

Memoirs: Art & Art History

These six paintings linking Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray are part of a long-term project on art, artists and art movements. The Duchamp/Man Ray paintings are pairs or companion pieces. The paintings, in gouache, are not absolutely faithful to detail or color and are painted with flat surfaces and thin paint so as not to reproduce the texture of the originals. The series began late in 1995. It was completed in early 2000 with nineteen paintings.

The work is in various paint media-gouache, acrylic, oil-acrylic gel transfer photocopies and computer-generated type. While each pair of paintings carries intellectual and personal content, their primary impact is visual.

The block letter texts framing the images are gleaned from various sources; they are pertinent to the images and are combinations of artist's titles and descriptions as well as observations from critics, historians and curators, and others.

Some of the artists have influenced me or been a source of inspiration. Others' work uses motifs and backdrops for intertextual discourse. Each pair has a Jewish context or presence. The Jewishness is represented by my selection of artists, critics, and historians. The paintings are personal responses to specific aesthetics, works of art, artists, art movements, art personalities, and my own social, aesthetic, or political engagement with them.

In this century, copying, can be found in the work of Pablo Picasso, Roy Lichtenstein and Sherrie Levine. Picasso abducted other sources because he needed icons as sources of inspiration; Lichtenstein carried away various modernist pictures to praise and subvert them for his popular comic book style and Levine deconstructed modernist paradigms in her

“stainless steals.” Unlike Picasso, I am not pilfering images; unlike Lichtenstein, I am not re-designing paintings to convey a post-modern aura; and unlike Levine, I am not re-writing history. But more like the poster paintings of Charles Demuth, on the other hand, which were tributes to his friends and associates, this work is largely about late modernism, artists and critics and their complicated inter-personal associations.

The written material, aside the paintings, augments the narrative I tell in pictures and words:

Paintings 1 & 2, 1997-1998 (44"x34")



- Left Panel: ADOPTED BY THE FRENCH/PAINTING WITH LIGHT/OUR OWN MAN RAY/BROKEN WITH SIGHT

The background image is a painted copy of Man Ray's *The Rope Dancer Accompanies herself with her Shadows*, 1916. This painting was completed while Marcel Duchamp was working on his *Large Glass*; it is in homage to or, at least, is an allusion to Duchamp's work. The central photocopy is a Man Ray self-portrait photograph with a camera. His quote reads: "I tell them that the tricks of today are the truths of tomorrow." The photocopy in the lower center is a photograph of the lower portion of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* by Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp's *Dust Breeding*, 1920.

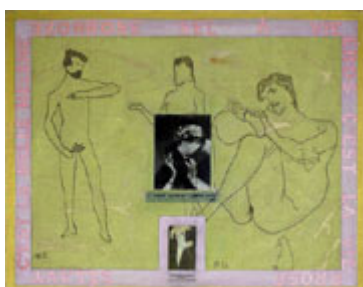
- Right panel: WELCOME TO NEW YORK/BROKEN WITH SIGHT/ENIGMATIC DUCHAMP/ANTI RETINAL ART

The background image is a painted copy of Duchamp's drawing for the *Large Glass*. The central photocopy is a photograph of Duchamp by Man Ray. His quote reads: "It is idle to explain it, I do not explain it. It is, after all, the fourth dimension." The photocopy in the lower center is the lower portion of the *Large Glass* photographed by Charles Scheeler, c. 1921.

Text around these paintings was gleaned from what the artists said and what others said about them. "WELCOME TO NEW YORK," is from a Francis Picabia painting completed shortly after he made his first visit to the city and encouraged Duchamp to follow.

Duchamp, a son of a French notary, and Man Ray, born of immigrant Jews in Philadelphia, were friends and partners in art and chess since they met in New Jersey in 1915 where they feigned an imaginary game of tennis. Perhaps this was the first work of Performance Art. They shared interests in Dada, machine-like contrivances, cross-dressing, women, sex and readymades, as well as chess, for over fifty years.

