



# Dada

YES! YES! YOU ARE SUCH A WOODEN HORSE.

Kathryn S Kelley Fall 2003  
Art Between The Wars with Brauer



# Dada

YES! YES! YOU ARE SUCH A WOODEN HORSE.

Kathryn S Kelley Fall 2003  
Art Between The Wars with Brauer



Marcel Duchamp | CHECK I



“The world made small by speed”<sup>1</sup> leaves me flat.

| WOODPUSHER | Having extricated myself from the blur, I peel myself back from the face of my computer monitor, and discover the sensuality of plying pigment upon a flat surface, employing marks in an attempt to find what I see. I am appalled to discover —*bête comme un peintre*— that makes me as stupid as a painter. This course and accompanying research, piled on top of last year’s studies in twentieth century design, raises more questions than it does answers. It also reveals to me my lack of historic perspective on what is happening currently in society, art, and my own work. I awaken from a fog of living the last [undisclosed number representing the entirety of my life] years in an egocentric vacuum, not knowing “ka ka”<sup>2</sup> about any art movement of the twentieth century into which I was born.

| PERPETUAL CHECK | Smashed between my eyes is the question “what is art?” Did a artist self-

proclaimed anti=non=artist<sup>6</sup>, French born, American citizen, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), largely define the course upon which the current art world navigates?

I think Duchamp would probably be a little disappointed that so little has changed from his works of almost one hundred years ago. The art world seems stuck in an infinite do loop. Is it what he would expect from such a *bourgeois moderne* society? Shall I continue to be flat? Shall I be lobotomized by all these questions, or use them?

| GAMBIT | Not out of wit or intelligence but desperation, I must expound on the New York Dadaist, Duchamp, via the vehicle of an assemblage of procured readymades—I’ve lifted from historical documents and other sources, and of course my Brauer lecture notes. I diverge somewhat from the requested discussion of New York Dada to focus mainly on the character Duchamp because his

work raises so many questions. Additionally, I shall sign it, call it my own, and I shall deem it to be art.

I have decontextualized  
and recontextualized!  
It is mine! I have  
signed it!  
It is art!

| FORK | This begs two fundamental questions: One, what does it mean to originate or create something? Two, what is art?

| DEVELOPMENT | Before becoming an inhabitant of New York in 1915, the official start date of New York Dada, Duchamp had already begun to wrestle with the aforementioned questions, both in his life and paintings works assembled objects of

art. His explorations and nonconclusive conclusion—"What isn't art?"<sup>5</sup>—occupy a pivotal place

in modernism.

Even today, in a post post-modern climate, much of

the Dada movement and Duchamp's evolution is a precursor to society and art, as we know it. I see it personified in the bumper stickers, "Question Authority" and "Shit Happens."

Think of it this way:

What does it mean to originate or create?

"Question Authority!"

What is art? "Shit Happens!"

Duchamp called into question the assumptions of art in regards to the elevated sacredness it held, the nature of materials used, the propensity toward it being retinally based, and by what or whose authority had all these standards been set. He strove for an intellectual art that blurred the





lines between what is art and what is life and asked, "Can one make works of art which are not works of art?"<sup>6</sup>

Duchamp evolved quickly, approximately a ten-year span, through the traditional medium of paint. Following suit from his two older brothers, the painter Jacques Villon and the sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon, he moved from Blainville, France, to Paris. There he began painting. He brought in a small income as a cartoonist that supplemented an allowance provided by his father and well to do notary, Eugène Duchamp.

| BLITZ | Never wholly taking on a particular painting style, he incorporated the conceptual elements and experimented with the techniques; ultimately he made them his own. Duchamp's painting progressed through Impressionism (*Landscape at Blainville* 1902), Cézannism (*Portrait of the Artist's Father* 1910), Fauvism (*Portrait of Dr Dumouchel* 1910), Symbolism (*Spring or, Young Man and Girl*

*in Spring* 1911), Cubism (*Portrait of Ducinea* 1911), and a touch of Futurism. He then began incorporating new machine-like elements (*Bride* 1912) and time (*Nude Descending a Staircase* 1 1911).

His paintings pivoted around three themes: movement/time, mechanization and irony. In 1911 he did his first of three *Nude Descending a Staircase*.

