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Dalí / Duchamp

An Introduction to the Exhibition for Teachers and Students

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For the Learning Department
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Dalí / Duchamp

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the Royal Academy of Arts, London,
and The Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida,
in collaboration with the Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation
and the Association Marcel Duchamp.

FRONT COVER Cat. 136, Salvador Dalí, *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*, 1938 (detail)
BACK COVER Cat. 102, Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917 (1964 edition, detail)

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Introduction

Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) are two of the twentieth century's best known and most influential artists. This fame stems both from their art and their life. Today, Duchamp is considered the father of conceptual art, his highly intellectual work having influenced countless artists throughout the twentieth century. To a general audience, however, his work can seem unapproachable and unintelligible. Dalí, on the other hand, is best known for his dreamlike, unsettling Surrealist paintings which are widely recognised, but he has often been dismissed by the artistic establishment as lacking substance, and as a chaser of money and fame.

Their lives took in many of the key artistic movements and ideas of the early twentieth century. After several years working as a painter in Paris, Duchamp found international fame in 1913 when his Cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912, attracted attention in America. He is better known today, however, for the work he completed subsequently, as he broke away from traditional modes of art-making to form a new category of art, based on the concept behind a work of art rather than its appearance. Although Duchamp never formally aligned himself with any artistic groups, his work is commonly associated with the Dada movement, artists who rejected bourgeois values in the wake of the horrors of the First World War. They produced art, poetry and performances that were satirical and challenged accepted norms, often to the extent of appearing nonsensical. Similarly, much of Duchamp's work was simultaneously humorous and radical, redefining what art could be. In the last two decades of his life Duchamp remained actively involved in artistic communities and debate, but managed to convince many in the art world that he had renounced art-making completely to focus on chess. However, he continued to create works in private.

Dalí came to prominence slightly later, during the 1930s, when he was closely involved in the Surrealist movement, a group of writers, artists and intellectuals who since the early 1920s had been exploring the world of dreams and the subconscious in order to overcome the confines of rational thought. Whilst working in the Surrealist circle, Dalí refined a highly idiosyncratic style of painting, creating dreamlike, often disconcerting scenes that are given an uneasy sense of reality by his naturalistic style. He also contributed to the wider development of Surrealist art and ideas through a new form of sculpture known as assemblage. An adept self-promoter, Dalí became extremely popular with the general public, but clashed with many in the artistic community, which led to his eventual ejection from the Surrealists in 1939. Following his Surrealist period, Dalí continued to paint prolifically, taking inspiration from topics ranging from religion to mathematics and perspective. His work remained popular, but he never regained the intellectual standing he had originally enjoyed.

While the lives of both artists have been thoroughly documented and studied, the friendship they shared is less well known. Although Duchamp was 17 years Dalí's senior and had established his artistic reputation long before Dalí entered the

art scene, Duchamp was not Dalí's mentor – they were both too independently minded. Evidence of their friendship exists in photographs (fig. 1), in their correspondence and in the accounts of contemporaries, but the basis of their connection is harder to identify. Many of their contemporaries were equally puzzled by it, perceiving Dalí as lacking in substance compared to Duchamp. Certain parallels in their lives – for example, their fathers both worked as small town notaries (an important legal position), and the fact that they both experimented with similar artistic styles – could suggest some similitude, but that alone would not seem enough to cement a friendship as long-lasting as the one they enjoyed.

Fundamentally, the two men were united by a humorous and sceptical outlook on life and art. By referring directly to their art work, we can begin to appreciate their shared interests and concerns, despite how visually different their resulting works might be. The fact that Dalí and Duchamp were not directly working together means that examples of their common interests might occur years apart, demonstrating underlying concerns rather than direct links. By attempting to understand their individual mindsets through their art, we can begin to see how these two great artists formed a friendship that would last for over thirty years.

Playing with Identity

Duchamp and Dalí both insisted on the importance of the individual, a concept they each explored in their work, primarily through consciously developed and performed identities: Dalí as a dandyish, extravagant showman and prolific artist; Duchamp as an ironic, solitary figure who by the 1930s many thought had relinquished art-making entirely. Although their public personas differed greatly, the two artists are united in their need to actively construct for themselves a unique identity.

