

through the lens:

jan. 21 - feb. 25, 2017

found object / readymade

curated by marilyn waligore

susi brister

francesca
brunetti

rachel cox

shannon
duncan

paho mann

kristy peet

reception: 8:00 - 10:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 21st

artist panel discussions: Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.

rachel cox, paho mann, kristy peet **February 2nd**

susi brister, francesca brunetti **February 9th**



Francesca Brunetti: *Sweet 28*, 2016, archival inkjet print, 16 x 22 inches

This exhibition *Through the Lens: Found Object/Readymade* features artists who use the lens to document objects: organic, inorganic, collected, discarded, precious, sentimental, manufactured, animated, still, even alive. The camera serves as a distancing device to frame, to recontextualize, to prompt viewer awareness. The mass-produced object becomes a readymade, which upsets the object's functionality and challenges our definition of art as unique. Meanwhile, an encounter with the found object taps into the unconscious. These actions address the concept of authorship, the definition of art, and the place of the object in commodity culture. Scholar Margaret Iverson seeks to differentiate between these two categories: "While the readymade is essentially indifferent, multiple, and mass-produced, the found object is essentially singular or irreplaceable, and both lost and found" (Iverson 50). Guided by Surrealist and Dada practices of the 20th century, contemporary artists use photography and video to frame the object a second time, echoing the relationship between selection and presentation of the object and image.

READYMADE

The designation of the readymade upsets the mass-produced object's functionality: engaging in play while disrupting work; incorporating humor; challenging the definition of art by selecting works that are ready-to-go—chosen and then re-presented. When reflecting on the history of Marcel Duchamp's readymade, *Fountain* (1917), the photograph appears front and center. As philosopher and historian Thierry De Duve recounts:

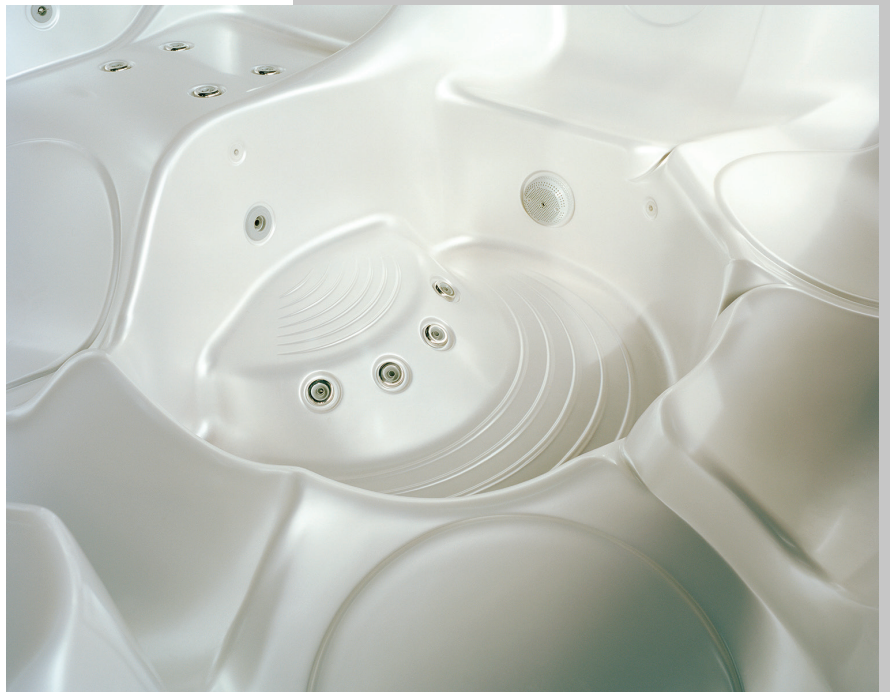
Duchamp's most celebrated readymade—perhaps his most celebrated work—is an object that has disappeared, that practically no one has seen, that never stirred up a public scandal, about which the press at the time never spoke, which never figured in the catalogue of the Independents' Show but made it into a discreet Salon des Refusés, and whose very existence could be doubted were it not for Stieglitz's photograph. This readymade is only known through its reproduction (411).