His second version, rejected by the Salon Des independents in Paris March 1912, made him notorious in New York when it was exhibited at the Armory Show in 1913 due to the scandalous uproar it caused. He continued with painting as his primary medium until in 1912 when he renounced his "intoxication with turpentine." For him, not art but painting was dead.<sup>5</sup>

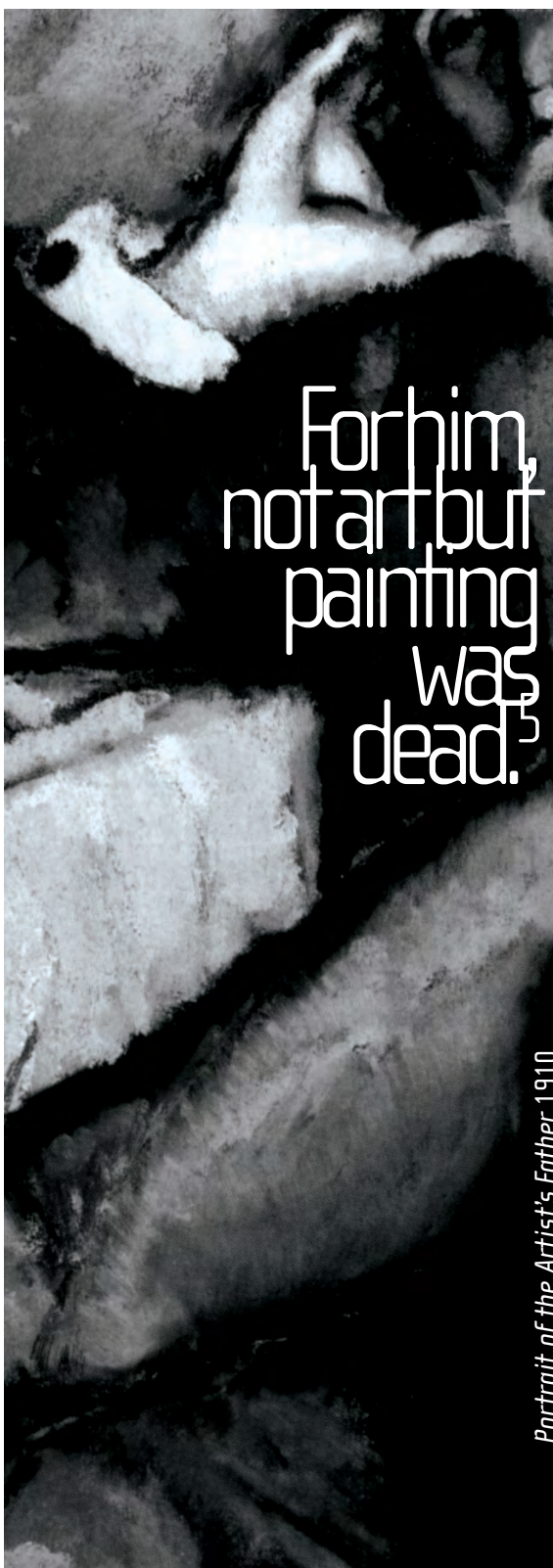
| ZUGZWANG | "I was finished with Cubism and with movement—at least movement mixed up with oil paint. The whole trend of painting was something I didn't care to continue. After ten years of painting I was bored with it—in fact I was always bored with it when I did paint, except at the very beginning

when there was that feeling of opening the eyes to something new. There was no essential satisfaction for me in painting ever...anyway, from 1912 on I decided to stop being a painter in the professional sense. I tried to look for another, personal way, and of course I couldn't expect anyone to be interested in what I was doing.”<sup>6</sup>

| SAC | One particular piece that he denoted<sup>5</sup> as being significant in his evolution beyond painting was 3 *Standard Stoppages* of 1913-1914. Fighting against the preoccupation of art being retinally based and using the law [a presumed absolute that might merely be arbitrary] of chance, he allowed 3 pieces of string, each measuring a meter in length, to drop from the height of one meter to the horizontal plane of the floor. These in their resting place, distorted, chance shaped, are each adhered to their own strip of canvas, glued to a piece of glass, and are accompanied by three wooden slats cut to the shape of the curves of string. The set is encased in a wooden croquet like box.

