

Marcel Duchamp is considered as one of the most influential artists of the 20th Century by the modern art world. Duchamp, who participated in artistic movements from Fauvism to Surrealism, was an innovator and a revolutionary within the art world. Duchamp, being a founding force in the Dada movement, was also a main influencing factor of the development of the 20th Century avant-garde art. All in all Duchamp has become a legend within the art world.

Marcel Duchamp was born on July 28, 1887 in Blainville France. Being the brother of two prominent artists, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Jacques Villon, it seemed only natural that the young Marcel Duchamp would participate in the arts. Also, his childhood home was abundantly decorated with seascapes, landscapes, and etchings produced by his grandfather Emile-Frederic Nicolle. As he himself put it, "When you see so many paintings you've got to paint." In 1907, at age 17, Duchamp resolved to become an artist.

Marcel Duchamp had the great fortune of entering the world of art at a most exciting time when the birth of Fauvism and Cubism was in the not so distant future. Although Marcel incorporated these styles he was never satisfied with any single style. He felt that styles were learned techniques which put creativity, exploration, and imagination in the background of the art scene. Duchamp's view of the lack of creativity and originality may have prompted many of his later creations which, at the time of their production, seemed absurd.

Throughout Marcel Duchamp's career he dabbled in a wide variety of styles ranging from Fauvism to Cubism, all the way to the art of Ready-mades. Although he openly expressed that painting bored him, he did it quite well. Early in his career he, like most young artists, painted friends and family, things he was familiar with. Duchamp's only formal training came at the Academie Julian in Paris from where he dropped out after only eighteen months to pursue his own interests. This seems to be a defining characteristic of Marcel Duchamp's career, he did things that suited him, not what others felt was the correct thing to do.

Marcel Duchamp's artistic output began with portraits of people close to him such as family members and close friends. At this time Duchamp was experimenting with Fauvism, the art of the "wild beasts". In this form of art one could use arbitrary colors. This is the reason one might see portraits made by Duchamp from around 1910 in which people are represented with greenish skin or blue hair. Throughout Duchamp's career it was not as important to be totally accurate as it was to get a creative point or theme across.

One negative view of Fauvism was that it was not intellectually stimulating for artists. This is a main reason why many artists, one of them being Duchamp, turned their artistic focus the avant-garde. Cubism, with complex planes and geometrically sound shapes gave artists the intellectual stimulation that they craved. Colors of the early cubist period were muted which put the spotlight more on the visual effects of the art. The possibilities of manipulation of the shapes to Duchamp's own

interests benefited him immensely.

Duchamp prospered as he turned away from the conservative Fauvism moving towards the avant-garde and experimentation within the cubist mode of art. He discovered ways to manipulate his paintings to be able to show the intricacies of his favorite game chess. Duchamp believed that art should be left up to the mind rather than the eyes, just as in chess. His first production of the Cubist origin is titled The Sonata. It is said that many of the characteristics of this painting reveal influence from a group of Cubist artists, which included his two brothers, called the Puteaux Cubists. This group of artists rebelled against casual cubism, which was practiced by the likes of Picasso and Braque, in favor of geometric precision.

Duchamp was a pioneer in Cubism by the way he showed movement in his paintings. His first attempt at showing movement through the geometric shapes is titled Sad Young Man On A Train. In this work Duchamp uses four or five overlapping profiles moving from left to right across the canvas. The colors were dark symbolizing Duchamp's mood at the time. He was preparing to leave Paris in favor of, what he believed to be a less commercial area, Munich. In another attempt at movement in Cubism, Duchamp created a painting known as Nude Descending A Staircase No.1. In viewing this work, the first version of one of his most famous works, one can see the motion is much more explicit. This painting and its other version was a combination of cubism and a play on futurism. In the second version of this work, Nude Descending A Staircase No. 2, Duchamp further developed and refined the movement of the piece through the use of swirling lines and arced dots. When the painting was introduced in Europe the Puteaux Cubists reacted violently which ended Marcel's affiliation with the group. When the painting was shown in America at the New York Armory Show in 1912 the American critics reacted quite the same as that of those in Europe. Although the painting was very much criticized at the time, four decades after it was unveiled people began to refer to Nude Descending A Staircase No.2 as a masterpiece.

After Duchamp completed his painting of Nude Descending A Staircase No.2 he ventured to Munich where he started such projects as a watercolor titled Virgin and two mastery oils titled Bride and Passage From the Virgin to the Bride. He also began to sketch what was to be a project of his for the next decade of his life, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. The effects of two of Duchamp's paintings at this time, Virgin and later in Passage From the Virgin to the Bride, he ventured into uncharted artistic territory with the use of Cubist techniques but the effect was not cubist at all. The images were unusual and almost machine-like in form. Duchamp had created a new form of art but, as he tended to do, he abandoned the form in favor of letting others develop his ideas. This virtually closed Marcel Duchamp's career as a painter.

In 1915, at age 25, Duchamp moved to New York taking him out of the world of conventional painting.

