

**John Golding**

MARCEL

**Duchamp**

**The Bride Stripped Bare  
by her Bachelors, Even**



**Art in Context**



## The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even

The *Large Glass*, as this extraordinary work is now familiarly known, occupied Duchamp intermittently for eight years, from 1915 to 1923. And he had been planning it for three years previously, ever since 1912, in Munich and Paris, though he made it in New York. It is one of the most complex, mysterious, and elusive art objects of all time. It has defied imitation. Yet it has changed the course of twentieth-century art and influenced three generations of artists, most of whom have never seen the original. Dr John Golding, in this penetrating study, discusses it first in its historical context – of Cubism and Futurism and later of Dada and Surrealism, which Duchamp did so much to create, though he always remained aloof from group manifestations; then he examines it in the light of contemporary literature, especially of Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel, and goes on to analyse its imagery, mainly sexual, though with other possible meanings and connections, suggesting interesting parallels with certain systems of alchemical procedure and thought. But, as John Golding points out, the work's true meaning is such that no complete explanation or solution of it can be given. For the *Large Glass* is an insoluble enigma. Duchamp, when asked about it, replied that 'there was no solution because there is no problem'. To which John Golding adds that there is no problem because the riddles embedded in it are designed in such a way that they can never be answered. But by leading us deeper and deeper into this extraordinary labyrinth, in which, of course, it is far more interesting and stimulating to be lost than to be shown the way out, he poses some of the unanswerable questions in a new light which illuminates this great work afresh.











*Art in Context*

*Marcel Duchamp: The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*







*Edited by John Fleming and Hugh Honour*

*Each volume in this series discusses a famous painting or sculpture as both image and idea in its context – whether stylistic, technical, literary, psychological, religious, social or political. In what circumstances was it conceived and created? What did the artist hope to achieve? What means did he employ, subconscious or conscious? Did he succeed? Or how far did he succeed? His preparatory drawings and sketches often allow us some insight into the creative process and other artists' renderings of the same or similar themes help us to understand his problems and ambitions. Technique and his handling of the medium are fascinating to watch close up. And the work's impact on contemporaries and its later influence on other artists can illuminate its meaning for us today.*

*By focusing on these outstanding paintings and sculptures our understanding of the artist and the world in which he lived is sharpened. But since all great works of art are unique and every one presents individual problems of understanding and appreciation, the authors of these volumes emphasize whichever aspects seem most relevant. And many great masterpieces, too often and too easily accepted and dismissed because they have become familiar, are shown to contain further and deeper layers of meaning for us.*



## *Art in Context*

*Marcel Duchamp* was born at Blainville (Seine-Inférieure), France, on 28 July 1887. His father was a notary. The sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1871–1918) and the painter Jacques Villon (pseudonym for Gaston Duchamp, 1875–1963) were his elder brothers. He came to his first artistic maturity during the years of his contact with Cubism. With his *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* of 1912 he established himself as a major, independent figure on the contemporary scene; following its sensational appearance at the New York Armory show of 1913, the *Nude* was to become perhaps the most celebrated ‘modern’ painting in the western hemisphere. Duchamp was subsequently to a very large extent responsible for injecting a proto-Dada element onto the Parisian scene and after his arrival in New York in 1915 he dominated Dada activities there. Subsequently he was to divorce himself from the movement just as he stood aside from Surrealism, a movement which he had done so much to create. Following the abandonment of the *Large Glass* in 1923 he devoted much of his time to chess and he was perhaps the first artist to have acquired a major reputation on the strength of what he failed or refused to produce. In fact he worked steadily throughout his life, at a quiet pace dictated by himself. After his death in 1968 it was discovered that he had been at work on a major artistic complex, *Étant Donnés*, which has since been installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. His influence on contemporary, post-war art has been to a large extent oblique, yet incalculable.

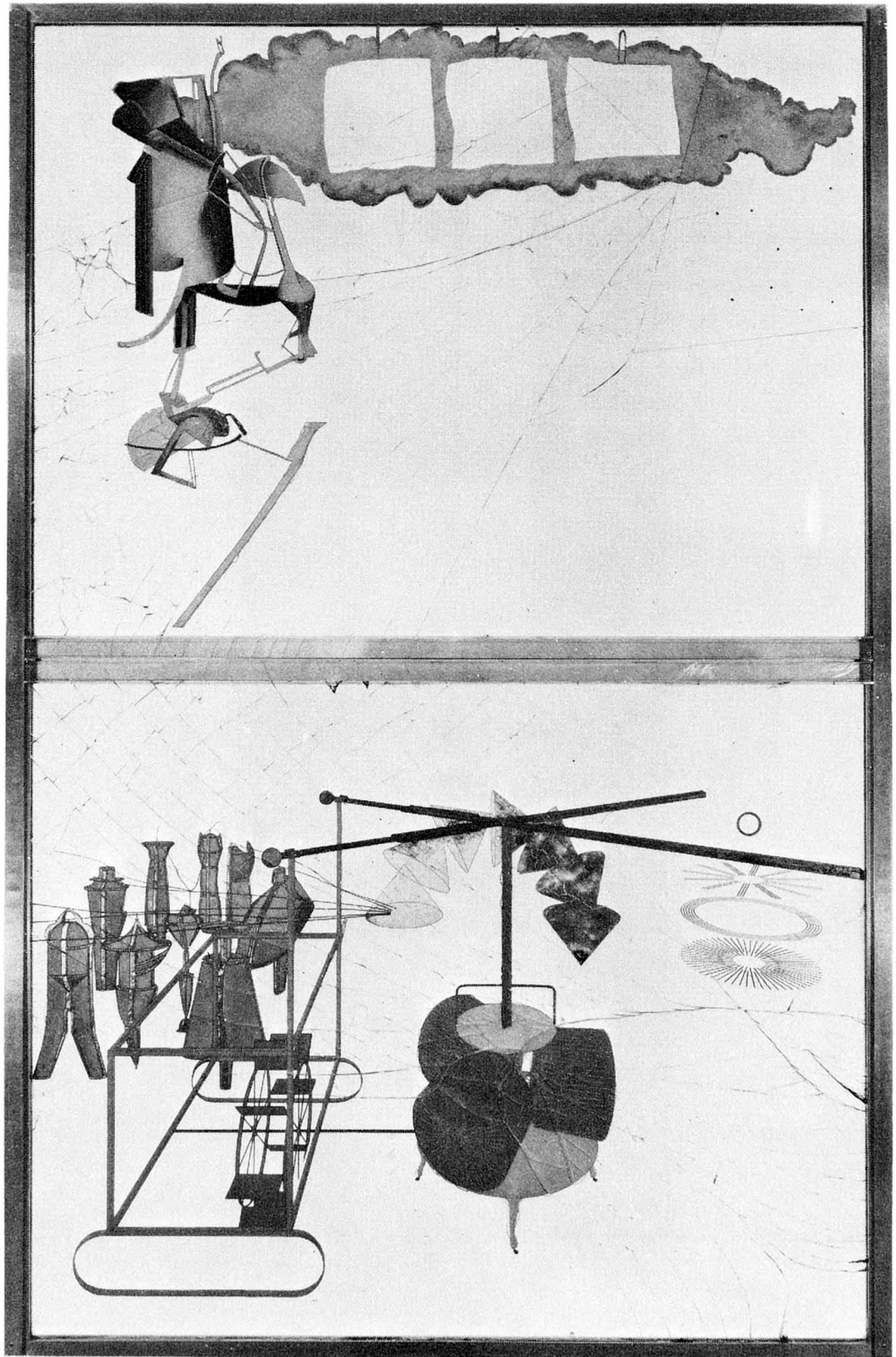
*The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, familiarly known as the *Large Glass*, was executed by Duchamp in New York during the years 1915–23, although almost all the plans for the work and some definitive studies for the component parts of it date from 1912 to 1915, the year in which he left France for America. It is executed in oil paint, lead wire and foil, dust and varnish on glass. The *Large Glass* was shattered in 1926 following its first public showing at the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum. It was exhibited once more, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York during 1943–4, before being installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1953. It is unlikely that it will ever travel again and it remains one of the most mysterious and elusive works of art of all time. It has defied imitation, and yet it has changed the course of twentieth-century art and influenced three generations of artists, most of whom have never seen the original.

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Marcel Duchamp:  
The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even

*John Golding*





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*Historical Table* 8, 9

*Introduction* 11

1. *The Bride* 15

2. *The Bachelors* 55

3. *The Stripping* 83

*Epilogue* 94

*Notes* 103

*A Bibliographical Note* 107

*List of Illustrations* 109

*Index* 115

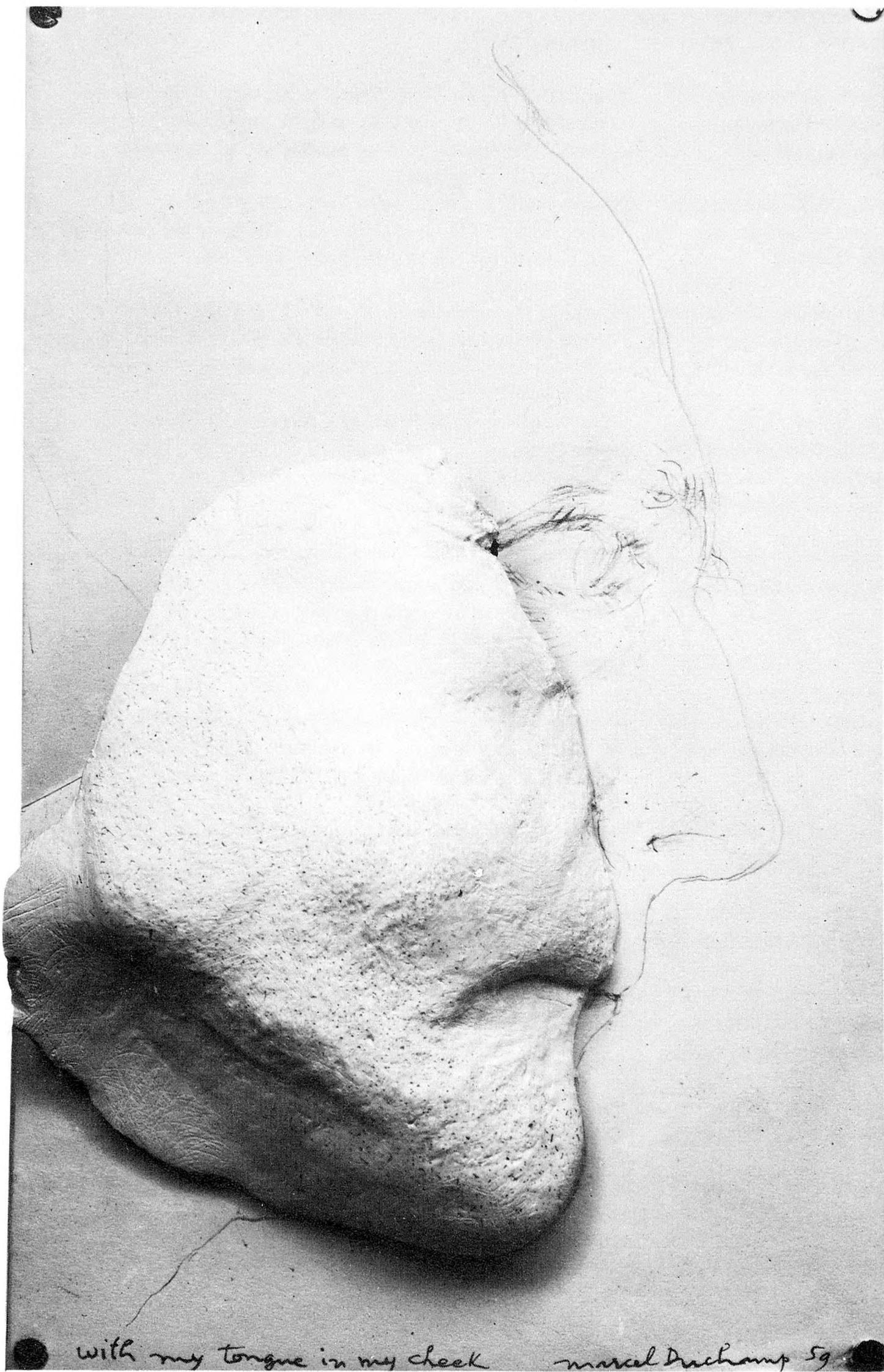
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*Historical Table*

1910	Mexican revolution.
1911	Moroccan Crisis. Italo-Turkish War.
1912	First Balkan War.
1913	Second Balkan War. France extends military service to three years.
1914	Outbreak of First World War.
1915	Italy enters the war. First use of poison gas.
1916	The battle of Verdun. Tanks go into action for the first time. Death of Emperor Franz Joseph.
1917	America enters the war. February and October revolutions in Russia.
1918	Declaration of Armistice. German revolution. Influenza epidemic.
1919	Treaty of Versailles. Founding of Communist International.
1920	Prohibition, slump and first women's votes in U.S.A. First chemical fumigators.
1921	
1922	Fascists come to power in Italy.
1923	
1924	



Manifesto of Futurist Painting. Cubism enters its 'hermetic' or 'classical' phase. Picasso's <i>Fanny Tellier</i> . Matisse's <i>La Danse et La Musique</i> .	Arthur Evans excavates Knossos. Stravinsky's <i>Firebird</i> first performed.	1910
The Cubists show for the first time as a group at the Paris <i>Indépendants</i> . Death of Douanier Rousseau. Braque's <i>Le Portugais</i> . Rousseau retrospective exhibition.	Foundation of the <i>Blaue Reiter</i> in Munich. Schoenberg expounds the twelve-tone scale in his <i>Harmonielehre</i> . Jarry's <i>Dr Faustroll</i> . First production of Roussel's <i>Impressions d'Afrique</i> .	1911
<i>Section d'Or</i> exhibition. First Cubist <i>collages</i> and <i>papiers collés</i> . Delaunay's <i>Fenêtres</i> . Futurists exhibit for the first time in Paris. Duchamp visits Munich.	Gleizes and Metzinger's <i>Du Cubisme</i> . 2nd edition of Kandinsky's <i>On the Spiritual in Art</i> . Jung's <i>Symbols of Transformation</i> . Apollinaire's <i>Zone</i> . Revival of <i>Impressions d'Afrique</i> .	1912
Cubism enters its first fully 'synthetic' phase. The New York Armory show. Picasso's <i>Femme en Chemise</i> . Duchamp employed at Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève. Duchamp's first 'ready-made'.	Husserl's <i>Phenomenology</i> . Freud's <i>Totem and Taboo</i> . First performance of Stravinsky's <i>Rite of Spring</i> . Apollinaire's <i>Les Peintres Cubistes</i> and <i>Antitradition Futuriste</i> . Proust's <i>Du Côté de Chez Swann</i> . Boccioni's <i>Unique Forms of Continuity in Space</i> .	1913
Kandinsky moves into total abstraction. Mondrian's 'plus and minus' series. Picasso produces drawings that look forward to Neo-classicism and Surrealism. Death of Duchamp-Villon.	Kafka begins <i>The Trial</i> . Gide's <i>Les Caves du Vatican</i> . Marinetti's <i>Zang Tumb Tuum</i> .	1914
Duchamp's arrival in New York: begins work on <i>Large Glass</i> .	Dada painters and poets assemble in New York and Zurich. Einstein's general theory of relativity. Malevitch's Suprematist Manifesto.	1915
		1916
Léger's <i>La Partie de Cartes</i> . Picasso visits Rome and Naples and moves towards a fully Neo-classical style. Death of Degas. Death of Rodin.	First performance of <i>Parade</i> . De Stijl launched in Holland. Apollinaire's lecture <i>l'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes</i> . First performance of Apollinaire's <i>Les Mamelles de Tiresias</i> .	1917
Ozenfant and Jeanneret publish <i>Après le Cubisme</i> and launch Purism. Duchamp to Buenos Aires for 9 months. Duchamp's <i>Tu m'</i> .	Death of Apollinaire. Death of Debussy.	1918
Schwitter's first <i>Merz</i> collages. Léger's <i>La Ville</i> . Death of Renoir. Duchamp returns to Paris for some months.	The Bauhaus founded in Weimar by Gropius. First issue of <i>Littérature</i> . First automatic texts by Breton and Souppault.	1919
<i>Festivale Dada</i> at the Salle Gaveau. Cologne Dada reaches its apogee. Duchamp, Katherine Dreier and Man Ray found <i>Société Anonyme</i> .	Kahnweiler's <i>Rise of Cubism</i> (written 1915). Satie's <i>Socrate</i> . Valéry's <i>Le Cimetière Marin</i> .	1920
Picasso's <i>Three Musicians</i> . Ernst produces paintings that are totally Surrealist in character. Duchamp spends six months in Paris.	The Surrealists stage the Trial of Barrès. Kafka writes <i>The Castle</i> .	1921
	Breton publishes his interview with Freud. Frazer's <i>Golden Bough</i> and Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> . T. S. Eliot's <i>Waste Land</i> . Death of Proust.	1922
The <i>Large Glass</i> abandoned. Duchamp returns to Paris for three years.	Freud's <i>The Ego and the Id</i> . Honneger's <i>Pacific 231</i> .	1923
	First Surrealist Manifesto.	1924



*With My Tongue in My Cheek,*  
1959. Marcel Duchamp



## *Introduction*

In 1926 *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (perhaps already known to its familiars as the *Large Glass* [colour plate]) was shattered while in transit following its first public appearance at the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum.<sup>1</sup> It is a work that today still holds a substantial claim to be the most complex and elaborately pondered art object that the twentieth century has yet produced. It had occupied its author's physical energies, intermittently, over a period of eight years, between 1915 and 1923, when it was abandoned in its present unfinished state, and it had absorbed all his unique intellectual powers from 1912 to 1915, the years during which plans for the great work were being elaborated and finalized. When he was informed of the disaster of 1926<sup>2</sup> Duchamp expressed only wry amusement, but ten years later he spent some laborious months piecing his creation together again, and as one by one the small fragments of glass and paint slotted into place so was one of the most remarkable myths in the history of art consolidated. Speaking of the breakage Duchamp later remarked that the cracks 'brought the work back into the world',<sup>3</sup> and it is true that the network of lines gives the work an air of physicality, if only because it serves to remind the viewer of the vulnerability of its prime matter. At the same time the restoration involved enclosing the original work between two sheets of heavier plate glass and the whole was encased in a new metal frame, so that the work has acquired the character of some giant icon, battered and venerable before its time.

The *Large Glass* was shown publicly only once again, at the Museum of Modern Art during the course of 1943-4, before it reached its final destination. In 1953 it joined the Arensberg collec-

tion in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a collection rich in the work of Duchamp's contemporaries but dedicated above all to a survey of his art, and there it has remained. Its condition is not good (the thin lead wires which serve to delineate most of the elements of the *Glass*, for example, have in places come loose, and much of the colour is badly faded) and it is unlikely that it will ever travel again. The projects and studies that led up to the final work were to be of cardinal importance in the emergence of the visual manifestations of Dada and Surrealism, although Duchamp himself for the most part was to keep aristocratically aloof from the most public and aggressive aspects of the two movements; the great work itself, on the other hand, although it has earned the accolade of two reconstructions by distinguished figures in the contemporary art world,<sup>4</sup> has in the wider sense of the word defied imitation. And yet despite its vicissitudes, its immobility, its relative inaccessibility (or partly because of these factors?) the *Large Glass* continues to emit a strange, pervasive intellectual perfume that has touched and transformed the lives and work of countless artists, many of whom have never seen the original.

Duchamp has said of it, 'The *Glass* is not to be looked at for itself but only as a function of a catalogue I never made.'<sup>5</sup> In fact in 1934 he published his *Green Box*, a compilation of documents, plans, sketches and notes made in connection with the *Large Glass* between 1912 and 1915 to which he added a few notes concerning his American ready-mades and some slightly later experiments in optics, which in retrospect he had come to see as significant in its genesis and elaboration.<sup>6</sup> Each of the slips of paper in the *Green Box* was reproduced in exact facsimile and these were then assembled in a deliberately random order, so that their arrangement varied from box to box. Although they fail, and indeed were not intended to explain the *Large Glass* rationally, the written notes complement their great visual counterpart and they help to illuminate a work which Duchamp himself has aptly described as 'a wedding of mental and visual concepts'.



The appearance of the *Green Box* provoked Breton's beautiful essay *Phare de la Mariée* (the reference is to Baudelaire's poem *Les Phares*, in which he compares artists to beacons or lighthouses radiating shafts of light out into the surrounding darkness), which appeared for the first time in the Surrealist biased periodical *Minotaure* in 1935. In it Breton described the *Large Glass* as 'a mechanical and cynical interpretation of the phenomenon of love', and, as he suggests, the work is concerned with the attempts of the bride and her bachelors to consummate the physical union which they both so desire (although the bride has odd hesitations) and which, it will be seen, they both recognize themselves as incapable of achieving. But if Breton's essay has never been superceded as a sympathetic commentary on the *Large Glass* – only Octavio Paz's recent short text rivals it in its imaginative insights<sup>7</sup> – this is because he was prepared to accept the fact that it was designed as an insoluble enigma. Duchamp when questioned about the work once said, 'There is no solution because there is no problem',<sup>8</sup> and this quotation might perhaps be justifiably expanded to say, '. . . and there is no problem because the riddles that are embedded in the *Large Glass* are in any case designed in such a way that they can never be answered.' The present essay contains no magic thread to lead the reader out of a labyrinth in which it is anyway more stimulating to be lost – it can only attempt to pose some of the unanswerable questions in a slightly different light.



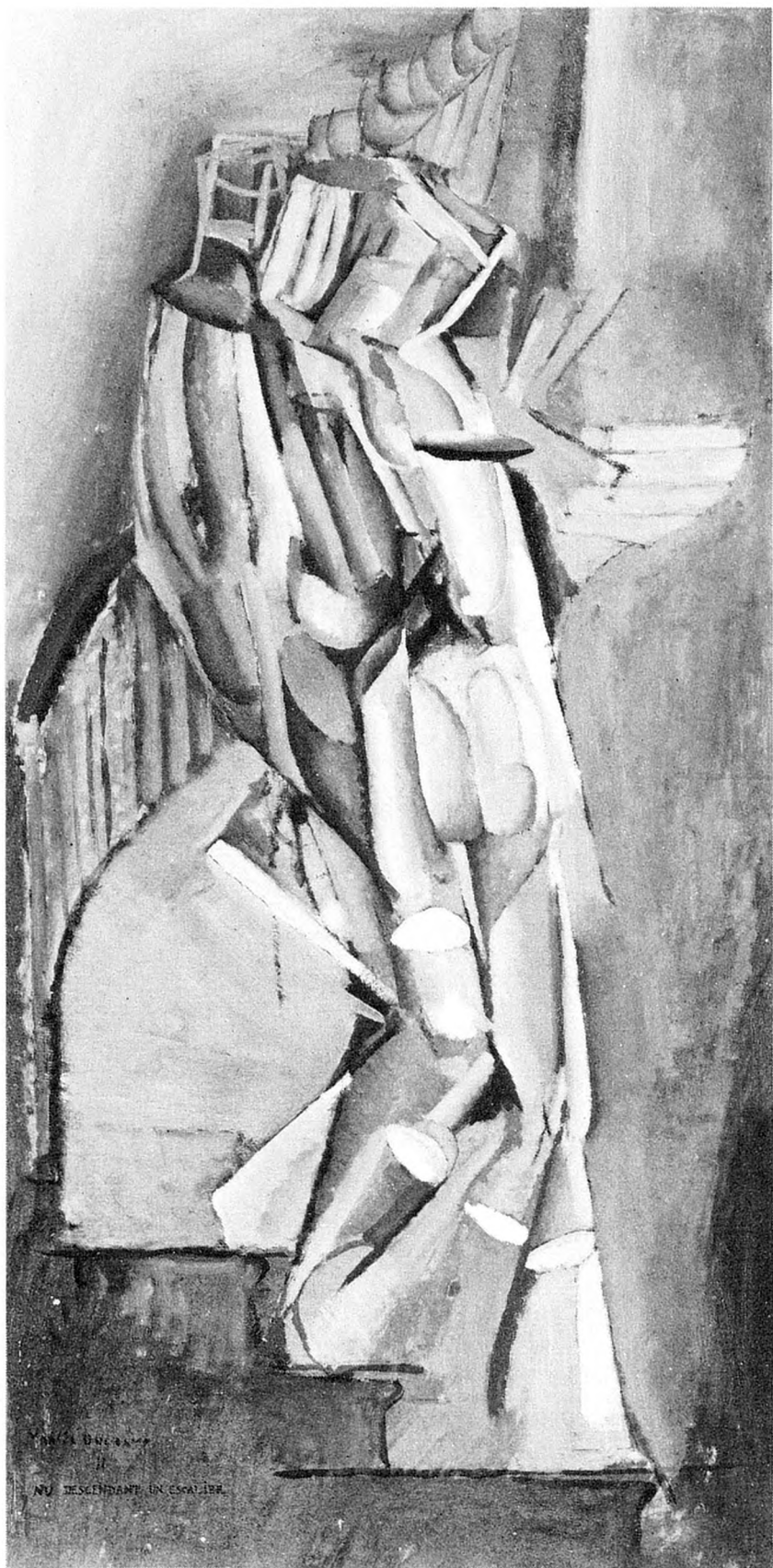


## 1. *The Bride*

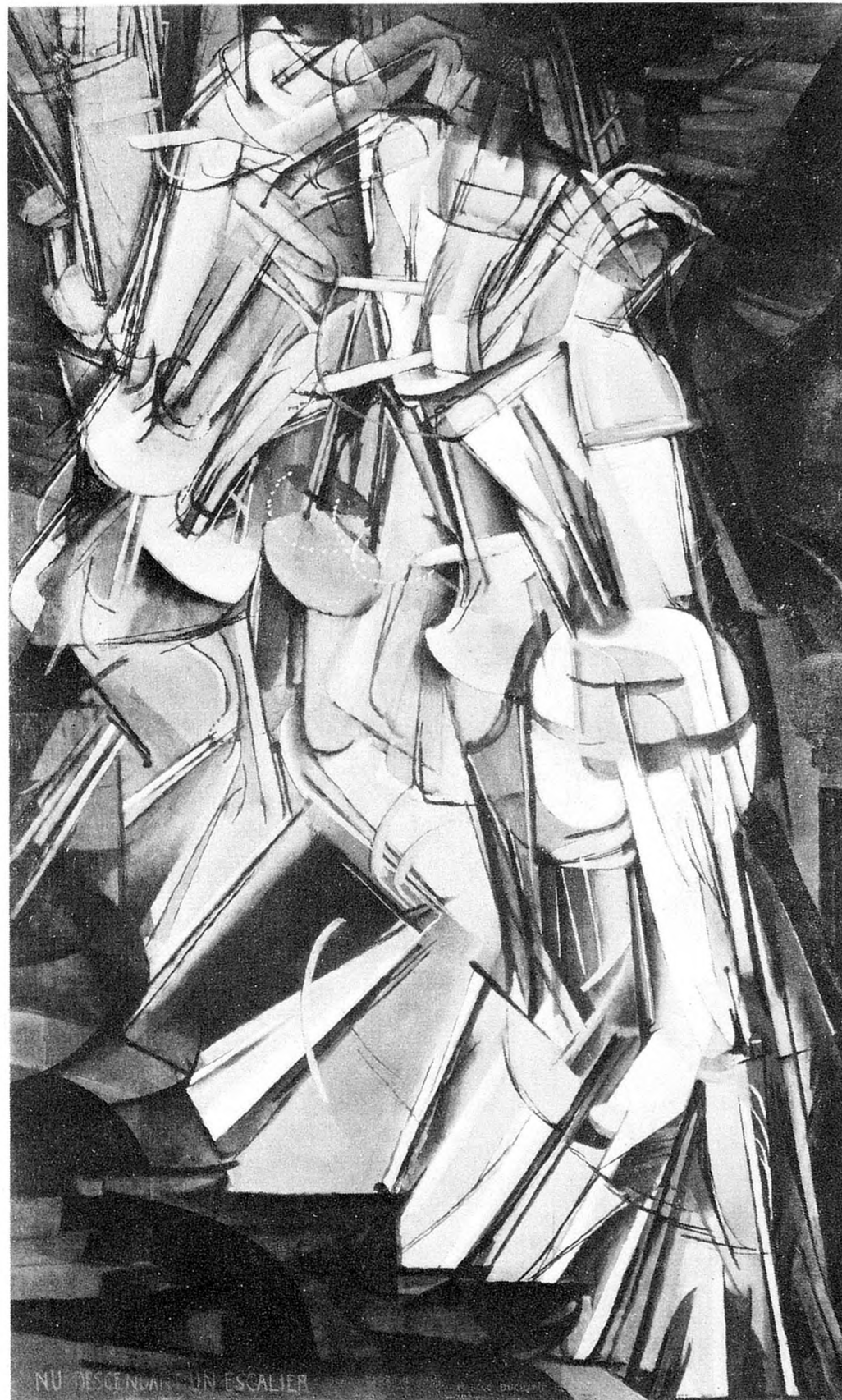
The *Bride* is the summation and embodiment of all the female figures in Duchamp's work from the first tentative sketches of his earliest youth through to the definitive oil painting of 1912, which was only slightly simplified for incorporation into the *Large Glass*. But she has her origins most directly in two particular works, both of these, characteristically enough, very minor in appearance, since for Duchamp the casual, allusive remark is always more redolent of possibilities and of meaning than the emphatic, elaborately pondered statement. The first of these direct ancestresses of the *Bride* is a drawing, little more than a scribble, designed as an illustration or accompaniment to Jules Laforgue's poem *Encore à Cet Astre* [1],

1. *Encore à Cet Astre*, 1911.  
Close-up of drawing.  
Marcel Duchamp





2. *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 1*,  
1911. Marcel Duchamp



3. *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*,  
1912. Marcel Duchamp

which subsequently gave birth to two important oil paintings, the two versions of the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, the second of which represents Duchamp's first fully mature artistic statement [2, 3]. The signature and the date 1912 were inscribed on the drawing when Duchamp gave it to F. C. Torrey who had acquired the definitive canvas following its sensational appearance at the Armory Show in New York early in 1913; the drawing, however, clearly precedes the first, preparatory oil painting on which Duchamp was at work at the end of 1911. Insofar as these two canvases (and in particular the latter) introduced a new dimension into contemporary French art, the freely pencilled image of a woman in motion (seen in the sketch as ascending rather than descending a staircase) can be regarded as the *Bride's* stylistic and technological antecedent.

Duchamp had entered the Cubist orbit during the course of 1911, in the company of his elder brothers Jacques Villon (a pseudonym), a highly gifted painter, and Duchamp-Villon, an equally talented sculptor; Villon's studio at Puteaux, on the outskirts of Paris, was soon to become an important meeting place for painters and writers moving in Cubist circles, although the true creators of the style, Picasso and Braque, remained almost entirely apart. Duchamp's work of 1911 shares many of the concerns of the Puteaux group and in particular an interest in what was to become known as the concept of 'simultaneity', a catch word in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war. Simultaneity was interpreted in very different ways by various artists but was concerned with the representation of time, or with the crystallization of a moment of dynamic, cosmic flux. Duchamp's *Portrait*, [4] a significant work of 1911, shows the same figure in successive stages of motion. *Sonata*, [5] in many ways a companion piece and depicting his three sisters making music, watched over by their mother, gives the impression of being a 'memory' painting in that the figures float in a vague, undefined space; the piano is symbolized by a keyboard suspended in air, while Mme Duchamp seems to

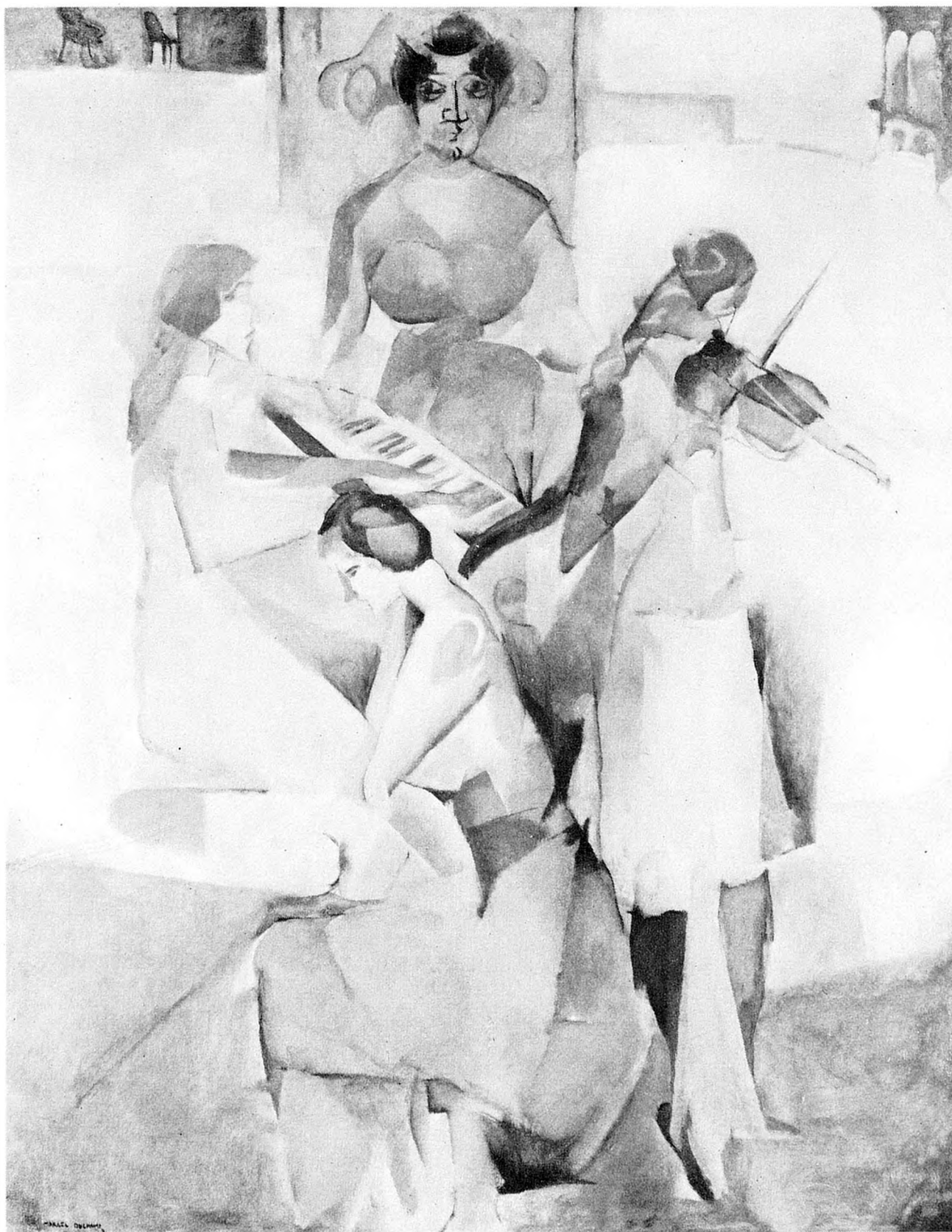




swim forward in front of the girls behind whom she is apparently standing. In both paintings the pictorial depth is restricted and the figures (and to a certain extent their surroundings) are treated in faceted, semi-transparent planes which tend to cling to the picture surface in the manner of early Cubist canvases, while the mother's face in *Sonata* combines in a somewhat schematic fashion full face and profile views. The light, lyrical colour schemes and the tentative, rather evasive handling of space, however, are peculiar to

4 (left). *Portrait*, 1911.  
Marcel Duchamp

5. *Sonata*, 1911.  
Marcel Duchamp





Duchamp's art, as is the humorous handling of the woman's figure in *Portrait* – as she crosses the canvas she divests herself of her clothes.

