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Resumen: The Fountain, by Marcel Duchamp, is the focus of a centennial tribute organized by a group of artists living in Puebla (Mexico) and in Puerto Rico. Since 2017, the Art Gallery of the School of Humanities at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez Campus has served as the headquarters for this confluence between readymades and prints which honor the legendary work created a century ago. [Bilingual version].

Palabras clave: Baruch Vergara , Carlos Fajardo , Carlos Flores Rom , Marcel Duchamp , Mónica Muñoz Cid , Rafael Trelles , Readymade , Yolanda Velázquez

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Jan Galligan y Lillian Mulero

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Given: 1. The Readymade Found Object, *Fountain*; 2. *The Multiple*, in seventeen variations.

Returning to Santa Olaya from a visit to Mayagüez to see an art exhibition based on Marcel Duchamp, we were pleased to find in our mailbox a new book of interviews with Duchamp conducted by Calvin Tompkins. Produced by artist Paul Chan's new venture Badlands Unlimited, *The Afternoon Interviews* features previously unpublished conversations conducted in 1965. In the introduction, Chan asks Tompkins, fifty years after those interviews, "What do you think is Duchamp's legacy today?" Tompkins replies, "His need, his passion to question everything, even the very nature of art. The real point of (his) Readymades was to deny the possibility of defining art. Art can be anything."

La Réplica Original is an exhibition organized by Baruch Vergara presented this month at the Art Gallery of UPR-Mayagüez to celebrate 100 years of Marcel Duchamp's iconic readymade found-sculpture, *Fountain*, an upturned porcelain men's urinal which he allegedly purchased at J.L. Mott Iron Works, a New York City plumbing supply shop. He signed the urinal with the name R. Mutt and added the date 1917. He then presented this work as an entry to that year's Society of Independent Artists annual exhibition, whose stated premise was that all works submitted by any artist paying the entry fee would be exhibited. At the time Duchamp was on the board of the Society whose member artists deemed the urinal an affront. Not knowing that Duchamp was the instigator, the board met and voted, declaring *Fountain* was not art, and

promptly removed and hid it from view. In the interim *Fountain* had been photographed by Alfred Stieglitz at his 291 Gallery where he placed it on a pedestal in front of *The Warriors*, a painting by Marsden Hartley. Within a short time the original *Fountain* was lost and thus only existed in the form of the Stieglitz photograph until 1950 when Duchamp authorized a replica for an exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery. Two more authorized replicas followed in 1953 and 1963. In 1964 Arturo Schwartz working with Duchamp manufactured an edition of eight replicas, with four artist's proof copies, bringing the total number of *Fountain* versions to 17.

Fascinated by these confluences of the number 17, Vergara who comes from Puebla, Mexico, was determined to put an exhibition together in 2017, and sent invitations to a group of artists in Puerto Rico and Puebla. Each artist was instructed to find an object, the readymade, then create an edition of 17 prints and two artist's proofs, which would relate in some way to their found object and include a reference to Duchamp. Each artist would receive a suite of all the prints and the two institutions presenting the exhibition, UPR-Mayaguez and Benemérita Universidad Autónoma in Puebla would get Hors Commerce (a set of the multiples) for their permanent collection.

Probably the most specific reference to Duchamp is found in the work by Monica Muñoz Cid (Puebla) which contains a serendipitous example of Duchamp's *Fountain*. Using a set of Spanish rubber stamp pictograms Muñoz Cid has created a rebus that spells out this quote from Duchamp: I DON'T BELIEVE IN ART, I BELIEVE IN THE ARTIST. Next to her print is a stack of the rubber stamps with the letter W (not used in the rebus) on top. W is commonly used to spell words of foreign origin – in this case water, for toilet – is represented by an image of the toilet.

The most enigmatic work is by Carlos Flores Rom (Puebla), which he based on Duchamp's mysterious small sculpture *With Hidden Noise*. In 1916 Duchamp sandwiched a ball of nautical twine between two square brass plates held together with four long metal bolts that project below the bottom plate, providing the legs on which the sculpture stands. As Duchamp was constructing this work he asked his friend the art collector Walter Arensberg to secretly place an object inside the ball of twine. When one shakes the sculpture you can hear the mystery object rattling against the metal.

In a wonderful inversion, Flores Rom made a drawing where he has turned Duchamp's artwork upside down so that the legs become posts and by adding three strands of twine for ropes the sculpture turns into a ring for a Mexican Lucha Libre wrestling match. Inside the ring are two



Mónica Muñoz Cid (Puebla), Art, 2017, Sellos de goma en papel (detalle de la letra "W").

masked luchadores ready for combat. In addition, Flores Rom perversely filled his Mexican found object *Lucha Libra* with extra strands of rope, trapping the luchadores in a maze preventing their actual combat, echoing the time Duchamp filled an art gallery with what he called *Sixteen Miles of String*, preventing viewers from entering the room.

Garvin Sierra (Puerto Rico) chose a group of schoolbooks which are stacked on a pedestal. Across from the books is his printed multiple, a poster made to look as if it comes from UNESCO stating that it is the government's responsibility to provide a free education to all children, and demanding the government not close the universities or the public schools. Sierra's demand comes at a time when the Puerto Rican government is promoting the idea of privatizing public education and selling off assets of the public school system. Sierra's work reflects a somewhat parallel gesture made by Duchamp in 1919. While in Buenos Aires, he wrote to his sister, the artist Suzanne Duchamp living in France, instructing her to take a geometry textbook and hang it outside from a clothesline on her balcony, exposing it to the elements. Wind, rain and sun took their toll and the book was left in tatters. The following year Suzanne made a painting of the results which she titled *Marcel Duchamp's Unhappy Readymade*.

