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THE FOUNTAIN FORMULA

by

Grayson Nader

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture
at
Lindenwood University

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THE FOUNTAIN FORMULA:
DAMIEN HIRST'S USE OF MARCEL DUCHAMP'S READYMADE CONTROVERSY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture
at
Lindenwood University

By

Grayson Nader

Saint Charles, Missouri

January 2022

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: The Fountain Formula. Damien Hirst's Use of Marcel Duchamp's Readymade Controversy

Grayson Nader, Master of Arts in Art History, 2021

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Trenton Olsen, Committee Chair

Controversial art challenges the norms of society, by pushing boundaries to expose what is comfortable and uncomfortable. It inevitably garners attention and demands discourse. Marcel Duchamp was an innovator of controversy. He was angered by the status quo and material greed of the art industry of the early 1900s and rebelled against it with his now-famous readymade, *Fountain*. In *Fountain*, Duchamp created a formula that used controversy to garner attention from the public, the media and the art world. This formula was used by various artists throughout the past century. Contemporary artist Damien Hirst was disillusioned by the monotony of the post-modern art scene and sought to stand out from his peers. Hirst gladly embraced the *Fountain* formula for his own use; however, where Duchamp sought a higher artistic message in his controversy, Hirst looked toward the formula as a means to fame, and possible fortune.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this paper to my family, and those very close to me who have encouraged me and always believed in me. I would like to acknowledge Saint Elizabeth University, and most importantly Dr. Virginia Butera for being one of the reasons that I love art. In addition, I would like to thank Lindenwood University for teaching me so much about Art History. It has been a pleasure to be able to attend this institution. Thank you to Dr. Olsen, Professor Scheffer, and Dr. Camara for being my committee, and pushing me along the way.

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Introduction

Controversy challenges the norms of society by pushing boundaries to expose what is comfortable and uncomfortable. It inevitably garners attention and demands discourse. Marcel Duchamp was an innovator of controversy. He was angered by the status quo and material greed of the art industry of the early 1900s and rebelled against it with his now-famous readymade, *Fountain*. In *Fountain*, Duchamp created a formula that used controversy to garner attention from the public, the media, and the art world. This formula was used by various artists throughout the past century. Contemporary artist Damien Hirst was disillusioned by the monotony of the post-modern art scene and sought to stand out from his peers. Hirst was disillusioned by the monotony of the post-modern art scene and sought to stand out to make a name for himself. It can be argued that Hirst gladly embraced Duchamp's formula for his own use; however, where Duchamp sought to impart higher moral and artistic message with his controversy, Hirst looked toward controversy as a path to attention, fame, and possible fortune.

Controversial art is not a new concept, but rather one that has been utilized by various artists and manifested in various forms throughout history. Controversial art is a moniker assigned to a piece seen as shocking or rebellious, by which artists achieve their ultimate goal of exposure. It is subjective and dependent upon the reaction of an audience. The definition of controversial art has inevitably evolved over time. Jerrod Levinson discusses the historic definition of art as "something that has been intended by someone for regard or treatment in some overall way that some earlier or pre-existing artwork or artworks are or were correctly regarded or treated."¹ Levinson describes the opposite of this as "revolutionary art," where the

¹ Daniel Wilson, "Can Levinson's Intentional-Historical Definition of Art Accommodate Revolutionary Art?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, no. 4 (2015): 407.

artist's intentions have changed.² The term “revolutionary art” is defined by Levinson as works that are “intended as revolutionary by their artists, that is to say, intended for treatment in a manner completely distinct from what has gone before.”³ It is understood that these revolutionary pieces are unsatisfactory as they rebel against the norm, creating conflict with work that is otherwise widely accepted. It is understood that these revolutionary pieces are inherently distinct from earlier works as prior methods of creating art are seen as inadequate by the artist.⁴ This revolutionary art challenges the norms of society, by pushing boundaries to expose what is comfortable and uncomfortable, and to redefine the meaning of art. In that way revolutionary art is often the catalyst of controversy. The French artist Marcel Duchamp was a revolutionary artist, specifically in his use of the readymade which will be discussed further throughout this paper.

Duchamp was a French American painter and sculptor born in the Normandy region of France in 1887.⁵ His full name is Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp.⁶ Duchamp grew up within an artistic family. He relocated to Paris in 1904 and began painting at home and drawing cartoons for comic magazines.⁷ He was exposed to the Parisian avant-garde movement and existing trends including Post Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism, among others. Attempting some of the styles such as Cubism, Duchamp did not endorse any style as none resonated with his persona. Art historian Roger Shattuck said of Duchamp that “it is no longer possible to be an artist in the way it was before.”⁸ This is because Duchamp altered the way in which an artist could think of

² Daniel Wilson, "Can Levinson's Intentional-Historical Definition of Art Accommodate Revolutionary Art?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, no. 4 (2015): 408.

³ Wilson, 408.

⁴ Wilson, 408.

⁵ Calvin Tomkins, and Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 7.

⁶ Robert Lebel, "Marcel Duchamp." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (September 28, 2021).

⁷ Lebel, 2021.

⁸ Tomkins, 7.

art. When technique and aesthetic was removed from the defining characteristics of art, there is an infinite source of opportunities for the artist to create. In his own words, he did that by forcing himself to contradict himself, “in order to avoid conforming to my own taste.”⁹ Duchamp declined to have a particular style, rather, he wanted to push boundaries, regardless of ways. Duchamp's freedom of expression resonated in his work with readymades. He could see beyond his contemporary views of artists means and methodologies towards the potential of artistic manifestations. This freedom of thinking continued to influence future generation of artists, as will be seen when we discuss Damien Hirst and his relation to Duchamp.¹⁰

Controversial art raises questions, initiates conversations, and even ignites arguments. The uneasiness of the viewer, as experienced by the viewer, is integral to the essence of controversial art; many contentious works have been questioned or identified for removal. Once the artist creates work that is inherently subjective, it enables the viewer to develop their own opinion. The controversy expands the mind to previously unexplored areas. One such style of controversy is that of the readymade. The readymade, in simple terms, involves the use of an existing object presented to the audience as art. Duchamp's 1917-piece *Fountain* (See Figure 1) was the impetus behind his recognition as the father of the readymade.

Duchamp's 1917-piece, *Fountain*, is an art installation composed of a common, everyday white porcelain urinal, that was removed from a wall and displayed horizontally on its side. It is roughly 15 in. x 19 1/4 in. x 24 5/8 in. (38.1 cm x 48.9 cm x 62.55) cm in size. One must approach it to understand what it is and why it's on display. The urinal was signed in black paint

⁹ Calvin Tomkins, and Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014),7.

¹⁰ Tomkins, 7.

with the name “R. Mutt”. The artist did not create the urinal, rather he displayed with the intent of presenting it as art.

Duchamp stated that when utilizing the readymade object “this choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with a total absence of good or bad taste... in fact a complete anesthesia.”¹¹ Anesthesia is an interesting choice of words as it represents a numbing of the senses and, perhaps here, Duchamp’s presentation is just a numbing of the aesthetic and the visual. Duchamp is stripping away the idea of technique and taste and inserting the cerebral experience of art in its place. The object was chosen for itself, without a direct intention of beauty as presented by Duchamp. If using Levinson’s definitions, this work was revolutionary when compared to contemporary pieces. Society at large, in the early twentieth century, directly related art both to technique and aesthetics. These accepted norms were put to the challenge by Duchamp.

Arthur Danto, a philosopher, and later an art critic, states “Duchamp's contribution to art is that his readymades showed that the aesthetic is a contingent feature of artworks, whereas it had previously been thought essential.”¹² Here Danto explains what will be an integral theme for Duchamp and that is the intellectual nature of art versus the aesthetic. Danto further explains, “I see Duchamp as the artist who above all has sought to produce an art without aesthetics, and to replace the sensuous with the intellectual.”¹³ Prior to Duchamp’s art, paintings or sculpture were judged mainly on technique and composition. Simply put, the aesthetic was paramount to the meaning. With *Fountain*, Duchamp reversed and replaced that preconception with the notion that the meaning was more important than the aesthetic. The cerebral nature of the readymade was

¹¹ Daniel Wilson, "Can Levinson's Intentional-Historical Definition of Art Accommodate Revolutionary Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, no. 4 (2015): 409.

¹² Wilson, 409.

¹³ Wilson, 410.

never universally accepted; however, there is an understanding that the work must be viewed intellectually to be considered art. The readymade was immediately a topic of debate, both within the art world and society in general.

After the Fountain was rejected as art, Duchamp stated, “No, not rejected. A work can’t be rejected by the Independents. It was simply suppressed. I was on the jury, but I wasn’t consulted, because the officials didn’t know that it was I who had sent it in; I had written the name ‘Mutt’ on it to avoid connection with the personal. The ‘Fountain’ was simply placed behind a partition, and, for the duration of the exhibition, I didn’t know where it was. I couldn’t say that I had sent the thing, but I think the organizers knew it through gossip. No one dared mention it. I had a falling out with them and retired from the organization. After the exhibition, we found the “Fountain” again, behind a partition, and I retrieved it!”¹⁴ In a 1975 interview with artist Nam June Paik, Duchamp explained that he “understood that the radicality of Duchamp’s invention lay not in incorporating mass-produced things in art, but rather in producing a paradoxical object locked in a perpetual oscillation between its status as a thing and its status as a sign.”¹⁵ The object is the understood (i.e., a urinal) and the sign is what it can represent (i.e., rebellion).

However, the power of the readymade is not infinite. In an article by David Joselit, he stated:

that unless the readymade is kept in motion, its initial shock value will quickly fade. Duchamp himself understood the susceptibility of readymades to recuperation. He labored to anticipate and outflank their neutralization by carefully limiting his output and, later, by wittily restaging and reissuing some of them, like Fountain, in order to maintain the instability between thing and concept that accompanied their initial presentations - in other words, by making objects into verb.¹⁶

¹⁴ Christopher P Jones, “Great Works of Art: Duchamp’s ‘Fountain,’” Medium (Medium, July 11, 2019), <https://christopherpjones.medium.com/great-works-of-art-duchamps-fountain-900a4acb4307>.

¹⁵ David Joselit, “No Exit: Video and the Readymade,” *The MIT Press* 119 (2007): 37.

¹⁶ Joselit, 41.

What Joselit is saying is that the line of controversy is ever moving, and the readymade must stay on the side of revolution. What was once controversial becomes status quo and no longer garners the intense attention it did at its initial public offering. Duchamp was able to accomplish staying on the side of the Avant Garde in both his choice of objects and their arrangement. He purposely chose objects that pushed the viewer's comfort level with their understanding of art, such as the urinal. By removing the readymade and then reissuing it at a later date, Duchamp was able to maintain its original meaning.

