

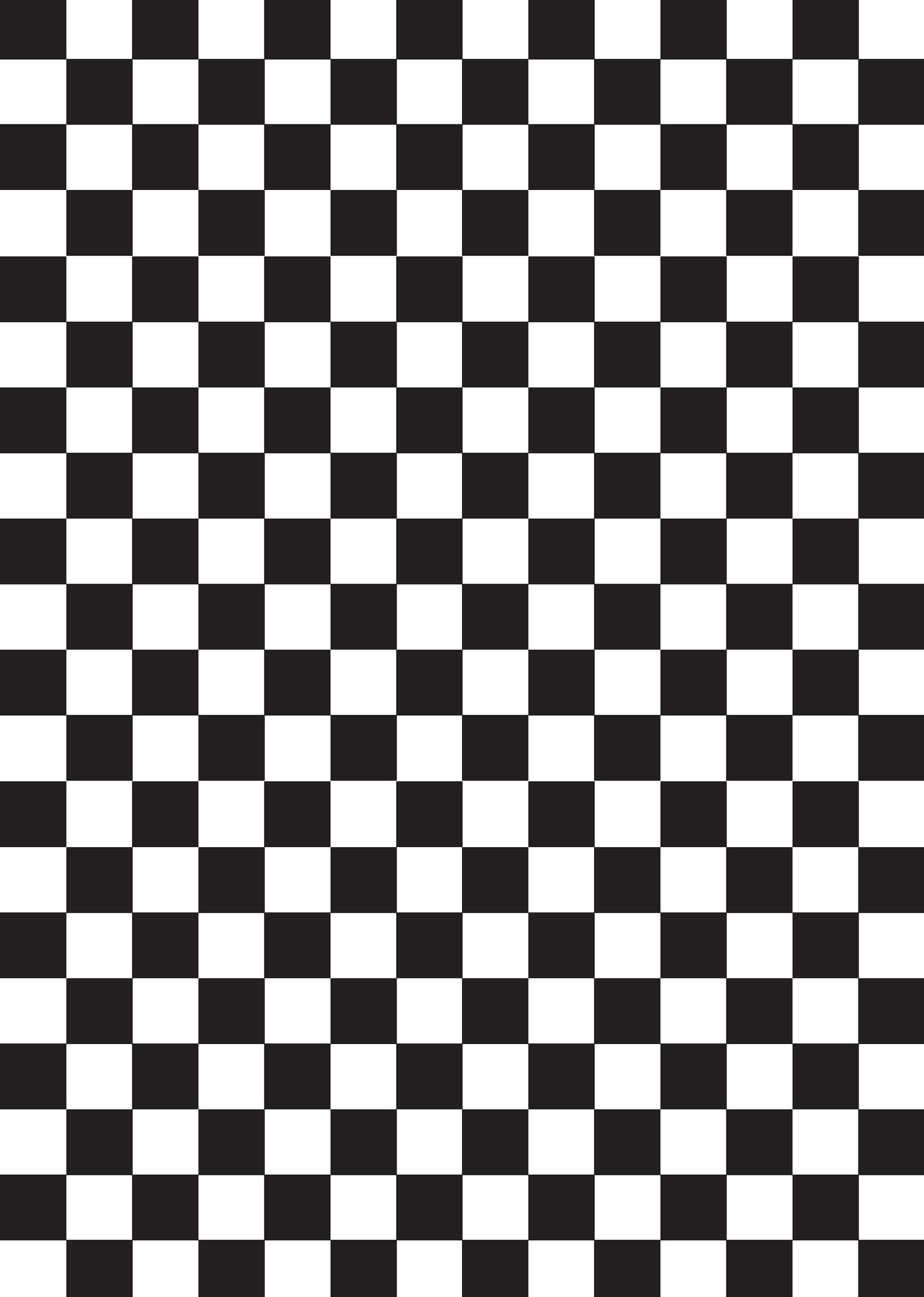
HERE & NOW 18

Besides, it is always the others who die



Fifty years since the death of Marcel Duchamp 1968-2018
Julie Dowling | Alex Spremberg | Perdita Phillips | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | Carly Lynch | Peter & Molly
Curated by Anna Louise Richardson

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY | 1 SEPTEMBER - 8 DECEMBER 2018



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HERE&NOW18: Besides, it is always the others who die is about Marcel Duchamp, the grandmaster of art¹, and his relevance to the practice of Dr Perdita Phillips, Dr Alex Spremberg, Carly Lynch, Peter & Molly, Julie Dowling, and Bjoern Rainer-Adamson. Presented at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at The University of Western Australia, the exhibition showcases a private collection of archival catalogues, prints and ephemera from Marcel Duchamp and items from the State Records Office of Western Australia in tandem with newly commissioned works from these Western Australian artists. It is also about my relationship to these artists and my interrogation of Duchamp, the artist, the provocateur, the disruptor, the player of games.

Duchamp is process, he is non-retinal, he is frustrating, he is willfully confusing, he is disruptive. He was in all probability, rampantly sexist. There are many reasons to dislike Duchamp, the man and/or the myth. Yet, he is duality. He holds our attention, he is clever, he anticipates your dislike but doesn't care. He quits art to play chess for 20 years. He is everywhere.

Duchamp is Rose Sélavy, Rose Sélavy is Duchamp.

Peter & Molly are masters of the abject, submerged in glossy high production film and photography. Often featuring in their work, collaborators in life and art, Peter Cheng and Molly Biddle create intimate spectacles of animal, mineral and vegetable melded with the human body. They work with the taboo, the distasteful and the processes of bodily function. They are two yet operate as one being within their work. Their work eats, poops and confesses its sins.

Duchamp doesn't care about the ideal.

Neither does Julie Dowling. Julie is a master of portraiture. Her work is an illustrated, decorative, deeply personal, and intensely powerful depiction of her history and the history of her people. By necessity she operates in parallel worlds and languages, across time and cultures. Julie is a twin. She shares my passion for glitter. Julie holds hands with Julie, Duchamp with Rose Sélavy.

Duchamp repurposed, rectified and recycled.

Bjoern Rainer-Adamson is a master of the machine. His work, once readymade, is destroyed with new alliances and relationships formed between the constituent parts, generating something new, mesmerising, without task. Bjoern thinks Duchamp's *Underwood* (1916) is excellent. What being lives beneath crunching hammers and numbers, what manifesto is produced?

Duchamp has endless patience, yet never finishes anything.

Completion only arrives when something breaks, or he dies. Carly Lynch works with archives, purposefully excavating dusty remnants. She is a master of teasing information, records and discarded history apart. If something is deconstructed enough, a new narrative can emerge, dysfunctional, but infinitely more poetic. Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (1915-1923) is poetic, but broken – literally and morally. Carly's work wants to smash the glass properly.

Duchamp doesn't care for pretty things. He prefers thought, word games and puns.

Perdita Phillips is a master of termites, of uncovering, of research, of information systems, of destruction. Yet, she also embodies risk, intuition, and the strange. She collects, forages and walks. Her work is a record of her footprint in the environment, constantly seeking answers and eroding the system.

Duchamp is verbified. So Duchamp.

Alex Spremberg is a master of optical rule breaking. Everyday objects, boxes, shopping trolleys and vinyl records emerge from baths of painted, oozing and repetitive layers. He works with geometry, process and repetition. The science of two dimensionality becoming three, the theory of optical illusion. Non-retinal expressed as mesmerising optical brilliance.

Duchamp doesn't provide any clues.

Aside from his parting gift, or horror, depending on your perspective – *Étant donnés* (1946-1966) – he leaves us with the statement *Besides, it is always the others who die*². An epitaph devised by Duchamp himself; a statement that is absolutely true.

Duchamp is not dead, and will never die.

Over 100 years ago Duchamp signed a urinal with a pseudonym, declared it a work of art and created a controversy that altered the course of art. Ironically, the original artwork was never displayed and was lost soon after. There is speculation *Fountain* (1917) was made by a woman³. Most of Duchamp's works today are replicas produced in the 1960s. It doesn't seem to matter.

Marcel Duchamp. 1968. Perth.

Three things intertwined in his legacy. In September an exhibition of his work *Marcel Duchamp: The Mary Sisler collection* arrived at The Western Australian Art Gallery; 7644 people visited⁴.

1968 also saw the Meckering Earthquake, *The Field* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, the first images of Earth from space (courtesy of Apollo 8), the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr, the sale of London Bridge for one million pounds and later re-erection in Arizona, a musical chess match between Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, a leap year, 20 years of communist rule by Mao Tse-tun, the original *Planet of the Apes*, The Nigerian Civil War and the Tet offensive in Vietnam, The Beatles record *Hey Jude*, the Prague Spring, Andy Warhol shot and injured, Boeing 747's maiden flight, The Mexico City Olympics, The Troubles began in Ireland, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and on 2 October the death of Marcel Duchamp⁵.

In recognition of 50 years since his death, *HERE&NOW18: Besides it is always the others who die* elicits new interpretations, affinities and oppositions between Duchamp's work and those of contemporary Western Australian artists in 2018.

*en passant*⁶ Duchamp –

All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives a final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists. – Marcel Duchamp⁷

1 – The highest title a chess player can attain.

2 – Linde, Ulf, 2016, 'Duchamp Out of Time', *Étant donné Marcel Duchamp*, no. 11, 324.

3 – Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.

4 – Visitor numbers for *The Marcel Duchamp: The Mary Sisler collection* exhibition at the Western Australian Art Gallery taken from the file in the State Records Office of Western Australia.

5 – From Wikipedia, where all facts come from.

6 – A French term, literally, in passing – commonly used to describe a rule in chess relating to the advancement of pawns. The rule allows a pawn that has just advanced two squares to be captured by an enemy pawn that is on the same rank and adjacent file. The pawn can be taken as if it had advanced only one square. Capturing *en passant* is possible only on the next move.

7 – A posthumous quote from Marcel Duchamp himself, taken from 'The Writings of Marcel Duchamp' (*Marchand du Sel*) e.d. Michel Sanouille and Elmer Peterson, New York 1973, 139-140.

ON THE LURE OF DUCHAMP

Megan Hyde

'What is "Duchamp"? Is it the name of a great artist? A genius? Or is it the name of a set of conditions? What does "Duchamp" refer to?' – Thierry de Duve¹

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), or 'Dada's Daddy' as *LIFE* magazine proclaimed in 1952, has been cited as an influential source, if not *the* source, for countless developments in the visual arts since the 1960s, including Pop art, Minimalism, Performance art, Conceptual art and Institutional Critique. He has been celebrated for rejecting the artist-as-genius ethos that dominated Western modernism, and subsequently heralded as the sage father of postmodernism².

While his name may not be as recognised outside of art circles as Henri Matisse or Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp occupies a monumental role within the recent history of visual art. Countless books, exhibitions, articles and symposia have analysed Duchamp's work. Devoted scholars – known as 'Duchampians' – have dedicated innumerable hours in an attempt to decipher its coded messages.

Duchamp's mythical status can be attributed to several interrelated factors: to his provocative, inquisitive work and to his enigmatic persona, which, like his work, has kept audiences engaged and guessing. While he was highly regarded amongst a circle of avant-garde artists, Duchamp's importance waned in the 1940s. In the 1960s and 1970s, prominent artists and curators, including John Cage, Brian Finemore, Richard Hamilton, Walter Hopps and Jasper Johns began shedding new light on Duchamp's art. Since then art historians have established his work, especially the *readymades*, as a critical link between modernism and postmodernism.

Born in Blainville-Crevon in Normandy, France, Duchamp moved to Paris at the age of 17 to pursue a career as an artist. In 1915 he relocated to New York; he would shuffle between New York and Paris for the rest of his life. While associated with two influential modern art movements, Dada and Surrealism, Duchamp remained independent throughout. He commonly criticised what he termed 'retinal' art, or art that merely stimulated the eye. In pursuit of art that stimulated the mind, he worked across mediums, including painting, sculpture, photography, film and kinetic art.

Duchamp's most significant contribution to the history of art has been the *readymade*, a mass-produced object that he selected and declared art. The objects are often altered slightly – inscribed with a title or signature or combined in various ways to create a single artwork. In 1917, the story goes that Duchamp anonymously submitted his most famous *readymade*, *Fountain*, to a jury-free exhibition run by the Society of Independent Artists in New York³. *Fountain* consists of a standard urinal, tipped so it sits on its back and signed with the pseudonym 'R. Mutt'. While everyday objects were being incorporated into collage, calling an unaltered object art proved too problematic for the exhibition's organisers, who declared it ineligible for inclusion.

