

SCHOLASTIC

# ART

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## Working With Ideas

# Marcel Duchamp

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 SCHOLASTIC



**COVER:** Marcel Duchamp (1887-1985). *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919. Rectified ready-made: pencil on a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, 7 3/4" x 4 3/4". Philadelphia Museum of Art; Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

# SCHOLASTIC ART

Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic Inc., 1895-1982

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# The Shock Art of Marcel Duc



"I am interested in ideas – not merely in visual products."

*Duchamp*

Recently, you received a *Scholastic Art* magazine featuring Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci. On the cover was Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, probably the

most famous work of art ever created. *Mona Lisa* appears again on this cover. But now she wears a mustache and beard. This month's featured artist's name appears upside down. What is going on?

This work was created by French artist Marcel Duchamp, one of the most important figures in 20th-century art. For 17 years, Duchamp produced one outrageous work after another. Then he virtually stopped making art, spending the last half of his life playing chess. Duchamp created art for a relatively short period of time. Yet his approach was so original that artists working today are still catching up to his radical ideas. Duchamp questioned the entire nature of art. In doing so, he changed its direction.

For such a controversial artist,

Duchamp's beginnings were very traditional. He was born in 1887, in northern France. His father was the mayor of his small town. At 17, the artist went to Paris where he took some art classes. During this time, new technological discoveries were changing the way artists saw the world. Photography was having a major effect on their art. Inspired by movies and motion photography, Duchamp tried adding action and movement to his paintings. He overlapped and repeated angular forms to create the effect of a moving figure (right). This painting doesn't look unusual now, but at the beginning of the century, it shocked people on both sides of the Atlantic.

Duchamp was in Paris when he first showed this work called *Nude Descending a Staircase*. He was asked to take it down at once. When it was shown a year later in New York City, it created a sensation. People were enraged that they couldn't find the figure. And even if they could, no human figure looks like that. Art, they said, must be beautiful, uplifting, and recognizable. Critics compared the painting to "an explosion in a shingle factory," and a "pile of golf clubs."