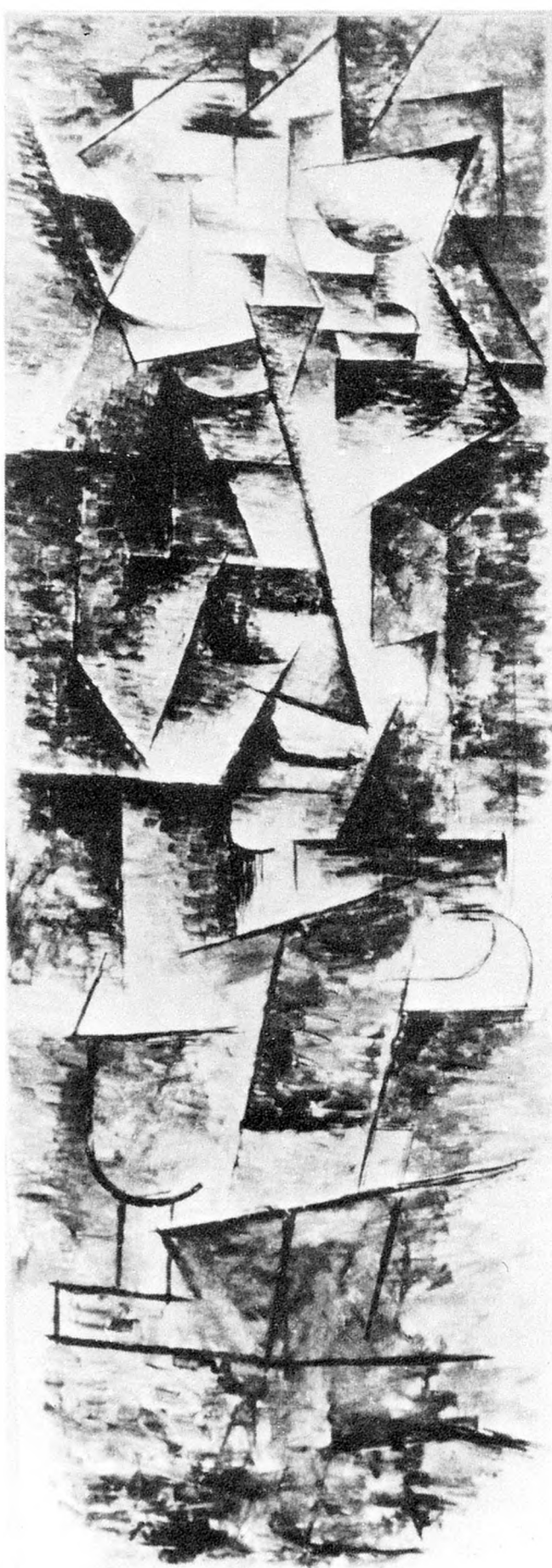
But it is in the two versions of the *Nude Descending*, more than in any other of his works, that Duchamp submitted himself to the pictorial discipline which this supremely sophisticated style



6. *Head*, 1909. Pablo Picasso

7 (right). *Nude*, 1910. Pablo Picasso





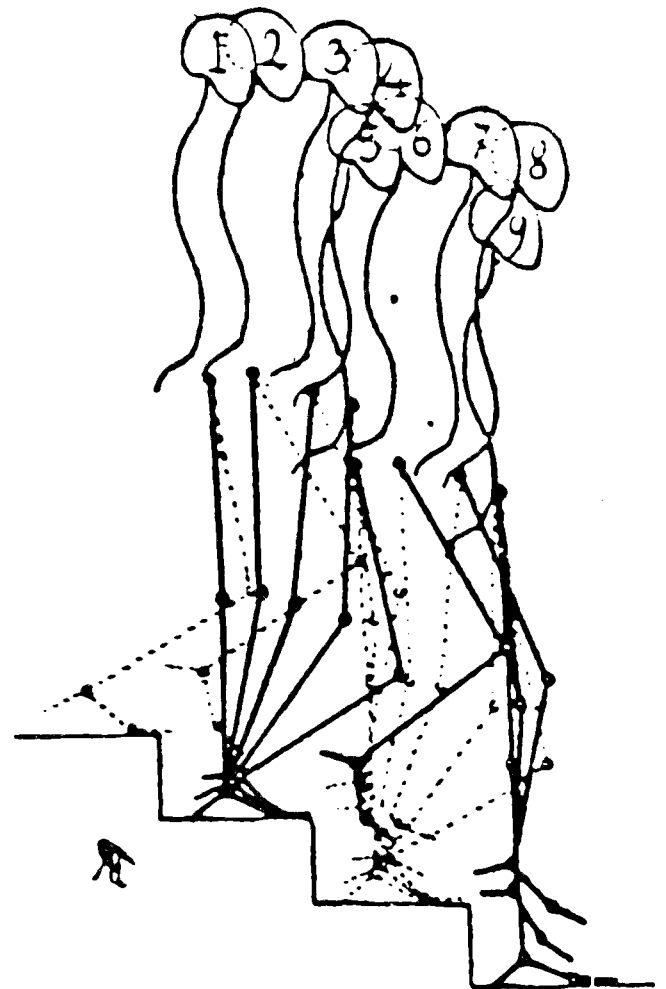
demanding, and it was as a result of the Cubist experience that during the following years he was able to realize convincingly his already strongly independent vision. The first of the *Nudes Descending* [2], although it is less fully resolved than its famous successor, comes in many ways closer to being a truly Cubist canvas than any other that Duchamp ever produced. The work is primarily a study of a figure in movement but it is dominated by a single major image, that of the nude standing on the two bottom steps. She is rendered in what is essentially a Cubist idiom in that her body has been dissected in a genuinely analytical fashion (in terms that is to say of a formalistic breakdown of her component parts) and to this extent the painting invites comparison with, for example, Picasso's canvases executed at Horta del Ebro during the summer of 1909, some of the most rigorously analytical of all his Cubist works [6]. Other factors – the strong linear element which results in a greater fluidity of form, the feeling of transparency and the austerity of the colour harmonies in what is basically a range of earth colours, browns and sienas – would suggest that Duchamp was by now also familiar with the more highly abstracted, more hermetic phase of Cubism initiated during the course of 1910, and of which Picasso's summer canvases done at Cadaquez represented some of the first and most extreme examples [7]. One feature which still isolates Duchamp's painting from main-line Cubism, and which makes it so extremely personal, is its interest in a cinematic depiction of successive stages of movement as opposed to the Cubists' incorporation of various viewpoints of a subject into a single, static image. This has necessitated the placing of the final figure in silhouette at right angles to the picture plane (the true Cubists rigidly avoided a purely profile view which they incorporated into the full face or three-quarter face view). Another feature is Duchamp's almost total disregard of the space around his subject; one senses that the areas to left and right of the central images have simply not interested him, an impression confirmed by the fact that he has painted out the areas at the extreme left and right

with wide black borders. Peculiar to Duchamp, too, are the elliptical forms (particularly evident in the lower legs) which seem to further define the volumes enclosed by the lines which contain them.

The compositional problems posed by the novelty of Duchamp's imagery were to be solved most coherently in the second version of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* [3], a work which was almost immediately recognized as one of the watersheds of twentieth-century art; and although the technical means used by Duchamp to achieve his ends still relate it to the concerns of Cubism, the work is so fully realized on its own independent terms that it can only be regarded as a totally original variant of the style. The canvas still retains a strongly perspectival passage at the top right-hand side, but successive images of the figure are now presented in a single plane only slightly angled to the picture surface (in the preparatory painting the nude seems to begin her descent down towards the spectator and then changes direction sharply in her final, most decisive stage of motion), and as in classical Cubism the entire surface is now broken down in pictorial elements of more or less equivalent weight and density, although even here, in one of Duchamp's flattest canvases, he shows little interest in forcing the images right up onto the picture plane, a characteristic concern of much contemporary French painting.

The elaborate subdivision of form, or to put it differently, the more frequent and insistent use of outlines, each of which echoes but modifies the one which precedes it, and the resultant very animated and lively breakdown of both image and picture surface can be accounted for, as Duchamp freely admitted, by the influence of chronophotography (the photographic recording of figures, animals and objects in motion) which had been invented some thirty years before but which in the early years of the century had caught the attention of the popular press [8, 9]. And although Duchamp appears to have been aware of this particular aspect of photography in the months before he embarked on the second *Nude Descending*, the total conviction that the work carries as a study of movement, and

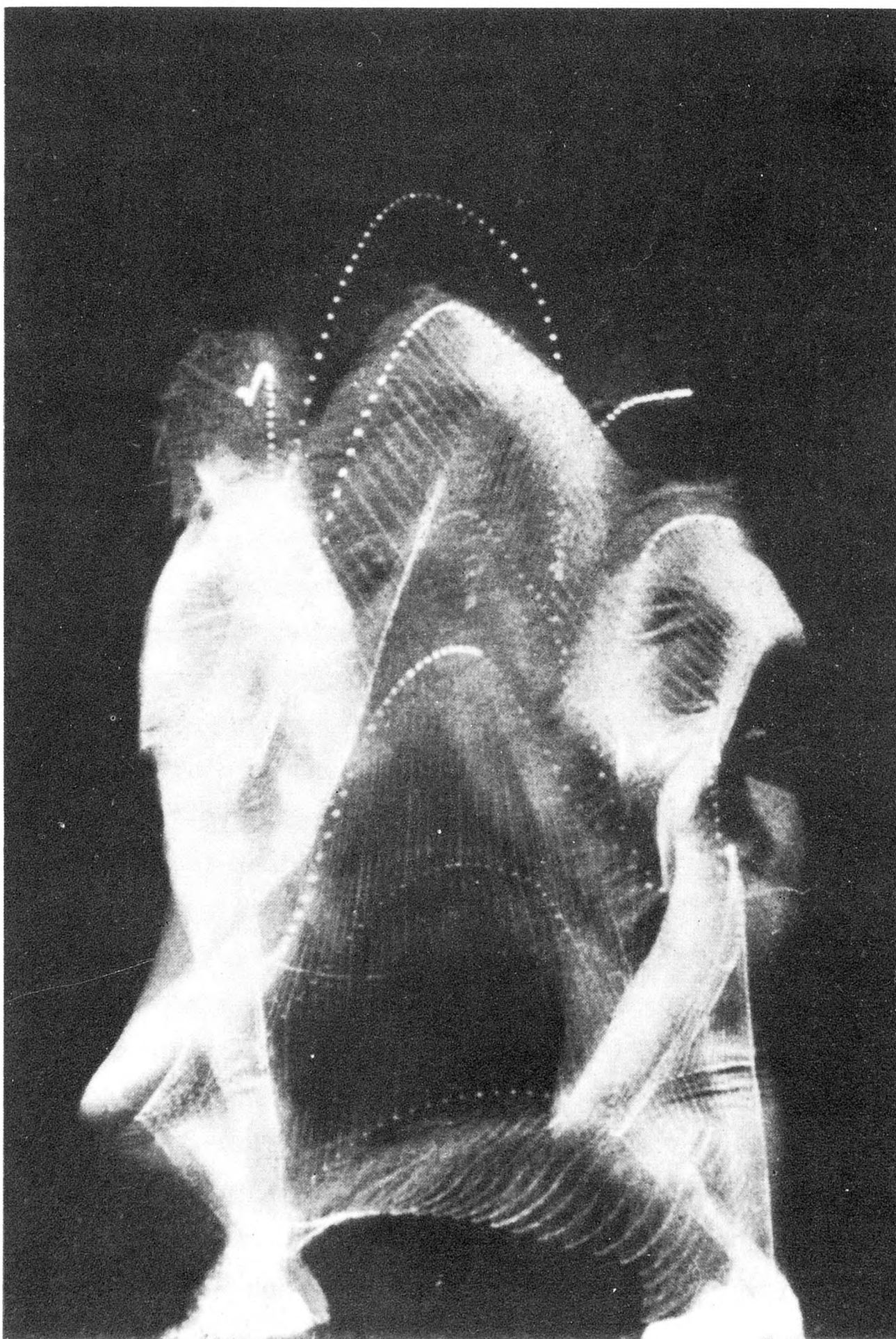
8. *Figure Descending a Staircase*, 1895. Paul Richer





certain details (the pearl-like dots at the centre of the composition for instance, which appear in chronophotographs as a result of the fact that the models carried small torches in their hands to record with light the successive movements of their hands and arms) would

9. Chronophotograph of a jumping figure, *c.* 1880. E. J. Marey





suggest that this was perhaps the first of Duchamp's works to effect a marriage on equal terms of the discoveries of art with those of science; and it is at least in part this fusion of disciplines that gives the work its particular originality and flavour and that makes it so pivotal in Duchamp's art. His attitude towards science was ironical and basically inimical but he realized that to create the sort of highly intellectualized art that was his aim it must be informed and enriched by references to other sources.

Painters had been making use of the discoveries and possibilities of photography since the middle of the nineteenth century, but Duchamp's overt reliance on a specialized aspect of it must have made his *Nude Descending* seem technologically very up to date – a pictorial realization of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *Eve Future*, the mechanically constructed paragon of female beauty. But because the *Nude* was to become such a scandal painting (it was one of the focal points of the Armory Show and became in subsequent years perhaps the most celebrated twentieth-century painting in the western hemisphere), critics have tended to overlook its most directly iconographical source, the poem of Laforgue which had first inspired Duchamp to re-create its mood in a graphic form. Laforgue, who belonged to the second generation of Symbolist poets, was the possessor of a double-sided talent particularly designed to appeal to Duchamp's sensibilities. His work was cosmic and philosophical in its aspirations and was informed by a pessimism and a blackness which at times seems to relate his thought as much to the nihilism of Céline and the pessimism of early Sartre as it does to the romantic 'malaise' and despair of many of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. At the same time his art is characterized by an ironical, equivocal, self-questioning wit and by a carefully calculated facetiousness. He delights in puns and incongruities and in a programmatic undermining of reason and logic. *Encore à Cet Astre* and the other two poems illustrated by Duchamp (all from *Le Sanglot de la Terre*) are basically concerned with the theme of sterility and im-

potence, with what Laforgue called the *éternulité* of human existence, although the style he uses is one of poetic understatement. In *Encore à Cet Astre* a group of mortals, ignorant and derisive, challenge the sun which is losing its warming, life-giving powers (the sun is compared to a pale, pock-marked sieve). In an imaginary dialogue the sun beams back a message of contempt, realizing that the puny creatures eons of time beneath it are doomed, animated puppets (*pantins*).

Some of the same bleak, quizzical despair is conveyed in Duchamp's work visually by the sad, falling linear rhythms and by the fact that the colour harmonies, superficially those of classical Cubism, have a doomed, leaden quality to them. What has been consistently ignored is that the *Nude Descending* is to a certain extent a 'mood' painting and it is perhaps this that sets it apart from Cubism as much as the modifications which Duchamp has imposed on a Cubist technical procedure. The *Nude Descending* is in no way a tragic painting and it would be falsifying Duchamp's original intent to dwell too deeply on its literary implications; and yet the debt to Laforgue exists in the sensation of pervasive melancholy that the canvas transmits (a month earlier Duchamp had portrayed himself as *Sad Young Man on a Train*), and also perhaps in the slightly mocking, ironic depiction of the female nude in terms of what already resembles a puppet-like agglomeration of quasi-mechanistic forms.

As early as 1914, when questioned as to whether his art was descended from that of Cézanne, Duchamp replied that whereas most of his colleagues would undoubtedly claim Cézanne as the most important of their ancestors, he personally felt a greater debt to Odilon Redon; and this was to remain an allegiance which he was still eager to acknowledge much later in life.<sup>9</sup> At first sight Duchamp's statement might seem puzzling. Much of his work of 1910 is obviously indebted to a study of Cézanne, whereas it is hard to find any traces of the direct influence of Redon, except perhaps in *Yvonne et Magdeleine Déchiquetées* [10] of the early autumn of 1911, which



10. *Yvonne et  
Magdeleine Déchiquetées*, 1911.  
Marcel Duchamp

shows four heads (or two heads each rendered twice) conveyed in strong chiaroscuro and floating against an indeterminate space. And yet Duchamp's remark is deeply revealing and testifies to the extraordinary degree of self-knowledge which conditioned his development as an artist, almost from the start. For of all the Symbolist painters Redon, perhaps more than any other, paralleled or echoed the preoccupations of his literary colleagues; and it is essential to an understanding of Duchamp's art that when his painting ceased to resemble anything else that was being produced in France (or elsewhere) in the visual field, it retained close links with the literature of the previous generation and with that of some of the most advanced and original of his contemporaries.

The imagery in the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, and the treatment of the figure as a dehumanized puppet, may owe something to Laforgue's poem which had prompted the original sketch, and the *Nude's* slow descent also recalls *Igitur's* progress down the steps to



the crypt of his forebears.<sup>10</sup> But Duchamp's debt to literature was in the last analysis much more profound, much less specific. His vision was born not only out of the despair of Laforgue, who had adopted as his battle cry '*aux armes citoyens il n'y a pas de raison*', but out of the ambiguity and deliberate hermeticism of Mallarmé, the poet he most loved, and the figure, he felt, who more than any other artist of his generation held the key to a new, intellectualized art. As Octavio Paz suggests, the work to which the *Large Glass* comes closest is *Un Coup de Dés*, Mallarmé's most ambitious experiment in which he exploited the irregular placing of words on the page and the use of different kinds of type. Duchamp realized, of course, that it was impossible to recapture the spirit and flavour of historical Symbolism which had been reflected in the work of Redon and his colleagues and he saw the element of humour in Laforgue (he particularly admired Laforgue's use of eccentric, often ironical titles) as a way out of Symbolism or as a direction in which Symbolism could be extended. He sensed, too, that the important moment in literature when the passion of the Symbolists and the so-called Decadents for the artificial met an emergent interest in the machine had not yet produced a parallel in the visual arts. Dovetailing into this literary climate and closely related to it was the emergence of science-fiction, first in the works of Verne, and in the 1890s Rosny and H. G. Wells, a form of literature which was also to affect Duchamp deeply if only because it touched the art of two other writers, Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel to whom he acknowledged a close debt.

Although Duchamp rejected the use of the word literary in connection with his own work as being meaningless and imprecise, he was at pains to stress that he felt a greater affinity with literature than with painting. In one of the last interviews he granted before his death he remarked, 'In France there is an old saying "Stupid like a painter", the painter was considered stupid but the poet and writer very intelligent. I wanted to be intelligent . . . I thought the ideatic a way to get away from influences.'<sup>11</sup> And it might be fair to say that Duchamp's unique contribution to the art of the first quarter of the

twentieth century lay in the fact that to a greater extent than any of his colleagues he kept alive the very fruitful dialogue between literature and the visual arts that had animated so much French nineteenth-century painting and on which the majority of his colleagues had tacitly closed the door when they acknowledged the supremacy of Cézanne, the most purely visual of the great Post Impressionists and the most formally challenging of all nineteenth-century artists.

The *Nude Descending a Staircase* was submitted to the *Salon des Indépendants* of 1912, where it was rejected by a Cubist hanging committee, a fact that underlined the by now almost total independence of Duchamp's achievement. It is possible also that the Cubists felt that the painting might lend weight to the bid for supremacy and attention that was being made by the Italian Futurists with their great exhibition at Bernheim Jeune's Gallery (which had opened a few weeks earlier) since Duchamp's art was, like theirs, primarily concerned with rendering a sensation of movement; this suspicion is to a certain extent confirmed by the fact that the *Nude* was shown at the *Section d'Or* exhibition the same autumn, a display that showed certain Cubists making tentative gestures of reconciliation with their Italian colleagues. Duchamp was later to deny any influence of Futurism on his work at the time, and it is certainly true that when he set to work on the two versions of the *Nude* there was nothing in visual Futurism that could have offered him any kind of stimulus; it is, however, possible that he may have been aware of their early manifestoes (all of which were published in France as well as in Italy) and that these may have unconsciously stimulated his imagination. Of the two painters then working in Paris to whose work Duchamp's was most comparable, one was Severini, a signatory of the initial Futurist manifesto, while the second, Léger, was sympathetic to many of their aims [11, 12]. But despite certain superficial similarities Duchamp's vision was even further removed from that of Léger and the Futurists than it was from that of the true Cubists. The art of the Futurists was one of optimism strongly tinged with bombast, and they glorified and virtually deified the

11. *Second Dancer (White)*,  
1912. Gino Severini

12 (right). *Three Figures*, 1911.  
Fernand Léger



position of the machine in society. Duchamp's vision was not exactly pessimistic but it was passive and critical, and his anarchy was of a subtler, gentler brand. Fundamentally he viewed the machine and its effects with distrust. The Futurists had engaged in the battle of modern art with a violence and bravado that were ultimately to be self-defeating. Duchamp's development after the *Nude Descending* was to become increasingly private and in his isolation lay his strength.

Duchamp's work of 1911 still belongs, albeit peripherally, to the Cubist world; some of it is relatively large in scale and one has the sensation that during this period Duchamp was consciously trying to carve out for himself a place at the forefront of the modern movement. In 1912 there is a change of mood. It may be that the rejection of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* had the effect of driving him in on himself, and it is possible too, that he found the politics of the Paris art world (particularly ferocious in 1912 in the face of the Futurist challenge) distasteful. At any rate, the next move was towards a more hermetic, more personal art and the *Nude* was succeeded by the *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* [13],

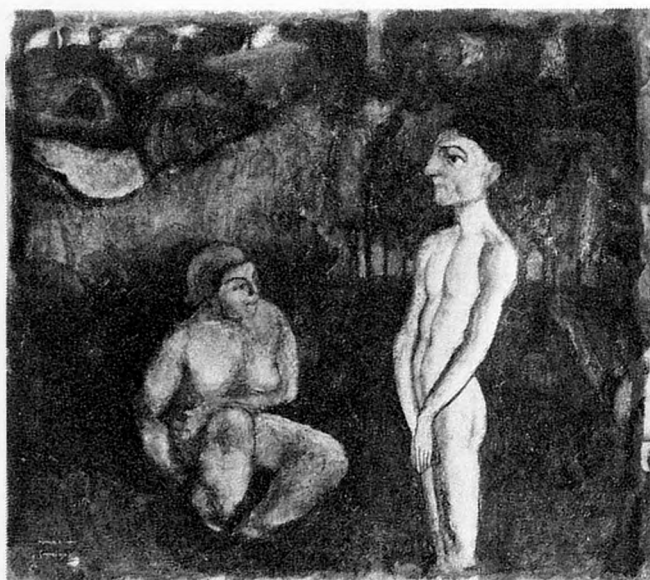


13. *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, 1912. Marcel Duchamp

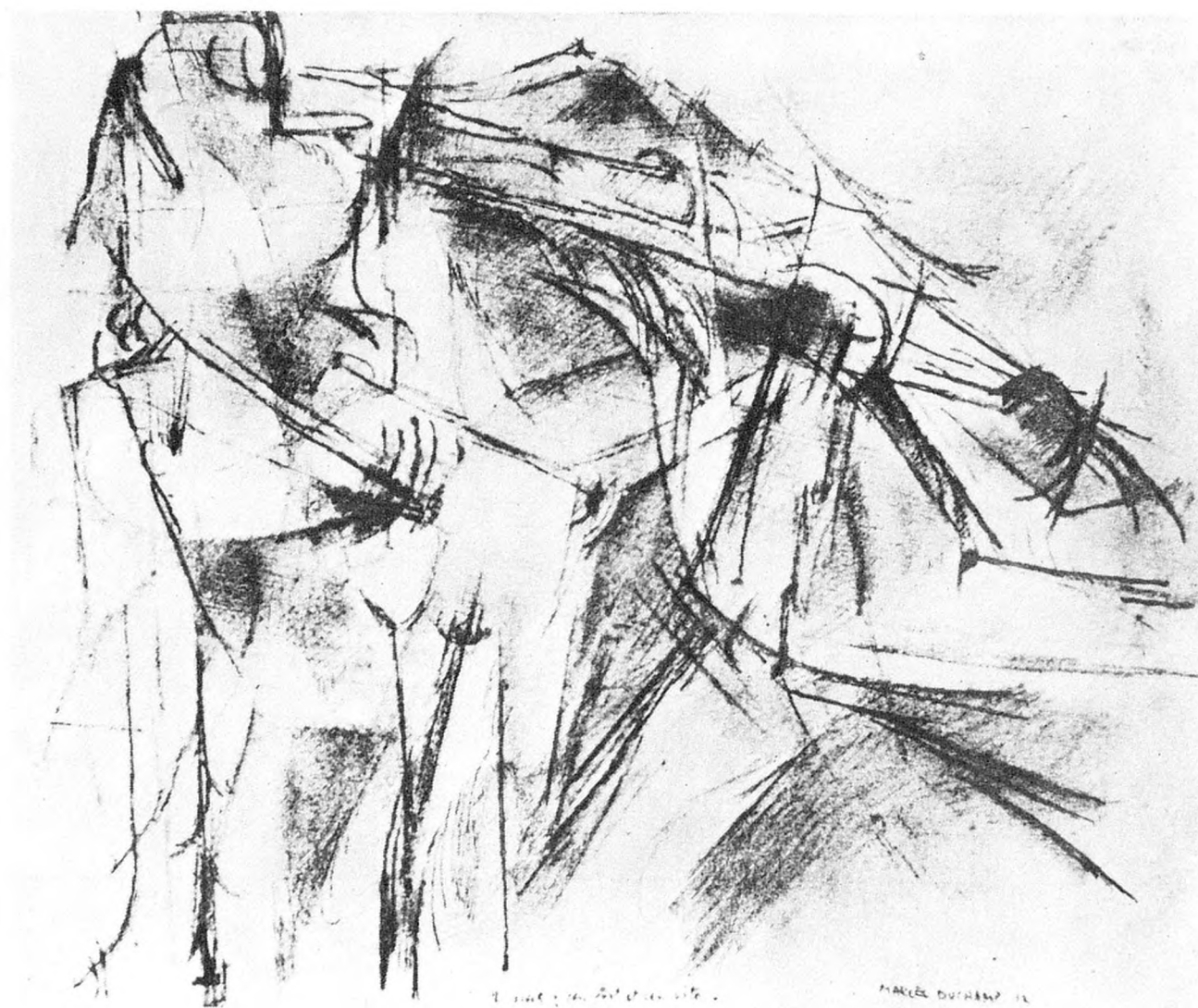




painted in the spring, a subtler, more elaborate work and one which Duchamp himself came to prefer to the earlier, more controversial canvas. The *King and Queen* was executed on the back of a mildly erotic work of 1910, *Le Paradis* [14], which shows a crouched female



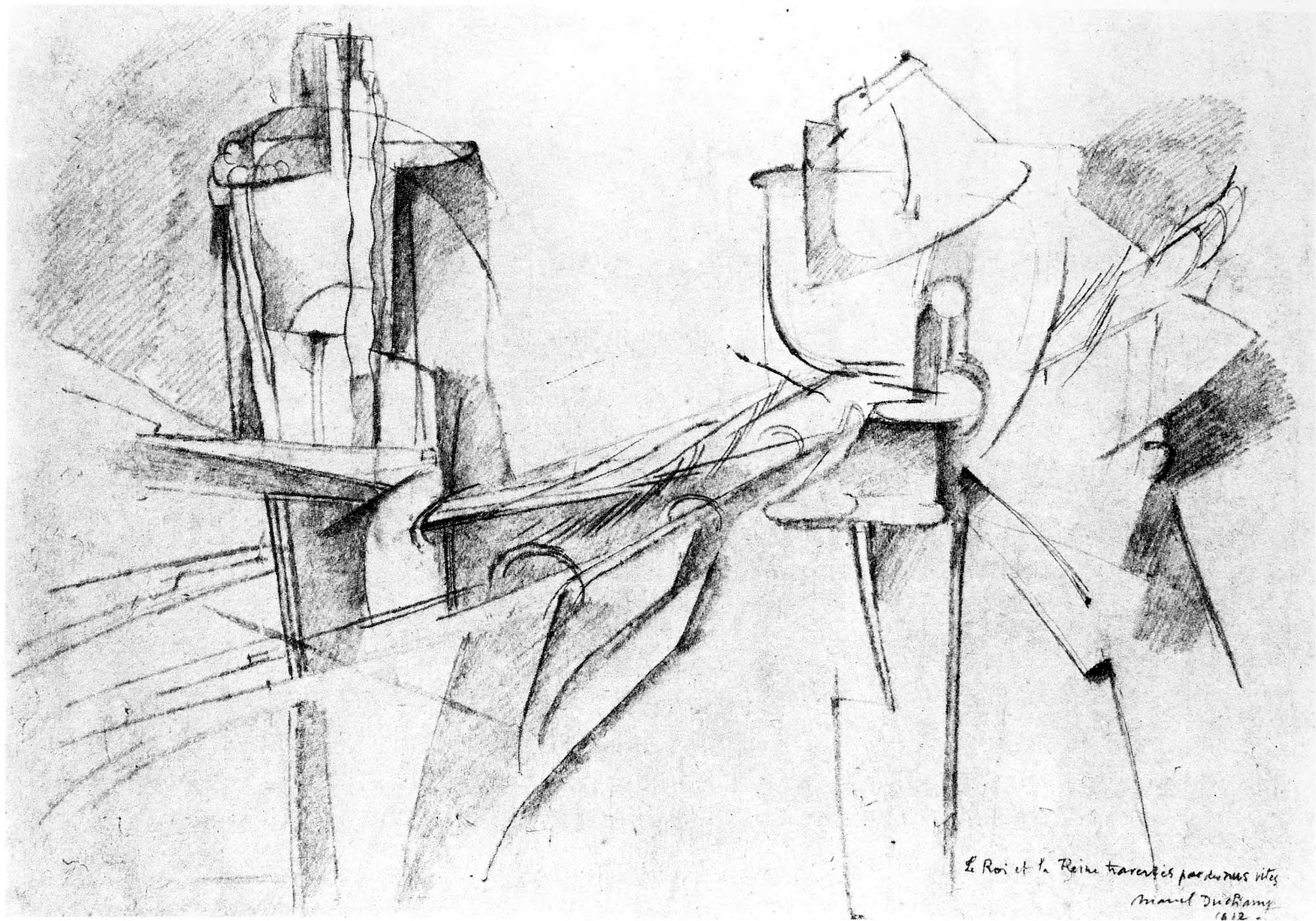
14. *Le Paradis*,  
1910. Marcel Duchamp



15. *Two Nudes:  
One Strong and One Swift*,  
1912. Marcel Duchamp

nude faced by a naked man who shields his sex with his hands. The first of the sketches for the new oil, *Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift* [15] (titles were now playing an increasingly important part in Duchamp's work and perhaps reflect his interest in Laforge's use of them) shows two figures in the same relative positions as in *Le Paradis*, although the male figure is set into cinematic motion in the manner of the *Nude Descending* and lunges forward towards his partner. In the next sketch, *King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes* [16] the positions of the figures are reversed and the figure of the woman has become more highly abstracted. Both figures have about them a depersonalized, sexless air, a feature already apparent in the *Nude Descending*, and owing something perhaps to Duchamp's

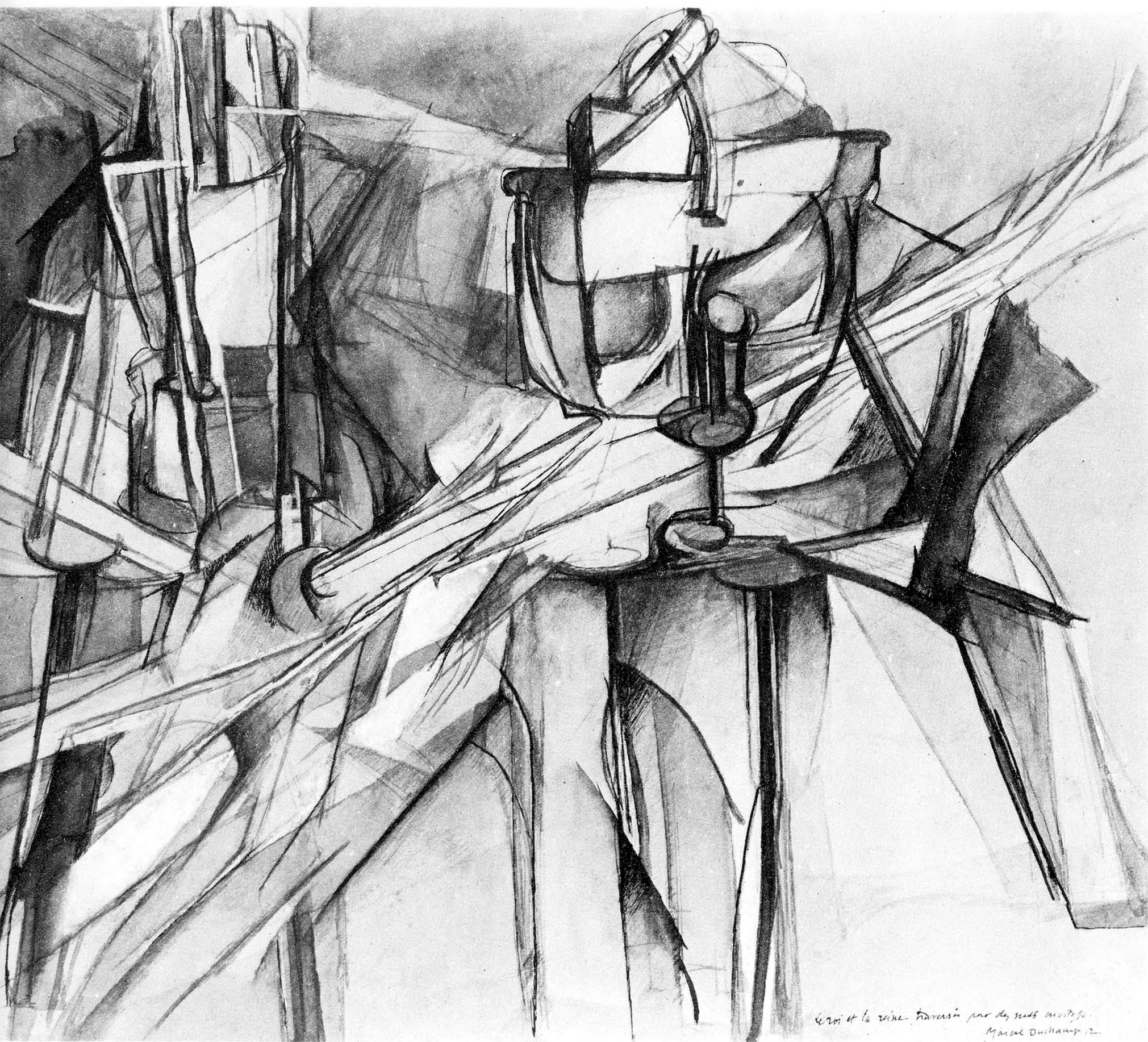
interest in the poetry of Mallarmé and Laforgue with its hermaphroditic ideal. Both figures are now static, but are connected by flowing forms that suggest some sort of sexual discharge, a feature that becomes unmistakably pronounced in the third and final study, *King and Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed* [17]. In the final painting, *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, the king appears to



have been moved back to his original position at the right although both figures have reached such a high degree of abstraction that it is hard to differentiate them in terms of sex. Their bodies are rendered by means of burnished, frankly metallic forms and they have about them a mysterious, hieratic air that is emphasized by the flurry of

