Although Duchamp expected the rejection, for many art historians it is not completely justified. As Naumann

argues, *Fountain* did depart from existing artistic standards, but so had the work of many others on the committee who appointed themselves as revolutionists and anarchists, going against any artistic and social establishment. Naumann notes: “Duchamp simply extended the artists’ individualist revolt to a realm most were unprepared to confront, namely, the institution of ‘art’ as such. What is more, Duchamp’s motivations for doing so sprang from the same source – anarchism – that had driven his iconoclastic predecessors.”<sup>78</sup> The anarchists’ vision about art would generally comply with Duchamp’s one. For example, as he was questioned about any possible interpretation or any artistic significance of *Bicycle Wheel*, Duchamp responded:

“That machine has no intention, except to get rid of the appearance of a work of art. It was a whim. I didn’t call it a ‘work of art.’ I wanted to throw off the desire to create works of art.”<sup>79</sup>

Duchamp’s comment on *Bicycle Wheel* reveals his vision about art, which could be stated as: more than characterizing an object, act, style, technique or performance as being art, in the marrow of art resides the urge to offer a critical view and awareness about any presumption that characterizes life. With

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<sup>78</sup> Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 212.

<sup>79</sup> Source: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p.171. Original not stated.



*Fountain*, Duchamp simply turned such a view onto the concurrent institutionalized artistic norms, offering an expression of a work of art's own self-doubting. Therefore, *Fountain's* rejection acquires the ironic significance that an anarchists' group exercised its status of power when a work offered a critical view upon established artistic standards.

We ought to reconsider if the board had any other option than rejecting *Fountain*. Or, the same question in different words would ask whether the board was able to preserve the "no jury" general rule unconditionally, even in the facing of a work as radical as *Fountain*.

Accepting *Fountain* would have been equal accepting anything as art unconditionally; also accepting the potential that, in the future, artists would have the freedom to express anything and still be considered as art. Art would have been in continuous and unpredictable change and any critical view of the art establishment would instantly be defined as artistic, including any content, technique, unpredictable combination, as well as any expression subverting any of the artistic standards, even the most foundational ones, beyond repetitions, references, or habits. Artistic creation would have been granted the freedom to bring into the artistic realm anything that belonged to – or was previously suppressed under – the impossibility of imagination.

Having examined *Fountain's* content and the contextual framing in which it was submitted, we may restate that by submitting *Fountain* to *The Big Show*, Duchamp challenged the directors to accept artwork that defied fundamental artistic presumptions because of the mere fact that it did so. Had *Fountain* been accepted for the exhibition, then those with the power to decide would have embraced art's potential for unpredictable change. The potential of the unpredictable would be unlimited. Those who were able to sense such a potential and decided against *Fountain* must have been overwhelmed by fear, rather than any hope. Therefore, *Fountain's* rejection stated a definite "no" to unconditional freedom of artistic expression.

*Fountain's* rejection showed that the rule of unconditional freedom was not realistic, even with *The Big Show's* genuine intentions. With *Fountain*, Duchamp's artistic challenge was to make something that would have been impossible to accept. Thus, with *Fountain's* rejection Duchamp showed that *The Big Show* had limits, it's just that the directors were not aware of them because they did not think that any artist would go as far as Duchamp did with *Fountain*. But, in contrast to the majority of the directors, Duchamp had already faced similar situations at least two times in the past, one with the rejection of his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* from the show of the *Salon des Indépendants* in Paris, and another one with the same painting's dramatic final approval in the *Armory Show* in New York, a few years before. Thus, in *The Big*

*Show* Duchamp was very much aware that any institutional judgment reflects institutional logics and the collective views of their boards; also, such logics and views are social and historical and context bound in nature, they can never be absolute, timeless and without any existing reference. Or, putting such a realization in Becker's words, "not everything can be made into a work of art just by definition or the creation of consensus, for not everything will pass muster under currently accepted art world standards."<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the rejection of *Fountain* simply showed that the general rule of unconditional acceptance was in fact conditioned to fundamental artistic standards imposed by the broader artistic context around *The Big Show*.

The second task is to examine the changing of artistic standards and the transformation of the artistic context, building up *Fountain's* artistic reputation as a ready-made. The ready-made reputation of *Fountain* was established as interpreting and promoting attempts succeeded in attributing related artistic significance to the artwork. Such attempts essentially responded to the characteristics of *Fountain*, thus constructing related artistic frameworks that either did not exist in the first place, or were comparatively considered to be of minor importance. Primarily, *Fountain's* success may be attributed to Duchamp himself, as he was able to find alternate outlets and add to his side other

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<sup>80</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London, 1982, p. 155.

supporters of the work. Every day, subsidies are given to a tiny fraction of the artists who apply for them, as also only a fraction of the works that apply are actually accepted for art shows, are given any sort of publicity, or generally have access to any form of art's institutional support. In contrast, because of his important role in the art circles of 1917, his reputation and connections, Duchamp had the privilege to approach those people who could promote his work and also to convince them to do so.

Evidently, *Fountain's* passage towards fame has bearing on the social construction of art in its institutionalized form. As Bourdieu remarks, in order to acquire artistic significance, artworks go through remarkable symbolic transformations by certain actions, to such an extent that<sup>81</sup>

“(T)he proportion of material, physical or chemical transformation (that performed for example by a metallurgical worker or an artisan) gets reduced to a minimum in relation to the proportion of essentially symbolic transformation, that performed by the attaching of a painter's signature or a couturier's label (or, at another level, the attribution by an expert). In contrast to fabricated objects with a weak or nugatory symbolic import (undoubtedly increasingly rare in the era of *design*), the work of art, like

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<sup>81</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p.171-2.

religious goods or services, amulets or various sacraments, receives value only from collective belief as collective misrecognition, collectively produced and reproduced.”

In other words, the symbolic transformations evoked by actions with artistic significance may have much greater impact on the artwork’s established fame, than the material, physical or chemical transformations performed during artistic creation.

