



DADA

National Gallery of Art, Washington
February 19–May 14, 2006

STUDENT GUIDE

PROGRAMMA

ABKOMEN
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REAR
KON

ADASOFIE T é
LEIDING DOOR THO VAN DOESBURG

ROSSEN LOR REICHER REVOLUTION

EVON DOOR KURT SCHWITTERS

PAULET
DICHTE VOOR ABSTRACTE

KBIS ZUM URLAUF DOOR
SCHWITTERS

QUALITÄTEN

neio Tisch-MECHAN
DOOR HUSZAR
MARCELE PE LA B
VAN Riet KLAVIER ESTIE

DA DA EXISTE DEPUIS
TOUJOURS LA SAINTE
VIERGE DEJA FUT
DAD AÏSIE

UNDALS SIE IN DIE TÜTE SAH
DA WAREN ROTB KIRSCHENDR
DA MACHTE SIE DIE TÜTE Z
DA WARDIE TÜTE ZU...

BEI RHEUMATISCHEN
ZAHNENSCHMERZEN
UND KOPFWEH GENÜGEN



Theo van Doesburg (and Kurt Schwitters?), detail, poster and program for *Kleine Dada Soirée* (Small Dada Evening), 1922/1923, lithograph, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson, 1945



A British Mark IV tank photographed from German trenches during the Battle of Cambrai, October 21, 1917. Photograph Archive, Imperial War Museum, London

The beginnings of dada were not the beginnings of an art, but of a disgust.

TRISTAN TZARA

DADA
HAD
ATTITUDE

Like the edgiest rock and hip-hop, Dada was young, smart, crude, angry, and outrageous. Dadaists, an international hodgepodge of mostly twenty-something artists and writers, were dismayed by the stupidity and horror of World War I. The conflict was unprecedented in human history because of its scale and its terrifying new weaponry. On average almost 900 Frenchmen and 1,300 Germans died *every day* between the outbreak of war in August 1914 and the armistice that ended it in November 1918. All told, nearly ten million people were killed.

For the dadaists, World War I discredited the notion of a civilized European society. As dadaist Hugo Ball noted, the war proved that “this world of systems has gone to pieces.” For Ball and his contemporaries, the pillars of society—law, culture, faith, language, economy, education, and the roles assigned to men and women—had failed to prevent the war and its unparalleled destruction.

fig. 1 German troops running through war zone in France, April 1918



Dada counterattacked with an insurrection against everything in society that was pompous and conventional—everything that was part of the “rational” mindset that had led to the war [fig. 1].

Dada’s chosen weapon was art, but it was art the likes of which the world had never seen. Dadaists were repulsed by self-styled “enlightened” societies that fawned over pretty paintings while dispatching youths by the millions to their deaths. They wanted art to be the equivalent of a slap in the face that compelled people to confront life’s ugly realities and goaded them to think about the forces, structures, and clichés in society that gave rise to them.

Dada reimagined what art could and should be in an age reeling from the world’s first industrial-sized slaughter and the onslaught of modern mass media that it triggered, which included war propaganda posters, films, and the photo-illustrated press [fig. 2].

Dada was not a particular style of making pictures, like impressionism. Rather, dadaists called into question the idea of art as a picture of the world. They invented a set of new approaches to art-making—**strategies for being an artist in the modern world**. Scorning traditional painting and sculpture, dadaists created new categories of art objects, embraced new technologies, and redefined ideas about artistic creativity. Sometimes this meant incorporating new materials into the art. And sometimes it meant stepping outside of object-making to connect art directly to the public, which the dadaists did by staging outlandish performances, putting out in-your-face journals and manifestos, and manipulating the popular press for subversive purposes.

Dada not only pushed the boundaries of art and society, it questioned their very forms. In the face of daily routine, civil propriety, and bourgeois self-satisfaction, Dada championed spontaneity, absurdity, and free will.

Cover of the French photographic weekly *Le Miroir*, January 3, 1915

fig. 2



Stretcher bearers transporting a wounded soldier under enemy fire.

