

Press release

Marcel Duchamp & Sturtevant

Dialogues are mostly fried snowballs

17 March—23 July 2026

Opening Tuesday 17 March 2026, 6.30—8.30pm

Thaddaeus Ropac Milan Palazzo Belgioioso
Piazza Belgioioso, 2, 20121 Milan



Irving Penn, *Marcel Duchamp (1 of 2)*, New York, 1948.
Gelatin silver print. © The Irving Penn Foundation



Portrait of Sturtevant. © Sturtevant Estate.
Published in *Frog Magazine*, April 2012. Photo: L. Muzzey

Thaddaeus Ropac Milan presents an unprecedented artistic and intellectual exchange between two pioneers: Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), the father of Conceptual art, and Sturtevant (1924–2014), whose groundbreaking practice critically interrogated the conceptual structure of art in a post-Duchampian world. A ‘one-man movement’ as Willem de Kooning described him, Duchamp initiated an artistic revolution with his readymades: ordinary objects that he elevated to the status of masterpiece by virtue of his simple choice. Much like Duchamp repudiated ‘retinal art’, Sturtevant’s radical repetitions, from memory, of artworks by her peers sparked a further ‘leap from image to concept’. Over the course of four decades, Sturtevant repeatedly employed Duchamp’s own style as a medium in order to investigate the ‘understructure’ of his oeuvre: how

it was made, consumed and, crucially, canonised. Titled after Sturtevant’s ironic remark, *Dialogues are mostly fried snowballs* reflects Duchamp’s penchant for witticisms. From Duchamp’s first readymade, *Porte-bouteilles (Bottle Rack, 1914/64)*, through both artists’ erotic objects to Sturtevant’s repetitions of Duchamp’s seminal *Fountain (1917)*, this first-ever exhibition dedicated to both inimitably provocative artists highlights the prescience of their practice in the age of digital reproduction and AI reproducibility.

In 1937, Duchamp met the eminent philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, and showed him a collotype copy of his landmark painting, *Nu descendant un escalier (N°2) (Nude Descending a Staircase (No.*

2), 1912; Philadelphia Museum of Art). As Benjamin recorded in his diary, he was profoundly marked by the ‘breathtakingly beautiful’ nature of the print, to the extent that he made a note to ‘maybe mention’ it in his visionary essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1935–39). Duchamp’s 1937 collotypes of *Nu descendant un escalier* – one of which is on view at Thaddaeus Ropac Milan – destabilised



Marcel Duchamp, *Nu descendant un escalier*, 1937.
Pochoir-coloured collotype. 34.8 × 20.8 cm (13.7 × 8.19 in)

Benjamin’s very concept of the incontrovertible ‘aura’ of an original artwork. Decades later, Sturtevant would repeat Duchamp’s Cubist-Futurist work in *Duchamp Nu descendant un escalier* (1967/68), excavating its origins in early cinema and chronophotography to create her own film – which is prominently projected at the entrance of the exhibition – wherein superimposed footage decomposes the movement of the nude artist as she descends a staircase. Sturtevant does not seek to conjure the Benjaminian aura of Duchamp’s work, but precisely to dissect it. As Sturtevant stated, ‘My intentions are to extend and to develop our present notion of aesthetics, to investigate originality, and to examine the relation between original and origins; opening up space for new thinking.’ Sturtevant’s repetitions embody the quintessential art of ‘grey matter’ that Duchamp lauded.

Across the exhibition, a cerebral confrontation is staged between Duchamp’s readymades and Sturtevant’s repetitions thereof. Duchamp’s *Porte-bouteilles* hangs above the main space, looking over its progeny, while his

playfully irreverent *Trébuchet* (*Trap*, 1917/64) is displayed on the floor, threatening to trip the viewer, just as it once did the artist himself. While Duchamp strove to ‘de-deify’ the artist through the seeming non-artistry of the readymade, it ironically contributed to apotheosising him in the pantheon of art history – a process that Sturtevant scrutinises through the exhibited works. For Sturtevant, Duchamp’s readymades epitomise his ‘force of resistance’; in her own words, ‘What Duchamp did no[t] do, not what he did – which is what he did, locates the dynamics of his work. [...] Thus, the grand contradiction is that giving up creativity made him the great creator.’ As *Dialogues are mostly fried snowballs* elucidates, Duchamp’s radical readymades are mirrored in Sturtevant’s avant-garde gesture of repetition. Renouncing the primacy of the visual, Sturtevant manually repeated the work of her contemporaries in a paradoxical effort to dematerialise it; to access ‘the silent interior of art’. The exhibition offers a myriad of Sturtevant’s repetitions of Duchamp’s legendary *Fountain*, spanning photography, collage, drawing and sculpture. Under Sturtevant’s incisive gaze, Duchamp’s signed urinal becomes the site of a sustained enquiry into its cult status. The discourse surrounding Duchamp’s readymades, rather than the objects themselves, is the true subject of Sturtevant’s work.