In an analogy to Bourdieu’s view, *Fountain’s* reputation was established by taking advantage of the broader social mechanisms of artistic determination appointed for its publicity. In fact, with carefully chosen moves, Duchamp used the available mechanisms of promotion to *Fountain’s* benefit, as the artist himself would also become increasingly known. More importantly, *Fountain’s* artistic recognition would have most probably been impossible otherwise, that is, had the work been left to its initial fate. Photographs, reproductions, interpretations and publications may also be viewed as expressions of the same mechanism that was appointed for *Fountain’s* promotion right after its initial rejection. With Duchamp’s increasing ability to access several different media, since 1917 the *Fountains* have been widely presented, represented, exhibited and generally documented across media, such as sculpture, purpose-re-makes, photos, text and press. To the social mechanisms of artistic determination we may also include Duchamp’s

participation in various art-related activities. Specifically, these activities would include the meetings and discussions on *The Big Show's* selection process, the critical reviews like *Blind Man* and Duchamp's selective participation on avant-gardes and groups of important friends that were – or would become – mainstream.

Therefore, the artistic recognition of *Fountain* demonstrates an exemplary case, one that highlights the significance of the social mechanisms and activities of publicity and promotion towards artistic creation. Duchamp's manipulations of the social mechanisms of promotion to *Fountain's* benefit further evinces the validity of Bourdieu's remarks on the art establishment as a system of power, primarily responsible for the artistic recognition or failure of any artwork. Bourdieu would also discern the various symbolic transformations of *Fountain*, as the artwork would establish its artistic legacy by being anchored to new art theories and styles. Finally, the development of new artistic standards and theories explaining and justifying *Fountain* and also the consequent changing of the artistic landscape demonstrate the significance of Becker's view that what is institutionally defined as art is constructed by various art related, socio-cultural and market-based processes, shaping the ever-changing social tastes.

In the next chapter we are going to analyze such processes in regards to *Fountain* more specifically: how interpretations, reproductions and photographic

representations contributed in defining *Fountain's* artistic status as a ready-made. By comparing the different documentation, we are also going to point out some questions relating to *Fountain's* artifactual status.

## **Analysis of *Fountain's* Artistic Status as a Ready-made**

*Fountain's* ready-made classification has mainly been attributed to the presence of the urinal as a mass-produced object of plumbing equipment. Although today *Fountain* is widely considered to be a ready-made, it is rather surprising that such a thing is not explicitly stated in *Fountain's* defense in *Blind Man*. Moreover, Duchamp did not mention *Fountain* in his lecture *Apropos of "Ready-mades"* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1961, when he described how he would create his ready-mades. For the purpose of the present study, we are going to compare Duchamp's definition of ready-mades to the specific example of *Fountain*, and also to interpretations of the artwork by other critics.

Duchamp was involved in the writing of the article "The Richard Mutt Case" of *Blind Man*, as with some certainty the authorship of "The Richard Mutt Case" has been attributed to him<sup>82</sup> and it reflects his view on the subject. The article defends the artistic significance of a piece of plumbing into artistic content.

Specifically, it states:

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<sup>82</sup> The information we have for the exact author of the editorial is ambiguous. It is safer to assume that it expresses the beliefs of the three main editors of the *Blind Man*. Beatriz Colomina attributes it to Beatrice Wood. However, as Calvin Tomkins argues, its style and content invokes more of Duchamp's writing. See Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture and Mass Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996, p.180. Also, Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, USA, 1996, p.185.



“They say any artist paying a 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:

Some contended that it was immoral, vulgar.

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.”<sup>83</sup>

Although the article implies *Fountain’s* resemblance to the ready-made style, describing the artwork in relation to plumbing equipment, it does not specifically state such a thing. Instead, the article presents *Fountain* as a result of choices.

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<sup>83</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.127.

The word “CHOSE” is the only one appearing in capital letters.<sup>84</sup> The artist’s choices are expressed by using the active verbs “took” and “placed,” also outlining how Richard Mutt “created” a new thought for that object. The article describes that *Fountain* was created through a series of actions, and the active verbs imply that there might have been some intention by the artist.

The artist’s intention may be addressed in the manipulations of each element of *Fountain* in order to refute any presumed functioning and offer a critical view to them, analyzed earlier from the Stieglitz photograph. The urinal and the pseudonym “Richard Mutt” clearly express such a view: the urinal invokes the entry of a mass-produced object into the art world, just as each of the components of the signature “R. Mutt 1917” invokes the relationship of art to the market forces, money, mass production, popular culture and to the historical context where the original *Fountain* appeared. The same observation can be made for the manipulation of the elements of art installation and support, appearing also in the Stieglitz photograph. Specifically, the off-centered placement of the urinal onto the pedestal contradicts to the pedestal’s primary supporting function and the presence of the art inscription would invoke Duchamp’s general view that any object from daily life could be viewed in-transition towards the art world. Similarly, the specific use of a painting as a

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<sup>84</sup> An image of it can be found in Beatriz Colomina’s *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture and Mass Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996, p.175.

backdrop and also the creation of anthropomorphic shadow curves by the exaggerated use of lighting effects is clearly beyond the functional purpose of objective presentation of the artwork.

We can make a similar observation about the name “Fountain,” which contradicts to the function of a urinal: a fountain provides drinkable water, being clearly counter-referent to the urinal’s function, which is to throw away the waste produced by the human body.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, artistic choice may be projected to justify artistic manipulations of the urinal and the signature, as well as of the elements of art installation and support of the Stieglitz photograph and may also be projected to explain the name “Fountain,” in such ways as to refute the presumed functioning of each.

However, Duchamp’s description of how he would create his ready-mades was substantially different. As he said, the ready-made is a “work of art without an artist to make it,” being also related to the idea of “letting things go by themselves.”<sup>86</sup> In interviews, he would also insist on the vague and almost accidental way in which each one came into existence.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>85</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.128. Also, this came out in a discussion with William Uricchio.

<sup>86</sup> Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.146.