Duchamp became bored with retinal art, art for the eye alone. He wanted to remove himself from all his previous ties with painting in order to produce something different and new. One idea he had to produce something different was to execute his workings on glass instead of the traditional canvas surface. This would certainly be different but the art would still be the same, and Duchamp recognized this. His answer to this problem was a new technique of drawing which was derived from an engineering method called mechanical drawing. Although this now seems to be quite ordinary, at the time it was a major breakthrough in the art industry.

Now, with a new idea at hand, Marcel began to derive the ways in which he would develop this new style. To carry out the task of drawing unlike your hand tells you to Duchamp said he had to unlearn to draw to execute his new ideas and technique. In a manner of speaking this is what he did. Duchamp first experimented with the media which was to be used on the glass. At first he used paraffin fluoridic acid as an engraving

tool for the glass. The fumes were quite strong and he quickly gave that up.

Next, he tried outlining his design with fine wire which would serve to keep colors in place. This was perfect for Duchamp's needs. The wire kept the colors

neatly in place while it could be manipulated to make lines as straight or wavy as he desired. As difficult as this task was to execute, Marcel Duchamp was satisfied.

Now that he had the tools and ideas Marcel could begin his work. He completed a work known as Glider which was ultimately produced to be employed into his later work referred to as The Large Glass or more formally

named The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Glider, or Sleigh as it is sometimes referred to as, was produced as a part of the Bachelor Machine

which was a main part of the Large Glass.

Although the Large Glass was Duchamp's primary project in the mid 1910s he did venture into other controversial

subjects. In 1914 Duchamp signed his name to a bottle rack in effect creating

his first ready-made. Ready-mades are objects that are signed and titled becoming

more an object of observation rather than a functional one. The ready-mades were an attack on traditional western art. Duchamp felt that any man-made object

was a work of art therefore treating them as such by signing his name on them and displaying these objects. This type of art was an instrumental part of the artistic movement known as Dada which Duchamp was a main contributor to.

In addition to Bottle Rack Marcel Duchamp produced controversy with other ready-mades.

Two of the better well know ready-mades were In Advance of the Broken Arm and Fountain. In Advance of the Broken Arm was the first American ready-made.

This work of art was a shovel, bought in a Columbus Avenue hardware store,

which had been signed and hung from the ceiling. In 1917 Fountain was scheduled for display at an art show put on by a group in which Duchamp helped found, The Society of Independent Artists. Although the showing was supposedly to have no restrictions on content the committee refused to show Fountain which was simply a urinal signed under the name of "R.Mutt".

Duchamp also pioneered another form of art known as kinetic art. Kinetic art, for our purposes, is art which employed actual movement. In 1913 Duchamp employed the front wheel from a bicycle in a type of sculpture. He mounted the wheel to a kitchen stool in effect making the first mobile sculpture. Duchamp would later name the kinetic sculptures of Alexander Calder simply as mobiles. These simple sculptures named mobiles and ready-mades were designed to make people think, to use their mind to understand art instead of only using their eyes.

In early 1916 the Dada movement was born in a direct result of World War I. This was not really even an artistic movement. To be more accurate the Dada art was more a frame of mind. This frame of mind was anti-art and, as time progressed, anti-everything else. The Dada movement was seen by conservatives as dangerous. The French almost felt as if it could have been of German or even Bolshevik origin. In any case the Dada movement started as a protest to the war which tore apart Europe. In time Dada seemed to not only protest the war but everything else also. In the end Dada was destroyed by achieving acceptance that it could not accept.

Duchamp, in the spirit of a true revolutionary and pioneer, became somewhat of a leader of the Dada period. Returning from Buenos Aires to Paris, Duchamp joined with fellow artist Picabia whom also was a prime leader of the Dada period of art. Duchamp took no part in Dadaist demonstrations which seemed to enhanced his reputation even more in the eyes of other Dadaists.

One of the more controversial and defining works of the Dada period was an "assisted" ready-made in which Duchamp drew a mustache and goatee to a photograph of DaVinci's Mona Lisa. This, being an ideal example of Dada artwork, represented his view that art had become too precious and expensive. Once again, Duchamp had stirred the conservatives of the art world into an uproar.

In 1918 Duchamp painted his first new picture after a four year absence. Duchamp produced this work, titled *Tu m'*, for a narrow space above an admirer's door in New York. This composition depicts images of three of Duchamp's ready-mades. The image depicts a bicycle wheel, a corkscrew, and a hat rack. Also a long row of overlapping colored squares stretched across the canvas. This proved to be Marcel Duchamp's last formal painting on canvas.

After this frantic time in Europe Marcel returned to life in New York in early 1920. At this point in his life Duchamp began experimenting with optics and motion as well as resuming work on his masterpiece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, Even. In a rather accidental discovery, Duchamp somehow found that when two spirals rotated on a common axis but somewhat off center that one appears to

come forward and the other appears to move backwards producing a corkscrew effect. In 1920 Duchamp constructed something titled Revolving Glass which demonstrated this movement through the usage of five glass plates at varried lengths.

