



## The Shadows of Readymades and the Ghost of the Missing *Fountain*

It is well known that as a boy, Marcel Duchamp was fond of mathematics. As an adult, as well, he remained interested in the latest mathematical advances, and when he hung his Readymades from the ceiling of his New York studio and looked at their shadows, he would think about things like dimensional migration and perspectival projection in four dimensions. Hirayoshi Yukihiro, a co-organizer of *Curatorial Studies 12*, expressed the importance of shadows in Duchamp's thinking quite succinctly in a May 2017 gallery talk: "If the shadow cast by a three-dimensional object is three dimensions collapsed into two, then in Duchamp's mind, a three-dimensional object was the shadow of something in a fourth dimension."

Readymades are industrial products made to fulfill some kind of function, and at the same time they signify underlying systems of production and meaning, but when selected by Duchamp, they are stripped of their original function and significance and transformed into stark, meaningless objects. When one of these stark and meaningless Readymades, particularly *Fountain*, which a century later has been mythologized as "one of the most important works of 20th-century art," along with its shadow, are exhibited and viewed at The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, a venue that is part of the art-world system, there is a sense of discomfort and absurdity, as if one were forced to play a game designed by Duchamp which there is no chance of winning.

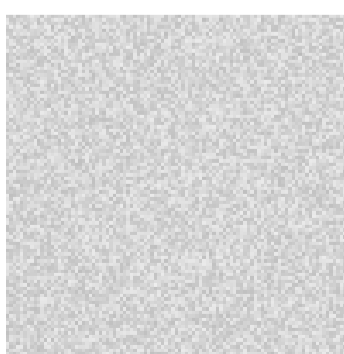
While this exhibition does not attempt to flee from this discomfort, neither does it play the game of "interpreting" *Fountain*. Rather, it employs replicas and historical documents to reproduce some of the past states in which this work, a urinal (apparently a model called the Bedfordshire) that Duchamp is said to have purchased in 1917 at the J.L. Mott Iron Works showroom (118 5th Ave., New York City), has appeared (or been exposed).

### 1

1917 photograph by Alfred Stieglitz on page 4  
of *The Blind Man No. 2* (published May 5, 1917)

One hour before the Society of Independent Artists exhibition opened on April 9, ten of the society's directors voted against exhibiting *Fountain*. A couple of days after the show opened, Duchamp himself is believed to have taken *Fountain*, which was being stored behind a temporary partition, and brought it to Gallery 291, managed by Stieglitz, whom he asked to photograph it (this last fact has been confirmed). Stieglitz certainly finished shooting the work and printing the photo no later than April 19. The photo that appeared in *The Blind Man No. 2* is said to be the only image of the original *Fountain*, and over the next 100 years it has been used and reproduced in a wide range of media, and gained a secure position as our shared image of Duchamp's iconic Readymade. However, there is room for debate as to whether this photo is actually of the original *Fountain*.

\*Appearing in this exhibition is a copy of the photo from page 4 of *The Blind Man No. 2* (published May 5, 1917), collection of The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto.



Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, *Fountain*, in *The Blind Man No. 2* (published May 5, 1917)

## 2

This is one of an edition of eight, plus two artist's proofs, official *Fountain* replicas (believed to be the fourth of such replicas), one of 13 Readymades reproduced by the Duchamp specialist and Milan art dealer Arturo Schwarz in 1964. Today, virtually all copies of *Fountain* in the collections of the world's major museums are from this Schwarz edition, and the one in The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto collection is number 6/8. To produce these replicas, Schwarz studied the 1917 Stieglitz photograph as the most crucial document, alongside Duchamp's hand-drawn sketches and notes, and created a blueprint. One could go so far as to say that the Schwarz edition is a three-dimensional reconstruction or replica of a two-dimensional shadow/image (the Stieglitz photo) of the original *Fountain*, and an example of the "dimensional migration" of images. One could also say that as the work was copied and recopied, going back and forth between dimensions, it drew ever farther away from the original.

\*In the exhibit featuring one of the 1964 Schwarz editions of *Fountain* (said to be the closest and most authoritative replicas of the lost original, which Duchamp was closely involved in creating), we sought to reproduce the way Duchamp's Readymade might have looked behind the temporary partition at the Society of Independent Artists exhibition, based on a statement from Beatrice Wood, one of the editors of *The Blind Man* and a friend of Duchamp's, to the effect that while *Fountain* was hidden behind a partition, it was visible to viewers.



L) photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, *Fountain*, in *The Blind Man* No. 2 (published May 5, 1917)

M) Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (plan), 1964

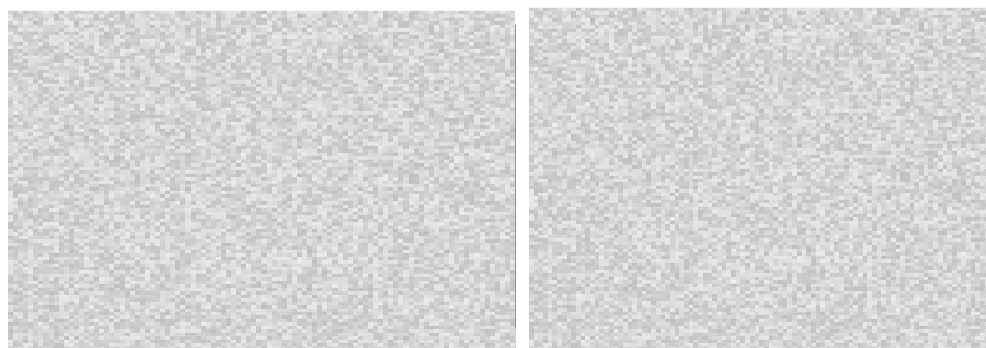
R) Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1964, Schwarz ed. 6/8. Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

## 3

The second *Fountain* replica (1950), collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. On the enthusiastic recommendation of Sidney Janis, the New York art dealer and Duchamp supporter, Duchamp decided to replicate *Fountain*. He achieved this by signing a urinal, discovered and purchased by Janis at a Paris flea market, with the same "R. Mutt 1917" as the original, and authorizing it as a replica. It should be noted that the object clearly differs in form from the one in Stieglitz's photo.