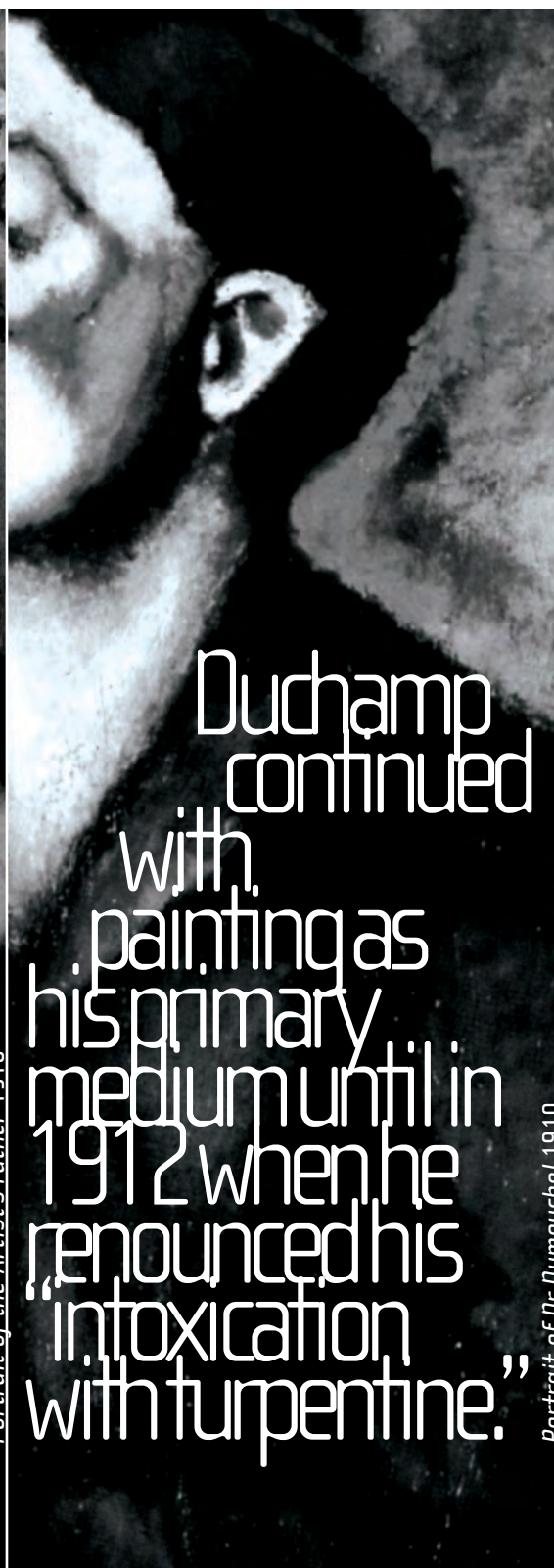
The 3 *Standard Stoppages* = “canned chance” or in post-modern terms, “shit happens.” And of course he signed it. “The work made a mockery of the received ideas and habits of mind that define ‘art.’ Duchamp was not only distancing himself from tradition and history [authority], he was trying to cut all ties with the past, and produce an impersonal language of ‘indifference’ and ‘dryness.’ ”<sup>4</sup>

| GRAND MASTER | From this same period came a series of Duchampian assemblages: the *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), both interactive and auditory<sup>5</sup>, was the front wheel of a bicycle with its fork inverted and attached to the seat of a kitchen stool; a galvanized iron rack, *Bottle Dryer* (1914), for drying wine bottles; and a purchased painting with the addition of a red and green dot of paint, *Pharmacy* (1914). Each of these pieces are a distortion of what had been held to be art. Was this for the purpose of creating an intellectual art? Humor? Was he trying to force the viewer to look at the banal objects with fresh eyes to see the beauty in

A black and white reproduction of a painting titled 'Portrait of the Artist's Father' by Marcel Duchamp, 1910. The painting shows a close-up of a man's face, looking slightly to the left. The style is dark and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a high-contrast, almost monochromatic palette. The man's features are rendered with soft, blended tones, while the background is dark and indistinct.

For him,  
not art but  
painting  
was  
dead.

*Portrait of the Artist's Father 1910*

A black and white reproduction of a painting titled 'Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel' by Marcel Duchamp, 1910. The painting is a close-up of a man's face, looking directly at the viewer. The style is dark and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a high-contrast, almost monochromatic palette. The man's features are rendered with soft, blended tones, while the background is dark and indistinct.

Duchamp  
continued  
with  
painting as  
his primary  
medium until in  
1912 when he  
renounced his  
"intoxication  
with turpentine."

*Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel 1910*

A black and white reproduction of a painting titled 'Spring or, Young Man and Girl in Spring' by Marcel Duchamp, 1911. The painting is a close-up of a man's face, looking directly at the viewer. The style is dark and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a high-contrast, almost monochromatic palette. The man's features are rendered with soft, blended tones, while the background is dark and indistinct.

*Spring or, Young Man and Girl in Spring 1911*





Portrait of Ducinea 1911



Nude Descending a Staircase 2 1912





the mundane, and imbue them with a new meaning?

| POSITIONAL ADVANTAGE | At some point he signed his name to this assemblages. Was he simply saying that art is a property conferred by an artist? It may have been all these things or none...he may have just decided to toy with his viewer; he was a chess player. But the juxtaposition of the commonplace item, created not by artistic skill, instead devised by the mind of the artist, with the artist's signature elevated the pieces to the context of "works of art;" thus we had the birth of the Readymade as art.