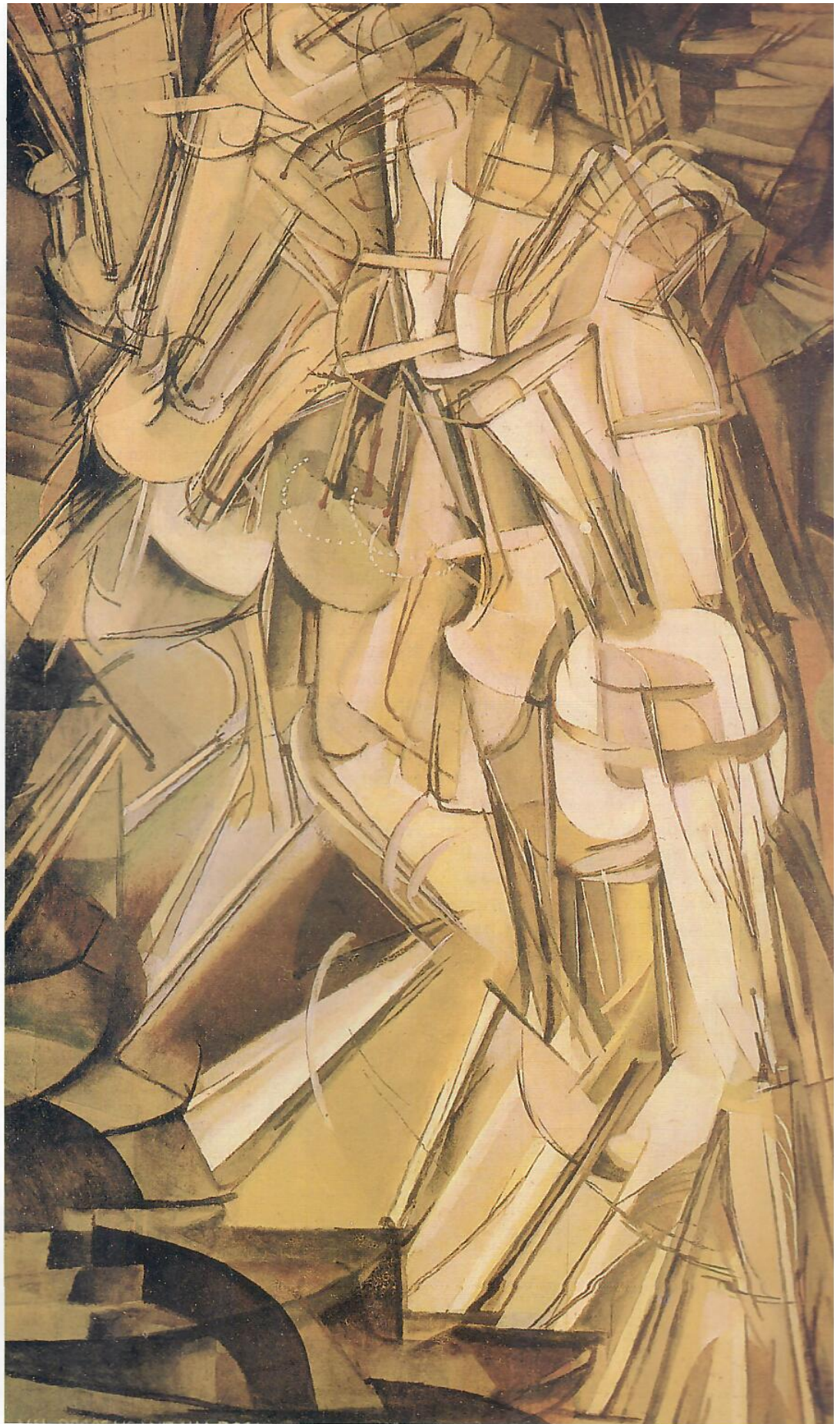
But a few people did appreciate the

# ing hamp

new kind of art. Today, this work is considered a symbol of modern art. When Duchamp came to the U.S. in 1915, he was welcomed as a celebrity. The painter of the scandalous nude was invited everywhere. He was offered huge amounts of money for his next painting. But Duchamp never painted again. He had many new ideas he wanted to get started on.

**This painting (right) created a sensation in 1913. The photo of Duchamp (below) reflects the painting's style.**

RIGHT: *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912. 58" x 35". Philadelphia Museum of Art; Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.  
BELOW: *Duchamp Descending a Staircase*, 1952. *Life* magazine. Photo, Elliot Elisofon.



# Duchamp's **Bride Minus Groom**

**W**hat do you make of the construction on the opposite page? Nine feet tall, it is made of foil, wire, and particles of dust pressed between plates of glass. Does it look like anything at all? How could this possibly be one of the great masterpieces of 20th-century art?

This piece, called *The Large Glass*, looks hard to understand. And that's exactly what Duchamp wanted. It seems to be a design for a complicated machine. To construct *The Large Glass*, Duchamp has parodied the language of science. The work's tubes, wheels, wires, and gears seem logical until the viewer finally realizes they have no function or reason for being. This mysterious construction may have no practical purpose, but it says a great deal about modern society. Its message is as mournful as a country ballad, as cynical and rebellious as a contemporary rap piece.

The work's official title is *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*. It is Duchamp's cynical commentary on the relationship between

men and women. The top panel contains the "bride," her veil streaming out behind her. She is completely isolated from the "figures" in the bottom panel. These "bachelors," directly below the bride, are represented by empty jackets. The suits symbolize men who "hide behind the uniforms of their masculine professions." The upper and lower panels are permanently separated. The bachelors endlessly operate a complex, nonfunctional treadmill-like device. In this work, male and female are reduced to dysfunctional pieces of plumbing.

*The Large Glass* is a dry and cynical version of a very emotional subject. The work reflects the pessimism and rebellious spirit that ran through much of the art created in the 1920s. The First World War (1914-18) had been the worst war in history; the first conflict in which modern weapons of destruction were used. Many artists felt the war made no sense. So they used a nonsense word—*Dada*—to name their art. *Dada* was deliberately anti-art and anti-sense; it was intended to shock and scandalize people. And Duchamp's *The Large Glass* was the most outrageous work of all.



Duchamp (in dark shirt) watches as *The Large Glass* is installed.

Duchamp began this construction in 1915, and spent the next nine years building it. In 1923, he declared the work "officially unfinished." But when one of the glass plates was accidentally smashed, Duchamp was delighted. His masterwork had been completed "by chance."

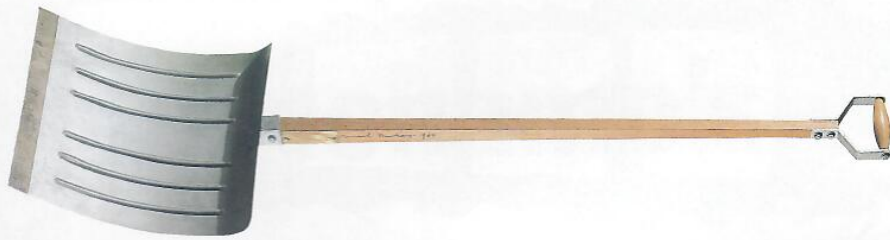
Duchamp's mysterious work, *The Large Glass* (right and above) makes fun of science, technology, society, modern art, and the relationship between men and women.

Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* or *The Large Glass*, 1915-23. Oil, varnish, lead wire, and dust on two glass plates mounted with aluminum, wood, and steel frames, 109 1/4" x 69 1/8". Philadelphia Museum of Art; Bequest of Katherine S. Drier.

'Can one make art which is not a work of art?'

*Duchamp*





**To Marcel Duchamp, an ordinary snow shovel was a work of art.**

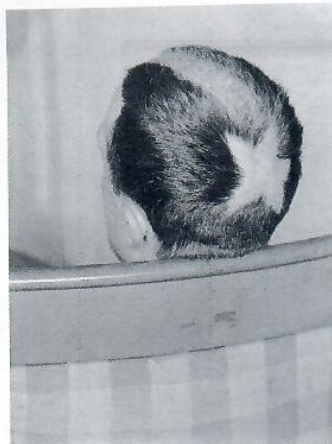
*In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1915. Readymade: snow shovel. Yale University Art Gallery.

**The artist's unusual haircut (right) was also art.**

*Tonsure*, 1921. Photo by Man Ray.

**A bicycle wheel on top of a stool became a sculpture.**

*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913. 1964. 50" high. Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington.



One afternoon in 1912, Marcel Duchamp went to an airplane show. After looking at the planes, he turned to his friends and said, "Painting is all washed up. Who could possibly ever create anything better than that propeller over there?" A year later, the artist mounted a bicycle wheel on a stool (top, center). He would spin it with his hand while he worked. He said, "I enjoy looking

at it, just as I enjoy looking at flames in a fireplace." This item would soon change the history of modern art.

At the beginning of this century, artists were doing all types of art that only a few people understood. The *Cubists* were reducing their subjects to rectangular shapes. The *Futurists* wanted to capture the feeling of movement. The *Abstractionists* worked with pure lines, colors, and shapes, and very few people had any idea what they were trying to do. But whatever their subjects, all these new artists were still creating sculptures, drawings, or paintings. It never occurred to them to make any other form of art. Marcel Duchamp changed all that.

Duchamp felt that the *idea* behind an object was more important than the way

it looked. The act of creation was what counted, not the creator. He also felt that art had become very limited. He wanted to revitalize it by opening it up. In the winter of 1916, while living in New York City, the artist bought a snow shovel (top). He signed and dated the shovel, then put it in a show calling it a "readymade." *Bicycle Wheel* (top, center) became an "assisted readymade."

Naturally, many people were furious. They felt the artist was mocking them, which in a way, he was. But that was nothing compared with the reaction to his next piece, *Fountain*. This was the title of a urinal Duchamp sent to a show, signing it "R. Mutt" (it was refused).

Duchamp also began signing his works *Rose Sélavy* (eh-roze say-la-VEE). This name is pronounced in the same way as the French phrase *Eros—C'est la vie*, which means "Eros [love] is life." Duchamp felt that "creativity has no gender." So *Rose* (top, right) became another aspect of the artist's personality.

One of Duchamp's best known visual jokes is the ready-made featured on our cover. In this work, Duchamp satirizes the snobbery of the art world of his time

**"The world is already so full of interesting and artistic objects. Why should artists add to them."**

*Duchamp*

# okes

**Duchamp signed some of his works as a woman (left) named Rose Sélavy.**

Man Ray (1890-1970). *Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*, c. 1920. Private collection.

by drawing a moustache and beard on a copy of one of the world's greatest artistic masterpieces. He called this work a "rectified readymade," indicating that he felt the original *Mona Lisa* needed correcting.

