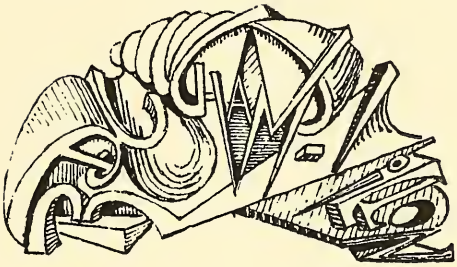
Jacques Villon



Marcel Duchamp

Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Villon, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Puteaux, 1912

JACQUES VILLON

RAYMOND DUCHAMP-VILLON

MARCEL DUCHAMP

1957

January 8 to February 17

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

The Museum of Fine Arts of Houston

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Foreword

There is one feature which is strikingly characteristic of the art of the three brothers Jacques Villon, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Marcel Duchamp. Juan Gris, the most rationalistic, but at the same time one of the greatest of the cubist painters, used to say: 'One must be inexact, but precise.' This is one of the essential qualities of poetry. It is what gives the effect of poetry to painting and sculpture. It is the common factor—perhaps the only one—which links the very dissimilar work of these markedly different artists.

At the same time, however, this maintenance of the 'inexact, but precise' in the art of these three brothers has its roots in a basic similarity of approach. Each in his own way sought to work out a tightly reasoned mode of pictorial or sculptural expression.

Each seemed particularly careful to avoid any concession on his part to the emotions. Art for all three was fundamentally intellectual, scientific and only secondarily sensuous. Jacques Villon saw painting as 'a method of prospecting, a manner of expression. With color as bait,' with drawing as the fisherman's line, painting, he has stated, 'brings up from the unknown, inexhaustible depths, possibilities barely suspected; it leads them step by step to the plane of human consciousness, and there, with subtlety, this tenuous material crystallizes'. This 'step by step' progress with Villon involves the conception of color on the part of the artist 'as a weight in the scale of the emotions' which increases 'when Red, Blue and Yellow are in the required balance as dictated by the chromatic scale'. 'Colors become values which through their interplay... produce a state of receptiveness.' Villon's science of expression

goes further to involve an adaptation of Leonardo's theories in his *Treatise on Painting* on 'the influence of the pyramid': 'This is the art of painting by pyramids, the forms and colors of the observed objects. I say "by pyramids", for there is no object however small which is not larger than the point where these pyramids meet. Therefore, if you take the lines at the extremities of each body and if you continue them to a single point, they will converge into the pyramidal form.' 'By superimposing on the painting this pyramidal form,' Villon adds, 'one gives it a density in which the interaction of echoing colors produces depth—a depth creating space.'

Raymond Duchamp-Villon, the sculptor brother, in a letter to Walter Pach in January 1913, discussing what would be necessary if a style reflective of the period were to be found for contemporary architecture, explained his viewpoint that we should not try to adapt the forms and lines of even the characteristic objects of our time. This he felt 'would only be a transposition of these lines and forms to other materials and therefore an error'. We should rather fill our minds tirelessly 'with the relationships of these objects among themselves in order to interpret them in synthetic lines, planes and volumes which shall, in their turn, equilibrate in rhythms analogous to those which surround us'.

This was Duchamp-Villon's science of expression through which he attempted to achieve his precision of correlation and at the same time avoid exactitude. We have a clear illustration of it in his last major work *The Horse*. 'At the beginning, the problem,' as Mr. Pach points out, 'had been that of movement—the gallop or trot of the horse.' Innumerable naturalistic studies were made. 'Then came the allusion, more and more evident to the machine and to the analogy of the two forces...' This grew from version to version until the realization of the final sculpture which is inexact both as an image of a horse and as an image of a machine, but which, in its fresh organization of precise sculptural relationships stands as an independent composition of forms suggesting both horse and machine.

Finally in Marcel Duchamp's *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* we find no pretention whatsoever to exactitude, but a strict and demanding precision in every millimeter of surface to the point of satirizing scientific precision through the nonsensical physical science

of the Large Glass—its 'Pataphysique', as Duchamp himself has said, employing Alfred Jarry's word. But this base of nonsensical physical science in the organization of the iconography serves a purpose in Duchamp's glass similar to that which the anecdotal order provides in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* and *Through the Looking Glass*. Possibly there is even an added relationship in the chess player habit of mind in both Carroll and Duchamp.

This is the ground on which the work of the three brothers Villon, Duchamp-Villon and Marcel Duchamp have their closest link, this consciousness of the importance for art to be 'inexact, but precise' and their realization of this in their work.

But beyond this all three have made their individual contributions to the esthetic shape of our age.

Jacques Villon, the oldest, is in a sense the youngest of the three—both in the spirit of his latest work and in his productivity. Although Villon was associated with the cubists as early as 1911 his work has always kept a distinctive, personal character. His fugal concept of color composition gives his canvases a much more lyric tone than that of his colleagues of the great years of the movement. They are more luminous, less architectural in organization. And possibly his emphasis on light effects is what gives his paintings today the air of youthfulness, of contemporaneity in our period.

Another feature of Villon's cubism notably personal to him is the sensibility of his portraits. It is doubtful if any cubist portrait can compare in sentimental evocation or humanity of suggestion with Villon's *Portrait of his Father,* 1924, to name only one of a long series of eloquent portrayals.

In *The Horse* Duchamp-Villon has left one of the master works of European sculpture of the first two decades of the twentieth century. It achieves the metaphor in sculpture in a way that few artists have excelled. It pointed to a new field of expression that its creator was amply fitted to explore had he had the opportunity to do so. The small sketch *Portrait of Professor Gosset*, barely more than an artist's note, done just before his death hinted at the direction in which the power, drama and sense of form which he embodied in his 1911 *Baudelaire* might have been carried to new heights. But *The Horse* in itself remains a life work and a period's achievement.

Of the three brothers Marcel Duchamp perhaps left the deepest impress on his time. In fact few painters in any period have contributed as widely to the intellectual texture of their time as Duchamp has. As a painter his achievement was concluded by 1915, but as an artist in a much wider sense his work goes on today. His earliest official showings took place in the cubist years before the first World War; his *Young Man in a Train, Nude descending a Staircase, King and Queen surrounded by Swift Nudes,* were painted in the years Futurism was still not too far in the past to have its interest; his 'ready-mades' were disclosed to a mystified world when Dada was striving energetically for less profoundly disturbing effects. Between the demise of Dada and the flowering of surrealism Duchamp was looked to as a leader, even as he was when it was necessary to find someone to inspire and direct the installation of the Surrealist exhibition in Paris in 1938 and in New York in 1942.

Painting is only one aspect of art in Duchamp's view. 'I have always had a horror of being a "professional" painter,' he will explain. 'The minute you become that you are lost.' This is a temptation to which Duchamp has never succumbed. For all that he remains in one sense a painter's painter—or more correctly an artist's artist. He feels that since the time of Impressionism the visual creations of painters for the greater part have had no deeper communication than to the retina of the observer. Impressionism, fauvism, cubism, abstract art have all been 'retinal' painting. 'Their preoccupations have all been physical, the reactions of colors and the like, always relegating to second place intellectual responses.'

What Duchamp felt was needed in the twentieth century was new hospitality to the mind on the part of the artist and the public. Painting was more than a mere physical experience. The sensuous was part but not the first part nor the greater part of a work of art or of its appeal.

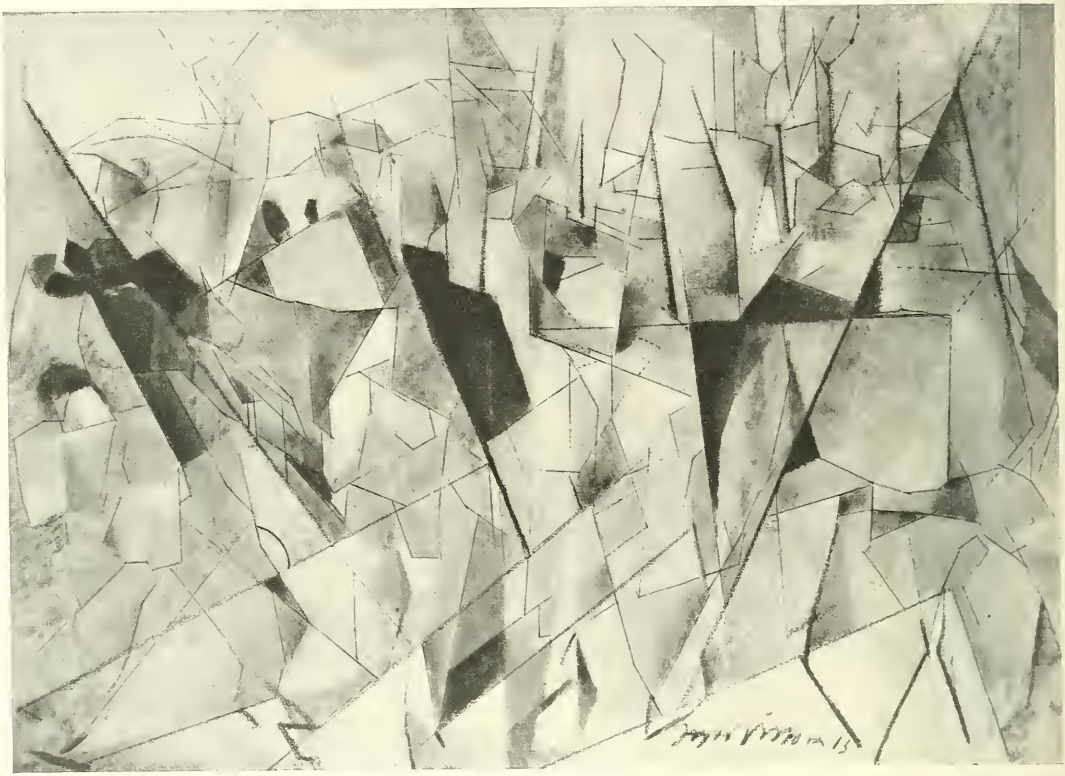
The recall of the intelligence to painting and sculpture—a fuller and richer art was Marcel Duchamp's ideal. He felt that 'taste' had too long ruled tyrannously without right. 'The great aim of my life,' he has said, 'has been a reaction against taste'.

The great merit of surrealism in Duchamp's opinion is that it attempted to go beyond a simple satisfaction of the eye—'the halt at the retina'. But he adds, 'I did not want to be understood

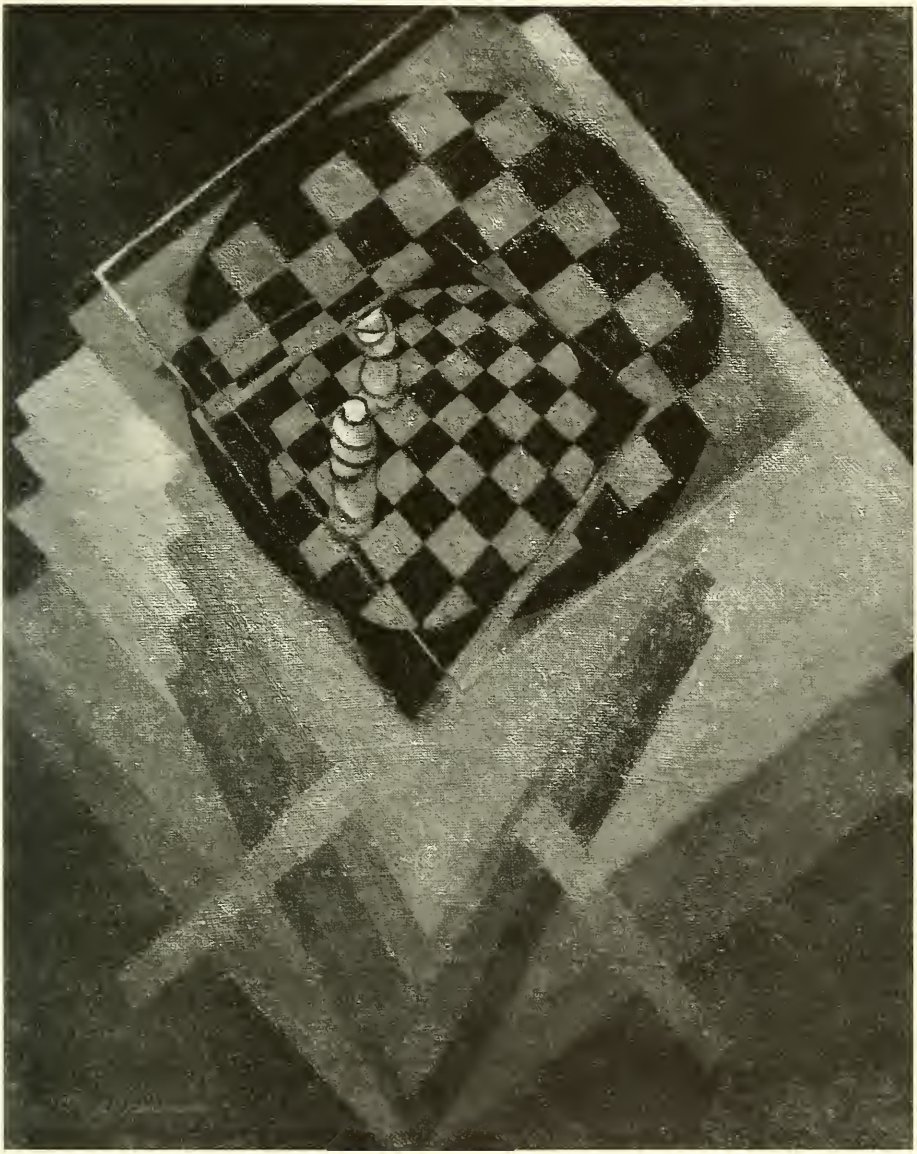
as saying that it is necessary to recall the anecdote in painting. Men such as Seurat and Mondrian were not mere "retinals", even though to a superficial view they may have had the air of being so.'

—Nor was Duchamp himself in his paintings before he turned to 'ready-mades' and his Large Glass; nor Duchamp-Villon in his *Baudelaire* or *The Horse;* nor Jacques Villon in any of his fullest work—his best portraits, *Jeu*, or his abstractions of the early twenties. All three when they succeeded in being 'inexact, but precise', penetrate deep beyond the retina to that area of judgment which alone can enjoy and appreciate the tension between the inexact and the precise in a work of art.

James Johnson Sweeney

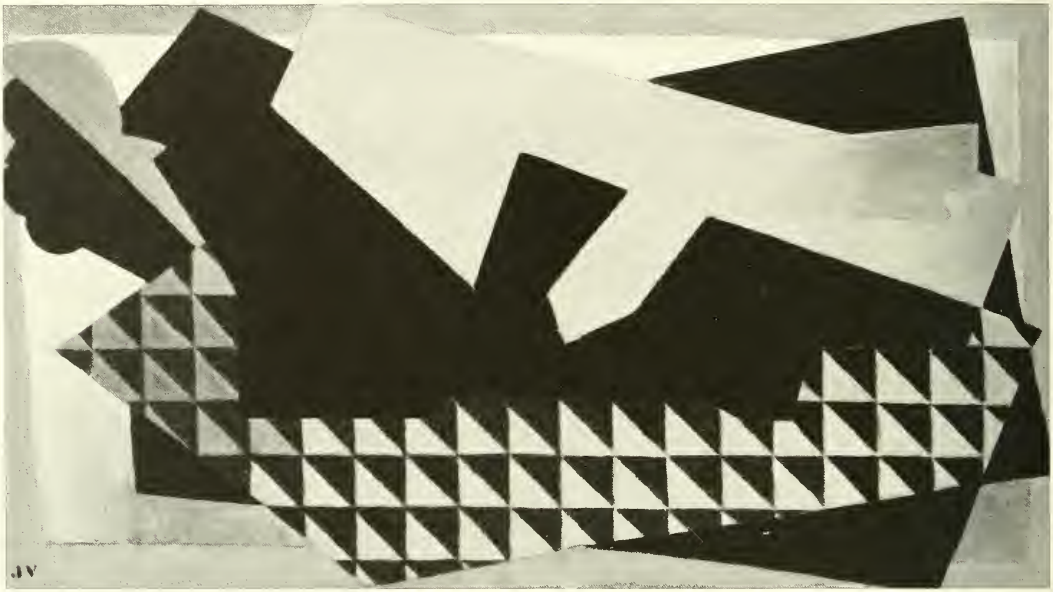


Jacques Villon «Soldiers on the March» 1913 Oil $25^{3}/_{8} \times 36^{1}/_{4}''$ Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