<sup>87</sup> For example, Duchamp compared to Schwarz the pleasure of watching a bicycle wheel turning, as being similar to “looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace.” See Francis M. Naumann,

throughout his life, Duchamp insisted that the choice of ready-mades was always based on “aesthetic indifference,” as objects had to be considered neither attractive nor unattractive at the same time and on the “total absence of good or bad taste.”<sup>88</sup> In contrast, we can induce from the intensely negative reaction that *Fountain* caused among the board of directors of *The Big Show* that a urinal was considered to be an “indecent” object for artistic content; that is, it was clearly perceived as being aesthetically subversive, thus not being aesthetically indifferent.

Moreover, aesthetic indifference for Duchamp was the principle criterion he used to choose titles for his ready-mades. As Duchamp mentioned in the lecture *Apropos of "Ready-mades,"* a short title in sentence form would be inscribed onto the ready-made, instead of a word title:

“One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the ready-made. That sentence, instead of describing the

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*Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.62. Also Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1999, p.146.

<sup>88</sup> See Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp: With an Appreciation by Jasper Johns*, translated by Ron Padgett, Da Capo Press/Thames and Hudson, 1971, p.48. See also Christina Petrinou, “Marcel Duchamp Pinxit,” in ARTI periodical edition vol.17, Athens, Greece, nov-dec 1993, p.127-8.

object like a title, was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal.”<sup>89</sup>

The idea of the short sentence title emerged with the coining of the term “ready-made.” Duchamp described how he first applied that idea to the artwork *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, in 1915. As Naumann remarks, one thing that remains consistent in all of his ready-mades is that the titles in sentence form contain a literary quality in their own right<sup>90</sup> that has no optical, literal, or descriptive relationship to the objects that participate in the compositions.<sup>91</sup> Then,

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<sup>89</sup> See *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, Da Capo Press/ Oxford University Press, 1973, p.141-2.

The lecture can be also found online at:

<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/visualarts/Duchamp-texts.html>

<sup>90</sup> Francis Naumann notes: “Although he still wanted the titles to have no direct relationship to the objects he selected, he soon decided that they could contain a literary quality in their own right.” Naumann also mentions the example of the title that Duchamp inscribed on an ordinary chimney ventilator, in 1915: “*Pulled at Four Pins*, four words that, when translated into French, would read literally ‘tire a quatre epingles,’ an idiomatic expression that means being exceptionally well dressed or groomed.” Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.63. See also See Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1996, p. 255-7.

<sup>91</sup> It is true that some of his projects seem not to follow this general view. For example, for the *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and the *Bottle Rack* (1914) no sentence inscription is known. However, the originals are lost and there is evidence that Duchamp in fact did inscribe them. In a letter to his sister Suzanne in Paris, dated sometime around the 15<sup>th</sup> of January of 1916, he explained his idea about the ready-mades and, since he was in New York how he would like her to write a sentence onto these two objects that were in his studio in Paris, to name them. Duchamp also explained to his sister that he chose intentionally meaningless titles for these works, which he inscribed upon them. Then, he asked her to add an inscription to the base of the bottle rack and then put the signature “[after] Marcel Duchamp,” as in the case of the snow shovel. By the time his sister got the letter, she had probably already discarded the two objects. Consequently, we may never know if she completed the artistic collaboration her brother proposed. After nine months, he wrote again to her asking if she had written the phrase on the “ready-made” (the bottle rack). If not, he said, “do so – and send it to me indicating how you did it.” Years later, Duchamp would forget the phrase he had inscribed on the original *Bottle Rack*. Even in the piece *Pharmacy* (1914), the title is unrelated to the subject, which is a reproduction of a landscape

the title must be viewed as having “nothing to do with” the object; the relationship between title and object must be anti-retinal, conceptual, or, in essence, arbitrary.<sup>92</sup> In contrast, the word “Fountain” cannot be viewed as a sentence title and as it has been argued before, the fountain’s functioning is clearly counter-referent to the function of a urinal.

In comparing documents about *Fountain* to documents about Duchamp’s view of his ready-mades, *Fountain* raises one more issue about the way Duchamp would sign his works. Duchamp would use the characteristic “[after] Marcel Duchamp” to sign them. As Naumann comments, this signature had a very special meaning: “the word ‘after’ was meant as a qualifier, to emphasize the fact that his work had come *from* him (as in *from* his intellect), rather than indicate that it had been

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painting with paint added onto it. Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.50, 64-5.

<sup>92</sup> This is a tactic Duchamp used to some of his texts, such as *The* (a sort of poem, written in 1915). As Naumann argues, “Even when Duchamp’s instructions are carefully followed, we are presented with a seemingly random string of French and English words that, when combined, still convey no apparent meaning.” A similar observation may also be made for many of the titles Duchamp gave to most of his works, such as *Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 Fevrier 1916* [a 1 h.  $\frac{3}{4}$  après midi (1916, typewritten text on four postcards), *Three or four drops of height have nothing to do with savagery* (1916, a comb), *With Hidden Noise* (1916, ball of twine containing unknown object between two brass plates joined by four long bolts), *Apolinere Enameled* (1916-7, paint on cardboard and tin advertising sign), *To Be Looked at (From the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye Close to, for Almost an Hour* (1918, a detail for the lower section of the Large Glass), *Tu’M* (1918), *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919, a phonetic pun, which, when read aloud, evokes in French the vulgar sentence: *Elle a chaud au cul*), *Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?* (1921), *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette* (1921), *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23, also known as the Large Glass) and *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even* – the only difference from the previous one being in the absence of the comma after the word *Bachelors* – (1934, contained in boxes and known as the *Green Box*). Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Delano Greenidge Editions, New York, USA, 2000, p.47. Also Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, 66-7, 72, 80.

made *by* him (as in the case of a traditional sculpture created by hand).<sup>93</sup> Yet, such a signature does not appear in *Fountain*; the "R. Mutt 1917" signature, although it was explained as Duchamp's specific intention to hide his identity, it remains very different from the typical signature he would use to sign his ready-mades.