Sturtevant, *Duchamp descendant l'escalier*, 1992.
Black and white photograph. 35 × 28 cm (13.78 × 11.02 in)

The exhibition explores key themes that recur through Duchamp’s practice, ranging from the kinetic to the erotic, which Sturtevant sublimates in her own work. Duchamp’s *Rotorelief* (1965) spins on a wall-mounted turntable

beside Sturtevant's *Duchamp Rotary Disc (Lanterne Chinoise)* (1969), her assiduous study of the work, scribbled with annotations and diagrams that probe its creation, instigating a transition from the realm of optical illusion to that of the ideational. Duchamp's erotic objects – from his disquieting *Objet-dard (Dart-Object)*, (1951/62) to the subversive *Feuille de vigne femelle (Female Fig Leaf)*, (1951/61) – are further juxtaposed with Sturtevant's repetitions of his fetish works, such as *Duchamp Coin de chasteté* (1967).

While Duchamp's transgressive works crystallise his perennial interest in eroticism as a central locus of human experience, 'exploit[ing] the slippages between the work of art and the fetish' as art historian Paul B. Franklin writes, Sturtevant's repetitions avowedly 'throw out representation' altogether to delve even further into



Marcel Duchamp, *Feuille de vigne femelle*, 1951/1961. Bronze. 9 × 14 × 12.5 cm (3.54 × 5.51 × 4.92 in)

their metaphysical power as objects of art. For writer Bruce Hainley, 'Sturtevant repeats works for the necessity of a catalytic recognizability, sparking an investigation of what allows 'art' to be, so that the entirety of the structure of art is reconsidered horizontally not linearly.'

At the core of the exhibition lies Duchamp's extraordinary *De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy, La Boîte-en-valise* (1966): the artist's self-curated 'portable museum'. The self-referential work, which belonged to Duchamp's wife 'Teeny', encloses three miniature replicas as well as 77 reproductions of his work, including a plethora of those on display in *Dialogues are mostly fried snowballs* and a 1936 photograph of *Porte-bouteilles* by Man Ray also on view. Similarly entrancing, Sturtevant's *Duchamp Ciné* (1992) draws the viewer towards an enigmatic coffee grinder handle beneath the projection of her film, which, when turned, activates a flow of vignettes of Sturtevant's repetitions of Duchamp's oeuvre glimpsed through a small aperture in the wall.



Sturtevant, *Duchamp Coin de chasteté*, 1967. Plaster and dental plastic. 6 × 9 × 6 cm (2.36 × 3.54 × 2.36 in)

Harking back to Duchamp's own peephole tableau and final work, *Étant donnés* (1966; Philadelphia Museum of Art), Sturtevant's inventive device functions like an interactive retrospective of the artists' entwined practices. Pushing authorial ambiguities further, Sturtevant merges her artistic identity with that of Duchamp's strategic alter ego – and potential co-author of *La Boîte-en-valise* – Rose Sélavy, in a mini-slide of *Duchamp Wanted* (1992). Fascinatingly, when Duchamp and Sturtevant first met, she showed him *Duchamp Relâche* (1967), a repetition she made with Robert Rauschenberg, which is exhibited at Thaddaeus Ropac Milan. As Sturtevant recalled, 'Marcel [...] said, "Where did you get that?" So you never knew, did he realize that was not his photo or did he really think it was his photo?'

Dialogues are mostly fried snowballs sheds light on the unremitting spirit of subversion that unites Sturtevant and Duchamp, both of whom fundamentally challenged and redefined the meaning of art through their practice. The exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Milan will coincide with the major retrospective of Duchamp's work opening at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, on 12 April 2026.



Marcel Duchamp, *De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy, La Boîte-en-Valise*, 1966. Original box, covered with red leather, with a total of 3 miniature objects and 77 reproductions after original works by the artist. 41.2 × 38.3 × 9.5 cm (16.22 × 15.08 × 3.74 in)



Irving Penn, *Marcel Duchamp (1 of 2)*, New York, 1948.
Gelatin silver print.
© The Irving Penn Foundation

Marcel Duchamp

Marcel Duchamp was born in Normandy in 1887 into a family of artists, counting painter Jacques Villon, Cubist sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Dada artist Suzanne Duchamp-Crotti among his siblings. He received academic training at the Académie Julian in 1904–05, and his early paintings reveal the influence of Cubism, as in his *Nu descendant un escalier (N°2)* (*Nude Descending a Staircase (N°2)*, 1912), which caused a sensation when shown at the New York Armory Show in 1913. However, by the late 1910s he had renounced painting in favour of a more singular and radical approach to art-making. As artist Jasper Johns eulogised, ‘He declared that he wanted to kill art (“for myself”) but his persistent attempts to destroy frames of reference altered our thinking, established new units of thought. [...] He has changed the condition of being here.’

