

The biography of marcel duchamp and his sculpture "the fountain"

[Literature](#), [Biography](#)



When you think of a high status art museum, what do you think of? I'll go ahead and take a guess that your first guess was probably not a urinal. Well that's exactly what Marcel Duchamp did on April 9th, 1917, with his sculpture "The Fountain".

Marcel Duchamp, born July 28, 1887, was a French painter and sculptor born in Normandy, France. He grew up in a family that consisted of artists, and eventually followed in his two older brothers to Paris to study paintings at Academie Julian. A man of puns, sexual innuendos, and great wit he got a job as a cartoonist to help pay for his studies. While in Paris Marcel studied Fauvism, Cubism, and Impressionism but would later be drawn to the ideas of Dadaism and Surrealism.

In 1915, Duchamp moved to New York where he created his first pieces of "readymade" art. Three of his most notable readymades included a snow shovel, a urinal, and a bicycle wheel. They were created in an attempt to go against the cookie cutter normalcy in the art world at the time. For the next seven years, from 1915 to 1923, Duchamp planned and painted on of his two most notable pieces of artwork. Called The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, or The Large Glass, it consisted of machinery wedged between glass panels. This became one of Duchamp's first rejections of the plain Jane obsessions with pleasing the eye.

During these seven years creating readymades, he created one of his most famous, controversial pieces of artwork...The Fountain. The story goes like this, in 1917, Duchamp wanted to submit a piece of his artwork to the Society of Independent Artists' Salon in New York. Claiming that they would

accept any work as long as the artist paid the application fee, Duchamp did what any reasonable human would do, submit the worst piece of artwork he could come up with. So, taking a porcelain urinal, he laid it on its side, signed it R. Mutt and dated it 1917. What did he call this absolute masterpiece.

Why did he sign it R. Mutt? Well, R. was said to stand for Richard, French slang for “ moneybags” while Mutt was a reference to JL Mott Iron Works. After being shown, the museum refused the “ sculpture” saying that it wasn't art, and that it wasn't moral enough to be shown in a museum. Others challenged this claim, saying that no matter what an object was, it was far more significant when selected by an artist for display. What was meant to be a middle finger at the art world, turned out to become one of the most important pieces of art in the 20th century. The Fountain, was so important because it raised the question of what was considered art. Some argued that anything an artist chose and created was considered art, but others argued that artwork had to be created from scratch, unlike Duchamp's readymades.

It's one of those things that art is subjective to the creator and the people that were viewing it. So what one person might considered art, another might consider it garbage. After creating his readymades, Duchamp kind of disappeared from the public eye. As of 1920, he continued to make readymades, creating his famous Bottle Rack series, and living out the rest of his life as a grumpy old man. People believed he gave up art to become a competitive chess player. Over time, Duchamp removed himself from the bigger art groups, and kept to a tight-knit group of artists. While out of the

public eye, Duchamp spent the next twenty years creating his second masterwork, *Étant donné*.

It was a work that depicted a sexualized diorama. It was a shock to the art community, because it wasn't discovered until after his death. Duchamp might not have been a very good artist, but he was a very controversial one, and one thing that always seems to come with controversy is influence. He may be dead, but he seemed to leave a hell of a legacy. Many people followed in his footsteps. He also helped form the debate as to what should be considered art, and what should be considered eligible to be in galleries and museums. Ky and I collectively agree that although Marcel Duchamp is world renowned, he isn't an artist. We feel like the only reason he is known is because of his controversial art. But hey, to each their own.