

# MERCI

à Camille Paix pour son article « *Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven : l'urinoir et la baronne qui sort Duchamp* » publié dans Libération le 22 août 2022 qui m'a fait découvrir l'histoire cachée derrière *Fontaine*, 1917

à Liza Maigan d'avoir fantasmé ensemble sous le soleil breton du Festival Setu, la publication d'un erratum pour faire savoir cette histoire

à Sarah Deslandes pour son désir de voir cette rêve devenir réalité

à Irène Gammel pour sa plongée complète dans la vie d'Elsa von Freitag Loringhoven, la publication de sa biographie et d'un important recueil de ses poèmes

à Violaine Lucas pour ses relectures et réflexions qui m'agitent

à la collective Bye Bye Binary et à Eugénie Bidaut pour la mise à disposition de sa typographie *Adelphe*

à Lucie Desaubliaux de La Maison de la Poésie de Rennes pour avoir fourni involontairement le papier de l'Erratum à travers un reliquat de production d'ateliers scolaires qu'elle m'avait demandé d'animer

à Valérie Garçon d'ABC Copy pour sa détermination à imprimer l'Erratum malgré un papier inadapté et des bourrages machine à répétition

à Antoin Giard de Ramette pour la mise à disposition et la formation sur son massicot à clavier analogique fantastique ainsi que pour son goût immodéré des pages de remerciements

à Tony Papin pour sa relecture en surlignage jaune de mes coquilles orthographico-typographiques

à vous qui diffusez, recherchez, poursuivez la connaissance de cette histoire et à travers elle, pensez l'autorat comme lieu multiple et collectif, contribuez à réécrire une histoire inclusive et juste où le culte du génie créateur devient celui de la puissance du génie collectif

Camille Bondon  
septembre 2023

# ERRATUM



*Fontaine*, 1917  
œuvre signée R. MUTT 1917 présentée au Salon des Indépendants à New York en avril 1917, puis refusée par le comité directeur le 9 avril. Le 11 avril, Marcel Duchamp écrit à sa sœur Suzanne: «*Une de mes amies sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, [a] envoyé une pissotière en porcelaine comme sculpture*». Cette amie est sans doute Elsa von Freitag Loringhoven (1874-1927), poétesse et artiste dada, la plus dada des dadas, dont Marcel Duchamp se serait approprié le geste et aurait inventé le récit de sa création.

photographie: Alfred Stieglitz  
devant un détail de *The Warriors* de Marsden Hartley

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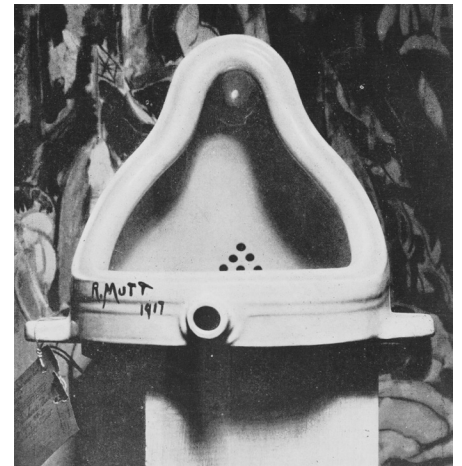
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# FONTAINE, 1917

## CHRONOLOGIE DES FAITS

### POUR L'ERRATUM

liste établie par Camille Bondon  
version de travail - 26 août 2023

#### 12 juillet 1874

naissance d'Elsa Plötz (E.P.) en Allemagne prussienne, aujourd'hui Swinoujscie en Pologne

#### 1887

naissance de Marcel Duchamp (M.D.)

#### 1893

E.P. arrive à Berlin à 19 ans, fréquente l'artiste transgenre Melchior Lechter

#### 1901

E.P. épouse August Endell (A.E.), architecte art nouveau. Elle devient Elsa Endell (E.E.)

#### 1902

E.E. démarre une relation avec Felix Paul Greve (F.P.G.) (1879–1948)

#### 1904

divorce de E.E. et A.E. E.P. écrit des poèmes et vit avec F.P.G.

#### 1905

publication de *Fanny Essler* de F.P.G. Le contenu de ce roman a été fourni par E.P.

#### 1907

E.P. et F.P.G. se marrient. E.P. devient Elsa Grève (E.G.)

#### 1910

arrestation d'E.G. pour cause de travestissement en compagnie de F.P.G. Le couple est relâché par la police

#### 1912

M.D. peint *Nu descendant un escalier* et crée *Porte bouteille*

#### 1913

E.G. épouse le baron Leopold von Freytag-Loringhoven à New York et devient Elsa von Freitag-Loringhoven (E.v.F.L.) E.v.F.L. crée *Enduring Ornament* à partir d'un anneau trouvé dans la rue en route pour son mariage  
M.D. crée *Roue de bicyclette*

#### 1914

L.v.F.L. rentre en Allemagne, est capturé par les français et se suicidera en prison en 1919  
E.v.F.L. reste à New York et devient modèle vivant

#### juin 1915

M.D. arrive à New York

#### 1915 > 1916

E.v.F.L. et M.D. habitent le même immeuble au Lincoln Arcad Building, Brodway 147, New York

#### 1915

film co-réalisé par M.D. et Man Ray (M.R.) (1890-1976), *Elsa, Baronne Von Freytag-Loringhoven rasant ses poils pubiens*. Pellicule détruite pendant le développement

#### 5 décembre 1916

création de la Société des Indépendants par 21 co-directeurices dont M.D., Walter Arensberg et Morton Schamberg

#### 1917

sculpture *God* de E.v.F.L. attribuée jusque dans les années 90 uniquement à Morton Schamberg (1881 - 1918) dont elle aurait été la seule sculpture de sa carrière de peintre et photographe. *God* est un assemblage de sections de plomberie soclée sur une boîte à ongles. *God* est sans doute une sculpture de E.v.F.L. et photographiée par Morton Schamberg

#### février 1917

un urinoir renversé (*Fontaine*) est déposé au Grand Central Palace, sur Lexington Avenue pour le Salon des Indépendants. Il est signé R.MUTT 1917. Il est envoyé à la galerie d'Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), au 291 Fifth Avenue, et photographié devant la peinture *The Warriors* (1913) de Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) dont Alfred Stieglitz a les toiles à la suite de son exposition du 22 janvier au 7 février 1917 dans sa galerie. La sculpture porte une étiquette sur laquelle figure l'adresse le nom de Richard Mutt et une adresse. À cette adresse réside également Louise Norton (L.N.) (1890-1989)

#### 6 avril 1917

entrée en guerre des États-Unis contre l'Allemagne

#### 9 avril 1917

le Salon des Indépendants refuse l'urinoir (*Fontaine*)  
M.D. démissionne du comité de direction

#### 11 avril 1917

lettre de M.D. à sa sœur, Suzanne Duchamp, vivant à Paris :  
«*Raconte ce détail à la famille : les Indépendants sont ouverts ici avec gros succès. Une de mes amies sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, avait envoyé une pissotière en porcelaine comme sculpture. Ce n'était pas du tout indécent, aucune raison pour la refuser. Le comité a décidé de refuser d'exposer cette chose. J'ai donné ma démission et c'est un potin qui aura sa valeur dans New York. J'avais envie de faire une exposition spéciale des refusés aux Indépendants. Mais ce serait un pléonasme ! Et la pissotière aurait été « lonely », à bientôt affect. Marcel*»

#### mai 1917

publication dans la revue *The Blind Man* d'un article de L.N. *The Richard Mutt Case* qui soutient la qualité d'œuvre de *Fontaine*.

#### 1918

publication de poèmes de E.v.F.L. dans *The Little Review*. Une trentaine de ses poèmes y seront publiés pendant 7 années

## autour de 1920

photographie par M.R. d'E.v.F.L. travestie en homme et de M.D. en femme (Rose Sélavy)

## avril 1921

publication de la revue *New York Dada*, entièrement conçue par M.R. et M.D. Y figurent des images de E.v.F.L. avec les accessoires de la photographie de M.D. en Rose Sélavy

## 1923

E.v.F.L. retourne à Berlin. Elle vend des journaux dans la rue

## 14 décembre 1927

décès de Elsa von Freitag-Loringhoven par asphyxie au gaz dans son appartement parisien

## 1935

André Breton réouvre l'affaire *Fontaine* et l'attribue à M.D.

## 1941

1<sup>re</sup> version de la boîte-en-valise de M.D. où figure l'urinoir en version miniature ainsi qu'une vue d'atelier de 1917 où *Fontaine* est présente par incrustation photographique

## 1950

un galeriste chine un urinoir et demande à M.D. de le signer

## 1963

M.D. fait éditer 12 copies de l'urinoir

## octobre 1968

décès de M.D

## 1983

publication de la lettre du 11 avril 1917 de M.D. à sa sœur Suzanne Duchamp

## 1992

publication d'une première biographie d'E.v.F.L.

## 2002

publication de la biographie de E.v.F.L. par Irene Gammel. Elle y mentionne E.v.F.L. comme candidate la plus probable de l'amie femme sous un pseudonyme masculin dont parle M.D. dans sa lettre du 11 avril 1917

## 14 décembre 2006

publication d'un article de Jacques Caumont dans *Libération* « *A Dada sur l'urinoir de Duchamp* » où il mentionne E.v.F.L. comme autrice de l'urinoir, dans une tribune au sujet du procès contre Pinoncelli qui a vandalisé *Fontaine* et en revendique une co-paternité

## 2011

publication de *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, premier recueil anglais de ses poèmes, publié à titre posthume par MIT Press, édité par la biographe d'E.v.F.L., Irene Gammel avec la poétesse et professeure canadienne Suzanne Zelazo.

## 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 2014

parution d'un article de Julian Spalding et Glyn Thomson dans *The Art Newspaper* « *Did Marcel Duchamp steal Elsa's urinal?* »

## 2015

exposition *A Lady's Not a Gent's* curatée par Glyn Thompson et Julian Spalding, avec le directeur du Glasgow Museums au Summerhall

## 22 août 2022

publication d'un article de Camille Paix dans *Libération* « *Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven : l'urinoir et la baronne qui sort Duchamp* »

## 27 août 2022

conversation lors du Festival SETU (Elian, France) avec Liza Maigan à la suite de la lecture de l'article de Camille Paix. Nous fantasmions alors la publication d'un erratum pour corriger les livres comportant une mention de *Fontaine*, 1917

## 26 juillet 2023

conversation lors des *mardis* avec Sarah Deslandes. Je lui évoque cet erratum, resté à l'état d'idée. Sarah est enthousiaste à l'écoute de ce récit. Son enthousiasme me donne l'envie et l'énergie de reprendre l'enquête, la publication et diffusion de cet erratum



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From the archive // Comment

### Did Marcel Duchamp steal Elsa's urinal?

The founding object of conceptualism was probably "by a German baroness", but this debate is rarely aired.

Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson

1 November 2014





Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven pictured around 1920-25  
© Bain News Service photograph collection/American Library of Congress

Evidence that Marcel Duchamp may have stolen his most famous work, *Fountain*, from a woman poet has been in the public domain for many years. But the art world as a whole—museums, academia and the market—has persistently refused to acknowledge this fact. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York is the latest eminent body to bury its head in the sand. It has just published a new edition of Calvin Tomkins's 1996 life of Duchamp, updated by its author. Ann Temkin, MoMA's chief curator of painting and sculpture, praises Tomkins in her introduction for his "thorough research". But Tomkins avoids addressing the implications of the question marks over the origins of the work that Duchamp himself raised in 1917.