Cat. 31 At first glance, the person in this photograph appears to be a fashionable woman of the 1920s. Wearing a low-set feathered hat and several necklaces, her gaze is direct, cool and questioning. At the time, her appearance would have been recognisable as a '*femme savante*', an educated, intellectual, artistically literate woman. She is, however, none other than Marcel Duchamp. This 1921 photograph

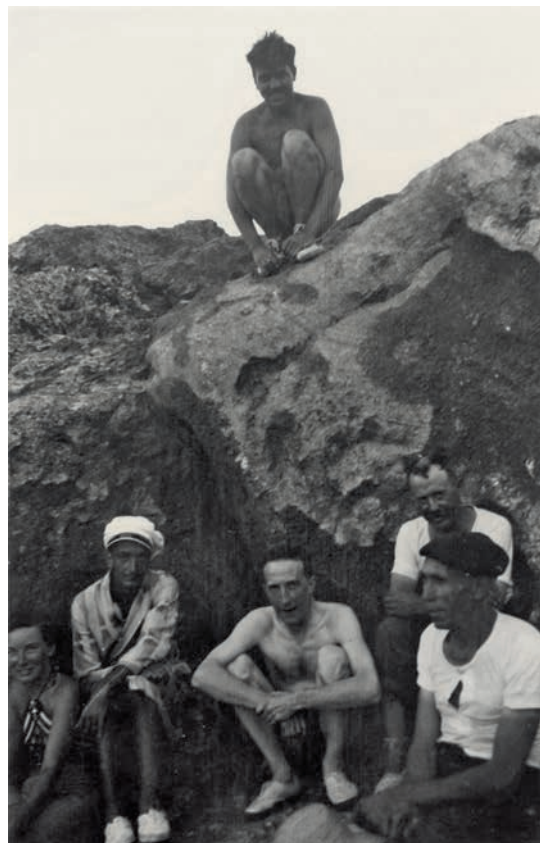


Fig. 1
UNKNOWN
PHOTOGRAPHER
Dalí, Duchamp and
friends, Cadaqués,
summer 1933
Vintage gelatin silver print,
8.6 × 5.8 cm

Emmanuel Boussard Library, London
Image Rights of Salvador Dalí reserved. Fundació
Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2017

demonstrates his visual, even flamboyant, exploration of assuming an alter ego, Rose Sélavy. This character was not a one-off occurrence, but an identity that Duchamp assumed many times during his career. He apparently signed or co-signed works 'by Duchamp and Rose Sélavy' and even appeared (in a photograph taken in the same costume) as the face of an imaginary fragrance, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette* (Beautiful Breath, Veil Water).

Key to understanding the layered significance of Duchamp/Rose is the name. Rather than a misspelling that stuck, Rose Sélavy is a deliberate pun, intended to prompt wider connotations when looking at anything created of or by her. Exactly what Duchamp meant by the pun is somewhat less clear. The most common interpretation is that it sounds like *Eros, c'est la vie* (Eros, that's the life. Eros is the Greek god of erotic love); but it has also been interpreted to mean *arroser la vie* (make a toast to life). Perhaps its ambiguity is one of the reasons why Duchamp made this pun, so that viewers would understand it differently based on their own associations and allowing for slippage of meaning. Puns appear many times throughout Duchamp's artworks and notes; they became an important element in his artistic identity, a way to encourage certain readings of works that otherwise may seem impenetrable. Often deciphering these puns relied on understanding an in-joke, or on being part of the specific circle of friends and artists known to Duchamp – to non-French speakers, for example, the name Rose Sélavy is not an obvious pun. Duchamp began to use puns as a way to promote his elusive persona, while also helping those 'in the know' to interpret his works.

Cat. 31
MAN RAY
Marcel Duchamp as
Rose Sélavy, 1921
Gelatin silver print,
17.5 × 12.5 cm

Private Collection
© Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris
and DACS, London 2017
Photo: © Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and
DACS, London 2017



Duchamp's exploration of a female identity is particularly relevant when considered alongside today's discourse surrounding gender. Duchamp's decision to 'change sex' at will was a radically unusual one for the period, suggesting he believed gender and identity to be a fluid concept, an idea which has only recently gained mainstream acceptance. However, it is important to approach Rose Sélavy within the context of the period in which the persona was created. The status of women in the art circles Duchamp frequented would have been limited, with women often seen as being muses for male artists rather than recognised as artists in their own right. Duchamp would deliberately 'put on' the persona of Rose Sélavy for the creation of artwork, rather than as a part of his lifestyle, or to make a political or feminist statement. With even her name acting as a pun, Rose Sélavy seems to be less a fully formed person than a personification of Duchamp's ideas about playing with identity.

Cat. 59 Duchamp-as-Rose Sélavy demonstrates the artist periodically putting on a personality. *The First Days of Spring*, 1929, on the other hand is a key work in which Dalí permanently aligns his distinctly Surrealist style of art with an equally singular and flamboyant identity. The stark beach-like setting alludes to Dalí's home since childhood, in Catalonia, Spain. Populating this bleak landscape are strange couplings of figures, and mythical creations, including a fish merged with a tree form and a praying mantis clinging to a dreamlike head. Such motifs, appearing often, became key to Dalí's work and formed part of his iconography (visual language). The eerie quality of the scene is heightened by Dalí's realistic painting style, which makes its dreamlike elements even more unsettling. Combined, these elements clearly make this painting recognisably a work by Salvador Dalí.