Paintings 3 & 4, 1998 (44"x34")



- Left Panel: ...ROSE SEL A VIE/EROSE C'EST LA VIE/EM(MAN)UEL (RA)DNITSK(Y)/C'EST DE LA BELLE HÆLEINE

The background images are painted copies of Man Ray drawings: the left side drawing was done from a photograph of Man Ray's wife, Julie in 1942; the right side is a surrealist drawing, *Sablier-compte fils* [(the) *Hourglass Counts* (the) *Threads*, (probably another reference to the bride stripping bare)], 1938. The central photocopy is a self-portrait photograph in which Man Ray depicts himself about to indulge in multiple suicides. His quote reads: "To Be-continued unnoticed." The photocopy lower center is a magazine reproduction of a solarized print with color: *Beauty in Ultra Violet*, 1940.

- Right Panel: ...ROSE SEL A VIE/EROS C'EST LA VIE/RROSE SELAVY/C'EST LA BELLE HELENE

The background images are painted copies of Duchamp's etchings. The left side is from Lucas Cranach's *Adam and Eve* from a presentation, years before, with Duchamp on stage as Adam and Bronia Perlmutter as Eve in a *Ciné Sketch* produced by Francis Picabia and René Clair at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The right side is from a painting by Gustav Courbét-this is the bride stripping bare; the falcon represents a "peeping Tom" bachelor and "a false cunt and a real one," according to Duchamp. The central photocopy is a photograph of Duchamp as Rose Selavy-his alter ego Jewish woman persona. His quote reads: "...I consider myself...'an unfrocked artist.'" The photocopy lower center is Duchamp's relief maquette, painted leather over a plaster mounted on velvet, for *Etant donné: Given the Illuminating Gas and the Waterfall*, 1948-'49.

Multiple puns abound in the text: Man Ray's, "...ROSE SEL A VIE (originally a Rayograph Dadist object portrait of Duchamp published in *The little Review*, 1922) translates to "ROSE THE SALT OF LIFE," Duchamp's French enunciation, EROS C'EST LA VIE, is "EROTICISM THAT'S LIFE," and his English transliteration of RROSE SELAVY is "ROSE LEVY." Other puns

revolve around the perfume bottle readymade with a photograph portrait of Duchamp as a woman wearing a hat (not shown) called "C'EST DE LA BELLE HÆLEINE-BEAUTIFUL BREATH." (I superimposed the "A" over the "E" to make the pun on "HALEINE" more closely resemble "HELENE." "C'EST DE LA BELLE HELENE-BEAUTIFUL HELEN," which is my addition to the punster game.

Paintings 5 & 6, 1998 (44"x34")



- Left Panel: I AND MARCEL A DUEL/THE KING IS MINE/PORTRAIT OF THIRTY YEARS/THE QUEEN IS YOURS (This is to be read horizontally top and bottom and vertically right and left.)

The background image is a painted copy of Man Ray's *Night Sun—Abandoned Playground*, 1943. The central photocopy is a photograph of Man Ray and Duchamp, as old men, playing chess. His quote reads: "The Cosmic Urge-with ape-ologies to PicASSo, 1915." The photocopy lower center is Man Ray's whimsical construction of a chess board with three giant chess pieces, *Permanent Attraction*, 1948

- Right Panel: A YOUNG MAN OF GOOD/ELEMENTARY TREATICE/PROVINCIAL/FAMILY/ON FOUR-DIMENSIONS (This is to be read horizontally top and bottom and vertically right and left.)

The background image is a painted copy of Duchamp's *The Chess*

Game, 1910, which includes his two artist brothers playing chess and his sisters sitting around. The central photocopy is of a photograph of Man Ray and Duchamp, as young men, playing chess. His quote reads: "A piece of canned chance. It's amusing to put chance in a can," 1913-1914. The photocopy lower center is of Duchamp's construction, "*Pocket Chess set with Rubber Glove*," 1966, upside down.

The mysteries of chess, plays on words, games, chance, physics and mathematics were mutual interests of these perplexing artists.