

EXHIBITION GUIDE



The earliest of these readymades is the *Bilboquet*, a popular French toy consisting of a wooden ball and peg connected by a string, sent from Paris in April of 1910 to Duchamp's friend Max Bergmann as a gift. The original was inscribed: "Bilboquet / Souvenir à Paris / A mon ami M. Bergmann / Duchamp printemps 1910" on the top of the ball. Its status as an artwork was only recently put forward following its "discovery" in 2000 by the art critic and Duchamp scholar Francis M. Naumann¹. The bilboquet predates *Bicycle Wheel* (considered by most to be the first readymade) by three years, and remains a source of conflict in the various debates on the readymades' chronology². Though inscribed with a date and signature, unlike most other official or "core" readymades the inscription is prosaic and has no pun. *Bilboquet* can be seen as an early signal into Duchamp's obsessive and sustained interest in eroticism, its form vaguely suggestive of male and female genitalia, not to mention the penetrative action involved in playing the game. The version on display dates from the period and is inscribed by two anonymous lovers, Bernard and Laurence, and was likely bought as a wedding present.

¹ Naumann, Francis M. "Duchamp's Erotic Souvenir." *Art News* 99.2 (Feb 2000): 100+.

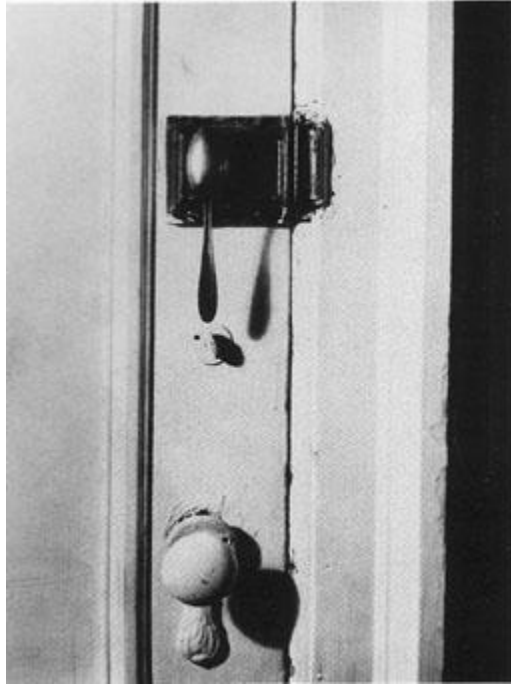
² Shearer, Rhonda Roland. "Bilboquet." *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* (2003).
https://www.toutfait.com/unmaking_the_museum/Bilboquet.html



Unhappy Readymade was also a wedding gift. In a 1919 letter to his sister Suzanne on the occasion of her marriage to the painter Jean Crotti in Paris, Duchamp wrote instructions for a readymade that would “seriously get the facts of life.”³ The task was to string up a geometry textbook on her balcony and leave it outside, exposed to the elements. Left like this, the textbook would slowly be destroyed. Duchamp remarked about the procedure in a late interview: “the wind had to go through the book, choose its own problems, turn and tear out the pages...it was an amusing idea.”⁴ This readymade is included in most catalogues and can be considered canonical, but it strays significantly from Duchamp’s typical program. Conceived as a set of instructions to be carried out, it presages by 40 years the Conceptualist model of the score— as practiced by artists like Sol Lewitt, John Cage, and the Fluxus group— and exists almost solely as an idea. By its nature it is un-conservable and non-archival; no original could possibly persist. The geometry textbook on view is the first volume of *Traité de Géométrie Descriptive par T. Cholle et P. Mineur*, published by Librairie Vuibert, Paris, 1914. It will remain on view at the gallery indefinitely.

³ Masheck, Joseph, ed. Marcel Duchamp in Perspective. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975: 37-8

⁴ Ibid.



The Locking Spoon (in French *Verrou de surete a la cuiller*) is exactly what it sounds like. In 1957, Duchamp affixed a regular soup spoon to the lock on the door to his East 58th Street apartment in New York. The work is considered a literalization, or perhaps a “manifestation”, of a punning phrase Duchamp deployed some time earlier: “Du dos de la cuiller au cul de la douairière (From the back of the spoon to the dowager’s ass.)”⁵ Inscribed into the realm of the domestic and primarily utilitarian, not unlike that other semi-readymade *Sink-Stopper* of 1964, the spoon was used by Duchamp simply as a handle to more easily lock and unlock his front door. Though listed officially as a work in most catalogues, *Spoon* maintains the designation of semi-readymade, and remains little discussed in Duchamp exegesis.