The public has a right to believe what it reads on a museum label. The Moderna Museet, Stockholm, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Tate Modern, the National Gallery of Canada, the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, the Centre Pompidou, Paris and the Israel Museum should all re-label their copies of *Fountain* as "a replica, appropriated by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), of an original by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-1927)".

○ The extraordinary fact that has emerged from the painstaking studies of William Camfield, Kirk Varnedoe and Hector Obalk is that Duchamp could not have done what he said he did

late in life. Irene Gammel and Glyn Thompson have revealed the truth of his much earlier private account that he did not submit the urinal to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York in 1917. Nevertheless, Duchamp's late, fictional story is still taught in every class and recited in every book.

Duchamp maintained that he bought the urinal from the J. L. Mott Iron Works in New York, signed it with the pseudonym R. Mutt, and submitted it to the Independents exhibition, calling it Fountain. The urinal was rejected despite the objection of Duchamp's rich friend Walter Arensberg, who argued that the society must honour its own rule and hang everything submitted. The urinal was a work of art, he claimed, because an artist had chosen it.

The submission and rejection of Duchamp's urinal is now regarded as one of the early turning points in the history of Modern art. Fountain is always cited as the source of conceptualism, the Modern art movement that America, rather than Europe, gave the world.

In conceptual art, the idea behind the work is more important than its visual appearance or any aesthetic considerations. Mere choice is enough to transpose any object into a work of art. The problem is that this new orthodoxy is based upon a myth, and this myth is not nearly as old as it claims.

Scholars have long since proved that Duchamp could not have bought the urinal from the J. L. Mott Iron Works because Mott didn't sell that particular model. Most tellingly, on 11 April 1917, just two days after the board had rejected it, Duchamp wrote to his sister, a nurse in war-torn Paris, telling her that "one of my female friends under a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, sent in a porcelain urinal as a sculpture". The explosive contents of this letter did not enter the public domain until 1983 when the missive was published in the Archives of American Art Journal.

*source? letter de 1917*  
The mere fact that Duchamp referred to the urinal as a sculpture suggests that it could not have been his, since by 1913, prompted by the work of the wealthy, chess-playing writer Raymond Roussel, he had stopped creating art. His Roussel-inspired "Readymades" were elaborate, personal rebuses to be read, not viewed.

The literary historian Irene Gammel was the first to discover who Duchamp's "female friend" was. She was born Else Plötz in Germany in 1874, the daughter of a builder and local politician who philandered freely and beat her mother. Afflicted with syphilis, her mother attempted suicide and died later in an institution. As Elsa put it, she "left me her heritage... to fight".

Elsa first married the leading Jugendstil architect August Endell, then Felix Paul Greve, the



translator of Oscar Wilde, who faked his own suicide to escape his creditors and fled with Elsa to America. Her third marriage was to Leopold Karl Friedrich Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven, the impoverished son of a German aristocrat who had also escaped to America to avoid debts. He soon vanished with Elsa's paltry savings but left her with a title and entrée into artistic circles in New York.

Elsa simultaneously inspired and repelled all who came into contact with her, from Ezra Pound to Ernest Hemingway. Nevertheless The Little Review treated her as a star and published her poems alongside excerpts from James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Elsa's genius was to find new ways to break out of the social straightjacket that bound women so that she could fight her mother's battle in public, whenever and wherever she wanted, not when men told her she could.

In October 1917, the painter George Biddle described her room in New York filled with "odd bits of ironware, automobile tiles... ash cans, every conceivable horror, which to her tortured yet highly sensitive perception, became objects of formal beauty... it had to me quite as much authenticity as, for instance, Brancusi's studio in Paris."

Elsa was a poet of found objects, but she didn't leave them as they were—she transformed them into works of art.

*source?*  
*croire* Elsa exploded in fury when the US declared war on her motherland, on Good Friday, 6 April 1917. Her target was the Society of Independent Artists, whose representatives had consistently cold-shouldered her. **We believe she submitted** an upside-down urinal, signed R. Mutt in a script similar to the one she sometimes used for her poems.

Armut—the homophone of R. Mutt—has many resonances in German. It is used in common phrases to mean "poverty", and in some contexts "intellectual poverty". Elsa's submission was a double-pronged attack. The society was hoisted by its own petard, for in accepting the entry it would demonstrate its inability to distinguish a work of art from an everyday object, but in rejecting it, it would break its own rule that the definition of what was art should be left to the submitting artist. Hence the "intellectual poverty" of its stance.

The urinal was Elsa's declaration of war against a man's war—an extraordinary visual assault on all that men stood for. As a sculpture of a transformed everyday object, it deserves to rank alongside Picasso's *Bull's Head*, 1942, made of bicycle handlebars and a saddle, and Dali's *Lobster Telephone*, 1936.

*révéaler - le "si" qu'on aime.*  
**If Duchamp did not submit the urinal, why would he pretend later that he did? After Elsa died in 1927, forgotten and in abject poverty, Duchamp began to let his name be associated with the urinal, and by 1950, four years after the death of Alfred Stieglitz, who photographed**

*plus de témoins!  
(interprétation)*

the original Fountain, he began to assume its authorship.

After he reluctantly abandoned his ambition to become a professional chess champion in 1933, Duchamp started to rebuild his artistic career by repackaging his early work. The problem was that there was not much of it. Only one of his original Readymades still existed, forgotten, in a drawer in Walter Arensberg's desk. It is from this period, beginning in 1936, that replicas of the "lost" Readymades began to appear. Elsa's urinal plugged a hole, but to make it his own Duchamp turned it into an attack on art itself.

Duchamp had long hated art. Both his elder brothers had become successful artists; he had not. Envy seeps out of many of his unguarded utterances: "Why should artists' egos be allowed to overflow and poison the atmosphere?" he said in 1963. "Can't you just smell the stench in the air?"

When the mood took him, Duchamp could be honest about his dishonesty. In an interview in 1962, he told William Seitz: "I insist every word I am telling you now is stupid and wrong." Why, then, has the art world persisted in believing an account grounded in the myths he promulgated?

The reason is simple: too much has been invested in Duchamp's fiction. Countless artistic, curatorial and academic theories have been based upon it. And national pride is at stake, for conceptual art was America's contribution to Modernism, supposedly dating from 1917, not the 1960s when Duchamp's work began to weave its spell.

Added to that is the money. Millions of pounds have been invested not just in the 17 or so copies Duchamp authorised of Elsa's urinal, but in the oceans of conceptual art legitimised by his anti-aesthetic. And in the wake of these ideas, expensive studio equipment and lengthy craft training have been swept out of education because it's cheaper to think than make.

Duchamp's mean and meaningless urinal has acted as a canker in the heart of visual creativity. Elsa's puts visual insight back on to the throne of art.

- A longer version of this article will appear online at [www.scottishreviewofbooks.org](http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org)

LES NOUVELLES FABLES DE

# FOUNTAIN

1917-2017

R. MUTT  
1917

LES NOUVELLES FABLES DE  
**FOUNTAIN**  
1917-2017

CHRONOLOGIE ÉTABLIE PAR  
**MICHAËL LA CHANCE**

ANNOTATIONS D'ANDRÉ GERVAIS

*initialiste  
de M.O.*

pourquoi?

une étiquette qui porte une adresse sur la 88<sup>e</sup> rue, près de Columbus. Ou plutôt, certains membres du comité n'ont pas manqué de reconnaître l'adresse de la jeune Louise Norton, éditorialiste très en vue, amie des Arensberg et maîtresse de Duchamp. Ayant reconnu le canular, ils ont préféré ne rien dire, pour ne pas embarrasser Duchamp. Autre possibilité: l'étiquette qui apparaît sur la photo de Stieglitz a été attachée plus tard.

encore une fois :  
adresse  
avec ou sans  
le nom de  
Louise Norton?  
être piégé  
être factuelle

### XI – Fable des sanitaires substitués

Un deuxième urinoir est venu se substituer au premier, brisé ou perdu. Un fac-similé prend le relais de l'objet initial. Dans un roman d'Alexandre Dumas, des ferrets sont fabriqués pour remplacer ceux qui ont été volés, afin de rétablir la position de la reine. Dans le jeu d'échecs, la reine est souveraine, pourtant elle doit se déplacer derrière une rangée de soldats. La reine serait-elle Dame Rogue, c'est-à-dire Louise Norton? Autre particularité des échecs: lorsque qu'un pion parvient à l'extrémité de l'échiquier dans le camp adverse, on peut lui substituer une autre pièce: une autre reine? L'urinoir aurait atteint cette limite, pour devenir œuvre souveraine?

Selon cette éventualité, une étiquette a été fixée sur le deuxième urinoir avant qu'il ne soit acheminé vers le studio de Stieglitz. Autre possibilité: l'étiquette a été rajoutée par procédé composite sur la photo de Stieglitz. Afin de créer une fausse piste? En effet, combien de personnes ont vu l'urinoir? Avec Duchamp, Stella et Arensberg qui l'ont choisi, il y a le sous-groupe des directeurs qui ont voté son exclusion: Glackens, Dreier, Bellows, etc. L'urinoir jamais exposé au public, son existence, moins qu'une luciole, aura duré quelques jours.

l'original.

le choix  
du cadrage  
de l'échant.  
cf p. 27

11 avril 1917 – Duchamp écrit à sa sœur Suzanne, elle-même artiste affranchie sur les idées Dada. Lettre divulguée en 1983: « Raconte ce détail à la famille: les Indépendants sont ouverts ici avec gros succès. Une de mes amies ~~soit~~ sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, avait envoyé une pissotière en porcelaine comme sculpture. Ce n'était pas du tout indécemment, aucune raison pour la refuser. Le comité a décidé de refuser d'exposer cette chose. J'ai donné ma démission et c'est un potin qui aura sa

la lettre  
du 11

ans  
souten?  
aise  
ctuelle.

11 avril 1917

Ma chère Suzanne -  
Impossible d'écrire -  
J'ai du par écrit que tu travaillais  
beaucoup -  
Dis moi à que tu fais -  
et si ce n'est pas trop difficile  
à envoyer - je pourrais peut  
être t'exposer au mois d'octobre  
ou novembre - prochain - ici.

Mais dis moi à que tu fais -  
Raconte ce détail à la famille :  
des Indépendants ont ouvert ici avec  
grand succès -  
une de mes amies sous un  
pseudonyme masculin, Richard  
Mutt, avait envoyé une pistolette  
en porcelaine comme souvenance;  
ce n'était pas du tout indiqué, aucune  
raison pour la refuser. Le comité  
a décidé de refuser d'exposer cette  
chose. j'ai donné ma démission et  
- c'est un potin qui aura sa valeur dans  
New York -

Ma chère Suzanne  
Impossible d'écrire -  
J'ai su par Cordi que  
tu travaillais beaucoup.  
Dis moi ce que tu fais  
et si ce n'est pas trop  
difficile à envoyer je  
passerais par chez  
t'excuse [?] en un mois  
d'octobre ou novembre  
prochain - ici.  
Mais dis moi ce que tu  
fais -

la lettre  
du 11 avril 1917

# Letters

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## Last word on the art historical mystery of R. Mutt's Fountain?

