The History of Found Objects in Art

This lecture examines the significance of the found object and readymade art in C20th sculpture. Beginning with Dada, then Surrealism and finishing with Pop Art this lecture's purpose is to show the history of the use of the 'Found Object' in Art.

INTRODUCTION

Visual Art in the C20th could be divided into two main categories – figurative or non-figurative art –

Figurative - representations of recognizable imagery.

Example- a sculpture of a woman that looks like a woman

Praxiteles: Medici Venus,
Roman Copy,
Uffizi, Florence
slide by F. Sullivan, S.J.

http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/art/greeksculp01.html

Non figurative- abstraction. Example a sculpture of a woman that doesn't look like a woman but represents a woman.

Kenneth Armitage

Seated Woman with Square Head (version B) 1955

Tate. Transferred from the Victoria and Albert Museum 1983

© Estate of the artist

View in Tate Collection

A comic strip parody of a modern artist in the studio often depicts the artwork as a dynamic array of lines, shapes and colours - **Abstract Art** - which has come to characterise the fundamental changes in C20th art.

A big change in sculpture came in the early C20th sculpture by the introduction of the **readymade**, also known as the found object, or 'object trouvé', as a means of representation. Rather than the artist making sculpture, from scratch, using raw materials such as marble or wood as the medium to construct a realistic depiction of their subject, for example a sculpture of a woman out of marble. Artists used found objects and 'assembled' them together to make a sculpture of a woman.

Thus a sculpture made out of found objects is an **'assemblage'.**

Making sculpture became a search for the right object, which was then manipulated and 'branded' as Art.

Normal boring things from people's ordinary lives became both the subject and medium of sculpture.

Art movements, such as Dada, Surrealism, Pop Art, Arte Povera, Fluxus and today's culturally blended, figurative art rest on this radical move away from the manipulation of traditional, raw materials to the found object.

DADA:

What is Dada?

D**ada** - An early twentieth century art movement which ridiculed contemporary culture and traditional art forms. The movement was formed in reaction to the art styles of the time rather than to promote a particular style itself. It was born as a consequence of the collapse during World War I of social and moral values which had developed at that time. Dada artists produced works which reflected a cynical attitude toward social values, and, irrational — absurd and playful, emotive and intuitive. Dadaists typically produced art objects in unconventional forms produced by unconventional methods. Several artists employed the chance results of accident as a means of production. Many other movements have been influenced by Dada, including Surrealism, Pop Art and Fluxus.

Dada and the use of the Found Object in Art

Arrtists in the Dada movement used found objects in a particular way, they were called ‘readymades’. The Dada artist often chose objects then presented them in an art gallery as Art with little or nothing being done to the object. No painting, glueing, attaching anything to it, just placing the object in a gallery signing it and pronouncing this is art.

This was called a readymade.

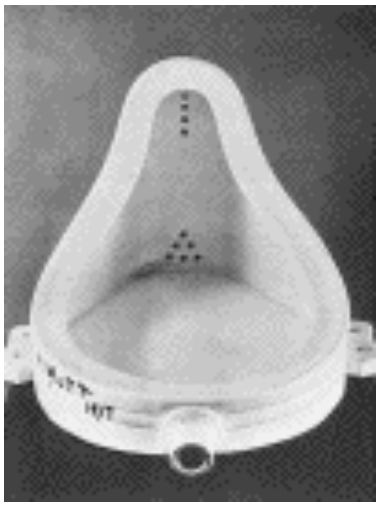
R**eadymade** or **ready-made** - An object manufactured for some other purpose, presented by an artist as a work of art. Between 1914 and 1921, Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968), who originated this concept, selected and signed, among others, a snow shovel, a comb, and a urinal. He occasionally altered readymades (sometimes called assisted readymades) — the most famous of which was a cheap reproduction of ***Mona Lisa*** on which Duchamp drew a mustache and a ***Urinal*** called Fountain.

The urinal, purchased from "Mott Works" company in New York and signed "R. Mutt," was submitted to the jury-free 1917 Independents exhibition but was suppressed by the hanging committee. This is a photograph of either the second version of 1951 or the third of 1964.

As if the addition of mustache and beard weren't enough of a poke at this most famous of paintings, the letters Duchamp penciled — L.H.O.O.Q. — at the bottom of his altered image are meaningless in themselves, but when read aloud in French, make the sound of "Elle a chaud au cul," meaning, "She has a hot ass."

Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, "rectified readymade," pencil on a reproduction — a chromolithograph, 7 3/4 x 4 7/8 inches, private collection, Paris.

The most notorious readymade sculpture is called *Fountain*, 1917, Marcel Duchamp,white glazed ceramic plumbing fixture and painted signature, readymade porcelain urinal on its back, 63 x 48 x 35 cm.



SURREALISM

What is SURREALISM?

Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 13 inches, Museum of Modern Art, NY. See distortion.

The Surrealist artists defied convention, questioning the ability of the human mind to grasp reality, - the nature of fantasy, the imagination, sexuality and dreams, the reality of the irrational sub conscious mind were the subjects of their art.