And, of course, *Fountain* is not just any mass-produced object; it unabashedly conjures the genital, sexual and scatological. 'It is indecent!' proclaimed artist George Bellows, one of the organisers⁴. *Fountain* even criticises art, suggesting it is something you urinate on. By discarding traditional signs of an artwork, such as signs of the artist's technical skill, and embracing everyday, manufactured items as worthy of artistic merit, the *readymades* called for a more expansive consideration of art. By deliberately submitting *Fountain* to a jury-free exhibition, Duchamp was challenging the definition of art and the institution of art that controls its borders.

In 1923, after completing his self-proclaimed 'unfinished' work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915-1923), Duchamp purportedly gave up art to pursue a career as a professional chess player. He nevertheless remained connected to art, designing journals, exhibitions and even a miniature retrospective with pint-sized replicas of his work that folded out from a suitcase, almost like a dollhouse for art⁵. Perhaps his most momentous ruse was his final work, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage...* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas...*) (1946-1966), which was unveiled after his death at the Philadelphia Museum of Art to the surprise of many.



Duchamp's elusive approach to identity comes to the fore with his female alter-ego Rose Sélavy. A pun, the name phonetically suggests 'Eros, c'est la vie', or 'Erotic love, that's life', as well as the verb 'arroser', or 'to water'⁶. Duchamp signed the name to numerous artworks and published puns, and introduced Sélavy through a series of photographs created with artist-friend Man Ray. Donning wigs, hats, make-up and jewellery, Duchamp takes on the guise of Sélavy, a seductive and seemingly well-to-do woman who frankly addresses the camera in several photographs and coyly looks to the side in others⁷.

Rose Sélavy deliberately complicates attempts to understand an individual's identity – and Duchamp's identity – as a fixed, stable, comprehensible thing. Sélavy can be seen specifically as a challenge to efforts to discern an artist's identity, especially in relationship to their work. By giving his alter-ego the form of a mysterious woman, Duchamp also speaks to the desire to romanticise artists, which Sélavy appears to both embrace and critique. The photographs also mimic celebrity headshots from the era, and in turn can be seen as a parody of femininity and its clichés.

The relationship between looking and eroticism also appears in *Étant donnés* and *The Large Glass*. While connections between looking and desire run throughout the history of art, *Étant donnés* and *The Large Glass* employ techniques that force viewers to become conscious of their own looking. In *Étant donnés*, Duchamp uses the format of a peep show to give viewers a private glimpse of a life-like naked female body, cropped at the head and knees and sprawled across a landscape. For *The Large Glass*, Duchamp sets the scene of an enigmatic sexual courtship between machine-like 'bachelors' and a 'bride' within glass; viewers cannot see the work without taking in the other elements, and the other people, in the space.

Duchamp's exploration into the act of looking can be seen as an extension of his interest in the role of the audience. For Duchamp, 'the creative act is not performed by the artist alone', as the audience plays a crucial role, interpreting the work and adding to its meaning⁸. Duchamp explored various ways to connect with audiences and to activate their role. He created puns and games for viewers to attempt to decipher, turning the artwork into a type of chess game between himself and the viewer⁹. In the 1920s and 1930s, he experimented with engaging audiences more directly with mechanical works that created optical illusions. Works like *Rotoreliefs* (1935), cardboard discs meant to rotate on a turntable to give the illusion of three-dimensionality, play with viewer's minds, almost like a riddle for the eyes.

In his work, Duchamp turned a critical lens onto the art of his time. The questions the *readymades* provoked regarding the definition of art and the role of the art institution became central to postmodernism. While the *readymades* have largely overshadowed Duchamp's other work, even his less celebrated pieces connect to important themes in post-1960s art, including identity, performance, desire, voyeurism and the role of audiences. How will future generations negotiate Duchamp's legacy? Will certain elements continue to resonate? Will overlooked facets be explored? Will 'Dada's Daddy' be rejected or critiqued?

1 – Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, eds., *The Duchamp Effect* (Cambridge: MIT Press and October, 1996), 224.

2 – *The consistent signalling of Duchamp as the father of postmodernism, a movement that asserts to overthrow modernism's masculinist investment in genius and hierarchies, is a paradox explored in Amelia Jones, Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

3 – This story is being contentiously debated. In April 1917, letters written by both Duchamp and artist Alfred Steiglitz indicated that a woman submitted *Fountain* to the exhibition. Beginning in the 1980s, art historians began examining the possible implications. Were these lies to maintain Duchamp's anonymity? Was the unnamed woman an early incarnation of Rose Sélavy? And if *Fountain* was indeed submitted by a woman was she merely the handler or the actual artist? The latter no doubt having massive implications on Duchamp's legacy, as well as the history of postmodern art.

4 – From artist and friend Beatrice Wood's recollection of the event as published in her autobiography *I Shock Myself* (Ojai, CA: Dillingham Press, 1985) and quoted in Calvin Thomkins, *Duchamp* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 182.

5 – *Box in a Valise* (From or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy) (1941-1942) shows Duchamp's careful consideration of his own legacy. He ensured that friends and patrons Louise and Walter Arensberg and Katherine Dreier were the major collectors of his work, and that both collections would be gifted to the Philadelphia Museum of Art after their deaths. The fact that the majority of his works can be viewed alongside each other in the same institution is a rare feat for an artist.

6 – According to Duchamp, he also selected the name Rose because it 'was the corniest name for a girl at the time' (Thomkins, *Duchamp*, 231).

7 – Germaine Everling, an important supporter of Paris Dada and the current partner of artist and friend Francis Picabia, lent her coats, hats, hands and forearms to the photographs.

8 – From his 1957 talk 'The Creative Act' given in Houston, Texas for a meeting of the American Federation of the Arts. In Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson eds, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt Seller/Marchand du Sel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 140.

9 – His cryptic notes on *The Large Glass*, collected and compiled as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*The Green Box*), can be seen in this light.

Sans colle (detail) | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 31.9 x 23.5 x 2.2cm
altered books
Image courtesy of the artist



MARCEL DUCHAMP

Monique Fong

The original of this text was published in Les Lettres Nouvelles in June 1967. This translation from French to English was commissioned by Tom Picton-Warlow in 2017¹.

Others need mystery to shore up their dominance. One ends up believing that such distance is a requirement. Marcel Duchamp's mystery rests on himself only. He does not refuse and would not resent being interrupted while eating artichokes. He cares about your finances, delights in a ferry-boat crossing, explains a dishwasher with happy precision.

Grinding one's chocolate alone is a curse, but chocolate nevertheless is sweet.
Self-evidence on every floor. *If solid foods bother you, do like me, try liquid ones.* Scrupulous.

From the first time we met, he took me to all sorts of places, discussed all sorts of things. Though I was quite young at the time, we never broached any important question head on. In *Orientalism* later ('Your Tibetan', a friend called him) I found the same way of capturing truth with a thousand light strokes. He bought me a paper dragon I shall never forget.

The subject of the conversation matters little or not at all. With the same pieces, the game endlessly renews itself. Through the most harmless remark he manages to express friendship, concern for one's *physique et moral*, one's obsessions. He offers help. When worst comes to worst, he does not give flowers, he gives wine. It is more practically effective.

He says: 'There is no solution because there is no problem' – and his mystery is that there is no mystery. He answers any question without hesitation. He enters the life of his friends with infectious ease, such ease that one forgets to pay proper attention to every word he says. It is however true that 1 – attention might be detrimental to ease and 2 – that is not the point.

From Paris he had seemed a figure of legend. I had been shown *The Green Box* as a treasure. Rose Sélavy. Sketches and ciphered messages. I liked *Lazy Hardware* and *Anémic Cinéma*. But a legend is remote. I did not live in New York and his reserve too is legendary. What he told me of his activities was all I had to imagine his 'fame' and I made no effort to find out more. *LIFE* devoted a long article to him². I was glad about the article but drew no conclusions. He was to my delight available and transparent. I am afraid in retrospect to have been a burden.

Men, it seems, do not know how to look at houses. I have read that his studio on 14th Street was empty, furnished with little more than a bed and a table to play chess. Anchorite. I found the place full of surprises. On the workbench running under the slanted skylight I remember tools, small silent rubber fans like the ones in New York telephone booths. Two or three chairs, shelves covered with dust that I once offered to clean for Christmas. I did not know then about his dust breeding. The shelves were filled with mysterious brown packages (I later decided that they must hold the things he used for the valises), pell-mell books, things for the pipe he smoked at the time. There was a small kitchen corner, *Rotoreliefs*, a refrigerator in which he mostly kept oranges and milk, a small bathtub near the door. Partitions he must have built himself nearly made the one room into a maze.

Having no telephone, he sent telegrams at any time of the day without laying himself open to intruders.

He eludes, seems to always have eluded, splintering, erosion so that the joy of knowing him has no shadow. Neither another time nor another place could have been more perfect. Luck remains whole.

'To lose the possibility of recognising two similar objects' (Robert Rauschenberg). The first time and infinite possibilities (at what cost?). M.D.'s teaching, as it were, of course, is insidious and analogical. Discovering one's bend and that one must not follow it except at a distance. Nothing is taken for granted. The grace with which he speaks and the pleasure of listening to him seem easy but are not. One finally 'gets the point' with delight, but after enough time has elapsed to know that it was not that simple.

At the Philadelphia Museum, in front of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Bride)*, an altogether nondescript man bursts into obviously delighted laughter. It is undoubtedly better than putting on a 'museum face'. The guard, on the other hand, advises not to waste one's time in these rooms but to go to the upper level where a tea house has been scrupulously reconstructed.

An untroubled face, inward turned, aware, under the ever present hat – untroubled also, at the end of a most demanding journey, untroubled, witnesses tell us, during the whole journey. He is the youth of the spirit. He does not shine, he sparkles. At a distance of one or two generations, one may feel heavy by comparison. He had, of course, by his own admission, been 50 years ahead of his time. Faced with any threat to his freedom, he does what a magician does – he vanishes.

One metre in length, one metre in height. Testing mordant or paint on glass. Rotary demi-sphere. One knows his taste for technique – as such and judged on its achievements. Whence the rubber fans, the perpetual waterfall, the countertop dishwasher without a motor. He makes them his own. He knows what use can be made of them and that a clock in profile tells nothing. Being so practical, he frees himself from things that weigh down those who run out of breath cursing them.

He has been living for some time in Greenwich Village in an elegant apartment whose ceilings are so high that one is not bothered by the smell of cigars. He can at last be seen with a glass whose travels are a fine example of friendship. He presides over dinner sitting in 'Max Ernst's chair'³. The place is one floor up, giving the feeling of a happy pilgrimage.

By painting such a crucial machine on glass, he sanctioned 40 years in advance silent music, white or black paintings. It has been said again and again that one could not look at *The Bride* without seeing one's own reflection, the walls of the Museum, other visitors. One can then stop looking at her and concentrate on what appears through her, or the other way around, but both focuses coexist at every point, art and life perpetually intersect or rather interplay.

Having caught up with the 50 years, the young and not so young of today claim him. But the work of the best of them in no way resembles of course anything that he did. They have learned from him to be unfamiliar with what they do and with what he has taught them.

An entire life without giving in to any temptation other than the ones he sets himself. What a temptation it is for others! But his strength is his alone. Others, as Michel Sanouillet wisely said, 'should not exceed the prescribed dosage.'

The first time the word 'bride' was uttered between us was on a somewhat shabby street in New York where store after store display only rather unappealing, cheap and touchingly ornate wedding dresses.

The second time was at the Museum of Modern Art. *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* was hung on the wall that so moved H.P. Roché. I asked him the reason for the title. He said: 'I painted it between *The Virgin* and *The Bride*.' I only saw *The Large Glass* in Philadelphia much later. Unhurried – because on that day at the MoMA I had told him that his work baffled me and he had answered, 'It does not matter, what matters is that we are friends.' When he told me that the lady who owned that glass had just died I knew nothing of Katherine Dreier. My 'approach' to Duchamp was the reverse of that of my contemporaries, less intelligent, but more gratifying. And when I finally more or less went through the *The Bride's* glass, I had known M.D. for ten years, I had read almost everything that had been written about her⁴ not because of her, because of him.

The way he asked me, 'Do you think I should read Nerval before I die?' pointed to both the futility and the constraint of excessive reading.

The greatest virtuosity. It is not a matter of talent, and 'genius' is not the right word. Proofs administered on the run: foamrubber breasts, a few miles of twine, the *Mona Lisa* shaved – on trust.

Does he know pain? Everything looks so simple. Self evidence itself.

How does one live when one is endowed with a mind that is pure invention?

Does he know pain? Cage says he can be emotional. Really? Don't you find that *fin tragique*⁵

unpleasant? While one is giving in to rage, he recognises that the text shows some talent and finds that rage pointless.

