

2 Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) ‘The Richard Mutt Case’

Duchamp, having abandoned painting and emigrated to America, began to produce ‘Ready-mades’, works calculated to reveal, among their other effects, the workings of the art institution as inseparable from the attribution of artistic value. In 1917, under the pseudonym ‘R. Mutt’, he submitted a urinal to the open exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, with the title ‘Fountain’. The piece was refused entry (as he no doubt intended). Accompanied by a photo taken by Alfred Stieglitz, the present text was originally published in the second and last issue of *The Blind Man*, New York, May 1917. Duchamp was unquestionably responsible for its publication, though he never acknowledged authorship of the text itself. It is reproduced here from Lucy Lippard (ed.), *Dadas on Art*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971, p. 143.

They say any artist paying 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:

- 1 Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.
- 2 Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.

Now Mr Mutt’s fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub 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.