Duchamp created a successful formula for controversy with his work, *Fountain*. The *Fountain* formula is unique to the readymade. It requires an understanding on the part of the artist to see where the current lines of acceptability are and then cross them. Duchamp created this formula to upset both the status quo of traditional art and the material gain the art industry grew to be in the early 1900s. In 1904, The First Art Fund was formed in Paris with the express intention of purchasing contemporary art, mostly Impressionist works. This art fund was said to set the tone of the intersection of art and finance.¹⁷ Art was seen as a speculative venture which could make a shrewd investor quite wealthy. Duchamp did not believe that art and finance should be intertwined. Equally disturbing to Duchamp was the idea of pure aesthetics. During the time of World War I, Duchamp rejected the work of other fellow artists that was defined as "retinal" art; artwork which the sole intention to please the eye.¹⁸ As Duchamp sought "to put art back in the service of the mind," he focused on redefining art with his readymades,

¹⁷ Sotheby's Institute of Art, "Art Market Histories of the 20th Century," Sotheby's Institute of Art, accessed November 1, 2021.

¹⁸ Nan Rosenthal, "Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968)," Metmuseum.org, October 2004, Accessed December 2021.

specifically *Fountain*.¹⁹ Duchamp changed the way art can be viewed and the definition of what art represents.

With the progression of time, other artists created their own versions of Duchamp's formula. The *Fountain* formula was utilized by many; however, this paper examines the use of Duchamp's formula by contemporary artist, Damien Hirst. Hirst used and manipulated the formula for divergent motivations, namely personal fame, and monetary gain.

It is important to unravel Hirst's background to understand better understand him as we further explore both the similarities and disparities between the readymades of Duchamp and Hirst. Hirst was born in Bristol, England in 1965, his childhood years were spent in Leeds before moving to London to attend Goldsmiths College in 1986.²⁰ He is the United Kingdom's wealthiest artist.²¹ The 1990's became the point when Hirst began to thrive and achieve notoriety with his works. In discussing the use of Duchamp's successful formula by Hirst, this paper specifically examines Hirst's use of the *Fountain* Formula in relation to his work, *The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living* (1991, London, Tate Modern Museum) and *Mother and Child (Divided)*.²²

The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living (see Figure 2) originally consisted of a deceased 14-foot tiger shark, suspended in a blue formaldehyde liquid within a vitrine.²³ The approximately 17-foot long by 7-foot-high vitrine is white and molding between glass panels divide the shark lengthwise into three vignettes on either side. The shark's mouth is

¹⁹ Nan Rosenthal, "Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968)," Metmuseum.org, October 2004, Accessed December 2021.

²⁰ Luke White, "Damien Hirst's Shark: Nature, Capitalism and the Sublime." Tate Modern Museum. (January 01, 2013).

²¹ Kate Brown, "Damien Hirst Is Still the UK's Richest Artist-With a Net Worth of \$384 Million, According to the Sunday Times's 'Rich List'," *Artnet News*, (May 18, 2020).

²² Elizabeth Manchester, "Mother and Child (Divided), Damien Hirst," Tate Modern Museum, (April/June 2009),

²³ Amie Corry, and Anna Godfrey, "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, 1991," Damien Hirst, March 2012.

open, exposing its large mouth and jaw. The viewer may approach the case from all angles, allowing for a complete study of the subject shark. The original shark decayed and has since been replaced.

A similar method was employed by Hirst for *Mother and Child (Divided)* (see Figure 3); however, here the cow and calf are bisected lengthwise, and each half placed in separate vitrines.²⁴ Again, blue formaldehyde suspends the cow and calf. The containers were placed with enough separation that a visitor could walk between the two halves and view the inside of the cow and calf. The cow's vitrine stands at over 6-feet tall, while the calf is approximately 3'6" tall. The placement allows for multiple views to experience the installation from various angles at one time.

Hirst knew the power of the Fountain formula and pushed the acceptable limits of art to expose a new potential for art while ensuring his own fame and monetary gain. In many ways Duchamp and Hirst were revolutionary artists, but as this paper suggests, the reasons and motivations of each artist have taken on a divergent path.

²⁴ Amie Corry, and Anna Godfrey, "Mother and Child (Divided), 1993." Damien Hirst, March 2012.

Literature Review

Tasos Zembylas, who wrote in the *Journal of Language and Politics*, makes a case for the use of controversial art in analyzing motives of not just the artist, but the culture within which the artist exists and works. In his article Tasos Zembylas states:

“the controversial nature of art is, in any case, a social phenomenon pointing to the currently effective limits of acceptability of artistic claims in a given social constellation. The analysis of conflicts aroused by art may therefore be of heuristic value for the social sciences in general. It may reveal something usually hidden, i.e., the nature of hegemonic culture as a system of norms, institutions and practices giving rise to the distinction between the legitimate and the non-legitimate.”²⁵

Zembylas speculates that society itself dictates what is acceptable and unacceptable and therefore allows the artist to understand how to push past the “legitimate” and towards the controversial. The concept of controversial art originates often with an individual seeing an artwork that breaks away from what is considered to be permissible and speaking out for it or against it. Although there is no lack of controversial artists today, Marcel Duchamp and Damien Hirst are two artists, separated by time, yet embroiled in similar controversies surrounded by both their readymade work and their personas.

The readymade was birthed in the early part of the twentieth century at an American art show. The 1917 Society of Independent Artists began in 1916 in New York City as a successor to Association of American Painters and Sculptors. The plan of the society was to give new artists the ability to display their work, in an attempt to rival a more conservative place that featured exhibitions called National Academy of Design.²⁶ The Society of Independent Artists first encountered Marcel Duchamp’s artwork titled *Fountain*. It opened at the Grand Central

²⁵ Tasos Zembylas, "Controversial Works of Art," *Communicating/Doing Politics Journal of Language and Politics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 1.

²⁶ "Society of Independent Artists," *Oxford Reference*, (Accessed October 22, 2020).

Palace in New York City. The show featured 2,500 works containing both paintings and sculptures by 1,200 artists.²⁷ Anyone who paid an initiation fee of one dollar could become a member of the Society of Independent Artists. In addition, when becoming a member, one would be allowed to submit two works of art to the exhibition. Duchamp, once a member of the Society, anonymously submitted a readymade, which was signed with a pseudonym “R.Mutt”. The submission led to outrage among fellow members of the Society. They argued and questioned the work on both aesthetic and moral grounds, which led to a meeting with the directors to discuss whether the artwork was to be accepted.²⁸ Aesthetically the argument was clear, *Fountain* was a utilitarian urinal, the moral grounds were a bit more subjective, some stated it was too “vulgar”, and others stating it was “plagiarism.”²⁹ The arguments over the artistic merits of the urinal lead to a vote which ultimately determined that *Fountain* would be denied for the exhibition. The Society stated in a press release “The *Fountain* may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition and it is, by no definition, a work of art.”³⁰

Although it was stated that anyone who paid could submit artwork to be shown, *Fountain* was rejected. In anger and frustration, Duchamp resigned from the Society. *Fountain* was later photographed by Alfred Stieglitz, an American photographer.^{31,32} While the original vanished, a

²⁷ Francis Naumann, "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, Part I." *Artforum International*. February 01, 1979.

²⁸ Naumann, “The Big Show”.

²⁹ Thierry De Duve, "The Story of Fountain: Hard Facts and Soft Speculation," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 28, (2019): 57.

³⁰ Naumann, “The Big Show”.

³¹ Lisa Hostetler, "Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) and American Photography," *Metmuseum.org*.

³² The photograph was printed in *The Blind Man*, an avant-garde magazine published by Duchamp and his friends.³² The original *Fountain* was no longer to be seen following this. No one knows what has happened to it. It has been lost, and never found again. A small number of replicas were created in the 1950’s and 1960’s after the original *Fountain* vanished.

total of eight replicas were made. Besides one that was sold privately, the others remain in the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Tate Modern.³³

Art historian William A. Camfield in "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917," offers an in-depth analysis of *Fountain*. Camfield examines why Duchamp created *Fountain*, and why its existence is critical in art history. Camfield initiates an understanding of how there are two views of *Fountain*. The first view is that *Fountain* is not seen as art at all but significant to the study of aesthetics or art history.³⁴ The other view being the absolute denial of the entirety of the piece as art. However, with that in mind, Camfield argues for the former, that *Fountain* should be understood as relevant in a historical aspect as an artistic movement reflective of a place and time, in some ways echoing Zembylas' views concerning art as a reflection or rejection of societal norms. Camfield further discusses how *Fountain* can be looked at differently throughout each decade, but he first analyzes it through the context of the year in which it first appeared in 1917 and the context of how it came to be known as *Fountain*. In relation to 1917, Duchamp was not fighting against art but rather sought to change art's definition. He referred to *Fountain* as "sculpture," as a way to illustrate that there was more meaning behind its form than its obvious function as a urinal, and as such, its aesthetics were secondary to its meaning.³⁵ First, the viewer is aware that the object was not created to be beautiful, it was created to perform a function. Secondly, a viewer of *Fountain* must postulate why the artist chose the object, therefore imparting meaning beyond what it is (i.e., a urinal). The appearance of *Fountain* pushed individuals to rethink what they knew as art and, due to its widespread impact, it is constantly presented as a tipping point in the world of art.

³³ Joseph Cooney, "Lessons from the Fountain · JCooney.NET," JCooney.NET, September 10, 2016.

³⁴ William A. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: It's History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917." *Winthrop*, (1990), 64.

³⁵ Camfield, 86.

Duchamp's use of a pseudonym has many theories which are discussed within this paper. He stated years later that the name "R. Mutt" came from Mott Works but was modified stating that:

"Mott was too close so I altered it to Mutt, after the daily strip cartoon 'Mutt and Jeff' which appeared at the time, and with which everyone was familiar. Thus, from the start there was an interplay of Mutt: a fat little funny man, and Jeff: a tall thin man... And I added Richard [French slang for money-bags]. That's not a bad name for a 'pissotiere.' Get it? The opposite of poverty. But not even that much, just R. MUTT."³⁶

With that signature on a urinal, Duchamp altered the object with action as well as the point of view of the artist.³⁷ In signing the urinal, the artist, here R. Mutt, lays claim to his ownership in its creation even though he obviously did not create the urinal. He is clearly motioning to the viewer that he is presenting this to them as his work of art.

There is also a departure from the notion of aesthetics that Duchamp drifts into when showcasing *Fountain*. It is tackling a new challenge to view art with no preconceived notions of what art should look like. That is the power that readymades carry; they put forth a naked mind to adapt to the readymade itself. However, some argue, although they are not the majority, that there can be a perceived beauty in *Fountain*, as it posits a different way of looking at art and noticing the beauty of everyday objects transformed in an artistic way.

When discussing the controversial nature of readymades, scholars Amelia Jones who wrote "Eros, That's Life, Or the Baroness' Penis" and William Camfield would agree that there is both feminine and masculine qualities in *Fountain*. However, Jones goes further recounting that the shape of the urinal appears to have feminine qualities with its curves while the masculine identity comes through with the idea of the urinal itself, a fixture used in a male bathroom. Here aesthetics come back into view, at least to Jones, but not necessarily to Duchamp. Even if one

³⁶ William A. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: It's History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917." *Winthrop*, (1990), 69.