All this before the official start date of Dada!

The beginning of New York Dada arrived via the person of Duchamp in 1915, though the name Dada surfaced later from Europe as well. This arrival was celebrated. Greeted by Walter and Louise Arensberg (important collectors), Duchamp was immediately incorporated into "the Arensberg Circle" in addition to the other artists of 291. Where Duchamp was, there was the center of modernism<sup>5</sup>. He worked and

socialized with the New York avant-garde—men such as Man Ray (1890–1976) and Francis Picabia (1879–1953), both of whom were significant in the New York Dada circles and fellow chess players. Man Ray was known for his tireless experimentation, original thinking (*The Rope Dancer Accompanied Herself with Her Shadows* 1916) and defiance toward the art of the past. He participated in the Cubist, Dadaist and Surrealist movements. Picabia was significant for his mechanical metaphors (*Portrait of a Young Girl in a State of Nudity* 1915). Picabia also spanned a number of movements including Fauvism, Cubism, Neo-Impressionism and Abstraction. Duchamp was influenced by both men; as they too were influenced by Duchamp. By 1917 the name for their thinking arrived in America and they quickly embraced it. They were very much Dada!

| SEALED MOVE | Duchamp further explored and tested his Dada ideas. He continued to provoke the New York art community with all his

ideas. "Can one make works of art which are not works of art?"<sup>6</sup> He submitted, anonymously, his readymade, *Fountain* (1917), to the Society of Independent Artist for a non-juried exhibition. This piece was a porcelain urinal turned on its side and signed by the artist, Duchamp, under the pseudonym, R. Mutt. The piece was exhibited but not exhibited—it was put out but partitioned off from view with a curtain. In the second issue of *The Blind Man*, a magazine founded by Duchamp along with Roché and Beatrice Wood, Duchamp published the following:

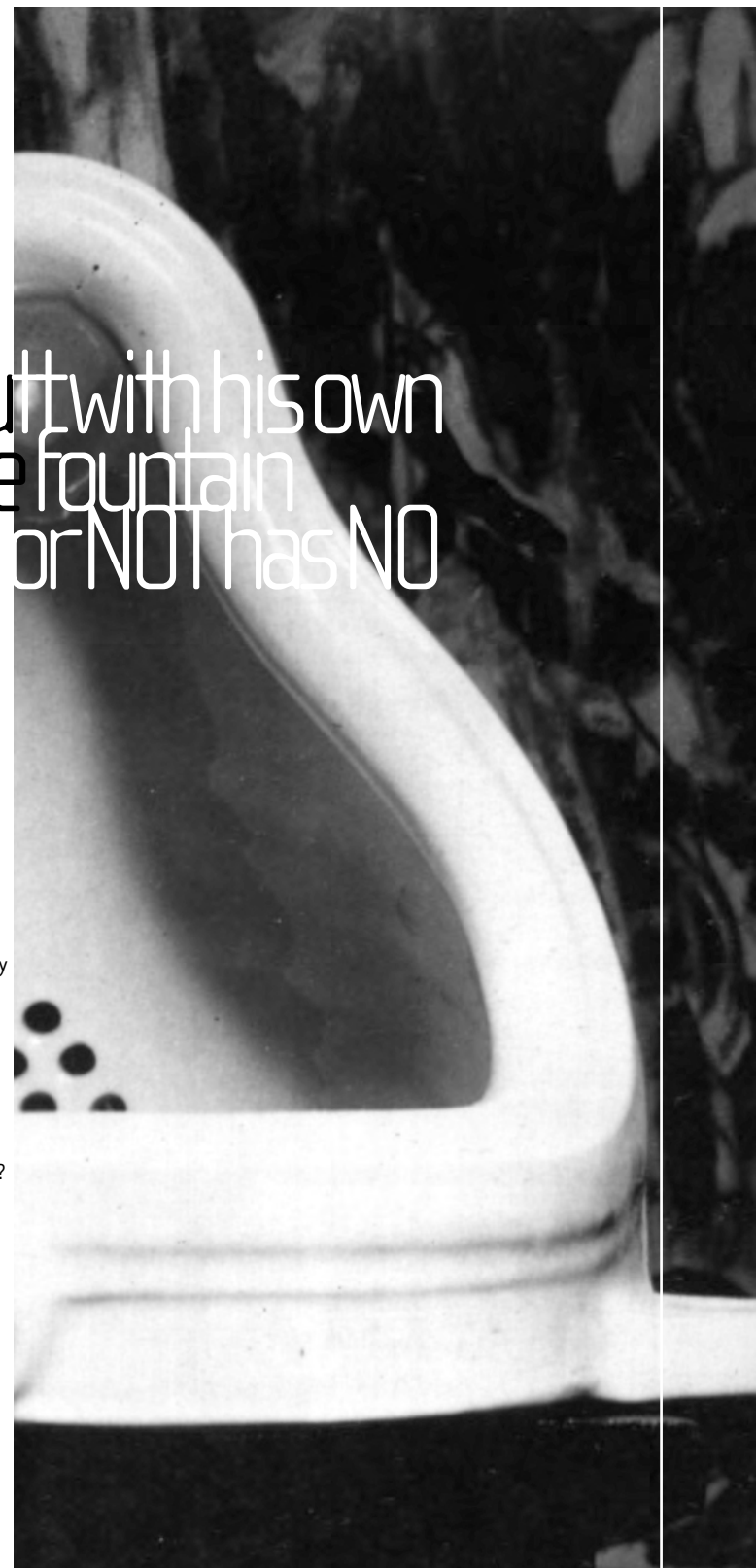
"They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit. Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited. What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain: 1) Some contended it was immoral, vulgar. 2) Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece 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 are her plumbing and her bridges."<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean to originate or create something?  
"Question Authority!" What is art? "Shit Happens!"