HAD ATTITUDE

DADA JOURNALS

Dada journals were the lifeblood of the movement, enabling dadaists to exchange ideas and images among themselves and to convey them to the public, across the world [fig. 3]. Dada journals sprang up in all Dada centers, and many are famed for their innovative typography and layout. Some journals were short-lived—often because government authorities banned them shortly after learning of their subversive content—but many reappeared soon after with different formats and new names. At right, a sample of Dada rant:

Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is **Dada**; a protest with the fists of its whole being engaged in destructive action: **Dada**; knowledge of all the means rejected up until now by the shamefaced sex of comfortable compromise and good manners: **Dada**; abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create: **Dada**; of every social hierarchy and equation set up for the sake of values by our valets: **Dada**; every object, all objects, sentiments, obscurities, apparitions, and the precise clash of parallel lines are weapons for the fight: **Dada**; abolition of memory: **Dada**; abolition of archaeology: **Dada**; abolition of prophets: **Dada**; abolition of the future: **Dada**; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity: **Dada**; elegant and unprejudiced leap from a harmony to the other sphere; trajectory of a word tossed like a screeching phonograph record; to respect all individuals in their folly of the moment: whether it be serious, fearful, timid, ardent, vigorous, determined, enthusiastic; to divest one's church of every useless cumbersome accessory; to spit out disagreeable or amorous ideas like a luminous waterfall, or coddle them—with the extreme satisfaction that it doesn't matter in the least—with the same intensity in the thicket of one's soul—pure of insects for blood well-born, and gilded with bodies of archangels. **Freedom: Dada Dada Dada**, a roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: **LIFE**.

—Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto*,
Published in the journal *Dada*,
no. 3, 1918



fig. 3 Marcel Janco, illustration on the cover of the journal *Dada*, no. 3, Tristan Tzara editor, Mouvement Dada, 1918, wood engraving. National Gallery of Art, Library. Gift of Thomas G. Klärner

ART NEEDS



DADA AND THE ANTI-MASTERPIECE

Dada disowned the idea of the “masterpiece”—a great, singular oil painting, like the *Mona Lisa*, made by a skilled genius. Dadaists found oil painting pretentious, and they ridiculed art history’s elite, from Leonardo da Vinci to Paul Cézanne [fig. 4]. Against the backdrop of the war, dadaists found this entire tradition of art pompous and bankrupt. And because they were skeptical about human character and the “cult of genius,” they advocated, instead, “impersonal” art that did not rely on artistic skill and did not reflect individual personality.

In Zurich, Hans Arp and his companion Sophie Taeuber, a textile designer and professor, launched a quiet time bomb by **challenging the distinction between “fine” and “applied” art**. Applied art, which usually refers to the design or decoration of functional objects—and was often considered the domain of women—was viewed as a lesser form of art. But Taeuber and Arp framed embroideries and hung them on the walls like paintings. They also jointly made a series of abstract geometric “duo-collages” [fig. 5] that had roots in Taeuber’s textile designs.

fig. 4

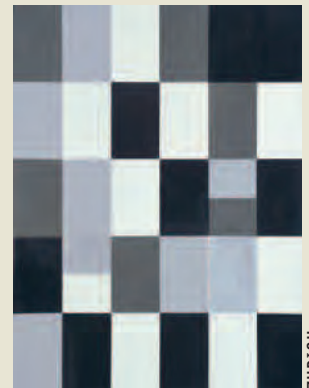
Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, rectified readymade: reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* with pencil. Private collection



Marcel Duchamp’s graffiti-like defacement of a *Mona Lisa* reproduction is the most famous of Dada’s many attacks against the traditions of high art. In French, the letters “LHOQQ” sound like the French phrase, which in loose translation would be, “She’s hot.”

fig. 5

Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber, *Untitled (Duo-Collage)*, 1918, collage of papers, board, and silver leaf on board. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie



The duo-collage's strict grid format **constrained artistic judgment**, and the uniformly sized rectangles were made with a paper cutter rather than scissors to eliminate any trace of the artist's personal touch. Arp addressed similar issues with his wood reliefs, like *Plant Hammer*, c. 1917 [fig. 6]. The reliefs were based on quickly made "automatic" drawings [fig. 7] in which Arp tried to avoid conscious control. He then hired a carpenter to cut the shapes out of wood, removing the artist altogether from a crucial step of creating the works (which Arp then assembled and painted). The resulting reliefs also **violate traditional artistic boundaries** because they are neither painting nor sculpture.

DNN: DADA NEWS NETWORK

Photo-filled newspapers and magazines, newsreels and commercial films, radio broadcasts, and propaganda and advertising posters first bombarded modern citizens during and after the war [fig. 8]. **Dada parodied this media overload** by planting fake news stories (including one of a duel between two Dada artists); issuing Dada

fig. 8 *Kriegsanleihe zeichnen!* (Subscribe to the War Loan!), between 1914 and 1918, poster (lithograph) by Louis Oppenheim. Dresden: Kunstanstalt Stengel & Co., G.m.b.H. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division



AN OPERATION.