³⁷ Camfield, 78.

finds beauty in the urinal curves, it is still the viewer imparting their own thinking, their own view. This falls in line with the previously discussed notion that the readymade is more than an object, but rather a meaning. With just a change of placement and turning it upside down, *Fountain* becomes something entirely new and open to interpretation. Duchamp was seemingly unaware of *Fountain's* impact to the arts, stating towards the end of his life that "I will have (later) only a public toilet or underground W. C. in my name."³⁸ One will never know whether this was a facetious statement or how he really felt, but there is an irony in the statement as *Fountain* is perhaps Duchamp's greatest legacy. Duchamp did not understand the full impact that *Fountain* would have on art for generations to come. Duchamp believed that art does not stand apart from the artist who created it; however, the viewer also performs a crucial role in the development of meaning of a work of art.³⁹

Scholar Paul B. Franklin delves into the use of the public toilet which emerged in Paris in 1841. In 1871, 687 pissoirs stood in the city, and by 1904 nearly 4,000 such structures were present, including in public squares and parks.⁴⁰ They were known as a place where men would engage in sexual actions with other men. Some, like Franklin, argue this is why Duchamp chose to use a urinal as a readymade. "Without exception, each public toilet was a place for homosexuals to gather and meet."⁴¹ By the mid-1930s, public toilets had become such a popular venue for sex between men that some, more reserved, gay men expressed disgust for those who engaged in such behavior.⁴² *Fountain* has been noted to relate to this theme which emerged

³⁸ Paul B. Franklin, "Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art, 27.

³⁹ History," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 27.

⁴⁰ Paul B. Franklin, "Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art, 27.

⁴¹ Franklin, 26.

⁴² Franklin, 28.

around the time that public bathrooms appeared. References to bodily function and association with a male sexual nature are connected to the *Fountain*.

Franklin postulates that Duchamp's use of the pseudonym "R. Mutt" for *Fountain* is actually a reference to the use of a fake name by numerous men who would go to public restrooms for specific sexual reasons.⁴³ This is a divergent theory from other scholars that suggest the pseudonym was in reference to industrialism or political statements. While one can see Franklin's line of thought in the correlation between the emergence of public restrooms and sexual connotations to the *Fountain*, it is not a common assertion. Duchamp's use of the urinal for public display at an art exhibition leads to the assertion by Franklin that the changes in art, along with the Avant-Garde movement, are reflective of male homosexuality (and its suppression) at that time. While most of early twentieth-century society thought the use of public restrooms as the meeting place for homosexual men as a form of degeneracy, Duchamp thought otherwise. In this line of thinking, Duchamp was then making a statement of solidarity with homosexuality with his creation of *Fountain*. Duchamp stated that "I admit it, but not in your terms . . . I believe that the homosexual public has shown more interest or curiosity for modern art than the heterosexual [public]."⁴⁴ Here, Duchamp shows his convictions to his own beliefs, like his art, he did not follow public opinion but followed what he believed to be true and right. "With *Fountain*, Duchamp tellingly demonstrated that object choice is both the art of this readymade and the art of queer art history."⁴⁵

Franklin goes on to discuss *Fountain* and its reflection of a society with a growing amount of mass-produced goods. According to Franklin, art historians define the word

⁴³ Paul B. Franklin, "Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art, 43.

⁴⁴ Franklin, 48.

⁴⁵ Franklin, 50.

readymade as “a unified group of mass-produced, objects whose appropriation and introduction into the museum enacted a critical commentary on the post-industrial commodification of art and the bourgeois institution of the masterpiece.”⁴⁶ As discussed previously, there was a push in the early 1900s to make art a lucrative speculative practice. Art was being made into a product and the artist, into a personality, rather than a person. Middle- and upper-class individuals would seek, promote, collect, buy and trade art. The readymade can be viewed as the distinction between art and non-art. *Fountain* brings a new element to this world. It tells the tale of objects which were only for commercial use but then transformed into museum pieces. The mass-produced objects, objects with less connection to its creator than those previously produced, are now seen as a form of the avant-garde production of art. Franklin describes *Fountain* to be an object bringing “homosexual reproduction” to the forefront.⁴⁷

Calvin Tompkins, who wrote a biography on Duchamp, which included an interview with him, describes a readymade as an “ordinary manufactured object converted into a work of art by the mere act of his choosing and signing it.”⁴⁸ Duchamp made thirteen readymades over the course of thirty years.⁴⁹ Tompkins further writes:

It has been argued that Duchamp’s influence is almost entirely destructive. Readymades are controversial because of the use of mass-produced objects by altering it metaphorically. By reusing the object, it gathers a whole new meaning. Opening the Pandora’s box of his absolute iconoclasm and breaking down the barriers between art and life, his adversaries charge, Duchamp loosed the demons that have swept away every standard of esthetic quality and opened the door to unlimited self-indulgence, cynicism, and charlatanism in the visual arts.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Paul B. Franklin, "Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's Fountain and the Art of Queer Art, 49.

⁴⁷ Franklin, 49.

⁴⁸ Calvin Tompkins, and Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 7.

⁴⁹ Dr. Charles Cramer, and Dr. Kim Grant, "Dada Readymades (article) | Dada," Khan Academy, Smarthistory, Accessed October 7, 2020.

⁵⁰ Tompkins, 12.

Tomkins sees the readymade as a cataclysmic turning point in art where aesthetics were abandoned and replaced with artistic hubris. Tomkins, writing nearly a century after Fountain's creation, sees how its Formula was twisted by artists over the past century. Damien Hirst, who is discussed more in the coming pages, is a candidate for Tomkins' argument of the increase of "self-indulgence" and "charlatanism in the visual arts."

Returning to Duchamp, Zembylas continues to argue a repetitive theme that Duchamp broke with traditional expectations held by his contemporaries regarding the traditions and aesthetic characteristics of art. Duchamp stated,

"Painter after painter, since the beginning of the century, has tended towards abstraction. First, the Impressionists simplified the landscape in terms of color, and then the Fauves simplified it again by adding distortion, which, for some reason, is a characteristic of our century. Why are all the artists so dead-set on distorting? It seems to be a reaction against photography, but I'm not sure. Since photography gives us something very accurate from a drawing point of view... It's very clear with all the painters, whether they are Fauves, Cubists, and even Dadaists or Surrealists."⁵¹

These words clearly define Duchamp's view of the shift of art in early twentieth century. Here Duchamp is rallying against the traditional expression of art as well as contemporary movements where he sees art as filtered through a narrow lens of historical definitions set in place from the Renaissance to modern times. Although referencing painting, these words demonstrate Duchamp's connection to presenting reality and the readymade.

"The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: The Ambiguities of an Aesthetic Revolution" by Steven Goldsmith examines how the readymades made their clear position in the world of academic history by influencing ideas to come. Goldsmith states that "without Duchamp's experiments it is likely that the Pop Art celebration of everyday objects or the current profusion

⁵¹ Dalia Judovitz, *Drawing on Art: Duchamp and Company*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010. 179.

of ‘junk’ sculpture might have never occurred.”⁵² Duchamp challenged artists and society to reconsider what can and cannot be art. Goldsmith’s analysis points out the manner in which Duchamp changed art by proposing endless possibilities of how art can be created and presented. Duchamp deemed the readymades art by placing them among other readily accepted artworks. That challenge was followed by arguments, rejection by some and acceptance by others. All this while *Fountain* sat firmly on its pedestal in quiet defiance.

Fountain is not concerned with being beautiful. Its appeal resides in its intellectual qualities. *Fountain* is a transformation from the mundane to the meaningful. In using everyday objects, the readymade becomes more than its inherent use, transcending the meaning of the object. While anyone could have exhibited a urinal, Duchamp was the one who accomplished it with clear intention. The repurposed object on its own is ambiguous, the subtle change of orientation as exhibited in the urinal’s placement on its side and the artist’s choice to prominently sign it “R. Mutt,” are ways in which the meaning of the base object was altered. The viewer must decide why these choices were made.

A theme of the readymade is examined in “Marcel Duchamp: A Re-Evaluation” by Jindřich Chalupecký and Paul Wilson. The article points out the complexities of attempting to synthesize the many aspects of Duchamp’s work and career as an artist. Duchamp chose to use the readymade to convey a thought rather than an aesthetic, according to Chalupecký, as artists are not magicians, capable to transforming immutable objects. Rather it is the thought the artist places behind the object, including the title and inscriptions, that illustrate the artist’s intention for the object. Those thoughts are necessary for the viewer to comprehend the object as art rather

⁵² Steven Goldsmith, “The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: The Ambiguities of an Aesthetic Revolution.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 2 (1983): 197.

than merely its inherent meaning and purpose. The object is not transformed in the obvious sense; however, it was altered through the interpretation of the object chosen and its ultimate presentation. *Fountain* took an “ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.”⁵³ The strength of Duchamp’s innovation was that it revealed the ability to take an object that is known in the obvious sense, and allow it to demand new meanings. The readymade *Fountain* carried the negative connotation of a dirty urinal and of the uncanny. It is associated with things that people did not discuss in the course of normal and civil conversations. In the gallery, its connotation shifted from the uncanny to the accepted.

The writer Martha Buskirk analyzes Duchamp in “Thoroughly Modern Marcel.”⁵⁴ Buskirk aptly points out how Duchamp was an artist who stood on his own, this view is much in line with others discussed in this review. Where Buskirk goes further is in her examination of how Duchamp’s work triumphed over others, particularly in the era of Pablo Picasso and other abstract artists. The majority of Duchamp’s readymades were lost to private collections or time itself, however, that did not decrease Duchamp’s influence, it gained momentum in the 1950s when Duchamp recreated a series of his readymades.⁵⁵

The shocking nature of the readymade; however, does not mean it is unique. The *Fountain*, for example, has been recreated numerous times. The readymades created by Duchamp did not lose their place in art history, rather they only grew in notoriety. Even recreating them between the 1950s, and 60s did not dilute the message for which it was

⁵³ Jindřich Chaloupecký, and Paul Wilson, "Marcel Duchamp: A Re-Evaluation." *Artibus Et Historiae 6*", no. 11 (1985): 125.

⁵⁴ Martha Buskirk, "Thoroughly Modern Marcel," *October* no. 70 (1994): 118.

⁵⁵ Buskirk, 118.

intended.⁵⁶ In fact, even recreating them furthered the notion that an everyday object can be art despite previous negative feelings towards this artform. Buskirk examines how the readymades would not have had as strong of an impact without Duchamp being known first as a painter for the work titled *Nude Descending a Staircase* in 1912. Duchamp had to be seen as a legitimate and talented artist in order to the gravity of the readymade to be understood. In other words, Duchamp was not an imposter posing as an artist, he knew what he was doing and understood the ramifications. The impact of the readymades is founded in its outward rejection of the simplicity of the object itself as it is mutated into a revered and established work of art.