Earlier in his career, Dalí had experimented with 'putting on' many of the different artistic styles that were popular at the time, including Impressionism, Realism and Cubism. This demonstrated his ability to skilfully adapt to different approaches to art, but did not mark out his work as uniquely individual. The idiosyncratic style of *The First Days of Spring* was therefore a new departure for Dalí, which is heightened by the title's reference to spring, a time of new beginnings. His choice of title suggests he had found a style that would become the focus of his energy and output.

As Duchamp does in *Rose Sélavy*, Dalí makes a photographic appearance in this painting by including a childhood portrait of himself, collaged at the centre of the scene. It is significant that Dalí chose to include himself as a child, rather than as the distinctively moustached adult he was at the time. In so doing, Dalí has associated this new painting style with an identity that links back to his childhood. His inclusion of the self-portrait may also refer to a historical tradition of famous artists, such as Jan Van Eyck (1390–1441) and Caravaggio (1571–1610), who sometimes included their own likeness in larger figurative scenes. However, rather than hiding his portrait, Dalí positions it at the centre, implying he is the key to understanding the painting. He encourages the viewer to lean in and inspect the photograph, making it possible to start deciphering the other mystical figures and objects that populate the scene.

'I wanted to change identity [...] suddenly I had an idea: why not change sex? It's much simpler!'

Quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (interviews with Marcel Duchamp), 1967

'The more [sic] important in my life, [...] more than the painting, more than my draughtsmanship, is my personality. My personality is more important than every one of these little facets of my activity'

Salvador Dalí, in interview with Mike Wallace, 1958

Given that the motifs formed part of Dalí's personal mythology, it is through linking them to Dalí that they gain meaning. Personality and art become integrated, each conditioning how the other is perceived.

Placing his photograph in the centre of *The First Days of Spring* is quite literally ego-centric, a quality that manifested throughout his career in Dalí's love of publicity and self-promotion. Ultimately, it was not only Dalí's persona that became identified with this artistic style. By the late 1930s the Parisian Surrealist movement had all but severed connections with Dalí, but in the same decade he had become seen in America as synonymous with Surrealism, largely due to his flamboyant personality and signature artistic style. His exaggerated artistic identity was all-consuming, engulfing both Dalí's day-to-day life and (in the public imagination) the identity of Surrealism as an artistic movement. He enchanted the general public and media but alienated many of his artistic contemporaries.

Duchamp was one of the few who seemed able to separate Dalí the man from his more outrageous stunts, perhaps due to his own experience of creating artistic personas. Although their separate artistic experiments with identity and self-presentation resulted in very different artistic styles, central to their friendship appears to have been a mutual understanding of the artist's need to shape and play with how they are perceived.

What are the different ways in which Duchamp and Dalí use photography in these works to create a sense of identity?

How does knowing about an artist's self-constructed identity change and guide your perception of their work?

Painting and Anti-Painting

Cat. 102 In 2004, a group of contemporary artists, dealers, critics and curators voted Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917, the most influential artwork of the twentieth century. At first glance, this accolade might appear unlikely; it is, after all, a standard porcelain urinal, placed horizontally on a plinth (rather than vertically on a wall). The only obvious human intervention is a signature across the base, 'R. Mutt 1917'. For its original viewers and those of today, encountering a urinal on display in an art gallery would be surprising, discomfiting even. It is not immediately obvious why the work is so important, or indeed why it is considered 'art' at all. The key to *Fountain's* central position in the development of modern art is in fact the concept behind it.

Around 1913, after several years as a practising painter, Duchamp became disillusioned with painting and the artistic groups that formed around different traditional styles and schools. He questioned what it was that made something an artwork: is something designated 'art' due to skill, beauty, or intellectual content? He resolved to create new criteria for art. He decided that it was the act of choosing, rather than making, that decided whether an object was an artwork or whether the

person who chose it was an artist. This means that Duchamp did not need to have physically made *Fountain* to be its creator; simply by selecting the object and presenting it, he became the artist.

Working against the long history of art that focused largely on creating attractive works, Duchamp deliberately selected items that were 'aesthetically neutral' (neither pleasing nor unpleasant to look at). This required the viewer to interact with the work more deeply than at, as he termed it, a 'retinal' level. By removing the possibility of a purely visual appreciation of a work, Duchamp encouraged people to engage their mind and other senses to explore what the work might mean. This is especially true of *Fountain*; someone looking at this artwork will almost certainly bring their own associations to what is essentially a displaced urinal. The title *Fountain* helps to guide us towards finding meaning in the work by encouraging two contradictory

references: the flow of liquid into a urinal (its actual purpose), and classical sculpted fountains that spout water. This leads to an association with movement, a contradiction to the usual static position of art shown in a gallery. Of course, different readings of the work are also possible. Duchamp considered it more important for people to engage thoughtfully with an artwork rather than merely appreciate it visually.

