

Draft Chronology of the Exhibitions and Collections Curated by Marcel Duchamp

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This chronology represents a selection of Marcel Duchamp's (MD) varied and complex curatorial roles. It gives an overview of the most important exhibitions curated by Duchamp and describes his advisory and curatorial activities for some of the main private collections of classical modern art.¹

1912

The origins of MD's curatorial activities lie in the discussions among the group of artists and critics around MD and his brothers in the Paris suburb of Puteaux before the Cubist exhibition in the 'Salon de la Section d'Or,' Galerie La Boétie Paris (October 10 – 30, 1912).²

1917

MD, who had been living in New York since 1915, becomes the co-founder of the Society of Independent Artists. Its president is William Glackens; artist, curator and critic Walter Pach is the treasurer; and art collector Walter Conrad Arensberg acts as managing director. MD is one of 21 directors, including Man Ray, Joseph Stella and Katherine S. Dreier. MD becomes chairman of the hanging committee for the first exhibition in 1917 (April 11 – May 6). For this non-juried exhibition, he suggests hanging the works in alphabetical order, beginning with a letter that had been chosen by drawing lots.³ (It has since been demonstrated that this supposedly 'democratic' selection process was manipulated by MD. He insisted that a picture by a conservative painter, Bertrand Rasmussen, not be the first work seen upon entering the exhibition, but, rather, a provocative piece by Dorothy Rice. This first documented curatorial role of MD for a group exhibition can be closely linked in conceptual terms with the contemporaneous contextualization of the first ready-mades by MD himself.)⁴

1918

In New York, MD becomes friendly with the sisters Carrie, Ettie and Florine Stettheimer. As a guest at their evening salons, he gets to know important representatives of the New York cultural scene. During this time, Carrie Stettheimer is primarily working on a doll's house. She asks the artists from her circle of friends to create miniature versions of their most important paintings to decorate it. MD produces a small version of his nude painting *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2* (*Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*), 1912 for her. This is the successful painting from the New York 'Armory Show' in 1913, which had become legendary. It is reasonable to assume that MD gives Carrie Stettheimer curatorial advice on her 'miniature museum' (today in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York) and

¹ For a more comprehensive description of MD's curatorial activities, see: Elena Filipovic: *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp*, Cambridge/London 2016.

² Anne d'Harnoncourt: *Introduction*, in: *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, exhib. cat. Museum of Modern Art/Philadelphia Museum of Art, New York 1973, pp. 34–45, here p. 41.

³ See on this subject: Katharina Neuburger: *Die amerikanische Erfahrung, oder: Weshalb Marcel Duchamp in New York Werke ausstellen konnte, die keine Kunst sind*, Cologne 2017, pp. 240–255, esp. p. 254.

⁴ Cf. Filipovic 2016 (see # 1), pp. 81, 85.

that, in addition, the doll's house is the impetus for MD's own 'miniature museum,' *Boîte-en-Valise (Box in a Suitcase)*,⁵ which he will design in the 1930s.



Carrie Stettheimer, Ballroom of the Dollhouse, ca. 1920s. Duchamps miniature version of *Nu descendant un escalier no. 2*, 1912, (2. Row from right, below) was executed 1918 as a present on the occasion of Carrie Stettheimer's 49th birthday (pencil, ink, wash on paper, 9,3 x 6,1 cm.)

At the end of 1918, MD travels to Buenos Aires and attempts among other things to organize an exhibition of Cubist art consisting of works culled from New York collections. However, he is unsuccessful due to hesitant lenders and a lack of funds.⁶

1920

From 1920 onward, MD is the co-initiator and co-curator (together with Katherine Dreier and Man Ray) of the 'Société Anonyme, Inc.: The Museum of Modern Art 1920' and its exhibition spaces and, from 1923 onward, of its collection. He organizes two solo exhibitions of the works of Louis Eilshemius at the Société Anonyme (September 13 – October 23, 1920 and April 16 – 29, 1924).⁷