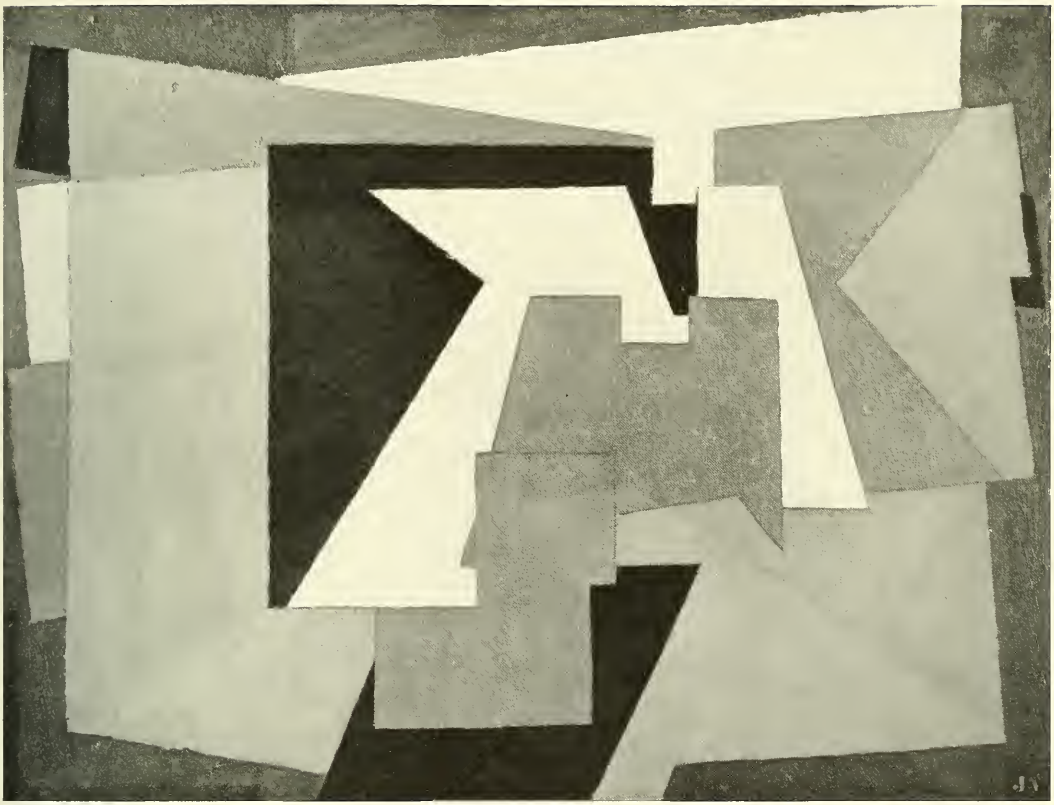


Jacques Villon «Game» 1919 Oil $36^{1}/_{4} \times 28^{3}/_{4}$"

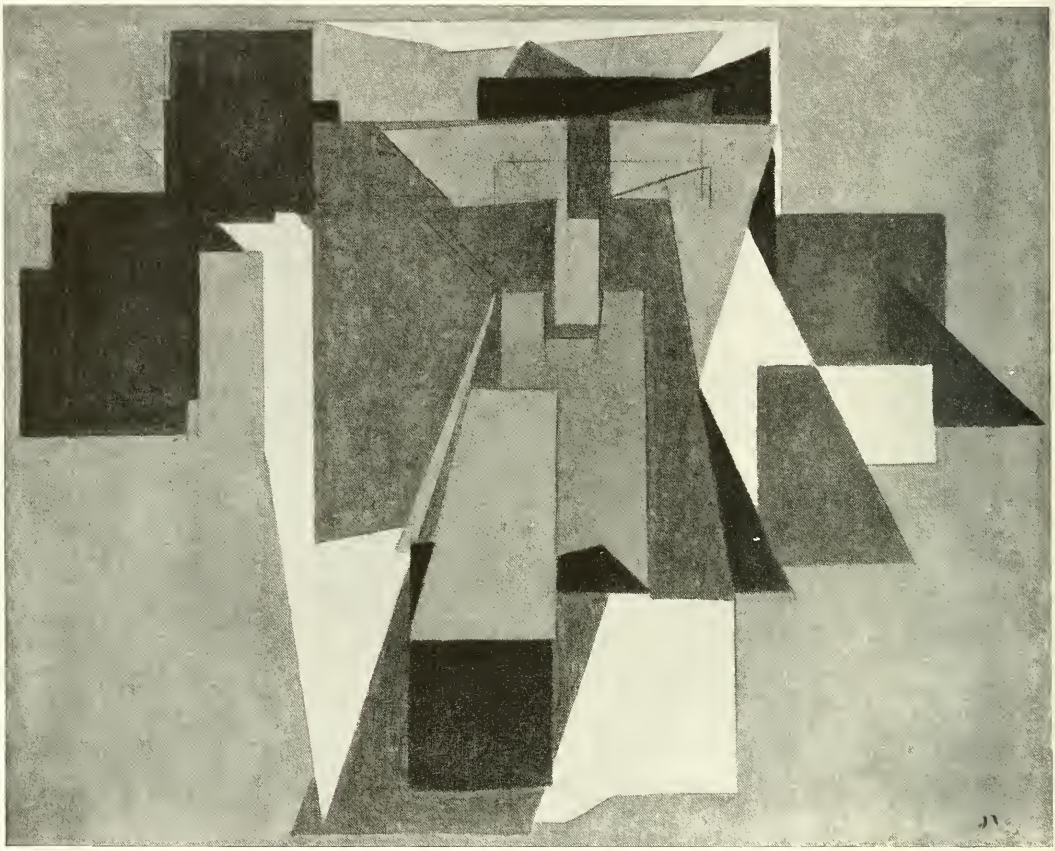
Galerie Louis Carré, Paris



Jacques Villon «Gallop» 1921 Oil $17^{3}/_{4} \times 31^{7}/_{8}$″ Galerie Louis Carré, Paris



Jacques Villon «Color perspective» 1921 Oil $21^{3}/_{8} \cdot 28^{5}/_{8}$" Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Gift, Katherine S. Dreier Estate



Jacques Villon «Withdrawal» 1921 Oil $28^{3}/_{4} \times 36^{1}/_{4}''$

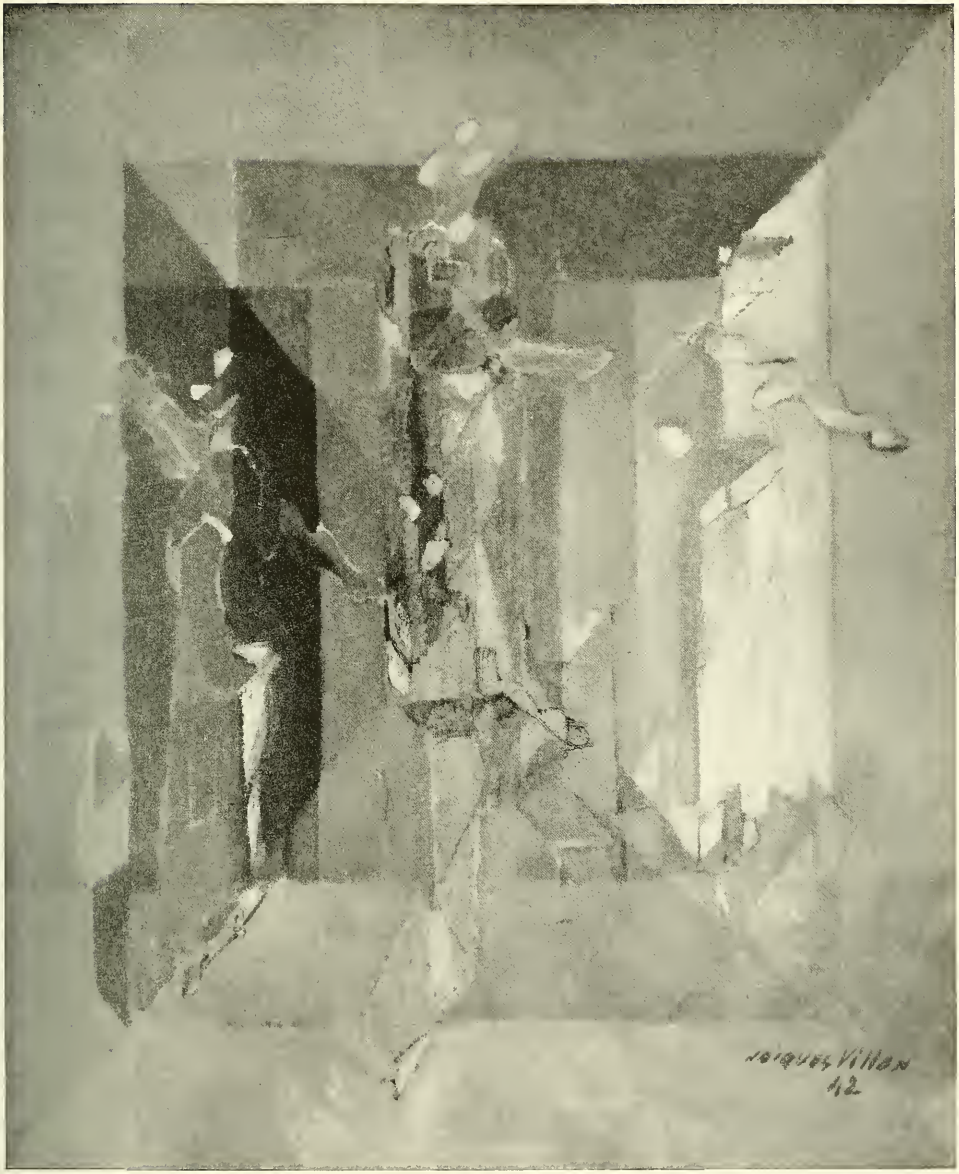
Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

Jacques Villon «Portrait of Artist's Father» 1924 Oil $21^1/_2 \times 18^1/_4$"

Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Jacques Villon «Space» 1932 Oil $45^{5}/_{8} \times 35''$

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris



Jacques Villon «Blindman's Buff» 1942 Oil $31^{7}/_{8} \times 25^{5}/_{8}$"

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Charles Zadok, Milwaukee

Jacques Villon «Self Portrait» 1942 Oil $36^{1}/_{4} \times 25^{5}/_{8}$"

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Francis Steegmuller, New York

Silent journey

For Villon, Cubism meant the conquest of a purity impossible to attain without that interior struggle which both the Impressionists and the Fauves were unwilling to make. He spontaneously made the most effective criticism of their weaknesses. The world with its first day freshness which they all tried to recreate was not made of soft vapours and effervescent patches. Throughout this whole period Villon avoided needless temptations and closed himself up in a meditation, the spirit of which was already determined by his austere palette, where grays predominated.

After the war in which he served in a camouflage unit—the destiny of painters—Villon came back to a rather lonely life. Engraving assured his financial independence and he continued his researches which tended to increase the spiritual intensity of the painting. The ten years from 1923 to 1933 were devoted to probing deeply into these problems; his concern to defend the inherent quality of the work led him to join those artists whose rule is to avoid any anecdotal element, knowing that

« Le sens trop précis rature
Ta vague littérature ».

But the moment when Villon yielded to this extent to the charms of abstraction was also the moment when he surrendered to color and cultivated a sumptuousness which until that moment he had disdained.

He studied the chromatic circle and classified the effective shades into a hierarchy which later was to govern his reactions as a painter. Few careers show so surely that the real problem for the painter is to know how to adapt himself to his discoveries.

In his last period, after 1935, Villon, still withdrawn from the hubbub of artistic life, but with a complete mastery of his expression transposed in it new experiences, the most precious of which was a prolonged contact in 1940 with the countryside of the southwest. According to his way of putting it, 'he touched the earth once again'. The harvests, the vintage, the complete georgic cycle which revolves round bread and wine—just as Villon's art revolves round an interest in primary structures and simple colors—now add the final touch of their generosity to the painter's felicitous conquests.

A career that is the frank and discreet career of a master of bygone days; who was it who said of Villon, 'He is another Corot'? This is profoundly illuminating when one compares the lucid statements of Villon with what Poussin, another Norman sure of himself, wrote in a letter. 'My natural disposition forces me to seek and cherish orderly things, avoiding confusion which is as contrary to my nature as is light to obscure gloom.'

Patterns of design

The themes of the painter are those of us all: the only difference is that of style and intention. An interior may be a palpitation of lights around a piano, on whose keyboard lies an open


Villon
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book: nothing subsists in the elements indispensable for evoking the world of the musician, and to inscribe it within the painting, a rhythm restored by another rhythm. The essential operation, the painter's very own act, is this feeling of loftiness, this sudden capture of distance in which the knowledge of the artist supports his will unequivocally. A black inkpad on a mahogany desk, an armchair before the hearth... the scene is for him only a certain projected force which will animate the painting with a presence as elusive as one may wish, but indestructible.

Chance gives the furnishings of a room an air of cohesion which reminds one of the characteristics of the human face and the features of a landscape: it is this which holds the painter and which he sublimates with complete liberty.

But Villon is less attentive to moments of repose and contemplation than to scenes of movement. Poussin, Seurat worked with a similar predilection at organizing difficult scenes, such as did not lend themselves naturally to unity: bacchanales or Sunday crowds. The circus, with its small, multi-colored, bouncing universe, has never ceased to interest him. The ease of the acrobat and of the bare back rider implies a long practice in dislocation and recovery, in which the artist recognizes his own preoccupations. With an almost fraternal tenderness he adorns them with his purest colors and encloses them within his most eloquent lines, as though to represent—what in reality he does represent— the workings of the world.

Finally, the human face and landscape have become his major themes. Before his own image

in a mirror, caught in the imperious network of reflections, true and false at the same time, man eagerly questions himself. And the calm undertaking of Villon, the certainty of his analyses, the luminosity of the precious diamond on which he works, is the answer to the gravity of the question. In the portrait of his father, in his self-portraits, he has brought the most astonishing visions of man to a century which fears them, and which he dominates through this special privilege. But, like Poussin and Seurat, he has finally allowed himself to be convinced of the superiority of the landscape to the still life and even the portrait: trees, houses, mountains, the sky, the earth enact a drama or a fairy tale and are characters in it. From it is released a dynamism which has only to be expressed. In the life of the countryside everything is related, is a challenge, an exhilaration; the composition is an incessant movement 'like a battle'.

Villon gathers and restores the rhythm of this violence and succession in a way that is almost epic in these series inspired by 'treading the corn' in the Tarn-et-Garonne and by 'threshing' in Normandy. The accent is so liturgical, the light is so pure and intense, that we find the true symbol of elementary life, as if Villon had wished to restore the primitive significance which colors had in the Middle Ages and which they still have in song—red the fire, blue the sky, green the water, ashen the earth; the others only the result of their mixing.

This is triumphal art, this festive painting, proceeds from an admirably pure and deliberate draughtsmanship; network of haunting aud regular lines weaves the delicately graded shadows,

but between the meshes leaves place for light. It spreads out swift and undulating fasces which could unfold the universe; a piece of bread, the contour of a cheek are simply its accidents. The lines take their places, run by, bind all together untiringly, as in the invisible studio where the scene is created. The artist, circumspect, fearful, authoritative, keeps the law and spreads the woof. The result is a song of the Fates, a continual gossip on life, but one which follows a simple and austere rule which makes it loyally bow to the eternal. It is not surprising that one of these drawings portrays a skull, calm and mineral in the tradition of the 'memento mori' of the classics, a spiritual symbol which, like the power of destiny, puts everything in its proper place by a pure act of attention.

It has been justly said of Seurat that the systematic spirit so evident in the geometry of his forms, the regular minutiae of his brush stroke, was not in his case at the service of his pride. Lacking the basic and, so to speak, protective assertion of the harmonic rule that he set himself, the artist would not succeed in making nature give way: for nature surrenders to science what does not speak to the sensations. 'I was the cubist impressionist,' says Villon, 'and I believe that I remain that. Perhaps less cubist, less impressionist, more I do not know what and what I am still seeking.' But in his work we have the answer. It is that he has found it in the celebration of the royal wedding of abstraction and sensibility that perpetuates the legitimate dynasty of French Art.

Réne-Jean

From *Jacques Villon ou l'Art Glorieux*. Paris, Louis Carré, 1948

Observations by Jacques Villon

What is painting?

Painting is a way of prospecting, a form of expression. With color as bait, with drawing as the fish line it pulls up from the inexhaustible gulf of the unknown, possibilities only surmised and brings them by successive efforts to the plane of human consciousness. There with subtlety it crystallizes them from the unsubstantial. It expresses the perfume, the spirit, the soul of things of which science only catalogues and explains the outward appearance.

How does painting express itself?

I have just said, by color within an exacting pictorial structure.

Everyone is familiar with the statement of Maurice Denis in which he stressed the fact that a painting before being a 'war horse' or a 'nude woman' is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.

The Impressionist painters consulted the scientists and little by little pure color came into its own and from the purely decorative realm it entered by the front door into Art.

It was a revelation, for color unconcerned with natural tones seeks to express itself by its own means; to express sentiments, no longer sensations.

Color is a weight of the scale that weighs the emotions; and this weight increases as Red, Blue, Yellow take their places out of a need for equilibrium which the color cycle dictates to them.

Colors become values which through their interplay from the moment of the first chord produce a state of receptiveness. That state allows the spirit to be carried along by a constrained élan and to succumb to the spell of a work while espousing the rhythm which has controlled its elaboration. Rhythm is the vital design showing through all things.

During the construction of the picture and in combination with the first outlines, an influence intervenes which, after da Vinci, might be called 'the influence of the Pyramid'.

'This is the art of painting, by means of pyramids, forms and colors of observed objects. I say "by pyramids", for there is no object however small, which is not larger than the point where these pyramids meet. Therefore, if you take the lines at the extremities of each body, and if you continue them up to a single point, they will have converged into the pyramidal form.'

By superimposing on the painting this pyramidal vision, one gives it a density in which the interaction of echoing colors play about in depth—a depth which creates space.