16. *King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes*, 1912.  
Marcel Duchamp



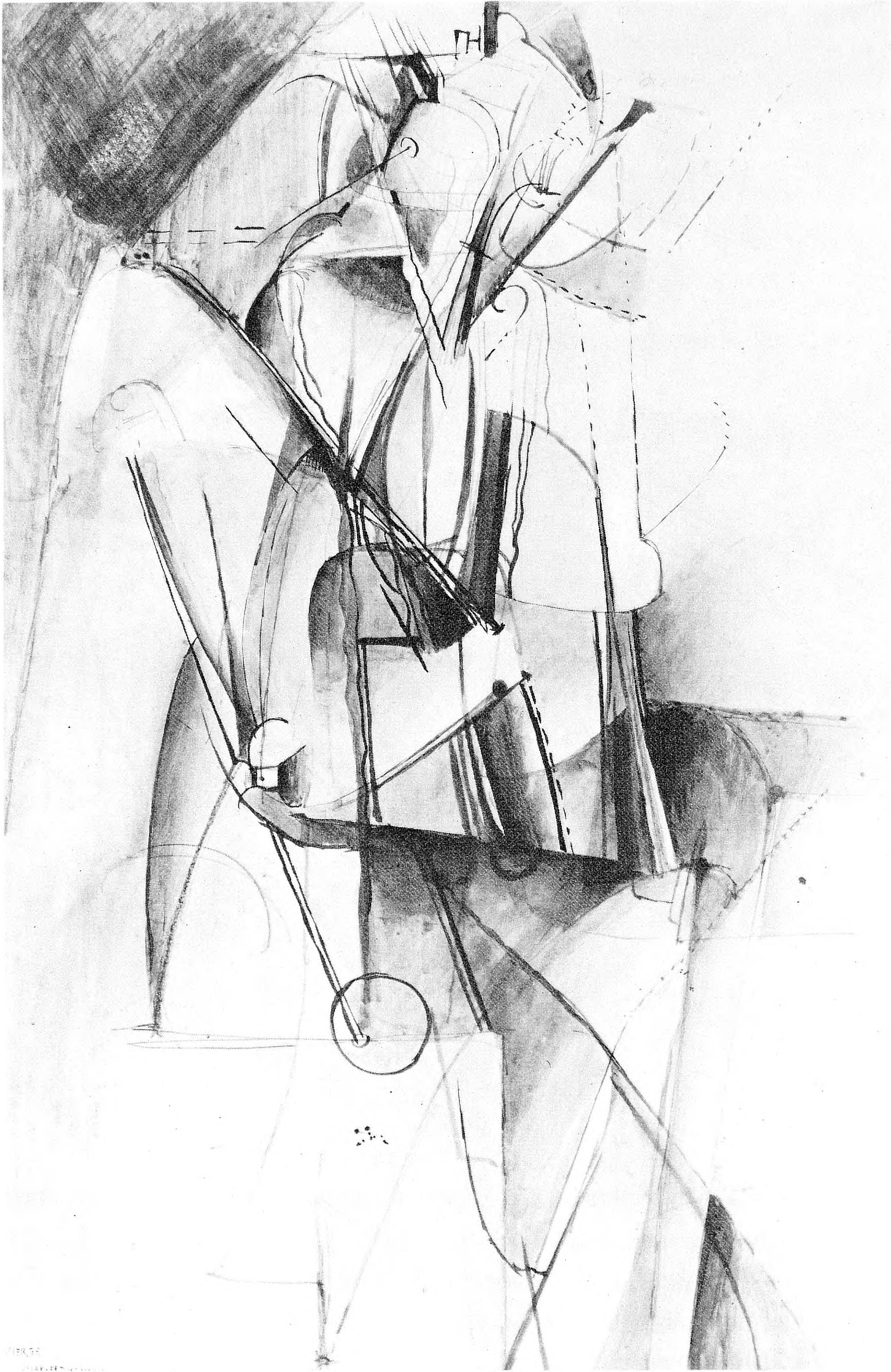


17. *King and Queen  
Traversed by Nudes at High Speed,*  
1912. Marcel Duchamp

small planes that separates them, like an electric current rendered visible.

The final study, heightened by colour, was the most overtly erotic work that Duchamp was to execute until long after he had abandoned the *Large Glass*. The male figure at the left is still recog-





nizable as an abstraction from nature: head, shoulders, arms and legs are identifiable and naturalistic in their proportions. The female presence, on the other hand, has taken on an increasingly abstract and mechanistic appearance, based, it would appear, on the shape and outline of a chess piece. Looking at the work one has the impression that as the latent eroticism of Duchamp's vision rose to the surface of his consciousness and of his art he felt the need to depersonalize, to abstract or to symbolize the identity and appearance of his subjects – it is perhaps not without significance that it is the

18 (left). *Virgin No. 2*, 1912.  
Marcel Duchamp

19. *Apropos of Little Sister*, 1911.  
Marcel Duchamp

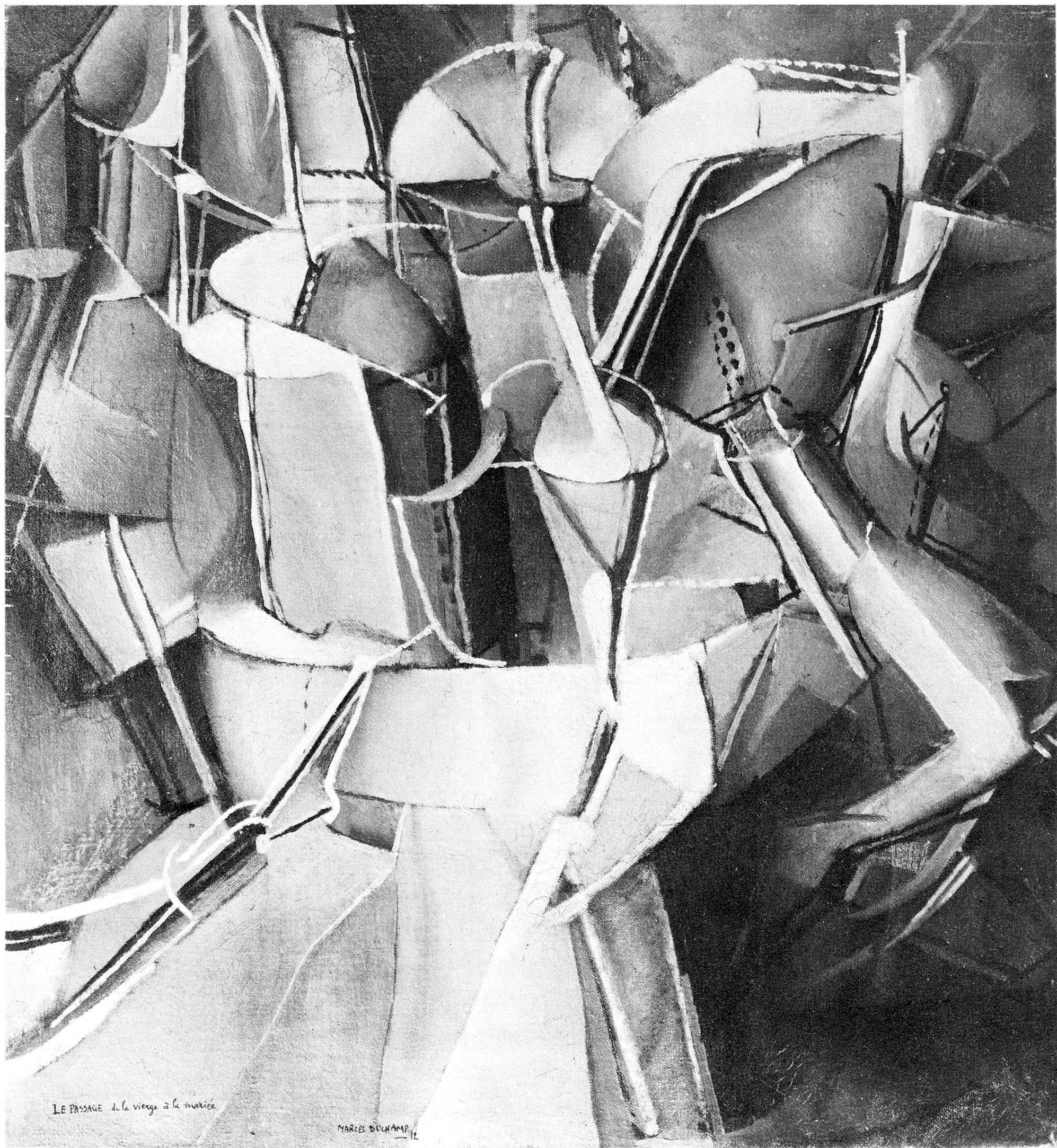




female figure that is the first to assume a full disguise. The sketch still retains a tenuous stylistic link with Cubism, but in terms of iconography it can be paralleled only in early twentieth-century literature. A passage from Jarry's *Messaline* could almost be used as a caption for the sketch: the Empress Messaline comes upon the acrobat Munster standing on his hands and in a provocative condition. She mistakes him for a divine presence '... And just as Priapus himself ... tires of balancing in front of him a great trunk – the sex of the god fell between the Empress's hands.' The exotic, hot-house atmosphere of *Messaline* evokes more immediately the jewelled imagery of Moreau rather than the mechanical, almost robot-like forms that Duchamp was evolving in his art, but *Le Surmâle*, published in 1902 a year after *Messaline* and in many ways its male counterpart, has strong science-fiction overtones and in it the machine plays an all important part. The climax of the novel is a love scene (if such it can be called) in which the hero and heroine achieve coition eighty-two times in remarkably few hours (it is worth perhaps noting in connection with the concept of love expressed in the *Large Glass* that the participants in this incredible feat of endurance withdraw at the moment of climax, or practice *coitus interruptus*), and this is preceded by a scene in which the hero enacts a symbolical rape on a weight-testing machine which is given specifically female attributes. In turn he meets his death through an encounter with a love-making machine. The sexuality of Duchamp's work is less Rabelaisian than that of Jarry, and it was to become increasingly veiled and allusive, but he shared with Jarry a sardonic, quizzical approach to the subject and it seems likely that he derived stimulation from the work of a writer who more than any other figure of his generation formed a bridge between French literature of the nineteenth century and its subsequent manifestations in the twentieth.

The calligraphic draughtsmanship evolved by Duchamp in his studies for the *King and Queen* which had resulted in the final work in a freer, more 'overall' kind of composition and the frankly mecanomorphic imagery of the final painting, were features that

20. *The Passage from the Virgin  
to the Bride*,  
1912. Marcel Duchamp



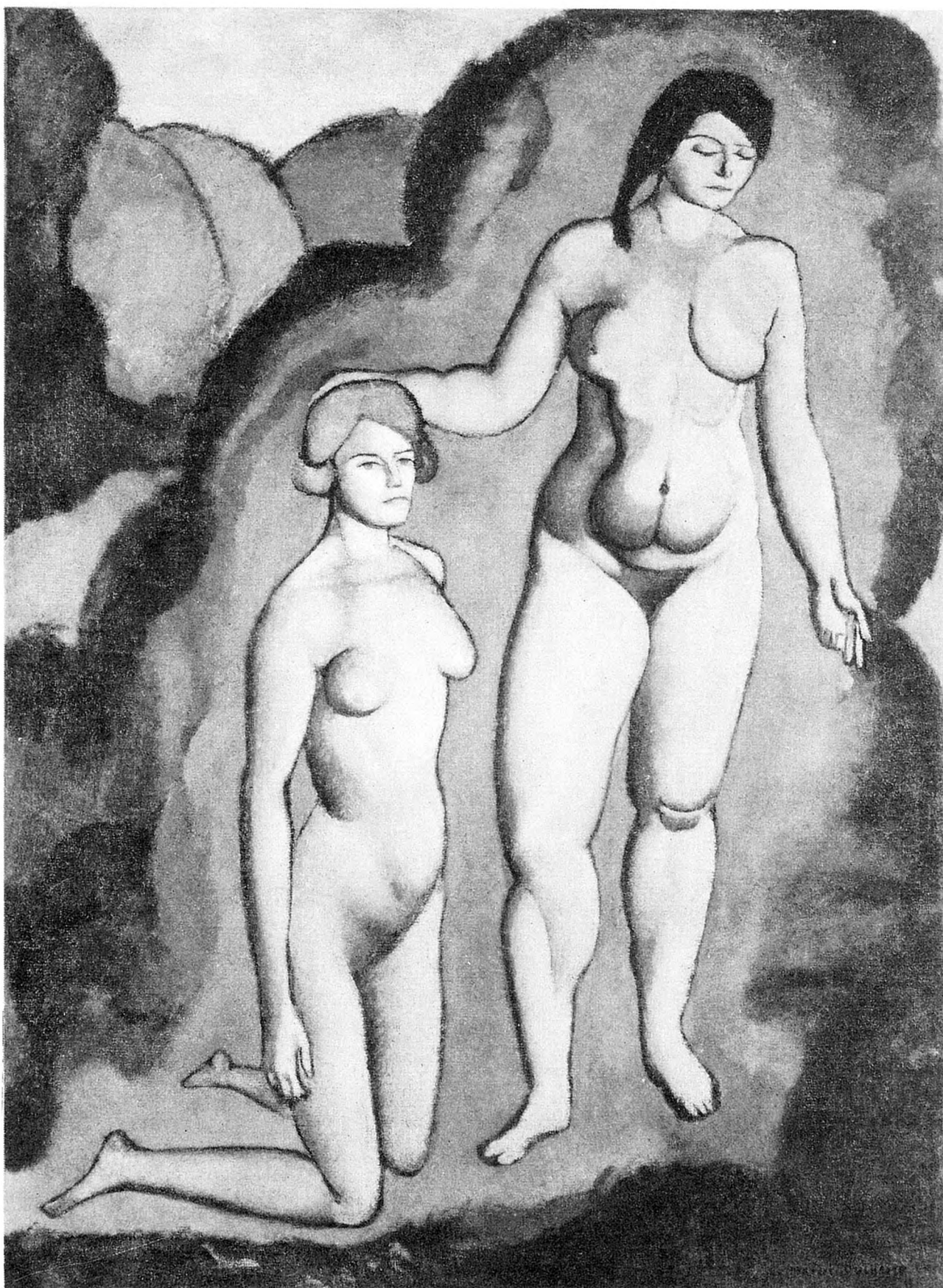
LE PASSAGE de la vierge à la mariée

MARCEL DUCHAMP 12

were carried a step further in a remarkable series of works executed in Munich in the late summer of the same year, 1912. Two *Virgin* drawings and a little sketch which can in some ways be considered the first step towards the *Large Glass* preceded the two important oil paintings. *Virgin No. 2* [18], stylistically the loosest and freest and perhaps the last of the drawings to be executed, appears to have been derived from a much more naturalistic oil sketch of the previous year, *Apropos of Little Sister* [19], posed for by his sister Magdeleine. And if the technological origins of the *Bride* go back to the sketchy accompaniment to *Encore à Cet Astre*, this small oil sketch of his sister is the *Bride's* most direct antecedent physically and psychologically. For in the pivotal oil painting which followed the *Virgin* drawings, the momentous *Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* [20], we witness her metamorphosis into the *Bride* herself.

The theme of sexual initiation and the psychological transposition it involves was one which had been hinted at in several works of 1911, most notably in *The Thicket* [21], a work finished in the early weeks of that year. It shows a heavy, mature woman who places her hand on the head of a younger, slender, virginal sister who seems to expose herself willingly to the gaze of some powerful, unseen male presence. The poses of the figures appear to have been borrowed from traditional presentation panels (often wings of altarpieces), where saints present a donor to some divinity, and there is a stylistic debt to Girieud, a now forgotten painter whom Duchamp admired. *The Thicket* is in many ways an unsatisfactory painting; the foreshortening of the kneeling figure's far leg for example is inept and the heavy modelling unconvincing, and like many other early works it suggests that Duchamp's natural talents were not primarily pictorial. A comparison with the wittily accomplished *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* [22], which probably preceded the two *Virgin* drawings, shows how far he had travelled in an astonishingly short time, both in terms of the formulation of an independent, emancipated iconography and a convincing style in which to

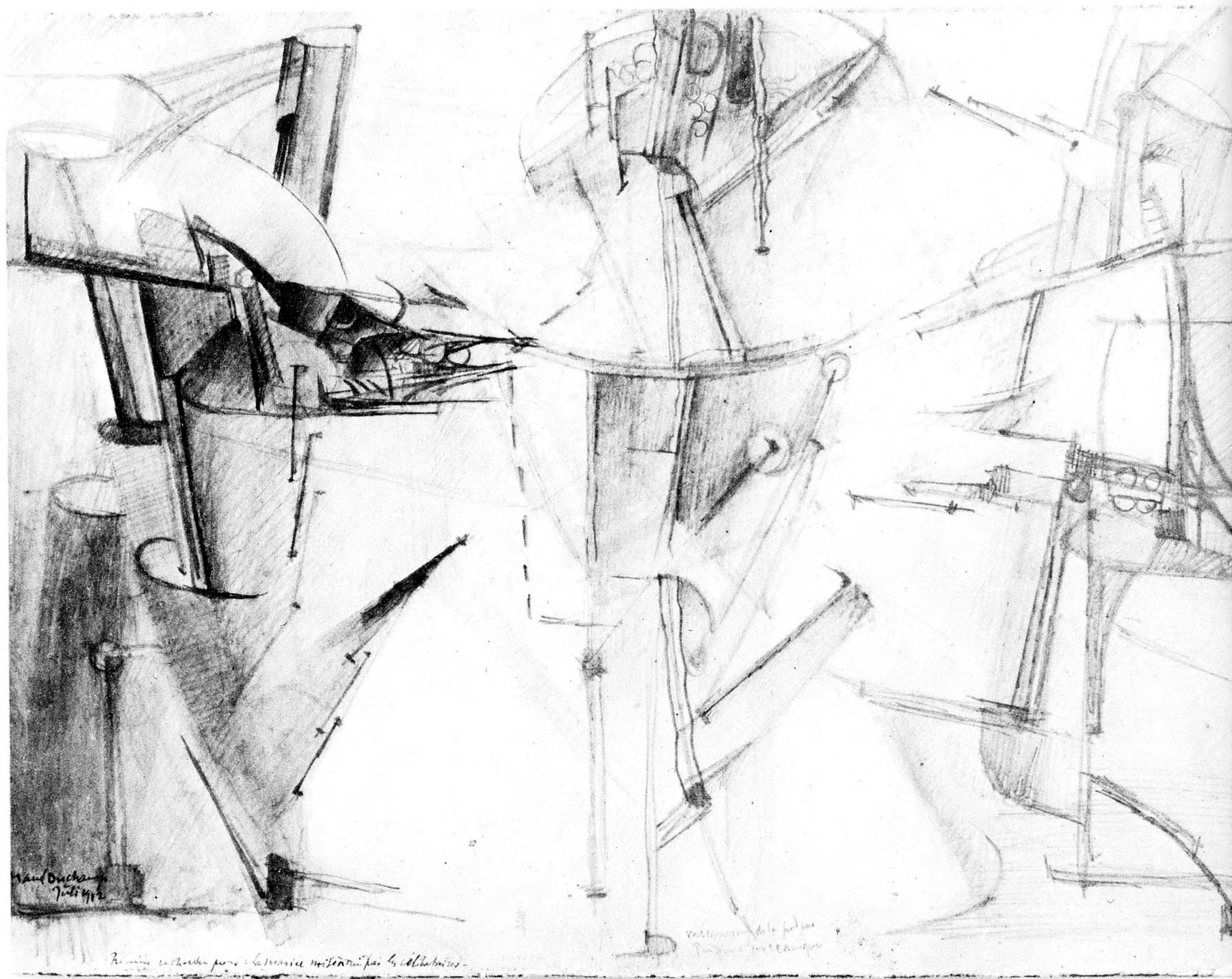




21. *The Thicket (The Bush)*, 1910–11.  
Marcel Duchamp

render it. *The Thicket* still belongs fundamentally to the esoteric world of 1890s Symbolism. The Munich sketch is a totally independent statement.

In *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* the composition is dominated by a slender female figure, the lower part of her body

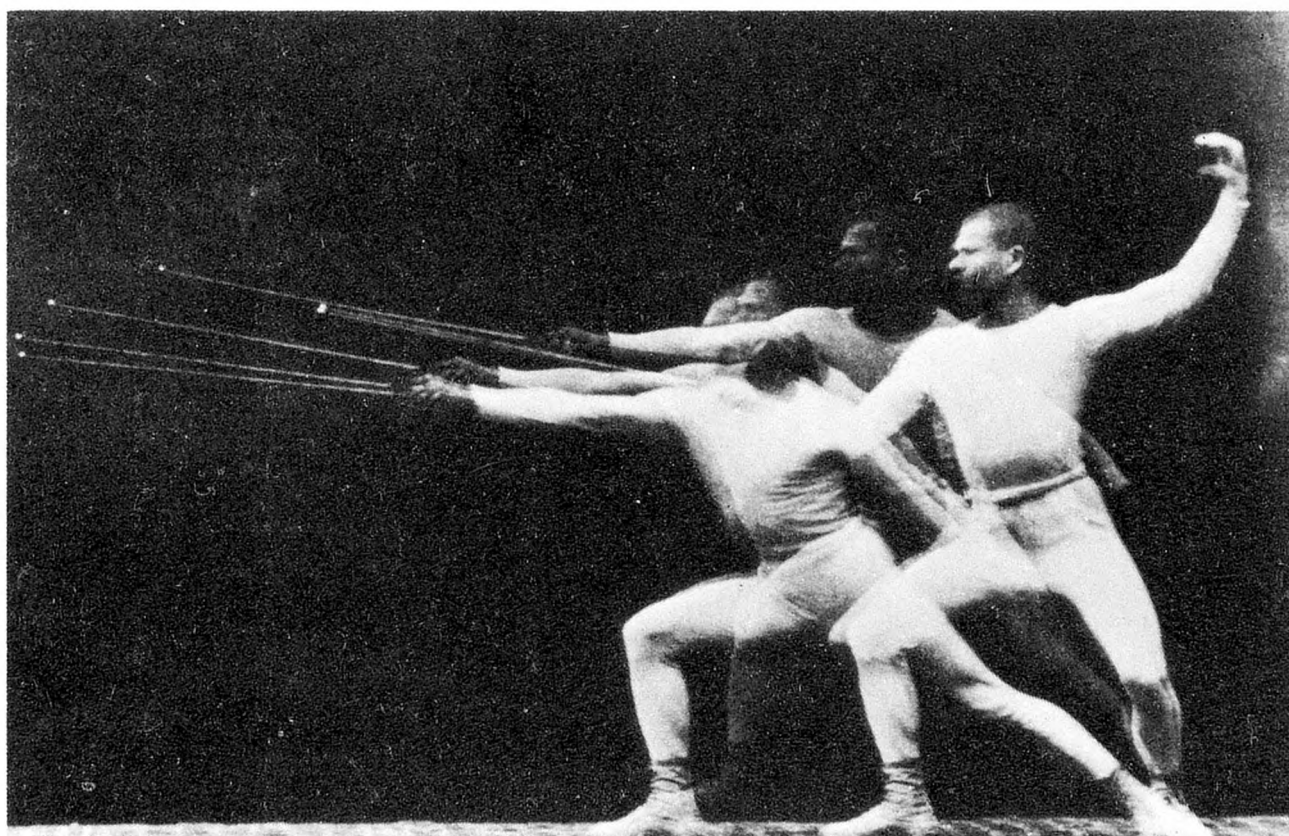


22. *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*, 1912. Marcel Duchamp



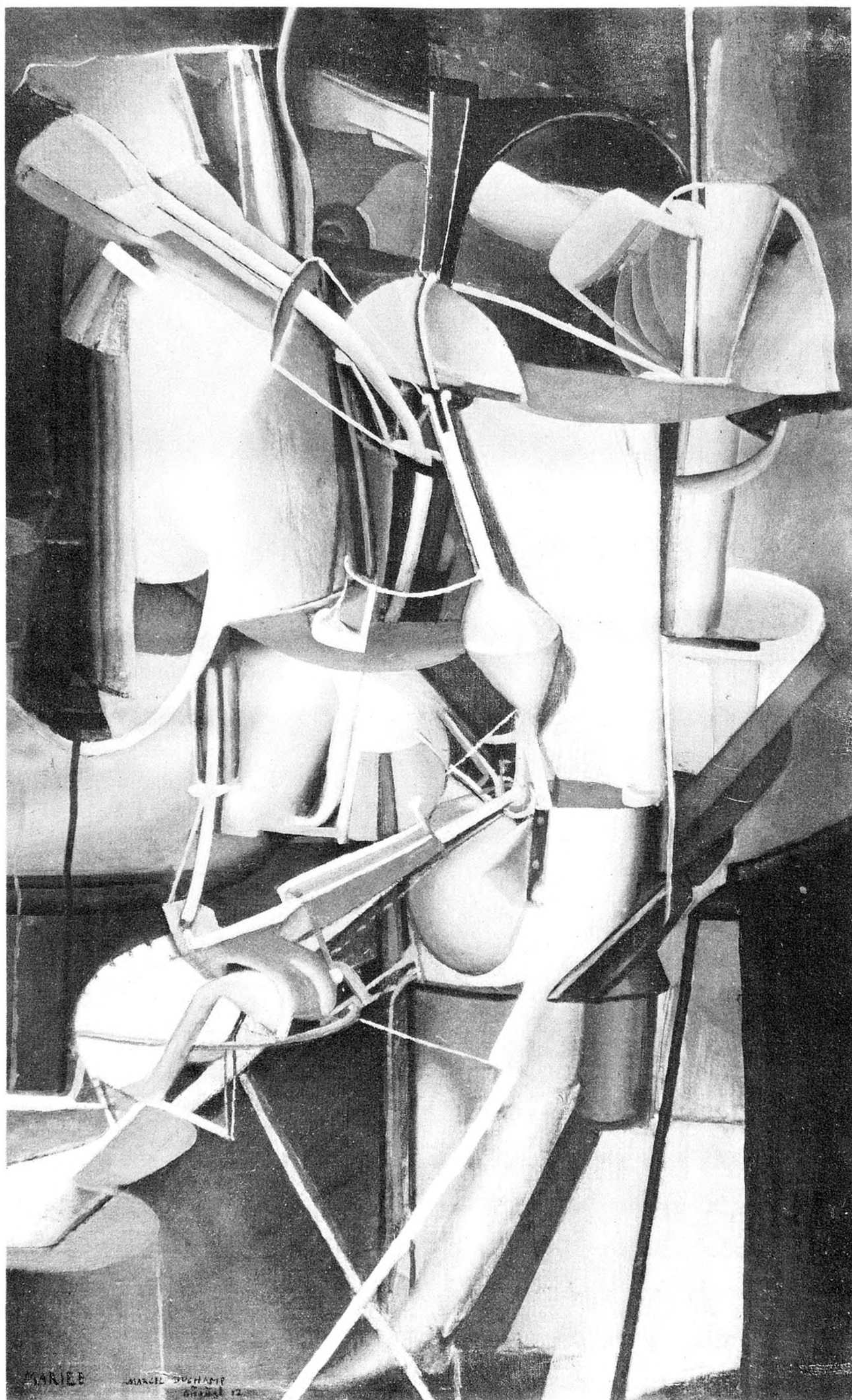
encased in a large cylindrical form ; subsequently this was to become for Duchamp the graphic symbol of the female genitals although here it seems to act as a shield or corset, while at the *Bride's* feet an inscription reads *Mécanique de la pudeur, pudeur mécanique*. On either side are two science-fiction male presences who point at the bridal figure a whole battery of upright phallic forms; the fact that these appear to have been derived from chronophotographs of fencers [23], to which Duchamp once referred specifically in an interview, (the successive images of the fencing foil have become the phallic barbs), accounts perhaps for some of the sadistic flavour that underlies the brilliant, mocking draughtsmanship.

23. Chronophotograph of a fencer,  
c. 1880. E. J. Marey



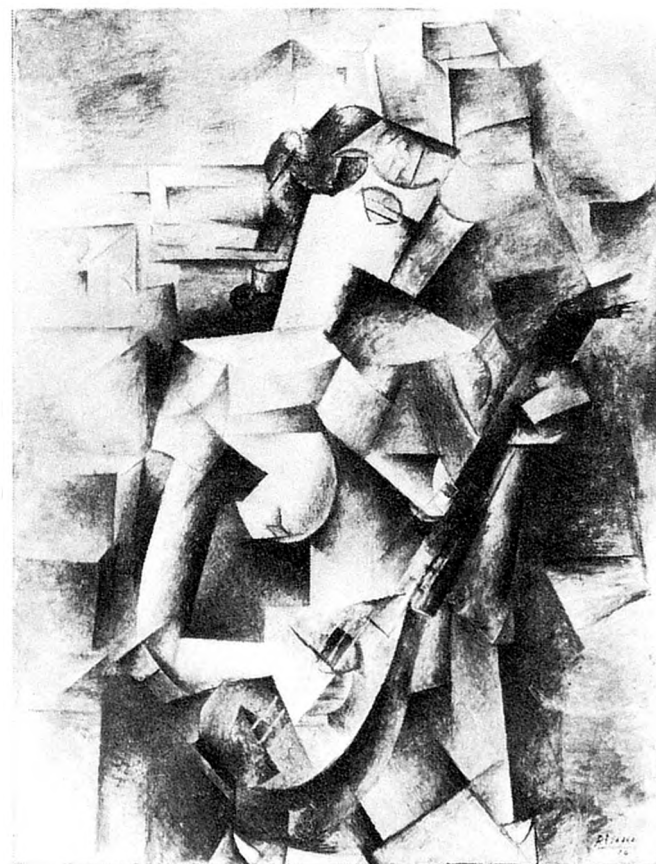
Duchamp appears to have found the imagery of the drawing too explicit, and in the *Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, the first of the Munich oils, the forms have become much more hermetic, and indeed the presence of a few relatively naturalistic members at the bottom right (a clearly legible arm attached to a headless neck) would suggest that we are not intended to 'read' the rest of the picture naturalistically or to identify its component parts in terms of specific body imagery. The forms at the left of the painting do,





24. *The Bride*,  
1912. Marcel Duchamp

25. *Girl with a Mandolin*  
(*Fanny Tellier*),  
1910. Pablo Picasso



however, relate to the forms of *Virgin No. 2* (and also to those of the left-hand side figure in the *King and Queen*), and shapes suggestive of an upflung arm at the top right indicate the presence of a second figure leaning back in an abandoned or satiated attitude. The cylinder that had encased the bridal figure in the drawing is now placed in the centre of the canvas as a clue to the picture's meaning, while the presence at the lower right appears to act as a witness to the ritual (it fulfills much the same function and also relates in its placing in the composition to the *Oculist Witnesses* in the *Large Glass*) and projects a strong male aura. Chronophotography had played an important role in the first sketches for the *King and Queen* and in the Munich *Bride Stripped Bare* drawing, but here there is no hint of the earlier cinematic technique and the idea of motion in terms of physical energy has been replaced by the concept of motion as the change from one psychological state of being to another, or to use a phrase employed by the painter Matta, Duchamp's art is now about the 'process of becoming'.