⁵ Francis M. Naumann/Hector Obalk (eds.): *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, Amsterdam 2000, pp. 48, 69, 82. Cf. *The Stettheimer Doll's House*, ed. by the Museum of the City of New York, New York 1947. John Noble: *A Fabulous Dollhouse of the Twenties: The Famous Stettheimer Dollhouse at the Museum of the City of New York*, New York 1976. Sheila W. Clark: *The Stettheimer Dollhouse*, San Francisco 2009. Cf. also: Kaitlin Vaughan: 'The Stettheimer Dollhouse: A Biography, Part I', in: *Dolls' Houses. Past & Present* 24, March 2015; <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue24march2015p3.htm> (September 6, 2017); and Kaitlin Vaughan: 'The Stettheimer Dollhouse: A Biography, Part II', in: *Dolls' Houses. Past & Present* 25, June 2015; <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue25june2015p8.htm> (September 6, 2017). Arturo Schwarz records the miniature version in the catalogue raisonné of MDs work with No. 359, see: Arturo Schwarz: *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, revised and expanded paperback edition, New York 2000, pp. 661 and 23, note 3. Already in 1916 MD realized a version of the painting in life size for Walter Arensberg, cf. *ibid.*, p. 647.

⁶ Cf. d'Harnoncourt 1973 (see # 2), p. 41 and Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), pp. 65ff.

⁷ Several publications about Louis Michel Eilshemius have recently appeared, including: Katharina Neuburger: *Louis M. Eilshemius: Die Entdeckung der performativen Malerei*, Göttingen 2015; Stefan Banz: *Eilshemius: Peer of Poet-Painters*, Zurich 2016.

1926

From 1926 onward, MD buys and sells artworks in New York for his collector friends the Arensbergs.⁸ At the same time he takes on the role of agent for the work of Constantin Brâncuși in New York. Among other things, MD organizes two exhibitions (November 17 to December 15, 1926 and a second one in 1933) in the Brummer Gallery in New York.⁹

In close cooperation with Katherine Dreier, MD co-curates the 'International Exhibition of Modern Art' at the Brooklyn Museum (November 19, 1926 – January 10, 1927) with works from the Société Anonyme collection.¹⁰ They visit numerous artists in Europe, among other activities, to select Futurist paintings. Instead of following the contemporary trend of organizing the works of the participating artists according to styles and movements, Dreier and MD choose an associative, open arrangement for the exhibition with the aim of visualizing the kaleidoscopic variety of modern art.

1927

Subsequently, the epoch-defining 'International Exhibition of Modern Art' travels in condensed form to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, as well as to the Toronto Art Gallery.

At the beginning of January, MD arranges a Brâncuși exhibition in the Arts Club Chicago.¹¹ Together with his friend Henri-Pierre Roché and a third provider of funding, MD acquires around 30 works by Constantin Brâncuși from the John Quinn collection before they are auctioned.¹²

1928

Together with Alfred Stieglitz, MD curates the 'Picabia Exhibition,' with works by Francis Picabia, in the Intimate Gallery in New York (April 19 – May 11).¹³

1931

In consultation with Dreier, MD, who spends the period from 1923 to 1942 mainly in Europe, collects works by artists such as Max Ernst, Joan Miró and Piet Mondrian for an exhibition of the Société Anonyme at the New School for Social Research, New York.

1933

On November 17, the second Brâncuși exhibition opens in the Brummer Gallery in New York, also curated by MD.¹⁴

⁸ Octavio Paz: *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare*, New York 1978, p. 193.

⁹ Cf. d'Harnoncourt 1973 (see # 2), p. 42.

¹⁰ Jennifer Gough-Cooper/Jacques Caumont: *Effemeridi su e intorno a Marcel Duchamp e Rrose Sélavy*, Milan 1993, p. 198.

¹¹ Cf. Paz 1978 (see # 8), p. 195 and Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), pp. 158ff.

¹² Cf. Paz 1978 (see # 8), p. 194 and Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), p. 90.

¹³ Paz 1978 (see # 8), p. 195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195 and Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), p. 175.