Kurt Schwitters | MIDDLEGAME |









Since life is relative,  
And one heel is uneven,  
The other is all the

## FLATTER<sup>8</sup>

| SIMULI | Duchamp causes me to think, and that makes my brain hurt! Thus it is with great mind numbing relief and visual pleasure over to discussing Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948)—a Duchamp contemporary and fellow Dadaist. Duchamp and Schwitters views overlapped in their Dada thinking. Showing the peculiar state of mind of a Dadaist, both men when asked, “What is art?” replied, “What isn’t?” Yet Duchamp saw himself as an artist, creating antiart; and, Schwitters was an “absolutely, unreserved, 24-hours-a-day PRO art”<sup>3</sup> artist. They were also oceans apart in process, form and location. Each was a part of the *avant-*

*garde* of their time; both were overlooked until relatively recently for their major roles played in directing art to what it is today.

Dadaists in Europe, unlike in New York, engaged in cultural politics. Armed with irony, both word and gesture, they fought. European Dada was a response to the horrors of WWI and those precipitating force that were believed to have caused it, the *bourgeois* entrenched powers. The Berlin Dada was probably the most political in nature of the three Dada centers—Zurich, Berlin and New York. This can be seen in Hannah Hoch’s *Dada Dissects*







*with a Kitchen Knife the Bourgeois Culture of Weimar Germany* (1919-1920), Otto Dix's *Three Prostitutes in the Street* (1925), and in George Grosz's *Metropolis* (1917). These forms of Dada were primarily a manifestation of anger. Yet Dada refuses any pure absolute definition, because it valued an infinite variety of forms, forever changing ["as often as your sheets"<sup>5</sup>].

Born in Hanover, Germany. Schwitters trained at the Dresden Academy where he was an average painter of unexceptional talent. He was introverted and insecure. In 1911, he was rejected from the Berlin Academy of Art.

The turning point from unexceptional to exceptional came hand in hand with Schwitters' friendship with Jean Arp and Raoul Hausmann and his first exhibition at Der Sturm Gallery, Berlin (1919)<sup>11</sup>. "It was Hans Arp, himself a pioneer of collage, who first persuaded Schwitters to abandon his sterile academic techniques.

Schwitters' first known collage, *Hansi*, is strongly reminiscent of Arp's work, and soon afterwards he began making assemblages from scraps of refuse."<sup>9</sup> As Schwitters' works became known, he seemed to thrive on the controversy they brought—bringing him somewhat out of his introversion, though still somewhat of his own man and a loner.

Unlike the bulk of European Dadaists, Kurt Schwitters, "felt political expression to be totally alien to art."<sup>8</sup> Instead of being pessimistic like most of European Dadaists, he was optimistic. Schwitters brought to life *Merz* which was his own type of Dada—where Dada was miserable; *Merz* was happy. *Merz* was a made-up term extracted from a newspaper clipping of the word *Kommerz* that he had included in one of his early collages. He was a master of collage. Most European Dada collage was derived from photographic elements and were politically relevant, but Schwitters brought together art and life in his visual collages through combining the medium of paint with discarded

rubbish [found in the streets] and abstraction. In his collages and assemblages, which he referred to as Merz, he created delicate balances between content and form not in any way political.