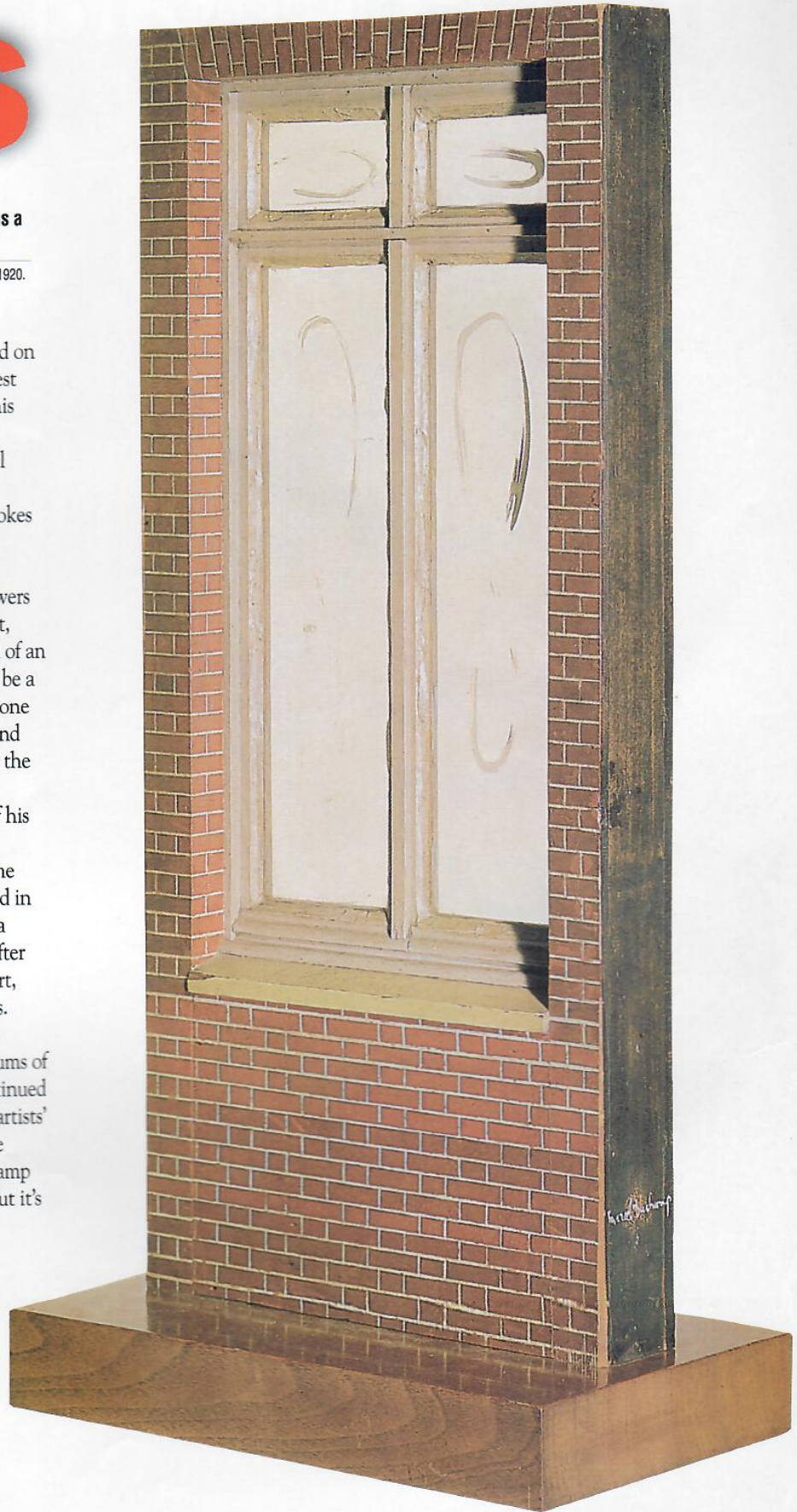
Duchamp's readymades were jokes on the art world. But the entire concept brought up a number of questions that can still puzzle viewers and critics. Can objects be works of art, even if they are not made by the hand of an artist? If one manufactured object can be a work of art, why can't they all be? No one had ever asked these things before. And these kinds of questions are the key to the art of Marcel Duchamp.

After 1915, the artist spent most of his time in New York City, eventually becoming a U.S. citizen. He made some constructions (right). And he appeared in photographs depicting his own life as a work of art (opposite page, far left). After 1923 he practically stopped creating art, devoting his time to tournament chess.

In the 1930s Duchamp made a few "suitcases" (pages 8-9), portable museums of his major works in miniature. He continued to organize shows, take part in young artists' performance pieces, and serve as a role model for generations of artists. Duchamp died in 1968. His tombstone reads, "But it's always other people who die."

**Sometimes Duchamp's joke was in his title. The name of this construction refers to a battle won by French general Napoleon. The window's small size suggests Duchamp's opinion of war and Napoleon.**

*The Brawl at Austerlitz*, 1921. Oil on wood and glass, 24 3/4" high. Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.