→ The reception of avant-garde art is often riddled with confusion, and recent controversy on *The Art Newspaper's* Letters page over the authorship of *Fountain* – the urinal declared by 500 art experts to be the 20th century's most influential artwork – is no different.

In the crosshairs of the controversy is Marcel Duchamp's letter to his sister in April 1917 explaining that a female friend, using the pseudonym R. Mutt, submitted the urinal to the First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists that year. This landmark exhibition in New York featured more than 2,000 works of art and boasted democratic principles without jury or prizes. In 2002, assuming a collusion with Duchamp, I suggested as a possible candidate the subject of my biography: Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, aka the Baroness, a Dada artist known for her scandalous sexual poetry, wearable sculptures and relentless desire to shock bourgeois America.

Twelve years later, the art critic Julian Spalding and the independent curator Glyn Thompson used my book to make a bold rhetorical leap: that Duchamp had appropriated "an original by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven". This assertion is problematic, however, asking us to overlook that 1) in available (and admittedly fragmentary) documents the Baroness never laid claim to the object; and 2) artists, writers and patrons in Duchamp's orbit made early connections that typically included Duchamp. The eyewitness Beatrice Wood recalled years later in her memoir: "R. Mutt, of course, was none other than Marcel testing the liberalism of the bylaws."

Duchamp and Freytag-Loringhoven were friends who shared a provocative tactic of infusing sexuality

12 ans après.

qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?

la durée de l'histoire à faire histoire...

man de la coherence  
des faits, des notes, des rapports...

[liberalism of the bylaws.]

Duchamp and Freytag-Loringhoven were friends who shared a provocative tactic of infusing sexuality in their works. making explosive statements in art. Their *modus operandi* was to defy censorship during an era that suppressed the body, and while Duchamp was careful to protect himself from repercussion, the Baroness often suffered harsh consequences, including imprisonment. Duchamp was an occasional art adviser to her and collaborator on the (lost) film, *Baroness Elsa Shaving her Pubic Hair*. Conversely, she was a shrewd critic of his work, as seen in a series of portraits, one of which, painted during the mid-1920s, centrally includes a depiction of *Fountain*.

1015

By April 1917, when *Fountain* was rejected at the exhibition in New York, the Baroness was in Philadelphia, as the painter George Biddle recalls in his autobiography. She showed him a portrait on celluloid (now lost) depicting Duchamp as an incandescent lightbulb with icicles and large, pendulous ears: "Genitals," she explained, "the emblem of his frightful and creative potency." The fact that their love was unconsummated only fuelled the Baroness's desire to commune through art. Indeed, several newspapers reported that *Fountain* came from Philadelphia.

Talk of *Fountain* spread like wildfire in the underground art world after the work was suppressed by the Independents, its mystique intensified by the added rumour that it had been submitted by a woman at the

instigation of Duchamp. Photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who famously photographed the work after its rejection, surmised that she was "young", a description that best fit 24-year-old Beatrice Wood, the youngest in Duchamp's circle, who did help deliver *Fountain* to Stieglitz. However, Wood makes no mention of having shipped the work to the exhibition, an episode she would surely have remembered in her memoir, which includes an extensive account of her recollections regarding the urinal.

Another proposed contender is 26-year-old Louise Norton, an editor and translator whose address appears on the exhibition label. This forensic fact was established by Francis M. Naumann more than two decades ago, but has recently been presented as "new" evidence in Bradley Bailey's article, who claims the address to be "incontrovertible" proof of Norton's role as the female friend who submitted *Fountain*. In fact, the archival documents transcribed by Bailey exclude Norton as a candidate for shipping *Fountain*. The mystery person, if she ever existed, remains unidentified to this day — meaning we cannot so easily exclude the Baroness.

Given the bluntness of the object — a urinal — and its association with masculinity, the visual and discursive feminisation of *Fountain* was an important strategy for its long-term acceptance and presence in museums.

est-ce suffisant?

mais pas  
sans nom  
sans l'écriture Richard Mutt  
+ adresse.

Duchamp's own 1918 photograph of his studio readymades makes it clear that his curation of the urinal hanging from the lintel, with co-conspirator Henri-Pierre Roché slouching underneath, did not resonate in the long run. The feminisation as performed in Stieglitz's photograph, which turned the urinal into a Madonna of the bathroom, was essential in aestheticising what would come to be known as *Fountain* over the course of the 20th century. Posing *Fountain* against Marsden Hartley's painting *The Warriors*, the photo also staged the work as a call to arms against censorship.

Norton and Wood helped translate and shape the significance of the work through criticisms in *The Blind Man*, creating an important discursive apparatus essential to the construction of *Fountain*. Their collaborative engagement, like the Baroness's engagement with Duchamp, was fuelled by female desire. Norton was having an affair with Duchamp at the time, which included at least one threesome with Roché, who noted in his 1917 diary that he helped Duchamp during the sex act.

Likewise, Wood, who defended *Fountain* in *The Blind Man* in terms that would be repeated for decades to come, was then involved in a triangulated relationship with Duchamp, having started an affair with Roché after being ignored by Duchamp. This sexual-creative bond was inscribed in plain sight on *The Blind Man's* cover in the editors' acronym PBT (Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood; and Totor, Roché and Wood's nickname for Duchamp).

Duchamp subtly distanced himself from these collaborators, thereby adding to the mystery. He ridiculed Norton's criticism of *Fountain* in *Rong Wrong*, he brushed off Stieglitz, and blamed his patron Walter Arensberg for the loss of *Fountain* after 1918. He also ignored the Baroness after she made demands that he help her. The Baroness retorted by calling him a "prostitute" in art. Norton spoke with action, losing the readymade *tiré à quatre épingles* Duchamp had given her as a gift.

As much as we yearn for clarity, the mystery remains. We should not dismiss the Baroness as a candidate for having submitted *Fountain*, even as we dismiss facile conclusions that submission of *Fountain* automatically constitutes authorship. Still, her role in this mystery is all the more pertinent, as by the mid-1920s she resuscitated *Fountain* in *Forgotten Like this Paraphuce* during a time when the original was lost and *Fountain* largely forgotten.

To this end, it is critical to underscore that revolutions in art or society are not individual but social phenomena. So far, the history of *Fountain* has been written almost entirely from the perspective of individual art-making. It is time to consider the work's inherent social dimensions, which will reveal *Fountain* as one of the most dynamic networks of exchange of the 20th century.

Irene Gammel, *Ryerson University, is the author of Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* (MIT Press, 2002)

mentions de  
E.v.F.L dans  
son journal?

sources?

"candidate"  
statu.

en voyer  
& penser.



spirit cours d'école

qm?

# 'It's the world's first great feminist, anti-war artwork'

quelle précision!  
= technique de l'argument

→ To answer Dawn Ades's question briefly: all the evidence connects the urinal to Baroness Elsa and none to Duchamp, including the fact that he wrote at the time that he didn't submit it [to the *Independents* exhibition] and that he couldn't have acquired this urinal where he later claimed he did, because that New York firm didn't stock this model. The internal evidence is, if possible, even stronger. The puns, the form, and the meaning relate it closely to Elsa's other sculptures, particularly *God*.

The urinal is the world's first great feminist, anti-war work of art.  
**Julian Spalding**, art critic, writer, broadcaster and a former curator

absence of a signature from a work of art proves its authorship.

Three other individuals resided at that address at the time, all of whom were equally qualified to have been capable of delivering the urinal to the Grand Central Palace on Easter Monday 1917.

Further, Ades has persisted with her belief that Duchamp's sister Suzanne, a Red Cross nurse in Paris, had put it about the New York art scene that Duchamp was not responsible for the work, an idea that Julian Spalding and I have cast doubt on. In the December issue of the *Burlington Magazine*, Ades wrote: "As for the assertion that the artist (rather than 'the nurse') Suzanne Duchamp was not in touch with the New York art scene, her partner was then Jean Crotti... who in 1916 had shared a studio with Duchamp in New York, where Crotti lived for several years. He was on amiable terms with nearly every person involved with the exhibition."

fiction was invented in the 1960s when Duchamp was interviewed by Otto Hahn and Pierre Cabanne. It was elaborated into what Ades adheres to by William Camfield, Thierry de Duve and Francis M Naumann, all of whom had confused the "no jury" rule with a *carte blanche* that would allow anybody to show anything. They didn't bother to read the publicity issued by the society that made it explicit that only members could show. Ades fails to identify anybody with whom Suzanne is known to have enjoyed any contact in New York during this period, citing no evidence that suggests any campaign to protect Duchamp's alleged anonymity was ever conducted, which is hardly surprising since, not having been responsible for the urinal, he had no anonymity to protect.

**Glyn Thompson**, independent scholar, curator and writer

## No grounds for Ades's view

→ Interested readers should know that Dawn Ades's assertions are ultimately grounded in the popular misconception that Marcel Duchamp was responsible for the urinal. What they will not learn from her criticism is that no evidence whatsoever either suggests or confirms that this was the case – for none survives, hence Ades's failure to cite any. In fact, the only item of forensically weighty evidence comes from Duchamp's own hand, in which he informed his sister Suzanne, two days after the urinal had been rejected, that not he but a "female friend" had been responsible.

Due diligence conducted on the history of the attribution to Duchamp that underpins Ades's assumptions demonstrates that, far from it being made in April 1917, the first citation was by Georges Hugnet, in *Cahiers d'Art* in 1932. There, not a shred of evidence is offered in support of such claims that, for example, Duchamp actually had "entered a porcelain urinal with the title *Fontaine*", or that Duchamp had "signed it R Mutt", for nowhere on the urinal, or the attached label, will you find Duchamp's hand.

Nor did Hugnet provide evidence

for Duchamp having done so "in order to test the impartiality of the jury" (not least since there was no jury to display any impartiality); or that, in so doing, "Duchamp had wished to signify his disgust for art and his complete admiration for ready-made objects", since he had neither submitted, nor therefore, signified, anything.

But Hugnet's unsubstantiated attribution would nevertheless be insinuated unalloyed into the master narrative by André Breton, equally unencumbered by any obligations to factual accuracy, in 1935, in *Minotaure*, and the rest is art history, courtesy of the March 1945 issue of *View Magazine*.

Ades makes much of Bradley Bailey's research published in the October 2019 issue of the *Burlington Magazine*, in which he presents the theory that the "female friend" who submitted the urinal to the *Independents* exhibition was the author and Duchamp's friend, Louise Norton.

What Bailey fails to reconcile is that, although the address on the label attached to the urinal was that of Norton, neither it, the name, nor the title of the work, is written in her hand, suggesting that Bailey has introduced into the practice of provenance the innovative concept that the

The following facts contextualise the situation. Suzanne was a nice *petit bourgeois* provincial, with no profession, who had enrolled in the Red Cross at her own expense to do her bit for the *Union Sacrée*, becoming a nurse at the Hospital for Blind Children in Paris. She had no medical experience, training or qualifications. Given the logistics of Ades's proposition, the entire suggestion is quite ridiculous. It assumes that Suzanne had contacts in New York on whose confidence she could rely. But of course no evidence suggests that any such thing ever happened; there is no record that anybody suspected or accused Duchamp of having anything to do with the urinal, or that anybody encouraged anybody else to believe that Duchamp had either been responsible or not.