Duchamp called this new type of art the 'readymade'. Over time he experimented with the concept, sometimes making slight changes to an object to make a 'rectified readymade', such as *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, a postcard of Leonardo da Vinci's portrait *Mona Lisa*, 1503, on which he drew a moustache (fig. 2). At other times he simply decontextualised a familiar object, as



he did with *Fountain*. There was no single formula for the creation of a readymade. Although these works are often referred to as a group or series of artworks, they were not conceived as such. Indeed, Duchamp did not start using the term 'readymade' until about 1916, despite having already made several works (now classed as readymades) that arose out of the same concept, such as *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913.

Cat. 102

MARCEL DUCHAMP
Fountain, 1917 (1964 edition)

Readymade: porcelain urinal,
36 × 48 × 61 cm

Rome, National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, by permission of Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo. Photography: © Schiavonotto Giuseppe / © Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2017

Fig. 2

MARCEL DUCHAMP
L.H.O.O.Q., 1919

Pencil on postcard of the
Mona Lisa,
19.7 × 12.4 cm

Private collection
© Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris
and DACS, London 2017

'I was interested in ideas, not in visual products.'

Marcel Duchamp, quoted in "Eleven Europeans in America," James Johnson Sweeney (ed.), 1946





Cat. 55
SALVADOR DALÍ
Fishermen in the Sun
1928
Oil on canvas with rope,
100 x 100 cm

Collezione Prada, Milan
Photo © 2016, Christie's Images Limited /
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,
DACS 2017

If *Fountain* were not so divisive, perhaps it would not be so celebrated today. It seems Duchamp deliberately chose his most provocative readymade, with its connotations of genitals and urine, as the concept's first public outing. Duchamp anonymously submitted *Fountain* to the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, New York, in 1917. The intention of the exhibition was to display all artworks that were submitted, provided an entry fee was paid. Given Duchamp's self-described penchant for naughty humour, *Fountain* could quite plausibly read as 'taking the piss' about the exhibition's purpose. The panel of artists and art-world insiders organising the exhibition were not impressed. Despite the open premise of the exhibition, after a narrow vote the exhibition panel refused to consider the work as art and would not display it. The impact of the ensuing scandal was amplified when Duchamp penned an anonymous defence of the work, which amounts to his clearest explanation of the readymade: 'Whether or not Mr Mutt made it with his own hand has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an everyday article, placed it so that its usual significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – and created a new thought for that object.'

Cat. 55 Today, Dalí is best known as a painter of unsettling, dreamlike scenes such as *The First Days of Spring*. However, his style took many years to develop. Dalí's artistic life began by him copying old master paintings, followed by his experimenting with many of the artistic styles of the day. He also created some extremely naturalistic, highly detailed scenes, which show his skill as a draughtsman and became central to his particular style from the 1930s onwards. However, during a less well known period of his life, in the 1920s prior to his international fame, he had experienced a period of disillusionment with painting, very much as Duchamp had. Perhaps due to his virtuoso skill at impersonating various styles of art, Dalí questioned whether an original, personal form of painting could ever be found. This crisis resulted in a series of 'anti-paintings' made during 1927–28, after which, for a brief period, he ceased painting altogether.

As one of the last works produced during this anti-painting period, *Fishermen in the Sun*, 1928, marks the extremity of Dalí's experimentation with extending the boundaries of what could be considered painting. It is full of contradictions. Surviving preparatory sketches show that his idea for the work was carefully planned, but the resulting canvas belies this effort and appears relatively random. The finished work looks extremely abstract, but the title suggests a landscape or scene of everyday life by the sea, and the use of bright primary colours contributes to creating a beach-like atmosphere. Dalí refused to be constrained by the edges of the canvas: he fixed rope to the work and even painted over the edge of the frame. Whilst the use of paint on canvas makes this technically a painting, it is poles apart from what would have been recognised as a traditional landscape painting.

Given Duchamp's own earlier rejection of traditional painting as being decoratively 'retinal', it is tempting to think that Dalí may have been influenced by

Duchamp's idea. As a young artist in training, Dalí followed the events of the international art world, so although the two men had not yet met it is highly likely that he was aware of Duchamp's influential readymades. However, Dalí's anti-paintings have nothing of the forms taken by Duchamp's anti-art. Rather, they align with the specific ideas with which Dalí himself was grappling at the time. In *Fisherman in the Sun*, he has broken down an everyday scene into constituent abstract shapes, then rebuilt the scene as a fragmented version of the original, reflecting his interest in the seemingly objective, mechanical gaze of photography and film, which he saw as able to reflect the world in new and unsettling ways. As a scene that invites recognition at the same time as abstractly denying it, *Fishermen in the Sun* is the most radical example of Dalí taking inspiration from the camera. The interest stayed with him later in his career, causing fellow artist Man Ray to comment in the 1930s that Dalí's 'painting was a kind of colour photography. He would anyway have preferred to photograph his ideas and considered his work as a form of anti-painting.'