Duchamp produced a large portion of his work from 1912 to 1923, until he stopped his art career in favor of chess.⁵⁷ Although he said he abandoned art, he did continue to produce sporadic pieces in following years, therefore Duchamp never stopped working entirely. Buskirk points out how, within a short period of time, Duchamp created work that challenged the entire art world. It is vital to acknowledge how Duchamp sought out his own individuality by discovering who he is and not being dictated by those in the public sphere. Although Duchamp's working years were limited, the impact of his work on the art world is clear. As a controversial artist, Duchamp did not seek out private collectors or major art institutions.⁵⁸ However, when he ceased to create new artwork, his appeal did not fade; it unleashed a following of artists to reinvent what Duchamp succeeded to do, using his successful *Fountain* formula. Buskirk states in reference to Duchamp's readymades, "were these objects simply accepted as eccentric or playful gestures on the part of the artist who had come to America with his avant-garde

⁵⁶ Martha Buskirk, "Thoroughly Modern Marcel," *October* no. 70 (1994): 121.

⁵⁷ Buskirk, 113.

⁵⁸ Buskirk, 113.

reputation already secured by the notoriety of the *Nude* at the Armory Show?”⁵⁹ Cubist work was prominent at the 1913 Armory Show, and Duchamp was seeking to step away from the popular art of the moment.⁶⁰ Reactions from viewers were important to Duchamp, as he wanted them to stop, think, and ponder, not just admire.

The readymades of Duchamp are further discussed in “Marcel Duchamp’s Art and the Geography of Modern Paris” by James Housefield. Housefield falls in line with both Goldsmith and Chalupecký in terms of the intellectual nature of Duchamp’s readymades. Housefield asserts that various generations of critics have understood the readymades of Duchamp as rooted in his fight against the predefined meaning of art.⁶¹ Housefield argues that the readymades of Duchamp shift the physical craft of making art to that of the intellectual, where an artist’s reason and choice come into play.

Going further than just the intellectual aspects of the readymade, Housefield also proports that Duchamp’s readymades translated the landscape style. Duchamp was able to contribute to a relationship between modern art and geography in the early twentieth century.⁶² According to Housefield, Duchamp’s piece titled *The Large Glass* is compared to a landscape painting as it maintains classical proportion and intent.⁶³ Housefield further analyzes Duchamp’s *Fountain*, noting that the rounded forms are similar to the landscape of a monument in Paris-known as the Basilique du Sacre-Coeur built between 1871 and 1919. Paris, according to Housefield, was the epicenter of modernism.⁶⁴ The basilica captured the same resentment of traditional forms and

⁵⁹ Martha Buskirk, "Thoroughly Modern Marcel," *October* no. 70 (1994): 119.

⁶⁰ Seán Kissane, "Analysing Cubism," *Irish Arts Review* (2002-) 30, no. 1 (2013): 62.

⁶¹ James Housefield, "Marcel Duchamp's Art and the Geography of Modern Paris," *Geographical Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 477.

⁶² Housefield, 478.

⁶³ James Housefield, "Marcel Duchamp's Art and the Geography of Modern Paris," *Geographical Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 478.

⁶⁴ Housefield, 489.

confusion of *Fountain*, as it seemingly mocked cultural norms and actively rejected them as well. Using modern technology, the Sacre-Coeur is seen through the *Fountain* because of the “smooth white surface.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, Housefield looks into Duchamp’s readymades as layers, as multiple meanings are derived from the object. Both perspective and context alter the experience for the one that is viewing the readymades.⁶⁶ Through his analysis Housefield insists on looking at the comparative representation of art in everyday life in connection with Duchamp’s readymades.

Anne Elisabeth Sejten rejects what many scholars expose that *Fountain* departs from the conventional belief that art needs to be beautiful in her article “Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics: Revisiting Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*.” Sejten argues that Duchamp’s readymade does not make him less of an artist because it does not possess physical beauty. She even goes as far as to define the *Fountain* as a new type of nude – industrial nudity.⁶⁷ Although it is argued that *Fountain* left the world of aesthetics, meaning that it separated from being or maintaining qualities that are appealing to the eye when one looks at a piece, it gathers attention for the beauty it possesses. This is similar to Jones, who also referenced the beauty of the feminine form of the urinal. But in either case, it’s not conventional beauty and that is not a widely discussed stance outside of these scholarly works. Agreeing with other scholars, Sejten states that by leaving behind the idea of what art is, Duchamp’s *Fountain* reemerges as a creative freedom that opens endless possibilities by demonstrating that there is no longer a pure definition of art. Art can be more than the appearance itself. *Fountain* has clearly showed this. *Fountain* does not

⁶⁵ James Housefield, "Marcel Duchamp's Art and the Geography of Modern Paris," *Geographical Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 490.

⁶⁶ Housefield, 498.

⁶⁷ Anne Elisabeth Sejten, “Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics Revisiting Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (December 2016): 6.

appear to be physically beautiful; however, it gathers the attention of the intellectual. Sejten argues that before Duchamp's readymades, when people looked at art, they are not really seeing its true meaning. She additionally points out how closing oneself to the artistic aspect of the readymade, the viewer is not open to the possibilities that can be revealed when closely examining the work of Duchamp.

Sejten reiterates the artistic readymade aspect of *Fountain* explaining it as “an ordinary, manufactured object [that] was designated by an artist to be a work of art”⁶⁸ Sejten further states “an artwork like *Fountain* causes displacements in the entire social and cultural field. It undoubtedly shows us an article for everyday use, an object normally overlooked by being used, but in doing so it reveals more than its rational relation to the consumer market.”⁶⁹ The consumer market purchases these everyday objects for intended uses, now that object is viewed as a work of art. The meaning changes with its placement. No longer is the urinal just a urinal, it has now become a symbol. By taking a urinal and putting it on display, the viewer is left confused and forced to think why its placed among other accepted and acknowledged works for art.

In addition to the object itself, Sejten also examines Duchamp's deliberate use of the pseudonym “R. Mutt” on *Fountain*.⁷⁰ Duchamp was a member on the Board of the Society of Independent Artist and wanted to give a name without being recognized. One potential explanation for the alternate name originates in the German word “Armut” which means poverty.⁷¹ However, it was noted that Duchamp himself claimed the name was chosen in regard to a “large sanitary equipment manufacturer Mott Works” which Sejten references could be a

⁶⁸ Anne Elisabeth Sejten, “Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics Revisiting Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (December 2016): 3.

⁶⁹ Sejten, 6.

⁷⁰ Sejten, 3.

⁷¹ Sejten, 3.

significant reason as to the choice of signature for the readymade.⁷² Finally, Sejten mentions a cartoon strip character who goes by the same name, Mutt.⁷³ The significance of Sejten discussing the pseudonym lies in the act of the signature. By signing the piece, the ordinary urinal was transformed to a work of curated art.

After the initial unveiling of *Fountain*, the bold declaration that a urinal was art set off a rapid series of arguments against such a claim. However, it is clear that Duchamp's main purpose was to have those in positions of power and respect showcase *Fountain* alongside other accepted artwork. From Duchamp's piece *Fountain* sprung a debate among Board members, critics, and the art world in general as to whether or not the urinal should be considered art. The responses were as varied as they were controversial. Duchamp protested the Board because of how they rejected the piece. He accused the Board of retracting on their word that any person who "pays six dollars will get to show their piece."⁷⁴ The fact that they did not stay true to their word frustrated Duchamp.

Louise Norton, who was a friend of Duchamp, wrote an article, which included the answer to an intriguing question "is he serious or is he joking,"⁷⁵ leading her to reply with "he is both."⁷⁶ Duchamp's answer reflects "the ambiguity between humor and gravity, between play and spirit, constitutes precisely the balanced counterattack of both refusals."⁷⁷ Norton was close with Duchamp as mentioned in the article titled "Blind Man" and that relationship undoubtedly

⁷² Anne Elisabeth Sejten, "Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics Revisiting Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (December 2016): 4.

⁷³ Sejten, 4.

⁷⁴ Sejten, 4.

⁷⁵ Sejten, 4.

⁷⁶ Sejten, 4.

⁷⁷ Sejten, 4.

leads to a more subjective look into Duchamp.⁷⁸ The article opens up about the *Fountain* by Duchamp, and the intention that he had when calling it art. The challenge was “testing the beliefs about art, and taste in the art world”⁷⁹ in a joking manner; however, he was serious as well. This placement was purposeful for Duchamp. He wanted to see if it did belong in the world of art.⁸⁰ A takeaway from readymades of Duchamp is the “questioning of the structures of belief and value associated with the concept of art on the one hand”⁸¹ and the decorative factor on the other hand; both should be considered when understanding the *Fountain*.

Duchamp's work was equated to the peeling away of layers, one after the other by art historian and philosopher Thierry de Duve, as well as Housefield, as previously discussed.⁸² The piece *Fountain* was described by de Duve as “peeling an onion.”⁸³ There are “three major layers.”⁸⁴ The first states that “anything can be art; the second is that anyone can be an artist, and lastly, the discovery that the Beaux-Arts system has collapsed.”⁸⁵ In terms of the establishment of contemporary art, Duchamp is a major founder and contributor. When looking at the *Fountain*, one can understand how it drifts away from any form of traditional beauty.

Thierry de Duve concedes to the point that Duchamp did not make the urinal; however, he maintains, that is not the point. Duchamp became the catalyst that broke the current trend. When looking at George Dickie’s institutional theory, he claims that “cultural institutions and sociological structures, such as museums, curators, galleries, art critics, auction houses, etc.

⁷⁸ Anne Elisabeth Sejten, “Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics Revisiting Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (December 2016): 4.

⁷⁹ Sejten, 4.

⁸⁰ Sejten, 4.

⁸¹ Sejten, 4.

⁸² Sejten, 4.

⁸³ Sejten, 5.

⁸⁴ Sejten, 5.

⁸⁵ Sejten, 5.

constitute the basis of art.”⁸⁶ The institution almost always influences the artist’s work and therefore dictates what is and is not considered fine art. The idea that art is structured around synthesis of the majority is reflected by Duchamp through his ability to break the barriers of what is said to be labeled as art through the formal qualities and challenge them. The controversy stems from the institutions that label art on their own definitions. Duchamp carried his own method to develop what he wanted art to be as an independent artist.

As an artist, Duchamp, goes back and forth between modern and contemporary art. Anne Cauquelin, a writer, discusses Duchamp as a contemporary artist. Cauquelin states that Duchamp is a “shifter because his readymades demonstrated that external features such as an artist’s signature and an exhibition space might determine what has value as art.”⁸⁷ His work encourages a new form of art, which adversely describes what art “can be, and what art should be.”⁸⁸ As a result, it becomes more than that; it shows what art is capable of when boundaries are removed, and the artist can venture into their own individual creativity. Duchamp’s *Fountain* allows art to be “constructed, and deconstructed,”⁸⁹ it can be torn down, and rebuilt. This understanding is the very “nature of art.”⁹⁰

Art theorist Margaret Iverson is concerned with Duchamp’s role in the anti-aesthetic asserting that “Duchamp pushed the logic of disinterestedness to such an extreme that it bites its own tail.”⁹¹ She maintains that with his readymade, Duchamp affectively changed the art narrative from what is beautiful to what constitutes art. However, the “disinterested” attitude of

⁸⁶ Anne Elisabeth Sejten, “Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics Revisiting Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (December 2016): 5.