De Duve's detailed review of this momentous unveiling of Duchamp's *Fountain* affirms that the readymade became known partially through its photographic copy. Furthermore, this image was not recorded by Duchamp, nor by just any photographer. "By photographing the *Fountain*, by inviting McBride to come to see it in his gallery, he [Stieglitz] was actually endorsing it in a roundabout way, as though it had been exhibited at 291, as though Duchamp had been among his protégés" (De Duve 120). Consequently, the validation of Duchamp's urinal occurred through the imprimatur of the renowned modern photographer Alfred Stieglitz, the co-founder of 291 gallery, and champion of photography as a fine art. Through this process of validation, questions regarding the judgment of artworks were forever changed, complicating notions of taste, beauty, and craft as factors in the valuation of an art object.



Susi Brister, *Burnout Bronze*, 2016
archival pigment print on
Hahnemühle photo rag, 10 x 10 inches

Rachel Cox *Nova*, 2015,
archival inkjet print, 31 x 39 inches



Rachel Cox's photographs of details from a hot tub salesroom parallel Duchamp's study of American plumbing. In the context of the readymade, curator Helen Molesworth notes, "objects [bottlerack, urinal, shovel, hat rack, coatrack] designed to aid in the cleaning and tidying up of places and people—[are] rendered deliberately dysfunctional" (52). The shiny, unused hot tubs connote cleanliness, falling into a category described by Molesworth as "bound together by the processes of maintenance.[...]They are the unsung aids that allow us to do the work of maintaining house and body, so that we are better prepared to do our other work, like making art, for instance"(51). The pristine, gleaming plastic forms promise luxurious leisure, while underscoring the connection to the body through multiple orifices--the waterjets and drains that dot the surface. These non-functioning hot tubs lack a connection to a water line. The readymades "help, in other words, to bring the relations of the everyday into focus for us and suggest that experiences of humor may be constitutive of the knowledge of the everyday" (Molesworth 58). We begin to reflect on the absurdity of yet another domestic convenience; Cox reframes the hot tubs with indifference so that they no longer serve as must-have products.

Similarly, **Francesca Brunetti** emphasizes the seductive saturated primary colors, quasi-organic forms, and patterned textures of manufactured candies in her "Sweet" series. She disrupts the familiar advertising representations of synthetic food through her approach to photographing what she describes as "a pure design object. Candies are food in which the material substance is turned into an aesthetic one" (Brunetti). By highlighting the visual design of these objects, she attempts to transform the "aesthetic" of this manufactured food back into the base material which comprises it, namely sugar, along with artificial flavors and colors.

Francesca Brunetti, **Susi Brister** and Kristy Peet explore the relationship between the natural and the artificial, injecting humor



Shannon Duncan, *Untitled*, (Re)Collection series, 2016, archival inkjet print from color negative, 20x20 inches

Kristy Peet, *Gilt World (tree, day 107)*, 2016, archival inkjet print, 22x27 inches



through their transformation of the commonplace in their altered or assisted readymades. Brister explores the gulf between "what we recognize as real and what we understand as 'fake'" (Brister). *Burnout Bronze* (2016) reveals a warm, metallic shroud marked with black broken lines; a crestfallen figure appears to hide under the heavy cloth. The object/figure merges into the matted texture of the background, which resembles rocks densely encrusted with a tan-colored seaweed. The manufactured fabric serves as a camouflage disguise, mimicking the ability of some species to change colors to match their surroundings, while underscoring our own attempts to simulate nature.

By embellishing a sapling with gold leaf, nature becomes a commodity in **Kristy Peet's** *Gilt World* images (2016). Over 107 days, this living object becomes transformed: producing bright green foliage; expanding in size to overcome its gilded surface. Peet brings nature into the studio, albeit with a sense of irony. Rather than photograph rose petals in full bloom, she documents a slow, deliberate passage of time as this twig bends toward the light. Photographed against a white studio backdrop, the multiple images of this object function like evidence of a pseudo-scientific experiment, presented and recorded with indifference.

