



avantgarde

Dada and Duchamp's Fountain



Duchamp's 'Fountain' has a very direct relation to Dada: A 'dada' in french is a horse in children's language, also rocking and hobby horse and hobby, and appears in 'à dada sur mon bidet', the french version of playing gee-gees, and 'bidet' is a little horse, as well as the sanitary fitment, which strongly resembles Duchamp's 'Fountain', not least because of the usual meaning of 'fountain'.

Details

(For many facts surrounding Duchamp's 'Fountain', see [Pilfered Pissaire? A Response to the Allegation that Duchamp Stole his Famous Fountain](#), Jesse Prinz, artbouillon, 20 Nov 2014.)

The name 'Dada' for the art movement originated in 1916 in the Zürich flat of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in company of Richard Huelsenbeck (Huelsenbeck, *transition*, No. 2 (May 1927), pp. 134-135):

I was standing behind Ball looking into the dictionary on his knees. Ball's finger pointed to the first letter of each word descending the page. Suddenly I cried halt. I was struck by a word I had never heard before, the word dada.

'Dada,' Ball read, and added: 'It is a children's word meaning hobby-horse'. At that moment I understood what advantages the word held for us.

'Let's take the word dada,' I said. 'It's just made for our purpose. The child's first sound expresses the primitiveness, the beginning at zero, in our art. We could not find a better word.'

Independently of whether things took part exactly that way, the primary association of Dada seems to be with the french 'dada', which is children's language for horse, including rocking and hobby horse, and figuratively also means hobby.

The nursery rhyme 'à dada sur mon bidet' corresponds to the english 'to play gee-gees', hence where a child "rides" on the thighs of an adult.

The word 'bidet' stands in French originally and until today for a kind of little horse. Today's better known meaning as a sanitary fitment with some kind of "fountain" in it, originates from its original appearance that resembled a little horse, for example in 'La toilette intime ou la fleur effeuillée' by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845):



Duchamp had submitted 'Fountain' with help from his friends towards 1 April 1917 for the New York art exhibition. For all that it appears as Dada in the sense not least of the french 'dada'.

Hence the fountain was intended to represent some kind of a bidet and thus Dada, as a sarcastic April Fool's joke. Almost all of modern art derives from that: This April Fool's joke became the 'object trouvé' / 'ready-made'. If you now think that these claims might be a bit exaggerated, you know the Bohème only from the outside...