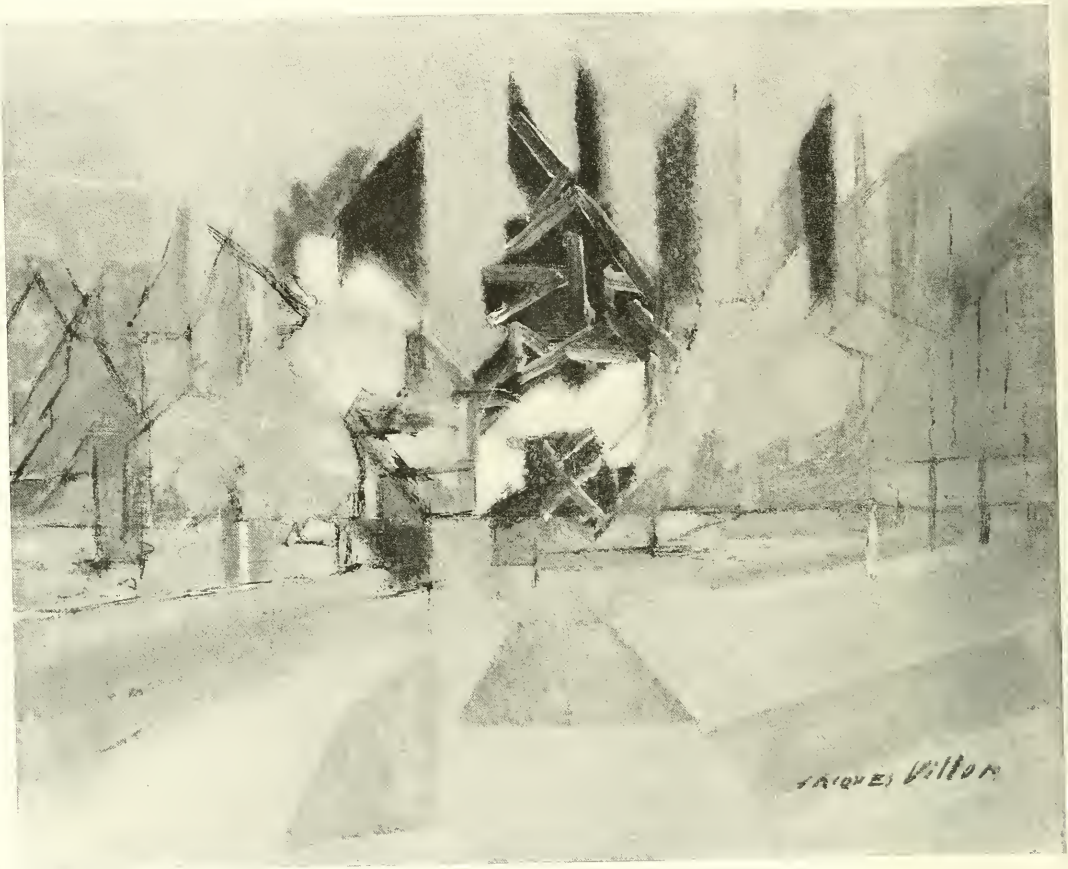
You may say: But does not this wealth of color lead to mere fugues? That can be argued; for instance, abstract art is a case in point. It gives the artist, if not the spectator, the pleasure of a commander-in-chief maneuvering his battalions of colors.

It is also logical to use this wealth of color to magnify all possible themes borrowed from life. For it is life that supplies the hand which notes them down, the eye which classifies these arabesques which retain only the essentials of the themes. It is life which is the true backbone—the keystone of the picture which in its turn becomes a being in its own right—a thing in its own right, no longer an open window.

All these reflections are, of course, only reflections; the main thing, for creating masterpieces is to have genius; one should, however, not disdain these notions; they prevent taste from becoming the sole master.

To sum up, for me, the picture is a creation in which the subject—the pretext furnished by a perceived rhythm, expressive of our unconscious life brought to the level of consciousness—is translated into areas of color, into a hierarchy of colored planes; the whole is bound together by an arabesque, closely incorporated into the basic division of the canvas where all elements are brought into balance.

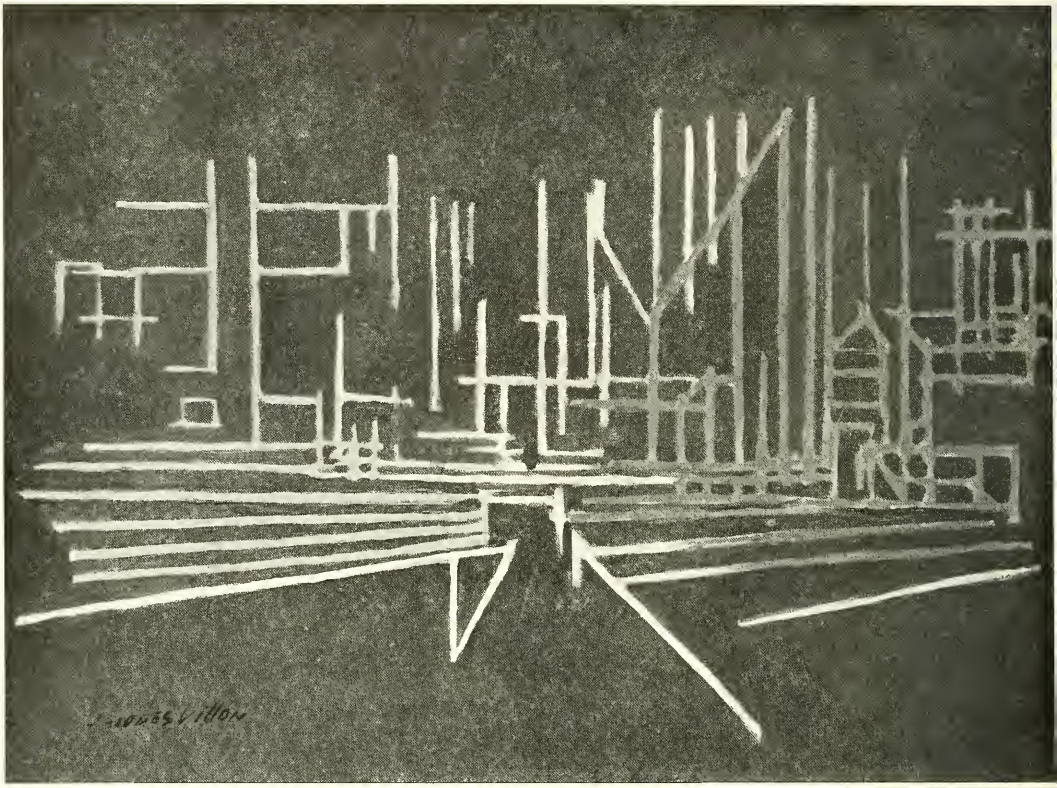
From *Jacques Villon*. Editions de Beaune, Paris, 1950



Jacques Villon «Landscape with Black Cedar» 1946 Oil 13×16⅛"

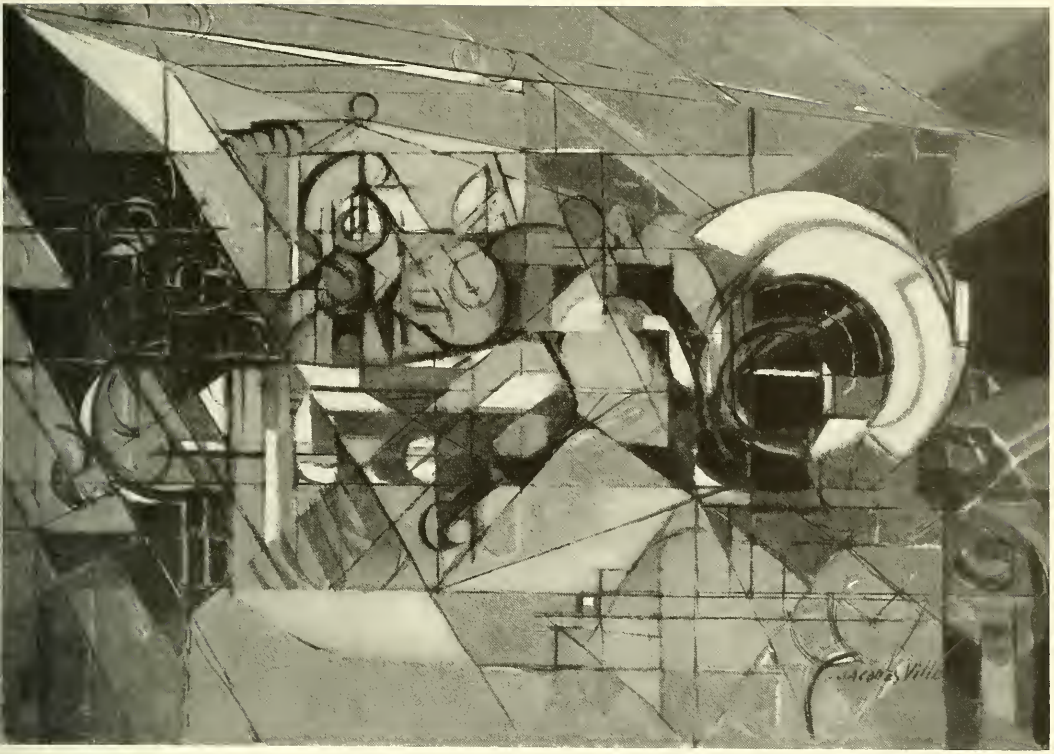
Collection Mr. and Mrs. William D. Vogel, Milwaukee

Jacques Villon «Cherry Tree in Bloom» 1943 Oil $28^{3}/_{4} \times 23^{5}/_{8}$″ Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ira Haupt, New York

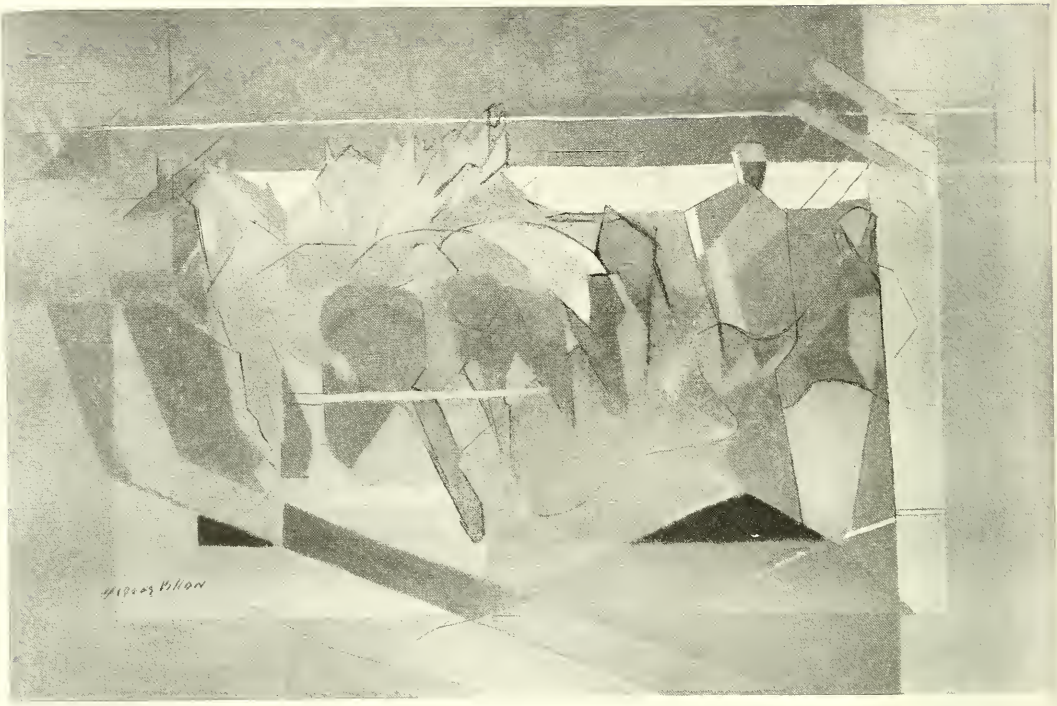


Jacques Villon «Garden in Party Dress» 1948 Oil $21\frac{1}{4} \times 28\frac{3}{4}$"

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

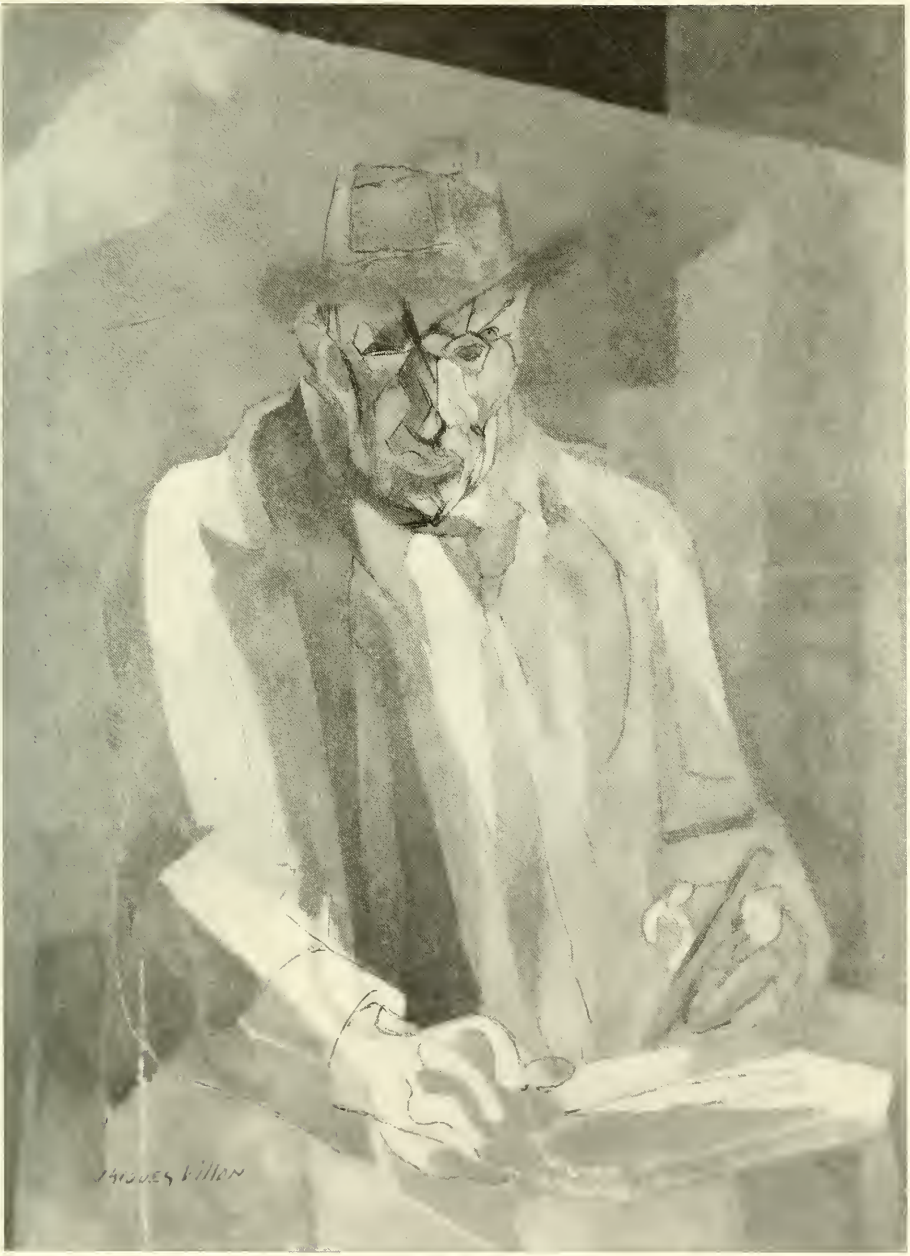


Jacques Villon «The Little Machine Shop» 1946 Oil $31^{7}/_{8} \times 45^{3}/_{8}$" The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

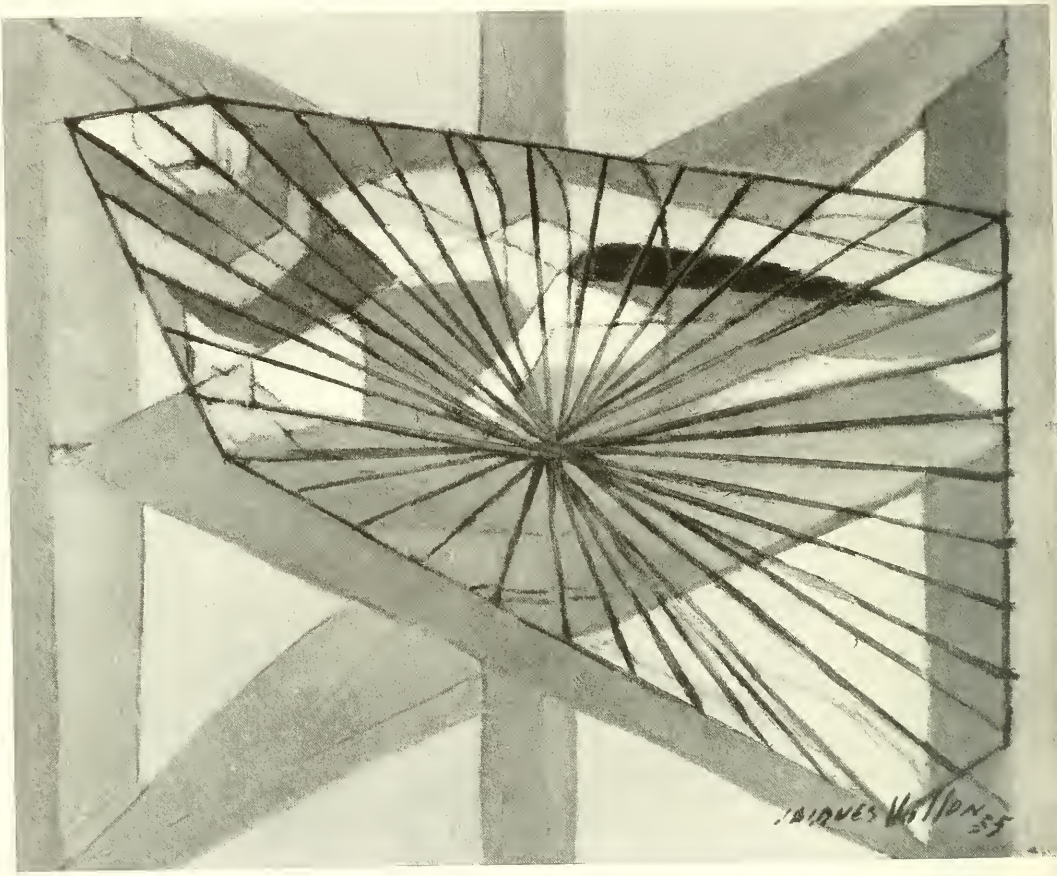


Jacques Villon «Large Mowing-machine with Horses» 1950 Oil $38^{1}/_{4} \times 57^{1}/_{2}$"