The final painting in the Munich series is *The Bride* herself [24]. And having passed through the hermetic ritual of initiation she is allowed to regain a semblance of anatomical legibility; shoulder, arm and breast seem to fall naturally into place and these in turn allow us to reconstruct the empty armature of the head. The pose comes very close to that of Picasso's *Fanny Tellier* [25] of 1910, one of the most celebrated of his canvases and a work which Duchamp may have known. The similarities are most probably fortuitous but a comparison of the two works serves to remind us that *The Bride* still relates at a distance to the world of Cubism and also to underline how completely mechanized Duchamp's vision has become. For *The Bride* resembles nothing so much as a dressmaker's dummy stripped to its metal armature, and Duchamp once remarked that she had her genesis in the figures to be seen in fair grounds, often given the attributes of bride and groom, at which visitors are invited to throw wooden balls.<sup>12</sup>

The dressmaker's dummy had in fact appeared in Duchamp's art in one of the cartoons of 1909, many of which are startlingly prophetic in their iconography.<sup>13</sup> In one of them, *Mi-Carême* [26], the standing woman is paired off against her headless, inanimate



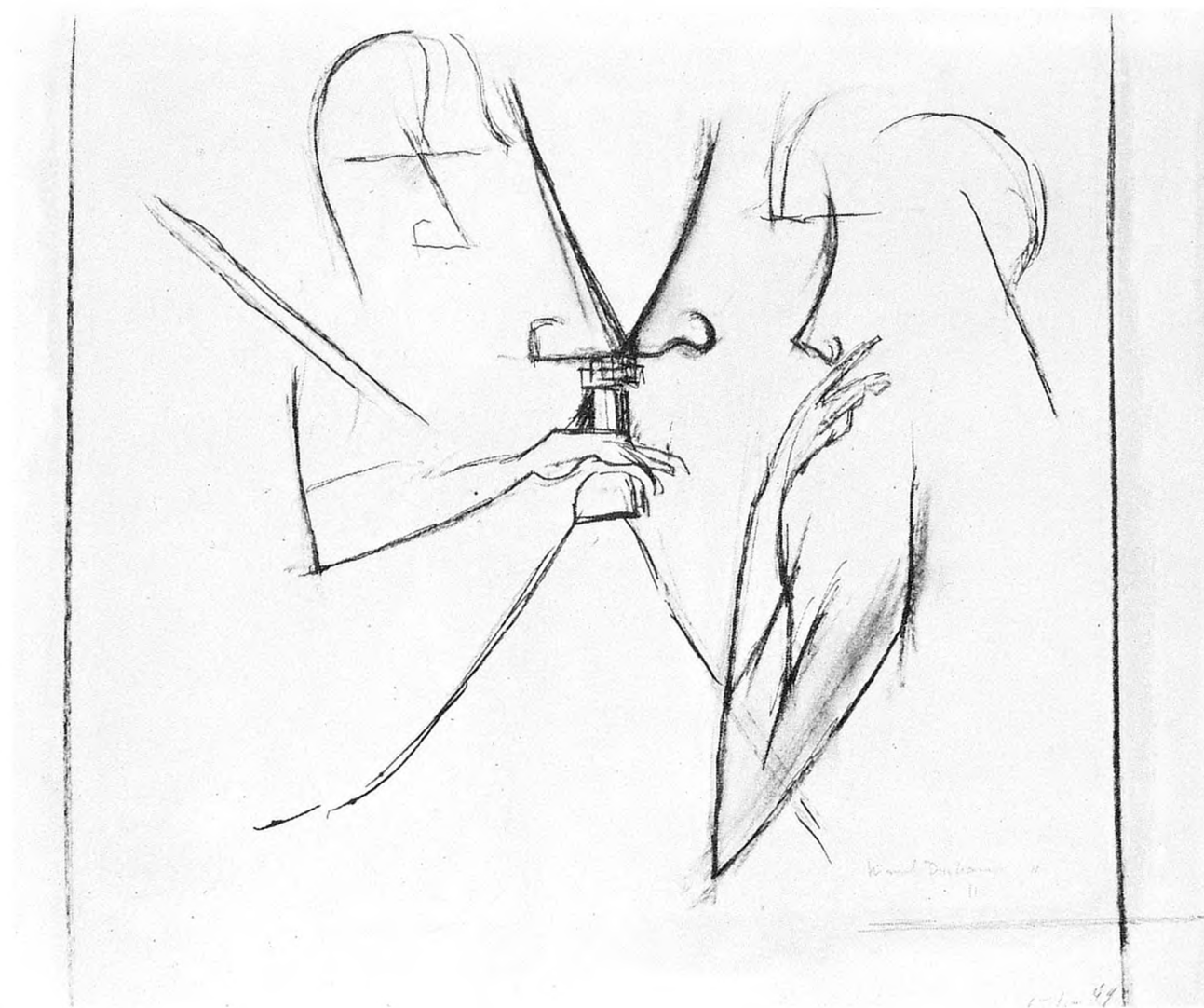
26. *Mi-Carême*, 1909.  
Marcel Duchamp

counterpart, while the wheel of the sewing machine acts as a displaced halo for the kneeling figure. In *The Bride* the 'sex' cylinder dominates once more the centre of the composition, now attached to the figure's head (a disquieting device which points forward to the displacement of the sexual organs found so frequently in Surrealist art), suggesting perhaps that sexual fantasies are the product of the mind and can be a form of intellectual as well as physical activity; in the same way one of the studies for the *Chess*



*Players* [27] of 1911 had shown the players' heads and arms enclosed by two larger heads (symbolized by their noses, which touch), an attempt to render graphically the idea that the true game is being played in the players' minds and not in the movement of their hands

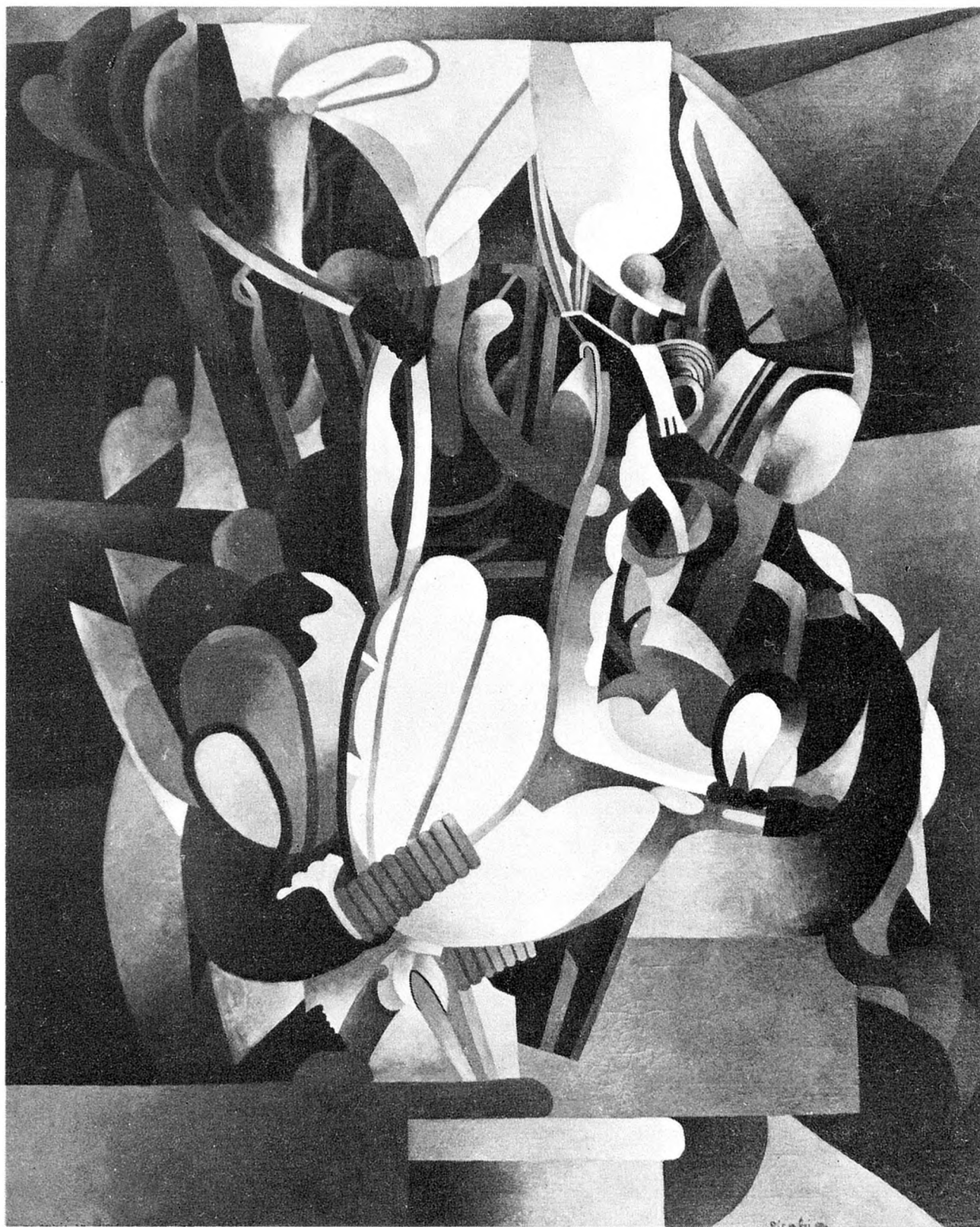
27. Study for *Chess Players*, 1911.  
Marcel Duchamp



across the board. Above, to the left of *The Bride*, hangs a cylindrical form which extends mechanical tentacles towards her and evokes some of the same sadistic, science-fiction overtones conveyed by the male presences in *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* [22].

The extraordinary originality of the *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* [13] and of the Munich series owes a great deal to a new range of intellectual and personal encounters which were conditioning Duchamp's artistic evolution. Duchamp had met Francis Picabia at the Salon d'Automne of 1911 and a friendship between the two men was soon struck up. Duchamp enjoyed Picabia's anarchistic sense of humour and he later observed that Picabia had been to a large extent instrumental in detaching him from the

somewhat solemn world of Puteaux, where the problems of contemporary painting were discussed in serious, often highly theoretical terms.<sup>14</sup> Picabia's *Je Revois en Souvenir Ma Chère Udnie* [28] of 1914, a work showing a marked influence from Duchamp, gives



28. *Je Revois en Souvenir  
Ma Chère Udnie*,  
1914. Francis Picabia

some idea of what the *Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* might have looked like had Duchamp executed it on canvas as he originally intended. Through Picabia Duchamp also found himself often in the company of Apollinaire, and although he later spoke of



the poet somewhat dismissively he cannot have failed to find his company stimulating. In 1912 Duchamp took a trip with his new friends to the district in the Jura Mountains known as Zone (Apollinaire was to use the word as the title for one of his most beautiful poems), an important event in the annals of Dada since it brought together in a concentrated form the personal ingredients that were to create such a strongly proto-Dada climate in Paris during succeeding years. On the holiday Duchamp conceived his idea for the *Jura-Paris Road*, for which the original notes still exist although the work itself was never carried out; it was to have been a two-sided panel with the *Chef des Cinq Nus* (a play on the words 'seins nus' or naked breasts) on the one side and on the other, executed in nickel and platinum, the *Enfant Phare* or 'Headlight Child' (a pun on the word 'fanfare'). Later, in New York, Duchamp was to pay his poet friend a tribute by his altered ready-made



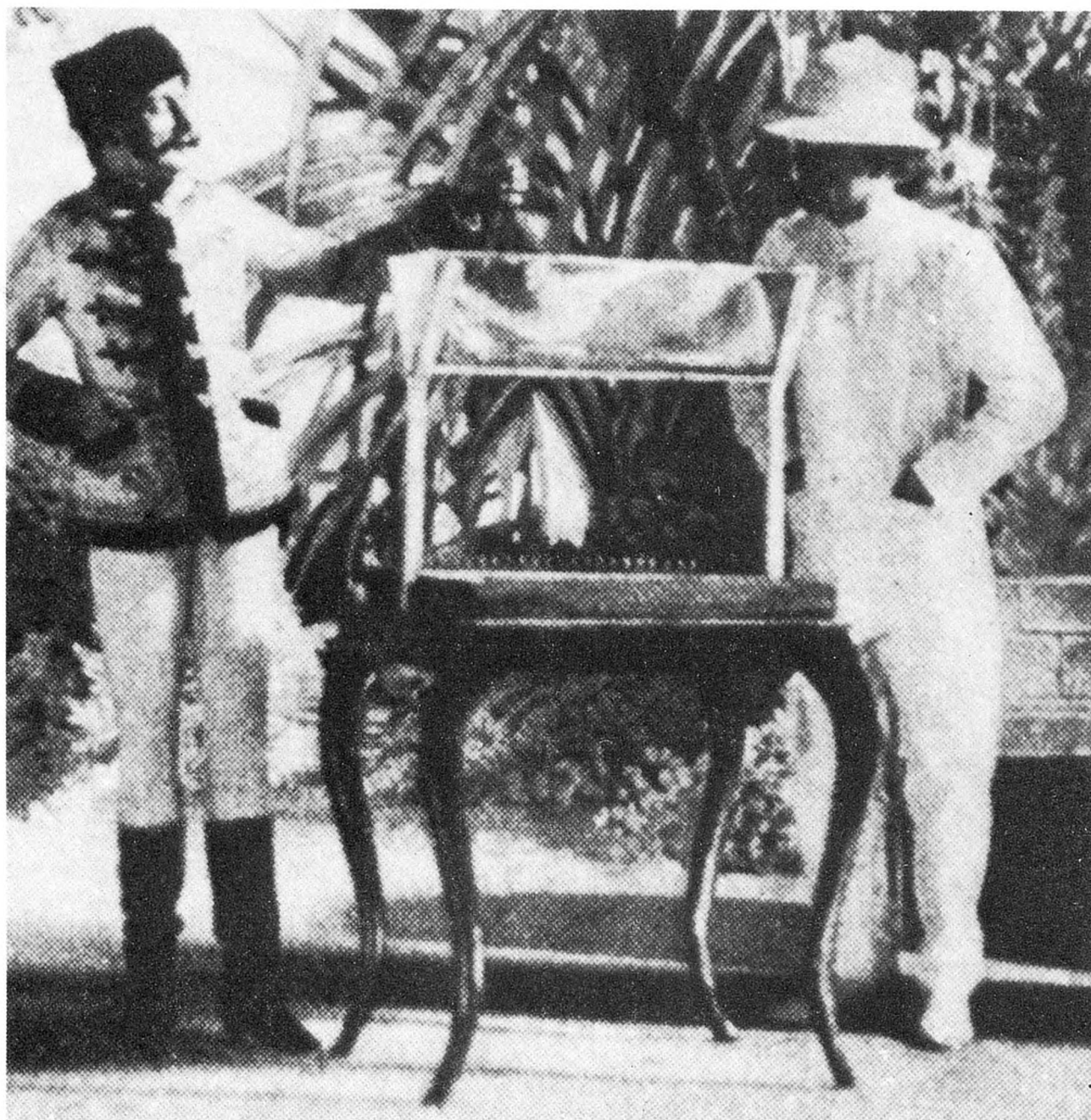
29. *Apolinère Enameled*, 1916-17.  
Marcel Duchamp

*Apolinère Enameled* [29] of 1916-17. It may have been Apollinaire who introduced Duchamp to the work of Brisset, an eccentric who had made a highly personal, not to say fantastical, scientific analysis of language, and whom Duchamp acknowledged as an influence.



Brisset felt that similar sounding words in both French and other languages really meant the same thing, a belief that led him to many bizarre and engaging conclusions (he felt, for example, that because of the similarity in sound between the word 'sexe' and the phrase 'qu'est ce que c'est que ça' he could deduce primitive man's emotions on the discovery of his reproductive organs). Brisset was acclaimed by Duchamp's writer friends as the Douanier Rousseau of contemporary literature, and just as the painters had staged a banquet for Rousseau, so the writers arranged a ceremony to honour Brisset; this took place, appropriately enough, under the statue of Rodin's *Thinker*. Duchamp was amused by Brisset's inventiveness, and his own experiments with language which were to complement increasingly his production in the visual field owe a little to the genial philologist's work.

Most important of all, however, was Duchamp's discovery of the work of Raymond Roussel, when he attended together with Picabia and Apollinaire a performance of Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* [30], an encounter that was to have, as Duchamp frequently stressed, a decisive effect on his art. The play was first staged at the Théâtre Fémina at the end of February 1911 where it ran only for a week, although it was revived at the Théâtre Antoine in May of the following year and played for some four weeks.<sup>15</sup> The work was originally conceived as a novel and appeared first in serialized form. *Impressions d'Afrique* could perhaps be best described as a latter-day science-fiction *Salammbô*. It is concerned with the adventures of a motley assortment of characters, shipwrecked on the shores of Africa, and half the book is devoted to describing a series of theatrical turns and displays of skill staged by the castaways to entertain themselves and their native captors, who also join in the proceedings. In its dramatic form the work was somewhat modified, and the more far-fetched of Roussel's startling inventions were obviously not practically realizable, but one suspects that Duchamp may well have been drawn to the work partly because he was entertained by the way in which the preposterous science-fiction happenings were



30. Photograph from production of  
*Impressions d'Afrique*

reduced to absurdity by the equipment of a conventional Paris theatre. Later he said, 'I realized at once that I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.'<sup>16</sup>

Reading Roussel's work with Duchamp's art in mind there are a startling number of iconographical and technical analogies between the two men's work. To begin with there is Roussel's obsession with the machine and with the human-machine analogy; one of the characters in *Impressions d'Afrique*, for example, is a woman called Louise Montalescot who breathes through a number of fine metal tubes concealed in the epaulettes of the military costume she affects, and who invents a painting machine. Some of

Roussel's machines look like machines but perform human functions. A description of one of them immediately calls Duchamp's Munich series to mind: 'The work was mounted on a sort of millstone which, worked by a pedal, could put into motion a whole system of wheels, rods, levers and springs, which formed an inextricable metallic tangle; on one side was attached an articulated arm ending in a hand clasping a fencing foil.' Other machines perform totally fantastic, pseudo-scientific functions and one is frequently reminded that Jules Verne was Roussel's favourite author. Throughout there is a fascination with transparent, glassy, gelatinous materials. Despite its weird fantasy the book is written in a deliberately straightforward, almost prosaic, matter-of-fact style, and the play was apparently performed in the same way.

In his posthumous book *Comment j'ai écrit mes livres*, which appeared in 1935, two years after his death, Roussel described how random phrases or slogans (the name and address of his bootmaker for instance), slightly altered or added to, could form the basis of a story or a poem. Another favourite technique was the arbitrary bringing together of disparate images or phrases and the subsequent formulation of relationships between them on as realistic a plane as possible. Frequently he would select two words identical in their composition except for a single letter. These words would then be put in identical sentences: one would introduce a story or a poem and the second would conclude it, so that the intervening composition or plot involved a great deal of ingenious intellectual acrobatics in order to link the two. In a sense Roussel's works are often simply gigantic puns, governed by a crazy but inexorable logic. The whole idea of *Impressions d'Afrique* was born, he tells us, out of the similarity in sound between the words 'billiard' and 'pilliard'. The pun was to become fundamental to much of Duchamp's work and often his visual images were the result of an attempt to give concrete, tangible expression to concepts that were purely linguistic. In *Impressions d'Afrique*, as in Roussel's other work, there is a deep fascination with transvestism, which can perhaps be regarded as an



extension of the hermaphroditism which preoccupied so many of the Symbolist writers, and which was in turn to obsess the Surrealists. Duchamp, too, was curious to explore the border lines of male and female sexuality and in the 1920s was to adopt a feminine pseudonym, while a collage of 1921, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, incorporates a photograph of Duchamp disguised as a woman.

Analysing Roussel's work Michel Leiris has written: 'aiming at an almost total detachment from everything that is nature, feeling and humanity, and working laboriously over materials apparently so gratuitous that they were not suspect to him Roussel arrived at the creation of an authentic myth.'<sup>17</sup> The statement might equally well be applied to Duchamp. And the comments of Roussel's distinguished analyst, Doctor Pierre Janet, are also worth recording for the indirect light that they shed on Duchamp's approach. Janet writes, 'Roussel has an interesting concept of literary beauty. The work must contain nothing real, no observations on the world or the mind; nothing but completely imaginary combinations. These are already the ideas of an extra human world.'<sup>18</sup> Duchamp was later to stress that Roussel was important to him because of the attitude embodied in his work rather than for any concrete or visually demonstrable influence that Roussel's work had upon his own. And he was right; the significance of Roussel for him lay in the fact that the writer suggested to him the possibilities of working out his fantasies and his obsessions by the creation of abstract or dehumanized and intellectual symbols which could be manipulated verbally and visually in such a way that they would not offend his deeply fastidious sensibilities. In what is perhaps the most revealing aside he ever made Duchamp once remarked, quite simply, 'It is better to project into machines than to take it out on people.'<sup>19</sup>

The *Bride* marks the culminating point of the first stage in the creation of the Duchamp myth. Her transference to the *Large Glass* is fairly straightforward although she has become, as Duchamp remarks in one of the notes of the *Green Box*, more skeletal [31]. At her base, we learn, 'is a reservoir of love gasoline (or timid-

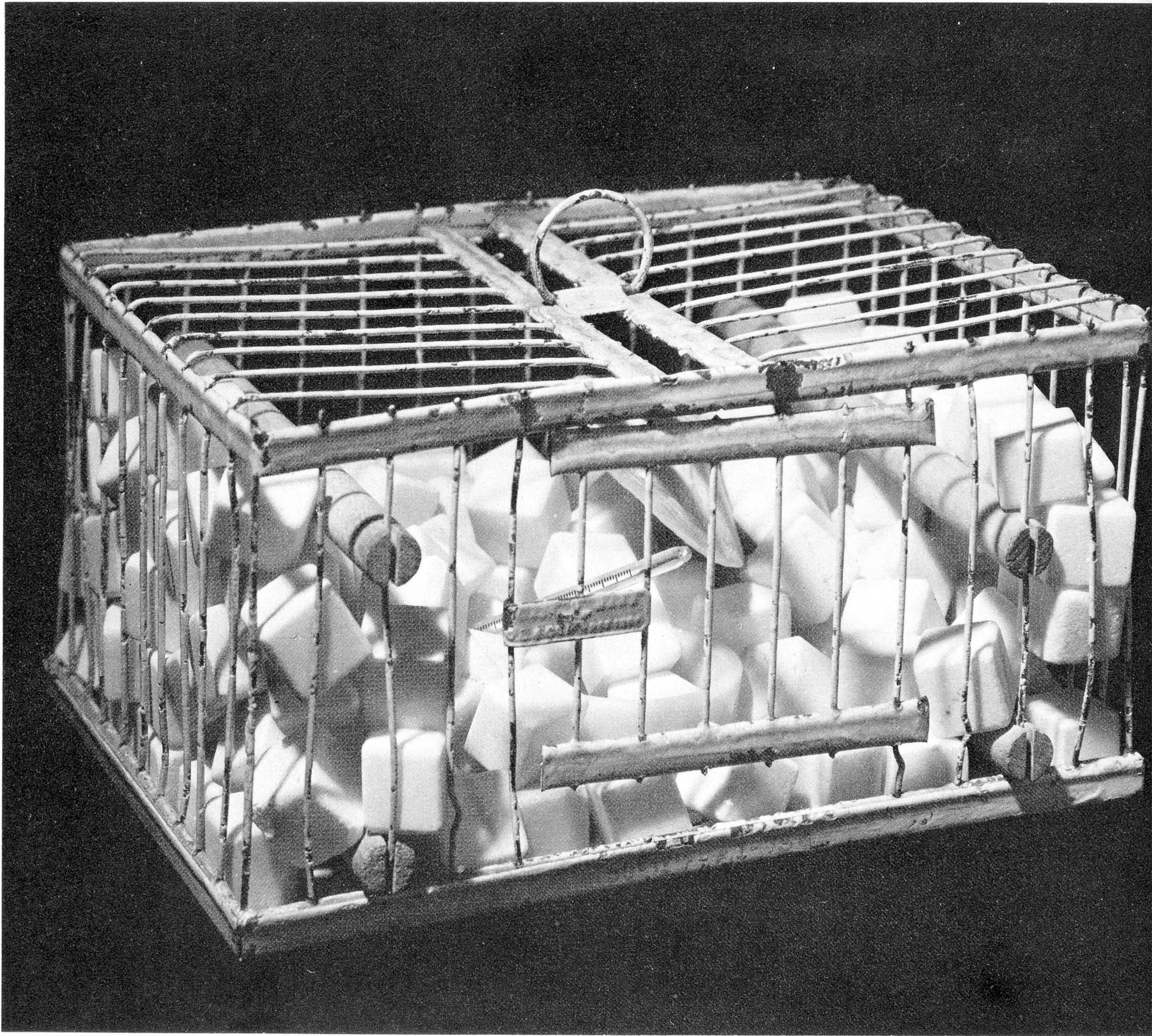


31. *The Bride.*  
Detail of the *Large Glass*

power) distributed to the motor with quite feeble cylinders . . .’ It is interesting to speculate as to whether the motor and the reservoir have been incorporated into the forms we actually see, but in the last analysis such speculation is irrelevant for these concepts may equally well be simply embedded in the transparent glass which surrounds the bridal figure. The motor emits ‘artificial sparks’ which bring about her threefold blossoming or stripping. One of these appears to take place in her mind, and there is more than a suggestion that it leads to an auto-erotic climax. The second blossoming takes the form of messages she emits to her bachelors through the ‘inscription on the top’, whose three openings correspond to the treble blossoming. These messages in turn excite the bachelors to attempt the stripping which they partially achieve (the *Bride*’s dress, originally represented by a thin strip of glass, now rests invisibly below her on the boundaries between the two glass panels), but which they lack the freedom and vitality to pursue to its ultimate conclusions. The third stripping appears to be a combination of the other two.

The *Bride* is a slightly absurd character, and she is not particularly likeable; she is a bitch, a tease and a flirt. But she shines with the pale, impersonal beauty of some primeval moon goddess, and she carries about her an air of authority that springs from the fact that she recognizes herself as the true descendant of Flaubert’s *Salammbô*, of Villier de L’Isle Adam’s *Axel* and his *Eve Future*, of Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* and perhaps most immediately of Laforgue’s *Salomé*. What distinguishes the *Bride* from these women of nineteenth-century fiction is her mordant sense of humour and above all her acute degree of self-knowledge. She is aware of her own absurdity and although she flaunts her sexuality so blatantly she is prepared to acknowledge its underlying frigidity. And like Mallarmé’s swan in *Le Vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui*, which gazes disdainfully around itself as the icy waters of the lake close in upon it, depriving it of its bodily functions, the *Bride*, in her glassy cage, miraculously preserves her dignity.





## 2. *The Bachelors*

It is one of the paradoxes of Duchamp's career (and indeed his is a career that can only be understood in terms of paradox) that while he was searching for technical solutions which would ensure the permanence of a work which was becoming increasingly ambitious iconographically and experimental in its means, he should have produced simultaneously a series of works of a highly ephemeral nature, which at the time of their creation were almost certainly not intended for posterity. These were his celebrated 'ready-mades', the objects which will perhaps prove to have been his most important contribution to the creation of a particular aesthetic climate which has conditioned a very considerable amount of subsequent artistic production. The *Bride* retained certain visual links with the world of Cubism. The *Bachelors* on the other hand belong to the world of the ready-made.

The ready-made can perhaps best be described as an object in the material, external world, most often a manufactured object, which the artist by virtue of the attention he turns upon it elevates to the symbolic status of a work of art. Its selection is obviously not a random affair and Duchamp has described his coming together with these objects as 'a kind of rendezvous'. Duchamp realized too that for the ready-made to retain its power to force upon the recipient or viewer a reappraisal of intellectual and aesthetic values it must retain a quality of rarity and he deliberately limited his output. The techniques employed in the selection or production of Duchamp's ready-mades were varied. An object could be selected on the spur of the moment but it could also be conceived in advance – a note in the *Green Box*, for example, reads 'buy a pair of tongs as a ready-made'. The ready-made could also be produced by proxy,

and in 1919 Duchamp's sister Suzanne produced in Paris the *Unhappy Ready-Made*, a geometry text book fastened to a balcony, on instructions sent to her by Duchamp from Buenos Aires. Duchamp also conceived the possibility of a reciprocal ready-made: 'use a Rembrandt as an ironing board.' Finally there was the assisted ready-made, less pure but capable of wider psychological interpretation and for this reason the form of ready-made most venerated by the Surrealists. One of the most celebrated of these, *Why Not Sneeze?* [32], executed in New York in 1921, consists of small marble blocks (resembling lumps of sugar), a cuttle bone and a thermometer, all placed in a small bird cage.

Because we have lived so long with the awareness or knowledge of Duchamp's ready-mades, they have assumed an endearing familiarity to our eyes, and it is perhaps proof of their importance that history has seen fit to present the concepts embodied in them in different ways to successive generations of artists and intellectuals. Originally, however, they were conceived by Duchamp as a form of communication devoid of aesthetic enjoyment, and in later life he remarked on the fact that one of the difficulties in the creation of a ready-made lay precisely in finding objects which possessed no formally pleasing properties to the eye.<sup>20</sup> The original ready-mades were, furthermore, gestures of revolt against accepted artistic canons, and in many ways the most self-consciously iconoclastic act that any artist had yet made. Because the gesture was made by an artist of stature the objects which were touched by him intellectually and physically (many of the ready-mades such as the *Trap*, for example, a coat-rack nailed to the floor, depended on their positioning for their impact) acquired by proxy an aesthetic significance, not so much because of the aesthetic qualities unexpectedly revealed in them as by virtue of the aesthetic questions that they raised. By subjecting objects to a dislocation from their normal function and material context Duchamp forces us to look at them in a new way. In the same way the 'dépaysement' to which the Symbolist poets subjected words in an attempt to liberate in them some hidden



meaning (Maeterlinck's is perhaps the most extreme case) endowed them with certain magical qualities. The difference lies in the fact that the ready-mades are deliberately devoid of poetry. They are incantatory objects devoid of cant. Subsequently Duchamp appears to have come to view the ready-made as a work of art, just as he admitted that by seeking to be as unpoetic as possible he was secretly hoping to create poetry of a new kind, and from the start he seems to have recognized their importance. But their value lay originally in the 'higher degree of intellectuality' they represented and not in the beauty of their forms or the aesthetic pleasure embodied in the gesture that produced them.

Ultimately Duchamp was to reject the term 'anti-art' which he felt implied too positive an aesthetic attitude. He said, 'the word anti-art annoys me a little, because whether you are anti or for, it's two sides of the same thing'.<sup>21</sup> And indeed what isolates him from the most characteristically Dada artists is precisely the passivity of his approach. 'Irony', he once remarked, 'is the playfulness of accepting something, mine is the irony of indifference.'<sup>22</sup> And again, 'While Dada was a movement of negation and, by the very fact of its negation, turned itself into an appendage of the exact thing it was negating, Picabia and I wanted to open up a corridor of humour which at once led into dream-imagery and, consequently, into Surrealism.'<sup>23</sup> In fact Duchamp's attitude towards Surrealism was basically the same as his attitude towards Dada. In both cases he had been a precursor and an important influence. He once said of Dada that it represented a sort of nihilism that he continued to find very sympathetic,<sup>24</sup> but he must have at the same time been slightly repelled by its aggressive earnestness and one suspects that he found Dada techniques lacking in subtlety, while in the same way he gracefully divorced himself from the conclusions of Surrealism when these became too programmatic and when the movement's aims involuntarily but inevitably hardened into a positive aesthetic. His own art was neither one of affirmation nor rejection, and his iconoclasm was one of sublimation and gentleness.

In a sense the ready-mades represent the culmination of a Symbolist aesthetic. Mallarmé, haunted by ‘the demon of analogy’, sought constantly to distance his images by substituting others which would convey similar ideas and sensations in a more allusive and suggestive way; his poems are works of art, deliberately hermetic, but immediately recognizable as such. It could be argued that Duchamp takes Mallarmé’s aesthetic through to its ultimate conclusions by finding a substitute for the work of art itself. For the veiled allusions of the Symbolists, for the layers of meaning disguised in ever paler tints and so often tinged with mysticism, Duchamp substitutes, quite simply, a technique of paradox. In other words, while Mallarmé distances his image from its description by an ever widening gulf of analogies, Duchamp produces much the same effect by an immediate short circuit of our preconceived notions about the nature of art and of the creative act. Although he was consciously trying to produce an art more purely cerebral in its conception than that of any of his contemporaries, as he was at pains to stress, he rejected the rational just as he rejected the natural, and to come to an appreciation of it the spectator must accept, as such, the paradoxes it involves.

Duchamp’s first ready-mades are highly attractive as objects, although they may have seemed less immediately so to the eyes of his contemporaries. Of the *Bicycle Wheel* [33], which in 1913 he had mounted on a white stool and placed in his studio, Duchamp later said, ‘It just came about as a pleasure, something to have in my room the way you have a fire . . . except that there was no usefulness. It was a pleasant gadget, pleasant for the movement it gave.’<sup>25</sup> But as the idea of the ready-made developed, its connotations tended to become blacker and more disturbing and at the same time more humorous. The first ready-made to be produced after Duchamp’s arrival in New York was a snow shovel entitled *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (implying that the user of the shovel may well encounter some hard, hostile substance buried under the soft snow), and this was succeeded in following years by such works as the celebrated

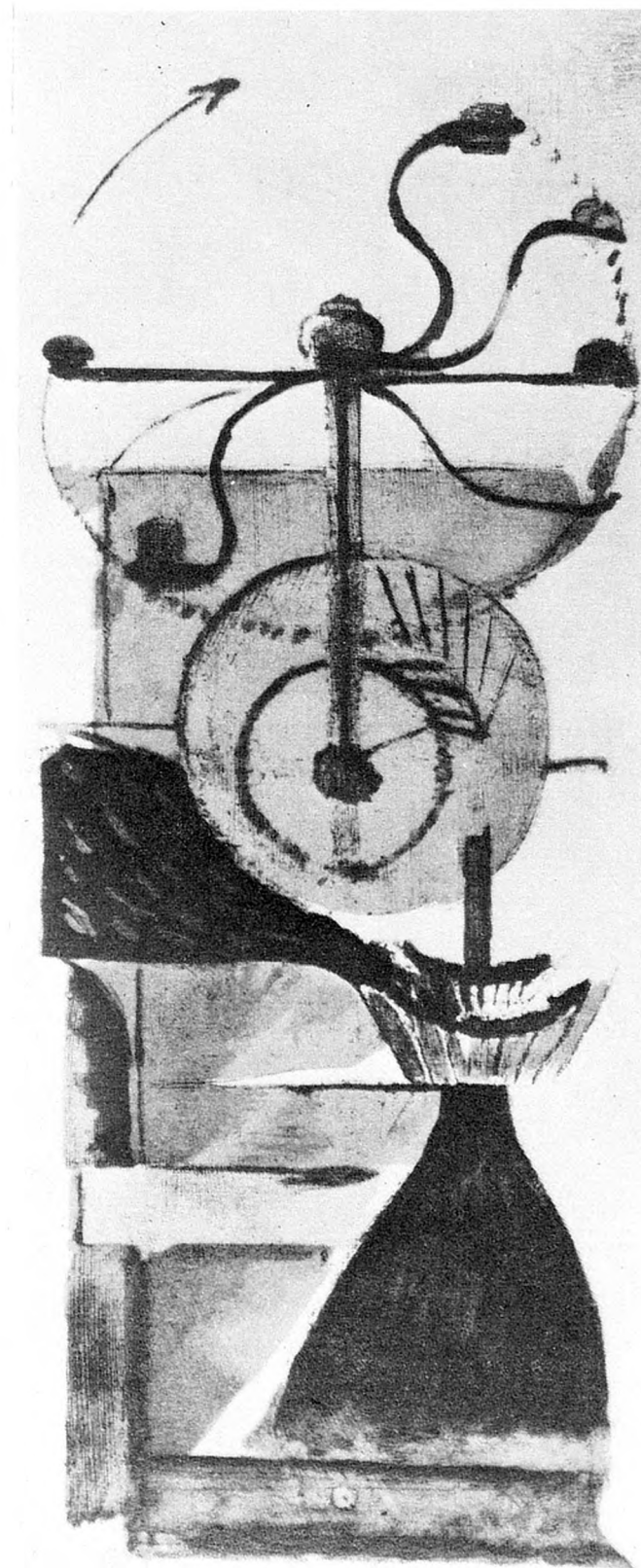


33. *Bicycle Wheel*. Marcel Duchamp



urinal or *Fountain*, signed by R. Mutt and submitted to the New York Independents of 1917: a brief article in *Blind Man* defended the work in words which bear the imprint of Duchamp's mind; '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.'<sup>26</sup> Since *Sad Young Man on a Train* of 1911 titles had played an important part in Duchamp's work (he was amused by the combination of the sounds 'triste' and 'train')<sup>27</sup> and now they often become an essential ingredient if the ready-made is to achieve its full significance or effect – this is true, for example, of the snow shovel – and generally speaking they tend to become more elaborate in their conception. Duchamp's puns or 'verbal ready-mades' also become increasingly sophisticated and are often applied to 'assisted' ready-mades as titles. Some of these are in French and some in English and they are for obvious reasons not always translatable. This is true even in the case of the *Large Glass* itself, for in French the 'même' of the title when spoken can be interpreted as 'm'aime' or as the fact that the Bride 'loves me'.

