

Shooting Bullets at the Barn

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Left subtitle

Marcel Duchamp, *Cover for the First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942 (verso)

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Right subtitle

Marcel Duchamp, *Cover for the First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942 (recto)

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Kurt Seligmann's farmhouse
in Sugar Loaf, NY, 26 April 2000

In 1942 Marcel Duchamp is said to have fired five shots at the base of artist-friend Kurt Seligmann's barn in Sugar Loaf, New York. Shortly thereafter, for the 1942 New York exhibition, *First Papers of Surrealism*, organized by the exiled Surrealist leader André Breton, the cover of the catalogue was perforated where Duchamp's bullets hit the nineteenth century stone wall.

Other holes on the cover look similar but remain without cut-through circles.

click to enlarge

Notes
From near or far (or, on a target)
This target is shot (or, on a target)
to the vanishing point (in perspective).
The figure thus obtained will be the
projection (through the) of the principal
points of a 3-dimensional body. -- With
sufficient skill, this projection would
be reduced to a point (the target).
With ordinary skill the
projection will be a dematerialization
of the target. (Each of the new points
(images of the target) will have a
coefficient of displacement. This coefficient
is nothing but a constant and can be noted
consequently. (The different shots
noted from their to which according to their
distance).
In general, the figure obtained
is the figure following (a step
on the way) of the dematerialized
body.

Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride
Stripped Bare by her Bachelors,
Even*, (a typographic
version by Richard Hamilton,
Percy Lund, Humphries: London, 1960),
n.p.

It has been suggested that by firing the bullets, Duchamp was referring to the Nine Shots of the Bachelors in the Bride's Domain of his *Large Glass*, whose location, according to one of his notes (written between 1911-15) published in the *Green Box* (1934), was to be achieved by randomly firing matches dipped in fresh paint from a toy cannon. ⁽¹⁾

On close examination almost sixty years later, the exact location of the barn's detail depicted on the cover of *First Papers of Surrealism* can no longer be made out on the surface of the crumbling and weather-beaten wall. As for the cheese on the back of the cover, the debate still continues. It is definitely Swiss cheese ⁽²⁾, from Seligmann's native country, but is it a refined "gruyère" as Francis M. Naumann and Arturo Schwarz maintain or just "emmentaler," as Stephan E. Hauser ⁽³⁾ claims? One final incidental: According to Charles Shaughnessy, a longtime family friend and neighbor, the .22 rifle Duchamp used is considered the same one that killed Seligmann twenty years later.

click image for video (0.8 MB)



- close-up video of Kurt Seligmann's barn in Sugar Loaf, NY, 26 April 2000
- video of Kurt Seligmann's farmhouse and barn in Sugar Loaf, NY, 26 April 2000

On Wednesday, April 26th, 2000, Bonnie Garner, Lester Lockwood and the author drove to the Seligmann homestead, 26 Oak Drive, Sugar Loaf, New York (Telephone: 914-469-3849), to examine the barn. We'd like to thank Ms. Patricia Gilchrest, Executive Director of the Orange County Citizens Foundation, and Mr. Charles "Chuck" Shaughnessy for their hospitality. We'd also like to thank Stephan E. Hauser for establishing the contact.

Notes :

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1. Francis M. Naumann. *The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. (Ghent, Amsterdam: Ludion Press, 1999), pp. 151. (See also: pp. 150, 153.)

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2. Martica Sawin. *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*. (Cambridge: MIT, 1995), pp. 224-226.

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3. Stephan E. Hauser. *Kurt Seligmann (1900-1962): Leben und Werk*. (Basel: Schwabe, 1997), pp. 221-222.