

Memories of Marcel Duchamp

George Staempfli, my friend and art dealer in New York, introduced me to Marcel Duchamp in the mid-1960s. He had exhibited the Duchamp brothers in Houston in 1957, at a time when hardly anyone in Europe was aware that Marcel was still around. He was also Teeny's riding instructor before she married Duchamp.

We visited him in the Village, on 10th Street. As a present, I brought *carro 64*, a multiple that could be altered, which George had just edited. It consists of sixty-four squares, like a chessboard. The squares are movable cubes. They are not black and white but have different shades of color. Applying various strategies, anyone can generate an endless sequence of constellations.

Duchamp was amused by the association with chess and the fact that viewers take part in producing the picture. He started playing with it right away and soon began turning the cubes over – another parameter of variation I had not considered. That was typical of Duchamp: instead of searching for solutions to fit the rules, he preferred to invent the rules himself.

We met again in Cadaquès, his Spanish summer home. One day we took the boat to a quiet bay. Teeny swam farther out to sea to dive and snorkel. After a short while, she returned with a sealed bottle she had found floating on the water's surface – a real message in a bottle. And the note inside, written in French, was a request to the finder to get in touch with – incredible as it may seem – Monsieur

things stick in one's mind for a year or a lifetime. And a very, very few works move all people at all times. These are milestones of the human evolution.

As I observed how Duchamp responded to contemporary art, I had the impression that he looked at everything presented to him with friendly interest. With regard to Andy Warhol's eight- and twenty-four-hour films, he once expressed regret that he hadn't come up with the idea of boring people with art himself. And indeed, he never bored anyone with his art. Quite the contrary.

Duchamp invited me to contribute a work to the benefit exhibition he was organizing on behalf of the *American Chess Foundation* in New York in 1966. I constructed a money-collecting machine suited to the purpose. Duchamp (the king) and Rose Sélavy (the Queen) walking down a chessboard in the form of a staircase. Throw in a quarter and both will rotate for a while in the manner of a *Rotorelief* (or like barber-poles, as the *New York Times* wrote) – the king toward the heavens, the queen toward the Earth.

I never learned, nor ever asked, how many quarters my mythological machine took in. But Duchamp's wish to have it put in a public place, preferably a well-frequented museum where it would continue to collect money after the exhibition of Cordier and Ekstrom, was never realized. I was disappointed, too, of course. But Duchamp comforted me: "Who knows what will happen to the object in the near or distant future?" He was an expert.



*Rose Sélavy et Marcel Duchamp . . .
... mis à nu – descendents un escalier, même
Ready-made for rotation by Karl Gerstner
Photo: Alexander von Steiger, Basel*