Everybody believed that "R. Mutt" was just another nobody who had taken the opportunity, usually denied nobodies, to show his work. Whilst some doubted his sincerity, nobody doubted his corporeality.

In short, it's bollocks: the ridiculous

pourquoi?

une association de M.P. & Fontaine.

# Plumbing fixtures: the vexing and perplexing case of R. Mutt's 'Fountain'

The biographer of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven responds to the debate about whether Marcel Duchamp or the Baroness was the creator of 'Fountain'.

by IRENE GAMMEL

**A**S IS DEMONSTRATED by recent articles in *The Burlington Magazine* and the *Art Newspaper* that pit Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven against Marcel Duchamp, the public discourse regarding the authorship of *Fountain* has become both blunted and frenzied, often resulting in circular debates.<sup>1</sup> Since my biography of the Baroness, published in 2002, is the origin of the debate, it seems to me that an open response to this issue is the best path forward – both to clarify my own position and, hopefully, generate new discussion to advance the debate beyond the rhetoric of a pissing contest.<sup>2</sup>

Let me be clear about where I stand. I do not agree with the accusations made by Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson nor with their loose use of my biography to establish their as yet unverified claim that Duchamp 'stole' the work from the Baroness.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding Thompson's laudable tracking and locating of the urinal model in St Louis, Missouri,<sup>4</sup> to conclude that museums should change the attribution with a label reading: 'a replica, appropriated by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), of an original by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874–1927)' is making a huge rhetorical leap in the absence of sufficient evidence.<sup>5</sup>

I maintain the position presented in my biography, which still provides the most accurate representation of the evidence we have available today from the vantage point of Freytag-Loringhoven (Fig. 4).<sup>6</sup> Underpinning my discussion of *Fountain* was – and continues to be – an understanding of the production of *Fountain* as a collaborative exchange. In 2002, I used as the basis for my intervention a letter written by Marcel Duchamp on 11th April 1917, two days after the urinal's rejection, a letter transcribed and translated thus in Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk's edition of Duchamp's correspondence: 'Une de mes amies sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, avait envoyé une pissotière en porcelaine comme sculpture; Ce n'était

pas du tout indécent. aucune raison pour la refuser'; 'A female friend of mine, using a male pseudonym, Richard Mutt, submitted a porcelain urinal as a sculpture. It wasn't at all indecent. No reason to refuse it!'

Discovering this letter in the course of my research on Freytag-Loringhoven, I was struck by the number of pertinent details from the *Fountain* case that corresponded with the Baroness's life and aesthetic: her consistent focus on scatological humour, which she herself traces back to her childhood; the thematic connection between *Fountain* and *God* (1917), the latter a plumbing trap sculpture attributed to both Morton L. Schamberg and Freytag-Loringhoven; the fact that she was in Philadelphia at the same time that newspapers indicated that *Fountain* had been shipped from there; the announcement that R. Mutt was asking for damages upon the urinal's rejection, precisely the kind of thing the Baroness would do to supplement her meagre income; and the name R. Mutt itself, which might be a homonym of *Armut* (poverty), an allusion to the deplorable condition in which the Baroness lived. Add to this her friendship with Duchamp and her artistic preoccupation with him from at least 1917 on.

However, because I was not able to locate evidence of the Baroness ever laying a claim to *Fountain*, I concluded with this caveat: 'The connections are intriguing, but in light of the fragmentary materials, crucial authorship questions remain unanswered.' After reviewing the flurry of responses and articles that have since been published on the topic, some of them cited herein, I note that many questions remain unanswered and that the central issue has been obscured behind entrenched binaries that falsely pit Duchamp against Freytag-Loringhoven, and the latter against other women.

In writing my biography, I did not propose a reassignment of authorship for *Fountain*, but asked readers to consider the work's inherent

1 See B. Bailey: 'Duchamp's "Fountain": the Baroness theory debunked', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 161 (2019), pp.804–10, and the letters published in response from Glyn Thompson, Bradley Bale, Dawn Ades and Alastair Brotchie in *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 161 (2019), pp.985–87. See also the

correspondence published in 'Letters to the editor', *The Art Newspaper* (February 2020), p.7, and (March 2020), p.17.

2 I. Gammel: *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity – A Cultural Biography*, Cambridge, MA 2002, pp.221–28; and I. Gammel: 'Last word on the art historical

mystery of R. Mutt's fountain?', *The Art Newspaper* (September 2020), p.17.

3 J. Spalding and G. Thompson: 'Did Marcel Duchamp steal Elsa's urinal?', *The Art Newspaper* (November 2014), p.59.

4 G. Thompson: 'The Richard Mutt Affair Meets the Louisiana Purchase

Exposition', *St Louis Magazine*, February 1, 2016, available at <https://www.stlmag.com/culture/visual-arts/the-richard-mutt-affair-meets-the-louisiana-purchase-exposition/>, accessed 3rd December 2020.

5 Spalding and Thompson, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.59.

6 Gammel *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.221–28.

on n'est pas dans  
une lettre / historique  
mais dans la font

savon  
d'on  
on parle.



1. *Fountain* by R. Mutt, by Alfred Stieglitz. 1917. Vintage silver print, 23.5 by 17.3 cm. (Private collection; © DACS London 2020).

collaborative dimensions, consistent with Dada's goal of undermining traditional notions of the singular artist genius through new methods, including cut-and-paste techniques and gestures of appropriation. In 2002 I noted that if the Baroness had a hand in the *Fountain* case, 'then this *pièce de résistance* must surely be seen as one of the most profoundly collaborative works in the annals of New York dada.'<sup>7</sup> Beyond the question of procurement, over the years I have come to think of *Fountain* as much more of a collaborative work than is traditionally understood. For example, Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) played a key part in the process that turned *Fountain* into an aesthetic object through his carefully composed photograph (Fig. 1); the Baudrillardian simulacrum is what we remember today, much more than the original piece itself (lost after 1918).

Stieglitz's photograph and the ensuing discussion in the avant-garde periodical *The Blind Man* would assume a key role in the complex decades-long process that has come to assign extraordinary cultural and art historical value to *Fountain*. The criticisms offered by the writer Louise Norton (1890–1989), the artist and actress Beatrice Wood (1893–1998), and Stieglitz himself singularly contributed to the work's artistic aura,

7 Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, 11th April 1917, quoted in F.M. Naumann and H. Obalk, eds: *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, transl. J Taylor, Ghent 2000, p.47.  
8 Gammel, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 228.  
9 *Ibid.*, p.225.

10 See T. De Duve: 'The story of *Fountain*: hard facts and soft speculation', *The Nordic Association of Aesthetics* 57/58 (2019), pp.10–47, at p.45, note 47, who admits that '[a] collaboration between Duchamp and the Baroness is not entirely to be excluded', citing Gammel, *op. cit.* (note 2), and

aestheticising the urinal as more than an ordinary object; by suppressing its commercial connotations, they exposed the blindness of the board members to its artistry. Stieglitz's juxtaposition of *Fountain* with Marsden Hartley's painting *The Warriors* (1913), whose work Stieglitz had been championing in his gallery since 1909, created a multimodal perspective intersecting photography, painting, and readymade sculpture. As much as he claimed to despise such aestheticising, Duchamp himself recognized this in his eventual curating of *Fountain* in the manner of Stieglitz's photograph, all of which speaks to the participatory construction of the sculpture.

The heightened rhetoric and strong positions defining this controversy are understandable; reattributions in art, much like the publication of new editions of beloved classic novels with startling new endings, are profoundly unsettling. All the more so when the work in question is arguably the most game-changing work of art produced in the twentieth century. Processes of reattribution expose the social and legal construction of authorship itself, revealing their ideological underpinnings as well. If anything, the *Fountain* controversy has exposed the danger of academic scholarship wanting to ignore the ideological apparatus that constructs 'facts'.<sup>8</sup> Facts themselves are part of what make up regimes of truths.

If writing my biography today, would I formulate some things differently? Yes and no. For example, I would not fundamentally change the argumentation as it simply followed the evidence, pointing to the Baroness as a plausible candidate in the mystery of which female friend might have sent in *Fountain*. In hindsight, and given some of the appropriations of the evidence from my 2002 book, I would reframe with more clarity and signal certain limits more clearly. With the benefit of two decades of reflection, I would write less metaphorically, as when referencing *Fountain* as the '*pièce de résistance*' of the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists (hereafter Independents), where it sat on a pedestal, turned upside down [...] detonat[ing] the unity of the vanguard itself.'<sup>9</sup> In writing these words, which appeared in the earliest edition, and which were clarified long ago in the paperback edition, published in 2003, I did not mean to suggest that the work was being literally exhibited at the Independents, as Dawn Ades, for example, chose to read these lines<sup>10</sup> – rather, I meant to hint at the complex circulation of *Fountain* as a multi-modal object mediated through photography and public discourse during April and May 1917.

I would also have been better served to simply cite Naumann's translation of Marcel Duchamp's letter above to avoid confusion. For example, the original text reads that a female friend '*avait envoyé une pissotière en porcelaine comme sculptur*', which translates 'had submitted', or 'had sent in' and not 'had sent me a porcelain urinal as a sculpture', a correction that has since been made by a number of scholars, for which I am grateful. That said, I did provide the French original for readers to see for themselves. Far from relegating it to a footnote, I presented the original in the main text; thus, to insist that my translation 'dramatically changes the sequence of events', as Bradley Bailey writes, overstates the case.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the recent argumentation works to reinforce the impossibility of attributing a sole author to *Fountain*. Bailey argues that due to the intensified focus on the Baroness as the prime candidate for Duchamp's 'female friend', scholarly attention has been diverted away from another legitimate contender: Louise Norton. However, I am not sure that this

opening the door for moving beyond the authorship orthodoxy. However, his conclusion enshrines *Fountain*, 'its place as secure as the Sistine Chapel', *ibid.*, p.41. Equally fraught is the conclusion that discussions around the Baroness are simply 'symptomatic of the exhaustion of the 'by' question',

*ibid.*, p. 42, which dismisses the ideological tensions in something as political as anti-art.

11 Gammel, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.228  
12 D. Ades: 'Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917', in D. McClean: *Artist, Authorship and Legacy: A Reader*, London 2018, pp.302–12, at p.305.  
13 Bailey, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 806.