TRISTAN TZARA

fig. 6

Hans Arp, *Untitled (Plant Hammer)*, c. 1917, painted wood relief. Lent by The Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague, The Netherlands



ZURICH

Arp experimented with "automatic drawings" inspired by natural forms such as roots and twigs. Rather than copying what he saw directly, he would give free rein to his brush and imagination. Working quickly, he deliberately tried *not* to control the drawing he was creating, making its final form subject to subconscious forces and chance.

fig. 7

Hans Arp, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1917-1918 (inscribed 1916), ink and pencil on paper. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously, 1936

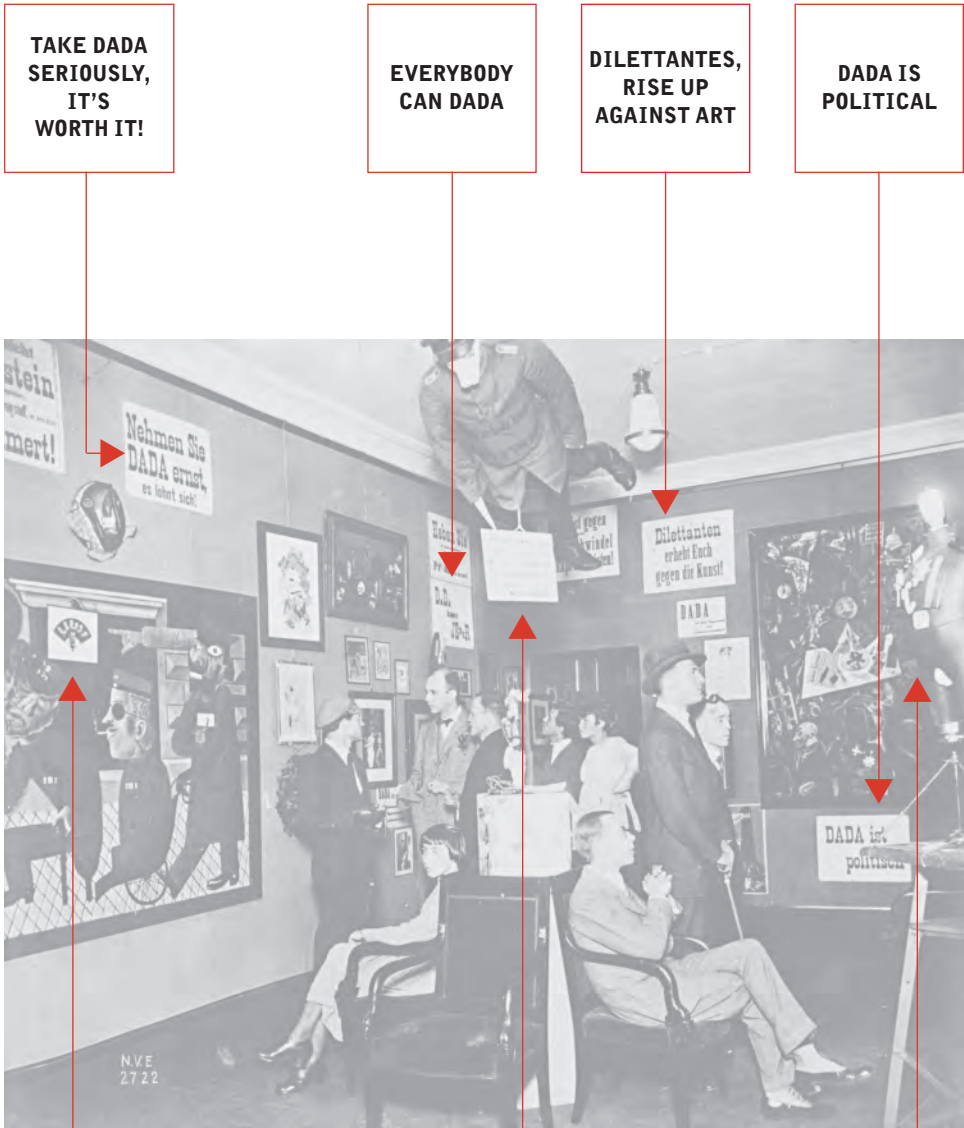


ZURICH

DADA FAIR

fig. 9 Opening of the First International Dada Fair, 1920. Standing (left to right): Raoul Hausmann, Otto Burchard, Johannes Baader, Wieland and Margarete Herzfelde, George Grosz, John Heartfield. Seated: Hannah Höch and Otto Schmalhausen. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

This Dada-financed publicity photograph of the notorious First International Dada Fair, which was held in a Berlin bookstore, features many artists and works shown in the National Gallery's 2006 exhibition.