# Marcel Duchamp's M

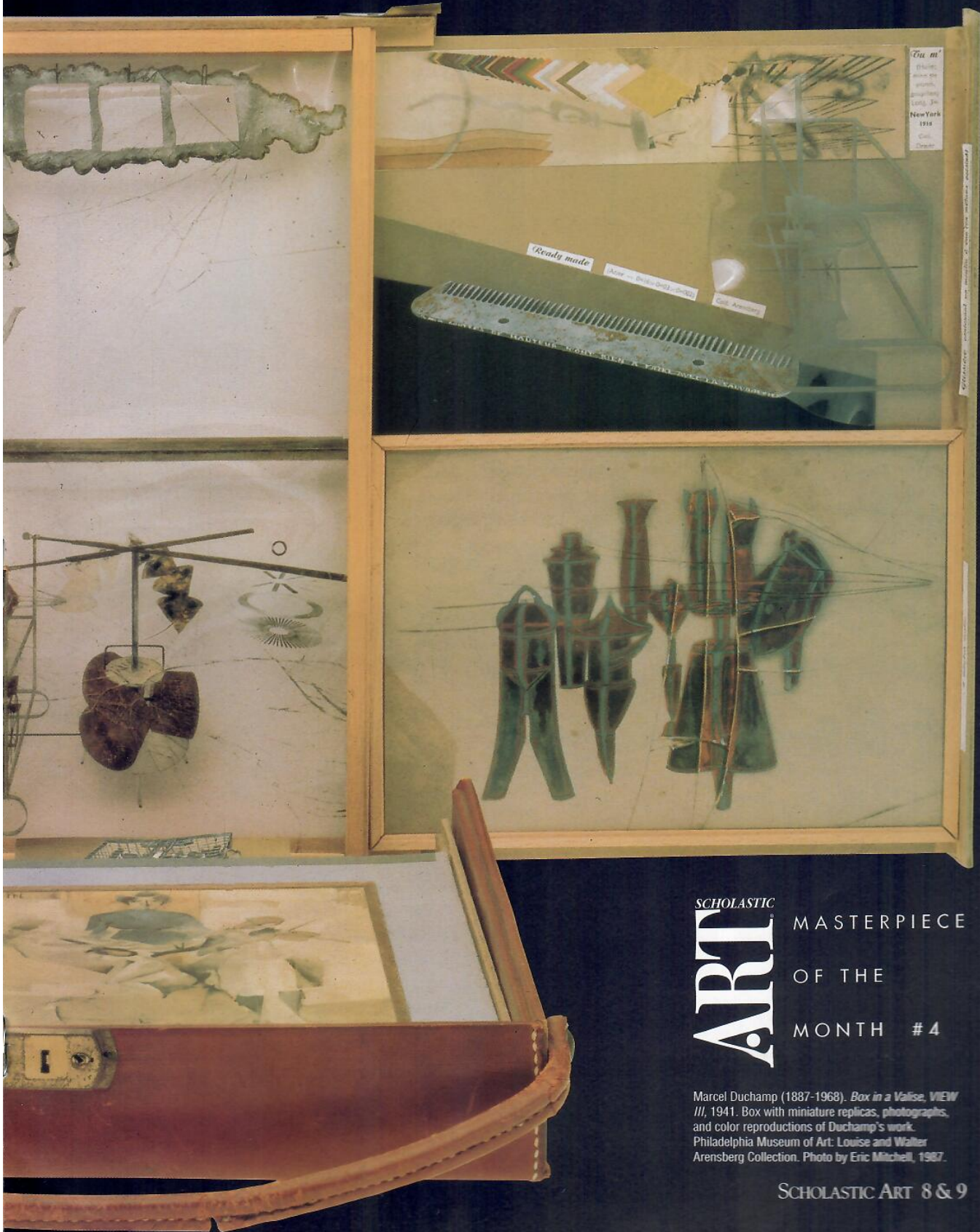


"I want the art world to  
throw off its chains and  
travel with me on an  
imaginative adventure."

*Duchamp*



# useum in a Suitcase



SCHOLASTIC

ART

MASTERPIECE

OF THE

MONTH # 4

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). *Box in a Valise, VIEW III*, 1941. Box with miniature replicas, photographs, and color reproductions of Duchamp's work. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. Photo by Eric Mitchell, 1987.

SCHOLASTIC ART 8 & 9

# Art That Unnerves

These contemporary artists want to shock you into seeing in new ways.

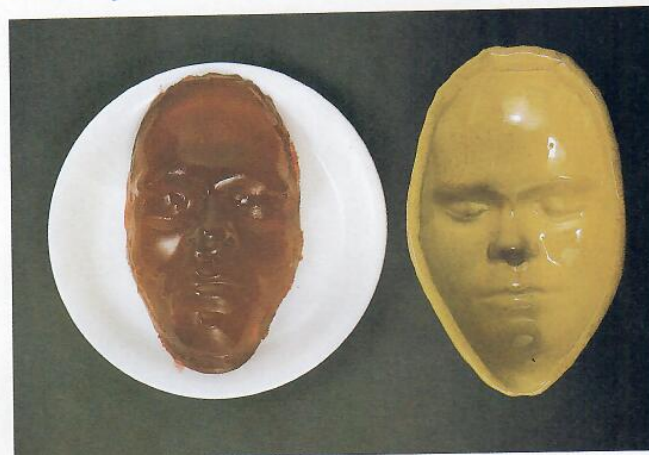
## A Tasteful Self-Portrait

In 1916, Marcel Duchamp outraged viewers by crossing the line between art and life. Fifty years later, some young American artists did the same thing.

