Duchamp the Gardener

Two years ago I went to a garden design festival on the river Loire, in France.40 or so gardens had been built, all selected for innovation of ideas, material or execution. The festival is held in the grounds of a castle overlooking the river Loire. The theme of the show that year was “Erotomania”.

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Figure 2
Céline Orsingher et Laurent Bailly, *Erotomania-Erotomachia*,

2002

Nestling amongst the fibreglass breasts, suspended underwear and other (small) feats of the designers' imagination was a garden enclosed by a corrugated iron wall. The only view of the garden was afforded by the occasional peep hole. Within the walls was a scene of urban decay : weeds grew high, plastic mannequins in various states of undress lay, erotically I suppose, in the overgrown vegetation. Experiencing the garden via the peephole made the experience short, private and intense. The title of the garden was *Erotomanie Erotomachie*. (Fig.
1) Had the idea been *Given* by Duchamp? (Fig.
2) I asked its architects but received no reply.

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- Figure 2
- Figure 3

Marcel Duchamp, *Given: 1.*

The Waterfall; 2. The Illuminating Gas, 1946-66

There are other links to be made between Duchamp and gardening…and Duchamp and landscape, I'm here today to argue the case for Duchamp the gardener and would love to hear the counter argument. I'll make them none the less.

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Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 1915-23

Let us take a famous work: *Fountain*. I won't labour this point but the simple fact is this man's fame rests on a water feature. Duchamps horticultural aspirations can hardly be made more obvious…and the *Large Glass*…glass and horticulture go hand in hand, in fact the Palm House at Kew gardens is discussed by one contributor to Tout fait. Glass is a complicated, conceptual, challenging material that both allows us grow tropical plants in boreal places, as well as transmit cryptic artistic messages. Duchamp chose the latter way of using it…but could have fairly chosen the former.

What stronger argument than these? If I must go on I will. Duchamp's liberation of Washington Square (attempted) was not, I would argue, the drunken detail in Duchamp's life has (regrettably) been bypassed by Duchampians. It shows a clear commitment to the municipal landscape…possibly with aspirations to community gardening. Duchamp was a great fan of

New York City and was it would not surprise me at all if he had been planning a post secession community (organic) wildflower meadow for the children of New York. Serious.

Not convinced? I'll continue. Rrose Sélavy? Quoi plus dire? Duchamp was of the field in name…of the flower in pseudonym. He didn't only think about flowers but also about watering them, and selected this as a identifying himself. A practical man as well as an aesthete…a landscaper. What better qualification for my thesis?

Duchamp was once described as being in an anti-nature phase, and defiantly turning his back on a Forsythia bush (who wouldn't). He doesn't fool me. The line between love and hate is a thin one.

I could go on, there is a gardener in all of us. Duchamp was no exception. The big question is why did he hide it from the world? It was nothing to be ashamed of. Answers please.

Fig. 2-3
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