⁸⁷ Sejten, 5.

⁸⁸ Sejten, 7.

⁸⁹ Sejten, 7.

⁹⁰ Sejten, 7.

⁹¹ Margaret Iverson, “Readymade, Found Object, Photograph,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004) 47.

Duchamp's readymade was perpetuated to an infinite degree in minimalist, pop and conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. In these artforms, Iverson insists that the individuality of the artist is removed in favor of material hierarchy, logical systems, or extreme minimalism.⁹²

Francis Naumann, scholar, curator, and art dealer, analyzes several letters from Duchamp to relatives in relation to his art career. Here Duchamp rallies against paintings as a preferred artform, even though he had received acclaim for his *Nude Descending a Staircase*, upon his arrival in New York. Duchamp describes painters as "salesmen" that need to keep their work popular in order to make living, or better yet, become wealthy.⁹³ Prolific painters, like Picasso, needed to produce new work to maintain a following. Duchamp further states that "originality is suicidal, in the sense that it removes you from a 'cliental' accustomed to 'copies of copyists,' which is often called 'tradition.'" ⁹⁴ However, as Duchamp states it is better to "use less self-analysis and work with pleasure without worrying about opinions, yours and those of others." Duchamp's advice on art and creating art is seen through his own work with readymades. He does not work to please anyone or make anyone see how he is different from his peers. He stands out for his own originality which pushes tradition to a whole new scope and allows for questioning of what can be art, and why art is art.

Duchamp and Damien Hirst are connected through their unique use of the readymade. As discussed above, Duchamp was driven to create the readymade to express his anti-establishment position as it related to the art world. Hirst started his career decades after Duchamp had retired from the artworld, but the impact of the readymade was far reaching. That inherent aspect of that Duchamp and readymades had on viewer and critic alike. As this paper progresses, we

⁹² Margaret Iverson, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004) 48.

⁹³ Francis M. Naumann, Lorraine Wild, and Amanda Washburn, *Making Mischief Dada Invades New York*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996.

⁹⁴ Naumann, "Making Mischief."

focus on Hirst's works *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* and *Mother and Child, Divided* (each piece was previously described in the introduction). While Duchamp used an industrial object for his readymade, Hirst used previously living creatures. His famous shark in formaldehyde was simply presented, while his mother cow and calf were split in two.

Hirst's decision to split the animals in two plays on symbolism by taking a readymade (i.e., the animals) and altering them with his own touch, similar to how Duchamp turned the urinal upside down.

Hirst, in his own words, states that he was drawn to the readymade because of how it could be used to present a conceptual reality.⁹⁵ Hirst started as a painter, just like Duchamp, and, just like Duchamp, he dropped painting. In Hirst's case this was because he was left paralyzed by the vast abyss of possibilities he could create on the canvas. He was pulled from that indecisiveness through minimalism and patterns, as one can see in his early *Spot Paintings* (Freeze, 1988).⁹⁶ However, he thought conceptual and minimal arts void of reality, which appealed to Hirst. That is when he turned to the readymade. Hirst was heavily exposed to the work of his contemporary, Jeff Koons, a readymade artist. There he saw the *Fountain* formula at work in Koons' *New Hoover Convertible* (See Figure 4). Koons had received a lot of attention for his display of Hoover vacuums in varying assemblies, that attention had led Koons to secure more exhibitions and sales for his artwork. This was of great interest to Hirst, as is discussed in the following pages.

⁹⁵ Chris King, "Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life," Drop Out Pictures/Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Bureau for Visual Affairs, Vimeo Media File, 2012, 8.09.

⁹⁶ King, "Damien Hirst," 8.15.

In *The Burlington Magazine*, Richard Shone analyzes the work of Hirst as being strange for his generation. There is not one interpretation of Hirst's work, but rather layers of meaning, many of which are considered to have a connection to life and death, as well as growth and decay. Layering is a persistent theme within literature analyzing readymade artwork. This is due to the intellectual aspect of the readymade along with the aesthetic, of lack thereof. These are major themes which are ever present in the work of Hirst. Shone states that "he is a consummately urban artist dealing with image from the natural world; his humour is matched by an appreciation of bleakness; his tone is usually austere but he is unafraid of sweet, cloying colour or the cliches of natural beauty; and several of his works are explicit longings for relationships which seem to acknowledge isolation, frustration and a sense of despair."⁹⁷

To solidify his stance, Shone examines the piece titled *In and Out of Love* (1991, Woodstock Street, London).⁹⁸ The piece features hundreds of Malaysian butterflies hatched in the gallery.⁹⁹ It also included pots of plants and flowers around the gallery, with butterflies from their pupae. Some laid there dead, some nearing the end of life. While some viewers were startled with this installation, others were intrigued by the piece, much like viewer's first reaction to Duchamp's *Fountain*. Hirst laid out the idea of "growth and decay" within this installation, along with the cycle of "birth and death."¹⁰⁰ Shone postulates that "it is to be hoped that his success as well as his undoubted achievement do not begin to separate him from the essential fuel for his work- uncertainty, contradiction, morality, unease- transformed from personal

⁹⁷ Richard Shone, Richard. "Damien Hirst. London, ICA Gallery." *The Burlington Magazine* 134, no. 1068 (1992): 197.

⁹⁸ Amie Corry, and Anna Godfrey, "In and Out of Love (Butterfly paintings and ashtrays), 1991," Damien Hirst, March 2012.

⁹⁹ Corry, "In and Out"

¹⁰⁰ Shone, 197.

phobias into compelling art.”¹⁰¹ Shone’s review of the exhibition explores Hirst as an artist who is fueled by ambitions which are tied to human nature.

Shone went on to discuss Hirst’s style, which is intended to “exaggerate, to enlarge, to astonish, taking objects from mundane situations and endowing them with the menacing presence.”¹⁰² The style that Hirst works with aids in his unique approach that stands out amongst other artists. In a similar manner to Duchamp, Hirst attempts to impart a deeper meaning into his work which outwardly consists of common animals and objects that are an ever-present part of our daily lives. Shone’s critique is that of a contemporary, reviewing Hirst’s work as it was released in a post-Duchamp world, where boundaries are fluctuating and open to interpretation.

In an interview with Hirst, Adrian Dannatt asks a series of questions about Hirst’s reasonings on death, on life, and on his work. As a viewer, it is important to understand the method of Damien Hirst. Seeing his style and ways of thinking aid in understanding why he chooses his pieces. Dannatt asks questions involving his opinions and feelings on Hirst’s work and his upbringing. This leads to the discussion and overall assertion that Hirst looks at death as a part of life, and once the realization kicks in that life ends and that everyone dies one day, life is to be enjoyed. In Hirst’s work of medicine cabinets and pharmacies including *Bodies* (1989) and *Pharmacy* (1992), among others, he often looks into the medical field with drugs. The irony is as Hirst states that “you can only cure people for so long and then they’re going to die anyway. You can’t arrest decay, but these medicine cabinets suggest you can.”¹⁰³ The clear theme of life and death that is present in the work of Hirst shows that everything in life revolves around death, and everything about death goes back to life. Art is an expression and communication of

¹⁰¹ Richard Shone, Richard. "Damien Hirst. London, ICA Gallery." *The Burlington Magazine* 134, no. 1068 (1992): 198.

¹⁰² Shone, 198.

¹⁰³ Adrian Dannatt, “Damien Hirst.” *Flash Art International* 41 (July, 2008): 185.

emotions and feelings, almost like watching a film. It involves various intellectual and physical experiences which gather as one to form an opinion or feeling.¹⁰⁴

Both Rob Bartram and Lynne Cooke discuss the impetus behind Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* and its associated themes of life and death. Cooke analyzes the artist and his breakout in 1988, stating, "his conviction that the art world as it then existed could not accommodate his generation led to the conclusion that he and his colleagues would have to reinvent it, tailoring it to their own ends."¹⁰⁵ This postulates a foundation of why Hirst felt the need to create pieces that would jolt the everyday person from preconceived ideas of art. Hirst needed a vehicle to present his vision and he turned to the readymade and Duchamp's formula to garner success. Much as Duchamp looked to upend his contemporaries, so did Hirst, but, as is discussed in this paper, with different motivations.

Cooke examines Hirst's development as an artist during his time at Goldsmiths College of Art in London. As an artist, Hirst delved into the uncomfortable to challenge his audience. "To take Hirst whole – that is, to engage with the full extent of his practice – is to become aware how uncomfortably fraught are the professional roles that we, his insider audience, are required to perform in what is becoming an increasingly toxic climate prioritizing 'entertainment.'"¹⁰⁶ Hirst believed that the art world was not adjusting to his generation. He chose to launch himself as a controversial artist with the clear intention to become famous. In 1988, as an undergraduate student at Goldsmiths College, Hirst curated his first show.¹⁰⁷ The show was entitled *Freeze* and included work from students at the college. It was a three-part show housed within a somewhat

¹⁰⁴ Adrian Dannatt, "Damien Hirst." *Flash Art International* 41 (July, 2008): 185.

¹⁰⁵ Lynne Cooke, "Damien Hirst: London," *The Burlington Magazine* 154, no. 1312 (2012): 505.

¹⁰⁶ Cooke, 506.

¹⁰⁷ Cooke, 504.

dilapidated warehouse.¹⁰⁸ It was during this show that Hirst developed a passion for the reinvention of the art world for the sake of his generation. He curated a work of the new avant-garde, pieces that would be questioned and discussed and it worked.

Hirst wanted to create a new, more jarring readymade pieces to gain attention of both the art public and critics. Where Cooke states that Hirst knew money would lead to artistic control, a correlation can be made that he needed to gain attention and fame to attain wealth.¹⁰⁹ A few years after realizing the importance of money to artistic autonomy, Hirst was involved in the staging of exhibitions, the creation of an artistic brand, and the fabrication of a public persona.

Hirst's work, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991, London, Tate Modern Museum) illustrates his budding obsession with ideas of life and death. This is seen through the usage of a dead shark which is placed in formaldehyde. Hirst presents the shark to the viewer; he did not create the shark. In this way, he creates a new version of the readymade. The body of the dead shark is the object to be viewed. As a British artist, Hirst's explorations of boundaries in art, were unique as "Britain is exceptional in the Western world today in the way, and to the degree, that contemporary art, the mass media and popular culture have become fused in public consciousness."¹¹⁰ The awareness of public expectations of art is challenged when artists, like Hirst, develop their own vision of art. This collides with pop culture and can have monetary benefits. Intrigue garners attention, whether positive or negative, promoting a person's brand (or in this case, an artist's brand). Hirst used this cultural collateral to gain both fame and riches.