During the 1960s, critics were horrified when artists began depicting images from popular products and calling their creations art. One of these “Pop” artists, Claes Oldenburg, produced sculptures based on ordinary objects. He made huge soft electric plugs, toilets, hamburgers. Their size and the fact that these solid and necessary objects had become limp and useless made people think of them differently.

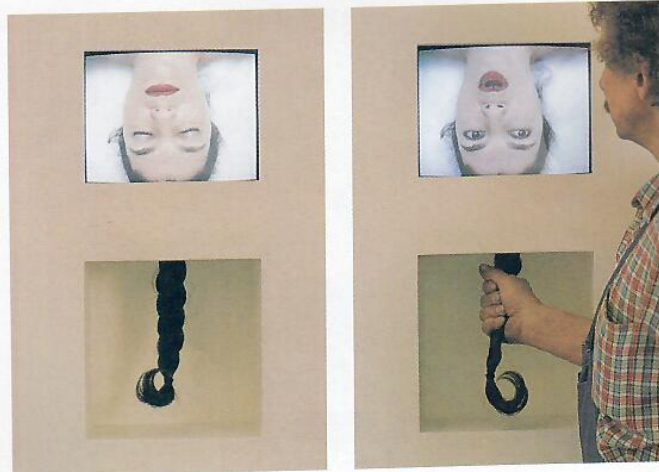
Works of art were supposed to be unique. So Oldenburg produced what he

called multiples. He would make a mold, then use it to cast a number of identical small sculptures. From a mold of his own face the artist turned out self-portraits (above) in many flavors of Jell-O. Oldenburg called his Jell-O faces “ephemeral” (eff-FEM-er-al) multiples because they didn’t last. He once exhibited an old red one; he liked the green mold pattern growing on it.



“What I see is not the object, but myself in it.”  
— Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929). Gelatin cast from Life Mask, 1966. 4' x 10' x 3 1/2' mold, collection of the artist.



“I never script any of my performances. I have an idea and I just hope for the best.” — Mona Hatoum

Mona Hatoum (b. 1952). *Pull*, 1995. Two-hour video performance. Künstlerwerk, Munich.

## A Touching Performance

Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian artist who works in London, communicates her ideas by addressing all the senses of her viewers. She makes videos, installations, and performance art. In many of her pieces she uses aspects of her own body. Like Duchamp, Hatoum presents situations that produce disturbing emotions, forcing the viewer to look at things from a new perspective.

In Hatoum’s performance piece, *Pull* (left), the viewer was invited to pull a length of braided hair hanging inside a niche in the wall below a TV monitor. The artist’s face on the screen then showed a look of pain or discomfort.


Viewers were so used to media images that it took them a while to realize that the artist herself was behind the wall. They gradually realized that when they yanked Hatoum’s hair, they were responsible for her pain. The TV in front of them was no longer showing secondhand images. Viewers were reminded that although the media make events seem remote, people are still directly connected to the images they see.

## A Disturbing Sight

How would you react if you looked down and saw this object? Would you take it seriously, be shocked, or feel it was a joke? Where is the rest of this person? Is his body on the other side of the wall? If so, how did it get there? Or, is his leg the only part of him that's left?

This work would be even more disturbing if you found it any place other than in a museum. In sculptures like this, American artist Robert Gober takes Duchamp's idea of the "readymade" one step further. Gober doesn't use the real object. He painstakingly crafts an elaborate new object that is as lifelike as his original subject. He takes everyday items and remakes them down to the smallest detail. He then arranges and changes them in small but very disturbing ways.

Obviously, this is not a real foot. The real human hairs "growing" on it are the artist's; each one put in by hand. The pant leg has been pulled up, suggesting that something sudden and unexpected has happened. The leg projects out from the wall, so this piece is impossible to ignore. By controlling the viewer's point of view the artist gives a glimpse into an uneasy, possibly sinister, world.



**"Most of my sculptures are memories remade and filtered through my current experiences."  
— Robert Gober**

Robert Gober (b. 1954),  
*Untitled*, Museum of Modern Art,  
Dannheiser Collection.



## Working With Ideas

Eighteen-year-old Lauren McIntyre comes from a family of artists. Her father is a freelance illustrator. Her sister studies at Cooper Union in New York City, while her mother creates college print materials.

Currently a senior, Lauren is focusing on sculpture at Houston's High School for Performing and Visual Arts. She has no doubt she'll devote her life to art. When she's not at school, her free time is spent working at a museum gift shop or creating art. "Art is my passion," Lauren says. "I can't see myself doing anything else."