Even when he had returned to painting in 1929, with *The First Days of Spring*, Dalí's art was informed by his earlier exploration of anti-painting, collage and photography. Although his later works such as *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*, 1938, are famous for their highly finished surfaces and fine painting, he also wanted to receive recognition for his conceptual ideas – and the anti-paintings are a clear demonstration of how far he was willing to interrogate and stretch the medium. They reveal a questioning, theoretical side to Dalí that is often unknown or ignored. It is very likely that this aspect of Dalí's practice is one of the reasons that he and Duchamp got along so well, a fact that many of Duchamp's acquaintances found incredulous, believing Dalí to be little more than a painter of optical illusions. By understanding Dalí's rejection of painting, albeit temporary, we can reconsider his later, more famous style of painting, as in *The First Days of Spring*. It was only by undergoing the theoretical struggle demonstrated in the anti-paintings that Dalí was able to break through and define his own unique style.

How do *Fishermen in the Sun* and *Fountain* challenged traditional ideas of painting, sculpture and artists' materials?

In what ways are titles important in directing our understanding of works of art?

Undermining Certainties

The questioning attitude that Dalí and Duchamp each took towards the medium of painting was representative of their respective outlooks on life. Both men took an interest in the current scholarship on art and science: Dalí, when he died, had books by leading physicists on his bedside table; while Duchamp had a deep knowledge of diverse subjects ranging from science to chess. Both artists' engagement with new ideas led them on to greater artistic innovation.

'I cannot in any case be accused of being a modern painter.'
Salvador Dalí, *ArtNews*, 1959

'Knowing how to look is a means of inventing.'
Salvador Dalí, quoted in Catherine Grenier, *Salvador Dalí: The Making of an Artist*

Cat. 136 *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*, 1938, centres around an optical illusion. At the core of this complex painting are a fruit dish full of browning pears and a ghostly face apparently floating above a Catalan beach. The pears simulate curly hair and objects behind the stem of the dish seem to form eyes. The literal title is quite unusual for Dalí. It reinforces the importance of recognising both the face and the fruit dish when looking at this painting. Once you have seen this first optical illusion, further imagery reveals itself: the upper section of the fruit dish forms the back of a setter-like dog, its nose pointing towards the top-right side of the canvas and its back legs extending towards the bottom left. Similarly, the dog's hind paw is a well-known 'duck or rabbit' optical illusion, in which the animal you see depends on which way you look at it. The dog's collar and its eye can also be interpreted as features of the beach landscape (an aqueduct and rock arch, respectively). The middle ground of the painting, between the fruit dish and the dog's head, is populated with a multitude of small figures and groupings, including some motifs that Dalí repeats elsewhere in his work, such as a silver fish-lake on the left. The complex double images function as clever visual puns comparable with Duchamp's love of verbal punning (as in *Rose Sélavy*). Both forms reward the viewer for taking the time to think about the work, while also allowing for flexibility of meaning.

The optical illusions are key to this painting. Dalí's interest in contemporary psychological theory indicates that he did not depict them simply for amusement. He and many fellow Surrealists were intrigued by psychoanalysis, the study of the unconscious mind. Over the previous 35 years Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) had developed theories regarding the role of repressed desires and memories in a variety of mental disorders. Given the Surrealists' interest in uncovering similarly suppressed thoughts and dreams, it seems that very early in the group's development they had been drawn to Freud's theories. Dalí, however, stands out as being extremely concerned with visualising Freud's ideas. His interest in Freud's theories of childhood development is evident in works such as *The First Days of Spring*, which makes a visual link between Dalí's adult identity and his formative childhood.

In *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach* Dalí takes his interest in psychoanalysis one step further by creating an image based on a psychoanalytical technique. Dalí conceived a theory that self-inducing a paranoid state would free the mind to wilfully confuse or misread visual stimuli, in the same way that we might deliberately see shapes in the clouds. *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*, however, does not allow such open-ended interpretation. It is instead a visualisation of the illusions and double images that Dalí himself saw in his surroundings. As the title prompts, we are meant to 'read' the double images in a certain way: the central form is a fruit dish and a face, rather than being open to our own differing interpretations. By painting such seemingly impossible appearances in a realistic manner, he encourages viewers to take what he has imagined when interpreting visual stimuli to be just as real as the world we see in day-to-day life. As with much of

Cat. 136
SALVADOR DALÍ
Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach, 1938
Oil on canvas,
114.3 × 143.8 cm

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.
© Wadsworth Atheneum Photography: Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum / © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, DACS 2017





Cat. 133

MARCEL DUCHAMP

3 Standard Stoppages
(3 Stoppages étalons),
1913–14 (1964 edition)

Wood, glass and paint on
canvas,
40 × 130 × 90 cm

Tate: Purchased 1999
Photo: © Tate, London 2017 / © Succession
Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP Paris and DACS,
London 2017



**'[3 Standard Stoppages]
was really when I tapped
into the mainspring of
my future.'**

Marcel Duchamp, c. 1962,
quoted in Herbert
Molderings, *Duchamp and
the Aesthetics of Chance*,
2006

Dali's output, *his* subjectivity is key: it is critical to comprehend his subjectivity in order to understand his works in the way he saw them.