¹⁰⁸ Lynne Cooke, "Damien Hirst: London," *The Burlington Magazine* 154, no. 1312 (2012): 504.

¹⁰⁹ Cooke, 505.

¹¹⁰ Cooke, 506.

While Cooke discusses motivation and inspiration, Bartram analyzes Hirst's exploration of themes of nature and art in an article titled "Nature, Art and Indifference." Bartram's main purpose is to analyze the themes of nature, birth, death, love, and life, which exist within Hirst's nature-based artwork. These themes are presented through dead animals including pigs, sheep, cows and sharks suspended within a bath of formaldehyde.¹¹¹ Bartram postulates that "his art affords nature the transformative qualities that rupture both its unproblematic differentiation from society and the belief that nature can be represented as an objectified truth through art."¹¹² Bartram engages the reader to develop a connection between Hirst and nature, stating that "by interpreting his work, we can begin to conceive of a natural world that is not fixed or differentiated from society and culture, but indifferent to them."¹¹³ Interpretation is a major theme of the work of Hirst through the exploration of how nature can be clarified. Hirst's work leaves the viewer with the chance to describe his "art in terms of its momentum or pace of revision, and the unpredictable ways in which this happens."¹¹⁴ Bartram points out how the world is more virtual in modern times as one can view the anatomy of a living creature on a screen where one is removed from the reality of life. Hirst brought the connection back to nature allowing people to see the anatomy as it truly is, not through a virtual platform. This is the controversial aspect which Bartram lays out to be understood, that people are uncomfortable with a dead animal right in front of them. Natural history is seen to be effective when viewing computer simulations. When is the natural world paused because reality becomes too

¹¹¹ Rob Bartram, "Nature, Art and Indifference," *Cultural Geographies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 2.

¹¹² Bartram, 2.

¹¹³ Bartram, 2.

¹¹⁴ Bartram, 2.

uncomfortable for people? This is the question that the viewer must answer when viewing Hirst's work.

Bartram specifically discusses *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* in terms of nature. Bartram argues that in using a shark, a universally feared animal, Hirst intended to be scandalous, creating an aura of rebellion around his work. Bartram examines this piece as a complete visual experience and challenges the reader to view the shark's "mimicking nature's 'minimalist', banal status in Western culture where its plight becomes all too apparent through momentary glimpses of documentary film, cinema, advertising and consumer good packaging."¹¹⁵ By saying this Bartram is implying that the shark is a symbol for society's marginalization of the natural, particularly in the urban settings where this shark was to be viewed. The location is paramount. This shark is not on the shore or a fishing village or a science museum, rather it is viewed in a city's modern art museum, far from its natural habitat. There is an uncomfortable connection to nature that Hirst is attempting to solidify with the viewers proximity to the shark as they circle its enclosure. The viewer is being asked to see this shark as art, not a creature, not a living being, not a dead shark and not an experiment. Much like with the urinal, the viewer is forced to ask themselves why. Why a shark? Why a container? Why here?

Bartram then proceeds to analyze *Mother and Child, Divided*.¹¹⁶ This installation by Hirst features a calf and cow cut lengthwise so that the carcasses comprise four separate boxes, arranged so the viewer may pass between them. Again, as with his shark, Hirst is presenting the existing creature to the viewer and his contribution is its placement and the choice to cut it in

¹¹⁵ Rob Bartram, "Nature, Art and Indifference," *Cultural Geographies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 7.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Manchester, "Mother and Child (Divided), Damien Hirst," Tate Modern Museum, (April/June 2009).

half. This piece features nature, death, and beauty in a natural, yet mechanical, manner. Using the dead animals and bisecting them is most certainly disturbing to the average person.

Bartram suggests that there must be love encapsulated between the calf and the mother and this relation of halves signifies the unity that they share, even in death. Even if one does not consider this meaning, the sterile presentation of once living creatures cannot be ignored. The brutality of death is erased with scientific precision, even though Hirst commissioned many of the deaths of his future art pieces. In fact, Hirst came under fire from animal rights groups regarding the treatment and killing of animals “in the name of art.”¹¹⁷ All in all 913,450 creatures (animals and insects) were featured in Hirsts work. “Some of the animals were dead before Hirst came around, while others met ends tailored to their artistically-conceived resting places. They are all united by their final resting place: the domain of the thanatotic artist. ‘Cut us all in half, we’re all the fucking same,’ Hirst said in conversation with writer Gordon Burn.”¹¹⁸ But with their reconstitution as art, one no longer sees the dead mother and the dead calf as victims, but rather as specimen. When discussing *Mother and Child Divided*, Hirst defines it as cutting something in half being an organic chaos.¹¹⁹ Hirst sees dead animals as peaceful and putting them together for a show shed a new light on life. Hirst wanted to deal with things that could not be avoided in life. That was his mission in art.¹²⁰

Bartram magnifies the connection of *Mother and Child* and *Impossibility of Death* to the medical field, asserting that Hirst’s animals “are cold and hygienic, reminding us of the scientific and medical obsession with categorization of the natural world in which the chaotic and

¹¹⁷ Caroline Goldstein, “How Many Animals Have Died for Damien Hirst's Art to Live? We Counted.,” Artnet News (Artnet News, August 16, 2017), <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-whats-your-beef-916097>.

¹¹⁸ Goldstein, How Many

¹¹⁹ Chris King, “Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life,” Drop Out Pictures/Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Bureau for Visual Affairs, Vimeo Media File, 2012, 20.47.

¹²⁰ King, 26.03.

dysfunctional are not allowed to exist.”¹²¹ Hirst chooses to use real animals because he wants to make his work real yet unsettling, highlighting that in death, all the living are reduced to the same status, a mere symbol of what once was living. The presentation of the shark reveals the animal from every angle and “the combination of bulging glass case and formaldehyde liquid refracts the view of the shark as you walk around the tank.”¹²² The space allows for the viewer to be one with the shark, in its death, in that moment.

While Bartram is using Hirst’s relationship to nature to illustrate the uncanny aspect of his work, his research also clearly demonstrates Hirst was aware that this dichotomy would create unrest and controversy among its viewers. Hirst wanted to be seen as a rebel. When placing this observation together with Cooke’s analysis of Hirst’s motivations toward self-promotion, one can see that Hirst harnessed the controversy of the readymade to gain attention for the purposes to monetary gain.

There is a definitive difference between Duchamp and Hirst in relation to their approach to art. Hirst’s professional website contains a video where he presents part of his personal journey as an artist, framing his story.¹²³ Starting as a painter, Hirst quickly realized that he was overwhelmed by the infinite possibilities of the canvas. He would often sit staring at the blank board in front of him. After a series of revelations prior to and during his time at Goldsmith, Hirst found a home in conceptual art where “the art does not exist in the object itself, it exists in the mind of the viewer.”¹²⁴ The art becomes just a trigger to set something off which is the art, which is the conceptual art.”¹²⁵ However, Hirst was also apprehensive about the notion that an

¹²¹ Rob Bartram, "Nature, Art and Indifference," *Cultural Geographies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 8.

¹²² Bartram, 9.

¹²³ Chris King, “Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life,” Drop Out Pictures/Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Bureau For Visual Affairs, Vimeo Media File, 2012, 6.04.

¹²⁴ King, 12.39.

¹²⁵ King, 6.04.

object could be placed as a work of art (what has been discussed in this paper as the readymade). Hirst realized the power of the readymade after looking at some of the artist Jeff Koons' readymade pieces, which gave Hirst the freedom to work on his *Medicine Cabinets* (1989, Goldsmiths), his first readymades.¹²⁶ Here, Hirst presented a pharmacy's storage shelves in various forms as part of a series of medicine cabinets. This led to further works as Hirst turned to pop culture as he saw this as the reality of the 1990s – television, music and advertisements. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* was inspired by the movie *Jaws*, as he saw sharks as fear inducing. Charles Saatchi, Hirst's early benefactor, commissioned the work to be made. Saatchi was a prolific art collector, benefactor and investor. He was a large influence on Hirst in his early days. Interestingly enough, Saatchi sold a copy of *Fountain* to the San Francisco Modern Art Museum of \$1,000,000 in 1997. In many ways, Hirst's early 1990s artworks may have helped increase interest in Duchamp's readymades among private collectors. Sotheby's featured *Fountain* on their 1999 catalog for contemporary art, the piece was sold for over \$1.7M at auction.¹²⁷ There is a deliberate monetizing of readymade artwork in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Returning to Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death*, this piece was to be part of a perpetual series of Natural History. Hirst did not like zoos because he felt that the animals looked unhappy, so he contrived the idea of a zoo of dead animals that died of natural causes.¹²⁸ Hirst like the idea of perpetual series, ones which could go on forever, but he never really states why.

¹²⁶ Chris King, "Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life," Drop Out Pictures/Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Bureau For Visual Affairs, Vimeo Media File, 2012, 12.06.

¹²⁷ Francis Naumann, "Marcel Duchamp: Money Is No Object the Art of Defying the Art Market," Toutfait Marcel Duchamp Online journal, April 1, 2003, <https://www.toutfait.com/marcel-duchamp-money-is-no-object-the-art-of-defying-the-art-market/>.

¹²⁸ King, 20.06.

Here, one can wonder if it was not for the fact that the pieces could continue infinitum, allowing for a steady stream of income, or perhaps just for the sake of keeping his name in the headlines. Although Hirst gained fame and monetary success through his patron, Saatchi's support, he started to feel limited by Saatchi. Hirst stated that the question is always whether you want money to make art or you do art to make the money.¹²⁹ What could have begun as a love of art, transcended into a connection between art and money.

An economic entrepreneur is defined (Bygrave & Hofer, 1991) in Marisa Enhuber's article as "someone who perceives an opportunity and creates an organization to pursue it."¹³⁰ Cultural entrepreneurship is defined as "cultural change agents and resourceful visionaries who organize cultural, financial, social and human capital, to generate revenue from a cultural activity."¹³¹ Enhuber questions the role of Hirst in society as either a cultural or economic entrepreneur, subsequently concluding that he is both. The actual product that a cultural entrepreneur sells is a shared experience that the artist curates for the public. Hirst's innovation was his ability to survey the current state of the art industry and carve a path through it that would ensure success. "Hirst is one of the few artists 'who can claim to have altered our concept of what art and an art career can be... The story of Damien Hirst – his art, his prices, his shark and his client Charles Saatchi – is a good introduction to... conceptual art and the role of the artist in marketing."¹³²

With his initial following, Hirst solidified his position in the world of art through his social ties. Enhuber purports that Hirst welcomed the chance for fame. Looking back to one of

¹²⁹ Chris King, "Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life," Drop Out Pictures/Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Bureau For Visual Affairs, Vimeo Media File, 2012, 33.10.

¹³⁰ Marisa Enhuber, "How Is Damien Hirst a Cultural Entrepreneur?" *Artivate* 3, no. 2 (2014): 4.

¹³¹ Enhuber, 4.