Collection Richard Zeisler, New York

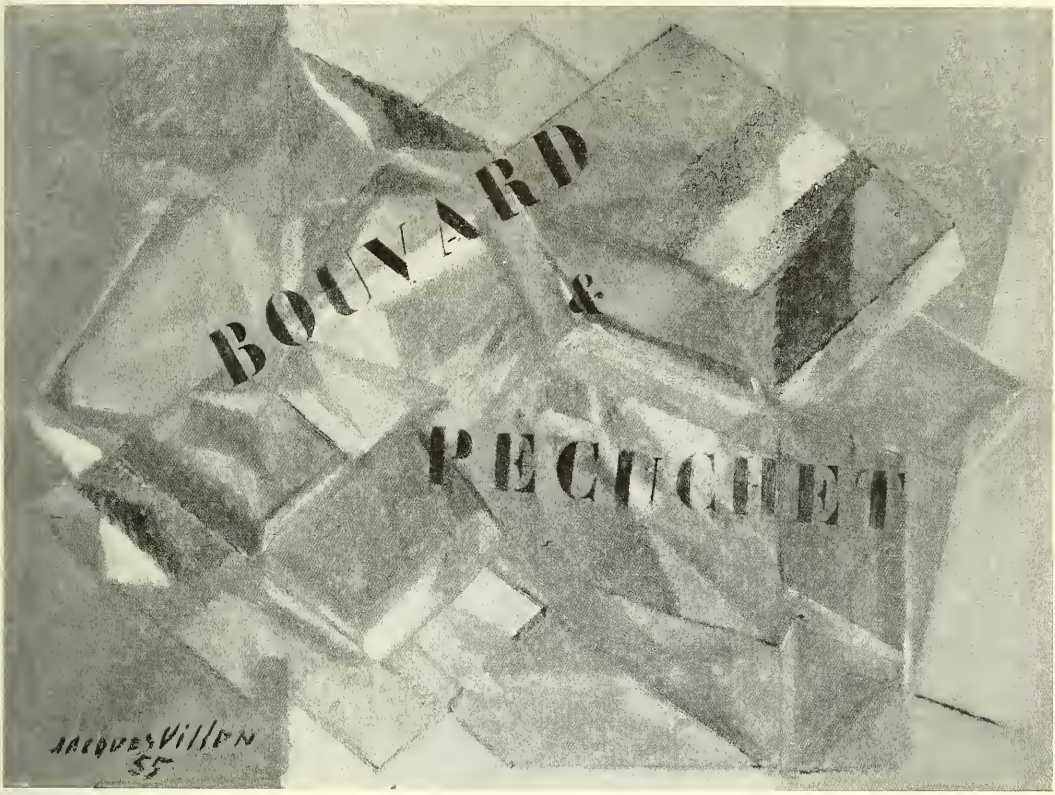


Jacques Villon «Portrait of the Artist (Le matois)» 1949 Oil $39^{3}/_{8} \times 28^{3}/_{4}''$ Collection Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh



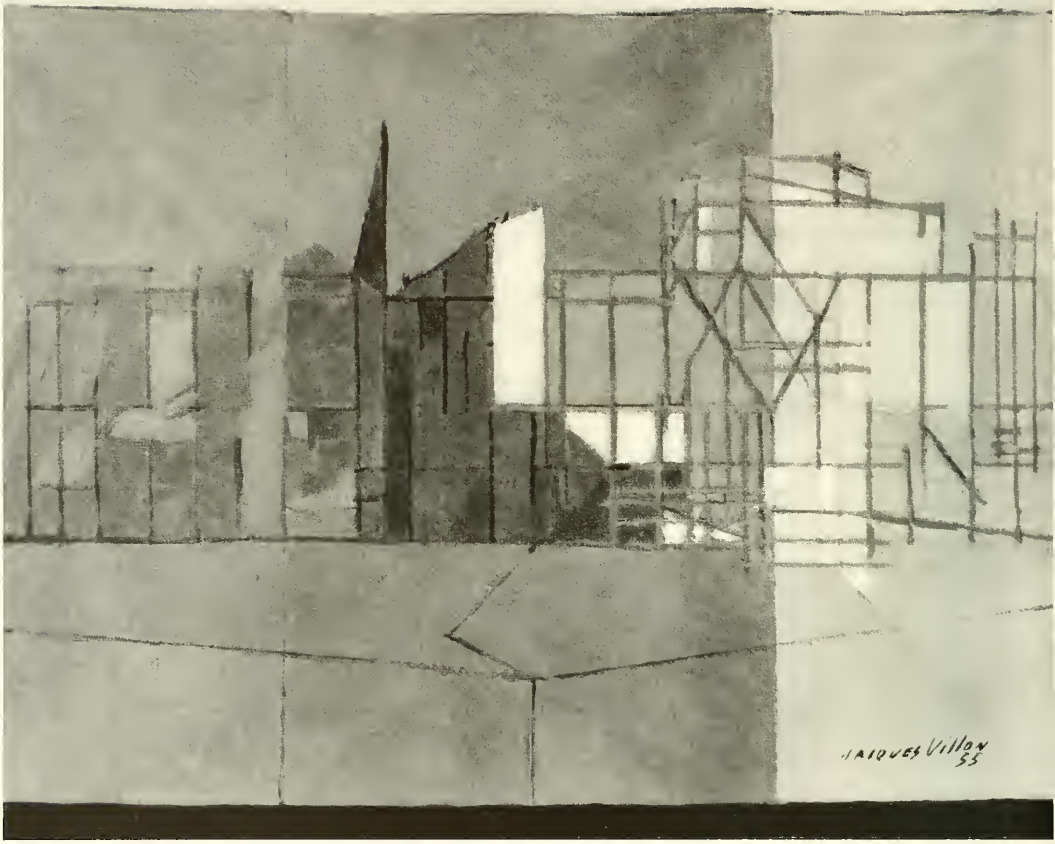
Jacques Villon «Bird Cage» 1955 Oil $18^{1}/_{8} \times 21^{5}/_{8}$"

Galerie Louis Carré, Pari



Jacques Villon «Bouvard and Pécuchet» 1955 Oil $21\frac{1}{4} \times 28\frac{3}{4}$"

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris



Jacques Villon «Along the Park» 1955 Oil $25\frac{3}{8} \times 31\frac{7}{8}$″

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

JACQUES VILLON '48

Biographical Notes

Jacques Villon

1875 31 July, born at Damville (Eure), Gaston Duchamp studied at the lycée in Rouen, began studies of law

1894 To Paris, in the Atelier Cormon

1894–1910 Drawings for weekly newspapers, *L'Assiette au Beurre, Le Courrier Français,* etc.– Lived in Montmartre from 1895–1906, made engravings in black and in color

1904 Associate member of Salon d'Automne, member of the Committee until 1911

1905 Rouen, first exhibition (with Raymond Duchamp-Villon), Galerie Legrip

1911 Adherence to cubism

1912 Co-founder of the Section d'Or
Exhibited in first Section d'Or,Galerie La Boétie, Paris

1913 Participated in New York Armory show:
Trees in Bloom; Little Girl at Piano; Study for Young Woman; Study for Puteaux, No. 1; Study for Puteaux, No. 2; Study for Puteaux, No. 3; Study for Puteaux, No. 4; Study for Little Girl at Piano; Young Woman

1914 2 August, mobilized, sent to the front in October

1916 Exhibition in Christiania (Oslo), Norway

1919 Demobilization

1919–1922 First abstract period

1922 One-man show, Société Anonyme, New York
Exhibition with Louis Latapie, Galerie Povolozky, Paris

1921–1930 Engravings in color after the work of modern masters

1925 Last exhibition of Section d'Or, Galerie Vavin-Raspail, Paris

1928 Exhibition, Brummer Gallery, New York
Exhibition of engravings in color after modern masters, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris

1930 Abandons engraving reproductions to devote himself exclusively to painting
Exhibition, Brummer Gallery, New York

1933 Beginning of present period – return to direct study, color predominating. Exhibition, Arts Club of Chicago

1934 Exhibition, Marie Harriman Gallery, New York

1935 Exhibition, Petit Palais, Paris

1936 Trip to America

1937 International exhibition in Paris. Two diplomas of honor. One gold medal (painting and engraving)
Named chevalier de la Legion d'honneur

1939 First Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Galerie Charpentier, Paris

1942 Exhibition with the sculpture of Duchamp-Villon, Galerie de France, Paris

1944 Exhibition, Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

1945 Exhibition of Duchamp, Duchamp-Villon, Villon, Yale University Art Gallery

1948 Exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Copenhagen
Exhibition, Galerie Louis Carré, Paris
Participation in Venice Biennale

1949 Exhibition, Louis Carré Gallery, New York
Exhibition, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Exhibition, Arensberg Collection, Art Institute, Chicago
Grand Prix, for engraving, exhibition, Lugano, Switzerland

1950 Exhibition, Phillips Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Exhibition, Delaware Art Center, Wilmington
Venice Biennale, Salle Jacques Villon
First prize, International Exhibition of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute

1951 Exhibition, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

1952 Exhibition, Arts Club of Chicago

1953 Exhibition, Rose Fried Gallery, New York

1955 Exhibition, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi
Exhibition, Lucien Goldschmidt, New York, publication Virgil's *Bucolics*, ill. by Villon, 25 full color lithographs
Exhibition, Galerie Louis Carré, Paris
Exhibition, Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York

1956 Venice Biennale, first prize for painting
Exhibition, Drawings, Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

Raymond Duchamp-Villon

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Large Horse» 1914 Bronze 39⅛" high

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

Raymond Duchamp-Villon was born at Damville (Eure) in 1876. His maternal grandfather, E. Nicolle, had devoted his life to engraving 'the hundred bell-towers' of the old Norman city of Rouen, and it was doubtless from this grandfather that Duchamp-Villon drew inspiration for his career. In any case, having finished his medical studies and having reached the age of twenty-six, he felt himself irresistibly attracted toward sculpture, an art in which he had indeed had a passionate interest for a long time. His elder brother, Jacques Villon, had already abandoned the practice of law in order to devote himself to painting and, in Marcel Duchamp, the youngest of the three brothers, the same vocation had declared itself. The points of contact among the three young men served only to accentuate the independence of their characters, and if they saw the evolution of their period too clearly for them to take opposing courses, their differences of concept still resulted in clear-cut distinctions among them, as every observer can see. A respectful sympathy did reign among the three, but not to the point of preventing Duchamp-Villon's remark that 'We are the severest critics of one another'.

During the first part of his life as an artist, he had shared the admiration in which Rodin was held by all the younger generation, but he soon understood the need to turn away from the line laid down by the sculptor of the Impressionist School. And so, between 1904 and 1906 we see Duchamp-Villon wrestling with the problem of directing his work to a more solid base than sensibility to the luminous surface. He suppresses the delicacies of modeling for the sake of the great planes which determine structure; he studies the relationship of figures—one with another, and with the forms that surround them. For us, who see the succession of his researches, the man is already himself in these first efforts, just as the young Corot and the young Cézanne foretell the work they will do later in life.

From 1907 to 1910 date sculptures like the **Old Peasant** and the **Girl Seated** in which, even while he seeks out the essential directions of the planes, the artist uses

rounded surfaces. In 1910, thanks to the efforts of the young Cubist group, he comes to understand how much he can accentuate the form and prevent any ambiguity as to its relationship with nature by respecting the clean and cutting edges that one sees in the **Torso of a Man** and, even more, in the **Dancers** of the following year (1911).

Still, with his natural faculty of remaining faithful to himself, it is at the same time that he executes the bust of **Baudelaire,** where the qualities of both types of work complete each other harmoniously. Not until two years later, in the series of bas-reliefs: the **Cat,** the **Parrot** and above all in that magnificent panel of the **Lovers** does he let himself go on to the use of separated planes which he recomposes according to the needs of the space in which they are to exist and according to a conception still further liberated from the imitation of nature. In this we see an effect of the work with architecture that Duchamp-Villon had undertaken the preceding year (1912).

One more step leads us to the **Seated Woman** of 1914, and the evolution touches its culminating point in the **Horse,** on which the sculptor was engaged when the war was declared, and which was to remain the subject of his meditations throughout his time in the army. Numerous drawings and studies of the subject were to modify his original conception, and they permitted him, during a furlough, to arrive at the execution of the definitive model. It is the last complete work of his career, for we must consider the **Cock**—for all its conciseness—as a return to ideas expressed three years previously. As to the small heads and portraits executed in the year before his death, they were regarded by him as mere studies.

Sculpture was what interested Duchamp-Villon almost exclusively. Yet his activity extended to results too important to let them pass unmentioned, even in a brief examination. He had made serious studies of medicine, and when the war broke out he was attached as **aide-major** to the 11th Regiment of Cuirassiers. After having assured the service of the hospital of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, he was sent to the front, and it was during his time in the trenches that he contracted the fever which, after two years of suffering, brought on his death in 1918, only a few days before the armistice.

'In the notes of his that we have found,' wrote Jacques Villon, 'some are related to the conception of a Center of Surgical Instruction. Our poor friend manifested, during as before the war, a tremendously active brain.' One sees the proof of this observation in the published extracts from his letters, in that so witty and so original piece, **Les Sémaphores,** which he wrote in collaboration with Jean Keller, and above all in his study of the **Variations in Consciousness.** But the most remarkable thing that Duchamp-Villon conceived, aside from his sculpture, was unquestionably his work in architecture.

It is necessary to consider this not as an isolated and personal thing, but as one closely bound up with the tendencies of his generation. The moment of impressionistic analysis having passed, the school which succeeded it, guided merely by its sensibility, had contributed all that it was capable of adding to our ideas, and so

the men who, in 1912, were preoccupied with arriving at realizations, were proceeding to a new synthesis. From every side there came demands for a modern architecture, one that would serve as a frame and as scaffolding for the various arts, and thus permit their cohesion in a logical group. Duchamp-Villon, whose letter of January 16, 1913, will give a clear-cut explanation of his ideas on this subject, was chosen as the man to create, at the Autumn Salon of 1912, an architectural setting which should bring together painters, sculptors, and the artists who worked in glass and with furniture. This choice was due to the character of his talent, in the first place, but we have also to see in it a testimony to the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues. The fact was that Duchamp-Villon was known as a man whose spirit was one of irreproachable probity. While holding to well-defined and clear opinions as to the tendencies of his period, he had always been hostile to those manifestations of mean and self-seeking politics which too often govern exhibitions. Duchamp-Villon was therefore completely designated to inspire confidence in men working in isolation, and to furnish them with the means for creating that collective movement which was becoming felt as an imperious need.

The architecture which was to concentrate all the scattered efforts had to remain within the limits set by practical possibilities of realization. But the important thing, above all and basically, was to satisfy the needs of a form corresponding to contemporary conditions of thought and construction. On these points the letter previously cited contains important definitions. The general aspect of this **Façade for a Residence,** so appropriate for the modern streets of French and indeed foreign cities, was devoid of any element which might shock a spectator uninitiated in the more interesting ideas which governed the work; on the contrary, many visitors to the Salon were naturally attracted to the series of rooms forming the interior of the building because of this architecture which was so distinctly new—and yet 'legible' and reassuring, through its success in incorporating the Cubistic forms in a practical building.

None the less, Duchamp-Villon had obtained this effect without the slightest sacrifice of the ideas which he considered important. On the contrary, new possibilities opened up before him the further he advanced in his work. 'It is almost droll,' he said, 'the pleasure I have in arranging simple square blocks, one with another, until I have found a true relationship of forms and of dimensions.' And then the satisfaction he felt that day when, having noticed a drop of water that had frozen on the outside of his house, he stylized it into the little triangle which decorates the balustrade on the first floor of his **Façade for a Residence.** Thus each form had its origin in observation of nature or in the movement of thought and, at the same time, in the system of aesthetic organization whose development was being pursued by his generation. How clearly we see in this the direction taken by the great architectures of the past!

A second architectural work, one which unfortunately remained merely as a model (a very complete model, however) was prepared for the building of a college. Several passages in the artist's letters deal with this work, which already offered sure indications of originality and certitude that go far beyond those which distinguished his first effort. Duchamp-Villon's purpose was to attain a style open to all men, and one whose general idea—which will remain his creation—should be utilizable for the most diverse constructions. Before a photograph of one of those formidable groups of New York skyscrapers, he exclaimed that he was seeing the cathedral of the future. When I said, on a certain occasion, that Duchamp-Villon lives and will live, even for those who were not acquainted with him, I was thinking of the people who, more and more, are moving on to a conception like his; the people who see the possibilities of realizing that conception, and especially those who see the interest there would be in doing so. The style he bequeathed to us is, as a matter of fact, accessible to other artists, and even while I am engaged in writing these lines, men in different countries, very far one from another, are struggling to incorporate the living ideas of the sculptor-architect in constructions which must express the existence of a modern world.

And yet it is to sculpture that we must return in order to appreciate the highest value of Duchamp-Villon's art. He himself returned to it with great satisfaction after having accomplished the architectural work imposed by his comrades of the Salon. His mind had developed in the intervening time, and in the **Lovers** one observes not alone a conception of sculpture purer and more evolved than what he had had previously, but also depths of tenderness and of strength which he had not attained before reaching this work. With the **Seated Woman** he again attacks the problem of sculpture in the round, and the work is an essay on the nature of solids such as he had not written at any earlier time.