TAKE DADA SERIOUSLY, IT'S WORTH IT!

EVERYBODY CAN DADA

DILETTANTES, RISE UP AGAINST ART

DADA IS POLITICAL



George Grosz, *Gallery of German Manly Beauty, Prize Question: "Who is the Most Beautiful?"* 1919. Fan-shaped photomontage attached to Otto Dix's montage painting, *War Cripples (45% Fit for Service)*. See fig. 11.



John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter, *Prussian Archangel*, 2004 (reconstruction of lost 1920 original), mixed media. Neue Galerie New York



George Grosz and John Heartfield, *The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild (Electro-Mechanical Tatlin Sculpture)*, 1988 (reconstruction of 1920 original), mixed media. Berlinische Galerie-Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur



Politicians are the same everywhere, flat-headed and vile.

RICHARD HUELSENBECK

tabloids filled with Dada ads (for example, *Neue Jugend*, or *New Youth*); making films with absurd plots (*Ghosts Before Breakfast*); and plastering Dada exhibitions with slogans that mimicked wartime propaganda, as at the First International Dada Fair in Berlin [fig. 9].

Dadaists sometimes **incorporated the press directly into their works**, giving them an automatic tie to reality. Otto Dix, for instance, inserted newspaper front pages into his brutal satire of German militarism, the *Skat Players*, 1920 [fig. 10], in which grossly disfigured and limbless war veterans play cards in a café. The work also violated traditional artistic categories by including collage elements in an oil painting.

Dada **photomontage**, one of the movement's most innovative assaults on traditional art, often used press images as source material. Substituting scissors and glue for brushes and paint, and calling themselves *monteurs*, or mechanics, rather than artists, Berlin dadaists weeded through illustrated magazines and newspapers, cut out images or fragments of images, and reassembled them to make new art products. Their "remix" works often included press images of leading politicians in photomontages, which they would then reproduce in Dada periodicals accompanied by satirical text. The goal: to take back control of the media, which seemed increasingly to control them and society at large. In a front-page photomontage in *Everyone His Own Soccerball*, 1919 [fig. 11], banned the day it went on sale, George Grosz lampooned members of Germany's oppressive postwar government, arranging their portraits in a woman's fan under a beauty pageant competition called: "Who is the Most Beautiful?"

fig. 10 Otto Dix, *Skat Players* (later titled *Card-Playing War Cripples*), 1920, oil on canvas with photomontage and collage. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Eigentum Verein der Freunde der Nationalgalerie



BERLIN

In addition to newspapers, Dix used several other collage materials in this work. The blue uniform of the figure at the right is made of woven paper used for cloth during a shortage in post-war Germany. The mechanical jaw of the figure at the right is made of silver paper used to line cigarette packets. (Dix inscribed the paper "lower jaw prosthesis brand Dix" and used a picture of himself as a "logo.") Real playing cards are used.

fig. 11 John Heartfield, cover of the newspaper *Everyone His Own Soccerball*, no. 1, unique issue, Wieland Herzfelde editor, Malik-Verlag, 1919. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles



BERLIN

This four-page periodical ridiculed the German socialist government's cooperation with the military in violently suppressing the workers' movement. Dadaists marched through Berlin's working-class districts and distributed the periodical to the accompaniment of a brass band playing patriotic military songs before German police stopped the procession and confiscated the remaining copies.

The title and the top photomontage mock the government's promise of future plenty. The top of the fan pictures German President Ebert and five members of his administration, while the lower portion features military leaders.



DADA, INC.

The dadaists were **shameless self-promoters**, but in promoting themselves they were also **parodying the new phenomenon of modern advertising and marketing**. The word “Dada” was vital to this effort. Chosen from a French-German dictionary, it was short, rhythmic, and while sounding almost absurdly childlike, also had meanings in several European languages (including “hobby horse” in French and “yes, yes” in Romanian).