¹³² Enhuber, 10.

his initial shows, *Freeze* (1988, London's Docklands warehouses), which was a major success for Hirst, it is possible to see that this show defined him as an artist who knows how to achieve what he wants.¹³³ He did not just exhibit in the show, but he also organized the building, lighting, catalog and PR efforts.¹³⁴ Enhuber reflects that Hirst's ability for self-promotion is evidence for his role as an entrepreneur. These social ties lead Hirst to build his now-famous relationship with Charles Saatchi, a London based advertising executive and art collector who promotes artists.¹³⁵ As result of their strong relationship, Saatchi backed anything business-related for Hirst. Hirst is using the readymade to gain the much-needed attention to build his brand and his following. Knowing the power of the *Fountain* formula, Hirst pushed the boundary of the readymade, with Saatchi's support, from the industrial object to the dead creature.

With vast amounts of media coverage, Hirst garnered fame and notoriety. "Hirst mass-customized his ideology of shock and provocation."¹³⁶ Hirst purposely creates art that makes people uncomfortable. The question is whether Hirst's intention is fame, or is Hirst creating work to promote new thoughts and ideas? This is left up to the viewer, however, it is undeniable that Hirst sought out to and did create his own brand in an Andy Warhol-like calculated move. While Duchamp used shock as a means to break away from traditional notions of what can and cannot be art, Hirst marketed his name by creating an entertaining environment of shock.¹³⁷ Enhuber analyzes this further in Hirst's piece, *The Tranquility of Solitude* (2006, Gagosian Gallery, Britannia Street, London), a triptych of bisected animals in formaldehyde, discussing the

¹³³ Marisa Enhuber, "How Is Damien Hirst a Cultural Entrepreneur?" *Artivate* 3, no. 2 (2014): 12.

¹³⁴ Chris King, "Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life," Drop Out Pictures/Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Bureau for Visual Affairs, Vimeo Media File, 2012, 20.47.

¹³⁵ James King, "Charles Saatchi," ARTnews.com, October 06, 2020.

¹³⁶ Enhuber, 14.

¹³⁷ Enhuber, 14.

nature of the piece in terms of the viewer's experience.¹³⁸ The entire presentation of the bisected animals is unnerving, supporting the idea of the environment of shock. Enhuber further points to Hirst's status as a controversial artist with his piece titled *For the Love of God* (2007, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy) which is a human skull dressed in 8,601 diamonds.¹³⁹ Although this piece can be considered an assisted readymade, it shows Hirst's constant progression towards shock, controversy and money. The piece sparked immense discord for Hirst's use of an actual human skull, as well as possibly unethically sourced diamonds. In a 2007 New York Times article, criticism was clear, not just of the skull but Hirst, himself.

Still, along with chutzpah, it shows that Hirst is a shining symbol of our times, a man who perhaps more than any artist since Andy Warhol has used marketing to turn his fertile imagination into an extraordinary business. And as the natural leader of the Young British Artists, or YBA's, who emerged here in the 1990s, he has paved the way for many others.

He made his name by pickling sharks, cows, sheep and the like, but his real achievement was to break the power of London's traditional galleries. Initially sponsored by the dealer-collector Charles Saatchi, himself a former advertising magnate, Hirst soon became an art entrepreneur in his own right. And having created his brand, he found he could sell almost anything...

But, in fairness, Hirst is just playing the game. It is a game played by collectors and dealers at art fairs throughout the year; it is a game finessed as never before by Sotheby's and Christie's; it is a game in which, in the words of Nick Cohen, a rare British art critic to rubbish Hirst's publicity coup, "the price tag is the art."¹⁴⁰

Enhuber sees *The physical impossibility of death* as a symbol for the "inhumane capitalist infiltration of the art world."¹⁴¹ Enhuber further states that "Hirst self-marketed his personal

¹³⁸ Amie Corry, and Anna Godfrey, "The Tranquility of Solitude (For George Dwyer), 2006," Damien Hirst. March 2012.

¹³⁹ Marisa Enhuber, "How Is Damien Hirst a Cultural Entrepreneur?" *Artivate* 3, no. 2 (2014): 15.

¹⁴⁰ Alan Riding, "Entr'Acte: Damien Hirst's 'Ethical' Art: A Diamond Skull for a Mere \$100 Million," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, June 8, 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/08/world/europe/08iht-entracte.1.6055315.html>.

¹⁴¹ Enhuber, 15.

brand to capitalize his art: however much this art work may in other respects accommodate itself to the spectacular forms and ideologies of the market, it nonetheless speaks volumes about the experience of being locked within spatio-practical logics of modern, capitalist and technocratic society.”¹⁴² Hirst in that way is a product of post-modernism and commercialism. His works are reflective of his experience “locked” within his society. Enhuber sees Hirst as using this readymade art as a way to increase brand awareness and net worth. Hirst is calculated in his decisions of what his art will produce for his brand, which was opposite from Duchamp’s primary goal of redefining the conception of art.

Undoubtedly, Hirst was aware of his ability to brand himself. “Because branding raises the value of the ordinary, the public activities of a branded artist like Hirst often end up being about money and publicity.”¹⁴³ Hirst changed the model for art dealing. He utilized his fame and position to contract directly with auction houses, Sotheby’s and Christies to sell his art directly, earning 111 million British pounds for 218 items. What is equally of interest is not just the money, but the fact that his pieces are produced in four factory-like studios employing forty artisans.¹⁴⁴ This allows for greater proliferation of Hirst’s vision but removes the maker from the made.

This paper suggests that Hirst knowingly used the *Fountain* formula set by Duchamp to gain fame and fortune. In addition to the reviews above, Hirst discussed the importance of money. In an interview, Hirst discusses how he allows the money to become intertwined with his art, stating “It’s all about money, power, success. I used to love the idea of money ‘cause it was like an element in the composition. Money’s a big important thing in life so I’ve taken it on in

¹⁴² Marisa Enhuber, "How Is Damien Hirst a Cultural Entrepreneur?" *Artivate* 3, no. 2 (2014): 15.

¹⁴³ Enhuber, 17.

¹⁴⁴ Enhuber, 14.

the art, but in the end it's not something you can do permanently."¹⁴⁵ Hirst saw the value that controversial art can produce along with the attention such art brings to the artist. "People say they don't care about money, and it's very easy to not care about money without confronting it, but if you confront it, it gets fucking tricky and dangerous. And value, what is value, what's everything worth? What's art worth?"¹⁴⁶ To Hirst, money and art go hand in hand. Hirst understands there is a lucrative market for controversial artwork and strives to continue to sell for larger and larger amounts, stating "I wonder if it's possible to sell an artwork for a billion dollars?"¹⁴⁷ Making money from his work is something worthwhile for Hirst as an artist stating:

"absolutely. Money talks. That's what's fucking amazing. You're an oddity. People would never buy a Damien Hirst before the auction, but then— Like a lot of wives of businessmen would buy my work and the businessman would be like, 'What the fuck you buying that for?' And then, suddenly they see you make \$200 million and they're like, 'What the fuck is that?' And it really disturbs their world, and I love that. Definitely, walking down the street I get businessmen nodding to me, which I never had before."¹⁴⁸

Hirst had clear controversial intention when he created his readymade work dealing with themes of life and death with a desire to be recognized. As Enhuber postulates – he was a cultural and economic entrepreneur.¹⁴⁹ Unlike Duchamp, Hirst sought out notoriety and attention for personal attention. Duchamp would oppose Hirst's motivation, as much of Duchamp's rallying against the accepted views of art was also his rallying against the commoditization of art. Hirst's work is undoubtedly pushing the ideas of what a readymade is by using animal carcasses, but in the end, they are still readymade. They did not shake a fist in the direction of a status quo as that definition had already been dismantled and rewritten with Duchamp's

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Boldizar, "Damien Hirst, New Paintings," Boldizar, WordPress, Sept. 2009, Accessed October 5.

¹⁴⁶ Boldizar, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Boldizar, 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Boldizar, 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Marisa Enhuber, "How Is Damien Hirst a Cultural Entrepreneur?" *Artivate* 3, no. 2 (2014): 14.

Fountain. However, the power of the readymade was far from lost by Hirst when it came to fame and monetary gain from his controversial pieces.

Results

As discussed, controversy exists within the art world when art is created outside of societies' norms. The term "controversial art" exists because society places definitions dictating what can and cannot be art. There are certain standard rules which are laid out by friends and foes of art to determine who is a "good" artist and who is not. The view is based upon the value of the art and its aesthetic appeal. The definition is not fixed, but rather wavering and mutable. Duchamp and Hirst pushed these accepted terms in the attempt to change the definition. They are breaking outside of these confines and showcasing artwork that they feel has value or a particular significance to the world. Both Duchamp and Hirst created their readymades to force individuals to reexamine the nature of art.

Additionally, aesthetics are a major issue when it comes to analyzing artwork. There are opposing labels that are used to categorize a work of art's moral or artistic value, including "good vs. bad, beautiful vs. ugly or innovative vs. traditional."¹⁵⁰ Anyone or anything that diverts from standard societal definitions of art is considered difficult to categorize and are judged for not falling within the line of standards. However, this can fall into disarray when the question arises of what the artist does when one creates art. There is a freedom of artistic expression that allows for the artist to create freely. How art is perceived varies drastically from person to person. Furthering this point, "humans can hear, see and read artworks in a variety of ways-not so much subjective, but rather inter-subjectively, i.e., in keeping with shared habits, conventions of perception, and patterns of interpretation."¹⁵¹ Works of art are seemingly a major part of social constructs, accompanying discussion and reception along with presentation, which all ties the art

¹⁵⁰ Tasos Zembylas, "Controversial Works of Art," *Communicating/Doing Politics Journal of Language and Politics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 2.

¹⁵¹ Zembylas, 5.

together. “We may see art objects as aesthetic, political, or historically oriented, etc., depending on current expectations, interpretive frameworks and institutional contexts.”¹⁵² What can be deemed as controversial art is separated with the beliefs of others for this specific boundary of what is acceptable artwork. “This controversial artwork or artistic act is ‘art’ or ‘non-art’, ‘obscene’, ‘immoral’, ‘offensive’ and ‘defamatory’, or merely ‘socio-critical’, and hence ‘acceptable’ – *for whom?*”¹⁵³ The question aligns within the context of where does controversial art fit within society, and how does it fit in? Art can provide reasons for conflict because certain art goes against what people believe. Cultural and societal beliefs are ever shifting. This paper does not delve into the origination of such beliefs, but rather concedes that a set of accepted cultural norms exist and most of the society accept these norms. However, some art is purposely created to create disharmony among people, to achieve a reaction, and fight against stereotypes. In addition, it is argued to be right and just because of freedom of expression. Addressing taboo subjects and topics often seen as atypical attracts those wishing to question established views or institutions (i.e., museums, critics, society-at-large). However, as there are different types of aesthetic beauty for varying cultures, people have different beliefs and feelings towards various aspects of society and open-minded communication allows individuals’ minds to accept new ideas. This aids in achieving less conflict with proper communication.