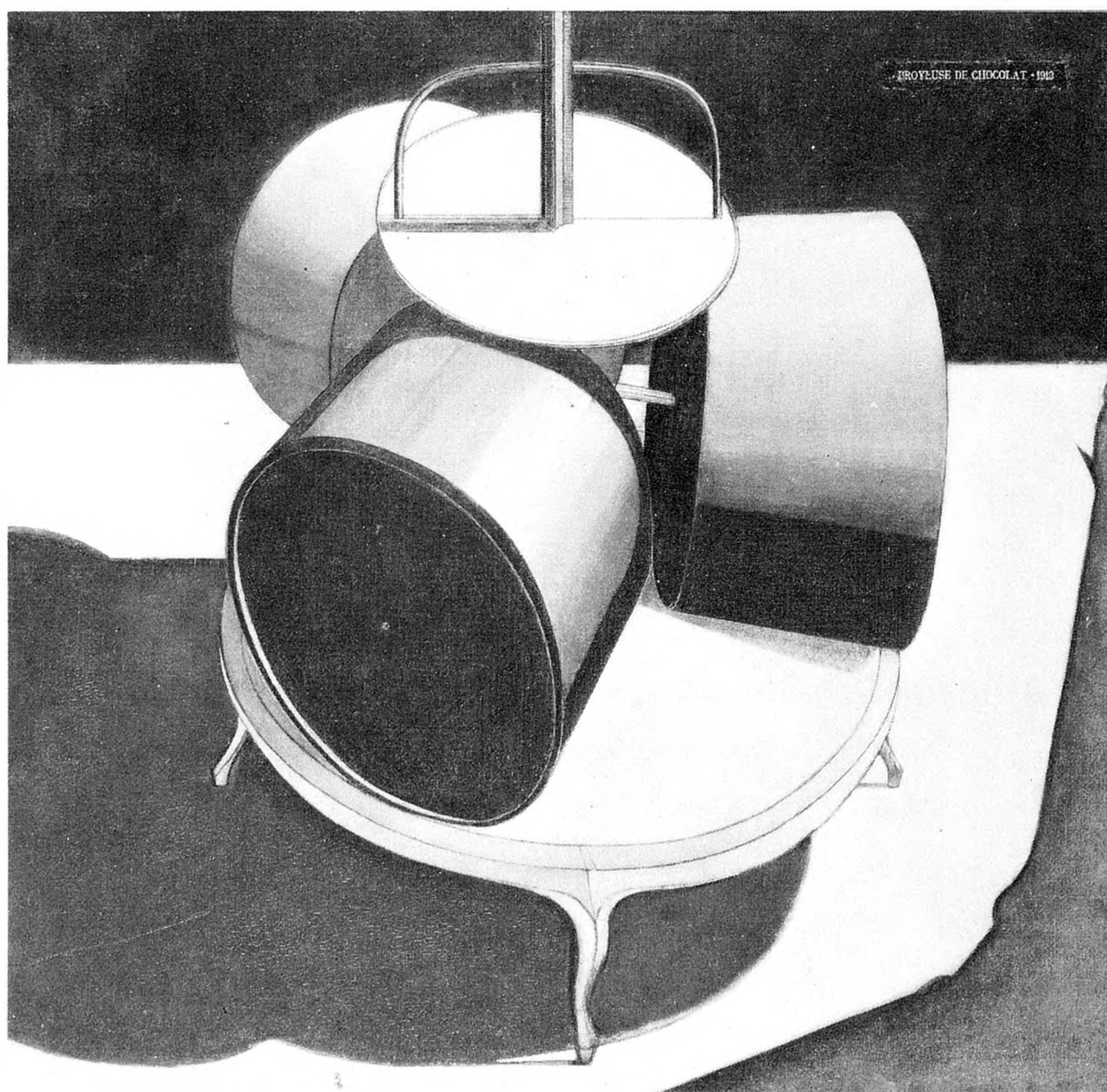
The studies for the lower half of the *Large Glass*, or for the *Bachelor Apparatus*, and its subsequent inclusion in the work itself introduce a further dimension into Duchamp's doctrine of paradox in that having transformed everyday objects of common usage into artifacts having artistic connotations, Duchamp was simultaneously rendering comparable objects in a painstakingly realistic or illusionistic technique. The machines of the *Bachelor Apparatus* (the *Chocolate Grinder* and the *Water Mill*) resemble the earliest ready-mades in that they have an undeniable formal elegance, although not surprisingly (since the iconography is so elaborately plotted) they also anticipate the complexity of later examples. As a prelude to the *Bachelor* machines Duchamp had executed the delightfully witty *Coffee Mill* [34] towards the end of 1911 as part of a light-hearted decorative scheme for the kitchen of one of his brothers, a



work of great importance in that it expresses, more clearly than anything Duchamp had hitherto produced, his fascination with the artistic possibilities of the machine. The work parodies in a schematic fashion the Cubists' use of a variable viewpoint, while the handle is shown in successive motion, completed by a diagrammatic arrow; the coffee is fed into the machine to the left of the painting and falls (invisibly) into the drawer at the bottom, an element which still calls to mind similar compositional devices in still lifes by Cézanne and the Cubists. In the *Chocolate Grinder* of 1913 [35], the first

34 (left). *Coffee Mill*, 1911.  
Marcel Duchamp

35. *Chocolate Grinder No. 1*, 1913.  
Marcel Duchamp



element of the bachelor apparatus to reach concrete expression, the raw material (the chocolate) is significantly absent and the object has acquired a hieratic, symbolic quality which results in part from the fact that it is divorced from its functional aspect (the ridges which the rollers of the original, glimpsed in a confectioner's shop

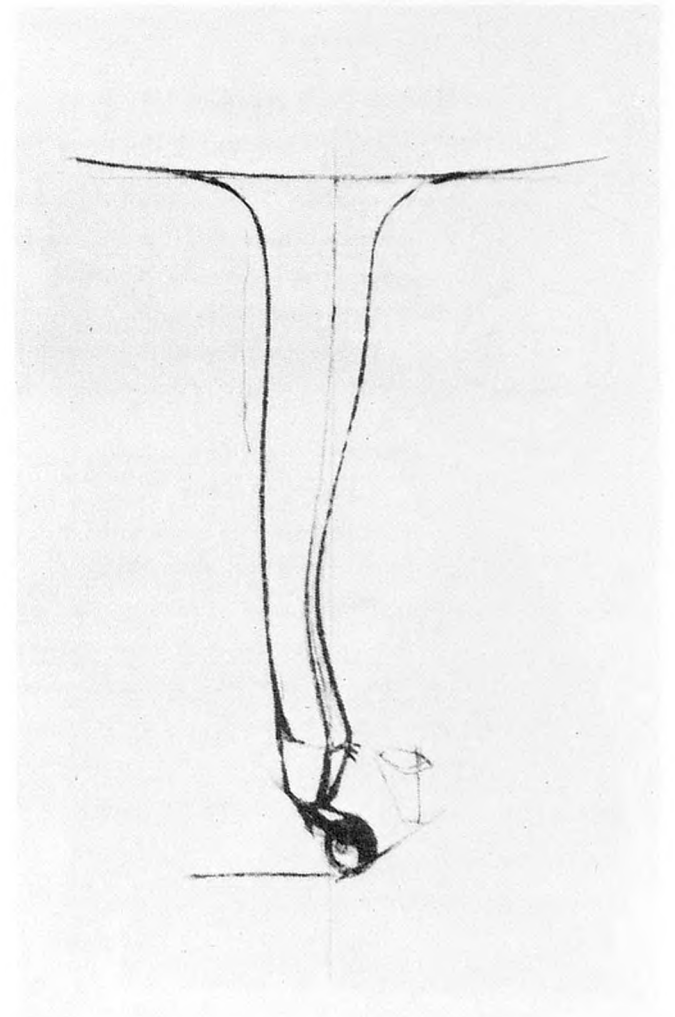


window in Rouen, must have possessed in order to grip the chocolate are missing) so that the machine is static, impotent and chocolateless. The icon-like quality is further heightened by the fact that the work is painted with a high degree of realism and in a technique of immaculate precision. Already in the *King and Queen* and in the Munich paintings Duchamp's manner had become increasingly impersonal with the paint smoothed and rubbed onto the canvas to eliminate the physical traces left by the painter's brush. Now, in the *Chocolate Grinder*, the drawing has become totally mechanical and in the process Duchamp's line has acquired a hard, spare elegance which is particularly evident in the drawing of the Louis XV leg of the machine [36], and which was to be a characteristic of all the elements in the lower half of the *Large Glass*. 'I wanted to return to an absolutely dry drawing, to the creation of a dry art', Duchamp later said, 'and what better example of this new art than mechanical drawing. I began to appreciate the value of exactitude and precision.'<sup>28</sup> Colour, too, has acquired a new metallic hardness.

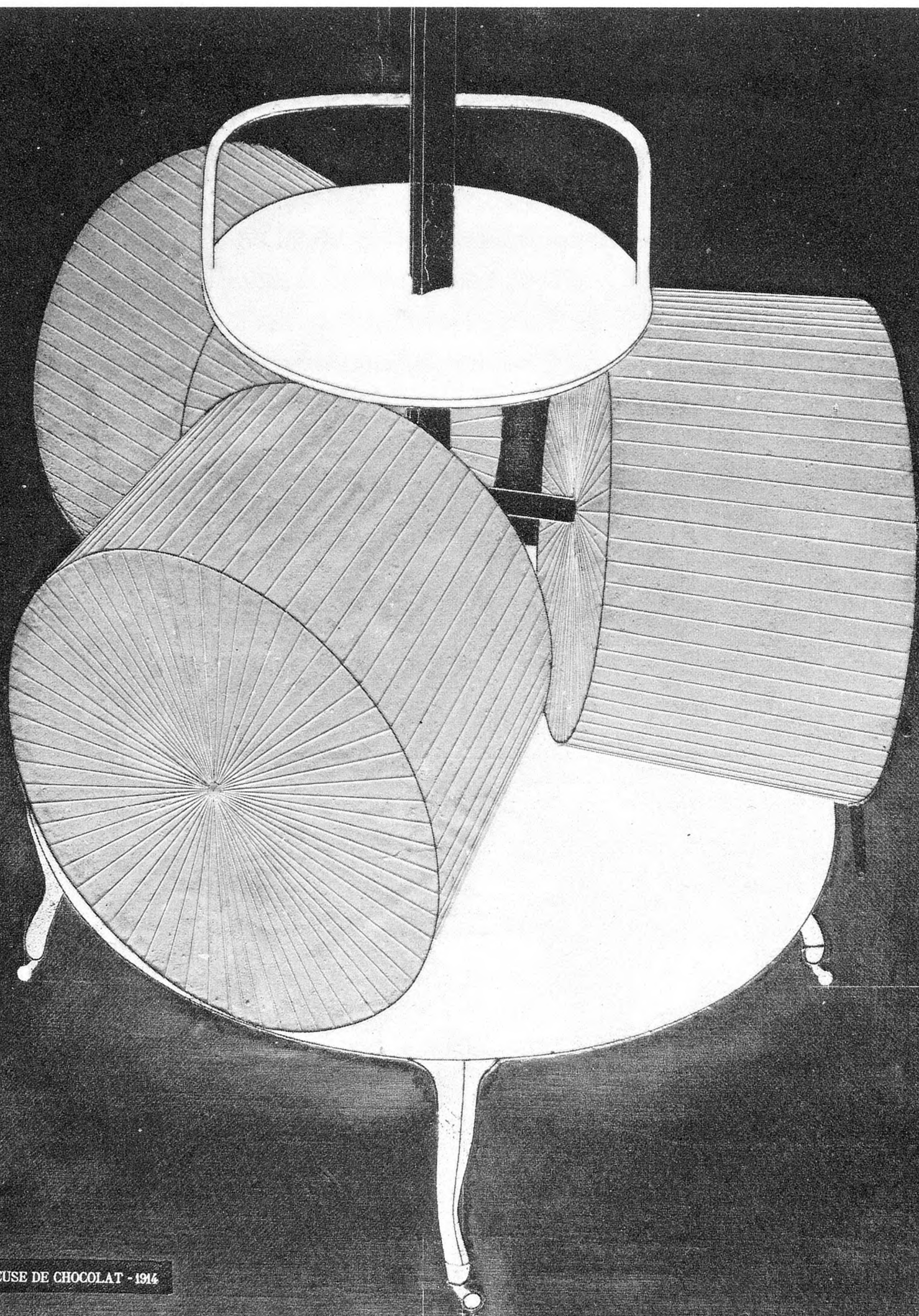
The Cubist multiple viewpoint perspective, so wittily mocked in the *Coffee Mill*, has been replaced in the *Chocolate Grinder* by an extraordinarily skilful and lucid reversion to a traditional single viewpoint system, applied with a rigour and seriousness that recalls the art of the Quattrocento; and indeed Duchamp later came to consider that one of his most important innovations in art was the reintroduction of traditional classical and Renaissance perspective into post-Cubist art. A second version of the *Chocolate Grinder* [37] emphasizes the perspectival element still further by the addition of the ridges of the rollers, achieved by the device of threading string through the canvas (the first version of the painting was to be, with one important exception, Duchamp's last essay in pure oil painting). In the first version the aggressive three-dimensionality of the machine had been counterbalanced by the adoption of a high, Cézannesque viewpoint, and by the suppression of recessive elements around the machine. In the second canvas the background has become totally flat, forcing the illusionistically rendered forms up

36 (below). *The Louis XV Leg*,  
1914. Marcel Duchamp

37 (right). *Chocolate Grinder No. 2*,  
1914. Marcel Duchamp



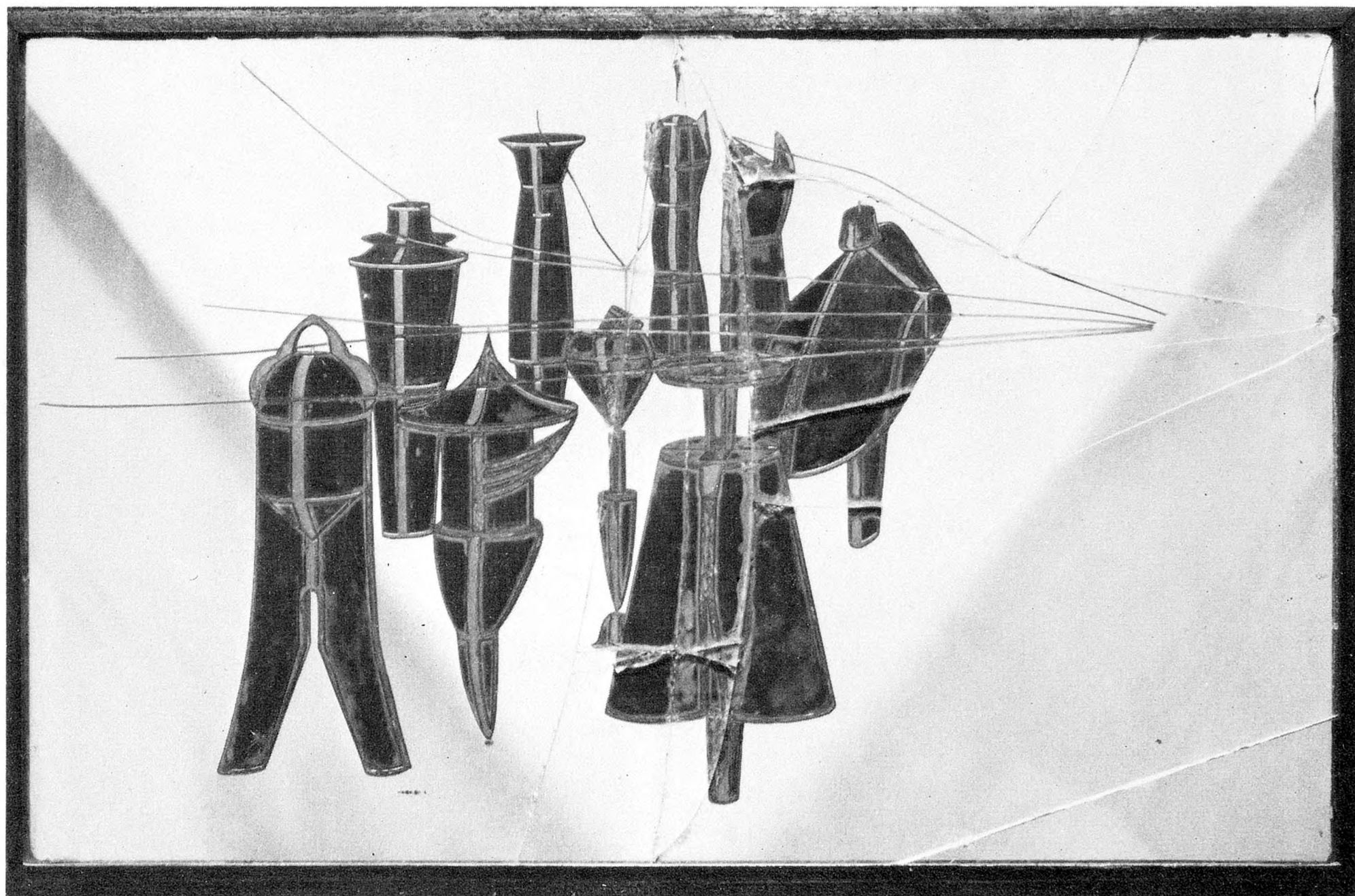




BROYEUSE DE CHOCOLAT - 1914



onto the two-dimensional support, and giving them a curiously heightened air of reality. The burnished, metallic colour of the earlier version has given way, too, to harmonics that are more impersonally elegant. Within the context of the *Large Glass* the *Chocolate Grinder*, as the notes from the *Green Box* make clear, is the symbol for the male genitals, and hence the counterpart of the bridal sex cylinder, and it occupies compositionally and symbolically much the same position in the *Large Glass* as the latter had done in the *Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*. The active role it plays in the mechanics of the *Glass* is relatively small, but it dominates the composition both by virtue of its size and by its positioning, just off



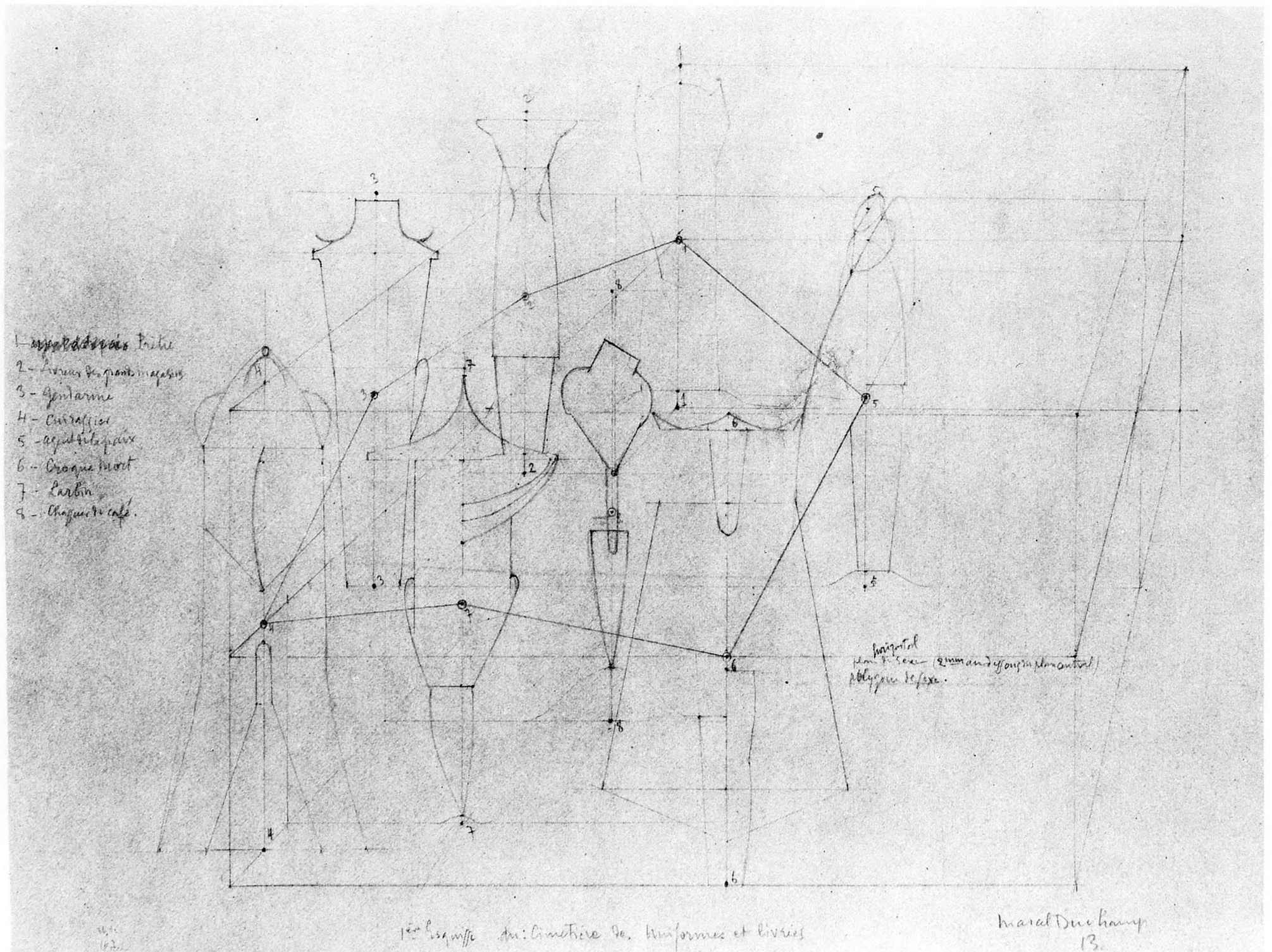
38. *Nine Malic Moulds*, 1913-14. Marcel Duchamp



centre. And once we become aware of its significance it assumes the role of a modern totem that acts as a key to the symbolism of the work as a whole.

The *Bride* is partnered not by the *Chocolate Grinder*, but by the *Nine Malic Moulds*, her bachelors, the malic of the title being, presumably, an 'adjustment' of the word 'phallic' [38]. A definitive model on glass was executed in Paris during 1914-15. The *Malic Moulds* have their origins most directly in the robot-like apparitions flanking the bridal figure in the first Munich sketch. The number of suitors was first of all extended to eight (in a preparatory drawing) and finally to nine, 'a mathematically more agile number'. Two

39. Cemetery of  
Uniforms and Liveries No. 1, 1913.  
Marcel Duchamp

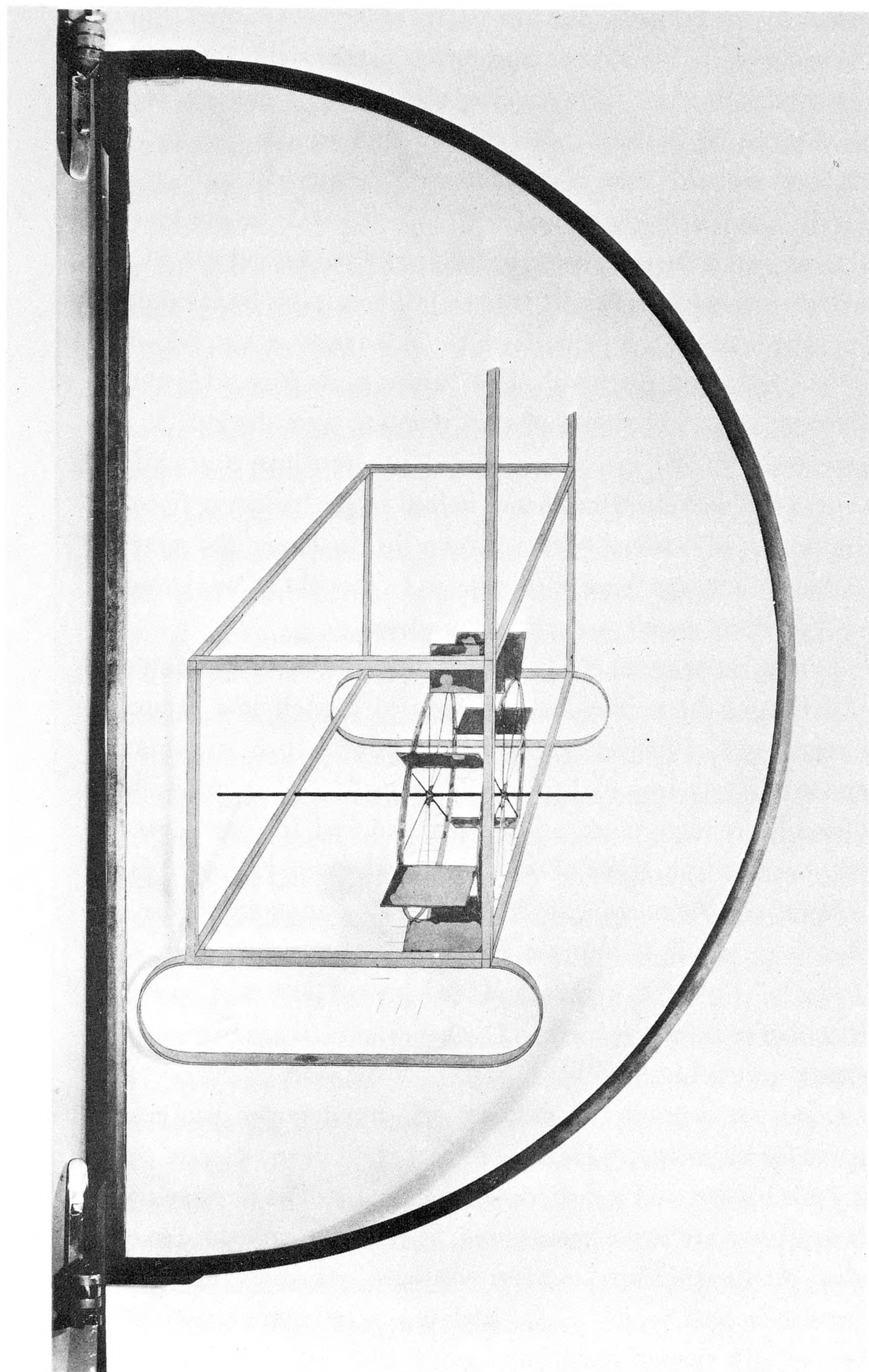




preparatory studies in pencil are entitled *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*, and a written key to the side of the first of these [39] enables us to identify the individual moulds in terms of their 'uniforms' as a priest, an undertaker, a policeman and so on. They are 'provisionally painted with red lead', the *Green Box* tells us, 'while waiting for each one to receive its colours, like croquet mallets'. They are hollow (the idea of the body as an empty vessel capable of receiving other substances into it was one that obsessed Duchamp from the start; for example in *Dimanches*, one of the cartoons of 1909, a young woman, obviously pregnant, pushes a pram carrying a baby thus unequivocally making a parallel between her body and the machine/container) and are destined to receive the 'illuminating gas' transmitted to them from the Bride's inscription at the top. The progenitors of the moulds in the Munich sketch had bristled with phallic menace but the *Bachelors* wait passively for an erotic fulfillment which they are eventually forced to carry out on themselves: 'the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself.' The reasons for the *Bride's* insistence on multiple partners are obscure, but her suitors perform the function of mechanical spare parts and they contribute to the sensation, cardinal to Duchamp's vision, that many possibilities are open even if none of them can lead to a definitive or totally satisfactory outcome.<sup>29</sup>

The first work to be executed on glass was not the *Malic Moulds* but the *Glider Containing a Water Mill (in neighbouring metals)* [40], begun in 1913 but finished (like the *Moulds*) in 1915 before Duchamp's departure for America; the *Glider* is unique in that of all the works on glass it alone remains unbroken. The main reason for Duchamp's adoption of glass as a support or vehicle was the result of a characteristic balance of visual stimulation and curiosity, supplemented by more purely abstract, speculative concerns. These dual aspects of artistic creativity are of course present in the production of all painting and sculpture, although in Duchamp's case the mind informs the eye to an unusually pronounced degree. In preceding years he had made use of a glass palette, and he had been

40. *Glider Containing  
a Water Mill*  
(in neighbouring metals),  
1913-15.  
Marcel Duchamp



struck by the brilliance and luminosity of pigment viewed through glass and by the fact that pressed up against the rigid, mechanically achieved surface the paint acquired a quality of impersonal perfection which he realized could ideally complement the dry, disciplined and exact form of draughtsmanship which he had achieved for the first time in the *Chocolate Grinder*. He was also intrigued by the idea that if the paint could be sealed off from behind it would not oxidize and would retain its pristine brilliance; this he achieved by pressing onto the wet paint (from behind) a layer of lead foil which isolated it from contact with the air about it. As Richard Hamilton remarks, 'The techniques of glass painting were directed at permanence.'<sup>30</sup> Then again glass offered an alternative to traditional canvas and stretchers and hence helped to get him away from the physicality of 'olefactory' art. A note in the *Green Box* suggests *Delay in Glass* as a 'kind of subtitle' to be thought of 'as you would say "poem in prose" or a spittoon in silver'.

During the years when Duchamp had worked with the traditional materials of the painter he had revealed himself as a painter of images, and of images whose relationship to their backgrounds and to the space around them was occasionally irrelevant and always of secondary importance, a factor that had from the start separated his concerns from those of the Cubists, who were interested in the concept of objects embedded in a spatial continuum or flux that was as pictorially significant as the objects themselves. In some works of 1911 the background had proved almost a source of irritation or embarrassment to Duchamp, who had in two instances simply painted in wide black borders at the sides of the canvas to obviate the necessity of working out a convincing background space for his images.<sup>31</sup> He once remarked, 'The question of painting in a background is degrading for a painter. The thing you want to express is not in the background.'<sup>32</sup> An image embedded in clear glass, on the other hand, accepts whatever background its situation cares to impose on it, '. . . with glass you can concentrate on the figure'.<sup>33</sup> In view of Duchamp's subsequent statements about the



role played by the spectator in completing for himself the inevitably imperfectly realized work of art (for he believed that between the artist's conception of a work of art and its physical realization a gap must necessarily exist) he may have been unconsciously attracted by the idea that when studying a work of art executed on glass the viewer would see himself and his surroundings to a certain extent mirrored in the object of his contemplation, thus involving a further degree of participation on his part. Jarry, in his experiments with the theatre, had toyed with the idea of a mirror backdrop which would reflect the audience behind the players' backs, thus forcing it to confront itself as part of the reality of the drama it was witnessing, and in a less extreme fashion a similar idea may have been at the back of Duchamp's mind.

Of all the elements that compose the *Bachelor Apparatus* the *Glider* [40] (also referred to as the 'sleigh' or 'slide' or 'chariot') approximates most closely the sort of devices found in the writings of Jarry and Roussel. One of the features of their science fiction (particularly of Roussel's) is that it is not on the whole mechanically and technologically visionary; rather it is the most ordinary objects that are made to perform the most extraordinary tasks. So too Duchamp's machines are mostly old fashioned, and out of date: the watermill is a relic of the nineteenth century as is the chocolate grinder. The difference between Duchamp's work and that of Roussel is that the marvels that the machines would have been made to perform in the latter's writings take place, if at all, in the case of Duchamp's art in the spectator's mind (although the *Green Box* conveys a great deal of supplementary if at times contradictory material). In the *Large Glass* the *Glider* or *Chariot* is put into motion partly by an imaginary waterfall which strikes the *Water Mill* 'from behind the *Malic Moulds*', but more directly by a hook or weight (invisible) which falls between the *Glider* and the *Grinder* and which is 'made of a substance of oscillating density'; at one point a bottle of benedictine is suggested as an alternative. The *Glider* moves back and forth in a plane parallel to that of the glass surface. The function



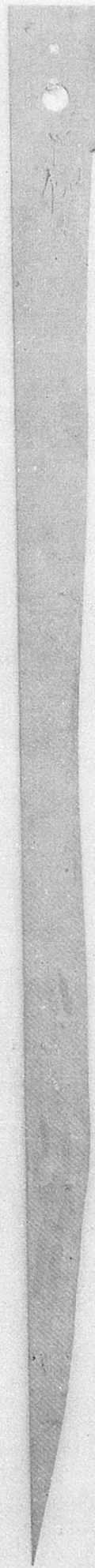
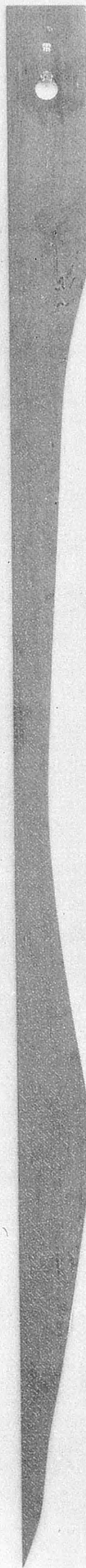
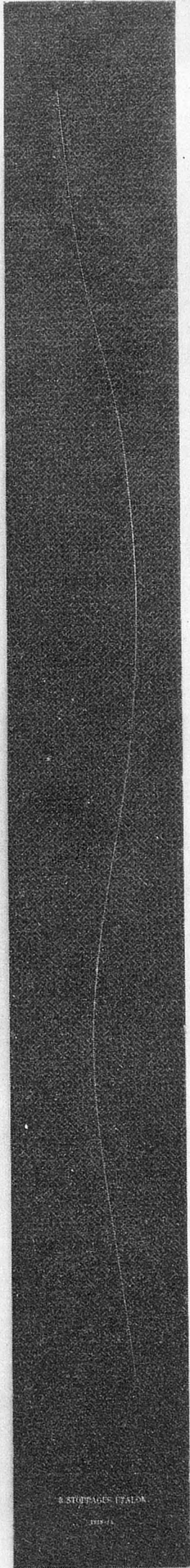
it plays in the overall action of the *Large Glass* is complex but, as will be seen, basically anti-climactic. In their first full incarnation the *Water Mill* and its *Glider* were inscribed on a semi-circular piece of glass, bound by metal and now hinged to a wall of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Thus for all the complicated engineering described in the *Green Box*, the movement the apparatus is allowed is one that the spectator imposes on it as he swings the glass semi-circle back and forth on the axis of its supports. Its placing, next to the *Large Glass*, adds to the sense of involvement.