This second edition of *Fountain* appeared in two shows at the Sidney Janis Gallery, the 1950 *Challenge and Defy* and the 1953 *Dada, 1916-1923*, before being acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

\*Here, we have recreated its presentation at the 1953 show *Dada, 1916-1923*. To do so, we purchased a Janis Ltd. model U120BW1 urinal online. Its form is midway between the one bought by Sidney Janis (1950, ver. 2) and the Schwarz edition (1964, ver. 4), and it is optimal for the intent of this exhibit.



L) Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1950 (second version at Sidney Janis Gallery)  
Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

R) Installation view of *Dada, 1916-1923* Exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, 1953

## 4

### Photos of Duchamp's studio taken around 1917:

believed to have been taken by Henri- Pierre Roché,  
a friend of Duchamp's who was closely involved in the R. Mutt Case.

This is a valuable photographic record of Duchamp's studio at 33 West 67th St. in New York, where he worked from October 1916 to August 1918. Several photos were made available to the public in 1945, but they drew little attention until the 1980s when materials on Duchamp were finally organized. The urinal and other Readymades are suspended from the ceiling of the studio, and their shadows on the wall are a central element. These somewhat overly dramatic photographs are fascinating, in part because (at least at present) there are no credible statements on record as to when and why they were taken, and when *Fountain* might have been at Duchamp's studio. Recently, there has been an anarchic spate of independent research by individuals not affiliated with any institution, working with image processing software, and the results have given rise to a growing number of mysteries that cannot be ignored.

\*Here, we aimed to reproduce the shadows of *Fountain* and other suspended Readymades, making reference to these photographs. To do so, we purchased a Janis Ltd. model U120BW1 urinal online. Its form is midway between the one bought by Sidney Janis (1950, ver. 2) and the Schwarz edition (1964, ver. 4), and it is optimal for the intent of this exhibit.



Views of Duchamp's studio, 33 West 67th Street, New York, c. 1917  
Photo presumed to be by Henri-Pierre Roché

Considering the amount of inconsistent testimony, which seems like it must have been partially intentional, over the 50 years or so between when Duchamp suspended a urinal from the ceiling in New York in 1917 and when he died in 1968, and the intermittent new discoveries, ongoing to this day, of materials that promise to take us back in time and unravel its mysteries, one wonders if the riddle of *Fountain* was not all planned out in advance by the artist. In the context of the narrative of modern art (the exaltation of novelty and originality), it seems to be a plot to build a labyrinth of discourse through which the stark, meaningless and hollow Readymade *Fountain* is transformed into "one of the most important works of 20th-century art," and a very cunning one in which Duchamp got others to do the building for him. In the end, from both a narrative and a conceptual standpoint, is the original *Fountain* only a ghost that haunts our minds? We can easily imagine Duchamp answering this question with a phrase he often used around 1917: *Cela n'a pas d'importance* ("It does not matter.")

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(Translated by Christopher Stephens)

[State I]

The photograph in *The Blind Man* No.2 (published May 5,1917) is said to be the only existing shot of the original *Fountain*. Marcel Duchamp brought this original to Gallery 291 himself and asked Alfred Stieglitz to photograph it. It is clear that this original *Fountain* was at Gallery 291 at least from April 10-19, 1917.

[State II]

Its display in the Society of Independent Artists exhibition (April 10 - May 6, 1917) having been rejected by 10 members of the Society’s board of directors, *Fountain* was widely believed to have been stored behind a temporary partition during the exhibition and forgotten, then gone missing after the show ended. However, in her autobiography, Beatrice Wood, a friend of Duchamp’s and one of the editors of *The Blind Man* , wrote that although it was behind a partition, *Fountain* sat on a pedestal and was visible to viewers (Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood*, 1985, p. 29). Here, we sought to reproduce the way Duchamp’s Readymade might have looked behind the temporary partition at the Society of Independent Artists exhibition, using one of the 1964 Schwarz editions of *Fountain* (the most authoritative replicas of the lost original, which Duchamp was closely involved in creating.)

[State III]

*Fountain* went missing after the close of the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition, but over 30 years later, in 1950, Duchamp decided to replicate it. He accomplished this by signing a urinal, purchased at a Paris flea market by the New York art dealer Sidney Janis, with the same “R. Mutt 1917” as the original, and authorizing it as a replica of *Fountain*. This replica was exhibited in group shows at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1950 and 1953. Here, its presentation at the 1953 show *Dada, 1916-1923* is recreated using a commercially available urinal that closely resembles the second version of the work.

[State IV]

This is a recreation of how Duchamp presented a group of his Readymades, with reference to photographs of his New York studio taken around 1917 and rediscovered in the 1980s. The snow shovel, hatrack, and urinal are hung from the ceiling, and it is evident that the shadows are as important as the objects themselves. For a long time the identity of the photographer was unknown, but it is now believed to have been Henri-Pierre Roché, one of the editors of *The Blind Man*, a friend of Duchamp’s and his collaborator on the R. Mutt Case. Researchers are seeking solid evidence as to whether the photographs were taken before, on, or after April 6, 1917.