And still it was for a more complete and definitive expression that he was preparing himself, when he came to the **Horse.** The works of Duchamp-Villon are, all of them, the result of long preparations; they are a summing up of varied and repeated studies. But not one of his sculptures appears to have been the object of deeper meditation than the **Horse.** The number of models marking all the stages traversed by this work indicates the development of his idea, from studies of a predominantly realistic nature, which nearly always were this sculptor's point of departure, down to the drawings announcing the end of the research by showing the almost purely mechanistic formula in which Duchamp-Villon saw the equivalent, outside of nature, for the movement of the animal. Jacques Villon noted in a letter, 'During the war, having come to a better understanding of the horse (as a doctor attached to a regiment of Cuirassiers, he had become an accomplished horseman) he had not ceased to envisage the work he had begun, and it is by dozens that we find the sketches which modified his first model'.

At the beginning, the problem had been that of the movement—the gallop or trot—of the horse. Then came the allusion, more and more evident, to the machine and to the analogy of the two forces as the characteristic of the thought of our time. And while the animal and the machine were merging into a sort of projectile (that was the word chosen by Henri Matisse, when speaking to Duchamp-Villon, a short time after the outbreak of the war), the ensemble was acquiring, more and more, a monumental quality—which is to be seen, however, even in the first models.

At the same time, the surface modelling was disappearing, to leave bare the big planes as they played together in a fashion at once moving and logical. A definitive execution in steel was to have given the final amplitude to this aspect of the piece. From whatever angle one looks at it, the equilibrium keeps up to an equal degree, the profiles fly to their summit with lines as living as flames, or dart back in perspective—as well controlled as the movement of an orchestra; the surfaces continue each another or accentuate each other masterfully, great alternations of light and shade are organized—dramatic and sonorous: Duchamp-Villon had carried through to full success a work for which no parallel had existed before. It was a thing of our period, and one with that hard and healthy beauty which justifies a period.

And yet the life of this artist was far, very far, from having given everything. In contrast with men like Masaccio, among the masters of the past, or Seurat, among those of our time, Duchamp-Villon is not of those artists who have had intimations of their death and who have concentrated within a few years a development to attain which others require three or four times the same span. With his sober nature, his power of calculating and his need to build on a sound foundation, Duchamp-Villon's way of constructing might be said to be that of the pyramids; if the work he has left is unshakable and impressive, we must recognize, unfortunately, that the production he counted on to continue it is lacking, and will remain lacking forever—whatever the influence of the sculptor on the later men. His death, then, seems to have nothing in common with a tragedy built up and regulated according to the law of poets, proceeding as they do with logic and with compensating movements; his death incorporates directly with all that is tragic in life, whose logic is to be discerned by no one.

We are still very near to the man; and we feel too vividly the bitterness of our loss to be able to say what would have been the consequences of his evolution if he had lived on. Not that we can have any doubt as to a succession of fine works, for if we can deduce one thing as certain from his production, it is that we could still have expected much from him, and we know well that our conviction on this point is not due either to the great charm of his personality or to our grief over his disappearance. It is his whole work that makes us thus sure, and the question is whether the future will be able to reach the depths of the lesson he gave from study of his finished

works. Time will be needed, perhaps (we recall Seurat, for example, and his not being appreciated at his true value until many a year after his death) but it is permissible to hope that the oncoming generations will know how to profit by the ideas defined by Duchamp-Villon.

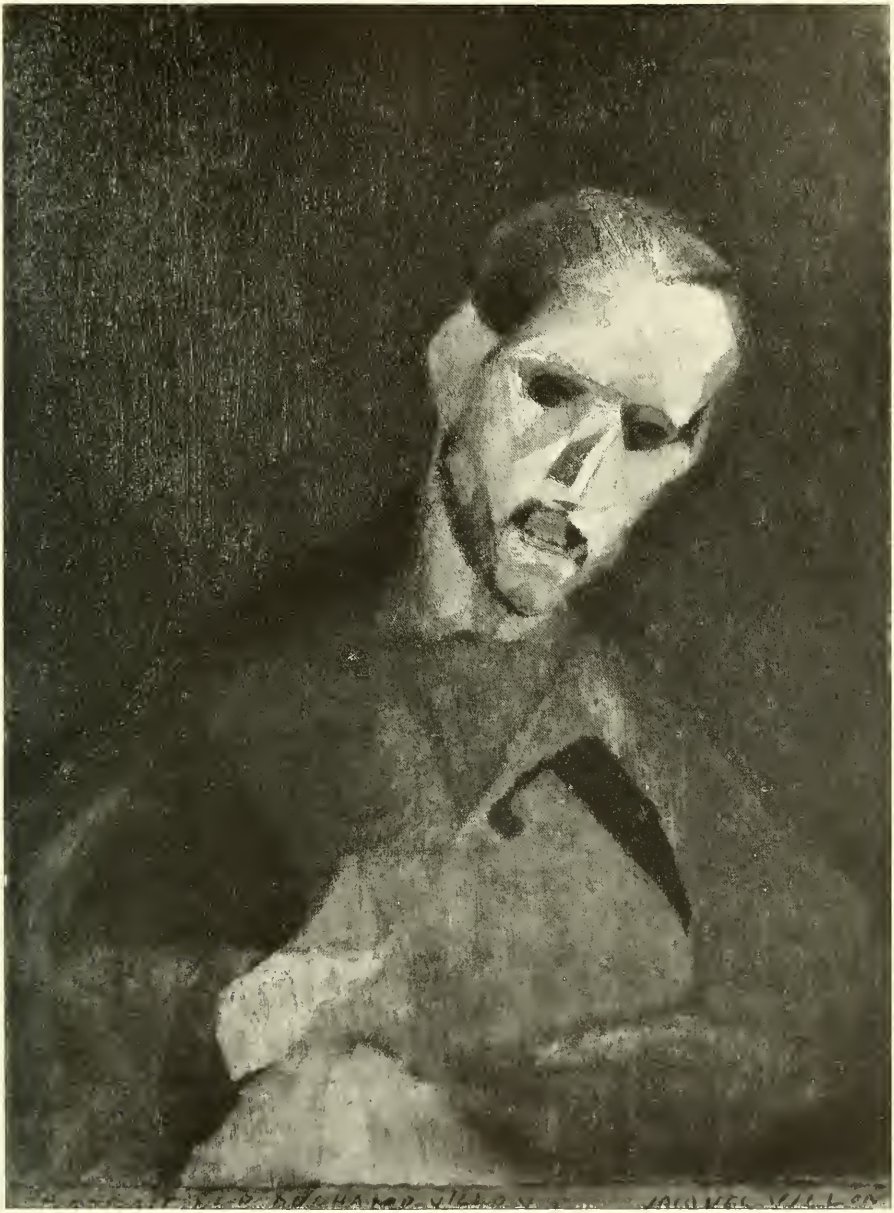
And we will not avoid uttering an opinion on his accord with the long line of artists of his country. Their essential quality is to bear within them the feeling for art which the past has transmitted to them and to give it new forms. This is again the prime characteristic of Duchamp-Villon. Place his **Torso of a Man** beside one of those figures of warriors from the tympanum of Aegina at the Munich gallery. The French sculptor knew them only by reproductions if he knew them at all, but no one will fail to be impressed by the relationship of mind which brings him so close to the Greek sculptor who announces the end of the archaic age. Long before the present time, Barye had made us feel the family likeness between modern French sculpture, and that of the archaic Greeks; Duchamp-Villon worthily continues the lesson of the older man.

But another school of the past furnishes us even more reasons to believe in the value of the contemporary sculptor. Compare that magnificent head of Baudelaire with the immortal figures on the **Portail Royal** of Chartres—it is the same art descending to us across the centuries, the same science of the planes as that which made up the strength of the Gothic sculptors—and the love which led Duchamp-Villon to honor the great poet of his period caused him to express in this face a sentiment of fateful grandeur in which the masters of the cathedrals might have recognized themselves. Look again at the bas-relief of the **Lovers** and see whether the logic of the design does not have the quality of inevitability of the cathedral itself. And as to that quality of renewal in the form which belongs to the essence of things for the French artist, the **Horse** and indeed the entire work of the sculptor's maturity are there to prove that he has the right to be considered as an innovator quite as much as he is a conserver.

He is in his work and will be known through it. It was through the work that many (including the writer of these lines) were drawn to the man himself. Before the sober and often uncommunicative externals of works of art, it is still possible to reach intuitions as to the personal qualities of the individuals who created those works; those who can do so may still cross the abyss separating the artist from even the men nearest to him; for persons of such insight there will also be accessible the kindness, the honesty, the gay humor and the calm fervor that we knew so well in our great friend.

Walter Pach

From « Raymond Duchamp-Villon, sculpteur. » Povolozky, Paris, 1924



Jacques Villon «Portrait of R. Duchamp-Villon» 1911 Oil $13^{3}/_{4} \times 10^{3}/_{8}$" Collection Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Excerpts from a letter to Walter Pach

January 16th, 1913

. . . I do not believe that an epoch wholly creates its aestheticism. It finds the germ of it in the arts of preceding generations which prepared it quite unconsciously. There remains a considerable work to be accomplished in order that the idea, blindly conceived—but ready to live, be developed and in its turn leave fruitful seed.

In the special case of architecture, the attempts made in France since the XVIIIth Century have not resulted in style. The buildings have the marks of the different periods of the XIXth without our being able to work out from them a well-defined tendency—as characteristic, for example, as that of furniture in the first half of the same century. That confirms me in my opinion that in an epoch of floating ideas and aspirations there can be no definitive or durable monument. It would seem that the balance between the political mechanism and the free functioning of the machinery of thought should favor the beginning of the XXth Century, and that there should really be a great desire, in our time, to give its true setting to the new social organization. For the need of such a setting makes itself felt through the confusion amidst which decorative art is struggling. You have well demonstrated that the aesthetics of the XIXth Century was dominated by painting, and that from it alone must come forth the new principles of the other arts—everybody feels this, and Cézanne will be looked on, from this point of view, as the best worker for the renascence in France.

If we examine the civilizations of Egypt, Greece, Rome and France, we are struck by the unity that governs every manifestation of their spirits from the attitude of the living being to the monument—passing through furniture, costume and articles of common use or of luxury.

In our day what could be more inconsistent, more of an anachronism, than a dress-suit in a Louis XV boudoir, or an electric tram on the square before the palace of

Versailles? If, in certain cases these meetings are inevitable, they should be the exception, and disappear so to speak, in normal surroundings. The dress-suit and the tramway are of our time; we owe them an appropriate frame, and on the conception of it **their aspect will have its influence** for the relationship is evident between the forms that clothe life and the aesthetic formulas of the same epoch.

It is, I think, from this fact that we should inspire ourselves in establishing a new architectural setting—not that we should try to adapt the forms and lines of even the characteristic objects of our time, which would only be a transposition of these lines and forms to other materials and therefore an error—but rather that we should tirelessly fill our minds with the relationships of these objects among themselves in order to interpret them in synthetic lines, planes and volumes which shall, in their turn, equilibrate in rhythms analogous to those which surround us.

We are the victims today of our unbridled activity, and our existence ceaselessly turned toward the morrow is forcedly rapid and, so to speak, cutting. Our movements are jerky, our voluntary gestures without emphasis; the spectacles sought for by our eyes are all of motion, and the words that our minds prefer express most in the least time. From this aspect of our surroundings and many others there works out, for me, a predominance of the straight line over the curved line, a predominance pushed to the point of tyranny. At the same time, as a reaction against our era of business, where money is the sovereign master, it seems to me that simplicity, austerity even, are the indispensable virtues, and that our idea of the beautiful should be clothed in them. An art which establishes itself on these bases is necessarily in absolute contradiction not only with the received ideas of the present, but with those of the past, for this past is also, at many points, the contrary of our present.

You will now understand better under what influence my searches for an architectural setting were made. It is the influence unconsciously felt by every true artist of the new generation. The power of the machine imposes itself and we scarcely conceive living beings any more without it. We are strangely moved by the rapid brushing by of men and things and we accustom ourselves without knowing it to perceive the forces of the former through the forces they dominate. From that to an opinion of life in which it appears to us simply under its form of higher dynamism there is only a step, which is quickly made...

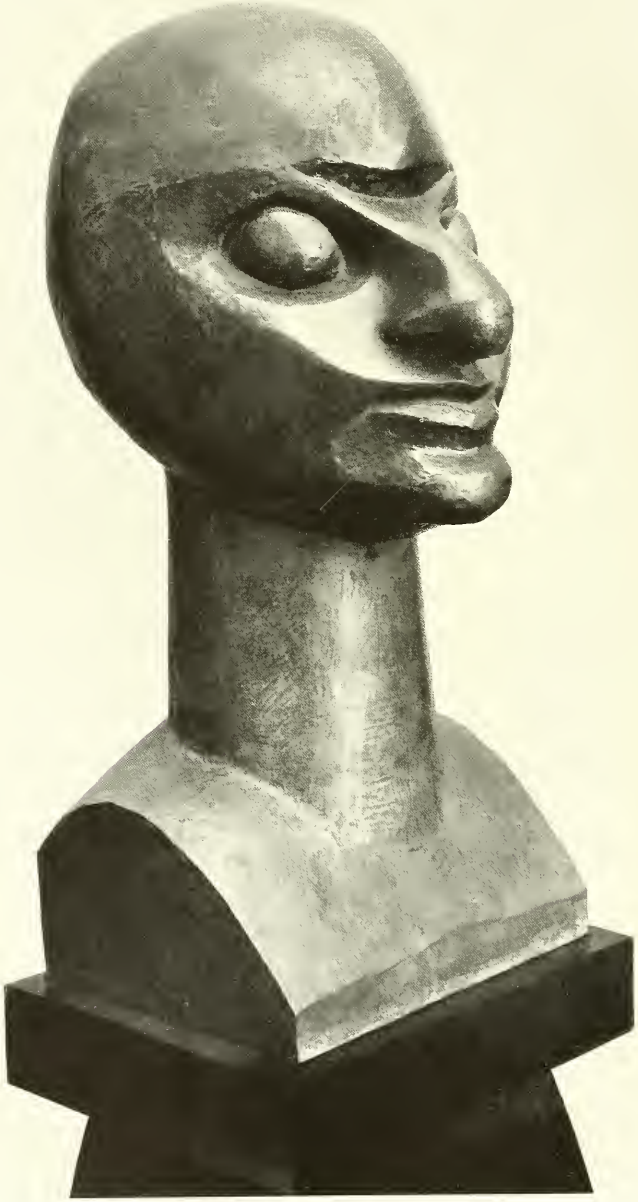
Raymond Duchamp-Villon

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Torso of a Young Man» 1910 Bronze 21 5/8" high

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Baudelaire» 1911 Bronze 15 3/4" high

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris



Raymond Duchamp-Villon **Maggy»** **1912** **Bronze** **28 3/8" high**

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Cat» 1913 Concrete 25″ diameter

Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, Katherine S. Dreier Estate

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Lovers» 1913 Bas-relief Lead $26^{3}/_{4} \times 39^{3}/_{8}''$

Galerie Louis Carré, Pari

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Seated Woman» 1914 Bronze 27 1/4" high Yale University Art Gallery, Collection of the Société Anonyme

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Horse and Rider» 1914 Bronze 11 1/2" high

Galerie Louis Carré, Paris

Raymond Duchamp-Villon «Head of Horse» 1914 Bronze 15 3/8" high The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Biographical Notes

Raymond Duchamp-Villon

1876 5 November, born Damville (Eure)

1918 7 October, died military hospital, Cannes

c. 1898 Studied medicine for three years before turning to sculpture
Abandoned medicine to devote himself to sculpture, self-taught

1901 First exhibition, Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Paris

1901–1908 In annual exhibitions of Société Nationale
Worked first under the influence of Rodin, then Maillol
First important sculpture, **Old Peasant**; second, a large torso of female nude

1905 Associate member of the Salon d'Automne, later member of the Comité
Exhibited annually at Salon d'Automne until 1913

1908 Salon d'Automne: **Song** (plaster)
Portrait of a Young Girl (bronze)

1909 Salon des Indépendants: **Old Peasant** (stone bust)
Portrait of a Child (plaster)
Salon d'Automne: **Girl seated** (bronze)
Song (wood)

1910 Salon des Indépendants: **Portrait of a Man** (marble)
Salon d'Automne: **Pastoral**e (plaster)
In adjoining homes at Puteaux, he and Jacques Villon began open-house Sundays

1911 **Baudelaire** (bronze)
Salon d'Automne: **Wood Nymph** (bronze)
Baudelaire (plaster bust)
Beginning of Cubist influence on his work

1912 Joined Cubists
Began studies to result in **Horse**
Exhibited with Section d'Or
Salon d'Automne: **Façade for a Residence,** architecture and sculpture

1913 Salon d'Automne: Bas-relief (plaster)
Bust (plaster)
Sculpture, bas-reliefs, architecture of the ensemble André Mare
Return to more personal expression after communal work
Lovers (bas-relief)
The Rider (bronze) first version of **Horse**

1913 Armory Show, N.Y.: **Façade for a Residence** (plaster)
Torso (plaster)
Girl of the Woods (plaster)
Dancer (plaster)
Baudelaire
Worked on architectural sculpture for a college in Connecticut

1914 **Horse,** final version (bronze)
Seated Woman (bronze)
Exhibited Prague, Berlin, Ghent
Joined French Army, doctor to 11th Cuirassiers

1916 During World War I, contracted blood poisoning
Did **Portrait of Professor Gosset** (his doctor) during illness

1918 Died, Cannes
Left unfinished manuscript, **Variations de la connaissance pendant le travail d'art**

Retrospective Exhibitions:

