

Some Debatable Readymades

May 3 - June 21, 2025

In a 1961 text titled *Apropos of Readymades*, Marcel Duchamp described his infamous found object artworks as “a form of manifestation.”¹ This succinct phrase seems closest to a definition of what scores of artists, critics, and art historians have labored over since Duchamp made the first of those endlessly strange *objets d’art* in 1913. It perhaps sums up what has allowed their radical alterity to persist over the last century and up to the present, consistently beguiling viewers and eluding complete apprehension. It also may explain why so many of them have been re-made. To Duchamp, who thought of art as simply “one of the activities”, the various readymades were discrete gestures in a much larger field of action, a thing to be done when the moment called for it, and an extension of his lived experience². He deliberately made very few of them over the course of his life. In the notes for his *Green Box* of 1934, this quixotic passage about them appears near the end:

Specifications for “Readymades”

—
by planning for a moment to come
(on such a day, such a date such a minute),
“To inscribe a readymade”.— the readymade
can later be looked for. (with all kinds of delays)
The important thing is just this matter of timing³

The many competing histories in scholarship on Duchamp try in vain to locate a precise moment at which the readymades “began”. The works’ provenance often seems deliberately obscured, and new discoveries complicate the debate⁴. Their number in the various *catalogues raisonnés* ranges from 18 to 43, with Duchamp himself citing a vague “30 to 35.” Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp’s good friend and biographer, claims Duchamp made “no more than twenty in his lifetime.”⁵ Elsewhere, another scholar says there were only ever ten⁶. On view in this exhibition are five of them, each of them replicas, each of them in their own way “debatable”. They were chosen and re-made according to what was available. The purpose of this show, if there is any, is not to render things even blurrier; on the contrary, it may be taken as an opportunity to shed light, to remind, and to make “manifest” this other, still alternative form of art.

¹ Sanouillet, Michel and Elmer Peterson, ed. *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975.

² Tomkins, Calvin. *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*. New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2013: 58.

³ Hamilton, Richard and George Heard Hamilton and Marcel Duchamp, ed. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. New York: Jaap Rietman, 1976.

⁴ Shearer, Rhonda Roland. “Creating Organization.” *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* (2003).

https://www.toutfait.com/unmaking_the_museum/introduction2.html

⁵ Tomkins, Calvin. *Duchamp: A Biography*. New York: Henry Holt, 1996: 159.

⁶ Tomkins, Calvin. *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*. New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2013: 55.

Marcel Duchamp
Bilboquet, 1910/2025

Marcel Duchamp
Unhappy Readymade, 1919/2025

Marcel Duchamp
Waistcoat, 1957/2025

Marcel Duchamp
The Locking Spoon or *Verrou de surete a la cuiller*, 1957/2025

Marcel Duchamp
Faux-Vagin, 1962-63/2025