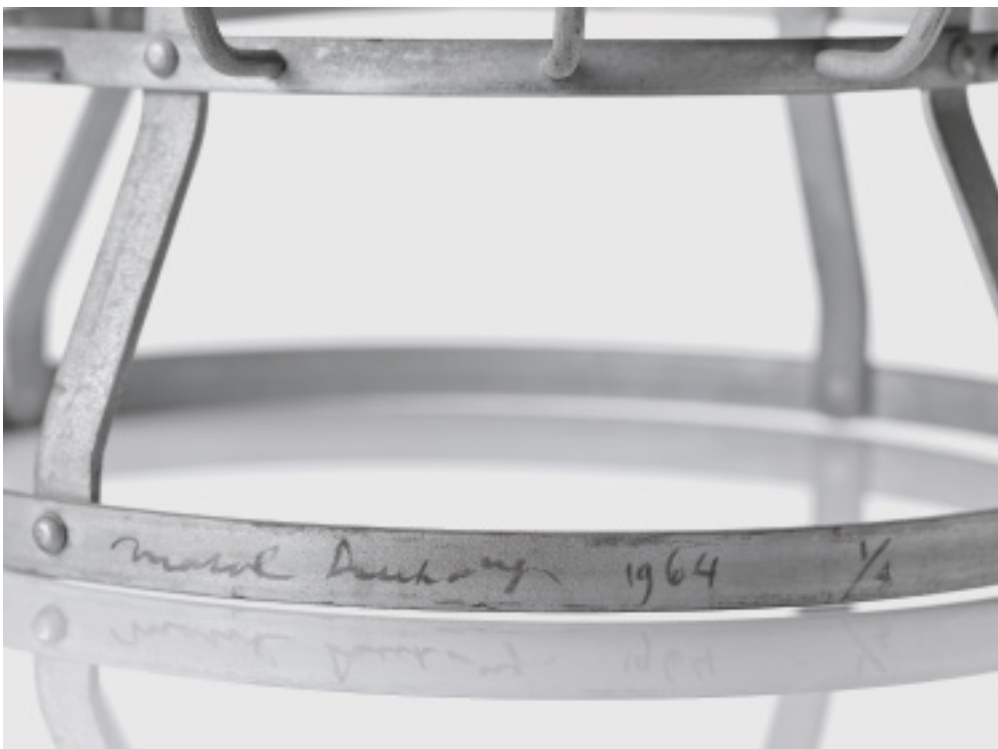


cat. 38



*Porte-bouteilles (Bottlerack),*  
(1914) 1964

Galvanized iron, riveted and welded (no. 1/8)  
Height: 64.2; diameter: 37 cm  
Inscribed, on the outside of the bottom ring:  
Marcel Duchamp 1964 1/8; a copper plate  
affixed to the inside of one of the vertical iron  
bands inscribed: Marcel Duchamp 1964 and  
engraved: PORTE-BOUITEILLES, 1914  
EDITION GALERIE SCHWARZ MILAN  
Edition produced by Galleria Schwarz, Milan  
Prov.: Estate Dieter Keller; acquired in 1985  
with lottery funds  
Inv. no. P 993  
(Schwarz 2000, no. 306g)



## Marcel Duchamp's *Porte-bouteilles*. À la recherche du readymade perdu Dieter Daniels

The most common English designation of the object is *Bottlerack*, Paris 1914. The anodyne obviousness of this designation is deceptive and leaves a multitude of questions unanswered. Technically speaking, it is a work without a title, or rather, the title, like the original work of 1914, are lost. As a matter of fact, the mass-produced utilitarian object Duchamp selected did not have a single definitive name; it was sold in France as *porte-bouteilles*, *égouttoir à bouteilles*, *séchoir à bouteilles*, *hérisson*. So, why is this work so significant to the history of art?

The object marks the beginning of Duchamp's engagement with the readymade. He purchased it in 1914 at the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville department store in Paris and installed it in his studio without modifying it in any way. At that time, it was neither signed nor did it have a title—nor had the term “readymade” yet been coined. It stayed behind in Paris when the First World War prompted Duchamp to leave Europe for New York in 1915. It was never exhibited, and in the absence of any photographs of this “original,” we know nothing definite about its appearance.