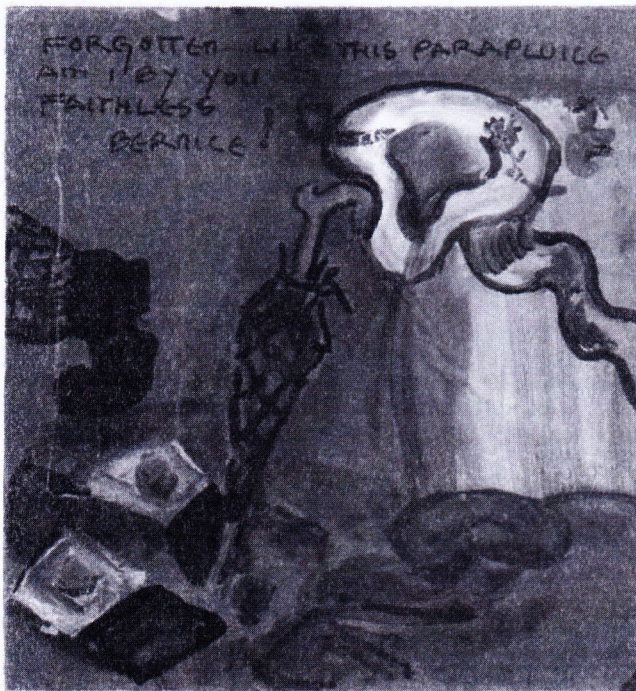
le choix de mots de fountain la pensée change!

confusion: bien la traduction  
1  
fountain from que les autres se fessent une idée.

is so, as we have been aware of her for a long time – I certainly was in 2000, through Naumann's 1994 *New York Dada* study, which features a photograph of *Fountain* showing the detail of the entry label with an address that Naumann identified as being Norton's address at [no] W[est] 88th Street.<sup>14</sup> I directed readers of my biography to the article by Norton in *The Blind Man*, 'Buddha of the bathroom', that publicly defended the urinal as a work of art entitled *Fountain*. Norton was implicated in the complex process of constructing *Fountain* as a work of art, a point that has never been debated by anybody – although in retrospect I wish I had made this even more explicit. Bailey also quotes Stieglitz, who references 'a young woman (probably at Duchamp's instigation) sent a large porcelain urinal on a pedestal to the Independents'.<sup>15</sup> Bailey concludes that the forty-two-year-old Baroness no longer qualified as young, whereas Norton at twenty-six perhaps still did. Nevertheless, Bailey fails to recognise that Norton's involvement does not necessarily erase the Baroness from the history of *Fountain*, but rather complicates the elaborate network of people possibly involved in its development as a work of art.

What adds to the mystery of *Fountain* is that the 'young' women candidates advanced as the 'female friend', including Norton and Beatrice Wood, remained silent on the topic in interviews conducted late in life with such scholars as William A. Camfield and Naumann. As for Norton, the brief comments discovered and reprinted by Bailey that he touts as incontrovertible evidence that she was the said female friend only add to the mystery. As Norton writes: 'To test the bona fides of the hanging committee he [Duchamp] sent in a porcelain urinal which he titled, *Fountain*, by R. Mutt. The committee promptly threw it out and Marcel very angry promptly resigned'. Norton adds, 'I also contributed some nonsense in the case forthwith titled Buddha of the Bath Room which at least illicit [sic] Marcel's famous chuckle'.<sup>16</sup> Norton's words, written in 1972, remove her as the go-between, revealing with absolute

2. *Forgotten – like this parapluie, by Am I by You-/Faithless/Beatrice!* by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. c.1923–24. Gouache and ink, 13 by 12.1 cm. (Marianne Elrick-Marley Fine Art, New York).



clarity that she did not send *Fountain*, thus bringing us back full-circle to the original question: who did? The Baroness? Or Duchamp himself, as Norton suggests? But if the latter is the case, why maintain the ruse in a private letter to his sister?

Naumann, who first published the infamous letter, writes that readers have been focusing on the wrong word, '*amies* (with a female gender), when they should be concentrating on the words *avoir envoyé*. He did not say that she made it (*avoir fait*), but that she "sent it in" or "submitted it". That is a crucial distinction'.<sup>17</sup> True, and yet sending a work to the Independents for submission typically in this context implies an artist's hand, as the same verb *envoyer* is also used in the same letter for his sister's art and throughout other letters in the collection.<sup>18</sup>

Who signed *Fountain*? In 2011, as part of her MA thesis at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Nina Zeller submitted the signature along with handwriting samples by both Duchamp and Freytag-Loringhoven to a forensic specialist, Hartmut Mutschler; in his opinion a match was inconclusive for the Baroness, meaning there was some positive overlap but not enough to establish an irrefutable match,<sup>19</sup> and mostly unlikely for Duchamp, although the handwriting samples submitted for both are limited and the sample for Duchamp is mostly lower-case handwriting, largely excluding the distinctive majuscules of some of his works, such as *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919; private collection). Given the small sample and the fact that Duchamp claimed to have signed the urinal himself, a new forensic analysis of the signature should be conducted, even though the pool of letters – just four – is small.

There is a belief that the Baroness had little contact with Duchamp before 1918. In fact, by the spring of 1917, when American painter George Biddle first met her in Philadelphia and hired her as a painter's model, she showed him 'her color poems' (no longer extant): 'painted on a bit of celluloid and [ . . . ] at once a portrait of, and an apostrophe to, Marcel Duchamp'.<sup>20</sup> Also, and most ironic, what has been entirely overlooked in all of the articles is that Freytag-Loringhoven herself was represented in the Grand Central Palace at the First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. She appeared in a portrait painting by Harriet W. Titlow, *E. von F.* (Fig. 3), exhibited as no. 42.<sup>21</sup> The Baroness sits on a Cantonese chair with her head cocked – quizzing, exploring, even judging. Less Queen of Bohemia, as she is often described, she is dressed in a formal evening dress with plunging neckline and shawl, holding what appears to be a cigarette in her left hand.

Having returned to Berlin, around 1923 or 1924, the Baroness made a gouache painting on paper with the elaborate inscription, 'Forgotten – Like this Parapluie/ Am I by You-/Faithless/Beatrice!' (Fig. 2), displaying a urinal in the upper-right quadrant, elevated like a work of art but now issuing water like a fountain with books strewn on the floor, soaking the books – perhaps blurring authorship? The elaborate inscription alludes to *Surtout n'oubliez pas ton parapluie* (1881), a humorous, even absurdist, satire focused on a French couple's marital tensions caused by a forgotten umbrella. It was written by the art critic Champfleury – a pseudonym for Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson, his pseudonym composed of [Du] champ + fleur (flower) – and a flower is displayed on the urinal's rim.

14. F.M. Naumann: *New York Dada 1915–1923*, New York 1994, p.239 note 17; and W.A. Camfield: 'Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917', *Dada/Surrealism* 16 (1987), p.72.

15. Bailey, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.808.

16. Bailey, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 810.

17. Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre Archive, Toronto.

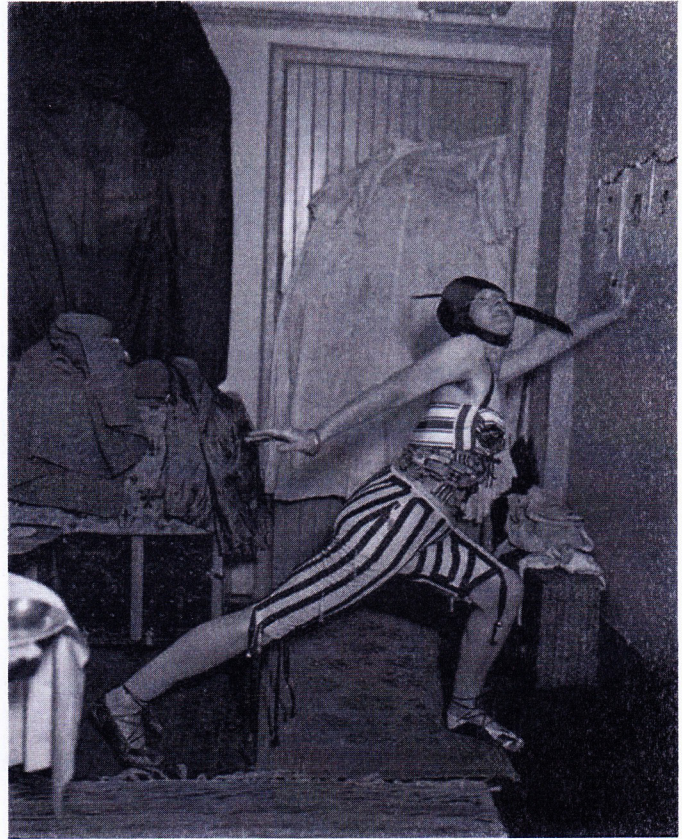
18. N. Zeller: 'Der "Fall R. Mutt"', F.M. Naumann: 'Marcel Duchamp vs.

Baroness Elsa "Fountain" authorship', unpublished manuscript, 2015, p.2.

19. See, for example, '*Dis moi ce que tu fais – et si ce n'est pas trop difficile à envoyer. Je pourrais peut être t'exposer*', letter from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, 11th April 1917, in Naumann and Obalk, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.47.

20. N. Zeller: 'Der "Fall R. Mutt"', Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Marcel

à intégrer au poster! non



On the left side of the urinal a smouldering pipe references Duchamp, whom the Baroness was also addressing with this work, presumably hoping that the primary addressee, the American photographer and friend Berenice Abbott, who was then in Paris and linked to Duchamp via common acquaintances, would share it with him.<sup>21</sup>

However, the small mysterious details of *Forgotten* – like *this paraplui*ce have remained unexplored and the controversy has made me look closer at this work. For example, there is a copper waste pipe at the bottom catching the water from the urinal and draining it into the underground, at the same level that the viewer finds the books wasting and being neglected (presumably referencing the obscuring of her work into forgetfulness). On the right rim of the urinal, embedded in the stem of the flower, there is a mystery number, 647 or 649 – possibly a three-digit telephone number. The pipe resting on the left side of the rim has a heart inscribed on its bowl, and the stem of the same pipe is broken to spell out the Baroness's signature, ELF. Meanwhile, the end of the written line at the top, 'Am I by you –' has the dash so deeply etched into the paper that its long groove doubles as the stern mouth of a mask of an indifferent face

3. E. von F. [Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven], by Harriet W. Titlow. (From: *Catalogue of the First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists*, New York 1917, p.230.

4. Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in her studio in Greenwich Village, New York. 1915. (International News Photography: Bridgeman Images).

without eyes, floating above the urinal – signifying the friend who does not see her need for help. With his own fountain lost and forgotten by this time, the Baroness's urinal is an offering to Duchamp, who loved to create and decode riddles. Here, I suggest, it functions as a semiotic exchange to solicit Duchamp's attention and help. For the Baroness, Duchamp, whom she irreverently called 'M'ars' (my arse), was a privileged insider in the American and transatlantic art world, whereas she was an outsider with an uncomfortably critical perspective. As she writes in 1922: 'M'ars came to *this country* – protected – carried by fame – to use its plumbing fixtures – mechanical comforts – so he takes you as you *are!* He merely amuses himself. But – I am he – not yet having attained his height – I have to fight.'<sup>22</sup> *M'ars - le suisse - sans avoir encore atteint sa hauteur*

*J'ai à me battre.*

Duchamp und die Frage nach der Urheberschaft des Readymades "Fountain", MA thesis (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich 2011), pp.106-12. The analysis highlights centrally the use of majuscules in the R. Mutt signature, which matches the Baroness's handwritten poetry.

20 G. Biddle: *An American Artist's Story*, Boston 1939, p.138. Celluloid

is also the material Duchamp used for some of his *Boite-en-valise* (1938-42) reproductions

21 *Catalogue of the First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists*, New York 1917, p.231. Harriet Woodfin Titlow (1875-1943) was a Virginia-born painter who is listed in the same catalogue (404) as having her studio at 108 Waverly Place, New

York City. The present author wishes to thank the artist Pere Sousa who first drew my attention to this portrait.