Where does the *aspirant* live?⁶

Kindness is not that country where all is still – that wilderness. It is one of the faces of intelligence, it does not need to be named.

Does he know pain?
He does not like to waste his time.
Silence.

M.D. has no aim. (*'The purpose of purposelessness?'*)⁷ Such freedom gives intelligence its price. Infinite concentration, almighty detachment – *l'umour, mon cher ami André, l'umour*⁸. He is rare. His freedom is infectious.

He says that if he had practiced alchemy it was without knowing it. As is appropriate in our time. Feint. He also says esotericism must not only be mental, it must have rituals. He never told me which.

During the years when, while giving himself, he produced little, he patiently, attentively encouraged others to write. He gave them subjects – showing that they need not be mastered. *I did not know you had 'soaked up' so much of him.* At most use him as a yardstick. (*I hope... to have made something hazardous with which we may try ourselves*)⁹. An approach less cruel but as imperative as that of the chopped finger.

As Jasper Johns quoted, 'OK, so he invented fire – but what did he do after that?'

One is worried by his public fame. Splashy. One does not fear that it would subdue him, but hinder him. Will his name be given to a street, a subway station? He continues to show no interest in the *Panthéon*¹⁰.

Should a woman resent that he made the female hanged body that sick form surrounding three empty spaces?

He puts everything into question and back in place.

The French original of this text was written in 1966. As luck would have it, it was published in 1967 at the time of Marcel Duchamp's 80th birthday. After having read it, he wrote me:

'It does not often happen that one must wait until one is exactly 80 to read sentences 'perfectly echoing' what one feels..

Thank you, then, for having succeeded.'

I don't think I have ever felt more happily proud.

Monique Fong with *The Large Glass*

© Pascal Goblot 2017

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1 – Monique Fong – 'Marcel Duchamp', *Les Lettres nouvelles, nouvelle série, mai-juin 1967, 70-76.*

2 – On 28 April 1952, *LIFE* published a long, illustrated article about M.D. for the general public.

3 – The "Max Ernst chair" had indeed been given M.D. by Max Ernst when he moved back to Europe. It had an extremely high back, red velvet upholstery – and the reputation of having originally been in a bordello.

4 – This was written in 1966 at a time that the duchampian literature was a fraction of what it has since become.

5 – 'Vivre et laisser mourir ou la fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp' (1965) was a collective series of eight paintings and a text attacking all that M.D. represented. One of the paintings represented M.D. being put to death by three artists of the collective. The last one showed M.D.'s casket, draped in the American flag and carried by Rauschenberg and others.

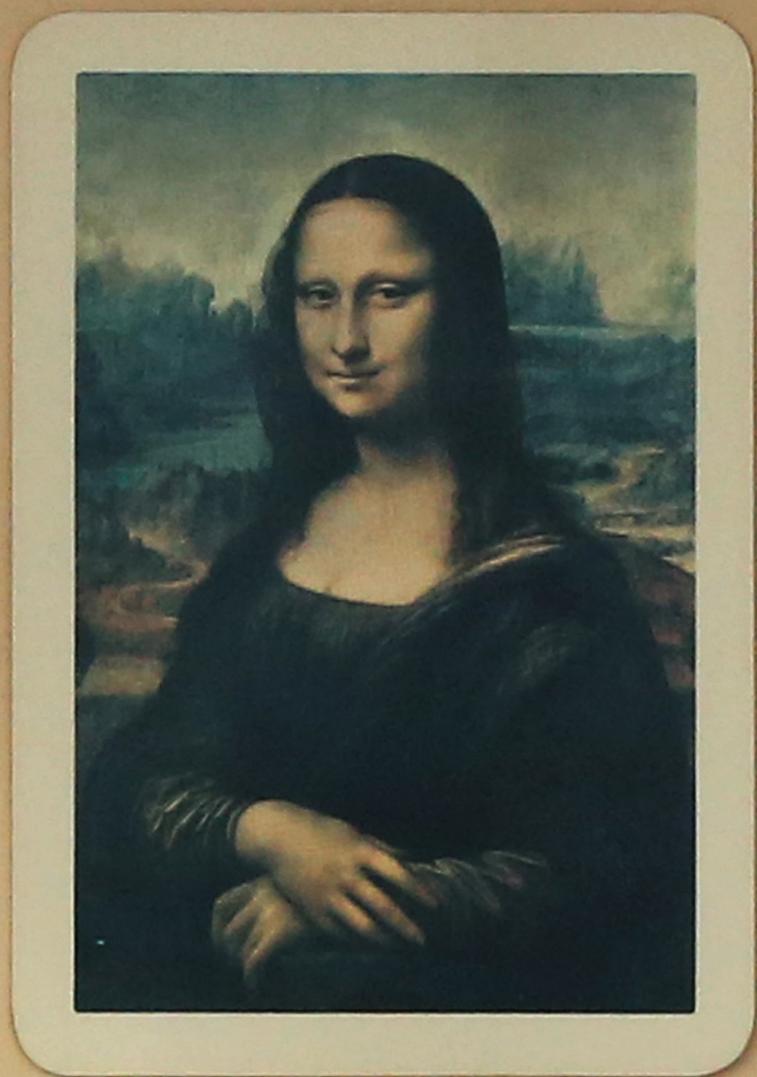
6 – The French original refers to a crude and well-known French spoonerism that M.D. had challenged me to guess. (*Il faut dire 'L'aspirant habite Javel' et non 'J'avais la bite en spirale'.*)

7 – 'The purpose of purposelessness' is an expression John Cage invented to describe his own work.

8 – From *Lettres de guerre* de Jacques Vaché – a collection of letters written to André Breton by his friend Jacques Vaché at the end of World War I.

9 – Robert Rauschenberg in an interview.

10 – A Paris monument resembling a Roman temple where 'great men' are buried by the 'grateful motherland.'



rasée

L.H.O.O.Q.

Please tell us a bit about yourself?

I live in Fremantle with my lovely wife Jenny and have three wonderful children Alex, Jess and Harry. I run a charity called *Swimming365* which uses swimming and diet to fight diabetes.

What was the starting point for the collection – your first encounter with Marcel Duchamp?

The Lovers (1968) etchings purchased in London 1997.

Where did your love of Marcel Duchamp originate?

I loved how Duchamp stirred things up with a great sense of humour. I have always related to his work via my computing background. For example: *Door 11 Rue Larrey* (1927) – Computing sees everything, eventually as binary. On=1 or Off=0. *The Larrey* door can be both open (On) and closed (Off) at the same time. Pataphysics to game the artificial intelligence machine.

What is the most surprising thing about Marcel Duchamp?

Just how influential he remains now around 100 years since he produced his most famous works.

What is the last artwork you purchased?

A 'livre-objet' by Octavio Paz translated by Monique Fong into French with works by Marcel Duchamp for a 1967 exhibition. There is an excellent poster from this exhibition of Duchamp's hand holding a cigar with its smoke shaped like a nuclear mushroom cloud.

Which of Marcel Duchamp's works do you most admire?

The Large Glass (1915-1923) with *The Green Box* (1934) is Duchamp's magnum opus and one of the most influential artworks of the last 100 years. It stands in Philadelphia at the top of the museum steps that Rocky Balboa runs up.

L.H.O.O.Q Rasée (Shaved) (1965) – an invitation signed by Duchamp for the opening of the *NOT SEEN and/or LESS SEEN by/of MARCEL DUCHAMP/RROSE SÉLAVY 1904-64* exhibition in New York on 14 January 1965. It's a *Mona Lisa* playing card below which is inscribed *rasée* just above the letters L.H.O.O.Q. Unlike the original from 1919 there is no moustache and goatee it's the *Mona Lisa* unchanged and retitled. I identify with it as computing is all about appropriation.

Obligation Monte Carlo (1924/1938) – I worked in investment banking for eight years so one of my favourite Duchamp's is the *Monte Carlo Bond*. Duchamp said that he had figured out a system to break the Monte Carlo Casino. The Bond was issued to raise money to make money and to be precise, provide a 20 percent return without fail to investors. Duchamp is photographed by Man Ray as Mercury God of Commerce who was also God of Vagabonds and Thieves. This summed up a lot about certain investment banks during the late 1990s and beyond. On the back it has a charter like a formal financial document. As I discovered almost anything can be packaged into a bond.

And in your collection – what would you say are three highlights?

1 – *Rasée* and the *NOT SEEN and/or LESS SEEN* catalogue.

2 – The catalogues and publications 1942-1945 are outstanding – *First Papers of Surrealism* is the one with Swiss Cheese on the front and five bullet holes in a barn door on the back, *VVV* and *View* magazine.

3 – *The Bride Stripped Bare* etching from 1968 *The Lovers* is sublime.

How does Marcel Duchamp's work compare to your expectations of what art should be, and or look like?

Duchamp's work is a philosophy or approach to art that develops through continual questioning. As Monique Fong wrote – 'He puts everything into question and back in place.' words which Duchamp read and approved of. As Duchamp himself said 'I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind.' For me, that's what art is all about.

L.H.O.O.Q Rasée (shaved) | 1965 | Marcel Duchamp | 21.6 x 14cm

readymade: playing card with reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, 8.9 x 6.4cm, mounted to dinner invitation dedicated to Mrs Colette Roberts. Signed and annotated 'rasee' in ink, from the edition of approx.100.

Image courtesy of the T.D. Picton-Warlow & J.J. Robson Collection.

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Marcel Duchamp / the Mary Sisler collection / 78 works 1904-1963
Australian State Galleries 1967/68

MARCEL DUCHAMP:

THE EIGHT STOPPAGES DOWN UNDER, 1967-1968 | Marcus Moore

'Dear Mrs. Sisler

I was greatly interested in reading of the Duchamp Retrospective Exhibition recently presented at the Cordier and Ekstrom Gallery and to learn of your patronage of the work of this remarkable artist. Consequently, I feel prompted to explore the possibility of bringing a Duchamp Exhibition to New Zealand for a special showing at the Auckland Art Gallery.' – Gil Docking¹

The above lines are some of the more noteworthy in the history of Australian and New Zealand art. Indirectly the letter landed what is arguably the most significant international exhibition ever to tour to this region, *Marcel Duchamp: The Mary Sisler collection: 78 Works 1904-1963* visited Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Hobart, Melbourne, Newcastle, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth between May 1967 and October 1968. Before touching down in Auckland, New Zealand, Sisler's collection had appeared in all the large exhibitions of Duchamp's work in Pasadena 1963, New York 1965 and London 1966, which were major influences exposing a new generation of artists to his ideas. So it came to be that Antipodean centres comprise half of Francis Naumann's claim that 'it was not until the sixteen city, four nation tour of the Sisler Collection, from 1965 through 1968, that Duchamp's historical importance became known and appreciated on an international scale ².' In review for *The Christchurch Press* the artist Don Peebles wrote, 'Emphatically this is not an exhibition to be overlooked, for there is little doubt that in this artist we confront one of the more compelling of twentieth century creative thinkers' – such remarks are the equal of any commentary on Duchamp published in public media anywhere in the world of this time.

If Duchamp's repute was first established between 1913 and 1920 and subsequently through his association with the Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s, it really was only 30 years later, in the 1960s, that receptions to Duchamp's work truly blossomed and took hold. Ironically, after all that time, the reasons why Duchamp enjoyed this delayed response only became finally comprehended through a spate of publications another 30 years later in the 1990s.

Apart from the the Arensberg collection of 46 Duchamp works which opened to view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1958 there were slender opportunities to encounter Duchamp's work first hand in the 1960s. That changed when the very first Duchamp retrospective *From and or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy* was held in West Coast Pasadena, 1963 – an exhibition in the words of Calvin Tomkins that 'opened an alternative vista on modern art.' This included the 96 works that Mary Sisler would soon purchase from the estates of Henri-Pierre Roché and Gustave Candel. Her collection's initial showing was in New York in 1965 with a title Duchamp splendidly gave as *NOT SEEN and/or LESS SEEN by/of MARCEL DUCHAMP/RROSE SÉLAVY 1904-64* (Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery, January - February 1965)³, and then embarked on a six-city tour of the United States. Thereafter it comprised more than a third of the 242 items in the massively successful exhibition, *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* at the Tate Gallery, London (1966). The next time the Sisler Collection touched down was at the Auckland Art Gallery, opening May 1967.