Dadaists **treated “Dada” like a brand name**, as if it were a commercial product with a logo. They often employed eye-catching typography to help their cause, emblazoning the Dada name across Dada journals, Dada histories, Dada manifestos, Dada letterhead, and posters for Dada performances. The word “Dada” was included in many Dada artworks, such as Raoul Hausmann’s photomontage

A Bourgeois Precision Brain Incites a World Movement, 1920 [fig. 12], where the movement’s global reach is humorously suggested by the word overlaid atop a world map and a soccer ball. Variations of the word were also adopted as a pseudonym or alter ego: Johannes Baader called himself “Oberdada”; Max Ernst, “dadamax”; and Raoul Hausmann, “dadasopher.” And Francis Picabia used it to designate new categories of anti-art, labeling his work and work by others, “Dada Picture” and “Dada Drawing.”

Dada’s branding succeeded more than that of many commercial products. Endlessly repeated, Dada quickly penetrated the world’s vocabulary and consciousness, even if its product—intellectual anarchy—was not always embraced.

“Dada” is printed across a world map.

The photo of a city street is labeled both “Dada” and “391,” a Dada journal.

The artist includes a photo of himself as a gloved sophisticate.

Dada is written on the soccerball, a reference to *Everyone His Own Soccerball*.

Richard Huelsenbeck, author of the first Berlin Dada manifesto, appears to utter the words “subtler natural forces.”



A Bourgeois Precision Brain is full of humorous self-aggrandizing Dada references, beginning with the revolutionary-sounding slogan, *Dada siegt* (Dada Triumphs).

fig. 12 Raoul Hausmann, *A Bourgeois Precision Brain Incites a World Movement* (later known as *Dada siegt* [Dada Triumphs]), 1920, photomontage and collage with watercolor on paper, private collection, courtesy Neue Galerie New York

EVERYTHING HAD BROKEN DOWN IN ANY CASE AND NEW THINGS HAD TO BE MADE OUT OF FRAGMENTS: AND THIS WAS MERZ.

KURT SCHWITTERS

DADA PAPER PUSHERS

Dada introduced a simple but revolutionary idea that has influenced art ever since: that art might be assembled from the stuff of modern life itself. With **collage** (and the closely related **assemblage**, which is like collage with objects), the dadaists could use the new staples of culture—such as advertisements, newspapers, art reproductions—to represent the chaos and fragmentation of contemporary life. Collage also fundamentally challenged the idea that an artwork should be a pure product of craftsmanship or require specialized technical training. Instead, collage is assembled, rather than created, by manipulating already existing materials.

Dada collage took many forms and had many meanings. The grid-based duo-collage by Taeluer and Arp, discussed earlier, suggested machinelike precision and impersonality. The collages of Kurt Schwitters, by contrast, were obviously made by hand and functioned like a chaotic

personal diary. Calling his creations “Merz,” from the German word *Kommerz* (commerce), Schwitters’ works are an accumulation and sampling of elements that he found in modern life. In his delicate and colorful *Mz 460 Two Underdrawers*, 1921 (fig. 13), Schwitters layered fragments of colored paper, paper printed with words, and fabric. Some of the papers are torn by hand and appear ragged, while others have straight edges. The words on the advertising or packaging papers are almost always broken up, frustrating a viewer’s attempt to create a story from the collaged elements. Yet there is something undeniably optimistic about Schwitters’ collages, even if they embody a fragmented world overrun with trash. For Schwitters was literally picking up the pieces of his defeated, war-ravaged country and, from these fragments, assembling a new kind of art for the future.

railroad timetable extract

swatch of cloth with loose threads

torn pieces of paper (ragged edges)

part of a page that is printed in three languages



fig. 13 Kurt Schwitters, *Mz 460 Two Underdrawers*, 1921, collage of papers, fabric, and board on card stock. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, 1963

fig. 14

Page from a teaching aids catalogue illustrating apparatuses and utensils for work in chemistry and biology, 1914. From William Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (New York, 1993)



fig. 15

Max Ernst, *1 Copper Sheet 1 Zinc Sheet 1 Rubber Cloth* (or *Two Ambiguous Figures*), c. 1920, gouache, watercolor, ink, pencil, and ink inscription on page of teaching aid catalogue illustrating science equipment. Collection Michael and Judy Steinhardt, New York



The titles of Max Ernst's works are often as enigmatic as the works themselves. He described the way he arrived at titles for the overpainted works as "a matter of interpreting the hallucination in a few words or sentences." The full title of this work is *1 Copper Sheet 1 Zinc Sheet 1 Rubber Cloth 2 Calipers 1 Drainpipe Telescope 1 Pipe Man*.