22 See Gammel, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.339-31, for an analysis of this painting as the Baroness addressing not only Berenice Abbott but also Marcel Duchamp, the interpretation has since been echoed by other scholars, most recently, C. Knighton:

*Modernist Wastes: Recovery, Re-Use and the Autobiographic in Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Djuna Barnes*, London 2020, pp.65-66, although the wrong work is illustrated.

23 Letter from Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven to *The Little Review*, 'You seem to ignore my queries', n.d. (c.1921-23), Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

# Letters

## 'Fountain', Marcel Duchamp and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

Sir, In her article 'Plumbing fixtures; the vexing and perplexing case of R. Mutt's "Fountain"', published in the January issue (pp.52-55), Irene Gammel writes that I made a 'loose' reading of her biography of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. She does not specify or explain this looseness, so I cannot respond, but I must apologise for any misinterpretation on my part. Gammel deserves eternal credit for identifying the Baroness as the originator of the *Urinal* and for so beautifully explaining its meaning. I cannot, however, agree with her first assertion – still maintained in this article despite twenty years of intensive research, above all by Glyn Thompson – that the Baroness's *Urinal* was 'a collaborative exchange' with Marcel Duchamp.

Collaboration occurs when artists combine to create a single, more meaningful work of art. The Baroness's and Duchamp's urinal are not one work of art, because they mean very different things and, worse, Duchamp's meaning cancels the Baroness's out. Moreover, Duchamp's *Urinal* is not, really, a work of art at all because it cannot be seen. But it did not need to be. Many people think they 'get' Duchamp's idea without seeing anything. They imagine that Duchamp exhibited a urinal along a row of paintings so visitors could piss in it and, by inference, piss on the rest. When people see Duchamp's *Urinal* they are confused because it does not look like a urinal, not at least one you can urinate into. But this is not surprising given that it is not his *Urinal* but the Baroness's. Her *Urinal* is a urinal imaginatively transformed, lain on its back to evoke a pelvic girdle and a seated Buddha containing in its shadow the profile of a veiled Madonna, images of motherhood and spirituality, peace not piss. The Baroness's *Urinal* was the world's first great, powerful and subtle anti-war, feminist work of art, which has to be seen to be appreciated.

Duchamp's *Urinal* did not exist and cannot be seen, except for his tellingly erroneous attempts to reconstruct the Baroness's original. Behind his fakes lie two aims: to take the piss out of art and, springing from his desire to enhance his own reputation, to lift artists above criticism by claiming, absurdly, that anything can be a work of art if any self-proclaimed artist says it is. The Baroness's *Urinal* was very different: it was a demonstration of the artist's freedom to create art from anything and to tackle any subject – it was she who extended the language of art not Duchamp. But her *Urinal* was also an assertion that art has to be created and has to communicate, both attributes of art that Duchamp denied.

Towards the end of his life Duchamp wanted to be seen as one of the founding fathers of modern art but had little to show from these early years. It is not that Duchamp didn't want to knock art at that time. Two years after the Baroness sent in her *Urinal*, he had the idea of drawing a moustache and a goatee beard on the face of the Mona Lisa and inscribing 'L.H.O.O.Q.' underneath her, meaning she has a hot 'arse'. Both the Baroness and Duchamp were interested in sex, but his prurience pales beside her magisterial fascination with the unacknowledged influence of sex on all aspects of life, as her *Urinal* and her poetry show. Duchamp did not collaborate with the Baroness to create 'his' *Urinal* any more than he collaborated with Leonardo to create *L.H.O.O.Q.*

Gammel is not alone in finding the case of *Urinal* 'vexing and perplexing', but it is actually very simple, if one looks at the visual evidence alone. The Baroness's *Urinal* stands in the mainstream of the history of visual creativity from Bosch to Goya to Picasso. Duchamp's is nowhere to be seen. The future of art depends on our ability to create powerful visual images. The immense significance of Gammel's discovery has yet to make its full impact because Duchamp's shadow still hides the Baroness's genius. It is time to nudge Duchamp's non-existent urinal into the margins of art history where it belongs and let the Baroness's real one reign.

JULIAN SPALDING

ce que le temps fait à l'histoire  
= RÈGLE LES FAITS

les articles de l'époque

Sir, In her article in the January issue, Irene Gammel states that she maintains 'the position presented in my biography, which still provides the most accurate representation of evidence we have available today from the vantage point of Freytag-Loringhoven', a view apparently formulated in 2002. However, Gammel appears to be unaware that in the intervening eighteen years a more comprehensive body of evidence has revealed a much clearer understanding of Freytag-Loringhoven's 'vantage point' in respect of her relationship with a urinal that, according to the only two critics of the exhibition in which it failed to appear who were in a position to know, had been sent from the city in which Freytag-Loringhoven was residing in April 1917, Philadelphia. These were Gustav Kobbé, music and art critic of the *New York Herald*, and Henry McBride, art critic of the *Sun*.

What Gammel, and the Duchamp commentariat in general, continues to overlook in discussion of the authorship of the inscription 'R. Mutt 1917' on the urinal is that it can be convincingly demonstrated to have been in the hand of Freytag-Loringhoven (see my letter in this Magazine, December 2019, pp.984-95). In addition, the inscription on the urinal and the handwriting on the label are clearly in two different hands, neither of which is Duchamp's. This confirms his disqualification from authorship of Mutt's gesture, a mistaken attribution that was initiated by George Hugnet in *Cahiers d'art* 1-2 (1932), p.62, and subsequently fabricated in complete ignorance of the evidence that flatly contradicts it.

GLYN THOMPSON

Sir, In a letter published in the January issue (p.4), we showed that although Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson claimed that their account of Duchamp's so-called theft was based on Irene Gammel's biography of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, the two accounts in fact contradicted one another. We are pleased to see that both parties now agree with us on this point, and each now maintains that the other is wrong. The truth is, of course, that both are wrong, neither having established any evidential link between the Baroness and *Fountain*. This remains our fundamental request, to them as to Professor Gammel. Spinning ever more fantastical accounts of this phantom relationship may be amusing for the authors, but their obvious and dishonourable purpose is to discredit Duchamp, regardless of facts.

Spalding and Thompson both feign to assume that the premise in contention has been resolved and that the Baroness was responsible for *Fountain*. We have shown that there is no evidence for this, and that anyway, the meaning of *Fountain* was indisputably given it by Duchamp and without that meaning it is nothing but a urinal. Spalding at least seems to be aware of this, while unaware that its title, *Fountain*, is visible on the submission label (he persists in calling it *Urinal*). So he has solemnly constructed a ponderous alternative meaning for it if it was by the Baroness: a big, spurious if, and a meaning so opaque it would indeed have guaranteed this object's oblivion within art history. None of this in fact has anything to do with art history, but it does at least merit a small footnote in histories of fake news, conspiracy theories and farce.

When we undertook the refutation of this absurd 're-attribution' we expected to find at least some evidence for it. We soon realised there was none, and the mountain of verbiage generated by Spalding and Thompson is simply intended to disguise this lack. They have neither explained away Louise Norton's evidence published by Bradley Bailey in this Magazine (October 2019, pp.804-10), nor shown any connection between the Baroness and *Fountain* apart from the inconsequential fact that she lived in Philadelphia. Gammel likewise now clings to a vague 'collaboration' in order not to discard her thesis entirely. Until they present real evidence we consider our case proven; the Baroness had no involvement with *Fountain*. For our detailed refutation, see [atlaspress.co.uk/marcel-duchamp-was-not-a-thief/](https://atlaspress.co.uk/marcel-duchamp-was-not-a-thief/)

DAWN ADES and ALASTAIR BROTCHE

# Une histoire peut en cacher une autre (32/36) Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven: l'urinoir et la baronne qui sort Duchamp

Camille PAIX

22 août 2022 - Libération

Article réservé aux abonnés

Une histoire peut en cacher une autre dossier <

Attribuée au Français, ayant fait polémique lors de sa présentation en 1917, la célèbre «Fontaine» pourrait avoir été pensée par Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. L'artiste allemande était le symbole **foldingue** du New York dada des années 10.

pourquoi?  
pour dire libre  
exubérante

pourquoi rattaché à à follic?



Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven en 1900. (Alamy Stock Photo)

par [Camille Paix](#)

publié le [22 août 2022](#) à 15h16

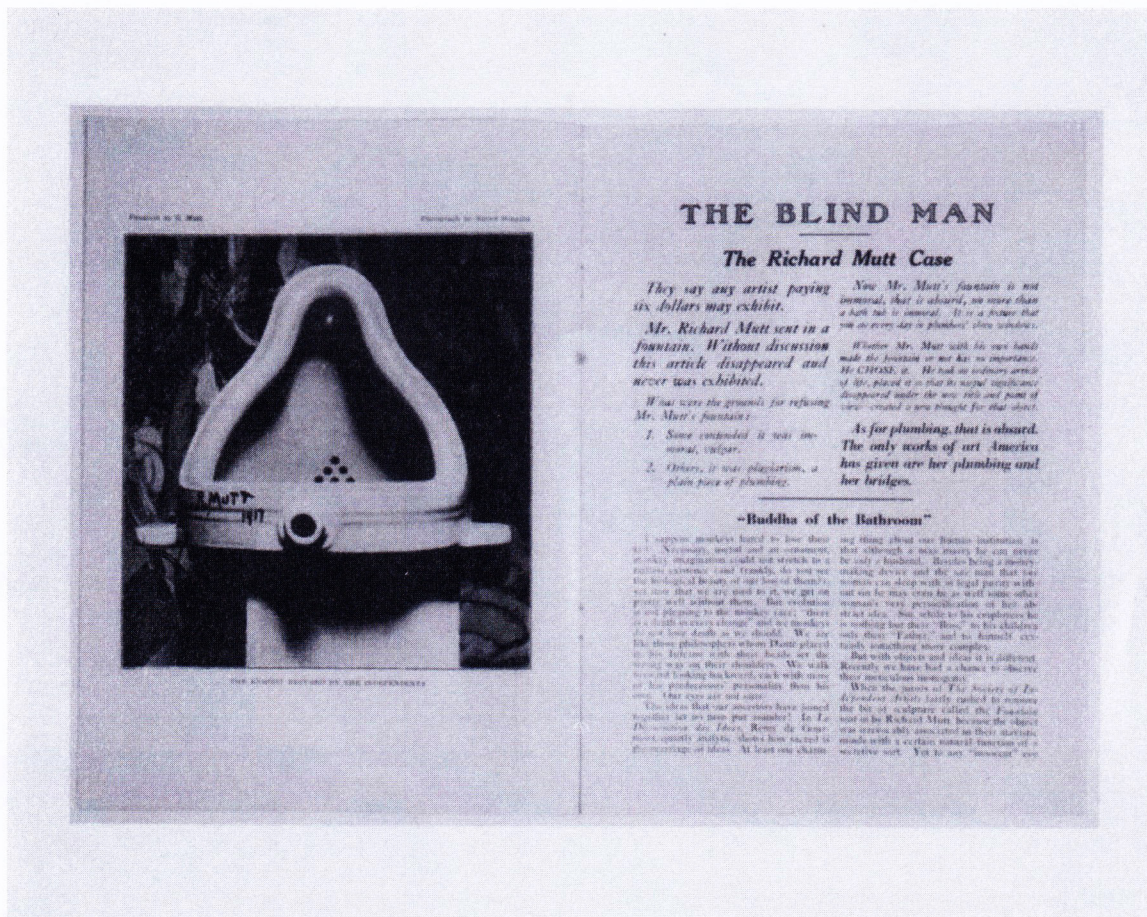
Tous les épisodes de notre série de l'été 2022, «Une histoire peut en cacher une autre», à [retrouver ici](#).