Going over such questions, *Fountain's* classification as ready-made needs to be further examined. In fact, art critics have responded to similar questions about the classification of Duchamp's works. For example, Naumann notes: "because of its profound aesthetic implications, ... [the ready-made] has offered difficulties in being defined itself,"<sup>94</sup> further addressing the general difficulty in classifying Duchamp's work under one broad term. He points out that "certain ready-mades are altered or combined with other elements, necessitating the use of prefixes such as: 'assisted,' 'imitated,' 'rectified,' 'semi,' 'printed,' etc."<sup>95</sup> The prefixes that better describe *Fountain* would be either "assisted" or "semi" ready-made. An "assisted" readymade would be slightly altered, or combined with another ready-made. The prefix "assisted" was also used to describe ready-mades that resulted

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<sup>93</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.62-3.

<sup>94</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.298.

<sup>95</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.298-9.

in altering our perception of a given artifact, as when Duchamp flipped the urinal from the position it would have in the lavatory and also as he placed the “R. Mutt 1917” signature onto it. A “semi” ready-made is a “work fabricated by an artist from a commercially available object, but which nonetheless retains the appearance of an industrially produced artifact.”<sup>96</sup> Such a description might better explain the flipping of the urinal from its primary position it would have in the lavatory.

Duchamp has also given his views: in the lecture *Apropos of “Ready-mades”* at the Museum of Modern Art he made a clear distinction between “ready-made” and “ready-made aided” works. For Duchamp, all works of art, even painting, use “ready-made” products and therefore they are inevitably “ready-made aided.”<sup>97</sup> In *Fountain*, the elements of the urinal and the signature were used as “ready-made” products, as Duchamp would claim. However, these two elements were manipulated subtly but significantly enough so that they would convey a meaning

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<sup>96</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Ludion Press, Amsterdam, Nederland and Abrams Books, New York, USA, 1999, p.299.

<sup>97</sup> As Duchamp claimed in the Museum of Modern Art lecture, he would put a “ready-made aided” product into an artwork, to “add a graphic detail of presentation ... in order to satisfy ... [his] craving for alliterations.” He also gave a very general explanation of the term “ready-made aided”: “Since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and ready made products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are “ready-mades aided” and also works of assemblage.” See *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, Da Capo Press/ Oxford University Press, 1973, p.141-2.

The lecture can be also found online at:

<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/visualarts/Duchamp-texts.html>



that is counter-referent to their presumed functioning. Therefore, Duchamp would have better described *Fountain* as “ready-made aided.”

With all the issues above, we can make the following observations: (1) *Fountain's* classification was based on the presence of the urinal, signed and dated as “R. Mutt 1917.” (2) For the classifying process, the very distinct manipulations of the pedestal and of the art inscription appearing in the Stieglitz photograph were ignored without adequate justification, as such an assumption cannot be made by examining that photograph and other descriptions about the original *Fountain*. (3) The “R. Mutt 1917” signature does not comply with Duchamp’s general way of signing his ready-mades. (4) The word title “Fountain” is used instead of a sentence title that would be a typical one for ready-mades and the fountain’s functional significance is not indifferent to the urinal’s function, but counter-referent to it.

Putting such issues aside for a moment, we may observe that the ready-made classification better fits to the signed urinal. Duchamp would agree with this too, verified by two facts: First, that in the two photographs taken at his studio sometime between 1917 and 1918, the urinal is shown with other of his other ready-mades, installed in such an unusual way as hanging. Second, that when Arturo Schwarz asked eight copies of his ready-mades in 1964, Duchamp replicated the urinal signed as “R. Mutt 1917” (**fig.4**). Since the “R. Mutt 1917”

does not include the true name of the artist (i.e. Duchamp's name) and is different than his typical "[after] Marcel Duchamp" signature, then it may be viewed equally as the sentence title. The claim is further supported by the fact that the meaning of "R. Mutt 1917" is not descriptive or metaphorical, but any referent must be sought through a highly conceptual and abstract process, similar to the ones with which he would create the other ready-made sentence titles.

In the next chapter we are going to respond to the dilemma presented above. We are going to examine if the reproductions made after 1917, can arguably be viewed as copies of the ready-made urinal piece named as *R. Mutt 1917*, and not as replicas of the *Fountain* that appears in the Stieglitz photograph, in which the pedestal and the art inscription can be viewed as parts of *Fountain's* core composition. We are going to analyze information about the most important reproductions, the replicas made for the Schwarz gallery in 1964.

