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| **Duchamp, Marcel (1887-1968)** |
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| Duchamp was one of the most influential and original artists of the 20th century. He rejected the constraints of painting and believed that contemporary art should reconnect – but in a radical, transgressive way – with its history as an intellectual as well as material practice. *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même (The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even­* - ‘The Large Glass')(1915-1923) exemplified the complexity and daring of his ideas, which were strikingly revealed again in his last work *Étant Donnés* (1946-1966), a secret installation that was only made public after his death. His concept of the ‘Readymade’ defied established notions of authorship and contributed to the opening up of the field of art later associated with postmodernism. |
| Duchamp was one of the most influential and original artists of the 20th century. He rejected the constraints of painting and believed that contemporary art should reconnect – but in a radical, transgressive way – with its history as an intellectual as well as material practice. *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même (The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even­* - ‘The Large Glass')(1915-1923) exemplified the complexity and daring of his ideas, which were strikingly revealed again in his last work *Étant Donnés* (1946-1966), a secret installation that was only made public after his death. His concept of the ‘Readymade’ defied established notions of authorship and contributed to the opening up of the field of art later associated with postmodernism. His singularity and importance in the history of 20th century art were established at the end of his life, after the publication of the monograph by Lebel (1959) and retrospective exhibitions in Pasadena (1963) and London (1966), the latter curated by the artist Richard Hamilton.  At the beginning of his career, Duchamp participated with his brothers Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Jacques Villon in the development of the Cubist movement in Paris. A major work from this period *Nu descendant un escalier* *2* (*Nude descending a staircase 2)* (1912; Fig. 1) caused a sensation when it was exhibited at the Armory Show in New York in 1913. However, in 1913 he became disillusioned with what he saw as the limitations of modernist practices based on formal and aesthetic values, and initiated a series of reflections and experiments that led to the making of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (Fig.2) that he worked on while living in New York during and after the war. This work combined intellectual, poetic and technical speculation: how to make a work of art on glass, employing perspective, using non-conventional materials, that represented erotic desire in machine terms, in images that might be projections of a world in four dimensions? He stopped working on this piece in 1923 and spent the rest of the interwar period moving between Paris and New York, an influential but rather detached participant in the avant-garde scene, with particularly close links to the Surrealists. He continued to make occasional readymades and engaged in various experimental projects, including filmmaking. In 1924 he featured with members of the Paris Dada circle in René Clair’s film *Entr'acte*. Two years later, he made *Anémic Cinéma* (1926) (Fig. 3) with the assistance of Man Ray and Marc Allégret, a short experimental film that explores themes he had previously dealt with in other media, including sculpture and painting. In it, Duchamp used spinning discs he called *Rotoreliefs*, on which various geometrical designs and printed words were placed, showcasing his interest in optical illusions, mechanical art and word play. In 1943, he collaborated with the experimental filmmaker Maya Deren on a short film they never finished, *Witch's Cradle*. The film was meant to explore fantastical elements in Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of this Century Gallery, where other works by Duchamp were exhibited. With other members of the New York avant-garde he collaborated with Hans Richter in 1947 on his Surrealist-inspired film *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, and worked with him again in 1957, with Jean Cocteau, on the film *8 × 8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements*. The work portrayed the unconscious of chess, a game about which Duchamp had a life-long passion.  In 1934 Duchamp published an edition of facsimile copies of his notes for the Large Glass –the *Boîte Verte* (Green Box), providing the first real insight into its meanings. He also began work on the production of a ‘catalogue’ of his work in the form of miniature reproductions, the *Box in a Valise* first published in 1941. This included the reproduction of readymades, some of which had been lost, and revealed again his fascination with issues of authorship and originality. This careful self-curation was a contributing factor in his growing fame in the postwar period. The Large Glass itself was damaged in 1926 and was too fragile to move. However, Duchamp authorised full-scale reconstructions to be made of it for exhibitions, by Ulfe Linde in 1961 and Richard Hamilton in 1966. This exposure consolidated the status of the Glass as one of the most remarkable examples of early 20th century avant-garde art, at a time when Duchamp’s radical example was widely recognised by younger artists associated with Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptual Art. During these years Duchamp collaborated willingly with all those who took an interest in his work. In his statements and interviews, however, he never mentioned that he was working on another project, *Étant Donnés*. The title derives from his notes to the Large Glass and the work is in fact a re-presentation, in a stark three-dimensional form, of the themes of the Glass – the nature of images*,* sexual desire, and the character of vision – that can only be experienced by peering voyeuristically through peepholes in a door. It was given after Duchamp's death to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, completing the comprehensive collection of his work donated by his long-standing friends, Louise and Walter Arensberg and, in the case of the Large Glass, Katherine Dreier, with whom he had collaborated over many years in the constitution of the *Société Anonyme* collection of international modernist art.  File: Escalier.jpg  Figure 1. Nu descendant un escalier 2 (1912). Philadelphia Museum of Art  Source: <http://ekladata.com/Eagcp5ECOwmpIxAhwajoNDaMPoo.jpg>  File: Mariee.jpg  Figure 2. La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même (1915-1923). Philadelphia Museum of Art  Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/T/T02/T02011\_10.jpg>  File: Anemic.jpg  Figure 3. Anémic Cinéma (1926). Museum of Modern Art Film Library  Source: <https://i0.wp.com/www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/anemic.jpg>  File: Donnes.jpg  Figure 4. Étant Donnés. Philadelphia Museum of Art  Source: <https://catsdogstalk.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/310107854\_9d63e8aa54\_b.jpg> |
| Further reading:  (Ades, Cox and Hopkins)  (Buskirk and Nixon)  (Cabanne)  (Clair)  (D'Harnoncourt and McShine)  (Judovitz)  (Lebel)  (Sanouillet)  (Schwarz)  (Taylor)  (Tomkins) |