Soon after Duchamp's return to New York he decided that he needed a change of identity. To meet this need of change Duchamp adopted a female alter ego

known as Rose Selavy. Duchamp even went as far as to appear in a photograph by Man

Ray while wearing women's clothes. Ready-mades were also signed by this name. Two

of which appeared in 1920 and 1921. The first of the two, Fresh Widow, was a

carpenter's French window sample in which the panes were covered with highly polished

black leather. The second, titled

Why Not Sneeze, was a birdcage filled with pieces of white marble. This marble

was frequently mistaken for lumps of sugar. Works like these were designed

to get people to view objects in a different way in effect creating a type of

new or revoloutionary thought. These were described by Duchamp as not objects only in

the physical sense but also as mental objects or as brain facts.

Duchamp had returned to Paris in 1923 leaving his masterpiece, The Large Glass, unfinished. In 1924 Duchamp participated in the only performance of Relache, a ballet developed by fellow artists Picabia

and Satié. During the intermission of this ballet Duchamp appeared in a short

film with Picabia, Man Ray, and Satié which was formed by Picabia and Rene Clair. These two projects proved to be the last flicker of Dadaism.

Marcel

Duchamp's parents died within a week of each other in 1925. Duchamp, who had inherited a modest sum of money, ventured into the art market purchasing a few pieces of art. In 1926 Duchamp funded a show for a sculptor he greatly admired, Brancusi. Duchamp would later, with friend H.P. Roche, purchase a quite sizable collection of Brancusi's sculptors. It is known that later in Duchamp's life he would sell these sculptures if he needed money for his quite limited needs.

During the rise of Surrealism time period Duchamp was considered an icon by the artists of this movement. Although Duchamp's paintings could not even be considered part of the Surrealist movement, he was championed.

It was Duchamp's actions which gave him the impressive reputation which was thrust upon him. Surrealist artists thought it was a most impressive move to abandon what would have been a brilliant career. Many took the saying similar

to "life should be lived, not painted" as a defining point of their admiration

for Marcel Duchamp.

By this time in Duchamp's life he began to play chess more and more. He learned chess as a child and had picked it up with a passion

again during the first World War. At times in the 1930's he represented his

country on the French championship chess team. Duchamp had time to devote most of his time to his favorite sport for the simple fact that Duchamp's only goal in his life at this time was to make it through, to break even.

In June of 1942 Duchamp moved back to what was to be his home for the remainder of his life, New York. Like most other artists whom moved away from France at this time, Duchamp left to escape horrors of the war. Duchamp, whom never enjoyed the "art factory" in Paris, enjoyed life in New York. Duchamp's New York residence, a small studio at 210 West 14th Street, had no phones. Although

Duchamp was not producing much art at this time he was not out of the scene.

Shortly after his arrival in New York Marcel, along with Andre Breton, executed a Surrealist

exhibition for the benefit of French children and war prisoners in the old Villard mansion on Madison Avenue. Also Duchamp found joy in promoting the careers of young artists in effect helping to develop modern art. What little

art that Duchamp did at this period consisted of one certain picture which was made for the cover of the March 1943 issue of VVV which was founded by Andre Breton and Max Ernst. The picture, entitled George Washington, showed our first president in a bandage gauze, covered in stars and bloodstains. This picture, which was funded by Vogue, was rejected.

During this same period Duchamp was becoming quite popular with many American art students and artists alike. In 1945 the Yale University Art Gallery hosted an exhibition of the three Duchamp brothers. If that was not enough to heighten Marcel's reputation, the art-literary magazine View devoted a whole issue to articles dealing with Duchamp and all of his accomplishments. Duchamp's reputation was starting to transform from a revolutionary artist to a legendary one.

After the war most of the European artists whom were exiled in the United States returned to their native countries. When faced with the question of moving back to France

or not Duchamp opted to stay in New York where he later became an American citizen in 1955. He felt that in Europe, artists considered themselves "grandsons"

of earlier artists which hindered new and revolutionary ideas. He believed Americans could care less about the history of art, in effect making America a better place for new developments. Marcel must have been wrong in this aspect

for future young American innovators would come to considered themselves as "grandsons" of Marcel Duchamp. In the 1963 Duchamp exhibition at the Pasadena

Art Museum effectively canonized Duchamp as a patron saint of modern art.

While living in New York, once again Duchamp played chess, but only on a pleasurable level. He married for the second time in 1958 to Alexina Sattler, a woman known throughout the art world simply as "Teeny". Together they apparently lived a extremely happy life making residence in a West 10th Street New York apartment. Marcel ventured to art gatherings from time to time but had no desire

to return to its production. In fact Duchamp was offered \$10,000 per year by

an art dealer named Ronald Knoedler if he would paint a single painting each year. Although Duchamp was quite able to perform this task he replied to the offer by saying that he had accomplished what he set out to do and was not interested in repeating it. What he was concerned with the survival of his ideas, not the reproduction of them.

In hindsight, one could never be able to classify Duchamp effectively into any single art category other than revolutionary and innovator. Duchamp lived his life on his own terms. He kept his independence from the arts. Duchamp refused to be dictated as to what would be incorporated into his art. Like many great artistic innovators, Duchamp became famous and even a legend from art that the critics of the time called absurd and pathetic. When Marcel Duchamp died in 1968 it could be said that the Frenchman's independence was his most enduring work of art.

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