## Dilemmas of the Artifactual Status of *Fountain's* Replicas

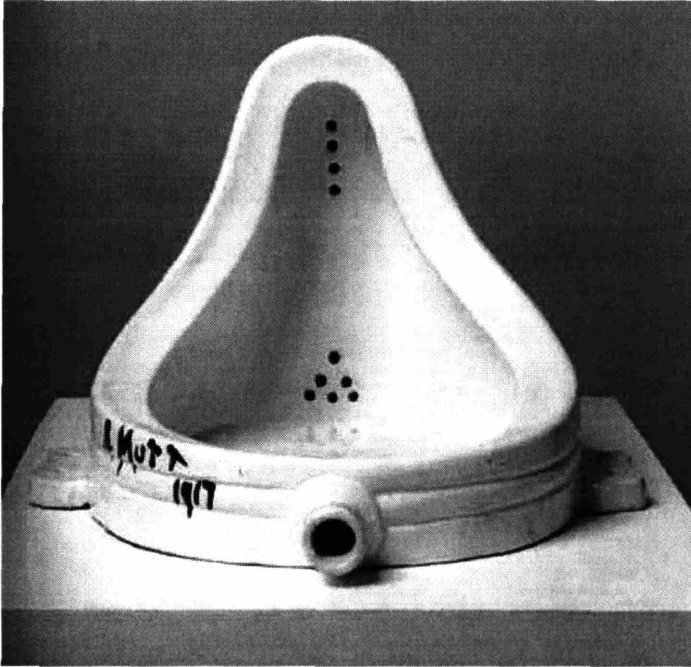


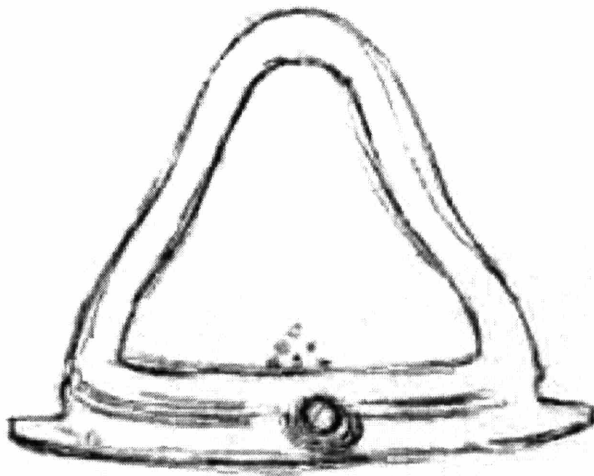
fig. 4: 1964 replica for the Schwarz Gallery in Milan.

The reproductions made after the appearance of the Stieglitz photograph include the miniatures of 1938, the three copies in the same scale as the original made in 1950, 1953 and 1963, and the eight replicas made in 1964 for the Schwarz gallery. In spite of the scale difference of the miniatures made in 1938, all the copies are variations of the same urinal inscribed as “R. Mutt 1917.” The eight replicas made for the Schwarz exhibition in 1964 are *Fountain's* most important reproductions: they perpetuated *Fountain's* fame as crucial artistic intervention in the birth of modernism; an argument and an artwork, all in one. Its fame as a case (stimulated by Duchamp and his allies) symbolized all that was new and

radical about a new generation of art. We are going to examine the eight replicas and also the catalogue of the Schwarz exhibition, where some working drawings and sketches<sup>98</sup> reveal significant information.

UN ROBINET ORIGINAL REVOLUTIONNAIRE

-REVUE MURCHIQUE-



-UN ROBINET QUI S'ARRETE DE COULER QUAND ON NE L'ECOUTE PAS-

fig. 5: The cover jacket setup for the Schwarz exhibition catalogue, made in 1964.

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<sup>98</sup> *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Delano Greenidge Editions, New York, USA, 2000, Arturo Schwarz, p.838-9.

The front cover jacket (**fig.5**) depicts a mirrored sketch of the urinal of the Stieglitz photograph. The sketch was drawn along with the titles in the opposite side of a tracing paper, as a negative mold for the cover.<sup>99</sup> Comparing this sketch to the Stieglitz photograph reveals a difference: Duchamp signed the sketch as “M.D.” (his initials) instead of “R. Mutt 1917” in the exact same spot on the urinal. On the same cover, the following titles appear. On the top: (U)N (R)OB(I)ET (O)R(I)GINAL (R)EVOLUTIONNAIRE / “RENVOI MIRIORIQUE”?<sup>100</sup> and at the bottom: (U)N (R)OB(I)(N)(E)T QUI S’ARRETE DE COULER QUAND ON NE L’ECOUTE PAS.” The letters in parentheses were printed in red and the rest ones in black. The top title means, in English: AN ORIGINAL REVOLUTIONARY FAUCET: “MIRRORICAL RETURN”? The bottom one means: A FAUCET THAT STOPS DRIPPING WHEN NOBODY IS LISTENING TO IT. The sentences in capital letters may be viewed as the title of the cover jacket of the catalogue. The red letters pop up as the words “URINOIR” at the top and “URINE” at the bottom. The word “URINAL” is also mentioned as the title of the *plan, front view* and *section* drawings. The drawings are all signed by Duchamp as “OK Marcel Duchamp” (**figs.6, 7**).

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<sup>99</sup> *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Delano Greenidge Editions, New York, USA, 2000, Arturo Schwarz, p.840.

<sup>100</sup> It was presumed that Duchamp made a mistake in the ordering of the letters in the word “MIRIORIQUE” instead of writing “MIRRIORIQUE.” This was corrected by the publisher directly on the front cover of the catalogue. *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Delano Greenidge Editions, New York, USA, 2000, Arturo Schwarz, p.840.

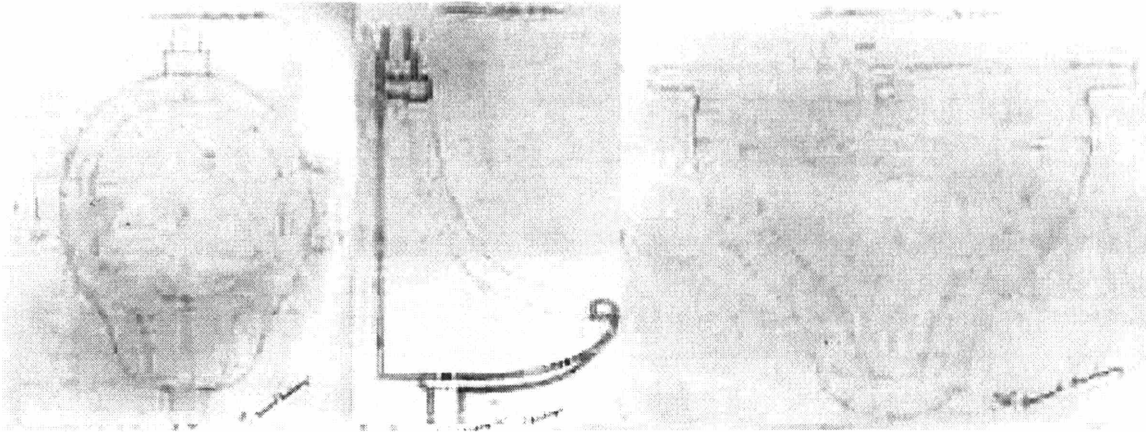


fig. 6: Drawings made in 1964 for the Schwarz replicas.

fig. 7: Detail showing the signing and naming of the drawings.

