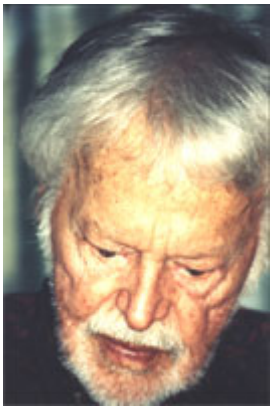
Flag of Ecstasy

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Photograph
of Charles Henry
Ford by Penny Arcade,
early 1990s

Charles Henri Ford (1913-2002) was a 20th century Renaissance man, admired for his literary criticism, editing and publishing, poetry, photography, film making, and visual art. “Flag of Ecstasy”, written for Duchamp, was the title poem of his 1972 poetry collection for Black Sparrow Press.

Ford was at the epicenter of the art world co-authored and influenced by Duchamp. Nurtured and encouraged from a young age by the likes of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams, Charles’s contemporaries and collaborators later included Djuna Barnes, Parker Tyler, Pavel Tchelitchew, Man Ray, Peggy Guggenheim, Andre Breton, Cecil Beaton, Salvadore Dali, Jean Cocteau, William Burroughs, Ned Rorem, Joseph Cornell… the list goes on.

Charles did not consent to recite his poetry often. This recording (2000) is one of the few that exist. When Charles agreed to record, I asked him to include “Flag of Ecstasy” because of my personal interest in Duchamp. I was fascinated by Charles’s words written specifically for the amusement of

Duchamp, whom Charles greatly admired. At 92, his speech in the recording is slightly slurred, but his voice carries the dignity and depth that characterize all of his work, regardless of medium.

The music behind Charles's recitation is an atonal soundscape, my impressionistic reaction to the poem. There is nothing "Duchampian" in the logic or construction of this piece; it is simply a contemporary reaction to Duchamp as an individual (Charles's poem) accompanied by my abstract composition, which is designed to provoke but not distract the listener from the poem. To collaborate with Charles, a genuine living Surrealist, was an honor and a thrill indeed.

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Charles Henri Ford,
"Flag of Ecstasy,"
published in View, vol.
5, no. 1 (March
1945), p. 4

FLAG OF ECSTASY
(For Marcel Duchamp)
by Charles Henri Ford

Over the towers of autoerotic honey
Over the dungeons of homicidal drives

Over the pleasures of invading sleep

Over the sorrows of invading a woman

Over the voix celeste
Over vomito negro

Over the unendurable sensation of madness
Over the insatiable sense of sin

Over the spirit of uprisings
Over the bodies of tragediennes

Over tarantism: “melancholy stupor and an uncontrollable desire to dance”
Over all

Over ambivalent virginity
Over unfathomable succubi

Over the tormentors of Negresses
Over openhearted sans-culottes

Over a stactometer for the tears of France
Over unmanageable hermaphrodites

Over the rattlesnake sexlessness of art lovers
Over the shithouse enigmas of art haters

Over the sun’s lascivious serum
Over the sewage of the moon

Over the saints of debauchery
Over criminals made of gold

Over the princes of delirium
Over the paupers of peace

Over signs foretelling the end of the world
Over signs foretelling the beginning of a world

Like one of those tender strips of flesh
On either side of the vertebral column

Marcel, wave!

download QuickTime Player

“Flag of Ecstasy”
Poem written and read by Charles Henri Ford; music by Chris Rael,
2000