DADA REVERSE-COLLAGES

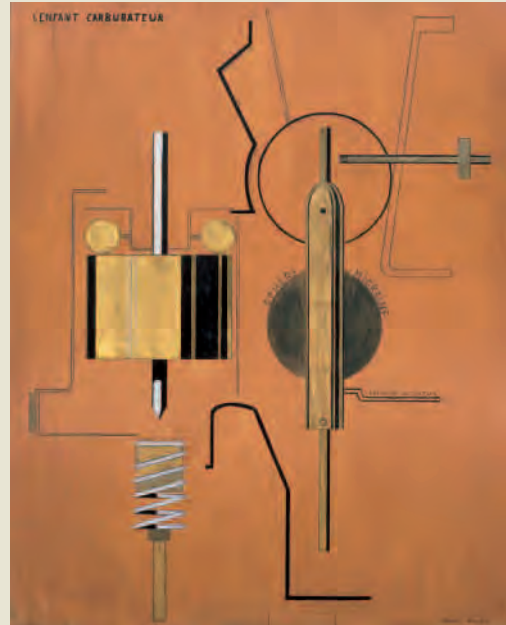
Sometimes what looks like a Dada collage is not a collage at all, because it did not involve literally cutting and sticking. Max Ernst made brilliant collages and photomontages, but he also achieved similar effects through overpainting, a reverse method also utilizing found print materials. Taking an existing illustration, Ernst would paint much of it out and then elaborate on what was left—changing its meaning in the process. In *1 Copper Sheet 1 Zinc Sheet 1 Rubber Cloth*, c. 1920, Ernst altered a catalogue page showing scientific teaching aids, constructing from it two bizarre machine beings [figs. 14, 15]. Ernst's work is so unsettling because he discovers within a given context—here, a printed catalogue—something completely unexpected, and from it creates a new reality based on a disturbing vision of modernity. By animating scientific instruments, Ernst suggests that an irrational, unconscious world may be lurking behind the rational, knowable world that is the object of scientific study.

DADA MANUFACTURING

Dadaists questioned almost every step of the art-making process, especially in terms of materials and technique. Dadaists found one model particularly attractive for **mocking the art-making tradition**: industrial manufacturing. Manufacturing was the quintessential

fig. 16

Francis Picabia, *The Child Carburetor*, c. 1919, oil, enamel, metallic paint, gold leaf, pencil, and crayon on stained plywood. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



dehumanizing endeavor of the modern age, and it was closely tied to the destructiveness of the war. Associated with repetition, utility, mass production, and consumerism, industrial manufacturing was the antithesis of traditional fine art—and thus a perfect weapon for Dada.

Several dadaists **turned to industrial techniques** to make impersonal works. Man Ray, for instance, used airbrush—a precise form of spray painting employed for commercial art—to create compositions he called “aerographs.” Francis Picabia, meanwhile, ironically elevated mechanical drawing—the dry and impersonal visual language of industry—to the status of fine art. Picabia’s absurd “machine portraits,” such as *Child Carburetor*, c. 1919 [fig. 16], suggest the uneasy relationship between people and machines in the modern era. With parts that look decidedly male and female, they can also be seen as humorous metaphors for human sexuality.



Marcel Duchamp went further still, buying common industrially manufactured objects and simply proclaiming them to be **“readymade” artworks**. Duchamp thought art should be about ideas rather than beautiful objects. By moving ordinary objects from the world of industry to the world of art, he raised questions about how art’s meaning relates to its context—as when he submitted *Fountain*, 1917 [fig. 17], a urinal he signed with the pseudonym R. Mutt, to an “open” New York art exhibition, knowing it would be loudly rejected because it was manufactured and crude. He also often gave the readymades humorously aggressive titles, like a snow shovel that he called *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1915 [fig. 18]. Such ironic titles call attention to the way language affects the viewer’s experience of art. With his simple but radical readymades, Duchamp fundamentally **challenged established ideas about what art is, what an artist is, and who gets to decide**.