1917 Independent Artists, N.Y.

1919 Salon d'Automne, Paris

1921 Exhibited henceforth with Société Anonyme, N.Y.

1926 Retrospective des Indépendants, Paris (6 works)

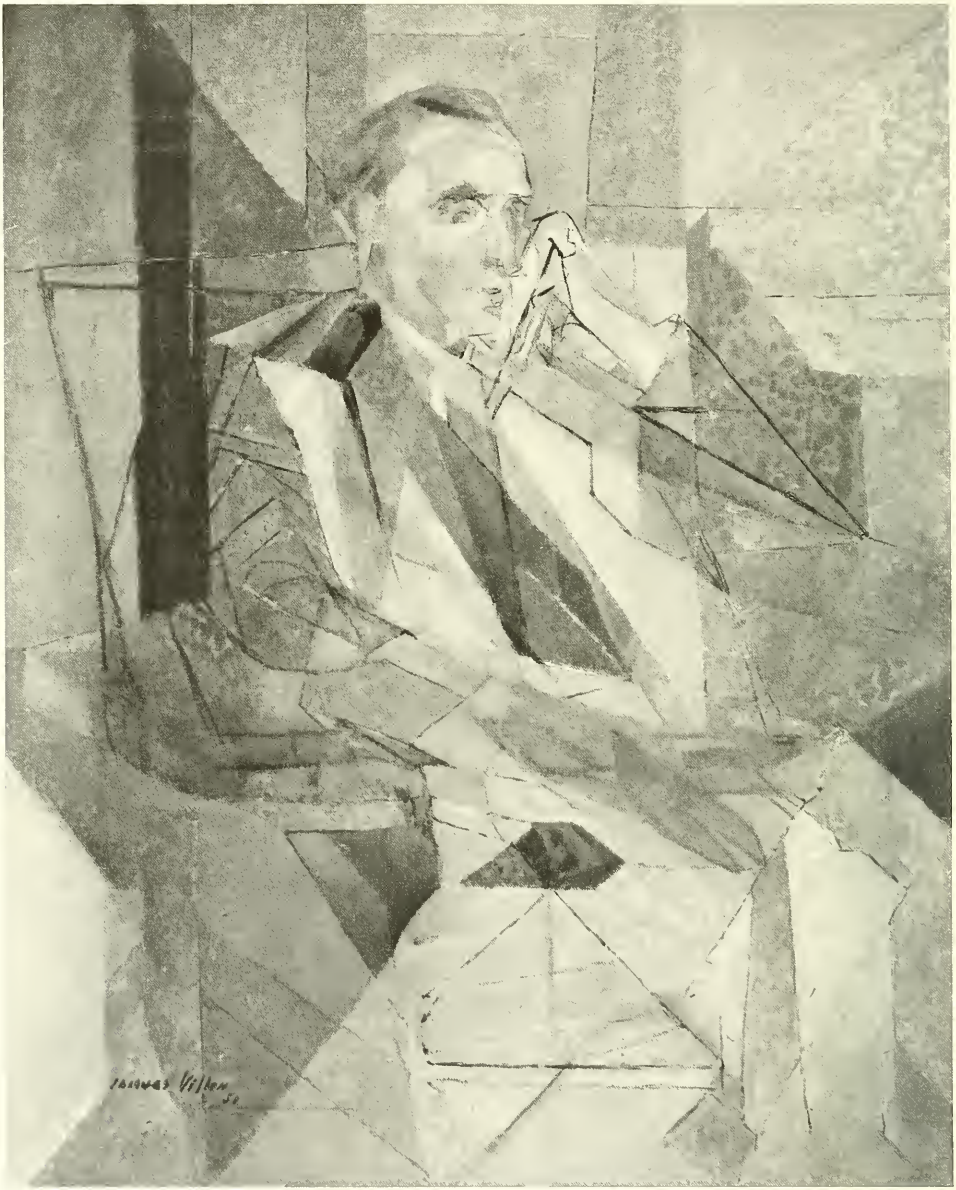
1929 Brummer Galleries, N.Y.

1931 Galerie Pierre, Paris

1942 Galerie de France, Paris (with brothers Jacques Villon and Marcel Duchamp)

1945 Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn. (with Jacques Villon and Marcel Duchamp)

Marcel Duchamp



Jacques Villon «Portrait of Marcel Duchamp» 1951 Oil $57^{1}/_{2} \times 44^{7}/_{8}$"

Collection Niels Onstad, New York

Lighthouse of the Bride

Buildings flung under a grey sky turning to pink, very slowly—it is in a troubled and anguishing style of conquest, where the transitory conflicts with the pompous—all this has just arisen in no time at some extreme point of the globe and there is nothing that can prevent it, besides, from melting for us at a distance into the most conventional scene of modern adventure, gold prospectors or others, as the early years of the movies have helped to fix it: **haute école,** luck, the fire of feminine eyes and lips; though in this instance it is a purely mental adventure, I get easily enough this impression of the greatness and the indigence of 'cubism'. Whoever has once caught himself in the act of believing the doctrinal affirmations from which this movement draws authority, of giving it credit for its scientific aspirations, of praising its constructive value, must in fact agree that the sum of research thus designated has been but a plaything for the **tidal wave** which soon came and put an end to it, not without upsetting from base to summit, far and wide, the artistic and moral landscape. This landscape, unrecognizable today, is still too troubled for anyone to pretend that he can rigorously untangle the deep causes of its torment: one is generally content to explain it by referring to the impossibility of building anything stable on socially undermined foundations. However expedient may be this manner of judging, which happily recalls the artist to a just appreciation of his limitations (the more and more necessary transformation of the world is **other** than that which can be achieved on canvas), I do not think that it should absolve us from studying the process of formation of the particularly hollow and voracious wave which I have just mentioned. From the strictly historical point of view, it is very important, in order to bring this study to a proper conclusion, to consider attentively the place where the very first characteristic vibrations of the phenomenon chose to be recorded, in this instance the general disposition of this or that artist who has proven himself on this occasion to be the most sensitive recording instrument. The unique position of Marcel Duchamp at the spearhead of all 'modern' movements which have succeeded each other for the last twenty-five years was, until quite recently, such as to make us deplore that the externally most important part of this work, from 1911 to 1918, rather jealously guarded its secret. If the 'tidal wave', which was later to be so vastly disrupting, could have once begun to swell, one had certainly come to think that Duchamp must, from the start, have known much about its resources, and one suspected him rather of having opened for it some mysterious valve. But one scarcely hoped to be some day more fully enlightened as to the part Duchamp had played. Therefore the publication, in October 1934, of ninety-four documents assembled by him under the title: **La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même,** which suddenly overturned before us this wave and afforded us a glimpse of all that is most complex in its enormous machinery, could not fail to pass for a capital event in the eyes of all who attach any importance to the determination of the great intellectual motives of our day.

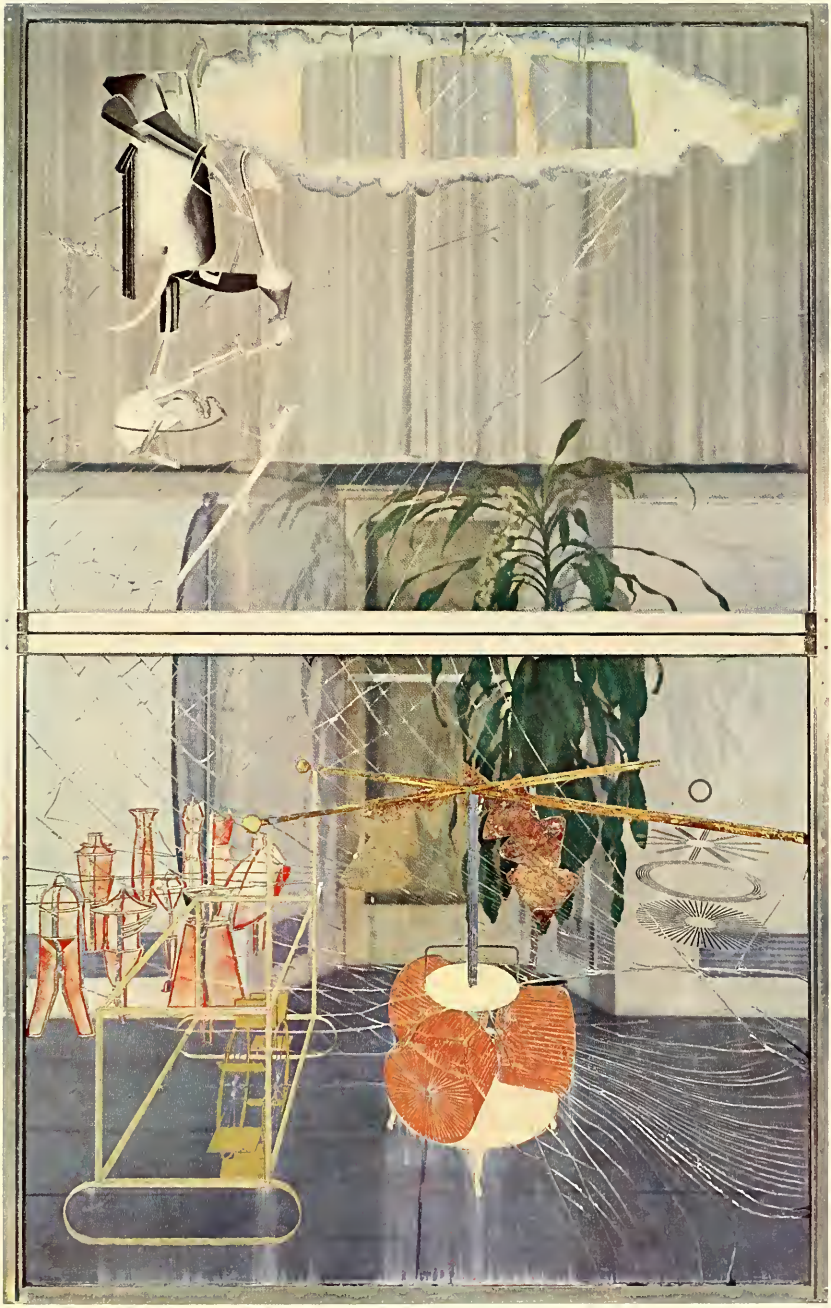
In a text that was destined to stress the most unfortunate aesthetic calculation, Edgar Allan Poe, after all, once expressed an admirable decision that has ever since been shared by all artists worthy of that title and still constitutes, though perhaps unconsciously for the majority of them, the most important of all directives. Poe wrote indeed that originality, except in minds of the most unusual vigor, is in no way, as many seem to believe, a matter of instinct and intuition; to find it, one must generally seek it laboriously and, though a positive merit of the highest order, it is achieved rather by the spirit of negation than by the inventive spirit.

Without prejudging the degree of 'unusual force' which precisely can be the mark of a spirit such as Duchamp's, those who have been

introduced to him to any extent will feel no scruples in recognizing that never has a more profound originality appeared more clearly to derive from a being charged with a more determined intention of negation. Does not all the history of poetry and art for the last hundred years strengthen in us the conviction that we are after all less sensitive to what we are told than to what we are spared, for instance, from repeating? There are **various means** of repeating, from pure and simple verbal repetition, so inept, like for instance 'blue skies'—which, when I come across it as soon as I open a book of poems, relieves me, with good reason, from the need to become aware of the context—passing through repetition, in the sphere of art, of the subject treated, fallaciously excused by the new manner of treatment, or repetition of the manner, fallaciously excused by the novelty of the subject, to repetition, in the sphere of human existence, of the pursuit of some artistic 'ideal' which requires continuous application, incompatible with any other form of action. Where else, if not in the hatred we feel for this eternal repetition, can we seek the reason for the increasing attraction exercised on us by certain books which are so strangely self-sufficient that we consider their authors have discharged their indebtedness: **Les Chimères, Les Fleurs du Mal, Les Chants de Maldoror, Les Illuminations?** Is it not, besides, reassuring and exemplary that, at this price, some of these authors also considered **themselves** free from debt? Absolute originality, from refusal to refusal, appears to me to lead inevitably to Rimbaud's conclusion: 'I am a thousand times the richest, let us be as miserly as the sea.' This refusal, pushed to the extreme, this final negation which is of an ethical order, weighs heavily on all debates arising from a typically modern artistic production. Nothing can prevent the abundance of this production, in a given artist, from being, until this attitude changes, its very drawback. Originality nowadays is narrowly connected with rareness. And on this point, Duchamp's attitude, the only one that is perfectly uncompromising, whatever human precautions he may surround it with, remains, to the more conscious poets and painters who approach him, a subject of confusion and envy.

Marcel Duchamp limits to approximately thirty-five the number of his activities in the field of plastic production, and even then he includes among them a series of achievements that an insufficiently sophisticated critical attitude would refuse to consider in one class: I mean, for instance, the act of signing some characterless large decorative panel in a restaurant and, generally speaking, that which constitutes the most obvious (and what might be the **most dazzling**) part of his activities of twenty years: the various speculations in which he became involved through his preoccupation with those **ready-mades** (manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of objects of art through the choice of the artist) by means of which, from time to time and with complete contempt for all other media, he very proudly expressed himself. But who can truly say how much it may mean, to those who really know, a signature that has been used openly in such a parsimonious manner? An intense and fascinating light is cast by it, no longer only on the narrow object that it generally locates, but on a whole process of intellectual life. This process, a most peculiar one indeed, can achieve its full meaning and become perfectly understandable only once it has been reunited to a series of other processes, all of a causal nature and not one of which we can afford to ignore. And all this means that one's understanding of Duchamp's work and the fact that one foresees its furthest consequences can only be the result of a deep historical understanding of the development of this work. And because of the prodigious speed with which this work developed, the very limited number of Duchamp's public utterances would make it necessary to enumerate them all without omitting any. I am, however, forced here to list only his more characteristic works.

Duchamp's **Coffee-grinder** (late 1911) indicates the start of the purely personal development that interests us; compared to the guitars of the cubists, it takes on the appearance of an infernal machine. The years 1911 and 1912 indeed already reveal the full extent of Duchamp's dissidence, a dissidence that affirms itself brilliantly as much in the subject-matter as in the manner of his paintings; and one should note that the major part of his more purely pictorial work falls into these limits of time **(Sad young man in a train, Nude descending a staircase, King and queen surrounded by swift nudes, King and queen crossed by swift nudes, Virgin, The passage from the virgin to the bride, Bride).** It was as early as the end of 1912 that Duchamp suffered the great intellectual crisis that progressively forced him to abandon this mode of expression which seemed vitiated to him. The practice of drawing and painting appeared to him as a kind of trickery that tended towards the senseless glorification of the **hand** and of nothing else. The hand is the great culprit, so how can one consent to be the slave of one's own hand? **It is inacceptable that drawing and painting should today still stand where writing stood before Gutenberg came.** To delight in color, which is all based on enjoyment of the sense of smell, is as wretched as to delight in line, which is based on enjoyment of the hand's sense. The only solution, under such conditions, is to unlearn painting and drawing. And Duchamp has never abandoned this purpose since that date; this consideration ought, I believe, to be enough to induce one to approach with a very special



interest the gigantic purpose to which, once such a negation had been formulated, he nevertheless devoted his strength for over ten years: it is into the details of this purpose that the publication of these documents initiated us, a purpose unequalled in contemporary history and which was destined to be achieved in the huge **glass** (an object painted on transparent glass) entitled **La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même** and left unfinished in New York. In this work it is impossible not to see at least the trophy of a fabulous hunt through virgin territory, at the frontiers of eroticism, of philosophical speculation, of the spirit of sporting competition, of the most recent data of science, of lyricism and of humor. From 1913 to 1923, the year when Duchamp finally abandoned this work, all the paintings, whether on canvas or on glass, that would have to be included in a catalogue of his works are but research and fragmentary attempts to achieve the various parts of **La Mariée mise à nu.** Such indeed is the case of the **Chocolate-grinder,** of the **Glissière** or **Slide,** of the **Neuf moules mâlic,** all of 1913, as well as of the 1914 **Chocolate-grinder** and the glass **To be watched closely with one eye for almost an hour** of 1918, which latter is a variation on the **Oculist witnesses** that likewise are part of the general description. At most, one might class as a partial exception to this rule the composition entitled **Tu m',** where there appear, on the right, the three **standard stops** that are included here in the composition with two **ready-mades,** on the one hand (an enamelled hand and a ceiling-brush), and on the other hand with the shadows cast by three other **ready-mades** brought close together (a bicycle wheel, a corkscrew and a coat-hanger).

A falling back on these **ready-mades,** after 1914, began to supplant, for Duchamp, all other forms of self-expression. It will be of great interest, some day, to explain the full meaning of all these projects, each so rigorously unexpected, in this respect, and to try to unravel the law whereby they progress. I can only recall now the **Pharmacy** of 1914, conceived in Rouen when Duchamp saw a snowscape (he added to a water-color, of the 'winter calendar' type, two tiny characters, one red and the other green, walking towards each other in the distance); also the ceiling of Duchamp's studio in 1915, bristling with objects such as coat-hangers, combs, weathercocks, all accompanied by some discordant inscription that served as a title or a caption (a snow-shovel was titled, in English, **In advance of the broken arm);** Duchamp's birthday present to his sister, which consisted in suspending by its four corners, beneath her balcony, an open geometry-book destined to become the plaything of the seasons; the rebus composed of a nursemaid and a lion's cage **(Nous nous cajolions);** the latrine exhibited in 1917 at the New York Independents Show under the title **Fountain,** and which Duchamp was forced to withdraw after the opening, as a result of which he resigned from the Association; his adding, in 1919, a moustache to the **Gioconda (LHOOQ);** his 1921 window entitled **Fresh Widow** which was a pun on the sound's ambiguous similarity with **French Window** (this consisted of a small window, manufactured by a carpenter after Duchamp's instructions, whose glass panes are covered with leather so that they become leather panes that must be polished); his 1922 window, a replica of the earlier one, but this time with a wooden base where bricks are drawn and with glass panes streaked with white like those of newly-built houses **(La bagarre d'Austerlitz);** his little 1923 birdcage filled with pieces of white marble cut to look like cubes of sugar and through whose top there emerged a thermometer **(Why not sneeze?);** his design for a perfume bottle, **Belle haleine—Eau de voilette;** his 1925 bond on the Monte Carlo roulette **(Moustiques domestiques demi-stock);** finally **Duchamp's door,** described for the first time in the summer 1933 issue of **Orbes** as follows: 'In the apartment entirely constructed by Duchamp's hands, there stands, in the studio, a door of natural wood that leads into the room. When one opens this door to enter the room, it then closes the entrance to the bathroom, and when one opens it to enter the bathroom, it closes the entrance to the studio and is painted with white enamel like the interior of the bathroom. ('A door must be either open or closed' had always seemed to be an inescapable truth; but Duchamp had managed to construct a door that was at the same time both open and closed.) One should also list contemporary with this series of activities that do not back continuity, on the one hand some optical research intended to be particularly applicable to movies, to which category belongs his famous cover design for an issue of **Minotaure,** as well as two different versions of a moving sphere on which a spiral is painted (the first version belongs to 1921 and the second, **Rrose Sélavy et moi nous estimons les ecchymoses des Esquimaux aux mots exquis,** belongs to 1925-26), and, on the other hand, some verbal research in which he was more actively and particularly engaged around 1920 (some puns by Marcel Duchamp were published in the fifth issue of the new series of **Littérature,** October 1922, as well as on the front inside cover of Pierre de Massot's **The wonderful book,** in 1924).