In fact, there is no record of its very existence until two years later, when Marcel Duchamp wrote to his sister Suzanne. The letter, dated to “15th January approximately,” contains not only the first mention of the bottle rack but also the first conceptualization of the term “readymade.” Duchamp sought to make the *Porte-bouteilles* “a readymade à distance” and gave his sister instructions how to inscribe and sign it.<sup>1</sup> These instructions amount to

a triple transfer: a claim to be recognized retroactively as the author of an object acquired two years earlier, relayed from New York to Paris with the delegation of the signature to the artist's sister. This undertaking, unique in the history of art, was dashed by mail delivery speeds. By the time the letter arrived, Duchamp's Paris studio had been cleared. The object and its inscription disappeared in the mists of time—“dans la nuit des temps,” as Duchamp was to put it later.<sup>2</sup> The exact wording of the planned inscription remains a subject of debate among experts.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until two decades later that the *Porte-bouteilles* was heard of again. In the 1930s, the Surrealists, having embraced literature, painting and film, turned their attention to the found object. A replica of the *Porte-bouteilles* (fig. 1) was shown alongside fetish objects from New Guinea, mathematical instruments from the Henri Poincaré Institute, and Meret Oppenheim's *Déjeuner en fourrure* (*Fur-lined Teacup*) in the *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* mounted by André Breton in 1936. With this curatorial constellation, Breton opened a historical reference field for Surrealist *objets trouvés* and paved the way for a far-reaching reinterpretation of the readymade.

A special issue of the periodical *Cahiers d'Art*, published to coincide with the exhibition, was the first publication to feature a photograph of the *Porte-bouteilles* (fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> Taken by Man Ray, the full-page image of the exhibition replica accompanied the first survey of Duchamp's work in a French art magazine (cat. 8). The author, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, a close friend of Duchamp's, explained the principle of the readymade as a conceptual attitude that could not be reduced to individual objects.<sup>5</sup> At the end of 1936, the photograph stood in for the *Porte-bouteilles* in the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art in



fig. 1  
*Porte-bouteilles*, (1914) 1936  
 In the *Exposition surréaliste d'objets*,  
 Galerie Charles Ratton, Paris 1936,  
 photograph: Man Ray

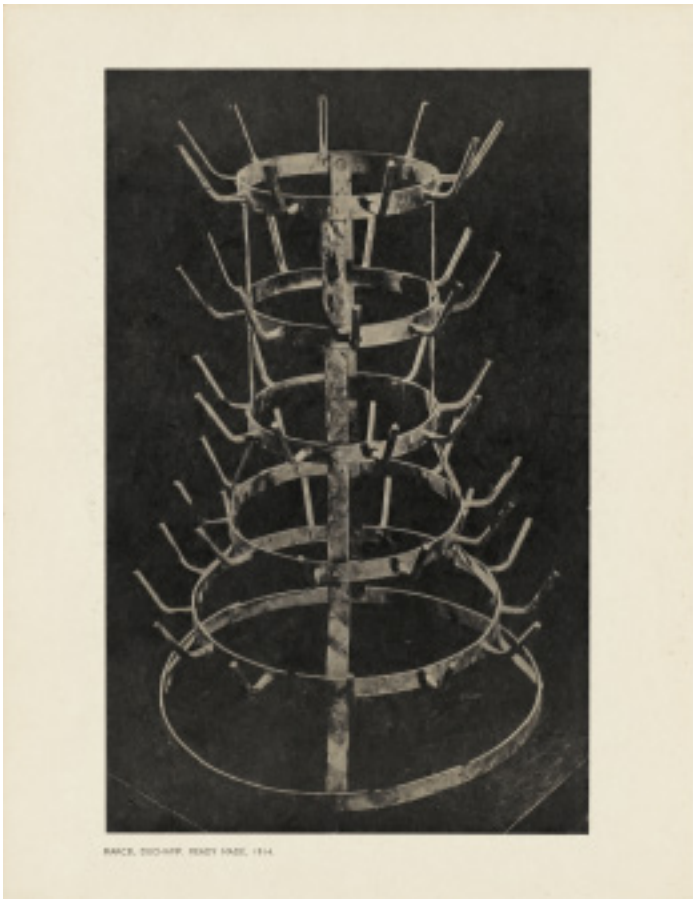


fig. 2  
*Porte-bouteilles*, (1914) 1936,  
 photograph: Man Ray, in *Cahiers d'Art*, 11, 1-2,  
 Paris 1936  
 cat. 8



fig. 3  
 Plate *Porte-bouteilles* from the  
*Boîte-en-valise*, (1941) 1966  
 cat. 46