The complexity or intricacy of the forms of the *Water Mill* in the *Glider* [40] demonstrate more than any other single element in the *Large Glass* Duchamp's virtuosity in the manipulation of complex effects of recession or foreshortening, and indeed the layout of the lower half of the *Glass* represents a unique perspectival *tour de force*. By the end of 1913 both plan and elevation for the *Bachelor Apparatus* were fully formulated in such a way that, to quote Richard Hamilton, 'The perspective projection onto the glass is an ideal demonstration of classical perspective, that is to say, the elements of the bachelor apparatus were first imagined as distributed on the floor behind the glass rather than as a composition on a two-dimensional surface.'<sup>34</sup> In fact the mathematical calculations involved in the perspectival projection though impressive in their combined complexity and lucidity are, as Hamilton points out, highly personal. And the spatial effect produced by the lower half of the *Glass* is ambiguous and hard to analyse. The perspectival lines all converge to a horizon that lies along the line where upper and lower panels touch. Given an effort of will on the spectator's part the various parts of the *Bachelor Apparatus* can be made to sit convincingly in this ideal illusionary space. The sensation of recession towards a horizon is however counteracted by the fact that forms and lines glimpsed through the glass (the line of a skirting board, for example) inevitably destroy the ideal mental projection of space, while an awareness of the *Glass's* flatness, undestroyed and undisturbed in the areas around the various male elements, constantly forces even

the most recessive and aggressively three-dimensional parts (the *Glider* and the *Chocolate Grinder*) to measure themselves up to the rigidly two-dimensional surface on which they are encrusted. We can force them back into depth and space by an effort of intellectual and visual will but they swim forward again to float, icon-like, on their glassy support.

It is characteristic of Duchamp's approach that while he was mastering various systems of scientific calculation with a view towards producing his own highly personal method of perspectival notation (in certain cases he toyed with the idea of using novel photographic procedures), he should simultaneously have been undermining the scientific basis of his art by informing it with what could perhaps best be called a sort of 'crazy mathematics' closer in many ways to Jarry's 'pataphysics' (described in *Dr Faustroll* of 1911 as the 'science of imaginary solutions') than to Pavlovski's interpretations of the fourth dimension which he was studying at the time. There had for some time been a certain amount of talk of the fourth dimension in Cubist circles though it is doubtful if any of the painters, with the possible exception of Gris, were seriously influenced by any very sophisticated or revolutionary scientific or mathematical systems of calculation. Duchamp, more than any other artist of his generation, had the bent of mind and the intellect to come to grips with the discoveries of science, and he was a friend of the amateur mathematician Maurice Princet, who was said to have introduced the subject of the fourth dimension into Cubist gatherings. But Duchamp's definition of the concept when he formulated it reflected his basic mistrust of science and was a characteristic blend of the ironically playful and the philosophically profound. There was no reason, he suggested, why three-dimensional objects could not be considered as the flat shadows or reflections of the fourth dimension, invisible because it could never be seen by the human eye. The *Large Glass*, he was to insist, was just such a projection of a four-dimensional object: 'the apparition of an appearance'.



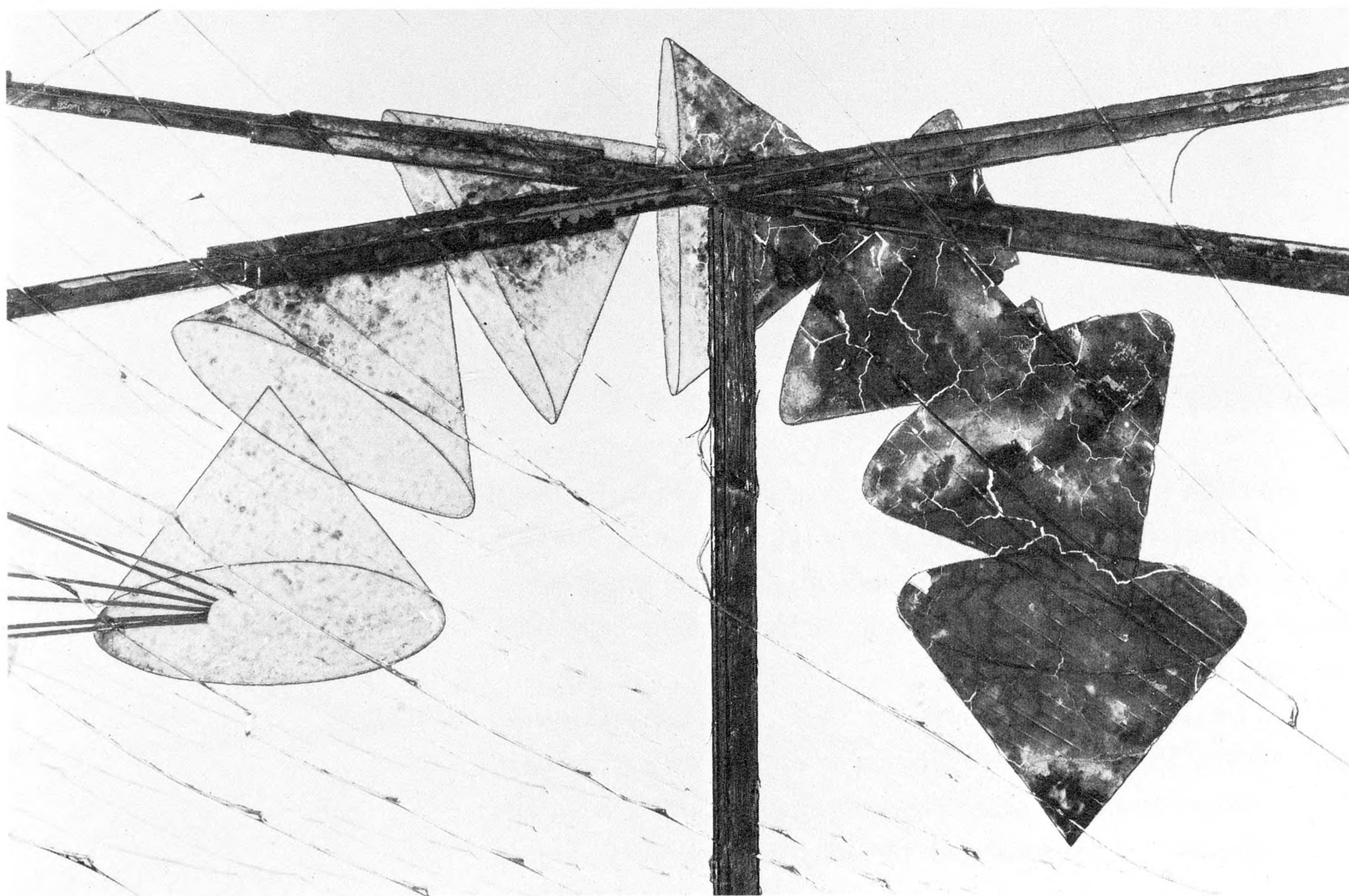




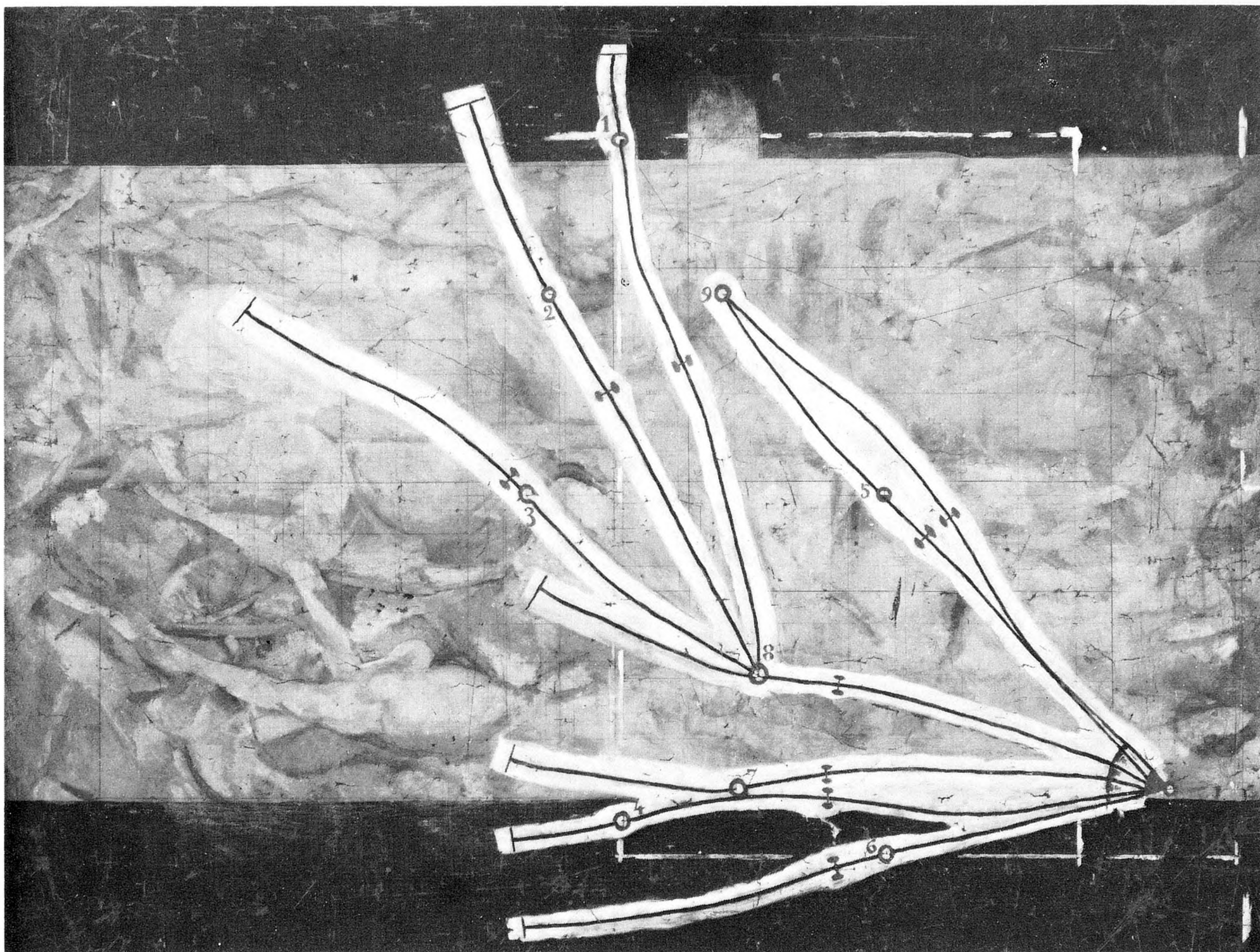
One of the works to which Duchamp was particularly attached, and which more than any other single product of his art qualifies as 'pataphysical', is the *Three Standard Stoppages* of 1913 [41]. Three threads each a metre long were dropped from the height of a metre onto canvases stained with Prussian blue. The threads, which had taken on different configurations in the process of their descent, were then fixed to the canvases with drops of varnish, and the canvases were cut out of the stretchers and glued onto long, thin sheets of plate glass. Subsequently wooden templates or rulers were cut to conform to the three different curves, and these random curves were used to achieve the 'capillary tubes' which serve in the *Large Glass* as methods of communication between the *Malic Moulds* and the *Sieves* or *Parasols* [42], the forms that arch their

41 (left). *Three Standard Stoppages*,  
1913-14. Marcel Duchamp

42. *The Sieves*.  
Detail of the *Large Glass*







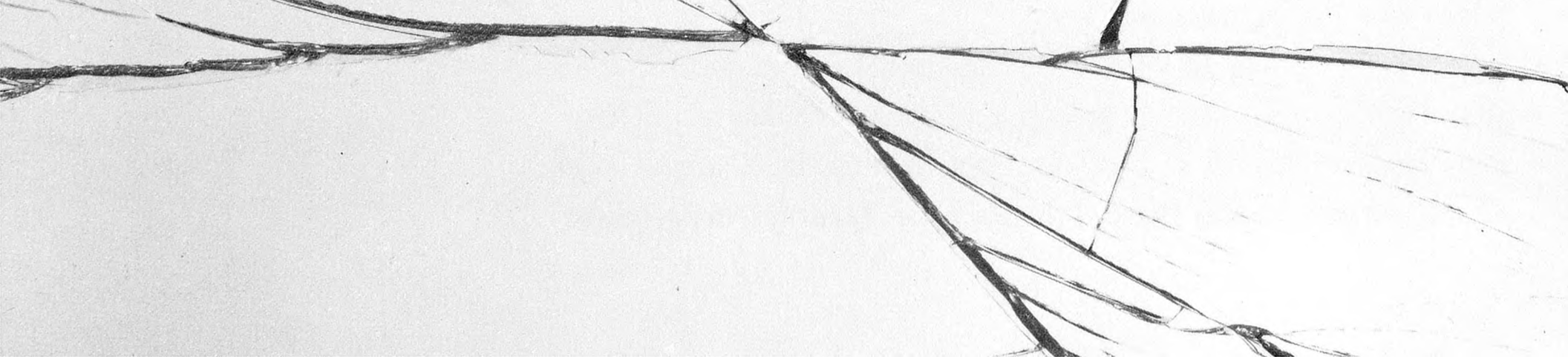
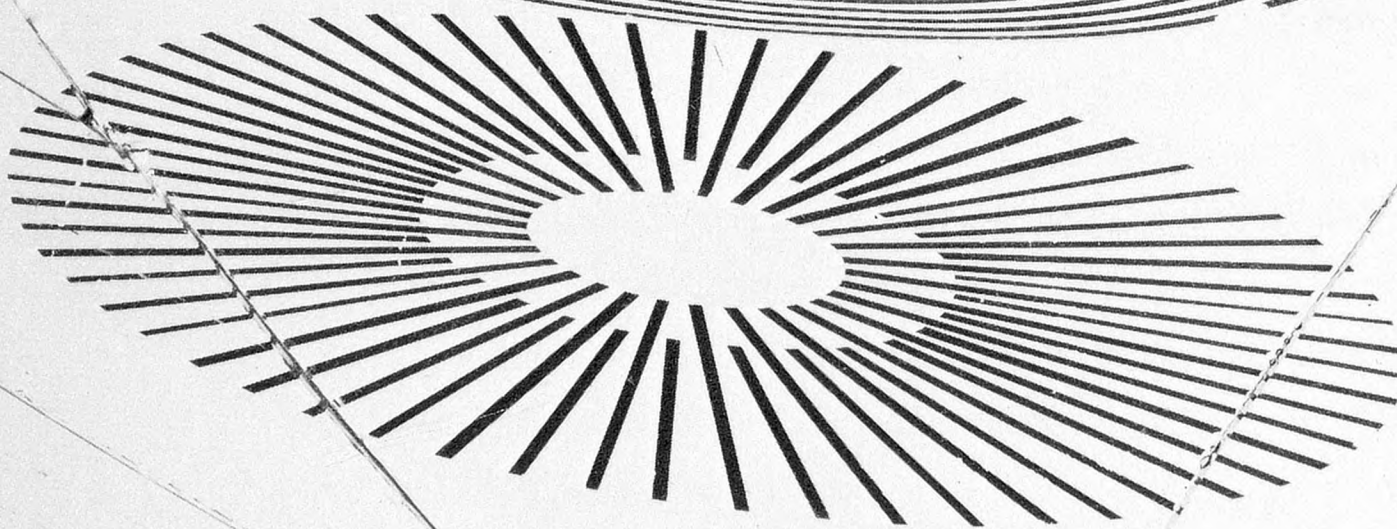
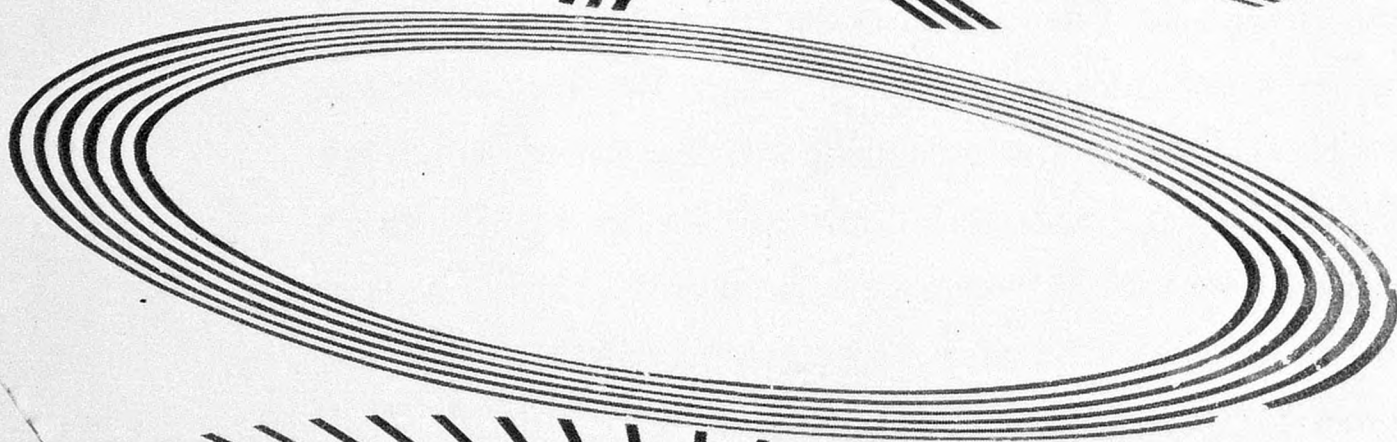
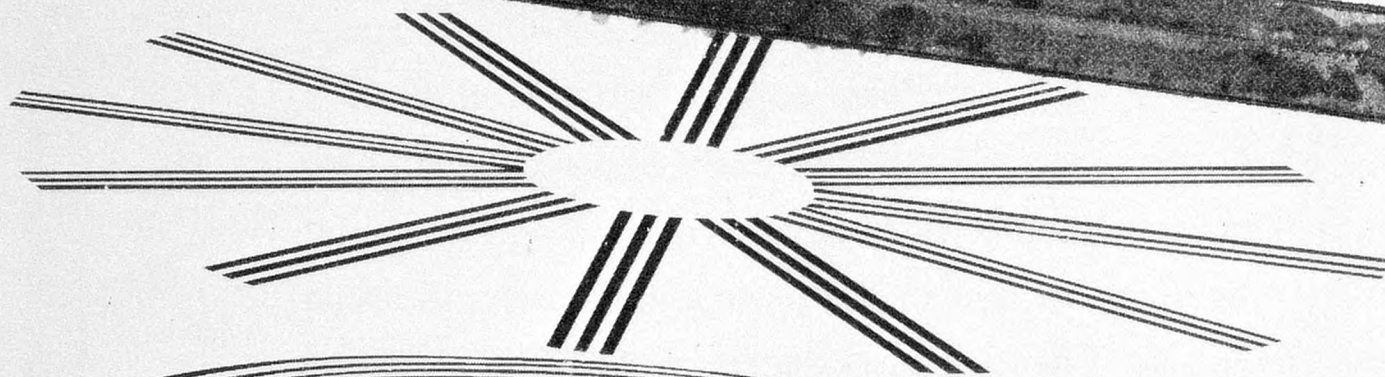
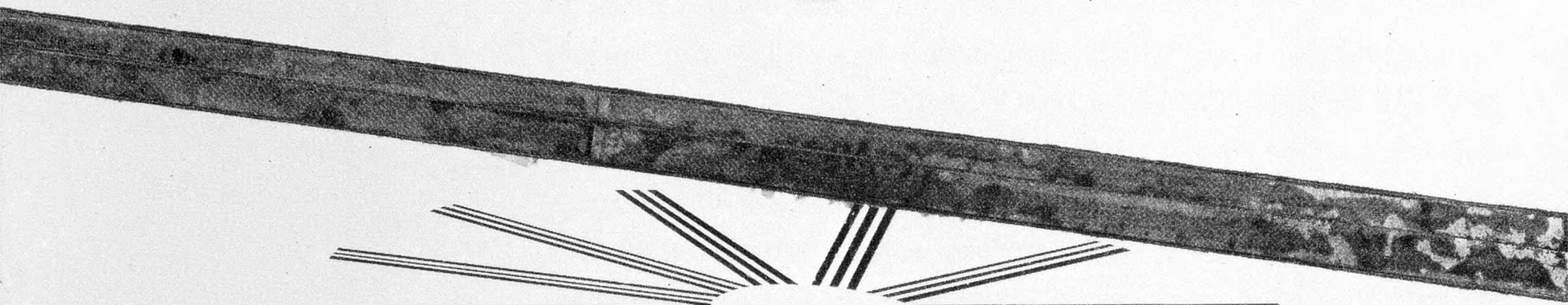
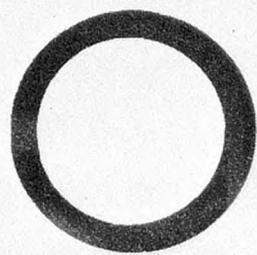
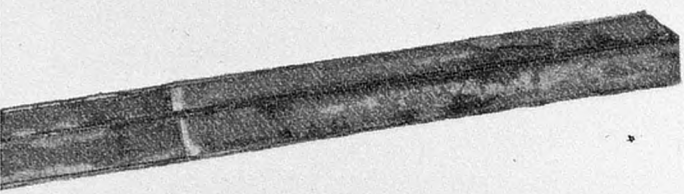
way over the *Chocolate Grinder*; their final form is perspectively achieved from the *Network of Stoppages* [43], a plan view in which each of the curves was used three times, an elaborate solution to a problem which the uninitiated might suppose could have been resolved by a freehand sketch.

From a technical point of view, the *Sieves*, the *Oculist Witnesses* [44], the *Nine Shots*, and the *Inscription for the Top* were achieved in different ways from the other elements in the *Large Glass*. The *Sieves* are outlined, like almost all the other main elements, in lead wire, but they are coloured not with paint but with dust. The lower

43. *Network of Stoppages*, 1914.  
Marcel Duchamp

44 (right). *The Oculist Witnesses*.  
Detail of the *Large Glass*



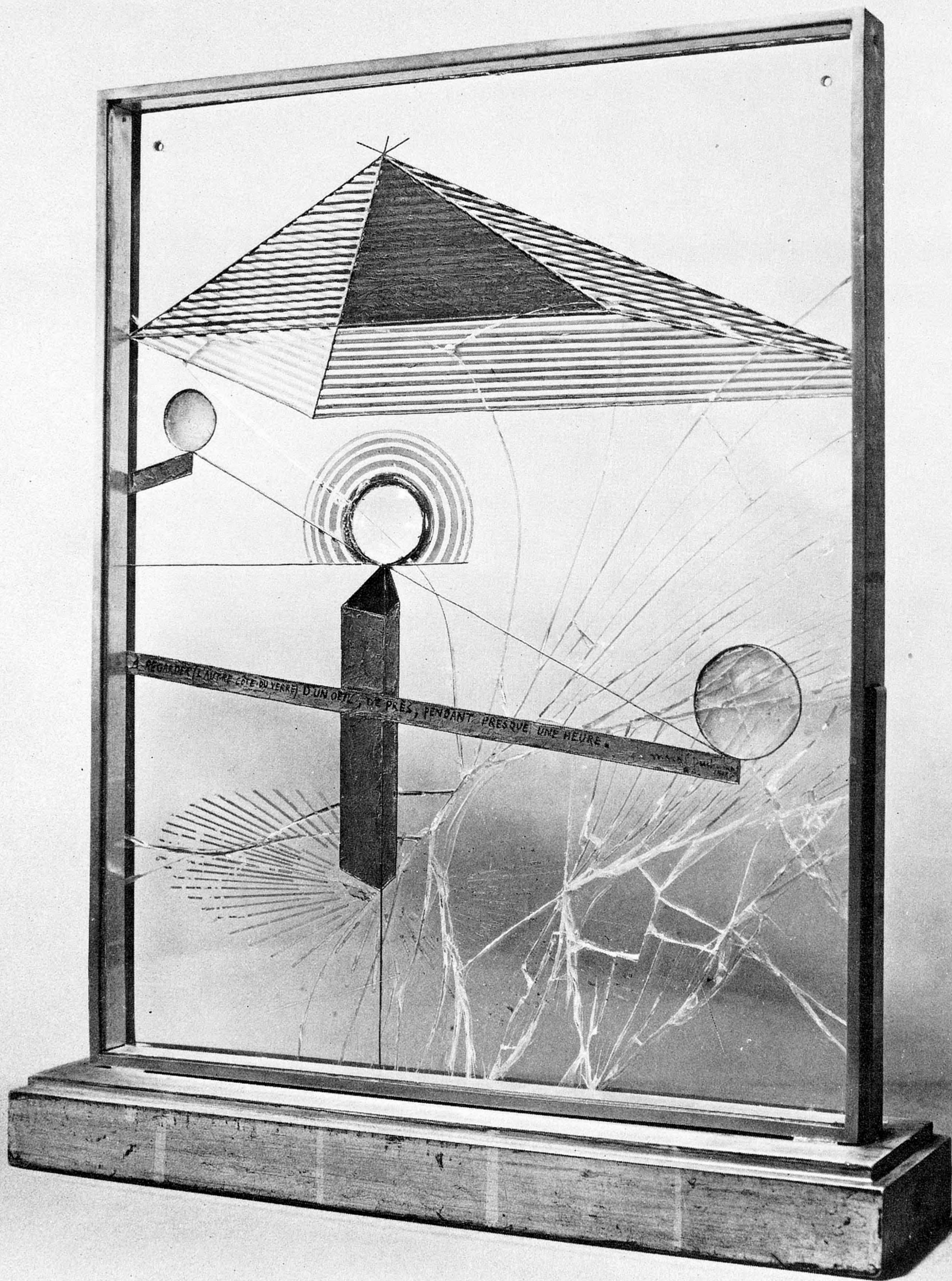


half of the *Large Glass* was laid face downwards on the floor, dust was allowed to accumulate for several months, and was fixed onto the *Sieves* with mastic varnish (one is reminded of Leonardo's projects for using dust as a measure of time). The forms of the *Oculist Witnesses*, the only part of the *Large Glass* which doesn't figure in the original plans, and which relate closely to an important work of 1918, *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour* [45], were taken from charts used by opticians (called in French *témoins oculistes*) and put into perspective: a drawing was done on carbon paper, transferred onto a silvered area, while the silver was subsequently scraped away from between the lines to leave behind the images; originally a magnifying glass was to have been embedded in the plate glass nearby to focus the 'splashes' (invisible). The *Oculist Witnesses* serves to involve the spectator in the mechanics of the *Large Glass*: we feel ourselves placed at the central axis of the ascending circular forms which are just below the level of our heads and shoulders – so that as in Alberti's ideal perspective both the beholder and the painted things he sees will appear to be on the same plane. The *Shots*, just below and to the right of the *Inscription for the Top*, were produced by firing matches dipped in paint from a toy cannon; the holes were then bored through. The forms of the three draft pistons which form the three roughly rectangular openings of the *Inscription for the Top* were derived from photographs of a square piece of net placed in a draught and photographed three times. It is perhaps worth noticing that the two areas or features of most direct communication within the mechanics of the *Large Glass*, the *Inscription* through which the *Bride* transmits her messages, and the *Shots* fired back ultimately by the bachelors, were both elaborated from starting points that were haphazard and casual.

It must be borne in mind when looking at the *Large Glass* that just as the notes in the *Green Box* had been assembled in a deliberately random fashion, so Duchamp insisted that the elements in the *Glass* (and presumably those of the *Bachelor Apparatus* in particular)

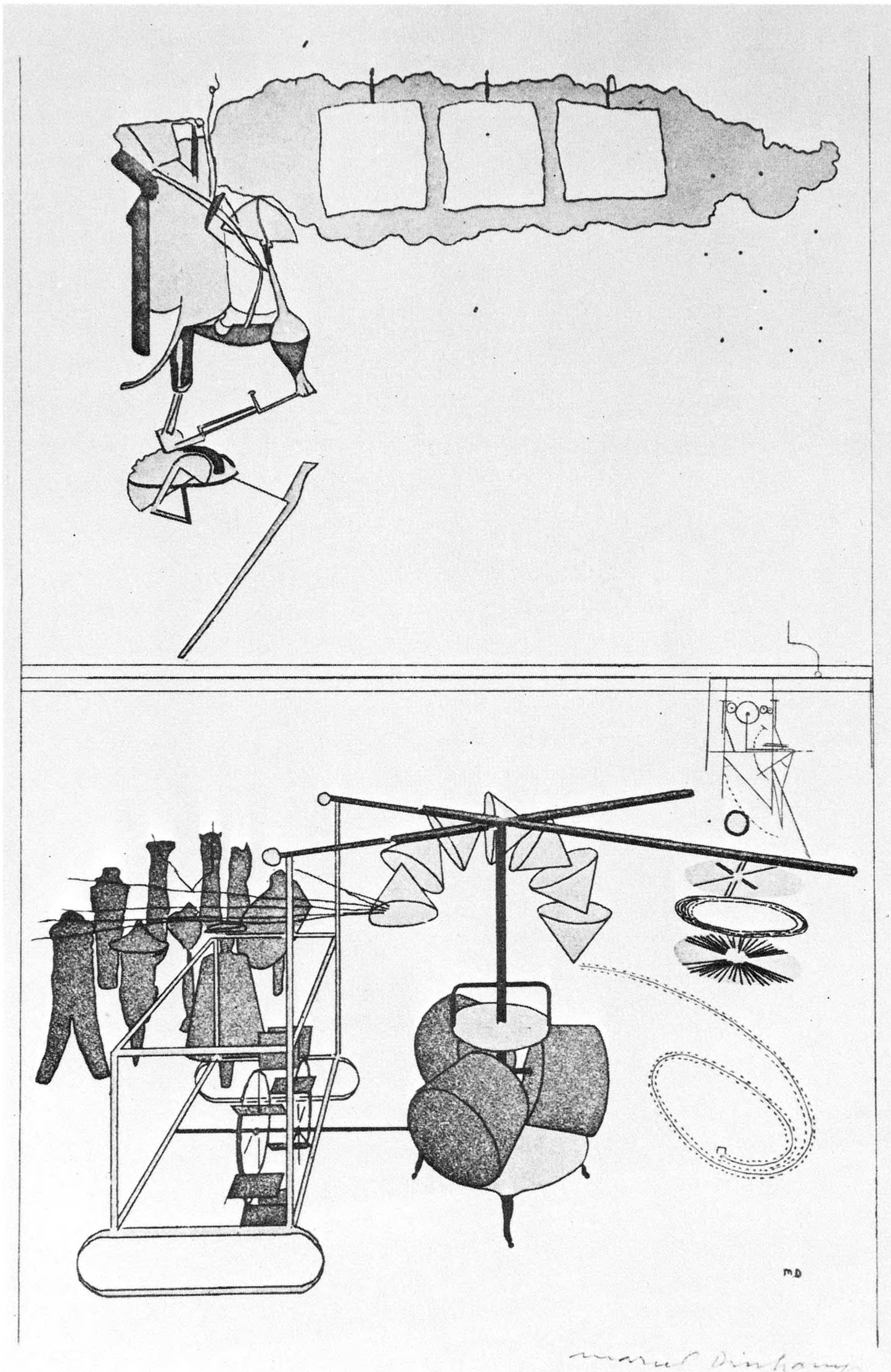
45. *To Be Looked at  
(from the Other Side of the Glass)  
with One Eye, Close to,  
for Almost an Hour*, 1918.  
Marcel Duchamp







46. *The Large Glass Completed*,  
1965-6. Marcel Duchamp



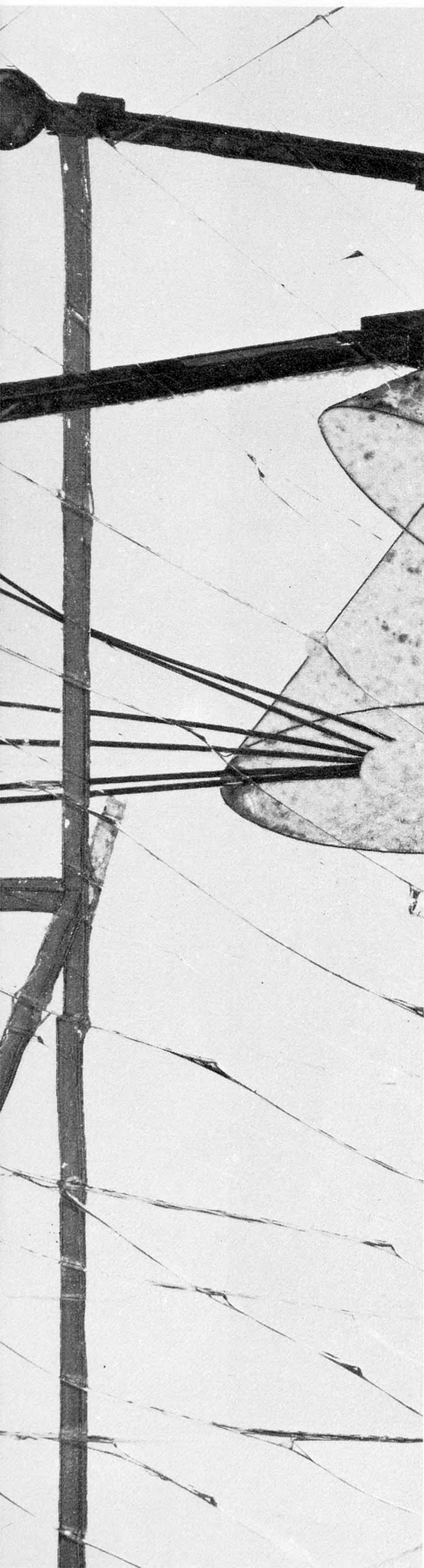
were conceived originally as being to a large extent interchangeable in their position and function.<sup>35</sup> Inevitably, however, as work progressed each element achieved a more particularized role within the mechanism as a whole. When asked why he had never finished the work Duchamp pleaded boredom, but it is likely that he also felt reluctant to freeze it into completion and felt that some of the mystery and vitality of the piece would disappear (for him at least) if he realized his plans through to the letter. Towards the end of his life Duchamp was persuaded, however, to execute an etching of the *Large Glass* as it would have been completed [46], and with the knowledge of how these elements would have fitted into the visual scheme, it is possible, always with the help of the notes, to describe the workings (or the non-workings) of the *Large Glass* as it exists in its present incarnation. Any description, no matter how lengthy, could however, only be partial, given the complexity of the notes and the interchangeability of ideas and imagery.

It has already been seen how the *Bride* transmits her commands or invitations to the *Bachelors* through the three *Draft Pistons* (corresponding to her treble blossoming) which are surrounded by a sort of *Milky Way*, perhaps the ectoplasmic expression of her sexual desires and processes. The *Bride's* messages appear to induce (though not directly) a gas cast by the *Malic Moulds* into the shapes of the nine *Bachelors*; the latter, though rigid and static are nevertheless in a state of tumescent excitement. Unable to contain themselves they allow the gas to escape through the *Capillary Tubes* [47], where it is frozen, cut into spangles and subsequently converted into a semi-solid fog. The spangles pass out of the *Capillary Tubes* and are fed into the *Seven Sieves*, condensing into a liquid suspension. The liquid thus produced falls into the *Toboggan* and crashes or splashes at its foot. In the last desperate attempt to achieve contact or union with the bridal apparatus the *Splashes* ascend vertically, channelled through the *Oculist Witnesses*. The *Scissors* (situated above and linked to the *Chocolate Grinder*) further control the ascent of the *Splashes* as does the circular form above the *Witnesses*,









originally to have been rendered by a magnifying glass embedded in the ordinary plate glass around it, and which was to have converted some of the liquid into light energy. Subsequently the liquid is once again dispersed (some of it makes a *Sculpture of Drops* for example) and in the process partly re-excites the *Bride* to envisage once again her strippings. The main bulk of the liquid it may be supposed (the idea is suggested visually rather than verbally in the notes) succeeds in reaching the *Bride* in the *Shots*.

