

An Impertinent Pilgrimage: A “Meditation” on the Creation of *Praying for Irreverence*

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Dove Bradshaw,
Praying For Irreverence, 1984

My involvement with Marcel Duchamp started early. Growing up in Manhattan, I first went to the Museum of Modern Art when I was eleven or twelve. I was understandably attracted to the machine imagery of the *Bicycle Wheel* in their permanent collection. The subversive nature of the work left a strong imprint. My first artbook was Arturo Schwarz’s original *Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. By 1969 I was in art school, and it was there that I stumbled into my future work with Indeterminacy in a piece that came from life. It was titled *Plain Air*.

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Dove Bradshaw,
Plain Air, 1969-91
PS1 Institute of Contemporary Art

Cycling home from school, I came across a discarded bicycle wheel. I hung it horizontally in my studio as a perch for a pair of doves. At the time I let them fly free. The birds picked up pieces of wire and string from the studio to make a nest. Then I placed a Zen archery target below the wheel on the floor. This piece has been recreated three times since: at Sandra Gering and PS 1 Institute of Contemporary Art in New York and at The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh.

In 1977 my partner William Anastasi was offered three evenings at the Clocktower in which to perform versions of *You Are*, a piece from 1967. He wanted a writer, a painter and a composer each to serve as narrators. The narrators described *ad libitum* the viewers. This was taken down by a court reporter and transcribed by a typist; the pages were then pinned to the wall. Because of my involvement with the philosophy of chance, (and remembering that Bill had met John Cage in the 1960s) I suggested Cage as the composer. Cage agreed; a friendship developed and through him we met Teeny Duchamp.

We were invited for dinner with Teeny at Cage's house in 1982. John, as he often did, had asked us to arrive at five for a round robin of chess. Chance placed me across from Teeny. We

had not met before and had barely said a few words before beginning.

It was an intense game. Chess has the capacity to be more revealing than small talk. The play went on for about two hours and I had the sense that neither of us wanted the other to lose, although perhaps neither wanted to throw the game. Teeny, the stronger player, won. This was the beginning of our friendship; we kept a correspondence until her death.

Bill and I often traveled to Europe for our work. On a number of occasions, we stayed with Teeny for a couple of weeks at her home in Villiers-sous-Gréz. In 1984, on such a visit, Teeny had driven us to Paris where she had things to do. She put us up in the apartment/studio in Neuilly that she had shared with Duchamp. She returned for us the next day. It was a marvelous unplanned experience.

The Neuilly studio was the place where Duchamp died. Although fifteen years had passed, it looked as if he had just left. The books and folios on the shelves gave the impression of constant use. The room seemed filled with a beautiful spirit.

Among many of the readymades were the *Bottle Dryer*, *Fresh Widow* and *Fountain*. The next morning I asked Bill to photograph me *Praying for Irreverence*.

That night, we took off for Cadaquès, Spain, where Teeny and Marcel had summered. Our host was Richard Hamilton who was responsible for the typographic version of the *Green Box* notes. Hamilton's house (formerly the Governor's) is a medieval building made of local flint stone. Richard had gathered a rare mix of Antonio Gaudí and seventeenth century furniture. We arrived in January during the month of the *Mistral* (a cold violent wind which whips off the Mediterranean). Its incessant howling rang through Richard's vaulted stone corridors. And each house we entered made a different sound. It was known to have set a native's mind mad.

We left this place after a week. I was grateful to quietly reclaim my thoughts. To this day, I associate the wail of the *Mistral* with that land of Duchamp, Dalí, and Buñuel.

[Click here for images of Duchamp's studio/apartment in Neuilly.](#)

[Click here for information on Dove Bradshaw's recent exhibitions.](#)

For articles on Dove Bradshaw's "Firehose" (1976-2000), see *The Columbus Dispatch* and *The New York Magazine*.

[Click here to see Dove Bradshaw's recent work: Water of Life.](#)