Cat. 133 Experimentation was crucial to Duchamp's artistic practice; by constantly experimenting he expanded the boundaries of what was considered 'art' and eventually developed the concept of readymades. Just as Dali adapted contemporary concepts of psychoanalysis and optics in his artworks, such as *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*, Duchamp, too, took a keen interest in the scientific and philosophical ideas of the day and used them in his work. His *3 Standard Stoppages* piece, begun as early as 1913, gives a fascinating insight into how he developed a questioning, experimental attitude.

Unlike the readymades, *3 Standard Stoppages* is clearly not an appropriated everyday object, but something physically created by Duchamp. Exactly *what* he has created is less obvious. It is a work of disparate parts. Three dark canvases, each displaying a gently curving white line, are encased behind glass. These are accompanied by three wooden rulers cut to mimic these lines, and a large wooden box. As with many of Duchamp's artworks, it is only by learning about the process through which he created it that the work becomes more understandable. The work we see today has experienced several alterations, but at its core it is a record of Duchamp playing a game with chance. In 1913, he questioned the idea of the standard metre by dropping three metre-long threads from a height of one metre onto three dark canvases. The threads were no longer straight but in wavy lines, which he then pasted onto the canvases where they had fallen. As he explained in 1963: 'This action invalidates [...] the concept of the shortest distance between two points, the classical definition of the straight line.' In doing this experiment, he attempted to question what we accept as mathematical truth by encouraging us to reconsider what we perceive.

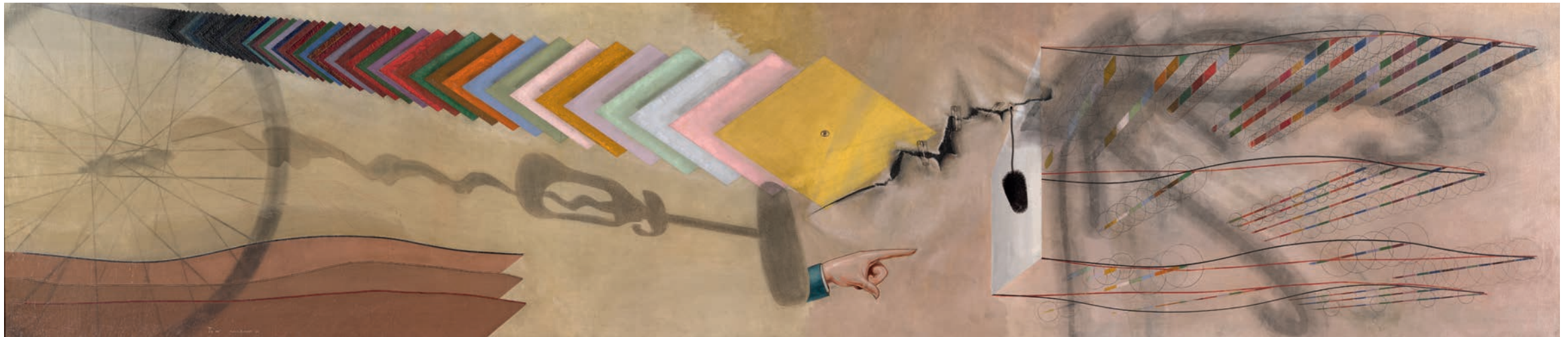
After pasting the wavy threads onto the canvases Duchamp secured them under glass as if they were microscope slides. Duchamp's pseudo-scientific, rigorously performed but ultimately non-mathematical experiment may recall an earlier attempt to 'capture' a metre. International uniformity in measurements is a modern invention, whereas, in the past, different countries would have had their own standard measurements. In 1799, the French revolutionary government created a new standard measurement based on the most up-to-date scientific information and made a template of platinum encased in glass. By Duchamp's lifetime, this measurement, named the 'metre', had become a standard unit of length in much of the world, although the original 1799 measurement was subsequently shown to be inaccurate and has since been recalculated several times. In capturing a 'non-standard metre', Duchamp draws attention to the conceptual strangeness of defining one length as *the* definitive measurement. Through this ironic questioning, he opens up the mind to multiple possibilities rather than it being limited to any one truth.