How did it get here? The influential New York based curator Alan R. Soloman had taken the responsibility to promote a circuit of the Sisler Collection through European galleries and then onto Tokyo, Japan, holding high hopes to secure representation of the collection following its inclusion at the Tate retrospective⁴. He sent letters to gallery directors throughout France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, and to Tokyo. Soloman's hopes were stymied somewhat because an exhibition of Arturo Schwarz's 1964 replicas of 13 of Duchamp's original 1913-1918 *readymades* had already toured through 12 European centres. Soloman reluctantly reported: 'To my disappointment, nothing has really materialised in Europe for the Sisler Collection. Apparently because everyone has already shown the Schwarz replicas and they seem less interested in the wealth of the earlier material in the Collection ⁵.' Records do however demonstrate that museum and gallery directors in Vienna, Basel, Turin and Japan held the desire to host the collection, but either due to a lack of funds or an inability to schedule it in respective exhibition programmes meant none ultimately could. Gil Docking and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand found the means, overcoming much greater distance and logistical issues. The works were sent by air in nine crates from London to Auckland.

The fact that 78 Duchamp works toured New Zealand and Australia in 1967-1968 cannot go underestimated. It is a crucial moment that belies 'Provincialism,' it is a significant moment from which to address post-nationalist accounts of our art histories, and to think of Australian and New Zealand art histories as not being separated from the contexts of the international centre(s). It is as much, a moment to offer nuanced contribution to the sum knowledge of Duchamp's impact worldwide.

1 – Gill Docking, *Director Auckland Art Gallery*, 1965.

2 – Naumann, Francis. *The Mary and William Sisler Collection*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984. 16.

3 – In a 1967 interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp explained that many items in the Sisler Collection were early works, but that 'it was really an absolutely remarkable and complete exhibition; I couldn't have asked for anything better.' Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues With Marcel Duchamp*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1971. 92. The Sisler Collection holds a large number of Duchamp's early works and paintings from 1902-1913, as well as later works including *Network of Stoppages* (1914), *Door, 11 Rue Larrey* (1927), *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924), *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)* (1925), the 'erotic sculptures' *Female Fig Leaf* (1950); *Objet-Dard* (1962 replica of 1951 original) and *Wedge of Chastity* (1963 replica of 1954 original), and an edition of the Schwarz replicas of readymades.

4 – Alan R. Solomon curated *Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenberg and Barnett Newman* for the Venice Biennale in 1964; and organised the 'American Painting Now' exhibition for the New York World's Expo in 1967.

5 – 5 October 1966 to Mary Sisler. *Mary Sisler Personal Papers, Section II, Folder 9, 1966, Museum of Modern Art Archives*.

Marcel Duchamp: The Mary Sisler collection | 1967
catalogue cover

Image courtesy of the State Records Office of Western Australia and the Art Gallery of Western Australia
© Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

'Oh, I am a breather, I am a respirateur, isn't that enough?' – Marcel Duchamp¹

Breathing, that's what you do before inevitably you become one of the other people who always die. Identifying with an involuntary action that we can all do without thinking, an action that is at once simple and yet a critical function within a much more complex survival mechanism is typical of Duchamp's knowing subversion of the importance of life and art and his own experiments with both. Of course, we know he was doing more than simply breathing. There was a lot of thinking, perhaps less so, doing. Duchamp was an efficient breather. As Richard Hamilton observed, his output was relatively stingy in terms of quantum, but his legacy became the bellows to a fire that engulfed far-ranging artistic practices for much of the twentieth century². Jasper Johns summed up his output when he referenced a caption to a cartoon in the *New Yorker*, which said, 'O.K. so he invented fire – but what did he do after that?'³ This short essay does not aim to answer Johns' question, there are shelves enough and libraries to carry out that interrogation. Instead, the aim here is to take a 'random' sample from the fire that followed and look at the presence of the Duchampian thread in Australian art largely through examples in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia⁴.

The wealthy American art collector, Mary Sisler played some role in Australian artists' encounter with Duchamp when she travelled her collection to the Antipodes in 1967-1968, first to New Zealand and then onto Australia where it was shown in seven State galleries before its finale at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (19 September - 20 October 1968). In 1973, the National Gallery of Australia acquired *Bottle dryer* and *Hat rack*, two of Duchamp's famous *readymades*, which had been reproduced in an edition of eight by Galleria Schwarz in Milan in 1964 under the artist's supervision. Indeed, they were the very works that Sisler had acquired from Schwarz that year and then later toured Australia. In the same year, the National Gallery of Australia also purchased another two Schwarz reproductions, *Why not sneeze Rose Sélavy?* and the iconic, *Bicycle wheel*. In 1979, came the miniaturist's dream, Duchamp's portable museum, *Boite-en-valise [The box in a valise]* (1942-1954).

Long before Sisler began her collection, Frank Hinder was among the first Australian artists to use Duchamp's innovations as a strategy to outgrow the confines of a two dimensional surface. In his effort to create a sense of velocity and movement in *Subway escalator* (1953) (Art Gallery of South Australia), Hinder harks back to Duchamp's seminal work *Nude descending a staircase* of 1912 to solve the problem inherent in suggesting movement on a static surface. The most obvious reprise of the work being by German painter Gerhard Richter in his 1966 painting of his wife, *Emma (nude on a staircase)* later reimagined in his 1992 Cibachrome photograph simply titled, *Emma* (Art Gallery of New South Wales). Hinder would discover the ultimate solution to the problem posed in his subway experiments when he shared Duchamp's fascination with machines and movement in his boxed luminal kinetics.

In Australian painting, nowhere is the reference to Marcel Duchamp more prescient than in Imants Tillers' most controversial painting, *The nine shots* of 1985. It gained notoriety in many ways by accident – an accident that Duchamp would have considered as all part of the unplanned universe that ends up influencing fate and fortune. Tillers' appropriation of Michael Nelson Jagermara's *Five dreamings* (1984) sparked vitriolic debate when the work was published in the catalogue of the 1986 Sydney Biennale on the page before one of the three works it referenced, namely *Five dreamings*. While it was made in the Post-modernist era when quotation was a dominant form of reappraisal and reprise, that the artist sourced iconography from Indigenous art without permission overshadowed much of the other meanings inherent in the work, most significantly Tillers' quotation from Duchamp's most enigmatic and famous works, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, (La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même)*, otherwise known as *The Large Glass (Le Grand Verre)*.

The title of Tillers' work, *The nine shots* refers to the nine seemingly random holes posited in the top right of the upper panel suspended in time and space below the 'bride's' 'Milky Way' blossoming cloud⁵. They were created by firing paint-dipped matches from a toy cannon – another one of Duchamp's games of chance at play. He then drilled holes at their landing point, holes which some have declared weakened the glass panel eventually leading to the cracking of the glass. They are a subtle element in the work but constitute the key to its entire drama – they are the complication in the story. *The Large Glass* is considered a narrative

of unconsummated love, or desire that is never satiated, and Duchamp tells that story through the formal structure of the work consisting of two opposing panels. The lower pane holds the nine suitors, or 'bachelor apparatus', the energy source that turns all of the cogs in an effort to ensnare their desired quarry, 'the bride'. Like a sideshow alley game, they are compelled to shoot their liquid gas into the 'bride's' ethereal realm above and hit one of the three windows suspended in her 'Milky Way'. Of course, we know the outcome of this highly mechanised game of chance because we can see that none of the nine shots reach their mark. Both the Bride and her 'bachelors' are destined to remain within their opposing realms – she stripped bare but unravished, sending out her electromagnetic signals of desire and they, all nine of them left hanging.

An early play on the power of the unconsummated is found in George Baldessin's *Final Banquet for no eating*, (1971-1972) (National Gallery of Australia), which consists of hard metal chairs that cannot be sat upon pushed up against a table than denies the diner any repast. Many of Baldessin's works played with anthropomorphic food which can never be eaten – desired but never consumed. His inedible pears, his empty tables and angular etched women of incomplete body falling through the picture plane, ultimately alone.

Neil Roberts was also fascinated by the legacy of *The Large Glass* and the mystery of its master. His work in the National Gallery of Australia, *Bachelor kiss* (2000) is a framed black glass panel found by chance already broken at the Mugga Lane Recycling Depot in Canberra. Its filigree breakage an uncanny simile to the famous shattering of the original work when it was being returned to its owner, Katherine S. Dreier from public exhibition at the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum in 1927. Aware of Duchamp, it was as though Roberts had stumbled upon a *readymade*, but one which needed nursing back to life. Like Duchamp's careful tending to *The Large Glass* post break, Roberts 'sutured' the cracks with copper-foiling and lead-lighting which he framed in timber⁶. That a glass maker should chance upon the panel at a tip was a Duchampian masterstroke of serendipity. Furthermore, that it was Roberts, whose body of work explores masculinity, violence and vulnerability, all three attributes that hang over the 'bachelor apparatus' in *The Large Glass*, was uncanny.

Roberts played with a number of Duchamp's subjects. *Bullet and breath* (National Gallery of Australia) of 1990 evokes both the nine shots in *The Large Glass* and of course *Air de Paris* (1919), which was a *readymade* from a 50cc glass ampule available at an apothecary in Paris. Roberts' *A volume of air/the palm of a hand* (1990) (National Gallery of Australia) similarly a glass repository of air closed by a grenade seemingly shaped by the squeeze of a hand. *Space inside my fist* (1995), a lead crystal moulding of his clenched fist, is entirely reminiscent of Duchamp's enigmatic and erotic body fragments of 1951. Duchamp's *In advance of the broken arm* (1915) provided the impetus for Roberts' own adjusted *readymade*, *Addressing the wounds: in corde* (1991) (National Gallery of Australia), which was a repurposed shovel, its neck encrusted with concrete and its shovel head decorated with fern embossing.

While Roberts does not appropriate Duchampian elements and instead alludes to the continuum of his legacy, other artists aim to brazenly rework his back catalogue. Perhaps the most obvious being Balardung artist Dianne Jones' ink jet canvas print *L.H.O.O.Q 'ERE!*, acquired by the National Gallery of Australia in 2002, the year after it was made. In 1919, Duchamp made a parody of the *Mona Lisa* by adorning a cheap postcard reproduction of the painting with a moustache and goatee beard. He added the monogram 'L.H.O.O.Q', a phonetic game which when read out aloud sounds like 'Elle a chaud au cul' (she has a hot arse). It became what Duchamp classified as a 'rectified' *readymade* – an object of mass production that is somehow interfered with to create new meanings and double entendres, in this case a cheap postcard of an iconic work of art that has been transformed by fame so that we can no longer look at it for what it is, a Renaissance portrait of a woman before a landscape of intense beauty.

Jones displays a good dose of Duchamp's iconoclastic wit in her desire to dismantle both white history and the art world in *L.H.O.O.Q 'ERE!*, which repurposes John Webber's finely painted late eighteenth century portrait of Captain James Cook into a commercially printed canvas that is defaced. Upon it she overlays the tweaked moustache and goatee beard of Duchamp's *La Jocande* post card to draw into the question the value society and its white institutions place on British cultural expressions of exploration and colonial sequestration of Indigenous land. She writes of the work:

'I have referenced renowned artist Marcel Duchamp's painting L.H.O.O.Q. (1919) because when Duchamp added a moustache and beard to Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait of the Mona Lisa he caused a collapse of the idealised. What is now an historic gesture was a reaction to the attention that the Mona Lisa was receiving at the time. By writing "L.H.O.O.Q." as the title Duchamp reduced the

painting to latrine humour. I have kept the original title L.H.O.O.Q. which sounds like “look” in English and added the word “ERE!” which is slang for “here” because often the words “look ere!” are used by Indigenous People to draw attention to something in particular.⁷

Mostly artists tend to pull at the cords of Duchamp’s practice and avoid overt replication, as though the ideas he set free on the art world, the thinking behind the doing, are really at the heart of the legacy and not the objects themselves. As object-painter, Ham Darroch recently observed, ‘Duchamp’s *readymades* resonate as elemental beginnings in my sculptural work. Their influence drifts in and out of focus for me as I redirect a humble shovel with a burst of colour. Would I have noticed this found object if not for Duchamp’s enormous conceptual leap?’ Answering his own question with a slightly unsure, ‘possibly’⁸.

An artist who made surprisingly few works, who turned the concept and occurrence of ‘chance’ into an act of creation, who was bemused at the idea of ‘taste’ and who found humankind to be surprising wound up about making the ridiculous very serious, closed the final chapter of his life in 1968 having completely rearranged art in the twentieth century. And still his succinct oeuvre remains enigmatic, replete with unanswered questions, mysterious and droll, tragic and comedic, exceptional and commonplace and casting a spell over all of us who, unlike the ‘brides’ and the ‘bachelors’ trapped in *The Large Glass*, fall in love with Marcel all over again each time we look.