New York. Thus, two decades after the failed designation as a readymade *à distance*, *Porte-bouteilles* was presented at several prominent locations and in three different formats.

Man Ray's 1936 photograph of the exhibition replica of the *Porte-bouteilles* also served Marcel Duchamp as the basis for the elaborately printed image (fig. 3) that went into his *Boîte-en-valise* (*Box in a Valise*, cat. 46).<sup>6</sup> In this well-known and still widely circulated image, which is more of an autonomous work than a documentary photograph, the object seems to float in an indeterminate space, casting an atmospheric but impossible shadow that is nothing other than an out-of-register silhouette of the object itself. The bottle rack seems to float in front of its own form, a stand-in for itself—perhaps a reference to the lost original of 1914 and its replacement with replicas.

In the 1960s, Duchamp signed several replicas of the *Porte-bouteilles*, some of which had been chosen by third parties. In 1962, for example, Duchamp suggested to Werner Hofmann that he purchase a new bottle rack at the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville for the permanent display at the newly founded Museum of Modern Art in Vienna.<sup>7</sup> Today, that bottle rack, unsigned and without an inscription, is part of the collection of the Hamburg Kunsthalle, which Hofmann directed from 1969. Thus, the failed 1916 project of authorizing a readymade *à distance* finally came to fruition.

The *Porte-bouteilles* in the collection of the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart is part of the edition of fourteen readymades as multiples by the Arturo Schwarz Gallery in 1964. The edition marked the passage of half a century since Duchamp's selection of the original *Porte-bouteilles* in 1914. At the same time, it put an end to the artist's generous practice of signing sundry "readymade" bottle racks, as his contract with the Schwarz Gallery

obligated him to guarantee the exclusivity of the multiple.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the miscellaneous diversity of objects made way for a standard form (fig. 4), which, as Arturo Schwarz asserted, replicated that of the lost original, even though its dimensions and appearance were not recorded. The production of the multiple was based on Man Ray's photograph of the equally lost exhibition replica of 1936, the same photograph that had served Duchamp in the production of his *Boîte-en-valise*.

Duchamp studies have not devoted a great deal of critical attention to the fundamental difference between the simple selection of an industrial product and the manual fabrication of a remake.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Duchamp's final contribution to the subject can be read as a playful reflection on the complexity of the issue. *Suite d'ombres transparents* (*Suite of Transparent Shadows*) was created in 1967 as a supplement to a book about Duchamp's work by Octavio Paz. When presented in a certain way, the shadow of the *Porte-bouteilles*, printed in white on transparent acetate, casts a shadow of its own (fig. 5). We see the shadow of a shadow, or, more precisely, the afterimage (shadow on the wall) of an afterimage (printed shadow of 1967) of an afterimage (multiple of 1964) of an afterimage (Man Ray's photograph of 1936) of an afterimage (replica of 1936) of a lost readymade of 1914.<sup>10</sup>

1 Naumann/Obalk, 2000, pp. 43–44.

2 Marcel Duchamp in a conversation with Philippe Collin, 21 June 1967, in Basel 2002, pp. 37–41, here p. 39. See Duchamp's answer to Serge Stauffer's question as to whether he remembered the inscription (Question no. 18 of the 100 Questions), "No – unfortunately." (French: "Non – malheureusement."), Serge Stauffer, *Cent questions à Monsieur M. Duchamp (One hundred questions to Mister M. Duchamp)*, 1960, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Archiv Serge Stauffer, see transcript in this publication, p. 57.