The link between scientific experimentation and *3 Standard Stoppages* is clear in the way Duchamp created the work. Like a scientist placing importance on following a rigorous method to achieve reliable yet unpredictable results, Duchamp created the original white lines by conceiving of a strict process, then recording the outcome apparently without influencing it. This emphasis on method rather than result is also evident in the amount of time that Duchamp worked on *3 Standard Stoppages*. He dropped the threads and recorded their shapes during 1913–14, but he did not create the wooden templates until 1918. The work was not finally configured for display as we see it today until 1936. Duchamp often left works unfinished for long periods before coming back to them. This demonstrates his emphasis on the creative process rather than the finished artwork.

Duchamp considered this emphasis on method to be particularly significant. In the 1960s he stated that the finished artwork, *3 Standard Stoppages* was not physically important, but that the thinking behind it was his 'most important work'. He saw it as the starting point for his conceptual art practice. This significance is perhaps why the random shapes formed by the dropped threads appear in several later artworks, including *Network of Stoppages*, 1914, and *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, 1915–23. Perhaps most symbolically, they appear in *Tu m'*, 1918, (fig. 3) which was his very last work on canvas, created at the request of Katherine Dreier, one of Duchamp's major patrons and collectors. As is typical for Duchamp, the title contains a telling pun, sounding in French like either '*tu m'emmerdes*' (you annoy me) or '*tu m'ennuies*' (you bore me), perhaps expressing his attitude to the medium of painting, the art form he was about to leave behind permanently. The *3 Standard Stoppages* work marked the beginning of his experimentation with conceptual art, so it seems appropriate that its forms reappear in *Tu m'*, his final 'conventional' artwork.

Fig. 3
MARCEL DUCHAMP
***Tu m'*, 1918**
Oil on canvas, with bottle-brush, safety pins, and bolt, 69.8 × 30.3 cm

Gift of the Estate of Katherine S. Dreier, Yale University Art Gallery, 1953.6.4
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Why do you think Dalí used optical illusions? What do you think he wanted us to think about as we look at this painting?

Duchamp considered the concept behind the creation of *3 Standard Stoppages* more important than the finished work. Would your impression of the work change if you did not know what the artist's intentions were?

Eroticising the object

While many of the artworks by Duchamp and Dalí can seem very intellectual, both artists were also preoccupied by the physical body and the eroticisation of it. Their similar sense of humour and interest in pushing the boundaries of society led them to explore both personal and universal approaches to the body in their art.

Cat. 78 Dalí's *Scatalogical Object Functioning Symbolically – Gala's Shoe*, 1930, is a complex grouping of recognisable objects taken out of their normal context. Rising up from a red high-heeled shoe is a wooden scaffold with weighted threads hanging from either end. The image of another shoe is repeated on three sugar cubes, one of which is attached to the thread on the left. Below this thread a small glass of 'milk' (actually wax) is cradled in the toe part of the shoe. Around the shoe are other objects including human hair and a brush stripped of its bristles. Dalí's ongoing interest in photography is present in a small photographic print showing a naked couple. The hair and the naked figures in the photograph conjure the human body literally, whereas the shoe empty of a foot does so by connotation. By stating in the title that the red shoe belongs to Dalí's lover, and later wife, Gala, the artist



Cat. 78

SALVADOR DALÍ

Scatalogical Object

Functioning

Symbolically – Gala's

Shoe, 1930

(1973 edition)

Assemblage with shoe,
white marble, photographs,
a gibbet, a matchbox, hair
and a wooden scraper,
48.3 x 27.9 x 9.4 cm

Collection of The Dalí Museum,
St Petersburg, Florida
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,
DACCS 2017

**'Objects with a symbolic
function leave no place
at all for formal
preoccupations. They
depend only on the
amorous imagination of
each person!'**

Salvador Dalí, *Objects of
Symbolic Function*, 1931

increases the potential for the work to appear erotic. The overall impression of these incongruous objects, however, goes beyond the sensual to create confusion.

In the 1930s, assemblages (combinations of objects into a sculpture, comparable to three-dimensional collage) were a new form of art that became particularly popular among the Surrealists. Never one to follow where he could lead, Dalí was very involved in the development of this new form. In 1931, he wrote a text called 'Objects of Symbolic Function' explaining his theory, which was instrumental in developing the group's ideas of what a Surrealist object might be. In that same year, the group staged their first show dedicated to assemblage. Although Duchamp declined to belong to any artistic groups, he was courted by the Surrealists and sometimes took part in their activities and exhibitions. His earlier readymades were an important influence on the creation of the Surrealist object; and it could be argued that it was due to the great popularity of Surrealist objects that readymades continued to be seen as artistically important.

