

## Marcel Duchamp and artistic descendants will be on view at playfully inventive Tang Museum exhibition this summer

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. — In 1919, Marcel Duchamp drew a mustache on a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, signed it, and inscribed it *L.H.O.O.Q.* Pronounced in French, the letters sound like "elle a chaud au cul" ("she has a hot derriere"). Witty and iconclastic, the mustachioed *Mona Lisa* will be among ten original Duchamp works to be presented in *Living with Duchamp*, on view June 27–Sept. 28 at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College.

"Arguably the most important voice in visual art of the last century, Duchamp has influenced artists in a variety of disciplines," said Tang curator Ian Berry, who organized the exhibition with curatorial assistant Gretchen Wagner. "His ideas about what art can be and how art can function in the world continue to be revolutionary and hotly debated."

Besides works by Duchamp himself, the Tang exhibition will also feature a wide array of contemporary artworks from artists working in the Duchampian spirit. Among the more than 40 artists represented are Matthew Antezzo, Conrad Bakker, Hans Peter Feldmann, Dan Fischer, Fischli and Weiss, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Sophie Matisse, Allan McCollum, Josiah McElheny, Richard Pettibone, Sturtevant, Jonathan Santlofer, Jonathan Seliger, Haim Steinbach, Jana Sterbak, and George Stoll. Their works on view date from the 1960s to the present and range from paintings, sculptures, and prints to installations, computer animations, textiles, and photography.

The exhibition itself will take its cue from Duchamp's ground-breaking installation designs for the 1938 International Exposition of Surrealism at the Galerie Beaux Arts in Paris and the 1942 First Papers of Surrealism at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in New York City. In both exhibitions, says Tang curator Berry, the artist—acting as curator—radically changed the exhibition environment; in one case, he spider-webbed the gallery with miles of white string. The Tang's Duchampian exhibition design will offer visitors a firsthand opportunity to experience the artist's ideas.

Born into a family of artists, Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) became part of a turn-of-the-century art movement away from traditional academy-style artworks and values. Taking up the family trade when he was 15, Duchamp first painted in a "pseudo-Impressionist" style (his term), later adding elements of Cubism and Futurism. At the age of 26, he was catapulted into the international art world when his *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) became a cause celebre at the New York Armory show in 1913, hotly debated on both sides of the Atlantic. (A reproduction of the painting, once described as looking like "an explosion in a shingle factory," will be on view at the Tang.) By 1913, Duchamp was a celebrated painter; in 1918, he abandoned painting for a quicksilver succession of other interests—oculism, mechanical drawing, optical illusion, photography, and chess, which he played professionally for ten years—while continuing to create almost covertly seminal works of art.

His most complex work was *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23). Also known as *The Large Glass*, it consisted of two glass panels laden with iconic references to gender, machinery, geometry, physics—and such unlikely objects as a sleigh and a chocolate grinder. His final masterpiece, begun in 1942 and worked on for 22 years, was *Given: 1) The waterfall, 2) The*

*illuminating gas*. Through peepholes in an old Spanish door, *Given* offers a languid, full-frontal view of a nude woman lying on her back and holding a gas lantern, with a waterfall in the background.

Witty, intelligent, and fond of visual and verbal puns, Duchamp has sometimes been described as a competent painter who somehow produced two or three undoubted masterpieces of modern art. "In a few short years after 1912," noted art critic Clement Greenberg, "he laid down the precedents for everything that advanced art has done in the 50-odd years since."

The precedents Duchamp set forth challenged conventional notions of art, artists, and museums, and helped generate the late-20<sup>th</sup>-century movement of conceptual art—art that exists by virtue of its idea rather than as the production and display of a rare and valuable object. "Conceptual art locates the artistic act not exclusively in the mastery of craft but in the moment of inspiration," says Tang curator Berry.

Art must be more than "visual euphoria," Duchamp believed; it must delight "the gray matter of our understanding" in a way that is aesthetically and intellectually interactive. "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone," Duchamp argued. By examining, deciphering, and interpreting a work of art, "The onlookers make the picture."

### **In Duchamp's footsteps**

Works by Duchamp's successors on view at the Tang this summer will trace variations on his themes. For instance, Duchamp's famous *Box in a Suitcase*—a set of miniature reproductions of his artworks packed into a leather suitcase—is referenced by artist Richard Pettibone, who creates painstakingly hand-colored versions of existing artworks. In Pettibone's case, the mini-paintings are replicas of works by Duchamp, appropriated from book and magazine illustrations and recreated in the same scale, i.e., only inches tall.

Especially stimulating to succeeding generations of artists is the 1913-23 series of works Duchamp called "ready-mades"—ordinary mass-produced objects elevated to the level of art because he selected, signed, and displayed them as art. Among the objects Duchamp so elevated were a bicycle wheel mounted on a household stool, a coat rack nailed to the floor, a snow shovel, and most notorious of all, a urinal titled *Fountain* (1917) and signed "R. Mutt." In a similar spirit, Jonathan Seliger produces oversized trompe l'oeil versions of Chinese food take-out containers; Swiss artists Fischli and Weiss transform two steps, a door, and construction debris into carved and cast updates of the classic still life. Duchamp's penchant for wordplay turns up in a Nayland Blake piece: a pair of shoes, chained together, sport the words "lap dog" attached to the toes. And in a playfully tongue-in-cheek reflection of Duchamp's own interest in financial transactions—his 1924 *Monte Carlo Bond* is a faked note of casino currency—Conrad Bakker will make his own handcrafted version of Tupperware kitchenware and sell it on eBay during the run of the exhibition.

### **Public events of *Living with Duchamp***

An opening reception celebrating all of the Tang's summer exhibitions will take place 6-7:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 26. The reception will be free and open to the public.

*Living with Duchamp* will be augmented by a curator-guided tour of the exhibition on Tuesday, August 12, and a Tribute to Duchamp Through Film, featuring films and videos screened

continuously from Saturday, Aug. 16, through Sunday, Aug. 24. A series of Family Saturdays, offering exhibition-related activities for adults and children, will take place 2-3:30 p.m. on June 21 and 28, July 12 and 19, and Aug. 2, 9, and 16. Each program will begin with a brief tour of the exhibition followed by hands-on activities on Duchampian themes such as a photography, found-object art, poetry, sound art, optical artworks, and the making of one's own "museum in a suitcase."

*Living with Duchamp* is made possible by support from the Voorhees Family and the Nathalie Potter Voorhees '45 memorial fund.

The Tang Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, to 7 p.m. on summer Fridays, and from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The museum is closed Mondays and major holidays. Suggested donations are \$5 for adults, \$3 for children over 12, \$2 for senior citizens; children under 12 are admitted free. For more information on exhibitions and events, call 518-580-8080 or go to [www.skidmore.edu/tang](http://www.skidmore.edu/tang).

Skidmore College, located in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., is an independent, liberal arts institution with an enrollment of approximately 2,200 men and women. Known for its interdisciplinary curriculum, the college offers majors in both traditional liberal arts disciplines and in such fields as business, the fine and performing arts, and social work. The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery opened on the Skidmore campus in October 2000 as a center to explore all areas of study through the visual arts.

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