

Documenting Disintegration

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Modern art exhibitions should not interest me as much as they do, because there is really next to no hope of modern art as such putting Humpty Dumpty visually together again. But "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," so on passing through London just now I went to see an Exhibition of Duchamp, Man Ray and Picabia, programmed as "three pioneering artists and friends whose meeting together during the first World War led to the creation of the New York Dada movement and changed the art world for ever."

Alas, the programme sounded good, but the actual exhibits were as disappointing as ever. Born between 1887 and 1890, all three artists showed some conventional talent before they met up, but from the moment they worked together to achieve their common goal of breaking all artistic convention, the exhibits of this Exhibition betray their almost complete inability to put anything of value in place of what they broke.

From the Frenchman Duchamp, thinker of the group, typical and notorious is his 1917 exhibit entitled "Fountain," consisting of nothing but an everyday porcelain urinal laid on its back. Some thinking! Art, said Duchamp, need neither be made by the artist himself, nor need it be visually appealing. Henceforth art could be anything ready-made, so long as it was designated by an "artist" as a work of "art." Hence the twisted steel garbage designated as "statues" to be found in so many a modern city. The three friends had set out to change the definition of art. They seem to have succeeded!

Francis Picabia's first wife said about Duchamp and her husband that they "displayed an extraordinary adherence to paradoxical, destructive principles in their blasphemies and inhumanities, which were directed not only against the old myths of art, but against all the foundations of life in

general.”

As for Man Ray, in 1951 he was still saying that he wanted “to paint as much as possible unlike other painters, above all, to paint unlike myself – so that each succeeding work, or series of works, shall be entirely different from preceding works.”

Fundamental destruction, not excluding self-destruction, was the programme of all three – re-defined – “artists.” How can their programme have achieved that universal prestige and popularity which it enjoys today? – the Exhibition was well attended by devout spectators! Answer, because any civilization that turns away from God must turn in on itself, and then, by a just vengeance, turn on itself. Here is why millions of souls want modernism in their art – and in their religion.

Kyrie eleison.