

A delay in porcelain by Paul Minott 2017

Lecture outline

A delay in porcelain is a lecture I prepared specifically for Fountain '17. Its title is a play on Duchamp's description of his Large Glass, which takes centre stage at the permanent gallery devoted to Duchamp in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which he called 'a delay in glass'.

The purpose of the lecture was to outline the official 'story' behind Fountain and how it achieved its notoriety, but ultimately argue that this notoriety, contrary to popular understanding, did not happen overnight and should be considered as a cleverly engineered long game on the part of Duchamp himself, whereby, as he himself intimated in 1956, might take fifty or a hundred years to complete.

Prologue (slides 1-9) sets up my claim.

Looking for a toilet (slides 10-42) explain the official history of Fountain:

1. How it was entered pseudonymously into the first annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, of which Duchamp was a Director, and how allegedly the urinal was purchased as a stunt by Duchamp, in league with Joseph Stella and Duchamp's principal patron Walter Arensberg.
2. How it was instantly rejected before ever being publicly exhibited, and was photographed by Alfred Stieglitz a week after the exhibition's opening; this image was not published until a further fortnight in *The Blind Man*.
3. How it's unclear what happened to the urinal, although images of a urinal in Duchamp's studio dating from 1918 suggest the artist may have retrieved it, and later gave it to Arensberg.
4. No other mention of Readymades occur (urinal or otherwise) except a brief mention in a catalogue of 1916, and *Bottle Rack* in 1936.
5. It isn't until 1935 that the notion of the Readymade is formally introduced in an essay by André Breton, as proto-Surrealist objets. 1935 is also the year in which Duchamp begins his own retrospective project, the *Boîte-en-valises*, which continue to be made in editions even after his death. In each edition, a miniature Fountain made of papier maché is featured.
6. A further decade passes before Breton's 1935 essay is reproduced in English for an American audience in *View* magazine.
7. A further fifteen years pass before the first replica of Fountain is purchased and exhibited by Sidney Janis. It is this replica (which bears no resemblance to the 1917 version) which now sits in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
8. 1951-1957 a new audience begins to emerge for Duchamp, as Dada is rediscovered by younger artists.
In 1957, at the age of 69, Duchamp acknowledges his own 'rehabilitation' after being long forgotten.
9. 1963 sees a further replica appear by Ulf Linde in Stockholm, which Duchamp 'signs' a year later.

10. Finally, at the age of 75, Duchamp has his first retrospective in Pasadena. The 1950 Janis replica appears in this show. Just prior to this, Duchamp agrees to have Arturo Schwarz manufacture a small edition of replica Readymades (including Fountain), and these are the replicas which are dotted around the world. As Duchamp suggested in 1956, almost exactly fifty years after the original first disappeared.

The Duchamp Effect (slides 43-67) illustrates Julien Heyen's point that Duchamp's 'afterlife' has become entwined with the artist's actual output, and that his entire oeuvre has been appropriated, interpreted, and speculated by countless artists since. Over several years my own research has documented this process, and that this has only served to mythologise Duchamp, Fountain in particular.

Beyond a joke (slides 68-96) therefore reconsiders the Fountain story through newspaper evidence at the time. I make the point that while Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* did indeed create a stir at the Armory Show in 1913, and gave Duchamp a degree of fame, no press cuttings at the time of the Fountain incident four years later provide any suggestion that the urinal was ever seen. Furthermore, *The Blind Man* was a very marginal publication with a tiny circulation. It becomes clear that actually the Fountain incident was either misreported or barely reported at all.

I also briefly outline the research of Art Science Research Laboratory, which questions whether Duchamp's Readymades (including Fountain) were ever 'found' at all, and that Stieglitz's photograph may have been faked. I also discuss the recent theory that Duchamp wasn't even responsible for Fountain, and that Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven was the true culprit.

Epilogue (slides 97-end) returns to the claim I make in the Prologue; that Duchamp cleverly orchestrated Fountain's mythology through a sequence of miniatures and replicas, all of which point back to a lost original which itself had a dubious provenance.

By deliberately limiting his output of Readymades, each replica points back to the collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art which he carefully arranged, ensuring that posterity would compensate for his overlooked artistic reputation. This was his 'delay in porcelain'.