FOUND OBJECT

The identification of the found object connects to the unconscious, often tapping the historical context of an earlier era, the supposed recollections of a previous owner, which informs the current viewer's awareness. Curator Eva Diaz comments on Surrealist Andre Breton's perspective on the found object:

Breton doesn't acquire these found objects; they seek him out. Previously lost to history, their outmoded, no longer useful forms

embody, personify even, the aspirations and longings of their former owners. A found object, then, is a deeply poignant piece of someone's repurposed trash, an unwanted/outmoded object still pregnant with prior use (Diaz 207).

One never discovers a found object; the object simply locates a new owner. **Shannon Duncan** documents insistent bulky furniture, which defies attempts at the curb for scheduled trash pickup. The worn armrests and tattered edges of the fabric corners of these couches and comfy chairs serve as a past record of human existence. The body molds to the couch; cushions reveal an echo of shapes of former owners. Stains and discoloration hint at patterns of daily use. Duncan affirms her role as collector: "I have a compulsion to collect, document, and photograph discarded, abandoned, and overlooked objects, [...] castaways of a consumer culture" (Duncan). Like their owners, these objects are mortal, yet their demise may be postponed.

Paho Mann's delicate gilded cup bears scratches from prior use; this is not a collector's item. By comparison the nondescript rock frustrates interpretation. Is it a moon rock or anonymous debris? By pairing a stone with a porcelain cup, the materials of dirt or clay become foregrounded; the objects themselves serve as a reminder that they are rough equivalents of one another. Through movement introduced via rotating platforms in his videos *Teacup with Thistle* (2016) and *Rock Version 2* (2016), we consider potential views as as if walking around stationary objects. The artist observes, "There is tension between the seemingly objective ability to examine all sides of the object and the inability to see the entire object at once" (Mann). With the aid of technology, our awareness of these forms is heightened and denied simultaneously, echoing Iverson's observation regarding the found object and perception. "The object found as if by chance is situated at the point of con-

nection between external nature, perception, and the unconscious, and thus has a peculiar, elusive relation to vision" (Iverson 49). Placed against the stark emptiness of the white seamless, the rock and cup appear to hover in space, acquiring a curious presence.

Most individuals now own cameras as well as collections; the use of the lens to generate photo-surrogates of objects has become commonplace. One encounters used items (inexplicable found objects) in online auctions, and manufactured products (potential readymades) on web storefronts. With a click, we may obtain the already-made object or recognize the object that has found us. Perhaps the consumption of these images, and not the objects themselves, represents part of the activity of the online viewer, who scrolls, clicks, zooms in, and occasionally hesitates. This pause, this hesitation, returns us to the role of the viewer in the context of the gallery space. De Duve notes that for Duchamp: "It is this transfer of legislative power that the readymade symbolically accomplished, as its author anticipatively assumed the position of the viewer, of the uninitiated, and handed him or her the right to judge about art, to judge anything whatever as art" (De Duve 339). Anyone can be the judge; the readymade proves it.

-Marilyn Waligore 2016

Work Cited

- Briester, Susi. Artist Statement, 2016.
Brunetti, Francesca. Artist Statement, 2016.
De Duve, Thierry. *Kant after Duchamp*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996. Print.
Díaz, Eva. "A Critical Glossary of Space and Sculpture." *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*. Eds. Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, and Massimiliano Gioni. London: Phaidon, 2007. 206-209. Print.
Duncan, Shannon. Artist Statement, 2016.
Iverson, Margaret. "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph." *Art Journal* (Summer 2004); 45-57. Print.
Mann, Paho. Artist Statement, 2016.
Molesworth, Helen. "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades." *Art Journal* 57.4 (1998): 50-61. Print.

Paho Mann,
Teacup with Thistle,
4K looping video,
2016



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