### When did you start making art?

I've been taking art classes ever since I can remember. It's so much a part of my life that sometimes I feel art makes me instead of me making my art, which is not always a healthy thing. What I mean is that some artists feel so much, they become their art. A lot of my art comes from my frustrations about things. It's how I bridge the gap between myself and the world around me.

### How did you come to do this award-winning piece (right)?

I did it last year in class. We had to create a piece on a subject we felt

passionate about. The work had to incorporate three elements. We had to visually communicate what our passion was. We also had to include a rendered drawing, and some kind of self-portrait.

I'm passionate about Eastern philosophy and I'm fascinated by Indian women. These women have such a restrained beauty, but are repressed culturally. Indian women live in a very paternalistic society. I wanted to capture all that in this piece.

### What did you want this piece to convey to the viewer?

I wanted the viewer to realize that this

**“A lot of my art comes from my frustration about things. It’s how I bridge the gap between myself and the world around me.”**

work is a self-portrait. The face of the Indian woman in the center and my face should be seen as one. All the pictures are of me except for the one in the center, a photo of an Indian woman. I thought this woman’s face and eyes were particularly beautiful. The mark on the forehead is the third eye. She was perfect for what I was trying to capture—the aesthetic beauty of the Indian culture. I wanted our faces to seem to blend together.

**How did you create this piece?**

I took a Polaroid self-portrait. I made copies and cut them up. Then I reassembled them to make nine photographic collages of my face. I glued them down, and drew on top with oil pastel. I drew third eyes to give the piece an Eastern feeling. I used bright hues to capture the colorful qualities of Indian women. Then I used a sewing machine to seal the photo collages between two sheets of heavy vinyl.

**What did you do after that?**

I used white silk from a sari [Indian dress] that I actually wore for a while last year. I cut the silk and put it over the images. Then I cut out and removed a square over the center photo of my face. I made a copy of the Indian woman’s face to the same size as my face. I then got the copy turned into a clear transparency. I sewed the transparency to the silk around it. The Indian woman’s face now partially covered mine. I sewed the silk to the top of the piece, so it acted like a veil. When you see the work at a distance (below, left) the veil is down. When you’re close (below, right), you can lift the veil.

**How long did it take to create this piece?**

I actually did it the night before it was due. A wave of energy kind of carried me through it. It was a very intuitive process that took about five hours. Most of my work isn’t like that, especially the sculpture. It’s usually very preplanned.

**What are you working on now?**

Right now I’m doing body casts and fragments and assembling some of them into large figure sculptures. These could eventually be combined into an installation piece.

**What kind of art career do you see for yourself at this point?**

I want to be a fine artist; I’d like to get a graduate degree in fine arts. I love sculpture. It’s where I’m headed. The sculptures I’ve seen that have excited me most are pieces featuring the female form. That’s what I’m into now. Most of the work I did last year was connected to Eastern philosophy. Now I’m more involved in women’s studies. These themes are reflected in my current work. I’d like to do art full-time. But if I can’t, I’d like to support myself by teaching art.

**Do you have any advice for aspiring artists like yourself?**

Do what you feel in your heart. Don’t make art if you don’t want to. But if you do, then make it for yourself. If you want to make it for other people, that’s good. But don’t let other people persuade you to create art you’re not passionate about.

*We select our Artist of the Month from among thousands of young art-award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to The Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books.*

**In the work shown below, the artist used veils and overlapping faces to express the concept of empathy.**





“I consider the viewer just as important as the maker.”

*Duckham*

## Materials

- Variety of mechanical and organic objects
- Old art-history and art books (which can be cut up)
- Adhering materials: hot glue gun, Elmer's Glue-All, thin wire, Quick Gel Super Glue
- Pliers, tweezers, small nails
- Hammer
- Screw driver
- Electric drill
- Wire cutters
- Saber saw
- X-Acto knife
- Drill
- Paper towels

## Step 1

Three or four weeks before beginning assignment, bring in a number of small mechanical and natural objects. Look for old art books or magazines that can be cut up. Figure a way to sort, categorize,

label, and store (files, bins, shoe boxes, buckets, ZipLoc bags, shopping bags). Make sure you return objects to proper containers while working on assignment.

## Step 2

Think about the ideas you've seen in this issue—ordinary things seen in a different way. Look at objects around your house, films, TV shows, newspapers, songs, school events that give you ideas. You may come up with a concept by looking through objects brought in. Your final result should be visually interesting. But your concept is the most important aspect of this project. The most effective pieces may be the simplest. But they often require the most thought.