*The Chariot* or *Sled* running back and forth on its runners controls the cutting motion of the *Scissors*, which in turn appear to work in unison with the *Sieves*. The *Chocolate Grinder* in the meantime remains passive and static, and in its immobility achieves a status more purely symbolic than any other element in the *Glass*. The *Chariot* in motion acts also as a commentator (and hence is in some ways a voluble counterpart to the *Oculist Witnesses*) and its litanies, 'slow life', 'vicious circle', 'onanism' and so forth, are heard in the *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*, so that even as the bachelor gas swells and expands in anticipation the *Bride's* partners are being informed that the game is up—it is 'check-mate'. On the surface then the *Large Glass* presents us with a tragi-comedy of frustrated physical love, with the *Bride* (as several commentators have pointed out) left literally hanging in the air.



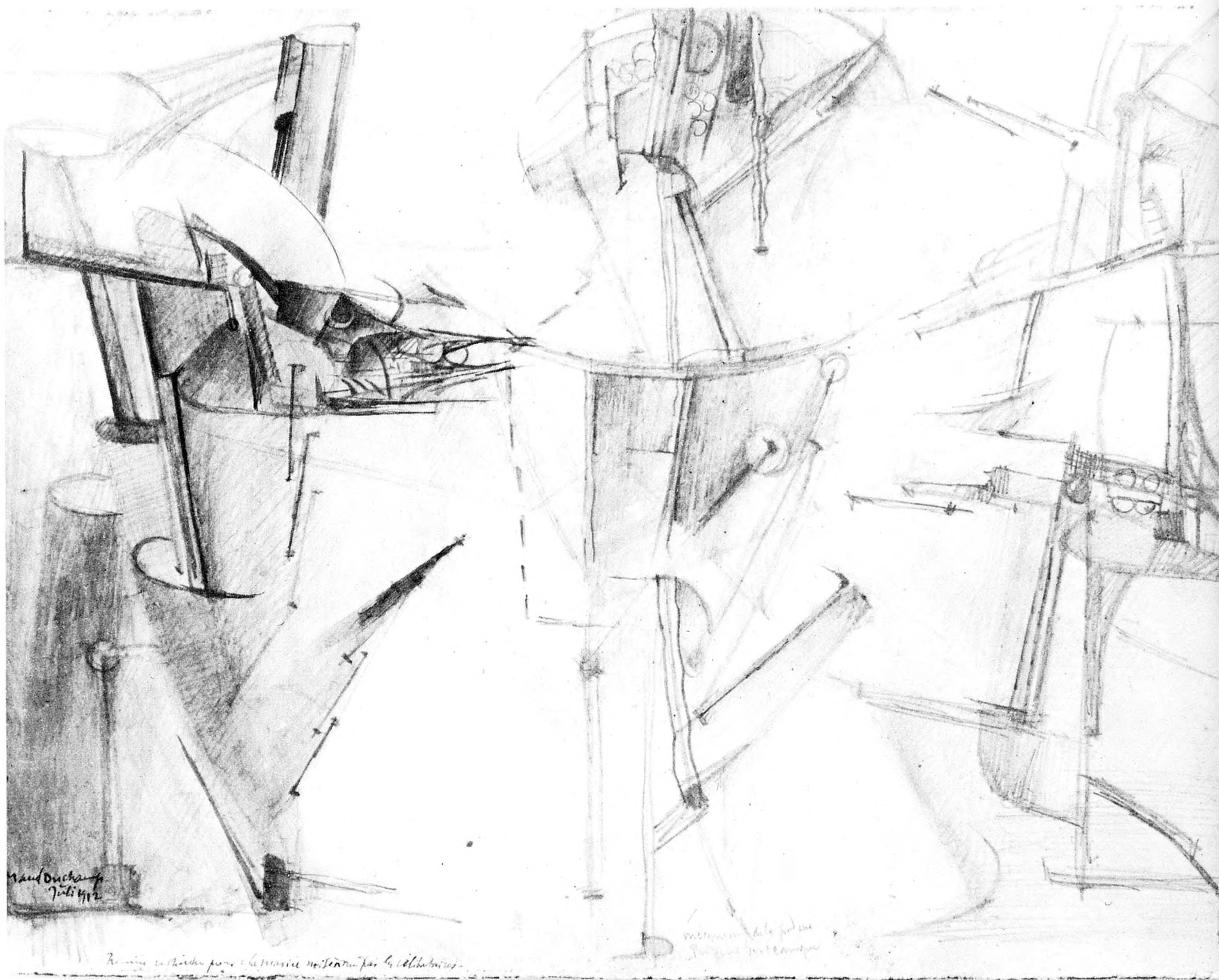


### 3. *The Stripping*

Two works of 1911, totally different in spirit, are particularly relevant in tracing the evolution of the iconography of the *Large Glass*. The first of these, *Spring* or *Young Man and Girl in Spring* [48], was a study for a large painting subsequently destroyed, and was given by Duchamp as a wedding present to his sister Suzanne. Two somewhat emasculated nudes, male and female, face each other across a space dominated by quasi-abstract forms which, in retrospect at least, have strong sexual connotations, although the symbolism may still have been to a certain extent unconscious. There is an air of solemnity, even of ritual about the confrontation, and basically the work still belongs to the allusive world of *fin de siècle* Symbolism. *Portrait* [4], a slightly later work, is more progressive from a stylistic point of view, showing as it does Duchamp's assimilation of some of the devices of Cubism, and it reveals perhaps for the first time in Duchamp's work a vein of irony and self-awareness. A woman enters the painting at the top left, crosses the canvas, turns around and exists again below her point of entry, assuming in the process five different positions, an explicit statement of Duchamp's new interest in depicting motion and, in the process, of incorporating the temporal element into his art. As Duchamp's 'Dulcinea' threads her way back and forth across the picture surface she strips, or sheds her clothes (although she keeps on her hat), and Duchamp later admitted that the idea for the painting had come to him when he found himself one day mentally undressing an attractive unknown woman whom he saw in a park.<sup>36</sup> Embedded in the transparent, interacting planes that build up the images is a large, symbolic phallus, a subliminal anticipation of the *Chocolate Grinder*. In *Sonata* [5], in many ways a companion painting, the figure of Duchamp's mother is seen

48. *Spring* or  
*Young Man and Girl in Spring*,  
1911. Marcel Duchamp





49. *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*, 1912. Marcel Duchamp

50 (right). *The Stripping of the Bride*. From a Ms. of the philosopher Solidonius

as a presiding genius suspended in the space above the musicians in much the same way as the *Bride* was later to hang over the *Bachelors*.

These early works of Duchamp's have about them a lyrical, tender quality, enhanced by the pale, pastel or rainbow-like tints, and tinged with an air of affectionate humour, and time has undoubtedly lent to them an aura of great distinction. On the other hand when compared to the contemporary achievements of his great colleagues in French art it must be admitted that they look distinctly minor in appearance. The means by which Duchamp transformed himself into one of the half dozen most significant artists of his generation were derived not only through a closer study of Cubism (in the *Chess Players* and the two versions of *Nude Descending a Staircase*) but through the recognition that to express his ideas adequately he must formulate a totally new set of visual premises. In the last analysis the ideas which involved the formulation of a new optical language were the result not so much of an appreciation of contemporary painting, as of his intellectual apprehension and enjoyment of progressive French literature, both of the late nineteenth century and of the early twentieth. There is however one source for the iconography and mechanics of the *Large Glass* which remains to be explored: characteristically enough this was a system of thought that combined the written word and the visual diagram in a unique fashion.

If, as seems likely, Duchamp became interested in alchemy this would have been about the time he left Paris for Munich, or possibly even in Munich itself. *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* [49], possibly the first of all the Munich works, appears to have been derived both iconographically and compositionally from an illustration of the stripping of a virgin (or a young bride) reproduced in a treatise by the philosopher Solidonius and subsequently used in other alchemical manuals [50]. Duchamp had the previous year produced his own first 'stripping' painting, *Portrait*, and one suspects that he would have been amused to discover a similar subject treated very graphically in an esoteric work of great learning. He seems to have realized at once that the symbolism of alchemy could help him



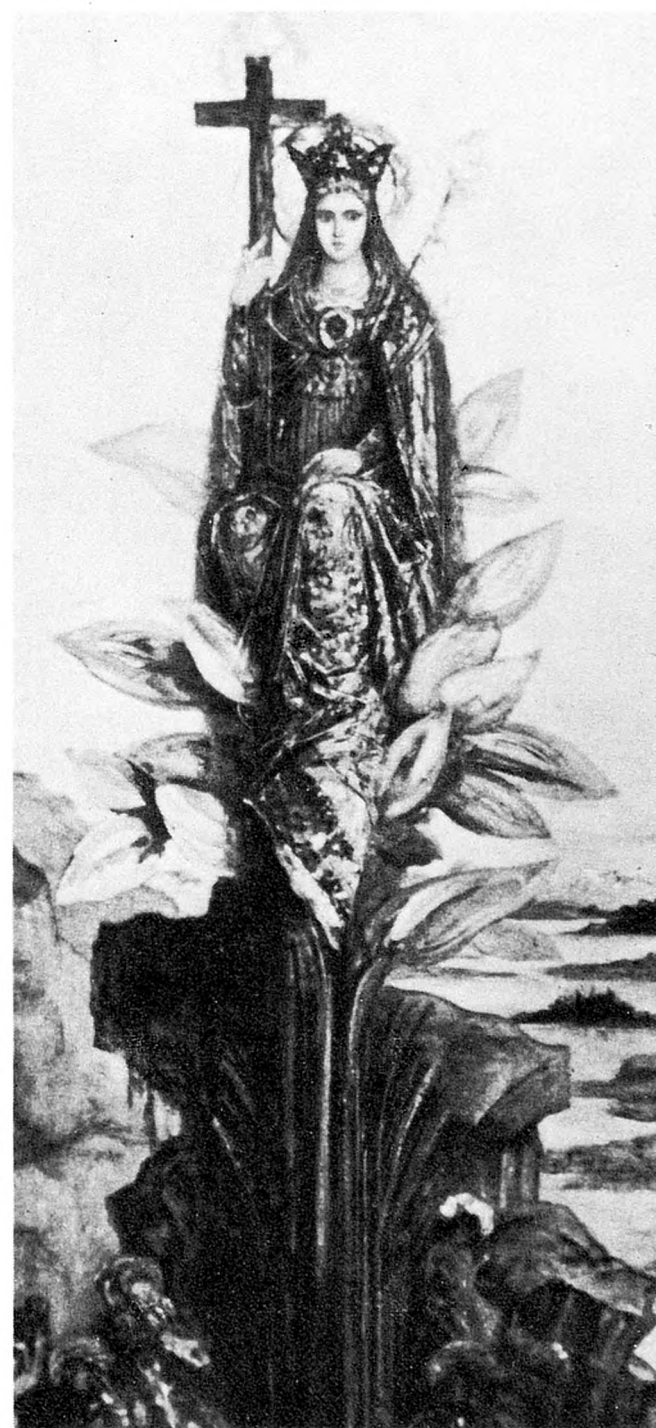


to achieve the more abstract, more hermetic and more intellectual art towards which he was striving. A year or two later he was to remark, 'Every picture has to exist before it is put on canvas and it always loses something when it is turned into paint. I prefer to see my pictures without that muddying.'<sup>37</sup> Alchemy, which dealt with concepts of a cosmic and esoteric nature and yet had been forced at certain stages to render these in terms of diagrammatic visual images, held out exciting possibilities. The mixture of science and the irrational involved in alchemical thought was also of a kind exactly calculated to appeal to Duchamp. Like science-fiction it must have seemed '... a way out of Symbolism'. Jung, writing of the great period of alchemy, says: 'There was no "either-or" for that age, but there did exist an intermediate realm between mind and matter, that is a realm of subtle bodies whose characteristic it is to manifest themselves in a mental as well as a material form.'<sup>38</sup> This defines exactly the condition to which Duchamp's art was aspiring.

Duchamp could have stumbled across alchemical writings fortuitously or he could have been led to them by his interest in Symbolism. The purest flowering of alchemy in Western Europe had taken place in the tenth and eleventh centuries when it had become almost a religion and hence had returned in a sense to its sources. In the fourteenth century it became increasingly materialistic and its apparatus correspondingly more complicated. The alchemists had always made use of sexual symbolism in the description of their methods of work and now pictorial illustrations in which the sexual symbolism was made visually very overt began to proliferate. The climate of the eighteenth century was basically unsympathetic to alchemy and it went into decline; in the nineteenth century, however, a revival of interest coincided with the emergence of a series of esoteric religions often fascinated by the occult. Alchemy held an obvious fascination for the Symbolists and certain painters of the *Rose Croix*, Moreau, for example, made use of its imagery [51].

The concept of the stripping of the virgin or bride in alchemical literature is symbolical of the purification of the 'stone' or of the

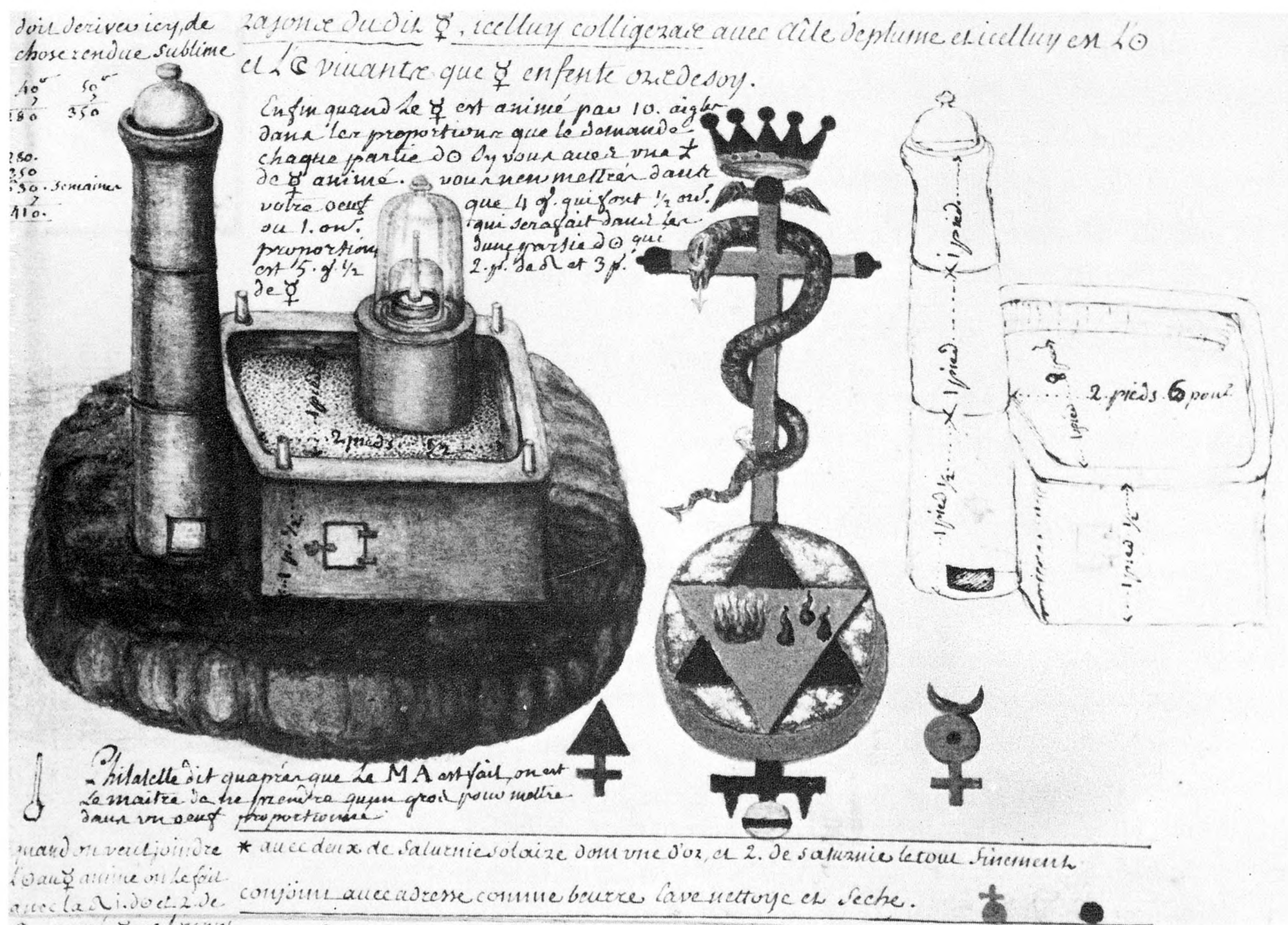
51. *Fleur Mystique* (detail),  
mid 1870s.  
Gustave Moreau





52. *The Furnace and the Alembic  
and the Cosmic  
Serpent Crucified, 14th century*

primal matter; even as the virgin is stripped of her rich bridal trappings on the night of her marriage to appear before her husband in all her transparent virginity, so the stone abandons one by one the colours which it assumed in the various processes to which it had been submitted, until it reaches a state of transparency which is the symbol of revelation and of true knowledge. Science fiction had tinged the first Munich *Bride* sketch in the form of the two robot-like *Bachelors*, but in the *Passage of the Virgin to the Bride* deeper, more mysterious forces are at work. The alchemical opus at its truest dealt not just with chemical experiments as such, but with the resolution of psychic processes and problems, expressed in a pseudo-chemical



or pseudo-scientific language. So too in the *Passage of the Virgin to the Bride* these processes are described in what might be called a pseudo-pictorial language and one which Duchamp was soon to abandon in favour of an even more intellectual approach to the machine and the machine-made object.

The machines of alchemy, the mills, the distilling apparatuses and the primitive furnaces, were also of a type that would have amused Duchamp and stimulated his imagination. As in the case of Roussel's science fiction it was relatively simple, commonplace apparatus that was to produce such amazing and unbelievable results. If the illustration of the *Stripping of the Virgin* may have suggested the iconography of the *Large Glass* as a whole, it is possible that the diagrams of other alchemical works suggested to him certain forms and functions of the *Bachelor Apparatus*. The general layout of the composition of lower half of the *Large Glass* resembles, for instance, the depiction of the *Furnace and Alembic and the Cosmic Serpent Crucified* in the *Alchimie* of Flamel, the greatest of fourteenth-century alchemists [52]. The funnel or chimney to the left is suggestive of the shapes of individual *Bachelors*, and although the solid brick furnace is replaced in Duchamp's work by the open fretwork of the *Glider*, the *Water Mill* appears at the same point as the distilling apparatus. The fact that Duchamp may have had similar alchemical apparatus in mind when plotting the first stages of the *Large Glass* is to a certain extent confirmed by some of the very first notes of the *Green Box*. One of these, datable to 1912, describes a 'steam engine on a masonry substructure' or on 'a brick base' which forms 'a solid foundation for the bachelor-machine fat' and the same note speaks of 'the place where their eroticism is revealed (which should be one of the principal cogs in the bachelor machine)'. The *Chocolate Grinder* we know was derived from a particular counterpart seen in the shop window in Rouen, but it is just possible that Duchamp was struck by the general similarities between its form and those of the right-hand section of Flamel's diagram; the sieves, which join together in a curve, compositionally essential to the lower half of the *Large Glass*,



are mysterious in their genesis and may perhaps relate to the image of the crucified serpent, an alchemical symbol of transformation and renewal.

Parallels between the tenets and language of alchemy and the iconography of the *Large Glass* abound, and although these may to a large extent be fortuitous it is also likely that certain alchemical



53. *The First Distillation*  
Offered to Luna, 1702



postulates may have furnished Duchamp with a series of propositions in the manner of a chess problem laid out in writing and accompanied by a schematic diagram. Thus seven was the most important number for alchemy in ancient times, although it was subsequently extended to nine or 'a company': there are seven *Sieves* and nine *Bachelors*. The four stages of alchemy were symbolized by blackening, whitening, yellowing and reddening, although the yellowing was in later days abandoned so that the three cardinal colours of alchemy were black, white and red. The *Glass* is described in the notes first of all as 'a world in yellow', but the *Bride* is rendered in 'grisaille' or black and white and the *Bachelors* in red. In alchemy red is for the king, white for the queen at the stage at which both are ready to consummate their symbolic union which is to produce the elixir. Tarot cards, dependent on the symbolism of alchemy, use animals to caricature the human predicament in much the same way that Duchamp uses machines, and their imagery includes *The Chariot* and the *Hanged Man* or '*Le Pendu*'; the *Bride* in some of the notes is referred to as *La Pendue Femelle*. The early distillations of alchemy were made from the most despised substances, including semen, and an eighteenth-century treatise shows the products of the first distillation being offered to Luna, the female moon divinity [53]; one is tempted to speculate whether it is not some such comparable substance that is reaching the *Bride* in the area of the *Shots*; she is referred to in the notes as an 'agricultural machine' and an 'instrument for farming', and she is, as Octavio Paz suggests, a Ceres figure, moon-like and remote, desirable but unattainable.<sup>39</sup>

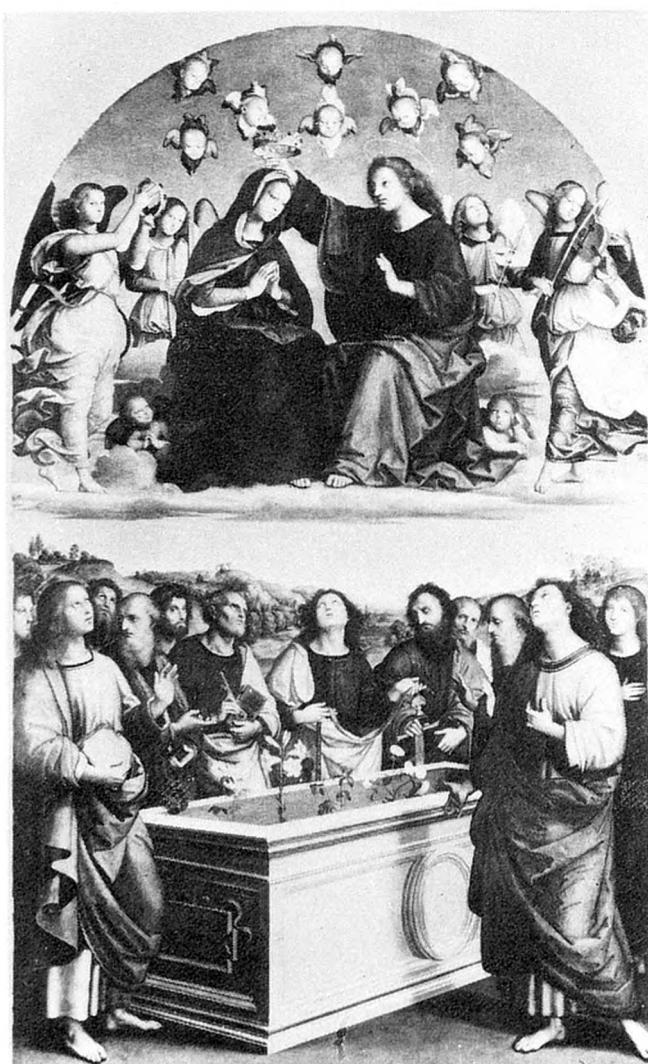
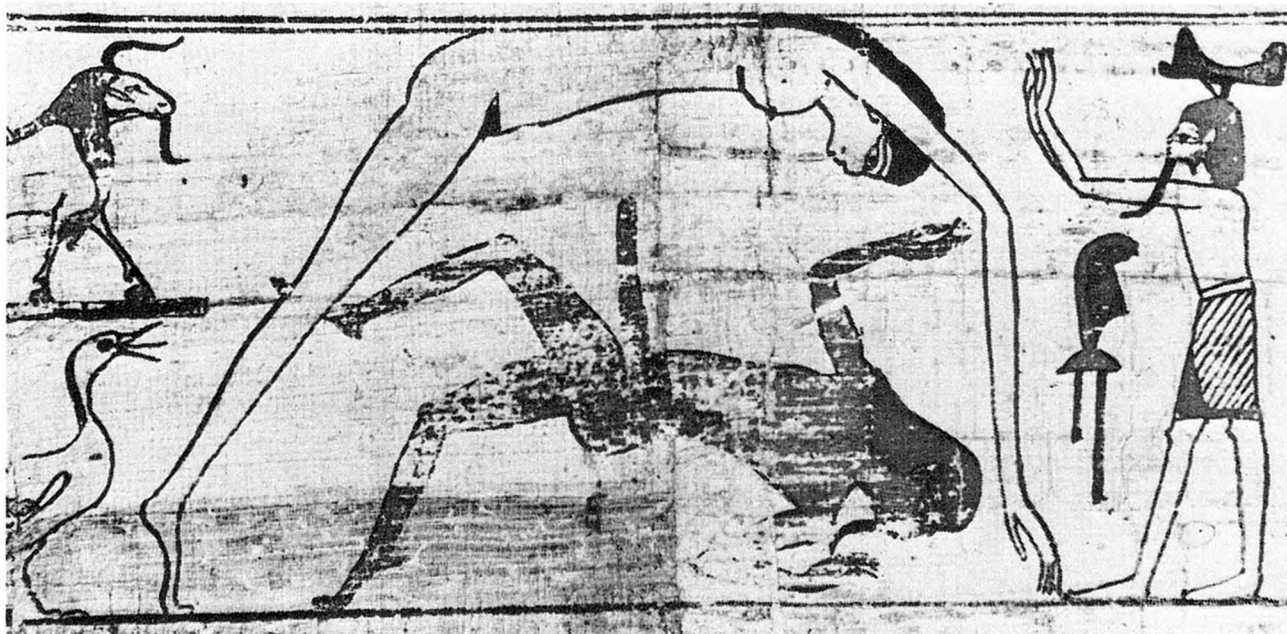
If alchemy interested Duchamp it was because he saw in it a kind of cosmic chess, a system of speculative thought, half science half philosophy, in which ideas were constantly being formulated which by definition could never reach a definite or positive conclusion. Fundamental to alchemy was the question of the union or mating of irreconcilables, of aboveness with belowness, of air and earth, of fire and water. Duchamp had always been attracted to forms with cosmic implications, in particular the circle and spiral in rotation (the first

ready-mades, the *Bicycle Wheel* and the *Bottle Rack*, are both based on the circle, a symbol or form of prime importance for the alchemist) and he may have been unconsciously attracted by the fact that the basic tenets of alchemy are archetypal in character. Alchemy for instance makes use of the myths of ancient Egypt [54] and at times overlays them with the iconography of Christianity. In the same way Duchamp can hardly have failed to be aware of the fact that as the

54 (right). *Separation of Earth and Sky at the Creation*, c. 1000 B.C.

55. *Endymion*, 1873. George Frederick Watts

56 (below). *The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1503. Raphael



iconography of the *Large Glass* developed it took on similarities with traditional scenes of the Virgin's assumption, and indeed a note in the *Green Box* refers to the fact that 'The Bachelors serving as an architectonic base for the Bride the latter becomes a sort of apotheosis of Virginity.' (One is reminded of Jarry's essay on *The Passion as an Uphill Bicycle Race*.) As in so many Assumption scenes [56] the forms of the upper half of the composition tend to be softer, more feminine and to float in an indefinite space where perspective plays little or no part, while the male world below is rendered in forms that are strongly three-dimensional and where linear perspective often plays a strong role [55].

A man of extraordinary honesty, Duchamp once denied that there was any conscious use of the imagery and symbolism of alchemy in his art,<sup>+0</sup> and it is possible that the parallels that exist are fortuitous or due to an unconscious attraction towards forms and images that are atavistic or archetypal in nature. Certainly it is true that Duchamp's 'alchemy' (and the *Large Glass* is a demonstration of alchemy if only because the most gratuitous objects and materials have been transformed into a work that is pure artistic gold), if it exists, is deeply ironic and of the same personal, deliberately dislocated brand as his science, which had been a quizzical branch of Jarry's 'pataphysics'. On the other hand it is possible that Duchamp's denial arose from the fact that he was reluctant to have too much read into his art; quite obviously it was an art of extraordinary depth and subtlety, but he was anxious that each spectator should extract from it what he wished and he knew that any hard and fast explanation of the *Large Glass* was not only impossible but that an attempt to produce one could only serve to kill any true contact between himself and his viewer.

Nevertheless the analogies between his art and that of the alchemists are revealing if only because of the light that they throw on the thought processes of one of the most intellectually gifted men of his age. Jung in some of the key passages of his treatise writes:



‘What the symbolism of alchemy expresses is the whole problem of the so-called individuation process . . . We now realize that [alchemy] is a question of actualizing those contents of the unconscious which are outside nature, that is, not a datum of our empirical world and therefore of an *a priori* or archetypal character. The place or the medium of realization is neither mind nor matter but that intermediate realm of subtle reality which can only be adequately expressed by the symbol. The symbol is neither abstract nor concrete, neither rational nor irrational, neither real nor unreal. It is always both. It is *non vulgi*, the aristocratic preoccupation of one who is set apart . . .’<sup>41</sup> Duchamp was arguably the most aristocratic artist of his generation and unquestionably the twentieth-century symbolist *par excellence*.

## *Epilogue*

Duchamp saw 1912 as the year in which he rejected the role of professional artist. The first version of the *Chocolate Grinder* [35] of the following year witnessed his last essay in traditional techniques (with the important exception of *Tu m'* of 1918, a commissioned work about which Duchamp later expressed doubts) and soon after came his first experiments on glass. By 1914 the plans for the *Large Glass* were all but finalized, so that the long labour involved in its execution in a sense qualified Duchamp for the simple role of 'artisan' which he was later to claim.<sup>42</sup> In the late twenties and early thirties he appeared to be dedicating most of his interest to chess. In fact, as two major retrospective exhibitions mounted in the 1960s demonstrated,<sup>43</sup> he continued to work steadily throughout his life. On the other hand with the definitive abandonment of the *Large Glass* in 1923 there appears to be a diminished sense of commitment. The new experiments in optics (for he had in a sense been interested in optics all along) which were initiated in 1920 with the *Rotary Glass Plate* (executed in collaboration with Man Ray) were time-consuming and have taken on a new importance in view of subsequent developments during the past two decades, but they lack the depth and intensity of the studies surrounding the *Glass*: the correspondence which accompanied the creation of the beautiful *Rotary Relief* is, significantly enough, completely factual in tone in contrast to the hermetic intensity of the notes surrounding the *Large Glass*. Subsequently, as history caught up with his achievements and as new schools found in his art premonitions of their own, he wryly commented on the situation in a series of appendices or footnotes (both verbal and visual) to his earlier work. The intellectual and aesthetic paradoxes mounted.

After his death, on 2 October 1968, rumours began to circulate about an important new work on which Duchamp had been at work for some time. The following year this was installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and opened to the public. *Étant Donnés: 1<sup>o</sup> la Chute d'Eau, 2<sup>o</sup> le Gaz d'Éclairage*, 1946–66, is as baffling a work and as hard to analyse as the *Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*.<sup>44</sup> The title of the late work is derived from the notes of the *Green Box* and obviously the two works are deeply interrelated. The immediate sensations evoked by the two works on the other hand are diametrically opposed. The *Large Glass* is mysterious, hieratic, and despite the fact that the cracks have 'brought it back into the world', ultimately its remoteness places it on the other side of our experience of the material world. It is the door, the window, the looking-glass through which we glimpse a ritual that involves us obsessively but from which we are forever distanced by virtue of the hermeticism of its imagery and by the fact that at best our understanding of it can only be partial. *Étant Donnés* is mystifying precisely because of its at least partial explicitness.

*Étant Donnés* can only be approached through the Duchamp galleries (presided over by the *Large Glass*) of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, so that even the visitor unfamiliar with Duchamp's work has absorbed some of its complexity, its variety, its humour and its detachment before he can confront the final 'tableau'; for *Étant Donnés* could with some justification be called a 'tableau mort' of extraordinary vividness and life. At the end of a narrow, underlit room, little more than a corridor, stands an ancient, weather-worn door of wood, arched and encased in a surround of bricks [62]. One senses at once that the door cannot be opened but one is drawn towards it as if by a magnet, and as one comes closer one becomes aware of two small holes, at eye-level, drilled through the wood. Beyond the door lies an extraordinary sight. On a plane parallel to the door and some few feet beyond it is a brick wall with a large uneven opening punched through it. Beyond and bathed in an almost blinding light is the figure of a recumbent woman modelled



with great delicacy and veracity but also slightly troubling because the illusion of three dimensionality is strong but not totally convincing (the figure is in fact in about three-quarter relief). She lies on a couch of twigs and branches and she opens her legs out towards the spectator with no false prurience or sense of shame. Her feet and ankles and most of her right arm are hidden by the brick wall and her head is shrouded by a long, continuous shock of blond hair. Her left arm is raised and in her hand she clasps a gas lamp (a jet inside an upright funnel) which glows dimly in the brilliance of light around it. Beyond the nude is a wooded landscape, rising to a low bluff, and surrounded by a blue sky, lightly ruffled by clouds. At the

57 (below left). *Étant Donnée  
le Gaz d'Éclairage et la Chute d'Eau*,  
1948-9. Marcel Duchamp

58 (below right). *Le 'Bec Auer'*, 1968.  
Marcel Duchamp



base of the bluff is a waterfall which flows and glints incessantly (the effect is achieved by a bent tin can which is rotated by a small motor) although its waters, one senses, are viscous and slow moving rather than clear and sparkling.

