The Marcel Duchamp Retrospective Exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963 captured the flow of Duchamp’s works and ideas from his early oil canvas paintings to his famous ready-mades. The Weingrow Collection’s edition of the catalogue includes the exhibition’s witty publicity poster, designed by the artist and playfully entitled *A Poster within a Poster.*
Marcel Duchamp’s early works were mostly oil-on-canvas paintings. As exemplified by *Portrait of the Artist’s Father*, in the early 1900s he painted portraits of his family and friends, with influences from post-impressionism and fauvism.¹
Around 1923, Duchamp shifted his focus from making art to playing chess. Even before this move, however, the theme of chess was prevalent in many of his major art pieces. One example is *Portrait of Chess Players* (1911), in which the profiles of two players interlock with chess pieces that are randomly placed throughout the work. Duchamp, who devoted the majority of his time to playing chess, once said, “I have come to the personal conclusion that while all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists.”
In 1912, Duchamp painted the controversial *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, which expressed motion through the use of successive superimposed images. This piece was one of Duchamp’s final oil-on-canvas paintings. By portraying movement through overlapping cubist-inspired figures, he began to show his passion for the analytical and scientific aspects of art.
Fig. 5. Marcel Duchamp, *The Passage from the Virgin to Bride*, 1912
Bride is the last of a series that represents a woman in her passage from virgin to bride. Also based again on cubism and morphology, this work exemplifies Duchamp’s focus on the theme of transformation, both in individual pieces and throughout a continuing series of artworks.

Fig. 6. Marcel Duchamp, Bride, 1912
Weingrow Collection
The background of *Network of Stoppages* features a version of Duchamp’s 1911 painting *Young Man and Girl in Spring*, which is framed by two horizontal black bands and rotated 90 degrees. In the foreground, Duchamp placed an arrangement of irregular lines. This “network” of lines derives from Duchamp’s *Three Standard Stoppages*, a system of arbitrary measurement that he said was constructed by dropping three meter-long strings in random configurations. This piece reveals Duchamp’s fascination with measurement and projective geometry.³
Duchamp worked on *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (also known as *The Large Glass*) from 1915 to 1923. He carefully executed the work on two panes of glass, using materials such as lead foil, fuse wire, and dust. In a later description, he noted that this work is intended to depict the encounter between the “Bride,” in the upper panel, and her nine “Bachelors,” gathered below in an abundance of mechanical devices. Duchamp said that this work was left in a “state of incompletion”; after an exhibition in 1926, it was accidentally shattered.⁴
Duchamp introduced the concept of ready-mades like those seen here: common objects, sometimes modified or “assisted” and presented as works of art. Recent scholarship characterizes these various works as custom-made objects that Duchamp created to explore the boundaries of perception and cognition.\textsuperscript{5}

\textit{Bicycle Wheel} (1913) incorporated movement in a literal way: viewers could spin the wheel. Together with Duchamp’s other “found objects” this piece helped to transform conventional ideas of what constitutes an art object.
Fountain (1917), perhaps Duchamp’s most recognizable work (despite the fact that he used the pseudonym “R. Mutt” for it) was refused entry in the Society of Independent Artists’s first exhibition. Ironically, Duchamp was one of the Society’s founding members—and the exhibition had been publicized as being “open to all.”

Fig. 10. R. Mutt [Marcel Duchamp], Fountain, 1917 (1964 replica, original lost)
Another ready-made was inspired by a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. Exemplifying Duchamp’s humor, a drawn-on beard and moustache were incorporated into this piece.

Fig. 11. Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919
Fresh Widow is another well-known ready-made. This miniature French window first introduced Duchamp’s pseudonym “Rrose Sélavy,” which was later described as his “feminine alter ego.”

Fig. 12. Rrose Sélavy [Marcel Duchamp], *Fresh Widow*, 1920
Beginning in 1918, Duchamp created six optical cardboard discs with images printed on both sides—an expression of his continuing obsession with movement and space. He named these discs “Rotoreliefs.” They were intended to be viewed while placed on a record player, to demonstrate the illusion of depth created by moving two-dimensional images. The spinning discs were featured in the film *Anemic Cinema* (1926), made by Duchamp, Man Ray, and Marc Allegret.
In one of Duchamp’s later works, Boîte-en-valise (1941), he miniaturized 68 reproductions of his works to make them fit into a single box of varying dimensions.
Starting in the 1930s, Duchamp collaborated with the surrealists, participating in their exhibitions. This photography captures one exhibition, held in 1942, in which he spun miles of string around the gallery in an immense web, which those who attended in formal attire struggled through, while groups of children he had invited played inside. 

Fig. 15. Marcel Duchamp, *Sixteen Miles of String*, at First Papers of Surrealism exhibition, 1942
The opportunity to design the publicity poster for the retrospective exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum presented Duchamp with a creative form in which to announce the event. The center of the piece is a “wanted” poster with a profile and frontal view of the artist. The description underneath the reward offered reveals Duchamp’s sense of humor, describing the “criminal” as a man known as Hooke, Lyon, and Cinquer. In addition, Duchamp used his pseudonym from other works, “Rrose Sélagvy,” along with his birth name, creating further confusion around authorship and the fluidity of identities.

Fig. 16. [By or of] Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy, A Poster Within a Poster, 1963
Born into an artistic family on July 28, 1887, Duchamp was a pioneer in object and kinetic art; his participation in dada, surrealism, and pop art had an influence that continued far beyond his death in 1968. The retrospective exhibition in Pasadena affirmed his long-term contribution to the art world.

“Being neither ‘anti’ nor ‘pro’ art, [Duchamp] has directly and indirectly furthered the development of many colleagues and modern art in general, participating in movements without the need to join, warning that art can be ‘a habit-forming drug,’ and cautioning that removed from the glare and noise of today’s vast art world, vital activities will go on ‘underground.’”

—Walter Hopps, Acting Director, Pasadena Art Museum

Fig. 17. Background Montage, Kristina Seekamp, “Unmaking the Museum: Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades in Context,” 2004
Notes


Illustrations

Illustrations (continued)


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