Lost Object-Found

Among the 1987 Centennial and Happy Birthday Marcel events in Philadelphia was a display of Duchamp's works at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, many of which were ready-mades.

They were in the long gallery leading toward the Arensberg Collection. There were many interesting labels and citations to read. Near the 1916 *Comb* inscribed with the wonderfully cryptic message: "3 or 4 drops of height have nothing to do with savagery" was Duchamp's proud comment about its durability: "During 48 years it has kept the characteristics of a true ready made; no beauty,
no ugliness, nothing particularly esthetic about it…."

click to enlarge


Label explaining Lost Ready Made

Figure 1
Label explaining
lost ready-made

As I continued my slow and thoughtful walk, reading as I went, I saw a little etching done in 1959 entitled *Tire a quatre epingles* [Pulled at 4 Corners] or "Dressed to the Nines." The museum's label mentioned that it was the title he'd given a chimney ventilator, a 1915 ready-made that was lost! (Fig. 1)

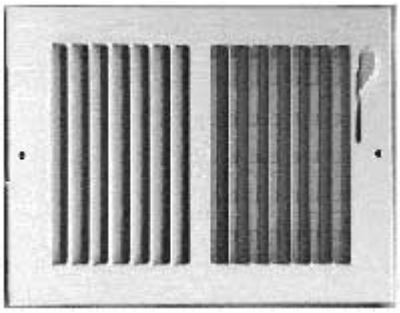
"Lost?" I said to myself; "I wonder if anyone is looking for it and if it can be found." Upon arriving home, I decided to keep an eye open for it. I discussed it with a friend who thought he'd seen it in the corner of the restaurant kitchen

where he was working as a pastry chef. I fumbled around in my attic and basement, thinking it just might turn up.

After checking the Yellow Pages under R, M, .D, and V, I decided that this was a long-term project and let it slip out of mind for a while, thinking that one day it would emerge on its own accord.

Several years later I stopped into Niece's Lumberyard in Lambertville, NJ to buy some art supplies. In an almost Proustian moment of ecstatic memory, I realized that I had found the lost ready made! There it was . . . a wall ventilator, a perfect analog of a formal dress shirt, its pleats pressed and shiny white, ready to wear to a special event—pulled at four corners, dressed to the nines. (Figs. 2, 3) It even had a little lever allowing it to shift quietly like a kinetic sculpture.

click images to enlarge

- 
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- Figure 2
- Figure 3

- Wall ventilator

- Wall ventilator

If I were to install it on my bedroom wall, it might qualify as a “disguised ready made.” If it were to be exhibited at a museum, perhaps it would be considered the first “forged ready made.”

Realizing that documentation is important, I enclose the receipt of its purchase as provenance— $5.44, 07/14/90. (Fig. 4)

Later I discovered that more than ten of the original ready mades had been lost, some of which were re-made in small editions by Arturo Schwarz and Ulf Linde.

However, there are some that remain a puzzle and an ongoing project for me. For example, when asked to design the installation of “First Papers of Surrealism” in 1942, (Fig. 5) Duchamp purchased 16 miles of string. He used only 1 mile of string for the show. What happened to the other 15 miles?

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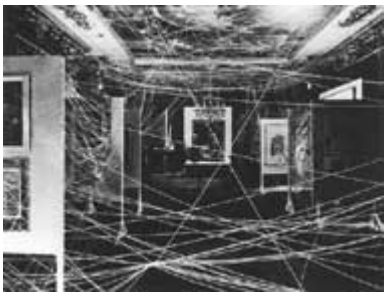
- 

- Figure 4
- Figure 5

- Receipt of the purchase
- Marcel Duchamp, Installation
  for the exhibition of *First Papers of Surrealism*, 1942

Stretched out from mid-town Manhattan, it could measure a radius that would reach Paterson, NJ, Newark Airport, Coney Island, Kennedy Airport, and some point in Long Island Sound south of Norwalk, CT. If rolled into a ball, what would 15 miles of string look like?

What would its measurements be?

click to enlarge



Figure 6
Nura Petrov with
the strings

Some of the string can be found in my work. (Fig. 6) Skeins of it occur in Kyria Anthusa's tangled loom, a construction of wooden branches that I made in 1995. Several yards of it, which I came upon in a ditch beside Bursonville Rd. c.1997, are hiding in a photo-copy collage from the same year. If you have any thoughts on this or other lost ready mades, drop me a line (or a standard stoppage) at my e-mail address: nurapetrov@conceptualist.com

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In regard to Duchamp's "Pulled at Four Pins," it is surprising that almost 50 years after the now lost original Readymade of 1915, Duchamp would have memorized its appearance as vividly as he did for the etching. For the catalogue of the1973/1974 exhibition "Marcel Duchamp: A Retrospective" (Philadelphia Museum of Art / Museum of Modern Art, NY) the American photographer Peter Hujar was assigned to take pictures of buildings in New York in which Duchamp had lived. While on Fire Island he also took several photographs of a chimney cowl similar to the one depicted in Duchamp's

etching. Such a chimney cowl was discovered and legally dismantled by ASRL intern Adam Kleinman in the summer of 2000 on a midtown-Manhattan rooftop. Together with an exhaustive collection of literature on both the variety and history of chimney cowls, the object is now part of the permanent collection at ASRL, NY. – Thomas Girst) **(Figs. 7, 8)**

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- Figure 7
- Figure 8

- Marcel Duchamp,*Pulled at Four Pins*, 1964
- Chimney Cowl,ASRL/NY, ca. 1910’s

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