A handful of works executed during the time when *Étant Donnés* was in the making might have given some clue as to the subject matter and appearance of the final work. *Étant Donné le Gaz d'Éclairage et la Chute d'Eau* [57] may be considered a study for the life-size figure in the final work and is modelled in shallow relief in gesso over which vellum has been stretched, while the flesh tints are achieved in coloured pencil. The female figure in *Le 'Bec Auer'* [58],

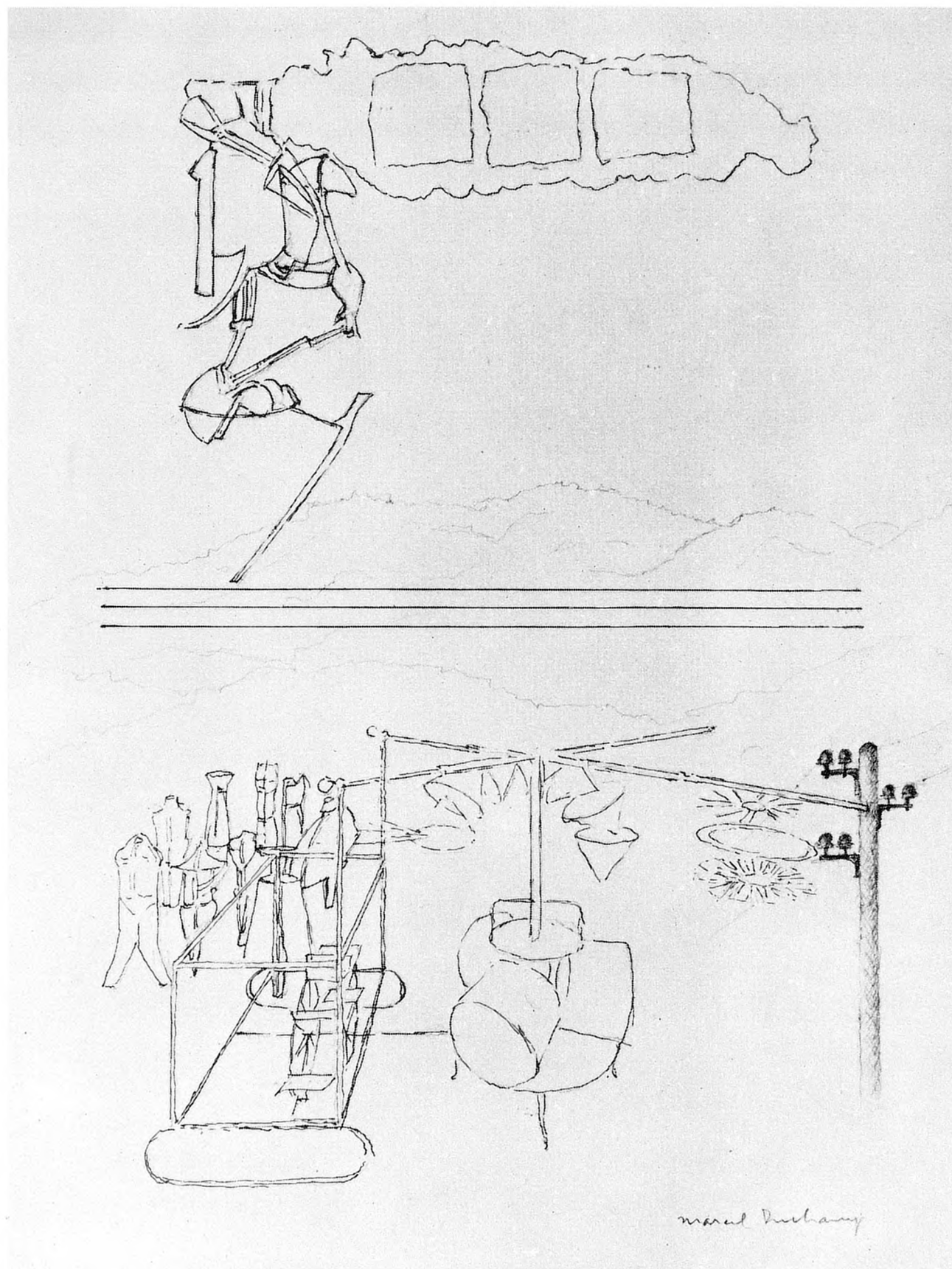
59 (below left). *The Bride, Stripped Bare*, 1968. Marcel Duchamp

60 (below right). *Morceaux Choisis d'après Courbet*, 1968. Marcel Duchamp





an etching from the *Lovers* series of 1968, must have been derived directly from the already finished sculpture. Another etching, *The Bride, Stripped Bare* [59], taken from a photograph, shows a young woman kneeling at a prayer stool, naked, while the directness of the eroticism of Duchamp's late work is further paralleled by yet another work of the series, *Morceaux Choisis d'après Courbet* [60]. Perhaps most remarkable of all the works related to the big Phila-



61. *Cols Alités*, 1959.  
Marcel Duchamp



delphia *tableau* is *Cols Alités* [61], a small drawing executed in 1959 which shows the *Large Glass* with a landscape background of gently swelling hills which turns the apparatus of the *Glass* quite literally into 'agricultural machinery'. To the right of the *Oculist Witnesses* and above the area of the splash is a telegraph pole, making explicit the connection between liquid and electricity.

It is hard not to view *Étant Donnée* as a latter-day version of the *Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*. The *Bride* has been brought down to earth with a bang, but the *Bachelors* have been reduced or compressed into a gas lamp, now truly fired with the bridal gas, symbol of desire and tumescent excitement. The liquid, the water, appears to have symbolic attributes that are both male and female; the pond is deep and still, the waterfall restless and incessantly active in its downward thrust. What gives the work its power to shock is an intense physicality that exists on two levels. The body of the woman is fleshy, naturalistic and desirable. The male presence is unmistakably present and literally burning with desire and yet quite obviously abstracted and symbolized to a high degree. It is perhaps not without significance that in the sketches leading up to the *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* it was the female form that was the first to be abstracted into a mechanistic chess piece, while late in life when the fantasy was rendered explicit it was the female who was made real while the male (Duchamp, the artist) has been, as it were, painted out of the picture, and who remains as a vestigial yet obsessive presence, half phallus, half machine.

Duchamp stressed the fact that not only the female image but the *Large Glass* as a whole was the *Bride*.<sup>45</sup> His attitude towards her, towards his art, was to a certain extent at least symbolized by the mechanics of the *Bachelor Apparatus*. Like Mallarmé, Duchamp appears to have been obsessed with the idea of the work of art as a symbol or substitute for the object of love or desire which cannot be touched, for to do so would break the spell. The *Large Glass* owes its depth, its never ending layers of meaning, to the fact that he saw

the need to distance himself from his subject in such a way that its iconography would exist in an aesthetic realm that belonged only to it. Late in life he appears to have felt sufficiently detached to execute its three-dimensional, naturalistic (one might almost say illusionistic) counterpart. The symbolism persists but in a sense the movement has been from the world of veiled allusions and 'imaginary solutions' to a realm that relates, albeit at several removes, to the world of Surrealism. Having to such a large extent helped to create Surrealism Duchamp in old age was perhaps prepared to accept some of its procedures. The Surrealists had dealt in terms of symbols, but, for all their love of mystery in terms of symbols that were ultimately decipherable; a fantasy is of interest only if its possibilities can be spelt out. And yet *Étant Donnés* retains its mystery, perhaps because the symbolism is so blatant that in a sense it cancels itself out. In the same way the eroticism is stressed to the point where it transcends the purely physical or even the mentally obsessive. It has become something quite else. In conversation with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp remarked, 'Eroticism . . . replaces if you like what other schools of literature called Symbolism, Romanticism. It could so to speak become another ism.'<sup>46</sup> In Duchamp's hands it has become just that. The *Large Glass* continues to preserve its enigmas intact, but it is as if having given us the literary key to a greater understanding of it by publishing the *Green Box*, Duchamp, forced to admit that he had been an artist all along, <sup>47</sup> felt obliged to paint and sculpt it 'back into the world' – and into art.

62. *Étant Donnés*:  
 1° *La Chute d'Eau*,  
 2° *Le Gaz d'Éclairage*  
 (detail of façade),  
 1946–66. Marcel Duchamp







## Notes

1. The exhibition was organized by Duchamp and Katherine Dreier.
2. Duchamp was in France at the time of the breakage and only discovered it several years later when the packing case containing the work was removed from storage.
3. Lawrence D. Steefel, *The Position of La Mariée Mise à Nu par ses Célibataires, Même (1915–23) in the Stylistic and Iconographic Development of the Art of Marcel Duchamp*, unpublished doctoral thesis. Princeton, 1960, p. 22. The statement was made in 1956.
4. The first of these was made by Ulf Linde for the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1961. The second, by Richard Hamilton and now in the collection of William Copley, was begun in 1965 and finished the following year.
5. Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*. London, 1959. (English translation by George Heard Hamilton), p. 67.
6. In 1914 Duchamp had published a first, smaller collection of notes of which only five copies were issued. This is generally known as the *Box* of 1914.
7. Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp or the Castle of Purity*. London, 1970. (Translated from the Spanish by Donald Gardner.) The pages of this short book are not numbered.
8. Quoted by Calvin Tomkins in *Ahead of the Game*. London, 1968, p. 58. (First published in America as *The Bride and the Bachelors*, 1962). The remark was made to George Heard Hamilton.
9. Quoted in Walter Pack, *Queer Thing Painting*. New York, 1935. The statement was made to Torrey in Paris before the war. He made the same statement to the author in 1956.
10. The point is made by Paz, op. cit.
11. 'I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics', *Art News*. New York, December 1968; the text of an interview with Francis Roberts which took place on the occasion of the Duchamp retrospective at Pasadena in 1963.
12. To the author in 1956.

13. Very few of these (perhaps none) were executed to commission so that both the ideas and the visual images are Duchamp's own.

14. Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp*. Paris, 1967, pp. 52–3. (Published in America as *Conversations With Marcel Duchamp*, The Viking Press, 1971.)

15. Cabanne, op. cit., in his interview refers to the visit to Roussel's play as having taken place in 1911 and Duchamp appears to have tacitly agreed.

16. Duchamp, interview in *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*. New York, Vol. XII, Nos. 4–5, 1946.

17. Michel Leiris, *Concepts of Reality in the Work of Raymond Roussel*. *Art & Literature*, No. 2, Lausanne, Summer 1964, p. 20.

18. Leiris, op. cit., p. 12.

19. Steefel, op. cit., p. 301, fn. 20.

20. Interview with Francis Roberts, cited above.

21. *ibid.*

22. Quoted in Harriet and Sydney Janis, 'Duchamp Anti-Artist', *Viem*, Series V, No. 1. New York, March 1945, p. 23.

23. Paz, op. cit.

24. Museum of Modern Art interview, cited above.

25. Calvin Tomkins, op. cit., p. 29.

26. *Blind Man*, No. 2, New York, May 1917.

27. Pierre Cabanne, op. cit., p. 47.

28. Quoted in James Nelson (ed.), 'Marcel Duchamp, *Conversations with the Elder Wise Men of Our Day*. New York, 1958, p. 92.

29. In Jarry's *Le Surmâle* during the course of the orgiastic love scene seven prostitutes are kept waiting in an adjacent room, again almost as 'spare parts', in case the heroine needs a replacement.

30. *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. Catalogue for the Arts Council exhibition held at the Tate Gallery, London, 1966, p. 51.

31. In the oil sketch for *Chess Players*, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, and in the first version of the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, in Philadelphia.

32. Interview with Francis Roberts, cited above.

33. *ibid.*

34. *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 45.

35. Duchamp stressed this point in his conversations with Steefel, op. cit., p. 27. 'Duchamp has stated that he consciously wished to create an



effect comparable to the paramagnetic process, where each form could be inter-changed with any other and still belong to many contexts.'

36. To the author.

37. Walter Pach, op. cit.

38. C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*. London, 1953. (First published in Zurich in 1944), pp. 266-7.

39. Paz, op. cit.

40. Lebel, op. cit., p. 73.

41. Jung, op. cit., pp. 269-70.

42. Talking about his experiments in optics with the author Duchamp referred to himself as 'simply an artisan'.

43. The first of these was at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963, the second at the Tate Gallery in 1966.

44. *Étant Donnés* is the subject of a revealing essay by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1969.

45. Steefel, op. cit., p. 164.

46. Cabanne, op. cit., pp. 166-7.

47. In 1961 Duchamp said 'I'm nothing else but an artist, I'm sure, and delighted to be'. Quoted in an interview by Richard Hamilton for the British Broadcasting Corporation, 27 September 1961.



## *A Bibliographical Note*

Arturo Schwarz's *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1969; New York, Abrams, n.d.) contains an exhaustive list of Duchamp's writings, lectures, translations and interviews (263 items), followed by an extensive bibliography of literature on and relevant to Duchamp (294 items). Works listed below comprise only the basic texts on Duchamp and a few other items that have been particularly useful in the preparation of this study.

All Duchamp studies must still begin with *Marcel Duchamp* by the artist's old friend Robert Lebel, with chapters by Duchamp, André Breton (a reprint of his *Phare de la Mariée*, originally published in *Minotaure*, Paris, 1935), and H. P. Roché, translated by George H. Hamilton (London and Paris, Trianon Press, 1959; New York, Grove Press, 1959). *The Position of La Mariée Mise à Nu par ses Célibataires, Même (1915-23) in the Stylistic and Iconographic Development of the Art of Marcel Duchamp*, a Ph.D. thesis submitted by Lawrence D. Steefel Jr to Princeton University in 1960 is a work of great importance that remains mysteriously unpublished. Richard Hamilton's *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (Catalogue for the Arts Council exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, 1966) is an indispensable document. Arturo Schwarz's weighty monograph referred to above is accompanied by *The Large Glass*, an invaluable attempt to order the notes and projects for the great work chronologically; the translations are by George H. Hamilton, Cleve Grey and Arturo Schwarz. Students unable to afford this luxurious production can still be grateful for Richard Hamilton's typographic version of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Bachelors, Even* (translated by George H. Hamilton, Lund Humphries, London, 1960). Michel Carrouges' *Les Machines Célibataires* (Paris, Arcanes, 1954) contains many interesting iconographic suggestions as does Octavio Paz's beautiful essay *Marcel Duchamp or the Castle of Purity* (Paris, Galerie Givaudan, 1968, and London and New York, Cape Goliard Press, 1970). Calvin Tomkins's *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art* (New York, The Viking Press, 1965) and *The*



*World of Marcel Duchamp* (with the Editors of Time-Life Books, 1966) are stimulating and entertaining. K. G. Pontius Hulton's catalogue for *The Machine*, an exhibition mounted at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1968, contains important information (some of it received from Ulf Linde) and makes the confrontation between Solidonius's *Bride Stripped Bare* and Duchamp's first Munich study. The alchemical suggestions are followed up by Nicolas Calas in an article, 'The *Large Glass*', published in *Art in America*, July–August 1969. Duchamp's last work, *Étant Donnés* is the subject of a brilliant essay by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1969. Of the countless interviews with Duchamp, the longest, fullest and most useful is Pierre Cabanne's *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (Paris, Pierre Belfond, 1967) recently translated as *Conversations with Marcel Duchamp* (London, Thames and Hudson; New York, The Viking Press, 1971).

## *List of Illustrations*

Colour plate: *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* ('*The Large Glass*'). By Marcel Duchamp. 1915–23 New York. Oil, lead wire and foil, dust and varnish on glass, in two parts. 272 x 170 cm./107 x 67 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier. (Photo: Museum.)

Page 10. *With My Tongue in My Cheek*. By Marcel Duchamp. 1959. Pencil on plaster and paper, 24 x 16 cm./9 x 6 in. Collection of Robert Lebel, Paris.

1. *Encore à Cet Astre (Once More to This Star)*. By Marcel Duchamp, November 1911. Pencil on paper. 25 x 16 cm./10 x 6 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

2. *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 1*. By Marcel Duchamp, December 1911. Oil on cardboard. 96 x 60 cm./38 x 24 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

3. *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*. By Marcel Duchamp, January 1912. Oil on canvas. 147 x 89 cm./58 x 35 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

4. *Portrait*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1911. Oil on canvas. 146 x 114 cm./58 x 45 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

5. *Sonata*. By Marcel Duchamp, January–September 1911. Oil on canvas. 145 x 113 cm./57 x 45 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

6. *Head*. By Pablo Picasso, 1909. Oil on canvas. 62 x 43 cm./25 x 17 in. Kunstsammlung Nordheim-Westfalen, Schloss-Jägerhof, Düsseldorf. (Photo: Galerie Leiris.)

7. *Nude*. By Pablo Picasso, 1910. Oil on canvas. 188 x 61 cm./73 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 24 in. Private collection, Milan. (Photo: Galerie Leiris.)

8. *Figure Descending a Staircase*. By Paul Richer. Drawing based on a chronophotograph. From *Physiologie Artistique de l'Homme en Mouvement*, 1895.

9. Chronophotograph of a jumping figure. By E. J. Marey, c. 1880.

10. *Yvonne et Magdeleine Déchiquetées (Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters)*. By Marcel Duchamp, September 1911. Oil on canvas. 60 x 73 cm./24 x 29 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

11. *Second Dancer (White)*. By Gino Severini, 1912. Oil on canvas. 52 x 43.5 cm./20 x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. Collection of Dr Ricardo Jucker, Milan.

12. *Three Figures*. By Fernand Léger, 1911. Oil on canvas. 192.5 x 113.75 cm./77 x 45 in. Milwaukee Art Center. (Photo: Courtesy of Milwaukee Art Center.)

13. *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*. By Marcel Duchamp, May 1912. Oil on canvas. 115 x 128 cm./45 x 51 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (the Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

14. *Le Paradis*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1910. Oil on canvas. 115 x 128 cm./45 x 51 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

15. *Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift*. By Marcel Duchamp, March 1912. Pencil on paper. 30 x 36 cm./12 x 14 in. Private Collection, Paris.

16. *King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1912. Pencil on paper. 27 x 39 cm./11 x 15 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

17. *King and Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed*. By Marcel Duchamp, April 1912. Pencil, watercolour and gouache. 49 x 59 cm./19 x 23 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

18. *Virgin No. 2*. By Marcel Duchamp, July 1912 (Munich). Pencil and watercolour on paper. 40 x 21 cm./16 x 8 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

19. *Apropos of Little Sister*. By Marcel Duchamp, October 1911. Oil on canvas. 73 x 60 cm./29 x 24 in. The Guggenheim Museum, New York.

20. *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*. By Marcel Duchamp, July–August 1912, (Munich). Oil on canvas, 59 x 54 cm./24 x 21 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo: Museum.)

21. *The Thicket (The Bush)*. By Marcel Duchamp, December 1910–January 1911. Oil on canvas. 128 x 92 cm./50 x 36 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)



22. *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*. By Marcel Duchamp, July 1912 (Munich). Pencil and wash on paper. 24 x 32 cm./9 x 13 in. Cordier and Ekstrom Inc., New York. (Photo: Geoffrey Clements.)
23. Chronophotograph of a fencer. By E. J. Marey, c. 1880.
24. *The Bride*. By Marcel Duchamp, August 1912 (Munich). Oil on canvas. 90 x 55 cm./35 x 22 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: The Museum.)
25. *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*. By Pablo Picasso, 1910. Oil on canvas. 100 x 93 cm./39 x 29 in. Private Collection, New York. (Photo: Galerie Leiris.)
26. *Mi-Carême (Mid-Lent)*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1909. Conte crayon, ink and 'splatter' on paper. 61 x 49 cm./24 x 19 in. The Mary Sisler Collection, New York.
27. Study for *Chess Players*. By Marcel Duchamp, October 1911. Charcoal and ink on paper. 45 x 61 cm./18 x 24 cm. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)
28. *Je Revois en Souvenir Ma Chère Udnie (I See Again in Memory My Dear Udnie)*. By Francis Picabia, 1914. Oil on canvas. 246 x 195.5 cm./98 x 78 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo: Museum.)
29. *Apolinère Enameled*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1916–17. Corrected ready-made, oil on tin. 24 x 34 cm./9 x 13 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)
30. Photograph from production of R. Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*.
31. *The Bride*. Detail of the *Large Glass*.
32. *Why Not Sneeze?* By Marcel Duchamp, 1921. Assisted ready-made, marble blocks, thermometer, wood and cuttle bone in a bird cage. 11 x 22 x 16 cm./5 x 9 x 6 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)
33. *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913 (one of eight replicas produced by the Galeria Schwarz in 1964). By Marcel Duchamp. Ready-made. 126 cm./50 in. high. Galeria Schwarz, Milan. (Photo: Bacci.)
34. *Coffee Mill*. By Marcel Duchamp, November–December 1911. Oil on cardboard. 33 x 12 cm./13 x 5 in. Collection of Maria Martins, Rio de Janeiro.
35. *Chocolate Grinder No. 1*. By Marcel Duchamp, March or April 1913. Oil on canvas. 63 x 65 cm./25 x 26 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)

36. *The Louis XV Leg*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1914. From the *Green Box*.
37. *Chocolate Grinder No. 2*. By Marcel Duchamp, February 1914. Oil, thread and pencil on canvas. 65 x 54 cm./26 x 21 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)
38. *Nine Malic Moulds*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1913-14. Oil, lead wire and foil on glass. 66 x 104 cm./26 x 41 in. Collection of Mrs Marcel Duchamp, New York. (Photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York.)
39. *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries No. 1*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1913. Pencil on paper. 31 x 40 cm./12 x 16 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)
40. *Glider Containing a Water Mill (in neighbouring metals)*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1913-15. Oil, lead wire and foil on glass. 153 x 84 cm./60 x 33 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection). (Photo: Museum.)
41. *Three Standard Stoppages*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1913-14. Three threads dropped onto canvas, fixed with varnish and then glued onto glass plates. 126 x 18 cm./50 x 7 in, three wooden rulers 112 cm./44 in., enclosed in a wooden croquet box, 126 x 18 cm./50 x 7 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo: Museum.)
42. *The Sieves*. Detail of the *Large Glass*.
43. *Network of Stoppages*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1914. Oil on canvas. 148 x 197 cm./58 x 78 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo: Museum.)
44. *The Oculist Witnesses*. Detail of the *Large Glass*.
45. *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1918. Lead, oil, rusted metal, magnifying glass and silver 'scratching' on glass. 51 x 41 cm./20 x 16 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo: Museum.)
46. *The Large Glass Completed*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1965. Etching. 50 x 33 cm./20 x 13 in. Galeria Schwarz, Milan.
47. *The Capillary Tubes*. Detail of the *Large Glass*.
48. *Spring or Young Man and Girl in Spring*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1911. Oil on canvas. 66 x 50 cm./26 x 20 in. Collection of Arturo Schwarz, Milan.
49. *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*. By Marcel Duchamp. (See 22.)
50. *The Stripping of the Bride*. From a Ms. of the philosopher Solidonius (after Canseliet, *Alchimie*).

51. *Fleur Mystique* (detail). By Gustave Moreau, mid 1870s. Oil on canvas. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.

52. *The Furnace and the Alembic and the Cosmic Serpent Crucified*. From the *Alchimie de Flamel*, fourteenth century. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. (Photo: F. Foliot.)

53. *The First Distillation Offered to Luna*. From the *Liber Mutus*, edition of 1702.

54. *Separation of Earth and Sky at the Creation*. From the Papyrus of Taweniu, Egyptian, c. 1000 B.C. (Photo: Courtauld Institute of Art.)

55. *Endymion*. By George Frederick Watts, 1873. Oil on canvas. 51.25 x 65 cm./20½ x 25 in. Lord Glenconnor, London. (Photo: Arts Council, London.)

56. *The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*. By Raphael, c. 1503. Oil on canvas. 267 x 163 cm./106 x 63 in. The Vatican Museum, Rome. (Photo: Courtauld Institute of Art.)

57. *Étant Donnée le Gaz d'Éclairage et la Chute d'Eau*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1948–9. Pencil on vellum over gesso, and velvet on cardboard. 50 x 31 cm./20 x 12 in. Collection of Maria Martins, Rio de Janeiro.

58. *Le 'Bec Auer'*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1968. Etching. 50.5 x 32.5 cm./20 x 13 in. Galeria Schwarz, Milan. (Photo: Bacci.)

59. *The Bride, Stripped Bare*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1968. Etching. 50.5 x 32.5 cm./20 x 13 in. Galeria Schwarz, Milan. (Photo: Gallery.)

60. *Morceaux Choisis d'après Courbet (Selected Fragments after Courbet)*. By Marcel Duchamp. Etching. 35 x 23.5 cm./13¾ x 9¼ in. Galleria Schwarz, Milan. (Photo: Bacci.)

61. *Cols Alités*. By Marcel Duchamp, 1959. Ink and pencil on paper. x 9 in. Collection of Robert Lebel, Paris.

62. *Étant Donnés: 1° La Chute d'Eau, 2° Le Gaz d'Éclairage* (detail of façade). By Marcel Duchamp, 1946–66. Mixed-media assemblage. Philadelphia Museum of Art (Gift of the Cassandra Foundation). (Photo: Museum.)





# Index

**Bold** numbers refer to illustration numbers

- Alberti, Leon Battista, 76  
alchemy, 85 ff.  
Apollinaire, Guillaume, 46 ff.  
Arensberg Collection, *see* Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Armory Show, New York, 17, 24
- Baudelaire, Charles, 13  
    *Les Phares*, 13  
Bernheim Jeune Gallery, Paris, 28  
*Blind Man*, 60  
Braque, Georges, 17  
Breton André, 13  
    *Phare de la Mariée*, 13  
Brisset, Jean-Pierre, 47, 48
- Cabanne, Pierre, 100  
Cézanne, Paul, 25, 28, 61, 62  
chronophotography, 22, 41  
Cubism, 17, 21, 25, 28, 43, 61, 71, 83, 85
- Dada, 12, 47, 57  
Duchamp, Madame (Duchamp's mother), 17, 85  
Duchamp, Magdeleine, 36  
Duchamp, Marcel (works),  
    *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (The  
        *Large Glass*), 11, *passim*  
    *The Green Box*, 12, 53, 64, 66, 68 ff., 76, 88, 92, 95, 100  
    *The Bride*, chapter 1, *passim*, 65, 66, 79, 81, 85, 90, 99  
    *Encore à Cet Astre*, 15, 1  
    *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 1*, 17, 20 ff., 85, 2  
    *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 17, 20 ff., 28, 29, 31,  
        85  
    *Portrait*, 17 ff., 83, 85, 3  
    *Sonata*, 17 ff., 83, 5  
    *Sad Young Man on a Train*, 25, 60  
    *Yvonne et Magdeleine Déchiquitées*, 25, 10  
    *King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, 29 ff., 43, 45,  
        62, 13  
    *Le Paradis*, 31, 14
- Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift*, 31, 15  
*King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes*, 31 ff., 99, 16  
*King and Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed*, 32, 17  
*Virgin, No. 1*, 30  
*Virgin, No. 2*, 38, 43, 18  
*Apropos of Little Sister*, 38, 19  
*Passage From the Virgin to the Bride*, 38 ff., 64, 87, 88, 20  
*The Thicket*, 38, 39, 21  
*Oculist Witnesses*, 43, 74, 76, 79, 81, 99  
*Mi-Carême*, 44, 26  
*Study for Chess Players*, 44, 45, 27  
*Jura-Paris Road*, 47  
*Chef des Cinq Nus*, 47  
*Enfant Phare*, 47  
*Apolinère Enameled*, 47, 29  
*Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, 51  
*The Bachelors*, chapter 2 *passim*, 88  
ready-mades, 55 ff.  
*Unhappy Ready-Made*, 56  
*Why Not Sneeze?*, 56, 32  
*Trap*, 56  
*Bicycle Wheel*, 58, 91, 33  
*In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 58, 60  
*Fountain*, (Urinal), 60  
*Coffee Mill*, 60, 62, 34  
*Chocolate Grinder* (No. 1, No. 2 and in the *Large Glass*),  
    60 ff., 68, 71, 79, 83, 88, 94, 35, 37  
*Water Mill*, 60 ff., 69, 70  
*Nine Malic Moulds*, 65 ff., 73, 79, 38  
*Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*, 66, 81, 39  
*Dimanches*, 66  
*Glider*, (Chariot, Sled), 66, 68 ff., 81, 90, 40  
*Three Standard Stoppages*, 73, 41  
*Capillary Tubes*, 73, 79, 47  
*Sieves*, 73, 74, 79, 88, 42  
*Network of Stoppages*, 74, 43  
*Shots*, 74, 76, 81, 90  
*Inscription for the Top*, 74, 76  
*To Be Looked at . . .*, 76, 45

- The *Large Glass* completed, 79, 46  
*Draft Pistons*, 79  
*Milky Way*, 79  
*Toboggan*, 79  
*Splashes*, 79  
*Scissors*, 79  
*Sculpture of Drops*, 81  
*Spring (Young Man and Girl in Spring)*, 83, 48  
*Chess Players*, 85  
*Bottle Rack*, 91  
*Tu m'*, 94  
*Rotary Glass Plate*, 94  
*Rotary Relief*, 94  
*Étant Donnés . . .*, 95 ff., 62  
*Étant Donné le Gaz d'Éclairage et la Chute d'Eau*, 97, 57  
*Le 'Bec Auer'*, 97, 58  
*Lovers* (etchings), 98  
*The Bride, Stripped Bare*, 98, 59  
*Morceaux Choisis d'Après Courbet*, 98, 60  
*Cols Alités*, 99, 61  
 Duchamp, Suzanne, 56, 83  
 Duchamp-Villon, Gaston, 17  
  
 Flamel, 88  
 Flaubert, Gustave,  
     *Salammbô*, 48, 53  
 Futurism, 28, 29  
  
 Girieud, Pierre, 38  
 Gris, Juan, 71  
  
 Hamilton, Richard, 68, 70  
  
 International Exhibition of Modern Art, Brooklyn Museum,  
     11  
  
 Janet, Dr Pierre, 51  
 Jarry, Alfred, 27, 36, 69, 92  
     *Messaline*, 35  
     *Le Surmâle*, 36  
     *Dr Faustroll*, 71  
     *The Passion as an Uphill Bicycle Race*, 92  
 Jung, C. G., 86, 92, 93  
  
 Laforgue, Jules, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32  
     *Encore à Cet Astre*, 15, 24 ff.  
     *Le Sanglot de la Terre*, 24  
     *Salomé*, 53  
 Leger, Fernand, 28  
 Leiris, Michel, 51  
  
 Leonardo da Vinci, 76  
  
 Mallarmé, Stéphane, 27, 32, 58, 99  
     *Igitur*, 26  
     *Un Coup de Dés*, 27  
     *Hérodiade*, 53  
     *Le Vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui*, 53  
 Matta, 43  
*Minotaure*, 13  
 Moreau, Gustave, 36, 86  
  
 Pavlovski, 71  
 Paz, Octavio, 13, 27, 90  
 Philadelphia Museum of Art, 11, 12, 95  
 Picabia, Francis, 45 ff., 57  
     *Je Revois en Souvenir Ma Chère Udnie*, 46, 28  
 Picasso, Pablo, 17, 20  
     *Fanny Tellier*, 43, 25  
 Princet, Maurice, 71  
 Puteaux, 17, 46  
  
 Ray, Man, 94  
 Redon, Odilon, 25, 26  
 Rembrandt, 56  
 Rodin, Auguste,  
     *The Thinker*, 48  
*Rose Croix*, 86  
 Rosny, 27  
 Rousseau, Henri (Le Douanier), 48  
 Roussel, Raymond, 27, 48 ff., 69, 88  
     *Impressions d'Afrique*, 48 ff.  
     *Comment j'ai écrit mes livres*, 50  
  
 Section d'Or exhibition, Paris, 28  
 Severini, Gino, 28  
 Simultaneity, 17  
 Solidonius, 85  
 Surrealism, 12, 44, 51, 57, 100  
 Symbolism, 24, 26, 27, 39, 58, 83, 86, 93, 100  
  
 Verne, Jules, 27, 52  
 Villiers de l'Isle Adam,  
     *L'Eve Future*, 24, 53  
     *Axel*, 53  
  
 Villon, Jacques, 17  
  
 Wells, H. G., 27  
  
 Zone (Jura), 47







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The front of the jacket shows a detail from *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* by Marcel Duchamp, slightly enlarged from the actual size (photograph courtesy of The Philadelphia Museum of Art: Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier)  
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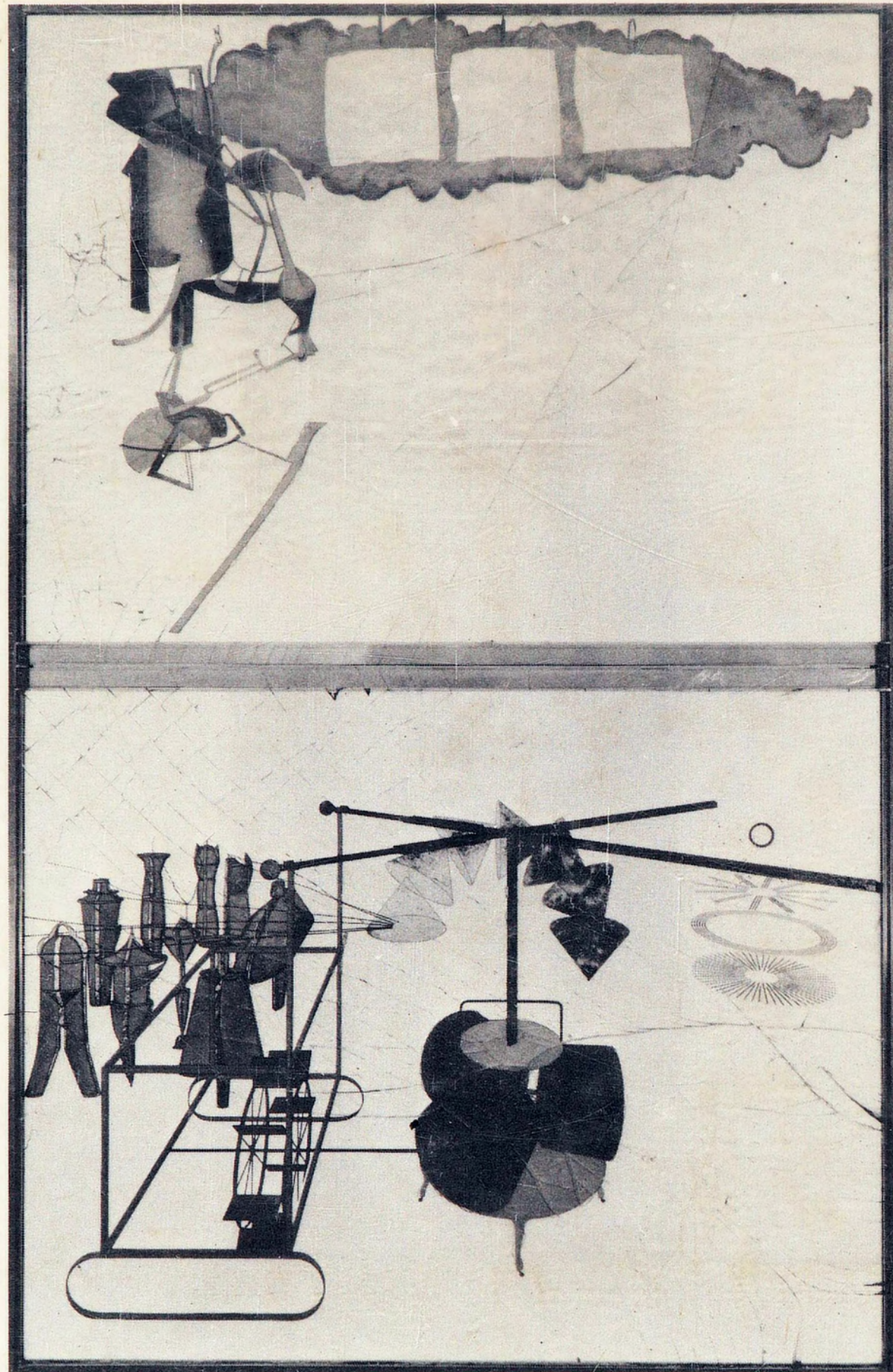


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22