⁵ Lebel, Robert. Sur Marcel Duchamp. Grove Press/Trianon Press/Hauser Wirth, 2021: 176



Waistcoat, also from 1957, is perhaps the most enchanting of Duchamp's late readymades, ghostly in its form and unassuming in its extreme ordinariness. Three replicas were made following the original, each of which follow the same program: a waistcoat from a men's three-piece suit with buttons spelling the name of the wearer's wife or wife-to-be. The letters, fashioned using found letterpress type blocks, are inverted, as if seen in a mirror. The original spells the name of Duchamp's wife Teeny, while the others (given to Duchamp's male friends as gifts), carry the name of each friend's respective spouse or fiancé. The name spelled in the buttons of this version, Terri, is the curator's mother. Rich in associative depth and deeply connected, as are all of the readymades, to the rest of Duchamp's oeuvre (most profoundly to *The Large Glass*), *Waistcoat* embodies forms that Duchamp employed throughout his career. It could easily be understood as a physical analog to the *Nine Malic Moulds* (along with its corollary the *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*) which comprise the bachelor-machine portion of the *Glass*, the most ambitious of Duchamp's projects and in his words "the most important thing he ever did."⁶ Naturally useful as an article of clothing, *Waistcoat* was likely worn by Duchamp, along with the later replicas of 1958 and 1961, worn by their respective *célibitaires*, each version only later sanctified as art.

⁶ Schwarz, Arturo. *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. 2 vols. New York: Abrams, 1970:

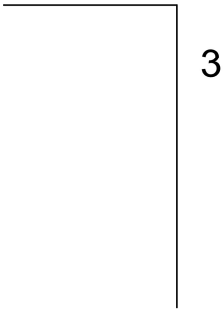
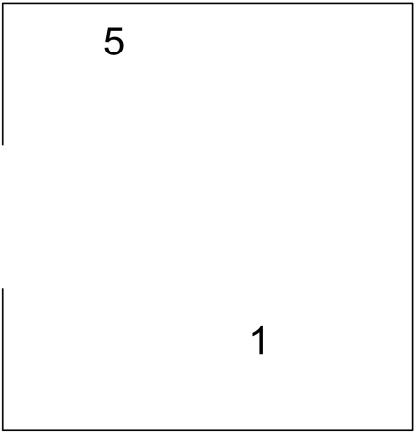


1963's *Faux-Vagin* is the least well-known and least-discussed of Duchamp's readymades, so much so that it fails to appear in even the most open-minded presentations of Duchamp's oeuvre⁷. Purported by some to be the "last readymade", it is shown here alongside the equally dubious *Bilboquet* as a bookend, the pair of them together delineating the beginning and end of Duchamp's whimsical activity with these objects⁸. The story goes that "one day in 1962 or 1963—more probably 1963 than 1962 when I think back on it", Grati Baroni and her husband Jorge Piqueras, both artists and good friends of the Duchamps, were driving with Marcel and Teeny from Cadaques to Paris. During lunch, Duchamp stepped over to the license plate of their Volkswagen (which he had taken to calling *Faux-Vagin* [False-Vagina] as a joke) and signed it "pour Grati / affectueusement / Marcel." Whether it was immediately removed and christened a readymade or only later ordained is not known⁹. Obviously erotic, it relates to other, similar late works by Duchamp like *Female Fig Leaf* and *Wedge of Chastity*, artworks which in themselves grew out of Duchamp's long-secret project *Étant donnés*, all of which deal explicitly with the subject of female genitals. The original license plate was kept at Baroni's home for years and was later sold (at one point Baroni tried to sell it to Jasper Johns), disappearing into the art market. The version on display here, like the *Bilboquet*, is an approximation. Setting critical interpretations aside, *Faux-Vagin* exists as yet another intriguing and inert (and quietly erotic) object that lightheartedly plays with language, casually wrought and given as a present to a friend.

⁷ Shearer, Rhonda Roland. "Readymade Chronology." *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* (2003). https://www.toutfait.com/unmaking_the_museum/chronology.html

⁸ Zaunschirm, Thomas. *Faux Vagin: Marcel Duchamp's Last Readymade*. Hatje Cantz, 2014.

⁹ Gervais, André. "Two Nuggets from the Spanish Days." *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* (2002). https://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/interviews/gervais/gervais.html



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