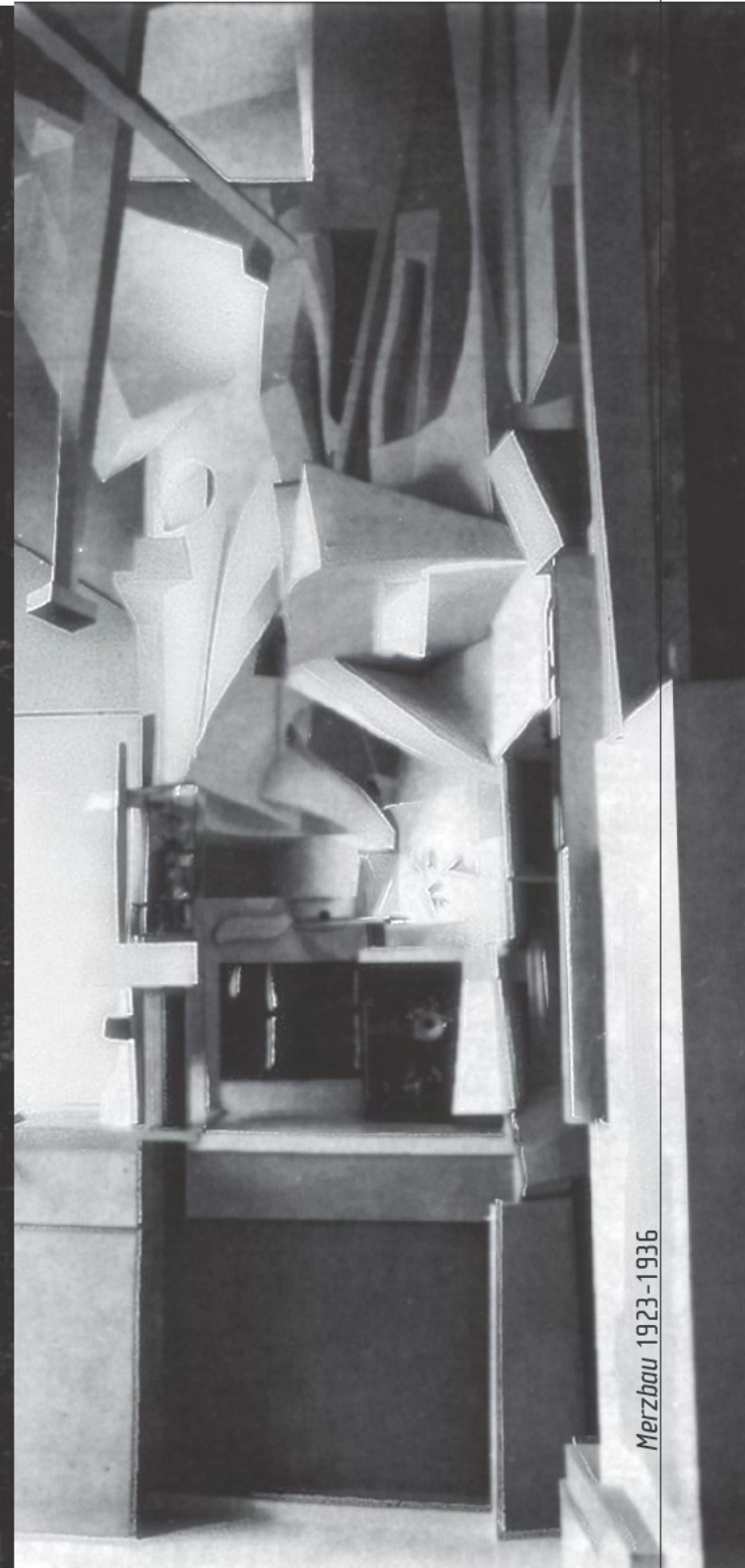
“Every combination of lines, colors, forms has a definite expression...”

Any desire to reproduce natural forms limits one's force and consistency in working out an expression. I abandoned all reproduction of natural elements and painted only with pictorial elements. These are my abstractions. I adjusted the elements of the picture to one another...yet not for the purpose of reproduction nature but with a view to expression...The medium is as unimportant as I myself. Essential is only the forming. Because the medium is unimportant, I take any material whatsoever if the picture demands it.”<sup>10</sup>

His visual works progressed from two-dimensional paintings to collages, to assemblages, to three-dimensional progressive environments. In addition to his retinal and tactile collages, “he undertook

radical experiments in such fields as drama, poetry (*Anna Blumé*), cabaret, typography (*Merz* magazine), multimedia art, body painting, music, photography, and architecture (environments).”<sup>9</sup> His

environments were quite extraordinary; his first spanned eight rooms within his home in Hanover. It was built over a thirteen-year period (1923–1936) and was known as *Merzbau*. The *Merzbau*'s original name was *Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. The *Merzbau* was changing constantly. In the many nooks and grottoes in the structure, Schwitters, placed materials and objects he had collected, many of sentimental value given him by colleagues. The structure appeared to be somewhat Cubistic and Gothic. The piece was destroyed during an allied bombing in WWII. Schwitters was forced to move



Merzbau 1923–1936



wird gesorgt  
Verstand

several times due to political pressures and war, in two subsequent locations *Merzbaus* were built, one in Norway (1937), one in England (*Merzbarn* 1947).