To this day, no cataloguing of this sort has been attempted; I therefore feel that my own may suffice, temporarily at least (until somebody chooses, as is proper, Duchamp's **ready-mades** as the subject of a thesis, and even this would not exhaust the topic). But we still have to consider rather closely, likewise for the first time,

Marcel Duchamp's monumental work beside which all his other works seem to gravitate almost like satellites, I mean **La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même.** The collection of documents that Duchamp published some years after abandoning this work in an unfinished state casts some appreciable light on its genesis, though this light itself cannot be truly enjoyed without some additional information. To recognize the objective value of **La Mariée mise à nu,** one requires, in my opinion, some Ariadne's thread that one would seek in vain among the thickets, whether written or drawn, that are contained within this strange green box of published documents. And it is necessary first to go back to a reproduction of the glass object before one can identify the various elements that constitute the whole, before one can become aware of their respective parts in the functioning of the whole. 1. **Bride (or female hanged body)** reduced to what one might call its skeleton in the 1912 canvas that bears this title. — 2. **Inscription for the top** (made out of the three **pistons for drafts** surrounded by a kind of **milky way).** — 3. **Nine mâlic moulds,** or **Eros machine,** or **Bachelor machine,** or **Cemetery for uniforms and liveries** (state trooper, cuirassier, policeman, priest, bellhop, department-store delivery-man, flunkey, mortician's assistant, station-master). — 4. **Slide** (or **chariot or sleigh,** standing on runners that slide in a gutter). — 5. **Water mill.** — 6. **Scissors.** — 7. **Sieve** (or **drainage slopes).** — 8. **Chocolate-grinder** (bayonet, cravat, rollers, Louis XV chassis). — 9. Region of the **splash** (not shown). — 10. **Oculist witnesses.** — 11. Region of the **gravity manager** (or **gravity caretaker,** not shown). — 12. **Pulls.** — 13. **Bride's clothes.**

The above described morphological analysis of the **Mariée mise à nu** allows a very summary idea of the physiological data which determined its elaboration. Actually, we find ourselves here in the presence of a mechanistic and cynical interpretation of the phenomenon of love: the passage of woman from the state of virginity to that of non-virginity taken as the theme of a fundamentally a-sentimental speculation, almost that of an extra-human being training himself to consider this sort of operation. Here the rigorously logical and expected are married to the arbitrary and the gratuitous. And one very soon abandons oneself to the charm of a kind of great modern legend where everything is unified by lyricism. I will limit myself again to facilitating one's reading of it by very briefly describing the relationship with life that seems to me to unite the thirteen principal component parts of the work that I have just enumerated.

The bride, by means of the three nets above her (the draft pistons) exchanges **orders** with the bachelor machine, orders that are transmitted along the milky way. For this, the nine mâlic moulds, in the appearance of waiting, in red lead, have by definition 'received' the **lighting gas** and have taken **moulds** of it; and when they hear the **litanies of the chariot recited** (the refrain of the bachelor machine), let this lighting gas escape through a given number of **capillary tubes** placed towards their top (each one of these tubes, where the gas is **drawn out,** has the shape of a **standard stop,** that is to say the shape that is adopted, as it meets the ground, by a thread one meter long that has previously been stretched horizontally one meter above ground and has then been suddenly allowed to fall of its own accord). The gas, being thus brought to the first sieve, continues to undergo various modifications in its state until in the end, after passing through a kind of **toboggan** or **corkscrew,** it becomes, as it comes out of the last sieve, **explosive fluid** (dust enters into the preparation of the sieves: **dust-raising** allows one to obtain four-month dust, six-month dust, etc. . . . Some varnish has been allowed to run over this dust in order to obtain a kind of transparent cement). During the whole of the operation just described, the chariot (formed of rods of **emancipated metal)** recites, as we have seen, its litanies ('Slow life. Vicious circle. Onanism. Horizontal. Tin for cans, ropes, wire. Wooden pulleys for eccentrics. Monotonous fly-wheel. Beer professor.') while at the same time performing a to-and-fro motion along its gutter. This movement is determined by the regulated fall of the **bottles of Bénédictine** (whose **density oscillates)** that are axled on the water-mill's wheel (a kind of water jet comes in a semi-circle from the corner above the mâlic moulds). Its effect is to open the scissors, thus producing the splash. The liquid gas thus splashed is thrown vertically; it goes past the oculist witnesses (the **dazzling of the splash)** and reaches the region of the pulls (of gunfire) corresponding to the **reduction** of the objective by an 'average skill' (a schematic version of any object). The gravity manager, lacking, ought to have been balanced on the bride's dress and thus suffered the countershock of the various episodes of a **boxing bout** taking place beneath him. The bride's dress, through whose three planes the **mirroric return** of each drop of the dazzled splash takes place, was intended to be conceived as an application of the Wilson-Lincoln system (that is to say by making the most of some of the refractory properties of glass, after the manner of those portraits 'that, seen from the right, reveal Wilson, then, seen from the left, reveal Lincoln'). The inscription for the top, supported by a kind of flesh-colored milky way, is obtained, as we have seen, by means of the three draft pistons that consist of three perfect squares cut out of bunting and are supposed to have changed their shape as they flapped in the wind. Through these pistons are transmitted the orders that are intended to reach the pulls and the splash,

in the last of which the series of bachelor operations reaches its conclusion. One should observe that the chocolate-grinder (whose bayonet acts as a support for the scissors), in spite of the relatively important space that it occupies in the glass, seems to be specially intended to qualify bachelors concretely, by applying the fundamental **adage of spontaneity:** 'a bachelor grinds his own chocolate'.

This commentary has but one object, to furnish a spatial basis for the orientation of anyone who questions the image of **La Mariée mise à nu** and allows himself to be intrigued to the point of classifying according to some order the loose papers of the magnificent 1934 box. But to this commentary one should add several others: philosophical, poetical, expressing faith or suspicion, novelistic, humorous, etc. Probably only the erotic commentary on **La Mariée mise à nu** cannot be ignored now. Fortunately, this commentary exists: written by Duchamp himself, it consists of a ten-page text that anyone who **wants** can today afford to seek and find among the ninety-four documents in the green box. I quote it too briefly, but may this extract inspire some reader to study the whole admirable document and thus reward him for the effort I have demanded of him when introducing him to the analytical details that alone could initiate him into the life of this kind of anti-picture:

'**La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires.** 2 principal elements: — 1. The Bride. — 2. The Bachelors... As the bachelors are intended to serve as an architectonic base for the Bride, the latter becomes a kind of apotheosis of virginity. A steam-engine on a masonry pediment. On this brick base, a solid foundation, the bachelor machine, all grease and lubricity (to be developed). — Just where, as one still ascends, this eroticism reveals itself (and it must be one of the major cogs of the bachelor machine), this tormented cog gives birth to the desire-part of the machine. This desire-part then changes its mechanical status, from that of a steam engine to that of internal combustion engine. And this desire-motor is the last part of the bachelor machine. Far from being in direct contact with the Bride, the desire-motor is separated from her by a gilled cooler. This cooler is to express graphically that the Bride, instead of being a mere asensual icicle, warmly rejects, not chastely, the bachelors' rebuffed offers... In spite of this cooler there exists no solution of continuity between the bachelor machine and the Bride. But the bonds will be **electrical** and will thus express her being stripped: an alternating process. If necessary, short circuit.

'**The Bride.** — In general, if this Bride motor must appear as an apotheosis of virginity, that is to say of ignorant desire, white desire (with a point of malice) and if it does not graphically need to conform to the laws of the equilibrium of weights, a bright metal stanchion might nevertheless represent the virgin's attachment to her girl-friends and her parents... Basically, the Bride is a motor. But before being a motor that transmits timidity-power, she is this very timidity-power which is a kind of petrol, a gasoline of love that, distributed among the very weak cylinders, within the reach of the sparks of its constant life, serves to achieve the final flowering of this virgin who has reached the goal of her desire. (Here the desire-cog will occupy less space than in the bachelor machine. It is only the string that binds the bouquet.) The whole graphical stress leads up to the cinematic blossoming which, determined by the electrical stripping of the clothes, is the halo of the Bride, the sum-total of her splendid vibrations. Graphically, it is not at all a matter of symbolising in a lofty painting this happy goal, the Bride's desire; but more clear in all this blossoming, painting will be an inventory only of the elements of this blossoming, elements of the sex-life imagined by the desiring Bride. In this blossoming, the Bride reveals herself in two appearances: the first is that of her being stripped by the bachelors, while the second is that of the Bride's own volitional imagination. On the coupling of these two appearances of pure virginity, on their collision, all the blossoming depends, the higher whole and crown of the composition. Therefore one must elaborate: firstly, the blossoming in the stripping by the bachelors; secondly, the blossoming in the stripping imagined by the Bride; thirdly, once these two graphical elaborations have been achieved, one must find their reconciliation which must be the blossoming without any causal distinction.'

I think it is unnecessary to insist on all the absolute novelty that is hidden within such a conception. No work of art seems to me, up to this day, to have given as equitable scope to the rational and the irrational as **La Mariée mise à nu.** And even its impeccable dialectical conclusion, as one has just seen, assures it an important place among the most significant works of the twentieth century. What Marcel Duchamp, in a caption to be found amongst his notes, has called a **glass delay,** 'a delay in all the general sense that is possible, a **glass delay** as one says a prose poem or a silver cuspidor,' has not finished being a landmark whereby one can truly classify everything that artistic routine may yet try to achieve wrongly as **advance.** It is wonderful to see how intact it manages to keep its power of anticipation. And one should keep it luminously erect, to guide future ships on a civilization which is ending.

André Breton

From Minotaure, No 6. Paris, 1935.

Lits et ratures.

Rendezvous du Dimanche 6 Février 1916 à $1^h 3/4$ après-midi

porte, dès maintenant par grande
quantité, pourront faire valoir le
clan oblong qui, sans ôter aucun
traversin ni contourner moins
de grelots, va remettre. Deux
fois seulement, tout élève voudrait
traire, quand il facilite la
bascule disséminée; mais, comme
quelqu'un démonte puis avale des
déchirements nains nombreux, soi
compris, on est obligé d'entamer
plusieurs grandes horloges pour
obtenir un tiroir à bas âge.
Conclusion: après maints efforts
en vue du peigne, quel dommage!
tous les fourreurs sont partis et
signifient riz. Aucune demande
ne nettoie l'ignorant ou scié
teneur; toutefois, étant données
quelques cages, c'eut une
profonde émotion qu'exécutent
toutes colles alitées. Tenues,
vous auriez manqué si s'était
trouvée là quelque prononciation

3 Stoppages étalon :
du hasard en conserve

114.

Parmi nos articles de quincaillerie paresseuse, nous recommandons un robinet qui s'arrête de couler quand on ne l'écoute pas.

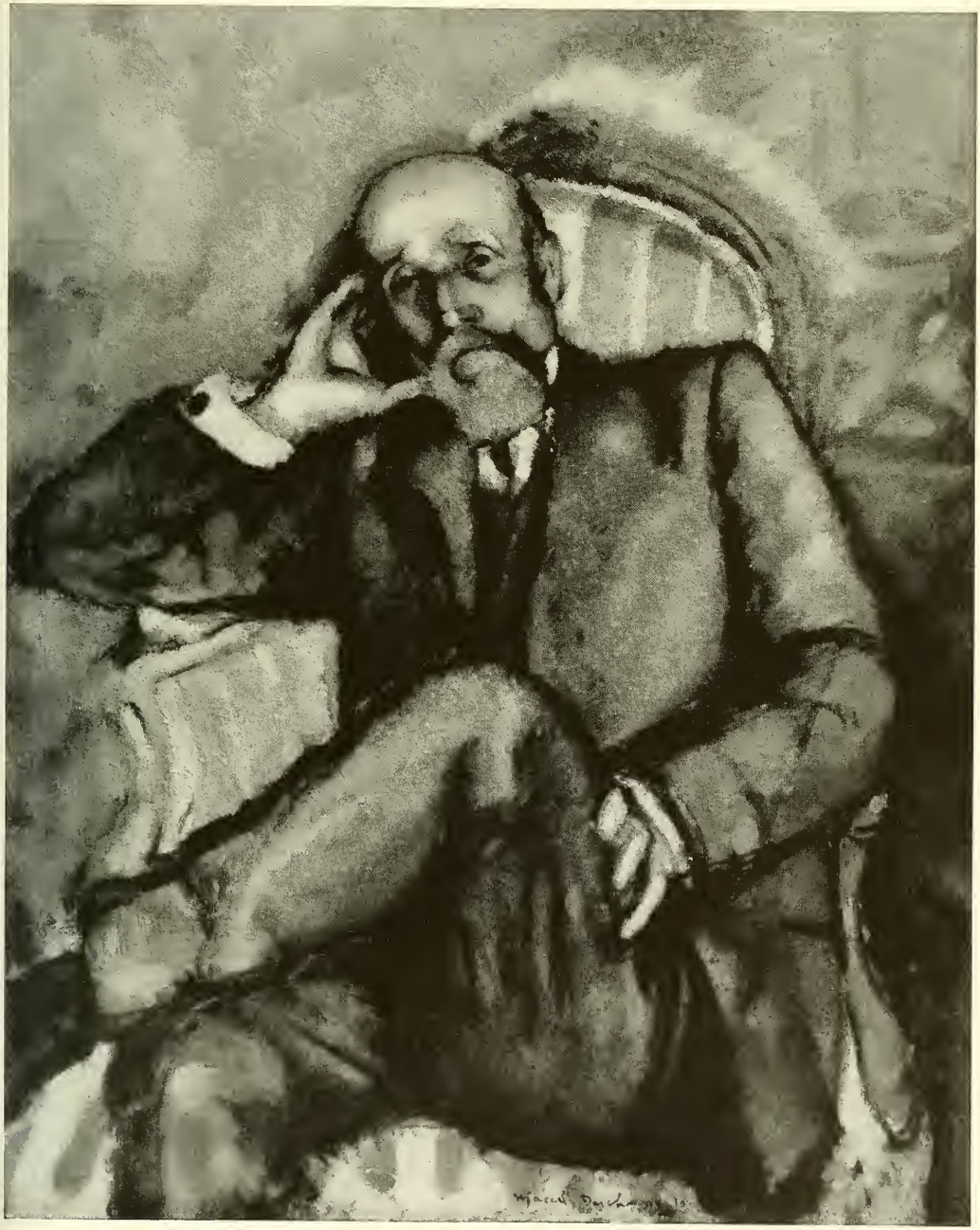
L'Idée de la Fabrication

— Si un fil horizontal droit d'un mètre de longueur tombe d'un mètre de hauteur sur un plan horizontal en se déformant à son gré et donne une figure nouvelle de l'unité de longueur. —

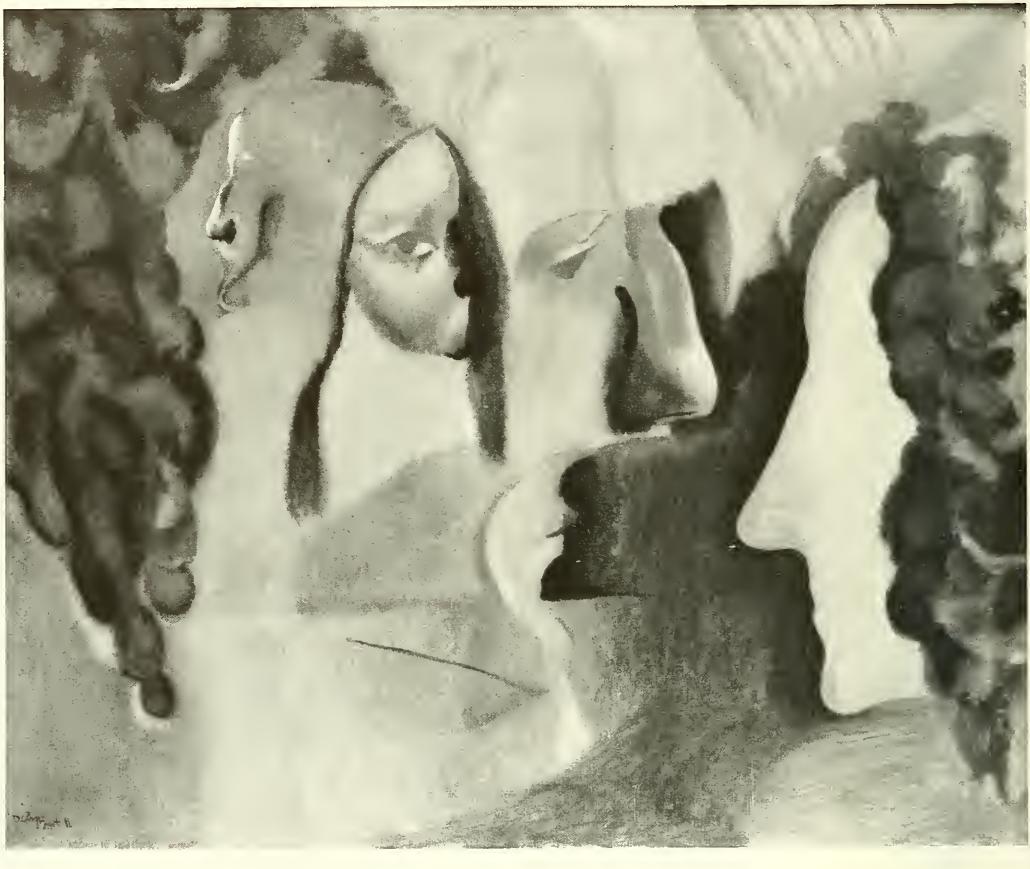
Paroi parée de paresse de paroisse.