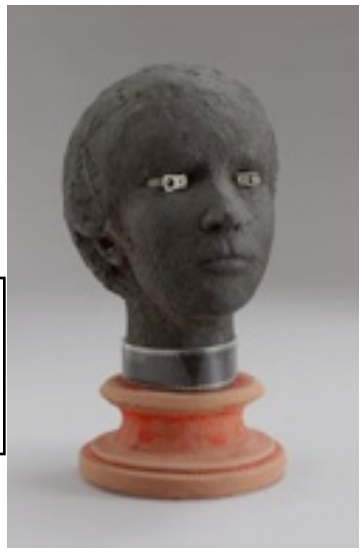
Influenced by the theories of the pioneer of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (German, 1856-1939), the images found in surrealist works are as confusing and startling as those of dreams. Surrealist works can have a realistic, though irrational style, precisely describing dreamlike fantasies, as in the works of René Magritte, Salvador Dalí, Yves Tanguy and Alfred Pellan.

Surrealism and the use of the Found Object in Art

The Surrealist artists' strategy was to juxtapose-(place objects together that don't belong), unlikely yet ordinary images, objects and materials to make works that, like dreaming, confound normal analysis. Marcel Jean's 'Déjeuner en Fourrure' (Breakfast in Fur) 1936, became an emblem of Surrealism .

A large, plain cup, saucer and spoon were purchased from the Parisian department store, Uniprix, then covered with the fur of a Chinese gazelle. As Meret is not a common name in America, the Swiss artist was commonly assumed to be a man.

Meret Oppenheim. *Object.* 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, (23.7 cm) in diameter, overall height (7.3 cm).



Specter of the Gardenia

Marcel Jean (French, 1900-1993) 1936. Plaster head with painted black cloth, zippers, and strip of film on velvet-covered wood base, (35 x 17.6 x 25 cm)

What is Pop Art?

Pop Art - An art movement and style that had its origins in England in the 1950s and made its way to the United States during the 1960s. Pop artists have focused attention upon familiar images of the popular culture such as billboards, comic strips, magazine advertisements and supermarket products. Leading artists are Richard Hamilton Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Jasper John, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Sexually explicit material, youth culture and the hedonistic life style of the rich consumer were examined and presented as the stuff of art. Pop Art in Britain and America narrowed the division of art from life and broadened fine art's domain .

Roy Lichtenstein,Whaam!, 1963, acrylic and oil on canvas, 172.7 x 406.4 cm, Tate Gallery, London.

Mass production, global marketing, the promotion of consumerism and capitalism's partner, advertising, were perceived to be the new 'landscape'.

An account of Pop Art, would not be complete without mention of Andy Warhol and the promotion of celebrity. Not only did he use mass media images of famous people as the subject of his art, such as Marilyn Monroe, Mao Tse Tung, Jackie Kennedy, Elvis Presley, he also promoted himself as an 'Art Star', – a new thing in the visual arts. Warhol's one liner that everyone would be famous for fifteen seconds, made in 1968, the year Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated propelling their murderers to notoriety, was an acknowledgement of the new phenomenon of ordinary people, for a blazing moment - often for the slightest of reasons - becoming the intense focus of mass media.

This can be seen in the new faze of 'Big Brother' or 'Reality Shows'.

Pop Art and the use of the Found Object in Art

Pop artists used found objects, but also represented them as glorified subjects of their work, thereby completing the elevation of the mundane into the subject of art.

They took normal found objects and made them 'Art'. Like Dada artworks, Pop Art objects were taken from the kitchen, supermarket shelves, lounge room, bed and bathroom into the art gallery or public place.

Floor Burger (1971) Claes Oldenburg

Claus Oldenberg's giant lipstick, his glass cabinets full of inedible food, and his soft sculpture like the burger shown, all make fun of the large, respectable form of conventional sculpture to intensify the dominance of hyped up 'products'.

My point here is that Oldenberg made a large solid piece like a traditional sculpture but he made a big burger. This could be seen to be making fun of the whole fast food culture.

Conceived in a time when the United States was consumed by the Vietnam War, *LOVE* became a symbol for Peace. This famous sculpture is one of the most celebrated works within the pop art movement as well the art world as a whole.

New York, in 2002, LOVE is a 144" (h) x144" (w) x72" (d) sculpture made of poly-chromed red and blue aluminum, weighing 3,800 lbs.

http://www.scottsdalepublicart.org/collection/love.php

Amongst these methodologies the readymade object remains the starting point of many contemporary artists' tool kits for visual representation.

I used the following sources in the lecture

ArtLex Art Dictionary

Scottsdale Public Art

www.tate.org.uk

Indianapolis Museum of Art: Modern, African & Fine Art, Gardens

www.moma.org

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FURTHER READING

Gilles Deleuze (1968) Repetition and Difference. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995), is a key figure in postmodern philosophy. Deleuze drew upon the writings of Franco-German philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716), who was profoundly influenced by exposure to Taoist philosophy in his correspondence on Chinese culture with Jesuit missionaries {see "The Fold"). Deleuzes's "Repetition and Difference" was written in 1968. It was translated into English in 1994 by Paul Patton. Pub. Columbia University Press, New York.

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