3 See Blunck 2014, p. 82.

4 Around 1960, Serge Stauffer began to research the dissemination of this photograph, which for a long time remained the only available image of the object. Setting up a card index, he recorded the instances of its publication along with the often contradictory information about the title and the date of the *Porte-bouteilles*, see Serge Stauffer's index cards on the life and work of Marcel Duchamp, in this publication p. 246.

5 Gabrielle Buffet, "Cœurs Volants," in *Cahiers d'Art*, 11, 1–2, 1936, pp. 34–43, here pp. 38–39.

6 See the detailed study by Bonk 1989, p. 233.

7 See facsimile of the letter in Cologne 1988, p. 76.

8 See Marcel Duchamp's letter of 1964 in Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Gent/New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 245.

9 See Daniels 2018. One of the rare theoretical reflections on this topic by Séverine Gossart comes to the conclusion: "All in all, the Schwarz edition is a set of sculptures that wipe out the process of the readymades, even while reproducing their material appearance as faithfully as possible." Séverine Gossart, "Des Originaux dérivés. La situation des ready-mades de Marcel Duchamp dans les années 1950–1960," in *The Challenge of the Object*, 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art, Congress Proceedings – Part 1, eds. G. Ulrich Großmann and Petra Krutisch (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2013), p. 160.

10 Duchamp's abiding interest in the shadows cast by readymades is borne out by the image of the *Porte-bouteilles* for the *Boîte-en-valise*, but his fascination with cast shadows goes back much further. The photograph *Ombres portées* (*Cast Shadows*, cat. 3) of 1918 in the collection of the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart shows shadows of the readymades *Hat Rack*, *Bicycle Wheel*, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (cropped top left) and *With Hidden Noise* in a constellation with *Sculpture de voyage* (*Sculpture for Traveling*). A further, thus far unidentified object can be seen at the top right intersecting with *With Hidden Noise*.

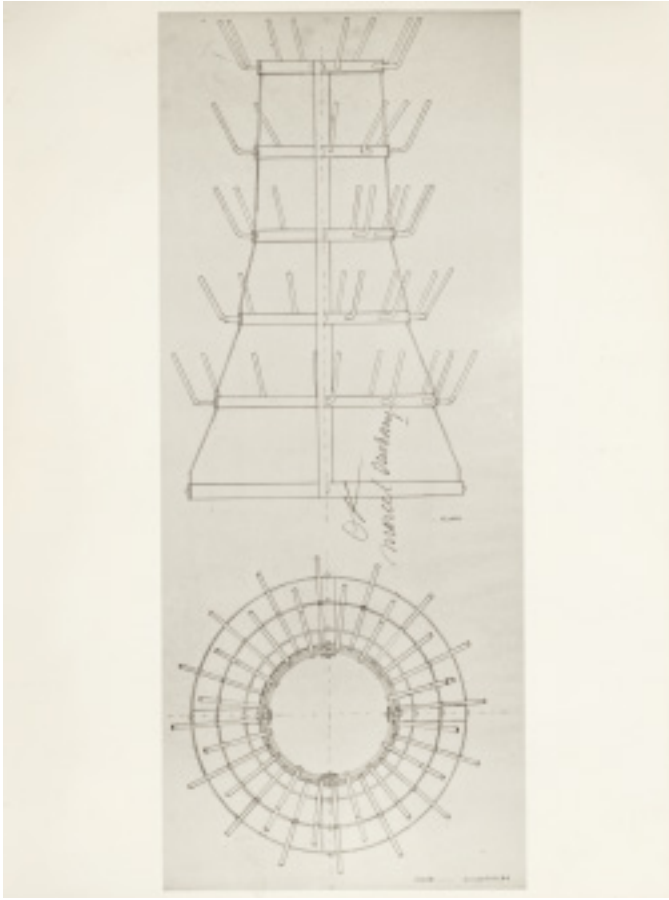


fig. 4  
 Technical drawings of the *Porte-bouteilles* for the production  
 of the multiple of 1964  
 118 × 49cm, annotated in center: OK / Marcel Duchamp  
 Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon



fig. 5  
*Suite d'ombres transparents*, 1967  
 In the exhibition *Schön, euch zu sehen!*,  
 Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, 2015  
 cat. 49