The clearest link between readymades and Surrealist objects is the use of everyday objects. Both Duchamp and Dalí hoped to encourage viewers to consider the world and the objects around them in a new light. Dalí and other creators of Surrealist objects deliberately endowed with eroticism what can be found in day-to-day life, prompting a sense of uneasiness that they hoped would disrupt the 'rational' lives of their viewers. Dalí was fascinated by Freud's definition of fetishism as 'the transferral of erotic thoughts onto a traditionally non-sexual body part or object'. Through his interpretation of Freud's ideas, Dalí felt liberated to construct strange juxtapositions that reflected his personal sense of the erotic. Although the *Scatalogical Object Functioning Symbolically – Gala's Shoe* is static, Dalí envisaged it moving: 'The mechanism consists of plunging a sugar lump on which an image of a shoe has been painted, in order to watch the sugar lump and consequently the image of the shoe breaking up in the milk.' The glass of milk functions as a reminder of childhood and mothering while the shoe references sexual appeal. Rather than achieving something like Duchamp's 'aesthetic neutrality' as seen in *Fountain*, with this work, Dalí provokes a visceral reaction by combining allusions to the maternal and the sexual. By linking the body and the machine-like object, the organic and the mechanical, in an uneasy eroticised assemblage, Dalí blurs the lines of man and machine, prompting questions about the level of control we have over our subconscious desires.

Cat. 79 The *Wedge of Chastity* title Duchamp gave to this small two-part object prompts one to assume that the artwork will deal with the human body and eroticism, as chastity means the state of abstaining from sexual intercourse, traditionally before marriage. But at first sight of the assembled object, its title seems quite unconnected to what one is seeing: a metallic, brick-like shape embedded in a smooth pink mass. Perhaps the most plausible thing to liken it to is a tooth (the dull metallic 'wedge' simulating the colour of a capped or filled tooth in a pink gum), an association confirmed by the fact that the pink material is actually dental plastic.

Wedge of Chastity was never meant to sit on display in an art gallery. Duchamp created it as a tactile object for his new wife, Alexina 'Teeny' Duchamp, on the occasion of their wedding in 1954. Only when it is held does its true meaning become apparent. Rather than a fixed object, the two pieces can be taken apart to reveal a deep, pink furrow. As the other half is now clearly the 'wedge', the pink half can more easily be likened to female genitalia. The physical action of taking the pieces apart and revealing the pink interior is key to understanding the work. Even when seen in 'open' and 'closed' states simultaneously, we miss the element of surprise and sensual enjoyment of opening the parts to discover the hidden interior for ourselves.

Rather than a work of explicit eroticism, Duchamp teases the viewer, playing with ideas of what can be seen and unseen, touched and not touched. This lively, witty approach to sexuality is found in some of his other works including *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919. Spoken in French, the titular pun sounds like 'She has a hot ass', but ironically we are unable to see what Duchamp is referring to. Similarly, the title *Wedge of Chastity* seems to tease us with something unseen except when permitted to do so. Containing a literal inner meaning, *Wedge of Chastity* continues Duchamp's creation of 'in jokes' in his work, here only accessible to those able to touch and explore it.

Most artworks are encountered purely through the sense of sight, rarely by touch: Duchamp's intention that *Wedge of Chastity* be understood through touch is highly unconventional. Its small scale and unusually textured surface encourage thoughts of touch. Mind and body are united in appreciating this work, fulfilling Duchamp's aim of creating 'anti-retinal' art (which is about the idea, not simply what you see). First explored forty years earlier through the readymades, the idea of anti-retinal art here takes a different form: *Wedge of Chastity* is an intimately personal, unique artwork, the opposite of Duchamp's deliberately chosen everyday objects repurposed as readymades. Painstakingly handmade, it draws attention to individual craftsmanship rather than mechanical reproduction. However, through the underlying emphasis on the concept of creating art that requires more than just 'retinal' appreciation, and by drawing attention to what might ordinarily be overlooked, it encompasses the same artistic concerns that characterise Duchamp's entire oeuvre.

In what ways do Duchamp's *Wedge of Chastity* and Dali's *Scatological Object Functioning Symbolically – Gala's Shoe*, conjure up a sense of the human body? What effect does this have?

How do these works reject or confuse ideas about the body?

Cat. 79

MARCEL DUCHAMP

Wedge of Chastity, 1954

Galvanised plaster and dental plastic, 5.6 × 8.6 × 4.2 cm

Private Collection
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'I believe in Eroticism a lot, because it's truly a rather widespread thing throughout the world, a thing that everyone understands.'

Marcel Duchamp, quoted in *Ades et al, Marcel Duchamp, 1999*, p. 145



Conclusion

By exploring the work of Dalí and Duchamp together, their shared interests surrounding identity, the nature of art, experimentation and eroticism become clearer. Such comparisons encourage us to reconsider the status that both artists hold in the popular imagination: Duchamp's playful humour and his flamboyant alter ego Rose Sélavy serve as counterpoints to the intellectual remoteness people often sense in conceptual art. Dalí's anti-paintings and ideas on assemblage demonstrate a sincere theoretical grappling that is easily overshadowed by his extravagant personality and style. Ultimately, these two men bonded through a shared outlook on life, forming a lasting friendship across continents and over many years.

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Cat. 55 (detail)
SALVADOR DALÍ
Fishermen in the Sun
1928