ORINATOIO - SEZIONE - AL VERO  
 (1964)  
 Ok Marcel Duchamp

We may interpret the replicas, the front sketch and the drawings of the catalogue as Duchamp's artistic acts. The results of these acts can be summarized in the following: the use of the urinal object, essentially identical to the ones used in 1917, the signing of the piece as "R. Mutt 1917," the absence of the word "Fountain" as the title from the replicas, the sketch and the drawings, and the absence of the art inscription and the pedestal shown in the Stieglitz photograph. Since we have already commented on the absence of the art inscription and the pedestal, we are going to focus on the signature and the absence of the title "Fountain."

As he signed the urinals, Duchamp had four options: one would be to sign with his real name, as “Marcel Duchamp.” The second would be to sign as “R. Mutt 1917.” The third would be to sign with a different name. The fourth would be not to sign at all. By signing with his name, the replicas would not match to the piece of 1917 and he would be immediately questioned. Still, he did a similar thing, although somewhat hidden, as he signed the cover sketch with his initials. As for the other options, signing with an unknown name or not signing at all would make a very noticeable difference to the pieces of 1917. Thus, he signed with “R. Mutt 1917,” as such a choice would create no further doubt.

We may note, however, that signing with a name that in 1964 was already recognized as *his* pseudonym was not the same context faced by Duchamp in 1917; when *Fountain* was submitted for *The Big Show*, Marcel Duchamp and the unknown artist Richard Mutt were two different persons in the eyes of the board of directors. Thus, in 1964 the artistic significance of “R. Mutt 1917” was immensely more important than in 1917. Additionally, the absence of the word “Fountain” from the cover jacket of the exhibition catalogue and the drawings is surprising. Using the provocative phrase “a faucet should stop dripping when nobody listens to it,” letting the words URINOIR and URINE pop out of the titles by using capital letters, and signing the cover sketch with his initials, raises suspicions that the produced replicas might have been reproductions of a urinal,

or a faucet, instead of the *Fountains* of the Stieglitz photograph and possibly of *The Big Show*.

In spite of any ambiguity of these documents, the eight replicas were unquestionably presumed to be exact copies of the *Fountain* of the Stieglitz photograph. As it is noted, because of the absence of the original, *Fountain's* copies have acquired significance as works of art, further influencing their market value as investments. By following this realization, we may view the replicas and the related documents as outcomes of Duchamp's artistic acts, to which we may speculate the following scenario: in 1964, as he did back in 1917, Duchamp would respond to questions about art in the moment that artwork is created. In 1964, Duchamp might claim that the signed urinal was considered to be artwork not because it would be accepted in any case, but because of *Fountain's* established artistic reputation, as well as of his own as an artist.

It is possible that Duchamp was testing again, after almost fifty years, whether the famous inscription "R. Mutt 1917" showing a pseudonym that was already certified as his and the fact that he inscribed it on the urinal would be adequate to lend high artistic significance to the work. We may extend such a question to the general presumption that any work would be attributed high artistic value unquestionably, as long as it bore the signature of a famous artist; also that the name of a famous artist is essentially surrounded by an artistic context in which



any of his artworks are given artistic significance; finally also that new artworks made by famous artists create new artistic standards, as the art establishment transforms in order to embrace them. In other words, the established reputation of an artist as well as of artwork act as guides providing artistic context and justification to artistic production, further assuring artwork's market value, the engine that drives institutionalized artistic production into capitalist cultures.

However, in the view of such presumptions, we may point to a general suspicion directed to the society's evaluating principles, which in many cases may not be based on the examination of the artistic significance of the actual work, but on the established reputation of the artist and also the artwork. In case these were Duchamp's suspicions in 1964, he was proven to be right, once again. In fact, the thing that would be enough to give artistic significance to the *Fountains* of 1964 would be the simple indication that they were made [by] – not [after] – Marcel Duchamp. The eight replicas were presented in an art exhibition especially organized to include copies of Duchamp's ready-mades. As it is demonstrated, the eight replicas of do not carry the “[after] Marcel Duchamp” signature, an important marking of his ready-mades, implicitly indicated in the sketch of the cover jacket of the catalogue of the Schwarz exhibition. Therefore, these eight pieces may be equally viewed as replicas of the 1917 urinal shown in his studio hanging from the lintel of a doorway, named and marked typically as a ready-made with the sentence title *R. Mutt 1917*, made [after] Marcel Duchamp, as he

would prefer to say, but not carrying Duchamp's standard signature of his ready-mades.

## **Conclusion: Evincing the Limitations of Art Evaluative Mechanisms over *Fountain***

To provide a general statement about the variations of *Fountain* over time, the piece was reproduced along with the construction of an artistic context for it, in ways that would satisfy concurrent art theories and styles. This factor contributed significantly to the artwork's broad recognition and eventual critical acclaim. The constructed art theories in some way raised artistic standards that *Fountain* should follow. Still, it seems that Duchamp, with carefully designed moves, was able to bypass the artistic context that was developed around *Fountain*, thus preserving considerable dilemmas of its artistic status and status as an artifact. As an explanation it might be claimed that although *Fountain* is a very complicated work conceptually, Duchamp achieved complexity through seemingly simple composition, due to the fact that *Fountain's* components are clearly distinguished, and that they are composed and related to each other with minor or no artistic intervention. This simplicity is also deceptive in the first and most important photographic documentation of *Fountain* of 1917, the reproduction of the Stieglitz photograph. A keen analysis reveals that the distinction between elements belonging to *Fountain* and art installation ones is highly subjective and moreover it is arbitrary, in regards to the pedestal and the art inscription. A closer examination of *Fountain's* interpretations and reproductions, rather than providing with convincing answers, it reveals

significant unresolved questions about its artistic status and its status as an artifact.