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- 1 – Marcel Duchamp interview with Calvin Tomkins, 1964 in CHAN, P., (ed) *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*, Badlands Unlimited, New York, 2012, introduction.
 - 2 – HAMILTON, R., *NOT SEEN and/or LESS SEEN of/by MARCEL DUCHAMP/RROSE SELAVY 1904 – 64*, Mary Sisler Collection, exhibition 14 January - 13 February, 1965, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1964, foreword (unpaginated).
 - 3 – *Op. cit.*
 - 4 – When the National Gallery of Australia was acquiring its first Duchamp works for the national collection it was known as the Australian National Gallery. However, this essay uses the current nomenclature.
 - 5 – Duchamp used such references in his *The Green Box notes* (1934). All terms in inverted commas in this discussion reference his terminology.
 - 6 – CAMPBELL, B. in Neil Roberts – *Chances with Glass*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra Glassworks, Kingston ACT, 17 August - 15 October 2017.
 - 7 – Artist statement, Submission to Council 11 December 2002, National Gallery of Australia.
 - 8 – Ham Darroch, notes on Duchamp’s practice, July 2018.



ONLY FAILURE IS WORKABLE:

CONCEPTUALISM AS COUNTERCULTURE | Robert Cook

It seems our memories are bad, that sequences are _____

We might consider ourselves accused by that exhibition, held to account by a set of, one presumes, radical ideals – if one reads Duchamp this way, and really one absolutely does not have to – and that would also be so like us. Failing to hold them (radical ideals, if they were that) close to our hearts. You see what the problem is right?

We never really 'hold' anything when we're in our pyjamas...sleep is a letting go.

Hippies were very cool at first.

Screen memories are so much more reliable!¹

And it reinforced the fact that we thought politics were optional. (Only when our torches are working.)

It arrived in the way the encyclopaedias arrived. This was information. Like geology. Factual. Anyway, our activities had seen us, the few years before, sawing roads in half, removing the library cards from all the public libraries across the state, and other hijinks. Our magazine could be found in Manila and Buenos Aires. I painted monochromes in Spring and learned maths on my Christmas break. Well, and then my NYC pen pal...

But of course 1968 stands for something.

Who threw that first frisbee?

Let's not kid ourselves, there was already a fully tricked-out structure of reception in place. An academy, referencing conventions, tiled bathrooms, provisions for war. Relationships were Humanities, our tropics were tropiques.

I don't discount the possibility of any occurrence or lack of occurrence.

The times and what lies behind them.

Little pockets of possibility though. Measured in months before they leave for The Near or Far East. I'm talking McClintock and Vike. The late 1930s, was it? Someone correct me. Always a shutting up shop. It's ok. Tightening the lid down is how all pressure cookers work.

Chilling by our Kombi van. Parked on Hay Street. Our surfboards, who would steal them here? Let's grab beers.

But of course 1968 stands for something.

Anna came and looked at our exhibition files, the ones stored off site. I was busy. Now, with the past wide and open, that sounds ridiculous. 'I was busy'. No one was busy in the past.

How long was this window when I wasn't busy, in dog months?

We lived in domes. Lightning threaded in. It's why blonde afros were so very suddenly in style.

I get the feeling that people think reading Kundera, like Salinger, is a phase you go through. I read some books (almost in a row) and really enjoyed them. They were spoken about in my house. I don't have them anymore in my house. Besides it wasn't a house just the idea of one, a plan for one, more specifically. And what I remember are not what was in the books but what was in the movie. Tanks in the streets, seen from open windows. (So the sense, oddly, mostly, of fresh air.) Girls with boyfriend shirts on, otherwise naked. A force and a lightness, a sense of invasion and romantic steadfastness. Dark hair.

What was surprising was that he brought a checker board with him and not a chess set. He said the pieces were easier to carry.

The Tel Quel group went to China and didn't find it. Barthes stayed on the bus or didn't. That was later, I forgot. But surely they are planning it then.

The word thermal is used by the Darlington set, and not to do with heating.

I mean he looked like the photo. But no one knew exactly how tall he was meant to be.

Turns out that the gallery I work at, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, did a Duchamp show in 1968. I had no idea about it until Anna emailed and told us about this project. It was in the old building, the one at the Museum, not the current 1979 building.

And way up in Scarborough.

Why aren't we more radical? Where is our radical artistic history? (This is history-as-consciousness of the moments/passages of radicality.) Why is this history so unavailable? Why is everything so quiet? These questions are our social and cultural history-as-consciousness. I mean this literally and figuratively. It's a thing I've said before but, like before, when I said it, I'm only channeling others in my role as a thin, cracked see-through apparatus. Appropriate. A spinning wheel, more so. Definitely a bachelor now though.

When there's a boom everyone is much more relaxed. Other times we just look at the ground and are angry at ourselves and at our leaders. Our catamarans float the same though.

I wasn't surprised about the show happening, nor was I surprised I hadn't heard of it. Stranger things happen all the time in life! Like Eftpos! Who would ever have imagined!

In that year what other things. In Perth these are things I think occurred: A mining boom. The Eric Cooke killings. The Narrows Bridge. When I put in the 'Perth 1968' into the internet the mining boom is true, and the Cooke stuff happened earlier and the bridge later. (Truth is, I never did type it in, that would have meant leaving this Pages program. History is not a series of images, just images...that's not cool...I live in a manifesto-less collage.)

The exhibition organiser said Tokyo did not feel very modern.

Later, in feminisms of difference versus more socially active ones. The same with class. A kind of divide between thinking through the complexity and generating enough force to break through it all. (Just so you know, *The Doors* floated a concept for that the year before.)

He is after all the artist of failure, of refusal, of incoherence. Think: his most famous work is the sine qua non of a failure to connect. He was always fussing. And that's exactly what hobbies are for.

How to commemorate a move from formalisms (of more or less all kinds) to embodied action. Ideas of the collective. Of a standing for and/or against a thing. With just a deck of playing cards. From formalism to gesture therefore?

Things have perimeters. That could be our problem. There is no thing in conceptualism.

In that year temperaments became positions. I took a big holiday. Got a great suntan.

We need the idea of connection like we need the idea of social transformation through cultural momentum and mythologised events. Like we need drive-in movie 'theatres'. Not being glib, both are about desire and pleasure in some way.

Duchamp made everyone call him Marcel, and then changed his mind and it was Duchamp-call-me-Duchamp. He said it with his accent and we took it be charming, because we wanted to be seen as 'winning'. 'Look at

the foothills Duchamp'. But he said he wouldn't. And he was lighting a smoke when the plane was banking in. We took him to a regatta.

Closer to end of the book Philip Mann writes: *'It was also at the end of the 1970s that the counter-culture lost its authenticity. While despair over the failure of the 1968 revolution had turned the hedonism of its children towards a serious drug culture, and their political activism towards terrorism, the 1970s remained the heyday of counter-cultural activity. As the French neo-noir writer Jean-Patrick Manchette explains, it was the dream of '68 that kept it alive: "From my point of view this was a special period in time, namely the one after 1968 ... a period in which a reincarnation of the revolution of '68 still seemed possible. This ceased to be a possibility by the end of the 1970s²"*.

Socks ran high.

Prague, Paris, Perth. Slogans: 'Structuralists don't take to the streets'; 'Burn-offs are safe'.

This is me just talking, the fine came in the second mail of the day. I thought the organiser was responsible for the Carnet. The ocean currents, the air has them too.

All this urgency f-l-o-a-t-i-n-g in at us now, rather too late for us to join in. Which is the point of romance, is it not? So much fun to wear black for the first time, and those oversize sweaters!

It was passed around.

No one needed to make a living from it; independent means were assumed.

In his back pocket he had a little quote from Wilde: 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias³'. One can only assume he carried it ironically. We might assume therefore he left it ironically too at the Boans milkshake counter. He said this was no place for strawberry milk. On that he was wrong.

It was hung from rails. The lighting was fixed. No one complained. It was understood as a period display. It said something about time, lags and anticipation.

What a massive hot-rod culture we enjoyed. And now it's back in a pretty big way.

The writing that was happening was so much about how power is internalised, how there is no beyond power, no outside the text. The tangle of eternal complicity. Though some people ran and ran hard. If someone was chasing me, I would too. It wouldn't be theoretical running either.

'Rather too thin'. But only behind his back.

In truth, those of us who weren't farmers were school teachers.

What's that phrase, 'rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated'?

Conceptualism is ghost making without the fear.

It's not a big deal. It sounded great and we wrote away and the mail order system was pretty well set up by then. Happy days! No one waited for the translation. So much energy. You would not recognise the place. Every street corner, a magazine stand.

Four years later, we met by accident on a train. I had to call him Buckminster. But why?

1 – Freudian concept, brilliantly summarised by Laplanche and Pontalis: 'A childhood memory characterised both by its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content. The analysis of such memories leads back to indelible childhood experiences and to unconscious phantasies. Like the symptom, the screen memory is a formation produced by a compromise between repressed elements and defence'. J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, (1988), *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Karnac Books: London, 410-411.

2 – Philip Mann (2017), *The Dandy at Dusk: taste and melancholy in the twentieth century*, Head of Zeus: London, [kindle edition] location 3387.

3 – Have no idea what I read this in, but it wasn't in the original source, which I believe is his 1891 essay 'The soul of man under socialism', though I do have that on my bookshelf.



Self Portrait: Code Switch – Mirabaya (Changing Skin) | 2018 | Julie Dowling | 100 x 120cm
mica gold, acrylic, glitter with holographic plastic
Image courtesy of the artist | Photograph by Robert Frith, Acorn Photo

It is clear that Julie Dowling is a master translator and autobiographical artist utilising social realist techniques to depict herself as a symbol of postcolonial Indigenous identity. In interrogating her own life as a by-product of the series of monumental historical injustices served upon First Nation peoples, she makes the personal political. Dowling subverts the paradigm of the black 'fringe narrative' by placing her story at the centre of an understanding of Australian identity as a whole. Her portraiture is multiple things at once, work that conveys conflicting narratives around the colonial gaze and the exercising of power. Holding a mirror up to the Western format of portraiture, Dowling consciously makes work that draws upon the styles of European masters, Christian iconography and other female portrait artists.

Dowling was born in Subiaco, Western Australia, a child of Badimaya and complex cultural heritage. In that era, the city of Perth was in a time of flux and division, with First Nation people relegated to the fringes of the city, or to the ghetto areas in the North and South, still reeling from the impact of not only the Stolen Generations but the history of the pastoral massacres in the North and throughout the Western Desert. Dowling is a twin, and alongside her sister Carol has been reminded throughout her life that the colour of her skin has served as a semiotic for wadjellas – white Australians – who seek to compartmentalise and reduce. Dowling has said 'My skin colour does not explain that I have experienced discrimination and seen racism inflicted upon my family'¹ and it is this that has served as the impetus to illustrate the duality of living in two skins, her European heritage and her Badimaya one.

In *Self Portrait: Code Switch – Mirabaya (Changing Skin)*, Dowling explores ideas centred around translation, duality and representation. The complexity of First Nation identity in a globalised milieu², and its relationship to the historical representation of women in particular is brought to the writer's mind by the composition of the work and its potential aesthetic relationship to the painting *Las Dos Frida*, by Frida Kahlo painted in 1939, with its intertwined hands. The two Dowlings could be her and her twin sister but are in fact two parts of herself; the 'real' Julie on the right and the echo of herself on the left. This work intelligently engages in dialogue with the idea of a performative aspect to her own work similar to Duchamp's. But it is the consistent thread of duality and the desire of the artist to translate the untranslatable – the anguish of living in a body politic that rejects the homogenous categorisations of 'other' and seeks to exist beyond being the observed – that sets the work apart. Julie states that she is like a ghost or 'wiru' – an unobserved gatherer of intel and a spy for information about the coloniser.

Code switching can be understood by relating it to language and other forms of semiotic expression that are reflective of and also create social situations, particularly related to class and ethnicity³. In Dowling's work, the artist portrays the emotional difficulty in having to continuously subvert her experience as a First Nation woman as 'authentic' to effectively 'speak to' the coloniser. Translation in this context implies potential loss, but in Dowling's work the humble strength of not only the artist but of the female ancestors who stand silently behind her across generations – as suggested by the dot work and iconography painted behind – characterise this work and becomes the substitute for being in the room of the coloniser even when a First Nations person is not physically present.

1 – Artist quote in Ryan, J. *Colour Power: Aboriginal art post 1984: in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria*. (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2004) 137.

2 – Laetitia Wilson, *Julie Dowling: Babanyu (Friends for life)*, *Art Almanac*, 29 March 2018.

3 – Robert N. St Clair, *Guadalupe, Valdés*, *The Sociology of Code Switching, Language Sciences*, vol 2, issue 2, September 1980, 205-221.