Peinture de précision, beauté d'indifférence

Marcel Duchamp «The Chess Players» 1910 Oil 45×57⅞″ The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Marcel Duchamp «The Artist's Father» 1910 Oil $36^{3}/_{8} \times 28^{1}/_{8}$" The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Marcel Duchamp «Yvonne and Magdeleine torn in Tatters» 1911 Oil $23^1/_2 \times 28^1/_4''$ The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

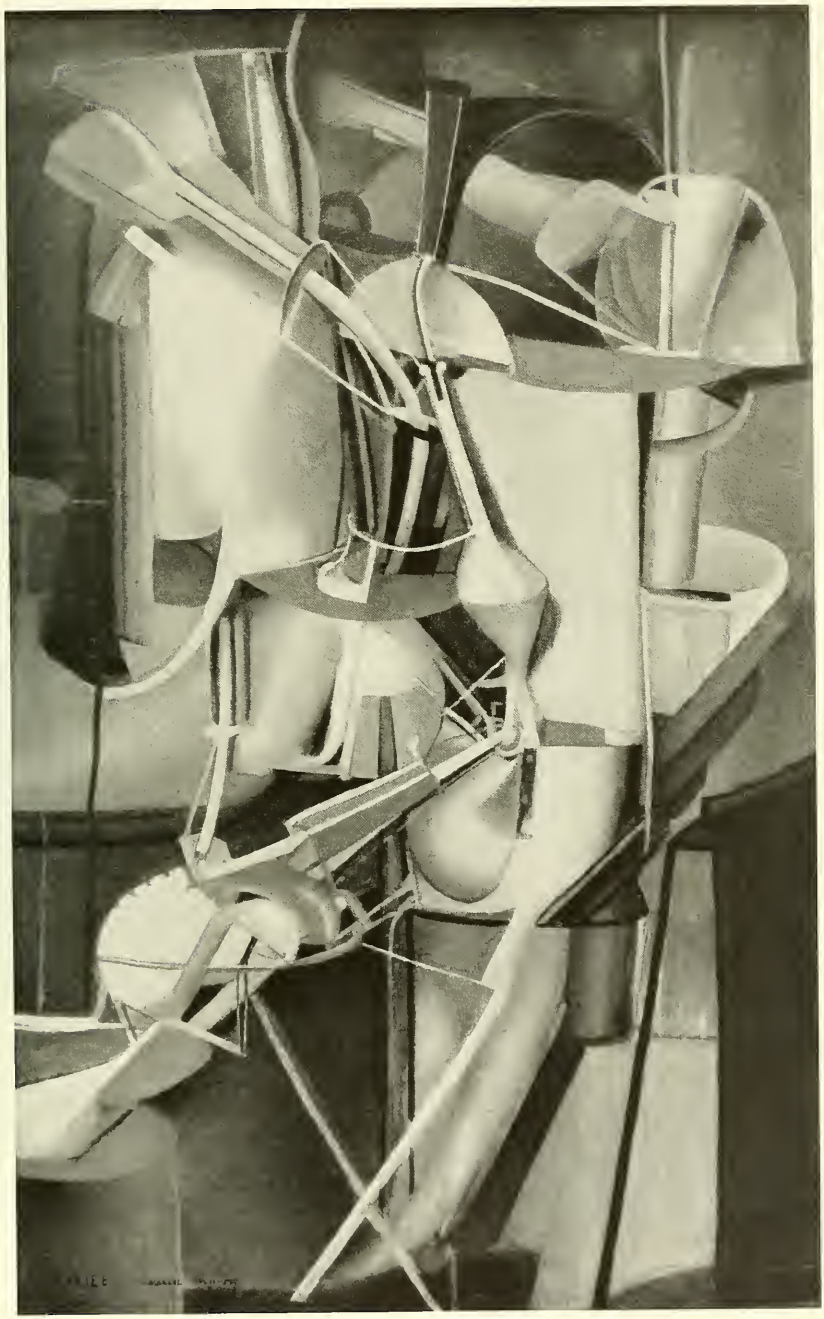
Marcel Duchamp «The Sonata» 1911 Oil 57×44½″ The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Marcel Duchamp «Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 1» 1911 Oil $37^{3}/_{4} \times 23^{1}/_{2}$"

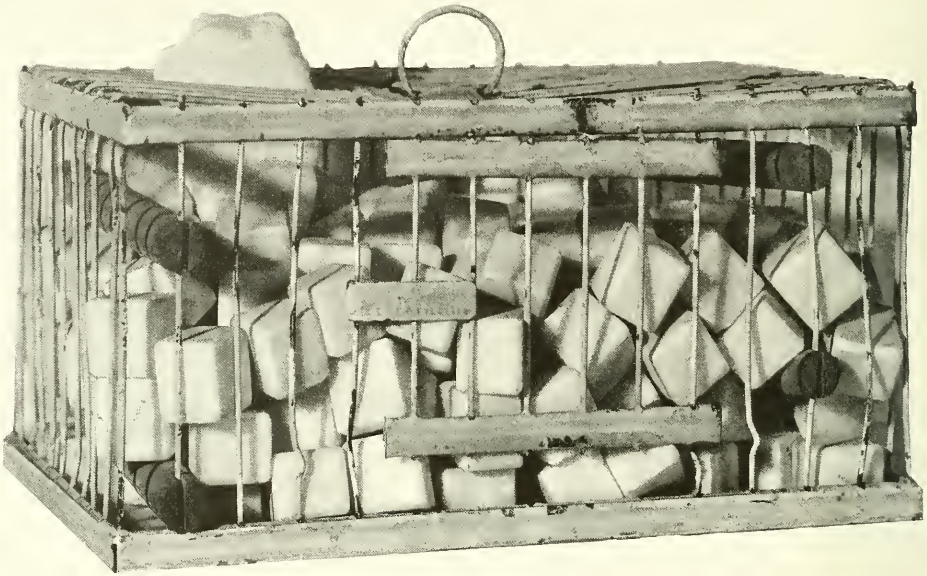
The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Marcel Duchamp «Portrait of Chess Players» 1911 Oil 39³/₄×39³/₄″ The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

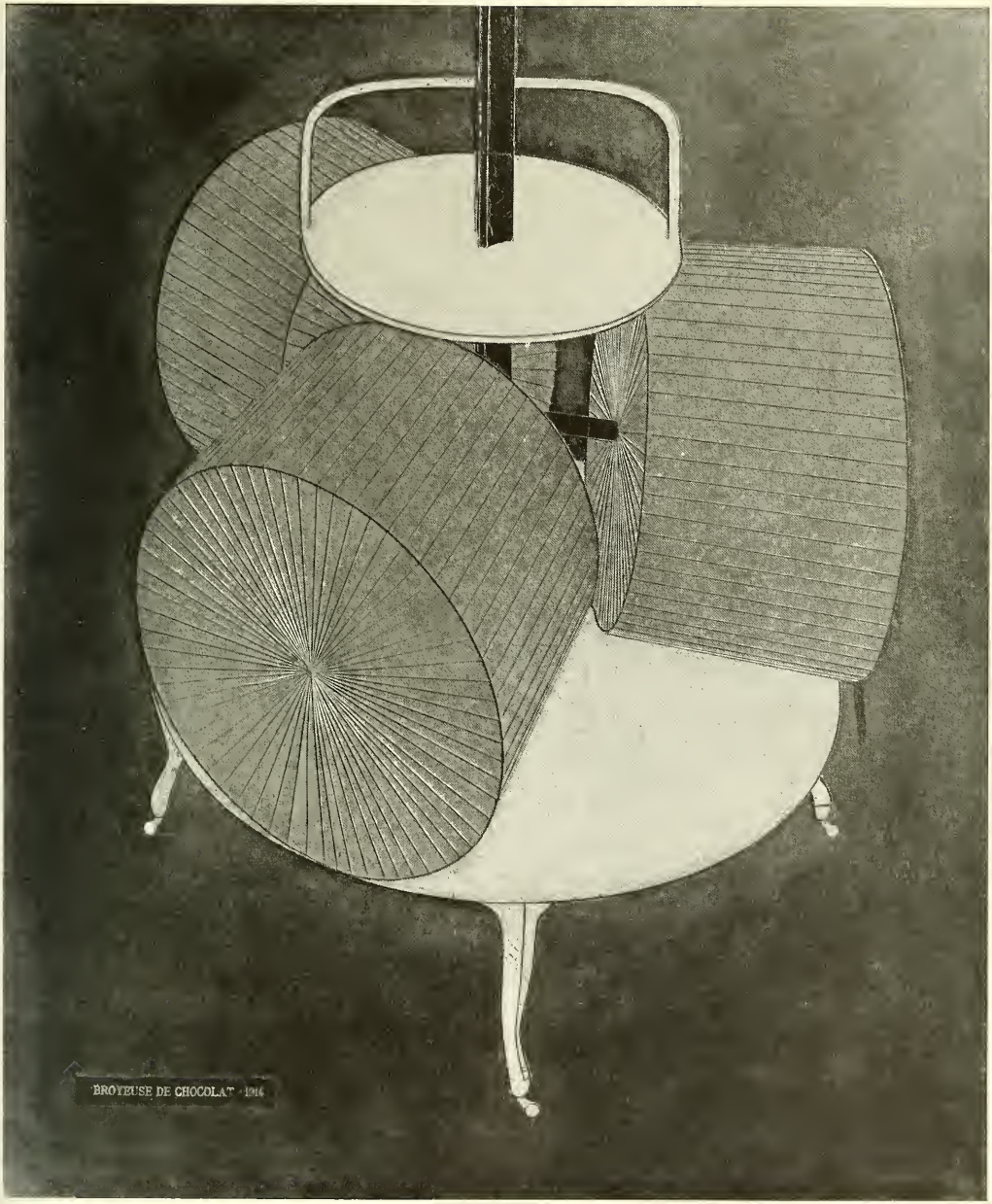
Marcel Duchamp «Le Passage de la Vierge à la Mariée» 1912 Oil $23^{3}/_{8} \times 21^{1}/_{4}''$ Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Marcel Duchamp «The Bride» 1912 Oil $35^{1}/_{8} \times 21^{3}/_{4}$ The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Marcel Duchamp «Why not sneeze Rose Sélavy?» 1921 Ready-made 4 1/2" high The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Marcel Duchamp «Chocolate Grinder, No.2» 1914 Oil 25 1/2 × 21 1/4″ The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Biographical Notes

Marcel Duchamp

1887 28 July, born Blainville, near Rouen
brother of painters Jacques Villon, Suzanne Duchamp, and sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon
attended school, Rouen
librarian, Bibliothèque Ste. Geneviève, Paris

1904 studied painting, Académie Julian, Paris

1910 painting, Portrait of Father, exhibited Salon d'Automne
first Chessplayers

1911 formally joined Cubists
first sketches and first oil for Nude Descending a Staircase
The Coffee Grinder
painted Portrait of Chess Players

1912 Nude Descending a Staircase, No 2 exhibited with Section d'Or, Paris
painted The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes
Munich: The Virgin, The Bride

1913 Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries, first pencil study
Boxing match, Chocolate Grinder, No 1
Armory Show, New York: The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes
Portrait of Chess Players
Nude Descending a Staircase
Nude (sketch)

1913 Water Mill within Glider (in Neighboring Metals), first painting on glass

1914 Paris, painted Bachelors
created first 'ready-mades', Pharmacy; bottle-rack
Chocolate Grinder, No 2

1915 left Paris for New York

1915-1923 worked on glass, La mariée mise á nu par ses célibataires, même

1916 Nude Descending a Staircase, No 3, made especially for Walter and Louise Arensberg
ready-made, Ball of twine
ready-made, Girl with Bedstead (Apolinère Enameled), 1916-1917
founding member of the Society of Independent Artists, Inc.

1917 published reviews, The Blind Man, Rong-wrong
sent ready-made Fountain, porcelain urinal, to first exhibition of Independent
signed it R. Mutt, rejected by executive committee, from which he resigned
quasi-Dada group with Picabia, Man Ray, Jean Crotti

1918 mural painting, Tu m'
to Argentina

1919 to Paris, ready-made vial, 50 cc. Air de Paris
La Joconde with moustache: LHOOQ—visual and literal pun

1920 New York, with Katherine S. Dreier, organized the Société Anonyme, first museum of modern art
birth of ROSE SÉLAVY in New York

1921 Revolving Glass (Appareil Rotatif, Optique de Précision)
New York, with Man Ray, published one issue of New York Dada
constructed object Why not sneeze?

1922 Paris, exhibited in international exhibition organized by Dadaists, Galerie Montaigne
began creation of anagrams, word games

1923 left La mariée mise à nu . . . unfinished, to devote himself to chess and experiments in optics

1925 associated with the surrealists, Paris
produced film, Anemic Cinema

1926 Paris
wrote book on chess
organized exhibition of modern art for Société Anonyme, Brooklyn Museum

1926-1927 installed Brancusi exhibit, Brummer Gallery, New York, and Arts Club of Chicago

1934 started making roto-reliefs
made the Box, portfolio containing 93 documents in facsimile

1935 bookcover for Jarry's Uhu Roi, bookbinding executed by Mary Reynolds

1937 first one-man show, Arts Club of Chicago

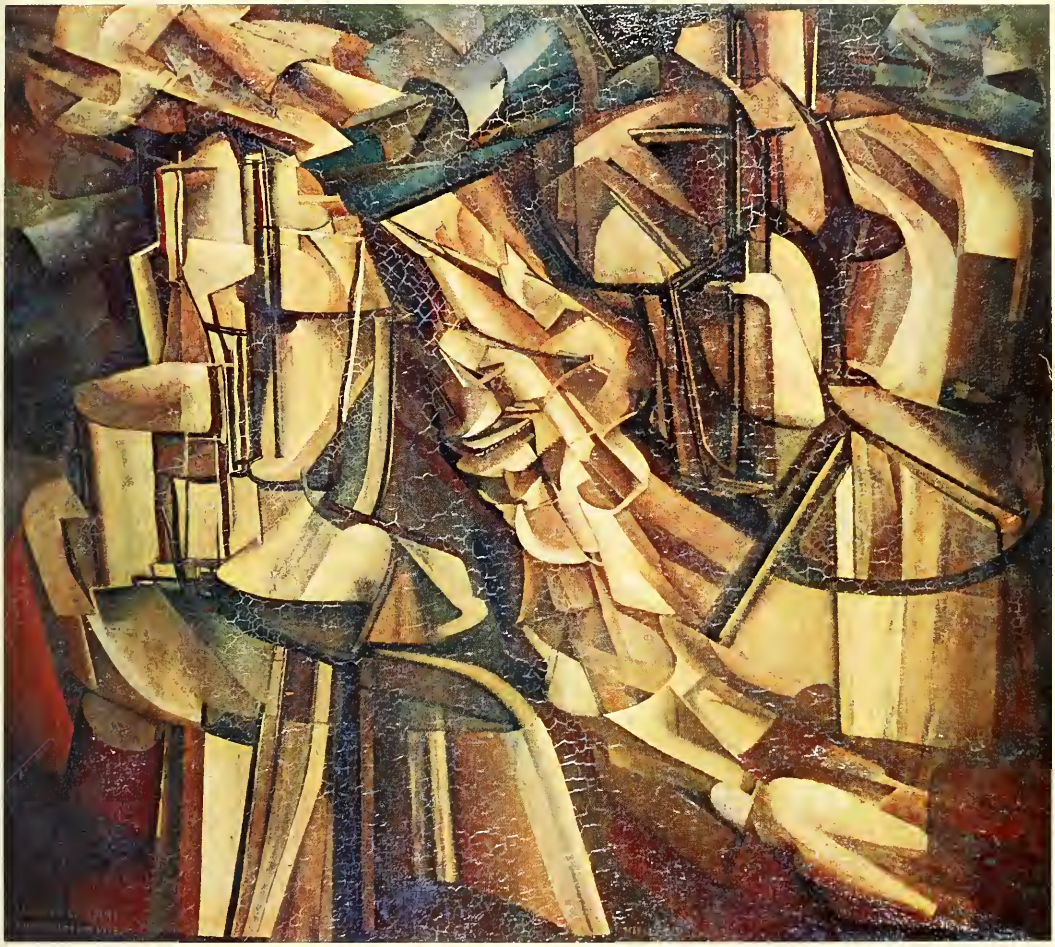
1939 published Rrose Sélavy: Oculisme de Précision

1942 organized surrealist exhibition in New York with André Breton
published suitcase with reproductions, Boîte-en-valise

1942-1944 New York, with David Hare, André Breton, Max Ernst, edited VVV, surrealist review

1947 International surrealist exhibition, Paris; contributed 'Rain Room' and 'Labyrinth'
made cover for catalogue

1955 became American citizen



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