1938

With André Breton and Paul Éluard, MD co-curates the ‘Exposition internationale du Surréalisme’ in Paris in the Galerie des Beaux-Arts (January 17 – February 24). His own artistic contribution is the installation *Twelve Hundred Coal Bags Suspended from the Ceiling over a Stove*, which dominates the central room that has been transformed into a grotto. A detailed description of MD’s curatorial activities is written by his friend, artist and author Marcel Jean.¹⁵

On January 17, the opening day of the ‘Exposition internationale du Surréalisme,’ MD leaves Paris and travels to London to design a summer sculpture exhibition entitled ‘Exhibition of Contemporary Sculpture’ for the Guggenheim Jeune gallery. Hans Arp, Constantin Brâncuși, Alexander Calder, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Antoine Pevsner are included (April 8–May 2).

MD’s genuine passion for curating culminates within his own oeuvre with the first examples of the *Boîte-en-Valise* (*Box in a Suitcase*).

1939

From 1939 on, MD, along with Howard Putzel, advises Peggy Guggenheim on the acquisition of contemporary art after her return to Paris. During this time, many gallery owners seek MD’s advice. Julien Levy recalls that collectors acted very quickly on his recommendations about certain artists.¹⁶

MD suggests to Peggy Guggenheim that a planned wall mural by Jackson Pollock should be painted on canvas instead.¹⁷

The private collections of Walter and Louise Arensberg and of Peggy Guggenheim, both of which are now in museums or on public display, owe a great deal of their quality to MD. In the case of the collection of the Société Anonyme, MD is responsible for both its quality and its eccentricity.¹⁸

1941

MD’s credibility and professionalism as a curator are illustrated by a noteworthy biographical detail: In order to expedite his plan to return to the United States, which is made in the summer of 1941, MD arranges, with aid from his art collector friend Arensberg, for a pro

¹⁵ Schwarz 2000 (see # 5), p. 747; in detail Filipovic 2016 (see # 1), pp. 96–107, for further literature see pp. 303ff.; Lewis Kachur: *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and the Surrealist Exhibition Installations*, Cambridge/London 2001, pp. 96ff. Cf. also: Bruce Altshuler: *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, New York 1994; Martica Sawin: *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*, Cambridge 1994; James D. Herbert: *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, Ithaca 1998.

¹⁶ Cf. Serge Stauffer: *Marcel Duchamp: Interviews and Statements*, collected, translated and annotated by Serge Stauffer, Stuttgart 1992, p. 116 and Robert Harvey: ‘Where’s Duchamp? Out Queering the Field,’ in: *Surrealism and Its Others: Yale French Studies* 109, 2006, pp. 82–97, here pp. 87f.

¹⁷ Cf. d’Harnoncourt 1973 (see # 2), p. 42.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

forma appointment as curator of the painting collection at the Francis Bacon Library in New York; he will not, however, take the position.¹⁹

1942

The 'First Papers of Surrealism' show, co-curated by Breton and MD, opens in the Whitelaw Reid Mansion on Madison Avenue in New York (October 14 – November 7). This is made possible by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies. Once again it is MD who gives the exhibition its particular character with his curatorial interventions, including elements of scenography and dramaturgy, in this case by installing *Sixteen Miles of String* in the exhibition space and inviting children to play there during the opening.²⁰

1944

MD stages the exhibition 'The Imagery of Chess' in New York for friend and gallery owner Julien Levy (December 12, 1944 – January 31, 1945). A total of 32 artists are involved, which is the number of pieces in a chess set. At MD's request, they present new artistic solutions for the design of chess pieces.²¹

1946

Together with Alfred H. Barr and Sidney Janis, MD becomes a member of the jury for 'The Temptation of St. Anthony,' a painting competition presented by the 'Bel Ami International Competition and Exhibition' with 11 participating American and European artists. Max Ernst receives the jury's award.

1947

In Paris, MD co-curates 'Le Surréalisme en 1947' at the Galerie Maeght (July 7 – September 30). The show is largely organized by his friend the artist, architect and designer Frederick Kiesler. MD exhibits an object montage entitled *The Juggler of Gravity*, known to posterity only via photographic documentation, and designs the installation-based photomontage *Rayon vert (Green Ray)*, which is realized and installed by Kiesler.²²

¹⁹ On his professional goal of becoming a curator at the Francis Bacon Library, cf. *Marcel Duchamp: Die grosse Schachtel: De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy, Inventar einer Edition von Ecke Bonk*, Munich 1989, p. 164.

