

# A MARCEL DUCHAMP COLLECTION

24 FEBRUARY – 14 MAY 2016 • Opening Reception: Wednesday, 24 February 6-8 pm



**Venice, CA --** L.A. Louver is proud to present a rare collection, amassed by a single collector over a period of 40 years, of works and matter by Marcel Duchamp. The exhibition will include original editioned objects and prints, collaborative designs, catalogues, readymades, archival materials and ephemera.

While considered to be among the most influential forces in the world of contemporary art, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) created preciously few works of art. His career spanned nearly seven decades (from 1900 to the year of his death, 1968), yet only about 650 items were recorded in the last edition of his catalogue raisonné (compared to some 50,000 by Picasso), and most are comparatively ephemeral in nature. The paucity of his production is due to the fact that in the early 1920s, Duchamp consciously withdrew from the world of art, partly to devote himself to the game of chess, but also because he became increasingly disenfranchised with the art world itself. Select artists were celebrated and rewarded for their success, while others—like him—refused to adhere to a specific style, and instead devoted themselves to challenging the rules of convention.

As a result, Duchamp felt that the unique works he made earlier in his career were too few in number to be speculated upon, so he skillfully arranged for them to be placed in two major collections of modern art, that of Louise and Walter Arensberg in Los Angeles (now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art) and of Katherine S. Dreier in Redding, Connecticut (now housed at the Yale University Art Gallery, with some works bequeathed to the Museum of Modern Art in New York). Throughout the time when most assumed Duchamp had ceased artistic production, he remained active in the periphery of the art world, creating designs for books, posters and exhibition catalogues, as well as issuing limited editions of his earlier work. It is from these later examples that collectors can continue to acquire the work of Duchamp, although over time, even these items have become increasingly rare and more difficult to obtain.

Chronologically, this exhibition begins with publications to which Duchamp contributed. In 1917, he helped assemble material for *The Blind Man*, a magazine that served the Society of Independent Artists in New York, of which he was a founding member. The magazine's second issue is devoted to the defense of R. Mutt's *Fountain*, an ordinary men's urinal that was submitted to the organization's first exhibition, but was refused from display, and features Stieglitz's memorable photograph of the controversial artifact. The survey continues with his design for the cover of *New York Dada*, the first and only magazine published under the name of the Dada movement in New York, featuring a reproduction of his

*Belle Haleine* perfume bottle. One of the rarest works in the collection is *Some French Moderns Says McBride*, a book designed by Duchamp that presents writings on modern art by the art critic Henry McBride. The articles—which are accompanied by black-and-white photographs of art works taken by Charles Sheeler—are gathered into the format of a three-ring binder. The text begins in a normal-sized typeface, a print that gradually increases in size throughout the publication until, on the last page, the words are suddenly and inexplicably presented in a miniscule font.

In the 1930s, Duchamp decided to publish his notes taken in preparation for the construction of the *Large Glass*, the most ambitious work of his early career that he had left in a state of intentional incompleteness in New York about a decade earlier. Rather than publish this material in the format of a traditional book, he painstakingly replicated each note in facsimile and issued them in a box with no prescribed sequence (known today because of its green frocking as the *Green Box*). Soon after, Duchamp embarked upon the publication of an album that was supposed to reproduce examples of his most important earlier work, a project that gradually grew in size and scope to include miniature, three-dimensional models, the whole housed in a box encased in a suitcase, thereby known as the *Boîte-en-valise*. Later editions—such as the one included in this exhibition (assembled in 1966 in an edition of 75 copies)—dispensed with the valise, and are therefore simply known as *boîtes* (this edition encased in red leather).

Many of the items included in this collection were produced in conjunction with Duchamp's production of the *Boîte-en-valise*, such as the covers he designed for various French magazines: *Cahiers d'Art*, *Minotaure*, *Transition*, *XXe siècle*. In most cases, he would ask the publisher to run off extra copies of the book or magazine to which he contributed, so that he could carefully excise the reproduction and include it in his valise. In order to raise the funds necessary for such an expensive project, he produced pochoirs of two earlier paintings, *Nude Descending a Staircase* and *Bride*, each of which were signed in a notarized format over the surface of a small-denomination French postage stamp. Finally, a portion of the collection is devoted to Duchamp's lifelong involvement in the game of chess, from various magazines that include the scores for games that he played, to deluxe and regular editions of a book he wrote with another chess master on an endgame theory.

In addition to examples of the replicated work, this exhibition includes several items by Duchamp that are unique: the drawing for a place card spelling out in elongated letters the last name of his good friend Henri-Pierre Roché; the drawing of a cupid that he made for a gallery announcement that contains an unsolvable endgame problem in chess; a piece of clay that he signed for a university student; a toy reproducing a baby's head in a milk bottle that he signed at the request of an artist. It is in the work produced for a larger audience, however—publications, book designs, posters, prints and works produced in limited editions (the better part of the present collection)—where Duchamp presents his public self. Here it becomes clear that he is an artist whose work cannot be casually observed to attain aesthetic pleasure (as in the case of most other artists of the 20th century), but each item must be individually studied and analyzed before it can be understood and appreciated for the fundamentally conceptual message it contains.

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We are fortunate to have the opportunity to present this unique collection of materials by Marcel Duchamp. On this occasion, we are extending the show through the duration of two concurrent gallery exhibitions—*Kienholz Televisions*, accompanied by a fully illustrated publication (24 February – 2 April 2016); and new paintings by Jason Martin from his London and Portugal studios (13 April – 14 May 2016).



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Gallery hours: Tues - Sat / 10am - 6pm; Validated parking available

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