In order to further explain how such dilemmas have persisted, we need to reconsider how any of *Fountain's* documentations and interpretations were used as arguments of its artistic status as a ready-made, but they also dictated its status as an artifact. These arguments essentially dictated what elements should be considered belonging to *Fountain's* core composition. The first artistic analyses of the work in the second issue of *Blind Man* essentially indicated how to view the work as a mass-produced manufactured object, as well as in relation to abstract and erotic art. We may attribute a similar aspect to *Fountain's* verbal defense during the emergency meeting of the organizers of *The Big Show*, as the work was related to the ready-made style.

Moreover, since its first appearance, photographic, textual and verbal methods defined certain artistic aspects of *Fountain*. Especially since the original was lost soon after it was created, and since the *Fountain* copy of the Stieglitz photograph is only known from that photograph, any information about the pieces made in 1917 is given by secondhand documentation. The ambiguity of the Stieglitz photograph evinces that any interpretation of *Fountain* from this photograph is highly subjective. Along with other verbal and textual methods, the Stieglitz photograph was essentially an artistic interpretation of *Fountain*, too; thus, as any

other interpretive method, it offered ways to look at the artwork in order to point out certain artistic aspects of it and make sense of the artwork within the existing conventions and standards of the art establishment of 1917.

However, with reference to textual theory, it is widely accepted that interpretations do not succeed in conveying all information residing in the artwork.<sup>101</sup> Interpretations are essentially *metaphors* about an entity. The *metaphor* is a figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, suggesting a likeness or analogy between them. It operates via a mechanism of *catachresis*, whereby what is presumed as the known entity infiltrates the unknown one effectively. The coupling of the two entities seems to allow a sort of osmosis of the one entity into the other. It must be noted, however, that *catachresis* in language means the *misuse* of a word. That is, every definition, metaphor or interpretation is inevitably rhetoric, even within the dictionary, or philosophical, preciseness.

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<sup>101</sup> Related sources: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The John Hopkins University Press, 1974, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, part I, chapter 2, p.27-73.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, Vintage, New York, USA, 1971.

Online sources: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html>

<http://www.webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=metaphor>

This is a definition of the term *catachresis*:

Etymology: Latin, from Greek *katachrEsis* misuse, from *katachrEsthai* to use up, misuse, from *kata-* + *chrEsthai* to use.

1 : use of the wrong word for the context.

2 : use of a forced and especially paradoxical figure of speech (as *blind mouths*)

Online source: <http://www.webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=catachresis>

Interpretations attribute significance to certain aspects over other ones that also reside in the work. In other words, interpretations actually act as an interpretive filtering, choosing what and what not to describe, what information to include and what to exclude in the analysis, where and where not to direct the attention and, eventually, how to look and how not to look at the work. By focusing selectively on certain aspects of the work, interpretations may exclude information that is not considered to be significant or relevant to explain the work. Such a realization outlines the limitation of any attempt at interpretation to supercede the object of interpretation. Consequently, interpretations may direct the eye to focus selectively to certain aspects of the work and to take no notice of any other. In other words, the eye is directed to see only what the filtered mind dictates.

As we apply such views to *Fountain*, we may observe that the construction of its artistic context primarily as a ready-made through various photographic, textual and verbal methods was directed by focusing on the presence of the urinal. Interpretations established the artistic reputation of *Fountain* primarily as a ready-made, as well as its relationship to several art theories and styles such as abstraction, Dada, Surrealism, pop art and modern art, but also acted as interpretive filtering on how to look at the work. The eye has been directed to pay attention to anything that reinforces comparing *Fountain* to the appointed

theories and styles, meanwhile being averted from anything that seemed irrelevant to the reviewers.

We may also verify such an observation in *Fountain's* first appearance. When *Fountain* was submitted for *The Big Show*, it was viewed as a ready-made because of the presence of the urinal as a mass-produced manufactured object. As Duchamp also expected, the presence of the urinal caused negative reactions. Although the ready-made style was relatively new, the organizers of *The Big Show* were aware of it; thus, *Fountain's* characterization as “unoriginal” was at odds to the main concept of the ready-made style, which was all about attributing aesthetic quality to mass-produced objects, that is, “unoriginal,” by definition. Moreover, the social standard of decency acted as interpretive filtering and was given higher artistic significance than *Fountain's* resemblance to ready-mades. Consequently, the work was also criticized as indecent, as if art should obey to – rather than challenge – any of the presumed aesthetic and social standards, including those of decency.

A similar observation can be verified in *Fountain's* appearances that followed at the “291” gallery, the Stieglitz photograph and the *Blind Man* magazine, as the subsequent interpretations of the photograph and the articles in the magazine focused only on the presence of the signed urinal. As it is noted, the Stieglitz photograph is the main referential source for the generation of *Fountain's*

numerous interpretations, reproductions and replicas. Thus, with the significance that the Stieglitz photograph acquired, interpretive filtering was transferred implicitly from that photograph to *Fountain's* subsequent copies, miniatures and replicas. Different artistic aspects relating to the signed urinal were promoted each time and the work was generally viewed as a ready-made, as it was also characterized with reference to obscenity, joke, eroticism, scatology, popular culture, modern art, and to other theories and styles. Every time *Fountain* or photographs of it were viewed, reviewed, replicated or reprinted, the initial presumption to view the work only as a signed urinal was already pre-established into the mind and was never questioned, further directing subsequent interpretive attempts. The eye simply kept ignoring the elements of the pedestal and the art inscription, because no prior interpretation of *Fountain* focused on them.

Consequently, attributing artistic value to *Fountain* by comparing the existing artistic standards that the artwork invokes outlines a mechanism of *Fountain's* artistic evaluations, which has been ever-present since 1917. This mechanism of evaluation was present in the rejection of *Fountain* from *The Big Show*: the mass-produced urinal object and *Fountain's* resemblance to the ready-made style were not strong enough reasons to compensate for the indecency, offensiveness and unoriginality with which it was criticized. The same mechanism was further responsible for constructing *Fountain's* artistic reputation, first in the *Blind Man* and later with the disclosure that Duchamp created the work.