DADA MENACE

Dada was widely perceived as being “frankly and openly an expression of contempt for the public,” as the photographer Edward Steichen put it. Dada did **deliberately antagonize its audiences**. Eliciting a response—whether outrage or laughter—was a purposeful strategy to wake people up and get them to look critically at the world around them. To enter a Dada exhibition in Cologne, Germany, for instance, visitors had to pass through a public toilet and were greeted by a girl in a communion dress reciting obscene poems.

The need to confront the public directly led dadaists to create art that took the form of **performances** and events, an entirely new and influential conception of art. Some Dada performances took place on the streets: the week after the war ended, police hauled away Johannes

fig. 17 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1964 (fifth version, after lost original of 1917), assisted readymade; porcelain urinal turned on its back. Mugarbi Collection



NEW YORK

The Society of Independent Artists explained their rejection of *Fountain* in the attention-grabbing and categorical terms that Duchamp expected: “The *Fountain* may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition and it is, by no definition, a work of art.”

fig. 18 Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1964 (fourth version, after lost original of 1915), readymade; wood and galvanized metal snow shovel. Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, Paris. Purchase, 1986



NEW YORK

Purchased at a hardware store on Columbus Avenue, New York City



fig. 19 View of the Festival Dada, Salle Gaveau, Paris, May 26, 1920. Mark Kelman, New York

Performances were integral to Dada, especially in Paris. The first “Dada season,” as it came to be known, featured six group performances. The season culminated in the ambitious Festival Dada, which ended in a brawl, with the audience hurling eggs, meat, vegetables, and coins at the performers.

DADA WILL GET YOU IF YOU DON'T WATCH OUT.

MARGERY REX

Baader for interrupting a mass in a Berlin cathedral to lecture the congregation on its lack of true faith.

In more conventional performance venues, such as theaters, dadaists eagerly incited primed audiences by reading manifestos that insulted them, playing “anti-symphonies” on pot lids, or reciting poems without words (which sometimes led to performance-ending clashes between dadaists and the public). Many Dada performances even featured staged violence, such as faked shootings, calculated to remind the civilian population of the real violence of the war **[fig. 19]**. Several Paris Dada works reflect this aggressive streak, including Picabia’s many paintings featuring targets, and Man Ray’s ironically titled *Gift*, 1921 **[fig. 20]**, which the artist made by gluing tacks to an iron, transforming an item of household utility into something reminiscent of a medieval torture instrument.

fig. 20 Man Ray, *Gift*, c. 1958 (replica of lost 1921 original), painted flat iron with row of tacks, heads glued to bottom. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. James Thrall Soby Fund, 1966



PARIS

Gift embodies weaponlike destruction: ironing with it would tear a garment to shreds.



BELLE HALEINE

Like so many Dada works, *Belle Haleine*, 1921, is the product of a collaborative effort between friends. Duchamp's belief that **art should be about ideas** led him to question what art is and who decides. *Belle Haleine* similarly challenges art's unacknowledged rules. Packaged as a luxury consumer product (perfume), it calls attention to how art, too, despite its reputation as a special cultural creation, can be seen as a mass-produced luxury product like any other, regularly bought and sold by people with money.

Making *Belle Haleine* required craftsmanship, but not the traditional fine art kind; instead, it required making a mechanical reproduction (Man Ray's photograph) and decorating the label, mostly with commercial lettering (also by Man Ray). And if Man Ray took the photograph and made the label, then Duchamp's only contribution to the work was coming up with the idea for it, sitting for

the photograph, and adding his/her signature [fig. 21]—a contribution that challenges traditional ideas of the artist as a maker, rather than conceiver, of a work of art.

Duchamp was a fierce, if subtle, champion of individualism. In *Belle Haleine*, he **questions received ideas** not only **about art**, but also about **identity** and **language**. By adopting a female alter ego, named Rose Sélavy, Duchamp humorously challenged a fundamental tenet of human existence — that we all have fixed identities determined at birth. Duchamp was raising questions about how **gender** determines, or is made to determine, one's role in life. By adopting an artistic female persona, Duchamp makes us question what is fixed, and why, and suggests a way to see individuals apart from constricting labels such as gender, class, or race.

Duchamp found in language, especially puns and double meanings, a model for **contesting whatever**

BELLE HALEINE

Here, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp create "art" by altering a manufactured object— a perfume bottle.

The label features a Man Ray photograph of Duchamp dressed as a woman, wearing a plumed hat, make-up, and woman's necklace and coat.