Schwitters' Merz creations (collage and environments) seemed influenced by the men who passed through the Bauhaus. There is a strong correlation between his art and Walter Gropius words from the first Bauhaus manifesto (1919). "Together let us desire,

conceive and create the new structure  
of the future, which will embrace  
architecture and sculpture and painting  
in one unity,

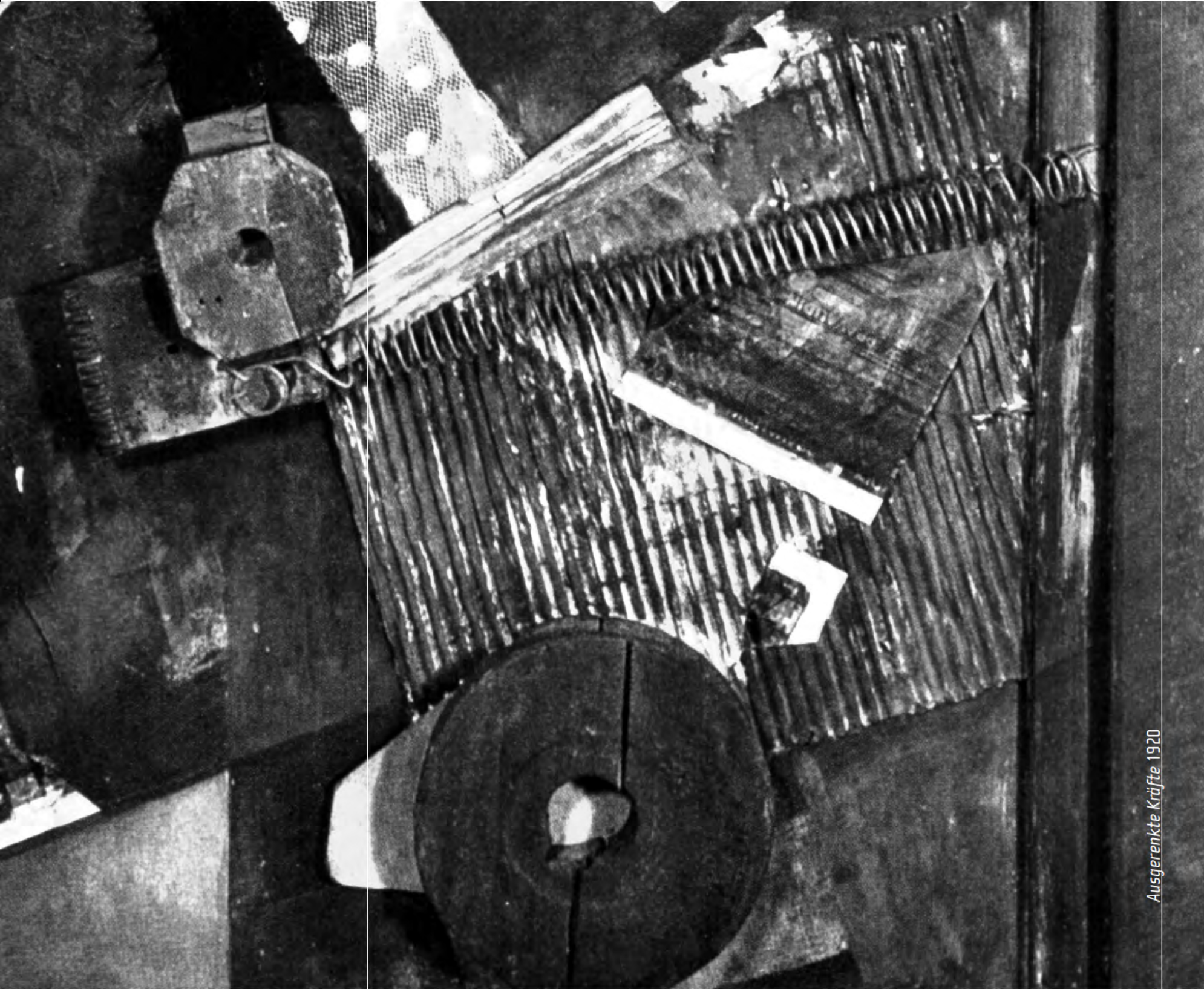
and which will one day rise toward heaven ...