## Step 3

With your idea in mind, choose one, or several (no more than four) objects. If you choose one as a “readymade,” the idea must be very strong for the piece to be “art.” Decide how you'll combine your objects— glue, wire, screws, nails, tape? Think about surface and texture. Will you sand or paint your piece?

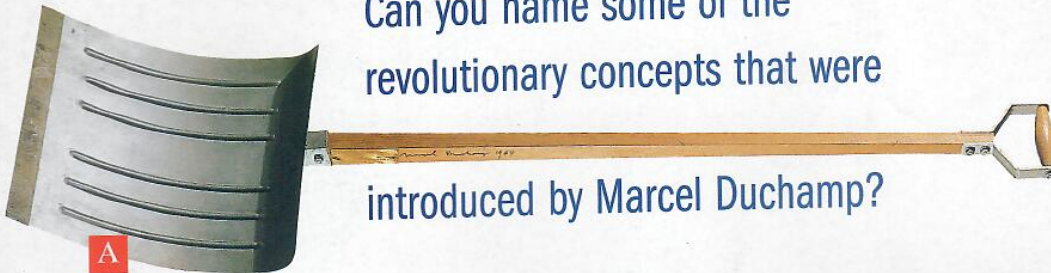
Before assembling, be prepared to explain verbally or in writing the concept behind your piece. Presentation is important. Your piece can be on a base, freestanding, in a frame. It might hang free from the wall or ceiling.

## Some Solutions

Will you take one object and **alter** it to make a broader statement? (What larger concept might be suggested by a toy plastic airplane that has been burned?) Perhaps you'll **change the surface** of an object. (What questions come up about the contrast in **scale** between a lightbulb and the moon and stars?) Will you **combine** several objects in a surprising or sinister way? (What does a large eye on fake white fur in a cage express about nature, captivity, or the environment?) Can the way two objects are combined suggest that one is **transforming** itself into another? (Does a shell on a pedestal look like a strange prehistoric animal?) How does changing the **texture** of an object completely change its meaning? (Does a Barbielike doll covered in tacks give you a feeling of comfort?)

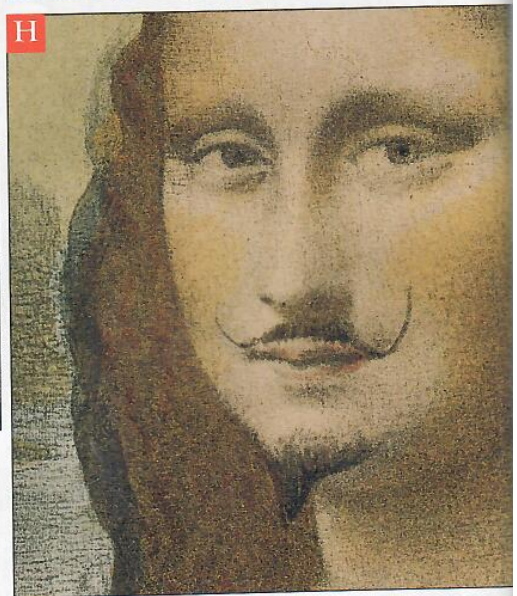
# Ideas that **Changed** Art

Can you name some of the revolutionary concepts that were introduced by Marcel Duchamp?



Today, artists work in every medium. And they depict just about any subject they want to. At the beginning of the 20th century, the rules of art were more rigid. The radical and highly original ideas introduced by Marcel Duchamp changed the way today's artists see the world. By looking at the visuals shown on this page, can you identify some of Duchamp's most important artistic breakthroughs?

Beside each of the descriptions below, write the letter of the visual that corresponds.



- \_\_\_ 1. A construction
- \_\_\_ 2. Example of art that makes no sense
- \_\_\_ 3. Example of use of accidents
- \_\_\_ 4. Example of the artist's life as art
- \_\_\_ 5. A readymade
- \_\_\_ 6. Example of art influenced by Duchamp
- \_\_\_ 7. Example of creativity having no gender
- \_\_\_ 8. An assisted readymade
- \_\_\_ 9. Example of art that shocked people
- \_\_\_ 10. A rectified readymade



# Creating Art That **Startles**

**M**arcel Duchamp liked to create art that shocked people. He didn't mind if people were outraged, or if they hated his works. Just as long as they didn't ignore them. By disturbing his viewers or making them laugh, Duchamp forced them to think about the ideas behind his art.

Duchamp often used very simple objects to convey his concepts. And the effects he obtained were usually sinister and satiric. In this workshop, you'll express an idea, belief, or feeling through your imaginative presentation of just a few objects.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison (IL) High School. Assisted by Tina M. Bastiani, Northern Illinois University.  
Photos by Larry Gregory