To Strip/To Dress | 2018 | Carly Lynch | dimensions variable
installation of deconstructed french chair (c1900), horse hair, pleated velvet, trimming, interfacing, cotton thread, calico, chalk, wool stuffing, hessian fabric/dust, wire and upholstery tacks
Image courtesy of the artist | Photograph by Eva Fernandez

TO STRIP/TO DRESS

Josephine Wilson

The viewer may well feel unease upon encountering Carly Lynch's *To Strip/To Dress*. The installation is both forensic and dramatic, like a snapshot from a crime scene. The title plays with equivocation (as if indecision were a peculiarly female weakness) and with equivalence (as if taking off your clothes were the same as putting them on) – as if *no* could mean *yes*. Lynch's green chair is stripped bare – or is in the process of reconstruction? *To Strip* leads us backwards to meaning and truth via a hermeneutic coded as gendered violence; *To Dress* suggests a movement towards restoration, not through some kind of fictive simulation (a cover-up), but through restoring the dignity of bodily cover to the naked victim.

It is considered Duchamp's magnum opus: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Bride)* (1915-1923). Lynch first admired the work's discordant combination of materials, its recto/verso structure, the way that the chance breaking of the glass during transportation was happily folded back into the work. But formal brackets have a way of coming apart; there was the matter of Duchamp's suggestively aggressive title, and of Duchamp himself, who functions in art history like the embellished letter of the first word in an illuminated text. This is a difficult legacy for any contemporary artist working in a feminist frame. As the progenitor of Anti-art – as *the first* – Duchamp is relieved of the anxiety of influence. But how is the contemporary artist to work with the origin myths she has inherited?

Lynch's research led her to Duchamp's *The Green Box* (1934), which gave her the velvet fabric that informs her work. Published by Duchamp in an edition of 300, *The Green Box* contains reproductions of notes, drawings, and plans which have come to function as a reliably unreliable interpretative key to the critical machine engendered by *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. Duchamp called *The Green Box* a Sears Roebuck catalogue of playful possibility. *The Bride* is no romantic object of desire; it is a hard, glassy, scientific sandwich of pistons and sieves. Duchamp speaks of 'hot chambers', 'erotic liquids', 'malic males', evoking a pneumatic model of male sexual drive¹. Critical reception has long supported the gendered reading of *The Bride*. Robert Hughes called the work 'an allegory of profane love', with the boys in their empty jackets grinding away and the 'bride' endlessly undressing. Janis Mink wrote of the 'bride' as hanging, isolated, caged, crucified, with the 'bachelors' below, left only with a churning, agonised masturbation.

The modern woman might think of a strip club, with the guys below in the pit and the woman up there physically out of reach, yet fantastically *available*.

The artist sets out to restore *The Bride's* dignity through a process of *dialogue*. She recovered a dishevelled late nineteenth century French chair that bore the mark of lived history and real bodies and set out to uncover and discover. Material choices are laid out in the gallery and address the hard fixity of form and material laminated into Duchamp's glass. *To Strip/To Dress* employs velvet – that most affective of fabrics – as a rejoinder to glass. Raw selvedge underlines the performative and immaterial, while the soft fatty lining of the chair are fragile echoes of forms in *The Bride*. Her materials speak of nature and the animal, of debased and superseded traditions of decorative art and craft: wood, horsehair, wire, lengths of trim and thread and tacks. Here is an archive of gendered practice and a memorial to aesthetic hierarchies; craft trades and soft furnishings once relegated to the 'purely' ornamental and the inessential feminine spaces of domesticity now inhabit the gallery space. 'The chair', she writes, 'refers to both Duchamp's "bride" and to Duchamp himself' (the latter surely holds *the* chair of twentieth century Anti-art!) Traces of Lynch's 'anxious reworkings' can be found in the pieces on the wall: she has forced the green velvet through the sewing machine; she has pleated, cut, and wrapped. As an anthropomorphic gesture, the work is fleshy, embodied, procedural and signals its relationship to Duchamp's 'bride' by shadowing the shapes and forms of the 'bachelors' domain (the triangular *sieves*, a wobbly wheel-like object) in a delicate balance and temporary array.

So, has a crime been committed?

No doubt.

1 – 'I want to grasp things with the mind the way the penis is grasped by the vagina'. [Marcel Duchamp: statement to Lawrence Steefel, 1960]



WHOLLY HOLY AND HOLEY

Tulleah Pearce

Peter & Molly's collaborative practice seeks to examine the binaries and assumed hierarchies that construct human experience, questioning the logic on which these conventions are built. Having worked together for three years Peter & Molly's performances and installations are complex and affecting; the visceral materials they employ are arresting and the way they engage the viewer is underscored with a devious sense of play.

In their 2016 video work *The Superior Animal I* we see the artists in a bath facing one another with octopuses on their heads, attempting to harness the power of the cephalopods to communicate telepathically. As the experiment goes on tentacles droop and ink is smeared across the tiles, while the water stains a repulsive brown. However evidence of psychic exchange never emanates, highlighting the human propensity for destruction in pursuit of success. Likewise, video *Finite Portions, Infinite Appetites* (2016) explores our desire for self-satisfaction at all costs. The artists sit behind a clear screen attempting to eat a cornucopia of produce. Hands mash fruit into the screen in attempted ingestion, ruining everything, yet never satiating their hunger. A key unifying theme running through Peter & Molly's practice is a mission to use their work to confront our shames and analyse the processes through which the natural becomes abhorrent or the artificial becomes normalised.

Continuing in this vein *Water Closet* (2018) is an assemblage that humorously gathers together a series of everyday objects to create a chimerical sculpture that emulates the structure and function of a confessional booth. Operating within the readymade tradition, *Water Closet* has been crafted from an ornate wardrobe with a spot lit-porcelain toilet occupying the seat where the confessor enters to seek absolution. The side of the confessional traditionally occupied by the priest is sealed off, intermittently it is animated by a short burst of an electronic symphony, modelled on those composed for Japanese lavatory manufacturers to cheerfully mask any sounds of ablution for users of their high-tech thrones.

Peter & Molly draw on the rich iconography of the Catholic Church and interrogate its significance as a system of power where the body is simultaneously transcended and controlled¹. The materials that form this work signify marginal identities that historically sat outside the moral bounds of the church. The use of the wardrobe alludes to the notion of 'being closeted' and invokes the assumption of heteronormativity that permeates society as its default setting. Peter & Molly also reference the bathroom, another increasingly politicised space where we grapple with the fiction of the fixed nature of gender. The humorous juxtaposition of the toilet and the confessional suggests the folly of these definitive binaries and the harmful disregard this dualism has for the complexity of human experience. By drawing on the confessional as an intimate space of private contemplation and reflection, the artists suggest we reassess these values.

Transubstantiation is the alchemy of changing one thing into another and 101 years on from Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) Peter & Molly have performed their own divine miracle. *Water Closet* draws our attention to the process of becoming, acknowledging that identity and meaning are not static but always in a state of formation. This gesture seems small but it is significant; by accepting our individual capacities for change, we open up the radical possibility of broader social justice – *Water Closet* is a call for transformation.

¹ – Foucault names this operation 'biopower', from *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin, 2008.

Water Closet | 2018 | Peter & Molly | 175 x 105 x 204cm
recycled wardrobe, toilet, light and sound
Image courtesy of the artists



The Art Turns to Shit | 2018 | Aaron & Etta | documented performance on opening night
single channel video
Image courtesy of Peter & Molly



toucher de prière (Please touch) | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 29.7 x 21 x 0.5cm
UV varnish

Gallery dust | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 10 x 20 x 20cm
dust

Pearl de la pear | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | provocation
fear, background radiation

Sans colle | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 32 x 23.5 x 2.2cm each
altered books

Fourmi blanche | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 34 x 26 x 6cm
altered books (special edition *HERE&NOW18* catalogue)



AUSTRALIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Perdita Phillips' multiple, individual artworks in *HERE&NOW18*, each refer to the life of 'the work of art'. They point to the presence of the artwork within the flow of time, in history, in public view and away from it. They remind us of its degrading materialities, from the atomic, to the perceived and sensed and felt. They show us the apparatus of exhibition-making around the artwork, its installation, interpretation, labelling, invigilation and documentation. They expose conventional readings of the artwork to the elements, and to other forms of life and intelligence.

The key to reading Phillips' work in this exhibition is a large drawing¹ which maps her thoughts from the name Marcel Duchamp outwards across the paper, where her words are splashed over with sienna and black ink. The large sheet is stuck with other scraps of notepaper and torn pieces of maps. Phillips' notes expand from observations around Duchamp's life, work and influences, into various ideas for how her responsive work will infiltrate the exhibition environment, or not. Some of these lines of enquiry reach dead ends, are disarranged or are refused by the gallery. The drawing allows us access to all these immaterialities. The influence of the immaterial on the material is the vector through which I will reflect on a few of Phillips' works.

Time. A little-known story of the Mary Sisler collection that toured to the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1968, is that following the close of the show, the majority of the collection including *Bicycle Wheel* (1951) and *Why not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (1921) was stuck in limbo for possibly up to a year at the Grace Brothers warehouse, in Osborne Park. The most likely cause of this logistical stasis was the artist's death, which had occurred in the middle of the exhibition's season, and which stimulated considerable market fluctuation around the value of his work thereafter. But Phillips' investigation of the exhibition archives has proven inconclusive on this front, and so she has constructed a material history around this indecisive moment, this literal non-event, by pointing to things that did happen around the inertia of the artworks from September 1968 to October 1969. Her installation of ephemera from this time includes references to environmental issues including the Meckering earthquake, to moon exploration and popular cultural materials and a photograph of the exterior of the warehouse on Scarborough Beach Road in which the artworks were stored.

Intelligence. Our op-shops, second-hand book stores and dumps are filled with the material histories of the twentieth century, and the once reliable resources used to comprehend the mastery of art. From this sad fate, Phillips rescued four identical copies of *Marcel Duchamp* according to World of Art Books, and introduced two of them to a termite colony. The social systems of such creatures were famously unappealing to Duchamp, as in many recorded interviews he expressed his dislike of collective endeavour: 'I don't agree at all with the anthill that waits for us in a few hundred years. I still believe in the individual and every man for himself, like in a shipwreck².' It appears for the termites, that *Marcel Duchamp* was either useful or tasty, or both.

Radiation. If one can get around the withering misogyny underpinning Duchamp's most famous, most well documented and most theorised work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), it shows the artist's obsession with immaterial forces including electromagnetism and radiation. His interest in science, mathematics and engineering are all captured in the individual mechanistic objects and the precision with which they are rendered in this work, reinforced by his copious notes. The writing of Linda Henderson, situates Duchamp's practice within the emerging scientific knowledge of its time, including his fascination with electricity, Hertzian waves and X-rays³. Phillips' gestures towards these powerfully unseen elements, in her infinitely-thin provocation to plumb the background radiation of the exhibition itself.

You won't see the provocation. But I can assure you, it's there.

1 – P. Phillips, *Problematics*, <http://www.perditaphillips.com/portfolio/problematics/> (accessed 1 August 2018).

2 – M. Duchamp, interviewed by Jean-Marie Drot, 1963, referenced from M. Nesbitt, 'Last words (Rilke, Wittgenstein) (Duchamp)', *Art History*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1998, *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, Ipswich, MA, (accessed 1 August 2018).

3 – L. Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*, N.Y., Princeton University Press, 2005.

Between a shipwreck and an anthill | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | dimensions variable
mixed media installation
Image courtesy of the artist



The Sound of White, Even | 2017-2018 | Alex Spremberg | 215 x 473cm
enamel on vinyl records
Image courtesy of the artist

ROUND TABLE

WITH ALEX SPREMBERG AND MARCEL DUCHAMP | Leigh Robb

Alex Spremberg has collected vinyl records and hoarded their covers, using them in the service of comic and surreal collages since 2008. Initially this was a side project that expressed his interest in music and popular culture and which, for many years, Spremberg didn't take seriously as a line of artistic enquiry. The album covers were witty pictorial asides that amused the artist while he pursued his more earnest non-objective projects. Looking back over the decade, Spremberg discovered he had created in excess of 120 album cover works. In 2016 Spremberg decided to unite them and present them publicly at the Art Gallery of Western Australia with the work *ReCover*.