Duchamp's female persona was Rose Sélavy. "Her" initials RS (the "R" reversed) are on the label.

"New York" and "Paris" indicate the native cities of the two artists.



fig. 21 Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, *Belle Haleine, eau de voilette* (Beautiful Breath, Veil Water), 1921, assisted readymade; Rigaud perfume bottle with artists' label in cardboard box. Collection Yves Saint Laurent - Pierre Bergé

seems categorical and certain. When pronounced, the name “Rose Sélavy” becomes the French sentence *Eros, c’est la vie*, which in English translates as “Eros (as in erotic), that is life”—something with which perfume has an obvious connection. It becomes impossible to separate Rose, the person, from the saying—one is the other, and vice versa. Similarly, “Belle Haleine,” which means beautiful breath, is pronounced almost identically with *Belle Hélène*, the classic French dessert that features a chocolate-covered pear **fig. 221**.

Duchamp’s work humorously suggests that convention can be turned upside down or inside out. By demonstrating that any widely accepted belief is open to challenge, he carves out a space for individual action where there often doesn’t seem to be any. Like many Dada works, *Belle Haleine* packs a big art punch in a small, untraditional package.

We are often told that we are incoherent, but into the word people try to put an insult that it is rather hard for me to fathom. Everything is incoherent.

TRISTAN TZARA



Like many dadaists, Duchamp adopted an alter ego—a second personality. Duchamp’s was female: he/she signed the accompanying perfume box—and many other works over the next twenty years—Rose Sélavy.

fig. 22

Pear with chocolate icing, or *poire Belle-Hélène*, the classic French dessert (detail).



DADA DOSSIERS

For extended biographies,
go to: [www.nga.gov/exhibitions/
2006/dada/cities/index.htm](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2006/dada/cities/index.htm)



Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven often accessorized with trash and wore a wastepaper basket as a hat.
German, 1874–1927



Hannah Höch added the "h" at the end of her first name, for symmetry.
German, 1889–1978



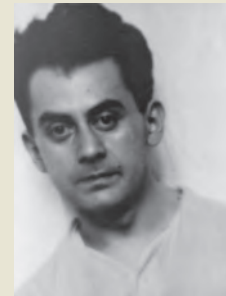
Sophie Taeuber has been depicted on the 50 franc Swiss note issued since 1995.
Swiss, 1889–1943



Emmy Hennings went to jail for faking draft evaders' passports.
German, 1885–1948



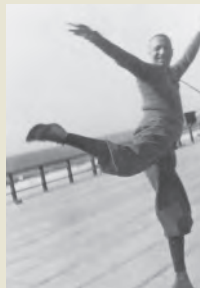
Max Ernst read Freud.
German, 1891–1976



Man Ray's gravestone reads "Unconcerned, but not indifferent."
American, 1890–1976



Kurt Schwitters said he bribed an army doctor to evade the draft.
German, 1887–1948



Hans Arp feigned insanity to avoid service in the German army.
Alsatian, 1886–1966



Johannes Baader's calling card read "President of the Earth and Universe."
German, 1875–1955



Tristan Tzara isn't his real name.
Romanian, 1896–1963

NOTES

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Huelsenbeck, p. 7 Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism* (1920), in Motherwell 1981, 23.

Schwitters, p. 9 Kurt Schwitters, "Kurt Schwitters" (1930), in Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (New York, 1967), 32.

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Tzara, p. 15 Tristan Tzara, "Lecture on Dada" (1922), in Motherwell 1981, 250.

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Johannes Baader June 22, 1919. Photograph by Hannah Höch, Hannah-Höch-Archiv, Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Max Ernst in uniform c. 1914–1918. Album of Philipp Ernst, Private collection

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Self-Portrait [May Ray] c. 1920. Man Ray Trust. © Man Ray Trust/ADAGP-ARS/Telimage—2005

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Sophie Taeuber with her puppets Zurich, 1918. Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber-Arp, e.V., Rolandseck © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, photo: Ernst Linck

Tristan Tzara Zurich, 1918. Fondation Arp, Clamart

Written by Mark Levitch.

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Cover

Raoul Hausmann, *Mechanical Head (The Spirit of Our Age)*, c. 1920, mixed media. Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris. Purchase, 1974

***Mechanical Head* is an unsettling assemblage of measurement-related found objects—including a tape measure, clock innards, and camera parts—attached to a wigmaking dummy. It was intended to personify the empty spirit of the artist's post-World War I era.**