²⁰ Cf. Filipovic 2016 (see # 1), pp. 108ff. and Gough-Cooper/Caumont 1993 (see # 10), p. 156. See also: John Vick: 'A New Look: Marcel Duchamp, His Twine, and the 1942 First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition,' in: *toutfait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, March 1, 2008; <http://toutfait.com/a-new-look-marcel-duchamp-his-twine-and-the-1942-first-papers-of-surrealism-exhibition> (August 25, 2017).

²¹ Cf. the brochure created by MD at:

<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/273062.html?mulR=8544#> (August 31, 2017) and details of the works in the exhibition: http://www.edochess.ca/batgirl/Imagery_of_Chess3.html (July 25, 2017). For more comprehensive information on the exhibition: Larry List: *The Imagery of Chess Revisited*, New York 2005. See as well Vick 2008 (see # 20).

²² On the basis of source material, Arturo Schwarz gives a detailed description of the staging of the exhibition, cf. Schwarz 2000 (see # 5), pp. 789f.; Filipovic 2016 (see # 1), pp. 179ff.; Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), pp. 256–262; Gough-Cooper/Caumont 1993 (see # 10), p. 158.

1948

MD designs a catalogue for the exhibition ‘Through the Big End of the Opera Glass,’ with works by MD, Joseph Cornell and Yves Tanguy, at the Julien Levy gallery.²³

MD acts as a jury member for an exhibition of American abstract painting in New York, together with Sidney Janis and Leo Castelli.

1949

MD co-curates the presentation of works from the Arensberg collection for the exhibition ‘20th Century Art from the Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection’ (October 20 – December 18) at the Art Institute of Chicago.²⁴

1950

On behalf of his friends Louise and Walter Arensberg, MD takes part in negotiations with the Philadelphia Museum of Art concerning the couple’s plan to make a substantial gift to the museum. MD travels to Philadelphia several times, meticulously measures the exhibition areas and draws up a number of different room plans and presentation concepts, including the necessary fittings and conversions, for the eventual installation of the prestigious collection, which includes important works by MD. However, the transfer of the collection consisting of around 1000 works will take place only after the death of the Arensbergs. (Louise dies on November 23, 1953 and Walter on January 29, 1954).

1951

MD and Janis curate another show together: They select 40 pictures for the first ‘Bienal Internacional de São Paulo,’ which opens in 1951 with the title ‘Do Figurativismo ao Abstracionismo.’ However, this selection is not shown in São Paulo because of organizational problems.²⁵

MD, together with artists such as Breton, Schwitters and Tzara, advises on and contributes to the artist Robert Motherwell’s anthology ‘The Dada Painters and Poets.’²⁶

1952

For the Yale University Art Gallery, MD curates the first exhibition of works from the private collection of Katherine Dreier, who dies this year: ‘In Memory of Katherine S. Dreier, 1877 – 1952: Her Own Collection of Modern Art’ (December 15, 1952 – February 1, 1953).

²³ Cf. esp. Francis Naumann: ‘A Problem with No Solution,’ in: *toutfait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, February 1, 2008; <http://toutfait.com/a-problem-with-no-solution> (July 25, 2017).

²⁴ Cf. Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), pp. 269ff. and Gough-Cooper/Caumont 1993 (see # 10), p. 165.

²⁵ Schwarz 2000 (see # 5), p. 919 and Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), pp. 265f. Comp.: León Degand in a letter to René Drouin., December 21, 1948. ICCA Record ID 1110822, Archive of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The digital archive project ‘Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art’ can be consulted here: <https://icaadocs.mfah.org> (July 27, 2017).

²⁶ Robert Motherwell (ed.): *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, New York 1951.

1953

MD spends time in New York organizing and curating ‘Dada 1916–1923’ (April 15 – May 9) in the Sidney Janis Gallery. He hangs around 200 works on partition walls, some of which are transparent, and also on the ceiling. His artistic contribution to the show is a poster which also serves as exhibition catalogue.²⁷

For his friend the artist Francis Picabia, who has recently died, MD organizes and curates a joint exhibition ‘Marcel Duchamp – Francis Picabia’ in the Rose Fried Gallery in New York (December 7, 1953 – January 8, 1954).