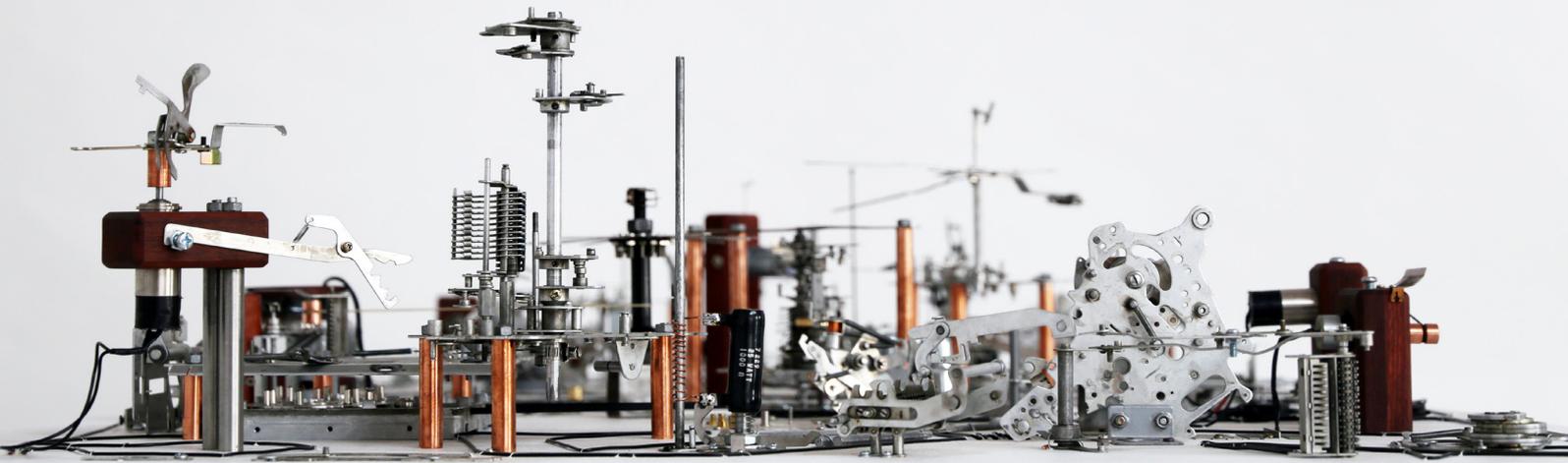
The study of optics, the harnessing of spatial illusion and the value of play are all points of convergence and connection between Alex Spremberg and Marcel Duchamp, separated by half a century, but united in wit, word play and experimentation.

Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* were painted flat discs designed to be played and animated on a turntable like a record, creating optical illusions of three dimensions. Nine of Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* were first captured appropriately through the medium of the motion picture, in *Anémic Cinéma*, a black and white film he made in 1926 with Man Ray and Marc Allégret. Shots of the spinning images were spliced with rotating discs of nine French puns and alliterations written by Duchamp.

Nearly a decade later in 1935 at the Paris Inventor's Fair, Duchamp rented a small booth to sell these pieces as 'play toys', and produced a first edition of 500 sets, or prints, of the six selected designs. Though the *Rotorelief* venture was a financial disaster, Duchamp's experiment in the marketing and merchandising of his work could be considered an early example of the artist's multiple. Duchamp would further this with his *Boîte-en-valise*, or box in a suitcase, (1935-1940), an edition of 300 Louis Vuitton suitcases, a compilation of miniature replica of his artistic oeuvre using photographs, hand-colored reproductions and scaled-down models of his sculptural works. It has been described as a portable exhibition or travelling museum monograph, but could also be considered a greatest hits album, Duchamp's 'Best of'.

Like Duchamp, Alex Spremberg is also fan of reprising his own work, but vastly scaling up rather than miniaturising. In the case of *The Sound of White, Even* (2018), Spremberg has animated part of his *Perceptual Objects* series from 2009. For his earlier work the artist created 46 painted spheres, hemispheres, or discs, creating an extraordinary arrangement of maquettes sporting permutations of black and white patterns. Displayed on a large circular table, *Perceptual Objects*, like the *Rotoreliefs* were designed to be viewed from above and in the round. Using this work as a starting point Spremberg has flattened the images, expanded the series and introduced colour to create 120 motorised spinning discs (the size of a 12-inch vinyl record), in 8 rows of 15 it fills the entire gallery wall and appears to condense and animate the history of kinetic op art in what could be described as the 'Spremberg Megamix'.

Spremberg has made a career of eschewing the traditional ground of canvas for his paintings, employing everyday objects and surfaces from newspaper to cardboard boxes to shopping trolleys, but *The Sound of White, Even* charges this agenda further. Scaled up to billboard size, hundreds of paintings spin, on loop, ad infinitum, a silent album on repeat which echoes on the retina and loudly rattles the optical nerves. The dissidence of the black vinyl and white paint has the effect of enhancing the colours of the found record labels, and become mesmerising targets. The kinetic impact of the work is such that it revolts expectation at every turn. A monochrome installation that spans the colour spectrum, and a silent album that demands to be heard, Alex Spremberg's deafening and hypnotic magnum opus is what you see when you hear *The Sound of White, Even*.



Moments of conflict (mechanical contention) | 2018 | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | 97 x 200 x 85cm
plywood, deconstructed 1969 Victor mechanical calculator parts reassembled with additional electric motors
Image courtesy of the artist

BJOERN RAINER-ADAMSON

Ross Rudesch Harley

'to separate the mass-produced readymade from the readyfound – the separation is an operation'
– Marcel Duchamp¹

Vimeo video scene:

Daylight: semi-industrial outdoor space.

A four-legged metal contraption with an Eames-style plywood seat affixed to it stands centre frame. A bicycle wheel sits beneath what looks like a gerry-rigged lawnmower engine at the back of the seat. The artist/operator enters left of frame and picks up an electric drill which he uses to jump-start the motor.

Sitting confidently in the driver's seat, the artist grips the throttle to the side, and the sputtering motor engages the bicycle wheel.

The digital camera shudders, and the entire rig begins to spin anti-clockwise.

At first it seems that the artist's machine is about to take off, but we soon perceive that this is a grounded kinetic sculpture spinning swiftly on its own axis.

After multiple 360-degree whip-pans the of semi-industrial location, the artist gently 'lands' the machine and exits to the right of frame.

This is how I first encounter the work of German-born Bjoern Rainer-Adamson entitled *Freedom of Choice* (2008), the playful kinetic sculpture which provides the leitmotif image for *HERE&NOW18*.

While having little interest in following in the footsteps of Duchamp, now Perth-based Rainer-Adamson has produced a body of work that brings *readymade* and readyfound objects into new productive and often humorous relationships.

No trash art or junk art here, Rainer-Adamson meticulously interrogates his battery of found materials in order to create new meaning and functional form from the old.

These well-crafted and highly conceptual artworks challenge the viewer to piece together a wide raft of underlying codes, schemas, and operations that constitute today's global materialist culture.

His curiosity to understand the internal machinations of all manner of devices combines powerfully with his master-craftsman ability to make highly-polished sculptural objects that set up intriguing perceptual puzzles and creative thought experiments.

Much of his practice puts into operation the detritus and discarded objects of mass-production and assembles them into playful sculptural propositions.

How can we decode the internal workings of global culture and society, and then encode it into what Rainer-Adamson describes as 'how reality is experienced as a shared phenomenon of the human collective mind'.

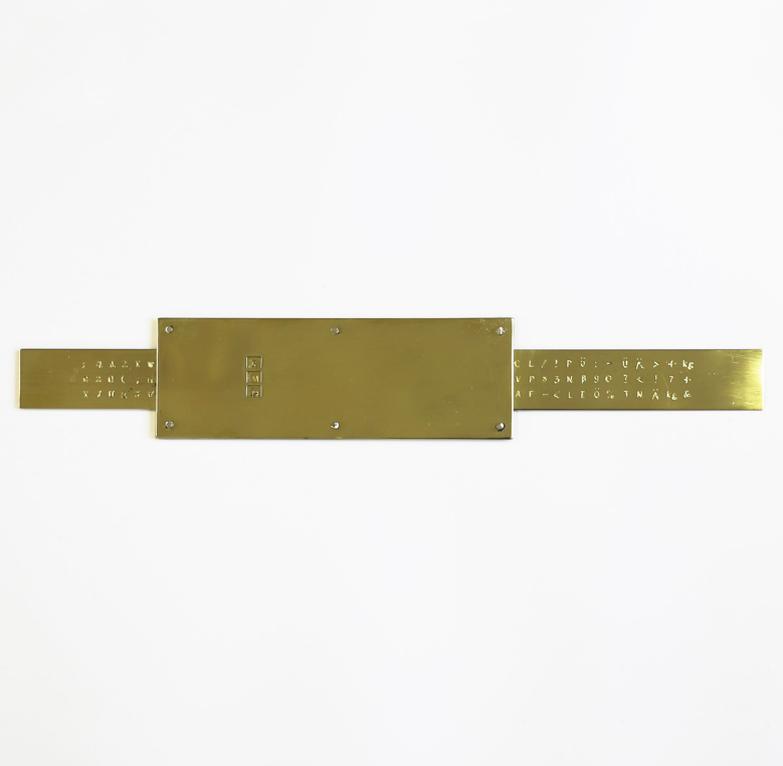
Rifle, the Optima typewriter piece he has created for this exhibition is a case in point. While this object deceptively imitates its East German original in surface detail, in fact it has been completely rebuilt into a fully-functioning device that will never write what the author intends.

Each key now connects with a different letter of the alphabet, and any attempt to write sensibly (if the audience were ever allowed) would be instantly turned into non-sense.

Together with *Optima decoder* and *Leadbox*, the suite of new works created for *HERE&NOW18* provide the audience with a new take on what Duchamp might have termed a 'playful science'.

These works seek to unravel the mechanisms and soul of the machine in new ways, piecing together the discarded components of our hyper-materialist society into intriguing portraits of our age.

¹ – Notes on *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* from *The Green Box* (1934).



(top left)

Optima decoder | 2018 | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | 31 x 5cm
hand engraved brass tool to be used to decrypt *Quote cards encrypted* and *Rifle*

(top right)

Quote cards encrypted | 2018 | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | 15 x 10cm each
paper, hand typed on modified Optima typewriter

(bottom left)

Leadbox | 2018 | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | 28 x 28 x 28cm
plywood, lead, collection of clues from *Rifle*, *Optima decoder* and *Moments of conflict* sealed within

(bottom right)

Rifle | 2018 | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | 50 x 47 x 25cm
readymade modified reconstruction of Optima typewriter
Images courtesy of the artist

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Perdita Phillips works across a range of media on issues surrounding the environment, ecology and non-human worlds. She creates small interventions or 'eclogues' in everyday life and takes viewers on walks through urban and ex-urban terrains. Phillips has been the recipient of two Australia Council Inter Arts grants, as well as Basel and Sydney residencies and funding for the book *Birdlife* and the *strange strolls* exhibition from the State Government of Western Australia. Exhibitions include *Make Known: The Exquisite Order of Infinite Variation*, UNSW Galleries (2018), *Objectillogica – a modern wunderkammer*, The Holmes à Court Gallery (2017) and *Another Green World*, Western Plains Cultural Centre (2017).

perditaphillips.com

Dr Alex Spremberg was born in 1950 in Hamburg, Germany and moved to Perth in 1982. In 2017 Spremberg completed his doctoral studies at Curtin University. He has been a lecturer for 24 years. His work was recently featured in *WA Focus TR + AS + JW* at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (2014). He has had solo exhibitions at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (2011); a survey exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (1994); as well as numerous solo and group exhibitions, both within Australia and internationally. Spremberg won the prestigious BankWest Contemporary Art Prize (2004), the Artitude Prize (2005) and the People's Choice Award, BankWest Contemporary Art Prize (2002).

alexspremberg.com

Carly Lynch is an artist with a BA (Hons First Class) from Curtin University, currently working on Wadjuk Noongar boodja/Perth. Her varied practice spans drawing to performance, as she considers the poetic potential for actions and materials to problematise the construction of dominant histories. Lynch has been included in the Fremantle Art Centre Print Award (2017), where she was previously an Artist In Residence, and Hatched Graduate Exhibition at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (2017). She has also been involved in a number of group, collaborative and solo exhibitions both locally and interstate. Her second solo exhibition *Murky Territories* was shown earlier this year at Seventh Gallery in Naarm/Melbourne.

c-lynch.com

Peter & Molly are performance-oriented artists based in Perth. They have been working in partnership since July 2015, and have since shown works at galleries including the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Their collaborative practice is founded upon a project of disruption and critique aimed at hermeneutic cultural and social systems, employing methods of film, sound and sculpture, to create striking, large scale installations.