Rafael Trelles (Puerto Rico) chose what he describes as a miniature antique carpenter's dovetail plane, a tool used for carving decorative details in wood, which he has placed in a small wooden box. The shape of the tool immediately reminds you of an upcurved moustache, while the box recalls Duchamp's container for the carved wooden *Three Standard Stoppages*, a work Duchamp described as "a joke about the meter." The shape for each of the three elements was determined by dropping a one meter length of twine from a height of one meter and using the resulting curve to define each element's outline. Trelles, noted for his painting of an emptied shirt floating in front of the scene of the 1937 Ponce Massacre, here in his printed multiple, replaces the arms and shoulders of a human torso with the top down view of the carpenter's plane, even while the object's shape reflects the moustache that Duchamp famously drew on top of a postcard version of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.





Rafael Trelles (Puerto Rico), Sin título, 2017 (detail of found object).

By far the most insouciant response to Vergara’s invitation is the work by Yolanda Velázquez (Puerto Rico) who chose a pantyliner pad. Her multiple is a woodcut print of a woman’s sexual anatomy, abundantly spilling roses and thorns from the fallopian tubes. As she says in her statement: “As I approach my ideal reproductive matrix, the firm stalk, with an icy blade, in each incision I mark the fertile footprint of my creation, reproducing 30 times 30 a spill of roses and thorns. As I go about worshiping my process, I could care 3 fucks about the guild of Duchamp historians.” To reinforce this premise, she has printed tiny roses from the woodcut onto the pantyliner.

The late Carlos Fajardo (Puerto Rico), former colleague of Vergara in the university art program, is represented by a work he titled *Legislative Seat*, a discarded porcelain toilet Fajardo had stored away in his art studio and had planned to use at some point as a neo-dada sculpture. For this exhibit, Fajardo filled the bowl with red roses. Sadly, Fajardo passed away before the exhibition’s opening, and in his honor, Vergara has added one white rose to the sculpture’s bouquet.

While Vergara was gathering artists and planning this exhibition, he chanced upon a can of paint on the side of the road that had been flattened, like roadkill, by a passing truck. The dead can of paint reminded Vergara of the many criticism’s of Duchamp for having “killed painting” through his



Yolanda Velázquez (Puerto Rico), Matriz original, 2017.

irreverent artistic creations. Considering this idea, Vergara decided to use the paint can as the object of his printed multiple by placing it on the printing press and directly impressing its outline onto the printed page. He complicated the process further by using four printing techniques on the same paper page, printing four more small images of the flattened can. He has titled his work *The Object of the Painting*, echoing Duchamp's lifelong penchant for puns and wordplay.

During their conversations in 1965, as presented in the new book *The Afternoon Interviews*, Tomkins asked Duchamp how he came to his conviction that art depends on the audience as much as it depends on the artist. Duchamp replied: "There are two poles, the artist and the onlooker. If there is no onlooker, there is no art. The artist looking at his own art is not enough... I give to the onlooker more importance than the artist, almost, because not only does he look, but he also gives a judgment." Tomkins then asked how he came to this conclusion. Duchamp said, "Little by little. I don't know how it came exactly. It doesn't take the form of a very important conclusion because it doesn't change anything. Art is one of many activities, no more than that."

Other artists in *La Réplica Original* from Puebla include: Fernando Diyarza, José Lazcarrot, and Roberto Rodriguez; and from Puerto Rico: Antonio Martorell, Edgard Luiggi, Humberto Figueroa, Omar Velázquez, and Poli Marichal.

Cover photograph: Baruch Vergara and son Bruno playing chess with Cheap Trick chessboard, by Omar Velázquez (Puerto Rico), 2017. Photo: Jan Galligan.



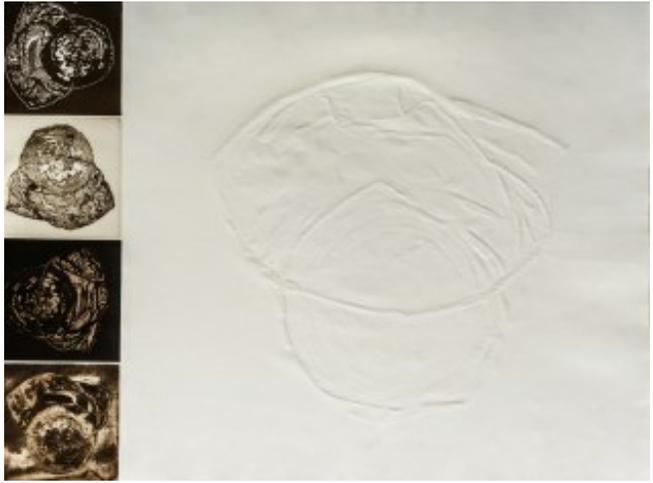
Carlos Fajardo (Puerto Rico), Legislative seat, 2017.



Baruch Vergara (Puebla y Puerto Rico), El objeto de la pintura, 2017.

Note: Artworks by the authors are included in the exhibition *Rose Ocean: Living with Duchamp* on view at the Tang Museum (Saratoga Springs, NY), curated by director Ian Berry and artist Michael Oatman.

VERSIÓN EN ESPAÑOL



Baruch Vergara (Puebla y Puerto Rico), La impresión de la pintura, 2017.