Au commencement était un urinoir. Les toilettes les plus commentées du monde de l'art, et le début d'une ère artistique nouvelle plaçant l'artiste au centre de tout, capable par son intention seule de transformer un objet déjà existant en œuvre. Vous aurez probablement reconnu le plus célèbre des ready-mades, la mythique *Fontaine* signée R. Mutt, alias Marcel Duchamp.

/ Malgré les penes, persiste à associer M.D. & Fontaine.  
= contribue au doute, au flou

Proposée au premier Salon des artistes indépendants de New York en 1917, l'œuvre a été refusée car jugée «*immorale et vulgaire*», et n'ayant rien à voir avec l'art, une bête «*pièce de plomberie*». Drame dans le petit milieu artistique new-yorkais, divisé entre ceux qui crient à l'imposture et ceux qui s'indignent de la censure. Dans la foulée, sans dévoiler qu'il est derrière cet envoi polémique, Marcel Duchamp démissionne du comité directeur de la société organisatrice, suivi par le collectionneur Walter Arensberg. La petite bande de farceurs dadas regroupés aux Etats-Unis autour de l'artiste français qu'on s'arrache monte l'affaire en épingle à coups d'articles dans ses revues branchées – dans un éditorial de *The Blind Man*, intitulé «The Richard Mutt Case», ils statuent carrément que les seules œuvres d'art qu'a produites l'Amérique sont ses ponts et ses canalisations. Mais qu'est-ce vraiment que ce *Fontaine*, cet ovni ? Une blague pour se poiler entre intellos ? Un piège tendu par Marcel et sa bande pour tester les limites de cette Société des artistes indépendants qui organise un salon sans jury auquel tout le monde doit en théorie pouvoir avoir accès ? En tout cas, l'inconnu au bataillon R. Mutt met le doigt sur la faille dans cette ouverture d'esprit revendiquée, et change par ce petit geste l'histoire de l'art pour toujours.



Publié en Mai 1917 dans le périodique The Blind Man n°2. Photographie d'Alfred Stieglitz d'une œuvre de Marcel Duchamp. conservé au Philadelphia Museum of Arts (Asso. Marcel Duchamp. RMN. ADAGP)

L'urinoir originel, que Duchamp a affirmé après coup avoir acheté à la droguerie J. L. Mott Iron Works, sur la Ve Avenue à New York, n'existe plus depuis longtemps. Les répliques qui sont exposées aujourd'hui ont été certifiées par l'artiste et sont désormais signées de son nom, ce qui n'était pas le cas à l'époque. R. Mutt s'est fondu dans Duchamp. Mais derrière le pseudonyme s'est glissée ces dernières années l'ombre d'un doute. En cause, une lettre datée du 11 juillet 1917 dans laquelle l'artiste raconte à sa sœur Suzanne le cas *Fontaine* : «*Une de mes amies sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, avait envoyé une pissotière en porcelaine comme sculpture, écrit-il. Ce n'était pas du tout indécent, aucune raison pour la refuser. Le comité a décidé de refuser d'exposer cette chose. J'ai donné ma démission et c'est un potin qui aura sa valeur dans New York.*» Et si Duchamp n'était pas l'artiste derrière la non-œuvre d'art

? réécrire, réévaluer, repenser.

A une époque où l'on aime partir sur les traces des femmes qui peuplent les oubliettes de l'histoire, l'identité de l'«*amie sous pseudonyme masculin*» a fait couler bien de l'encre. Surtout que la bande dada new-yorkaise de Duchamp n'est pas un boys club,

loin de là. On a d'abord vu derrière l'identité mystère Louise Norton, écrivaine et amante de l'artiste, dont l'adresse est inscrite sur une étiquette qui accompagne l'œuvre au salon. Alfred Stieglitz, auteur de la seule photo existante de l'urinoir originel, affirme dans une lettre à Georgia O'Keeffe, que l'expéditeur de l'œuvre serait «une jeune femme (probablement sur les conseils de Duchamp)», ce qui peut correspondre à Louise et ouvrir la porte à la théorie d'une **idée collective**. Mais l'hypothèse qui revient le plus souvent est celle qui place derrière l'urinoir le génie complètement **foldingue** d'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, alias la «baronne dada». *pourquoi?*

## «Elle s'habille dada, aime dada, vit dada»

Née Else Plötz en 1874 en Allemagne, l'artiste s'est installée, quelques années avant l'épisode du salon, à New York, où elle a convolé avec un baron désargenté et dépressif. Dans les rues de Greenwich Village comme dans les salons huppés des artistes, la baronne, généralement défoncée, promène ses cheveux rasés, ses moult chiens bâtards et ses tenues farfelues. Pour gagner sa vie, elle pose pour ses amis artistes mais se réserve le droit de choisir ce qu'elle porte, c'est-à-dire généralement un n'importe quoi savamment étudié : plumes ou argenterie sur la tête, conserves sur les seins, canari vivant dans une petite cage accrochée à un soutien-gorge...

Personnage à cheval entre Lady Gaga et une artiste féministe des années 70, elle est à la maison et au carnaval partout et devient symbole, voire mascotte, d'une scène dada new-yorkaise qu'elle écrase par sa **radicalité**. *mieux!* «C'est la seule personne dans le monde qui s'habille dada, aime dada, vit dada», écrit à propos d'elle son amie Jane Heap, qui édite avec sa compagne Margaret Anderson la revue *The Little Review* dans laquelle les poèmes ultra-crus et sexuels de la baronne s'invitent souvent.



La dadaïste Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. (Alamy Stock Photo)

A lire les descriptions de ce curieux personnage par ceux qui ont croisé sa route, on croirait tour à tour que l'on décrit une créature mythique, folle courtisane fin de siècle, ou une clocharde céleste. «*Elle vivait dans un appartement à la saleté inimaginable. Romantiquement, mystiquement sale*», écrit en 1921 le poète William Carlos Williams,

qui se souvient qu'elle empestait «une étrange, âcre odeur de crasse et de transpiration» – il la déteste parce qu'elle a développé pour lui une de ses rituelles passions dévorantes. Les ready-mades n'ont pas encore de noms mais la baronne entasse dans sa chambre des «déchets ramassés dans la rue» auxquels elle donne des noms mystiques. Outre ses poèmes et son apparence qu'elle élève au rang d'œuvre d'art, la baronne peint, sculpte avec tout ce qui lui passe par la main, fait des collages, joue avec les matériaux et les mélanges. Elle est pour la photographe Berenice Abbott «un mélange de Shakespeare et de Jésus».

## Sculpture de plumes et de fer dans un verre à pied

A l'époque du Salon des artistes indépendants, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven a jeté son dévolu sur Marcel Duchamp. Elle brûle pour lui, au point de se frotter sur tout le corps un article portant sur sa peinture *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2*, en récitant un poème qui se termine par «*Marcel, Marcel, I love you like hell, Marcel*». L'être idolâtré, qui a une dizaine d'années de moins qu'elle et n'est pas particulièrement intéressé, dit qu'elle «*n'est pas une futuriste*» mais qu'elle «*est le futur*». Il la considère comme l'essence du dada new-yorkais, et en fait la vedette d'un film coréalisé avec Man Ray et sobrement intitulé *La baronne rase ses poils pubiens*. De son côté, elle réalise aussi le portrait de l'artiste, drôle de sculpture de plumes et de fer dans un verre à pied.

La théorie selon laquelle Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven serait derrière *Fontaine* émane d'Irene Gammel, autrice en 2003 d'une biographie de l'artiste (1), et qui a remonté le fil de l'étude exhaustive de l'œuvre et son histoire par William A. Camfield. Une question qui titille Camfield attire son attention : «*[L'amie de Duchamp] vivait-elle à Philadelphie, puisque les journaux identifient régulièrement Mutt comme philadelphien ?*» Il se trouve qu'à ce moment-là, la baronne a temporairement quitté New York pour la ville de Pennsylvanie, où elle travaille sur une sculpture avec Morton Schamberg. Intitulée *God*, l'œuvre intrigue par ses similitudes avec *Fontaine*. Elle représente un morceau de canalisation retournée et assemblée à un socle de bois – pas exactement un ready-made donc. Mélanger le scato et le catho, c'est vraiment le dada de la baronne qui a hérité de son père anticlérical un «*mauvais esprit*» et un «*humour d'un goût douteux*» – pour dire qu'il allait aux toilettes, le paternel disait : «*Je vais*

prier.» Elle le développe poème après poème : «*Et Dieu a parlé gentiment à mon cœur / Il a dit : / «J'ai fait / Le devant / Et le derrière / J'ai fait les pets / J'ai fait les cœurs / Je suis un grand maître des arts.»* C'est aussi ce qui fait dire à Irene Gammel que *Fontaine*, qui a aussi été appelée *Bouddha de la salle de bains*, porte la marque d'Elsa.



«Portrait de Marcel Duchamp» par Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. (Charles Sheeler/Wikimedia Commons)

Enfin, c'est derrière le pseudonyme qu'on a vu la clé de la maternité (ou en tout cas de l'influence) baronesque sur l'urinoir : R. Mutt peut se lire *Armut*, pauvreté en