‘After renouncing easel painting in the late 1910s, he pursued numerous other endeavors in the course of the ensuing decades, almost none of which would have qualified as high art at the time,’ writes Paul B. Franklin. ‘These included, among others, selecting commonplace, mass-produced objects and presenting them as his own; contriving and constructing an abstract, phantasmagoric love machine in glass titled *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her*

Bachelors, Even, 1915–23) and generally referred to as the *Grand Verre* (*Large Glass*); playing chess and devising chess sets; designing posters, catalogues, book covers, and bookbindings; taking notes and later publishing them in elaborate facsimile editions; composing puns and spoonerisms; curating collections and exhibitions; fashioning miniature reproductions and replicas of his work; and simply being a “breather,” as he characterised himself in 1954 when pressed to identify his vocation.’

For most of his life, Duchamp divided his time between France and the USA, living primarily in New York in 1915–23 and then in Paris in 1923–42, before returning to New York. He became a naturalised American citizen in 1955. His first solo exhibition was held at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1937, followed by his first American retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963, and his first European survey at the Tate Gallery, London, in 1966. Since his death in 1968, Duchamp’s work has been the subject of countless exhibitions and can be found in the permanent collections of the most important museums worldwide. The Philadelphia Museum of Art houses the most extensive holdings of his work, due to a generous donation by Louise and Walter Arensberg, who were his lifelong friends and patrons.



Portrait of Sturtevant. © Sturtevant Estate.
Published in *Frog Magazine*, April 2012.
Photo: L. Muzzey

Sturtevant

The American artist Sturtevant is best known for her repetitions of the works of other artists, including her contemporaries in American Pop – Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol and Tom Wesselmann – as well as Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Frank Stella, Félix González-Torres, Keith Haring and Anselm Kiefer, among others. Her aim was not to achieve an exact replica, but rather, as art historian Peter Eleey writes, ‘to consume them completely and turn them into tools of their own self-depiction’.

Sturtevant’s first exhibition, held in 1965 at the Bianchini Gallery, New York, featured her repetitions of Andy Warhol’s silkscreened flowers, a Jasper Johns flag, a Frank Stella concentric square, a Claes Oldenburg garment and other paintings suspended on a clothes rack. The relationship between repetition and difference, as articulated in Gilles Deleuze’s seminal philosophical text, was central to her practice. Before it became available in English translation, Sturtevant read *Différence et répétition* (1968) in the original French with the aid of a dictionary. The disparities between versions encourage the viewer to look beyond their surface similarities and ‘trigger thinking’ about the underlying conceptual structure of art. She achieved these crucial differences by working ‘predominantly from memory, using the same techniques,

making the same errors and thus coming out in the same place’. When Warhol was asked how he made his work he famously replied: ‘I don’t know. Ask Elaine [Sturtevant]’.

Sturtevant worked across media, ranging from painting and sculpture to photography, wallpaper and, from 2000 onwards, video works that combined advertising and internet images with her own film material. These later video works turn a critical gaze on today’s image-saturated media culture, creating repetitions of a different kind on a continuous loop. As the artist stated in 2012, ‘What is currently compelling is our pervasive cybernetic mode, which plunks copyright into mythology, makes origins a romantic notion, and pushes creativity outside the self. Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine – that’s the way to go.’

Born in Lakewood, Ohio in 1924, Sturtevant received her BA from the University of Iowa, followed by an MA in psychology from Columbia University. In 1990, she relocated from the US to Paris, where she lived and worked until her death in 2014. She was awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, and was appointed to the rank of Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur in France in 2013. Her work has been the subject of monographic exhibitions

at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2015); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2014); Albertina, Vienna (2014); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2014); Serpentine Galleries, London (2013); Kunsthalle, Zürich (2012); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2012); Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (2010); Le Consortium, Dijon (2008); Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2004); École Régionale des Beaux-arts de Nantes (2000); MAMCO, Geneva (1999) and Villa Arson, Nice (1993). Notable recent group exhibitions include *La Répétition* at the Centre Pompidou-Metz (2024–25); *Inheritance* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2023–24); *Carte blanche à Anne Imhof, Natures Mortes* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2021); and *She-Bam Pow POP Wizz ! Les Amazones du POP* at the MAMAC, Nice (2020). In 2025, the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville, organised a retrospective of Sturtevant's work.

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