

## Conceptual Art 101: Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte en valise*

Focusing on a single artwork in the museum's permanent collection—Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*—this exhibition considers conceptualism in art, that is, art less about the object than about the concept (or idea) behind it. An artist of many interests and talents (he was a painter, a sculptor, a writer, and a master of chess), Duchamp was the first to devote his career to demonstrating the richness and variety of art about ideas. From the moment he upended a bicycle wheel, mounted it on a stool, and called it sculpture, he repeatedly called attention to the fundamental aesthetic value of the intellectual exercise of selection, and, downplaying notions of creative individualism and authorship, he insisted that even a facsimile could be a work of art. In privileging the concept over the original object, Duchamp questioned the notion that successful art required a public and, exhibiting only rarely, placed his best work in private collections.

In 1936, Duchamp began working on a compendium of “approximately all the things I produced”: a “portable museum” that would contain his principal works in miniature. Into this *Boîte-en-valise* he carefully folded 69 scaled-down replicas of his paintings, drawings, and objects, including Cubist landmarks such as *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), “Readymades” such as *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Bottle Rack* (1914), and *Fountain* (1917), and the archly erotic *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1913) and *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Mona Lisa with a moustache, 1919). During the remainder of his life there followed six partial editions of the *Boîte*, each of which incorporated additional items and varied in presentation. Although fabricated in multiple editions, the *Boîtes* are not true copies, for Duchamp personally and meticulously oversaw the exacting production of each component.

One of the most important and influential works of 20<sup>th</sup>-century art, Duchamp's *Boîte* is not only a convenient summation of his oeuvre, but also, as a selection of duplicates paradoxically engineered by the artist himself, a clever synthesis of his conceptual practice. His artistic statements and achievements, in all their heterogeneous and many-sided profusion, are presented here as a carefully ordered whole, from his early attempts at Fauvism and Cubism, to the groundbreaking objects and themes that place him at the forefront of Pop Art, Minimalism, and Conceptualism.