like the crystal symbol of a new faith."

| TOUCHED PIECE RULE | Ultimately, I have told you nothing you didn't already know and even some things that are probably erroneous. But the bit of mental lubri-cant dispensed in class and the library are functioning as a solvent on the frozen gears of my mind and with ponderously slow certainty, they have just begun to move.

| END GAME |





## WORKS CITED

- <sup>1</sup> FT Marinetti, Futurist Manifesto (Paris: LeFigaro, February 1909).
- <sup>2</sup> Francis M. Naumann, New York Dada 1915-23. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994).
- <sup>3</sup> Calvin Tompkins, The World of Marcel Duchamp. (New York: Time Inc., 1966).
- <sup>4</sup> Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp & Co. (Paris: Bayard Presse SA, 1997).
- <sup>5</sup> David Brauer, Art History Professor, University of Houston, ARTH6394 Art Between The Wars: 1918-1940 lecture series. (Texas, October 6, 2003).
- <sup>6</sup> Calvin Tompkins, Duchamp, A Biography. Marcel Duchamp, Note of 1913. (Henry Holt and & Co., 1996).
- <sup>7</sup> Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," (Letter to The Blind Man, May 1917).
- <sup>8</sup> Stephen C Foster, Ed. Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada. (New York: GK Hall & Co., 1996).
- <sup>9</sup> Gwendolen F Webster, Kurt Merz Schwitters: A Biographical Study. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).
- <sup>10</sup> Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).
- <sup>11</sup> Works in the Collection: Kurt Schwitters. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, [www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist\\_bio\\_144.html](http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_144.html), October 2003)

## SIDENOTES

### | INFINITE DO LOOP |

Where a piece of program is executed repeatedly with no hope of stopping. This is nearly always because of a bug, e.g. if the condition for exiting the loop is wrong, though it may be intentional if the program is controlling an embedded system which is supposed to run continuously until it is turned off. The programmer may also intend the program to run until interrupted by the user. An infinite do loop may also be used as a last-resort error handler when no other action is appropriate. This is used in some operating system kernels following a panic.

A program executing an infinite loop is said to spin or buzz forever and goes catatonic.

Denis Howe *The Free On-line Dictionary of Computing* 1993-2003. <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=infinite%20loop>, October 2003)

### TYPEFACES

TarzanaNarrow

11pt/20pt leading

Zuzana Licko. Emigre, 1998

ChollaSans

48pt light/30pt leading

Sibylle Hagmann. Emigre, 1999.

SIDENOTES | Glossary of Chess Terminology |  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess\\_terminology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess_terminology)

| BLINDFOLD |

An expert player plays one or more opponents without sight of the board.

| BLITZ |

A fast game of chess usually clocked in 5 or 10 minutes.

| CENTER |

The four squares in the middle of the board.

| CHEAPO |

A clever tactical combination or trap usually made by a losing side to hold a draw or even win.

| DEVELOPMENT |

The process of moving pieces from their original squares to positions where they can better aid the player's plans.

| EN PRISE |

Said of a piece that can be captured.

| ENDGAME |

Also called "ending," it is the third and final phase of the game, in which each player has relatively few pieces remaining. The promotion of pawns is a common goal in the endgame.

| EXCHANGE |

The advantage of a Rook for a Bishop or Knight.

| FISH |

A bad chess player.

| FORK |

A tactical concept when a Knight attacks two or more opponent pieces at once. grand-master - An outstanding chess player. A title awarded by FIDE.

| GAMBIT |

A pawn sacrifice in the opening.

| J'ADOUBE |

A notice to one's opponent that one is about to adjust the position of a piece on its square with no intention to move the piece to another square.

| MATERIAL |

The chess pieces. The player whose remaining pieces are of greater value is said to have a "material advantage."

| MIDDLEGAME |

The second phase of the game, in which development of the pieces is complete or nearly complete and many pieces are captured or traded as the players pursue their plans.

| PATZER |

A bad chess player.

| PIN |

A tactical concept when a piece cannot or should not move because it shields another piece from capture. The shielding piece is said to be pinned to the other piece.

| POSITION |

The arrangement of chess pieces. The player whose pieces have better placement is said to have a "positional advantage."

| SAC |

A sacrifice of material for anticipated advantage.

| SEALED MOVE |

A move placed in an envelope when a game is adjourned.

| SIMUL |

When one person plays chess with two or more opponents at the same time.

| TEMPO |

A turn at move.

| WOODPUSHER |

A bad chess player.

| ZUGZWANG |

The compulsion to move. When a player would rather maintain the current position, but must move in turn.