peterandmolly.com.au

Dr Julie Dowling works in a social realist style, drawing on diverse art traditions including European portraiture and Christian icons, mural painting, and Badimaya First Nation iconography. Her pictorial works have a strong political edge, recording the deep-seated injustices in the Indigenous community. She speaks as a de-colonised subject subverting the traditional power relations between the observer and the observed, the coloniser and the de-colonised. Dowling holds a BA from Curtin University (1992) and Honorary Doctorate in Literature from Murdoch University (2002). Her work has been exhibited extensively, notably at Art Fair Cologne (1997), *Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art*, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art (2000), *Places that Name Us - Kate Challis RAKA Award*, The Ian Potter Museum of Art (2003), *Malga Gurbarl (Hard Secret)*, K1 #5 Seipple Gallery, Cologne (2017) and *Babanyu (Friends for Life)*, Art Gallery of Western Australia (2018).

juliedowling.net

Bjoern Rainer-Adamson grew up in Kaufbeuren, Germany, based now in Perth. Trained in cabinet making, woodcarving, drawing and printing he has been a sculptor for 20 years. His main interests are human dealings with their personal circumstances, and behaviour in their environment. He translates his observations into works with mechanical aesthetics. He is especially interested in the functionality and failure of an object. Through his working processes he often dismantles the subjects and then rebuilds and modifies them for his final work. Rainer-Adamson has had solo exhibitions at International Schoolhouse, Weicht (2013) and Art in the Factory, Neugablonz (2006) and has exhibited at Kulturschutzgebiet, Munich (2011), Noah Gallery, Augsburg (2008) and Sculpture at Bathers, Fremantle (2017).

bjoernraineradamson.co

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS BIOGRAPHIES

Anna Louise Richardson is an artist and independent curator whose practice focuses on regional and marginal identities, as well as intergenerational communication. She is currently contracted as Lead Curator for *The Alternative Archive*, as part of The Connect to the Creative Grid project for Regional Arts Partnership Program (RAPP) facilitated by Southern Forest Arts Inc and supported by the State Government and Country Arts WA. Richardson has curated independent projects in WA, NSW and VIC, including the Human Rights Arts & Film Festival (2015) and Next Wave Festival (2016). She also undertook a curatorial internship for the 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art with curator Lisa Slade. She has worked for Artsource (2014-2018) delivering professional development programs, and has received funding from the Department of Culture and the Arts (now DLGSC), NAVA, ART ON THE MOVE, the Australia Council and the Copyright Agency.

Megan Hyde is a freelance curator, educator and writer specialising in international contemporary art, community engagement and social practice. Currently an Adjunct Teaching Fellow at the Cultural Precinct at the University of Western Australia, she has worked on projects at Paper Mountain in Perth, Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, and the Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College in Clinton, among others. She received her BA in Art History from Union College in Schenectady, and her MA in Art History, Theory and Criticism from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Monique Fong was born in 1926 in Paris of a French mother and a Chinese father. She met André Breton and joined the Paris surrealist group in 1949. She met Octavio Paz. In 1951, she moved to the United States and met Marcel Duchamp. In 1966, she wrote her first text on Marcel Duchamp and moved from Washington, DC to New York City. She translated Octavio Paz's first essay on Marcel Duchamp, *The Castle of Purity*. A few years later, she translated some of John Cage's writings into French under the title *Silence*. Later still, John Cage and she collected the former's *How to Improve the World, You Will Only Make Matters Worse* which had appeared in various publications. The French translation was published in book form. She translated Octavio Paz's second essay on Marcel Duchamp, *Appearance Stripped Bare*. Late in life, she wrote three small essays around Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp des oiseaux*, *Glanes Duchamp* and *Entre Octavio Paz et Marcel Duchamp*. She collaborated on the bilingual publication, *Étant donné Marcel Duchamp* during all the years it was published.

Tom Picton-Warlow is a consultant in business analytics and strategy, program and project management and innovation in the areas of Oil and Gas, Mining, eCommerce, Merchant and Retail Banking, Health, Nutrition and Exercise. He is a Director of registered charity *Swimming365* which focuses on using swimming for health and fighting diabetes type 2. Prior appointments include Director of Swimming Australia and Swimming Western Australia. Picton-Warlow holds an MBA (UWA), GAICD, B.A. (Hons) (UWA), Grad. Dip. Comp. (Curtin). He has been collecting the works of Marcel Duchamp since 1997 and in 2017 commissioned Monique Fong to translate her 1966 text *Marcel Duchamp* into English.

Marcus Moore is an academic with expertise on 1960s receptions to Marcel Duchamp; the legacy of the *readymade*; and conceptual and 'post-object' art practices of the 1960s and 1970s. He earned his PhD in Art History on the topic of Marcel Duchamp and New Zealand art, subsequently curating the important historical exhibition *Peripheral Relations: Marcel Duchamp and New Zealand Art 1965-2011* (Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, 2012). He has addressed the life and work of Duchamp in many conference papers and articles, most recently in terms of an object-oriented-ontology of the *readymade*. He is Senior Lecturer in Critical Studies, College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington.

Lara Nicholls is the Curator of 19th century Australian Art at the National Gallery of Australia. She curated the travelling exhibition, *Abstraction: Celebrating Australian Abstract Women Artists* and has researched the influence of Duchamp and Malevich on Australian contemporary art. Between 2016-2018 she was the curator of the Lorne Sculpture Biennale in Victoria. Prior to joining the National Gallery of Australia she held senior specialist positions at both Sotheby's and Deutscher and Hackett. She holds an MA in Art History (Hons First Class) from the University of Melbourne.

Robert Cook is Curator of Contemporary Design and International Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Exhibitions include *Comic Tragic: the exploding language of contemporary comics* and *Ryan Trecartin: 6 movies; Under God's hammer: William Blake versus David Shrigley; Swamp op – Brent Harris; John Nixon: Matter; Mari Funaki – works, 1992-2009; and Brutal, tender, human, animal: Roger Ballen Photography*. In 2007, he was guest curator of *Octopus 7: don't show me your poetry* at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, and, in the same year, co-curated *Old skool (never lose that feeling)* with Hannah Matthews for the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. He was the curator of *Primavera 2013* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. His collaboration with Max Pam, *Narcolepsy*, was included in the 2012 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia.

Clothilde Bullen, a Wardandi (Nyoongar)/Yamatji woman, was the Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia for over a decade until taking up the position of Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibitions and Collections at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in early 2017. Clothilde has curated a number of shows independently including *When the Sky Fell: Legacies of the 1967 Referendum* at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts in 2017. Clothilde was the commissioning co-editor of the Indigenous edition of *Artlink* magazine in 2018 and has written extensively including for *Artlink*, *Sturgeon* and major catalogues.

Josephine Wilson lives in Perth. She has written essays, poetry and reviews and is the author of two novels; *Cusp* (UWAP 2005) and *Extinctions* (UWAP 2016). *Extinctions* won the 2017 Miles Franklin Literary Award and the Colin Roderick Award after winning the inaugural Dorothy Hewitt Award in manuscript. She has taught as a sessional academic at Murdoch University, the University of Western Australia and Curtin University.

Tulleah Pearce is a curator and producer who works with interdisciplinary and experimental practices. She is the Program Manager at Performance Space in Sydney, producing the annual Liveworks Festival of Experimental Art that commissions and presents independent visual and performing arts from across the Asia Pacific. Independently she has worked extensively with emerging artists and art forms; as a director of artist-run initiative Firstdraft, as a director of *Critical Animals* creative research symposium and anniversary publication *Critical Animalia*, and managed the 2016 SafARI Festival writing program *Explorer*.

Bec Dean is a curator, writer, educator and consultant with a background as an artist in photomedia and performance art. She is a PhD candidate at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Her curatorial practice-based research PhD engages with biomedical art and curatorial care. She has worked for multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary contemporary arts organisations in Australia since 1996 and has been curating exhibitions and producing events for 20 years. She was Associate Director of Performance Space, Sydney from 2007-2012, and Co-Director from 2012-2014. She was Curator at the Australian Centre for Photography from 2005-2007 and Gallery Manager at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts from 2001-2005.

Leigh Robb is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Previously she was Curator at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts from 2009-2016. She has curated over 40 exhibitions including solo exhibitions of Chiharu Shiota, John Gerrard, Tracey Moffatt, Richard Bell, Alex Spremberg, Erin Coates, Pilar Mata-Dupont & Tarryn Gill, and group exhibitions including *Versus Rodin: bodies across space and time*, *Dead Ringer*, *First Amongst Equals*, *Love of Diagrams*, and co-curated *Hijacked III: Contemporary photography from Australia and UK* and *Alternating Currents: Japanese Art after March 2011*.

Ross Rudesch Harley is an artist, writer and educator. He is Dean of the Faculty of Art and Design, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

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Book and exhibition by Anna Louise Richardson.

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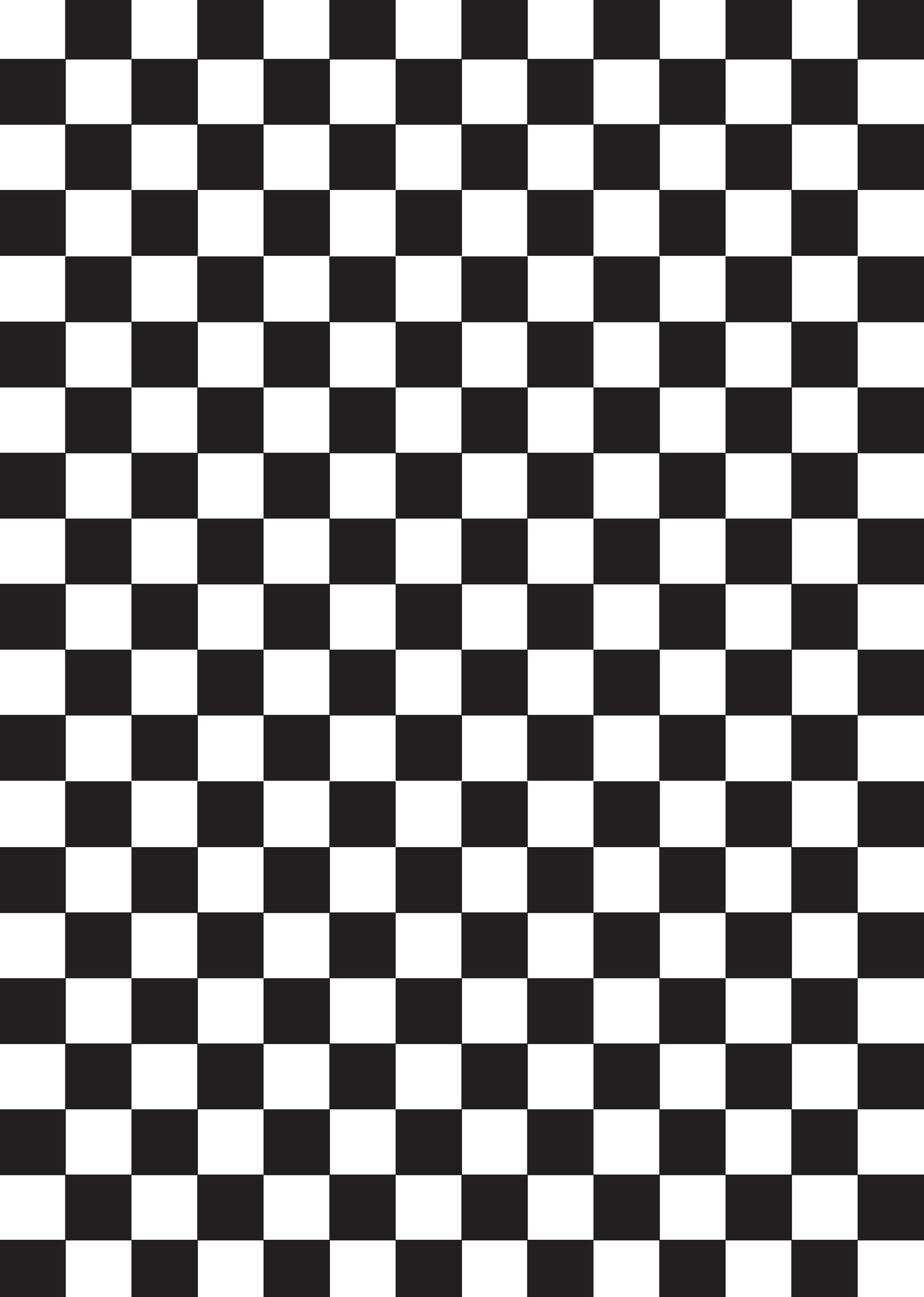


CULTURAL PRECINCT



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This catalogue was published on Whadjuk land, the traditional country of the Noongar people.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land.

We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to Noongar people living today.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future.



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