1954

On October 16, 1954, the first exhibition displaying the Arensberg collection, co-curated by MD, opens in Philadelphia. (Beginning in 1917, when he first arrived in New York, until the handing over of the collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art (December 27, 1950), MD acted continuously as artistic advisor to the Arensbergs. Until 1923, he did so in New York. In the two subsequent decades he performed this role from Europe until his return to the USA in 1954.)

1959

In letters and via telephone, MD contributes curatorial ideas for the ‘8th Exposition internationale du Surréalisme (E.R.O.S.)’ (December 15, 1959 – February 15, 1960) in the Galerie Daniel Cordier in Paris and for the accompanying catalogue and edition. In a letter to André Breton, MD summarizes the principles of his exhibition concept, as he is not present. He designs the edition (consisting of male and female potholders) as a catalogue contribution which will be realized in Paris.²⁸

1960

In his role as chairman of the ‘American Chess Foundation,’ MD writes an open letter to its members asking them to donate works of art to the organization. His plan is to curate an exhibition using the donated works and then to auction them for the benefit of the foundation.²⁹

1961

His final act as an exhibition organizer and publicist for the Surrealists results in a dispute with his old friend Breton: Breton writes to MD from Paris asking him to curate the exhibition ‘Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter’s Domain’ in the D’Arcy Gallery in New York (November 28, 1960 – January 14, 1961) and to help with designing the exhibition catalogue. MD’s willful decision to include a work by Salvador Dalí, who had been ‘excommunicated’

²⁷ Sidney Janis wrote a more detailed description in 1963. Cf. Schwarz 2000 (see # 5), p. 801 and Rudi Blesh: *Modern Art USA: Men, Rebellion, Conquest 1900–1956*, New York 1956, p. 251. Gough-Cooper/Caumont 1993 (see # 10), p. 349.

²⁸ Duchamp in a letter to Breton, November 9, 1959, quoted in: Schwarz (see # 5), p. 822; and Filipovic 2016 (see # 1), pp. 190ff. Gough-Cooper/Caumont 1993 (see # 10), p. 137.

²⁹ Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), p. 365.

from the Surrealist circle by Breton, triggers letters of protest from the latter.³⁰ As a consequence, Breton decides that MD will not be invited to take part as an artist in the 1965 exhibition of Surrealist work entitled ‘L’Écart absolu: XIe Exposition internationale du Surréalisme’ in the L’Œil Galerie d’Art. However, the exhibition lists show that MD does in fact exhibit his work.³¹

Marcel Duchamp’s activities as a curator have contextualized and exposed artists, he opened paths for careers – yet, accompanying his increasing fame, the weight and dominance of his view on art created from to time to time tensions and controversies. Another dispute with the Surrealists occurs in 1965 when MD refuses to sign the public letter written by them protesting the exhibition of pictures by young Parisian painters announcing the death of MD.³² Breton reproaches Duchamp for not adopting the Surrealist’s stance towards the hoax, but Duchamp considers the symbolic death an amusing and thoroughly personal matter.³³

³⁰ Cf. Kachur 2001 (see # 15). The author only briefly mentions this important exhibition in the Galerie Maeght in 1947 (pp. 204ff.). It is covered in detail in this publication, see the article by Eva Kraus. Surprisingly, Kachur does not mention ‘Surrealist Intrusion,’ the last exhibition curated by MD.

³¹ A detailed description of MD’s complex staging of the exhibition and an excerpt from the correspondence between MD and Breton can be found in: Naumann/Obalk 2000 (see # 5), pp. 367–371. Cf. also Gough-Cooper/Caumont 1993 (see # 10), pp. 206f.

³² Robert Lebel: *Marcel Duchamp and André Breton*, in: *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, exh. cat. Museum of Modern Art/Philadelphia Museum of Art, New York 1973, pp. 135–141, here p. 139.

³³ Robert Lebel: *Marcel Duchamp and André Breton*, in: *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, exh. cat. Museum of Modern Art/Philadelphia Museum of Art, New York 1973, pp. 135–141, here p. 139.