Additionally, *Fountain's* different artistic qualities were applied to its "re-creations" across media and were further analyzed in its interpretations across different popular art theories, styles and tastes. *Fountain's* continuous appearances and mentioning over various circumstances and media outline processes of artistic promotion: as Bourdieu states "the work is in fact made not twice, but hundreds of times, thousands of times" by actions which have been nothing different than multifaceted collaborations of all those who "have an interest in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, decoding it, commenting on it, reproducing it, criticizing it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it."<sup>102</sup> Bourdieu's account describes processes of making new art theories and artistic standards, of constructing *Fountain's* artistic context and of transforming the art establishment in order to accept the work.

Duchamp enacted and nurtured *Fountain's* gradual artistic recognition, which was further accomplished because he had access to the right people and to the mechanisms of publicity and artistic support. In reverse, *Fountain's* increasing reputation would also increase Duchamp's fame, as well as that of his other artworks. The example of *Fountain* shows that the reputation of artworks and the artist are primarily a social construct. Those offering interpretations and being

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<sup>102</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1996, p.171.

involved in actions that built up *Fountain's* increasingly undisputed artistic significance would also link themselves to the concurrent art establishment. We may attribute similar significance to the activities connected to art-related institutions, all making up the art system: museums, art performances, universities, publications, bookstores, public discourses and debates, are some of the various art-supporting mechanisms, which would set up a social network to support artistic development. Consequently, the art system is a complex mechanism responsible for evaluation and recognition of art and of the artist. With ongoing similar processes, *Fountain* is being preserved in the forefront level of artistic creativity of the twentieth century by anyone who gets involved with the debates, writing about, or praising the artwork, including myself. *Fountain's* continuous reappearance in scholarly writing and art world conversations marks its own valiant survival; its artistic recognition signifies Duchamp's victory over the art system.

Meanwhile, as much as such a process applies different art-identifying theories to *Fountain*, the comparison of artwork's various documentations, photographs, articles, descriptions, publications, representations and reproductions has revealed some unresolved questions about its artistic status and status as an artifact. By examining closely the documentary evidence and by following the processes of *Fountain's* artistic evaluations, we were able to trace how the artwork was attributed a range of radically different artistic judgments and to

respond to such dilemmas. Methodologically, the thesis traced inconsistencies between *Fountain* and its ready-made classification. It also examined elements shown with a copy of the work in the main photographic evidence of it in 1917. The elements of the pedestal and of the art inscription are presumed to be related to art installation, but rather the thesis asserts can arguably be taken as elements of the work's core composition.

Behind such dilemmas we may discern the genius of Marcel Duchamp; not only was he able to manipulate the mechanisms of artistic production, reproduction, presentation, representation, promotion and support to *Fountain's* benefit, but also with his carefully designed actions, lectures, interviews and writings he was able to cultivate and to preserve dilemmas over the work's status as an artifact. As a result, the several *Fountains* of 1964 may well be replicas of the ready-made artwork *R. Mutt 1917* shown in the photographs of Duchamp's studio, which is composed of a signed urinal, as the word URINAL pops up in the front cover of the Schwarz catalogue and the drawings also imply. They exist in eleven total copies – including the ones made between 1950 and 1963 – and they do not bear the “[after] Marcel Duchamp” ready-made identifying signature. With all these observations in mind, *Fountain* poses significant questions about art, the processes of artistic evaluation, the role of the artist, and the general functioning of the art system since 1964. Rather to our surprise, *Fountain* raised the same questions with its first appearance in 1917. In 1917, the “Fountain scandal”

emerged in response to them. Since 1964, it is possible that another scandal is still pending today.

Along with such observations, we may discern the limitations of the mechanisms of artistic evaluation, classification, support and promotion, making up the art system, as well as of the processes of creating new artistic standards, reshaping the art establishment of each time. In order to speculate today's responses to such concerns, we may place them in the contemporary socio-technological context. Today, examples of the mechanisms of the art system would be the pop music ranking system and any other ladder-scaling system, such as in film. As currently popular mechanisms of artistic promotion we may also note that it appears absolutely normal to watch TV commercials and online advertising about films and music, or to search for the work of an artist or architect in magazines and on the Internet before choosing to consume. It is possible that we also see TV commercials for other kinds of art soon, such as painting, photography, sculpture and architecture – real estate and house-leasing commercials, as well as TV and online art auctions are existing forms of advertising for art products in various media networks.

Acting as branches of the general market, art-promotion mechanisms are also art-governing ones, holding the power – being somewhat concealed – to raise, maintain or decrease the value of any artwork, to put a work onto the most

prominent pedestal or throw it into the storage room; or, one might also say, to put any work onto the most prominent art pedestal. At any moment, the art system defines what is and what is not art. Such a role would also outline the main responsibility of the art system to preserve space for artistic creativity, belonging primarily in the hands of those agents who manage the art market and the artistic standards. Therefore, the main challenge becomes to preserve and expand to anyone interested an ongoing debate and awareness about art, the functioning of the art-related mechanisms and the formation and implementation of artistic standards, how they are applied, and what or whom they may actually serve.

Going beyond such speculations or outlining a role for the art system would be far beyond the scope of the present thesis. However, an important contribution to such an endeavor would be to outline the significance of the mass media and new media platforms in the mapping of the contemporary infrastructures of artistic creation and distribution. By bridging the sources of artistic creation with the audience/receiver and by providing art-making and distributing tools to large masses, prior forms of the institutional control of art would become subordinate to direct exposure and to the judgment of virtually anyone, including artists, supporters and the audience, generally the public sphere. The large expansion of the new media networks and especially the Internet has offered an infrastructure, which supports communication globally; meanwhile it has also precipitated the

urge to preserve everyone's right to express one's own visions. The new public arena outlines new frontiers of human interaction. Imagining the new complexities of such a new phase of communication and the potentially contributive role of the former and the new media infrastructures seems to be very challenging, as much as still very obscure. Especially in the artistic field, the art system will be extended without limits. It seems that monopolizing such a globally accessible info-scape and not being given a chance to publish or to present one's artistic work or vision, will become impossible.

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