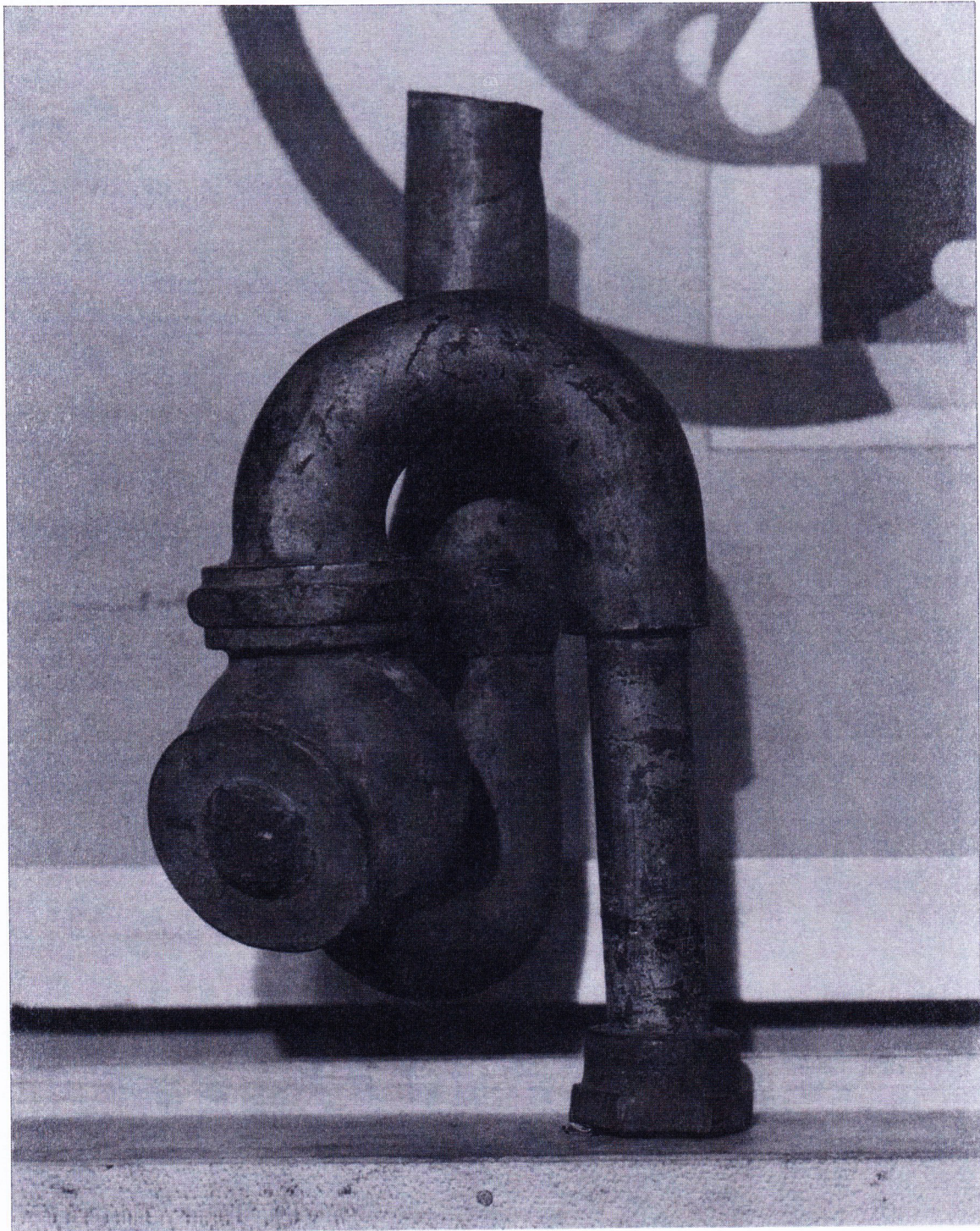
"marve"  
qui se lit  
d'un autre côté  
PAS UN FAIT

allemand, langue maternelle de la baronne, cette pauvreté de laquelle elle ne parvint jamais à s'extraire ; *Mutt*, ces «chiens bâtards» (en anglais) qu'elle trimballe partout ; ou encore, pris à l'envers, *Mutter*, la mère qu'elle a perdue tôt d'un cancer de l'utérus. Il est vrai aussi qu'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven écrit tous ses poèmes ou sur ses dessins d'une écriture en lettres noires et capitales qui ressemble à la signature présente sur la porcelaine – mais enfin, écrire en majuscule reste quand même quelque chose d'assez répandu.

il ya un tentative d'étude  
mais pas assez de sens (c Mutt)  
nom devenu une preuve tangible.

## Couche de grandiose

Un jour à New York, le dada est mort. Peut-être en 1921, quand *The Little Review* a perdu son procès en obscénité pour avoir publié *l'Ulysse* de James Joyce ; et la liberté promise par le Nouveau Continent évaporée. Duchamp et toute la bande sont partis fissa en France, et Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven est restée un temps, seule et déprimée, ayant transformé toute son admiration pour l'artiste français en haine sourde. Après un passage par Berlin, elle finit par rejoindre à Paris sa nouvelle amie, l'autrice lesbienne Djuna Barnes, qui hérite à son tour de tout son amour débordant et qu'elle s'imagine épouser. Mais malgré le soutien sans faille de Djuna Barnes, qui s'occupe d'elle et lui sert d'éditrice, d'agente et de VRP, l'épuisement et la misère la submergent. Elle nourrit les souris qui prolifèrent dans sa chambre à Montparnasse et se fâche avec à peu près tout le monde.



«God» (1917) d'Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven et Morton Schamberg. (Sepia Times/Sepia Times/Universal Images Gro)  
*photographié par 5*

Le 14 décembre 1927, la baronne se met au lit avec son pékinois Pinky, et ne se réveille pas. Le gaz est resté allumé dans son appartement, l'empoisonnant à 53 ans, dix ans tout juste après la présentation de *Fontaine* au Salon des artistes indépendants. **Mort accidentelle ou suicide ?** En l'absence de note ou de mise en scène, ses amis ont du mal à croire que le geste peut émaner de celle qui ne fait rien sans l'enrober d'une couche de grandiose. Certains spéculent qu'**un amant aurait pu lui jouer un tour** en allumant le gaz en la quittant, et que, trop fatiguée, elle ne s'en serait juste pas rendu compte. Mais peut-être s'agit-il d'une énième farce de la baronne que de choisir, à rebours de ce que *la bonne blague...*



l'on attendait d'elle, de disparaître sans un bruit. Une disparition totale puisque, malgré la description par Djuna Barnes de son enterrement au Père-Lachaise, impossible de retrouver la trace d'une tombe ou d'une inhumation.

→ Camille Poir, auteure de *Mine Lachaise sans la tombe* & du cimetière

Vu d'aujourd'hui, aussi séduisante que soit l'hypothèse baronne, il est impossible d'établir formellement que Duchamp n'est pas le cerveau derrière *Fontaine*. Irene Gammel s'est bien gardée de le faire, même si elle introduit dans son livre tous les éléments qui font selon elle planer l'ombre d'Elsa sur ce petit coup de génie. Ceux qui ont pris fait et cause pour cette théorie affirment notamment que Duchamp n'aurait pas pu acheter l'urinoir là où il l'avait dit, le magasin ne commercialisant pas le modèle en question, et que l'artiste aurait attendu la mort de son ancienne soupirante pour revendiquer la paternité de l'œuvre.

toucher au génie!

Mais cette remise en question du sacro-saint artiste a créé des remous dans le monde de l'art, conservateurs et chercheurs se bastonnant assez violemment par médias interposés. Il faut dire que de nombreux imprudents ont voulu voir dans ce qui n'étaient qu'indices ou hypothèses des faits avérés. Mais même si la baronne n'avait finalement rien à voir avec *Fontaine*, débarquer sans gêne d'outre-tombe pour piquer un peu de la lumière de son «*Marcel Duchamp*» qui malgré toutes ses belles idées rebelles sur l'art est devenu un grand nom, un artiste avec un grand A, n'est-ce pas le geste le plus dada qui soit ?

(1) *Baroness Elsa : Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* d'Irene Gammel, MIT Press, 2003.



The Warriors - MARDSEN HARTLEY 1993

# THE BLIND MAN

## The Richard Mutt Case

*They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.*

*Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.*

*What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:—*

- 1. Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.*
- 2. Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.*

*Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.*

*Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.*

*As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.*

### “Buddha of the Bathroom”

I suppose monkeys hated to lose their tail. Necessary, useful and an ornament, monkey imagination could not stretch to a tailless existence (and frankly, do you see the biological beauty of our loss of them?), yet now that we are used to it, we get on pretty well without them. But evolution is not pleasing to the monkey race; “there is a death in every change” and we monkeys do not love death as we should. We are like those philosophers whom Dante placed in his Inferno with their heads set the wrong way on their shoulders. We walk forward looking backward, each with more of his predecessors' personality than his own. Our eyes are not ours.

The ideas that our ancestors have joined together let no man put asunder! In *La Dissociation des Idees*, Remy de Gourmont, quietly analytic, shows how sacred is the marriage of ideas. At least one charm-

ing thing about our human institution is that although a man marry he can never be *only* a husband. Besides being a money-making device and the *one* man that *one* woman can sleep with in legal purity without sin he may even be as well some other woman's very personification of her abstract idea. Sin, while to his employees he is nothing but their “Boss,” to his children only their “Father,” and to himself certainly something more complex.

But with objects and ideas it is different. Recently we have had a chance to observe their meticulous monogamy.

When the jurors of *The Society of Independent Artists* fairly rushed to remove the bit of sculpture called the *Fountain* sent in by Richard Mutt, because the object was irrevocably associated in their atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort. Yet to any “innocent” eye

how pleasant is its chaste simplicity of line and color! Someone said, "Like a lovely Buddha"; someone said, "Like the legs of the ladies by Cezanne"; but have they not, those ladies, in their long, round nudity always recalled to your mind the calm curves of decadent plumbers' porcelains?

At least as a touchstone of Art how valuable it might have been! If it be true, as Gertrude Stein says, that pictures that are right stay right, consider, please, on one side of a work of art with excellent references from the Past, the *Fountain*, and on the other almost anyone of the majority of pictures now blushing along the miles of wall in the Grand Central Palace of ART. Do you see what I mean?

Like Mr. Mutt, many of us had quite an exorbitant notion of the independence of the Independents. It was a sad surprise to learn of a Board of Censors sitting upon the ambiguous question, What is ART?

To those who say that Mr. Mutt's exhibit may be Art, but is it the art of Mr. Mutt since a plumber made it? I reply simply that the *Fountain* was not made by a plumber but by the force of an imagination; and of imagination it has been said, "All men are shocked by it and some overthrown by it." There are those of my intimate acquaintance who pretending to admit the imaginative vigor of Mr. Mutt and his porcelain, slyly quoted to me a story told by Montaigne in his *Force of the Imagination* of a man, whose Latin name I can by no means remember, who so studied the very "essence and motion of folly" as to unsettle his initial judgment forevermore; so that through overmuch wisdom he became a fool. It is a pretty story, but in defense of Mr. Mutt I must in justice point out that our merry Montaigne

is a garrulous and gullible old man, neither safe nor scientific, who on the same subject seriously cites by way of illustration, how by the strength simply of her imagination, a white woman gave birth to a "black-a-moor"! So you see how he is good for nothing but quotation, M. Montaigne.

Then again, there are those who anxiously ask, "Is he serious or is he joking?" Perhaps he is both! Is it not possible? In this connection I think it would be well to remember that the sense of the ridiculous *as well as* "the sense of the tragic increases and declines with sensuousness." It puts it rather up to you. And there is among us to-day a spirit of "blague" arising out of the artist's bitter vision of an over-institutionalized world of stagnant statistics and antique axioms. With a frank creed of immutability the Chinese worshipped their ancestors and dignity took the place of understanding; but we who worship Progress, Speed and Efficiency are like a little dog chasing after his own wagging tail that has dazzled him. Our ancestor-worship is without grace and it is because of our conceited hypocrisy that our artists are sometimes sad, and if there is a shade of bitter mockery in some of them it is only there because they know that the joyful spirit of their work is to this age a hidden treasure.

But pardon my praise for, sayeth Nietzsche, "In praise there is more obtrusiveness than in blame"; and so as not to seem officiously sincere or subtly serious, I shall write in above, with a perverse pen, a neutral title that will please none; and as did Remy de Gourmont, that gentle cynic and monkey without a tail, I, too, conclude with the most profound word in language and one which cannot be argued—a pacific Perhaps!

LOUISE NORTON.

#### FOR RICHARD MUTT

One must say every thing,—  
then no one will know.  
To know nothing is to say  
a great deal.  
So many say that they say  
nothing,—but these never really send.  
For some there is no stopping.  
Most stop or get a style.

When they stop they make  
a convention.  
That is their end.  
For the going every thing  
has an idea.  
The going run right along.  
The going just keep going.

C. DEMUTH.

(Copy) Arthur H. Mutt  
 July 12, 1967