Duchamp and Hirst are prime examples of people who, as artists, defied the traditional societal boundaries of what can and cannot be considered art. As individual artists, they explored and pushed these perceived boundaries that were set by society to make a definitive statement against the norm. Duchamp excelled in defining that art can be more than simply beautiful. With

¹⁵² Tasos Zembylas, "Controversial Works of Art," *Communicating/Doing Politics Journal of Language and Politics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 2.5.

¹⁵³ Zembylas, 5.

his readymade he made art an intellectual proposition rather than merely an aesthetic one. The display of an everyday object as art required the viewer to engage with their thoughts and answer their own questions – why a urinal, is this art? The *Fountain* by Duchamp solidified his prominent position in the art world by submitting a urinal in the exhibition of the 1917 Society of Independent Artists in New York City.¹⁵⁴ With that one action, he redefined art and created a new type of conceptual art, the readymade. He did so explicitly to contradict what Duchamp felt was an overindulgence in the aesthetic and monetization of art. Conversely, Hirst delved into darker themes, which separates them both from a hegemonic group that sets out to decide what can and cannot be art. However, stemming from Duchamp, Hirst incorporates a configuration of readymade art that stands alone in his style, which incorporates similar controversial approach that is ever present in both Duchamp and Hirst's work.

Duchamp was anti-establishment and sought to make work that was free from the power and opinion of those in control, because he adamantly believed that no one could dictate what is art.¹⁵⁵ However, he did believe in artistic freedom of the artist, which would imply that the artist can create, and his creations should be accepted as art if they are presented as art. Duchamp did not necessarily crave the attention that some artists need to thrive. He was inspired by his own beliefs and desires. He had an insatiable yearning to contradict the forms of expression to further his work. Duchamp stated in terms of the separation from Cubism and abstraction that "I had already abandoned stretchers and canvas. I already had a sort of disgust for them, not because there were too many paintings or stretched canvases, but, because, in my eyes, this wasn't

¹⁵⁴ Anne Elisabeth Sejten, "Art Fighting Its Way Back to Aesthetics Revisiting Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (December 2016): 3.

¹⁵⁵ Pierre Cabanne, and Marcel Duchamp, "Interview: Marcel Duchamp," *The American Scholar* 40, no. 2 (1971): 274.

necessarily a way of expressing myself.”¹⁵⁶ Instead of following what other artists had done, he chose to bring about his distinctive style using the readymades.

Duchamp spoke to a new audience - the general public, not the elite. The choice of selecting an everyday object makes the viewer wonder why Duchamp chose this specific object, and what importance does it seek to explain when compared to other objects? In some ways the everyday object was used to connect to the everyday man, in other words, to grab art from the hands of the artistic elite and hand it to the masses. While Duchamp’s readymade may have done this, artists that followed Duchamp, in many ways, were still part of the artistic elite. Yet, at the same time, this everyday object speaks to the intellectual, a larger meaning, a statement for a cause, or a larger moral argument is being made within that same object. In separating from the materialistic approach in art through the use of everyday objects, the formal qualities expected of art are stripped away in favor of an intellectual approach.

There is a certain power of the readymade that connects the viewer to the artist. Although intent is subjective, the object is understood. The viewer supplements visual cues with their own understanding of the object and the artist's possible intent at using that object on display. It is that connection that Duchamp was able to create. It was shocking at the time, and through that unexpected nature of the object, the art opened conversations about art and what constitutes art. That conversation persists today. It is a question that cannot be answered because of artists like Duchamp. He pushed the limits on what would be accepted and, by doing so, he was received and heralded as the father of the readymade.

Using an alternate name (R. Mutt), as discussed earlier, gave Duchamp the ability to challenge the art world while remaining to be hidden with an alternate name, and to show the

¹⁵⁶ Pierre Cabanne, and Marcel Duchamp, "Interview: Marcel Duchamp," *The American Scholar* 40, no. 2 (1971): 275.

world what the readymade is, and what it can achieve. This was the impetus of the readymade movement, and it solidified the readymade as an integral part of controversial art.

Although Duchamp is not the first artist to use mass produced materials in his work, he is most well-known for readymades, and incorporated them for a large majority of his work. Duchamp had clear reasonings for his readymades. “Marcel Duchamp’s investigation of the readymade definitively substituted the act of (artistic) production with consumption, purchasing his sculptures already made.”¹⁵⁷ Continuing to state “as much as this act constituted an attack on the original and unique art object, it also displayed an enormous degree of ambivalence toward historical definitions of artistic skill and, by extension, the traditional labor of the artist.”¹⁵⁸ There is an underlying meaning within the readymade object itself and then there is secondary meaning imparted when it is chosen to be used as art.

Where Duchamp’s primary focus with *Fountain* was the introduction of the artist to the artwork, Hirst uses death as a pivotal theme, even to the point of imagining his own death or questioning the meaning of life. Hirst stated “my interest in death is very lively, about how to live, what is important. Loss of loved ones or of life is sad but that is loss. I find the end of a relationship more upsetting than death. Death leaves me numb.”¹⁵⁹ This morbid fascination with death is in itself controversial because of the macabre nature of the subject. People do not like to discuss death, despite its role in nature. However, with that in mind, Hirst uses what is uncomfortable to create work that is hard for many to understand. It can go even further with the theme of death with someone taboo. Hirst goes onto further state that, in regard to death being featured in a photograph next to dead people in a morgue, “that was always just something in my

¹⁵⁷ Helen Molesworth, “From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again,” *October* 105 (2003): 179.

¹⁵⁸ Molesworth, 179.

¹⁵⁹ Adrian Dannatt, “Damien Hirst,” *Flash Art International* 41 (July 2008): 183.

mind. Here I was with this interest in life-death ideas, and then this really dumb picture. Face to face with death, laughing in the face of death, with a dead head next to me. It's humorous and shocking and sad and confusing, it's ten years old. People say, when are you going to do a human in formaldehyde? But I would never do that because the shock factor would be too much, it would fail."¹⁶⁰ Like Duchamp, Hirst sees the humor of his work and coexisting with the seriousness of his work. When it comes to pushing the boundaries of controversy, Hirst understands what would be going too far; however, he maintains his ideas of death as seen with the shark in formaldehyde as well as other animals that he uses.

The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, features an inventive visual experience.¹⁶¹ The piece is an engaging experience that allows for the viewer to analyze artwork in the most physical sense that it could get. However, controversy sparks when the object, an animal, is placed in formaldehyde and called art. Through this piece, Hirst connects to Duchamp's *Fountain* as his piece was questioned for the usage of an already made object. Hirst in a similar way is incorporating the animal to be front and center for his piece, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. The title alone of the piece creates an interesting image in one's mind.

The piece outlines "beauty combined with cruelty."¹⁶² The piece juxtaposes the harsh reality of death with the shark's natural beauty. When looking at the captivating and controversial piece, one is often reminded of Duchamp's influence. The aesthetic appeal crosses over through the imaginative experience, and one can delve in and experience the beauty of the

¹⁶⁰ Adrian Dannatt, "Damien Hirst," *Flash Art International* 41 (July 2008): 183.

¹⁶¹ David Tan, and Yong Neng Chan, "Copyright subsistence in Contemporary Times: a Dead Shark, an Unmade Bed and Bright Lights in an Empty Room," *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, (2013), 403.

¹⁶² Peg Zeglin Brand, "Beauty Matters," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (1999): 2.

shark while also the uncomfortable feeling of it not being alive.¹⁶³ There is no doubt that Hirst knew the reaction this piece would generate from the artworld and the public at large. It was through the creation of these extreme readymades that Hirst became famous and formed a lucrative art portfolio. Hirst made a stand for what the art world can be, and his work does shock audiences through his themes of life, death, happiness, and fear. Hirst's artwork is clearly controversial, and he stands for what he believes in. Whether it be so self-gain or personal growth as an artist, Damien Hirst is a controversial artist.

The view of the internal parts of the cow and calf's bodies are completely visible and placed in a way that one could place them together to make them whole again. Again, taking on the reoccurring theme of using an animal as art places deep thought into why the use of animals gained Hirst fame. As previously mentioned, Hirst's deliberate decision to split the cow and calf in two plays on symbolism by taking the readymade, in this case the animal, and altering them with his own touch, which was similar to how Duchamp chose to turn the urinal upside down. However, the intention of Hirst was to shock the audience even further than Duchamp. The confusing title and the brutal appearance of the animals is a shock to the eye and mind.

Whether intentional or a byproduct of the *Fountain's* success, Duchamp created a formula that resulted in notoriety. This is what is referred to in this paper as the *Fountain* formula. It consists of a proven series of actions involving the use of a readymade object, repurposed as art with the intention of the artist to gain attention to their personal cause.

The formula begins with Duchamp who took an everyday object and repurposed it to be seen as fine art. Duchamp's repurpose of the everyday object was represented in a minimal way, taking the object as is making minor adjustments. This is seen in *Fountain* where Duchamp took

¹⁶³ Peg Zeglin Brand, "Beauty Matters," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (1999): 2.

a urinal, an object never thought of as having even the possibility to be viewed as a work of art and challenged this notion. *Fountain* is a urinal turned upside down and signed “R. Mutt.” Who would have thought that a urinal turned upside down would be presented or even thought of as having an opportunity to be titled fine art. The intention of Duchamp was to embrace the uprising criticism that would engage audiences all around who would view the notorious *Fountain*. The piece enraged many at the 1917 Society of Independent Artists. Many felt this was not art. Duchamp purposely chose to remain anonymous, which further compounded *Fountain*'s rejection. The bold act solidified that Duchamp did not seek fame and fortune and specifically sought to show that art can go further than paintings and sculptures. *Fountain* opened the doors for artists like Damien Hirst to use the *Fountain* formula for a vastly different purpose. Although some argue for and against the piece, it nevertheless remains a significant part of controversial art.

Duchamp, perhaps unintentionally, created the *Fountain* formula with the success of his outrageous readymade. *Fountain* not only rewrote the definition of art, but it also created an intellectual, social and media frenzy. The power of the readymade as a way for an artist to gain a following only grew as media outlets expanded throughout the twentieth century from print to radio to movies and television, culminating with the internet. Artists of the late twentieth century, such as Hirst, were aware of media's gravitation toward controversy.

Conclusion

This paper proposes that Duchamp created a successful formula for attention and controversy with his *Fountain*. The formula is rather simple: an artist chooses an existing object that would not be considered art by current societal standards, the artist presents it as art without explanation to the viewer, the viewer is shocked by the presentation of this object as art as it goes against their current beliefs, and critics start discussing the meaning and legitimacy of the artwork. This is controversy at its core. In all of this, the artist is in the forefront of the discussion as much as the object. The object, title and the placement are of equal importance in the formula, as they are what causes the viewer to question, is this art, and, if it is, why is it art? This controversy gains attention from viewers, critics, and the media, in general.

Duchamp, an avant-garde artist, conceptualized the formula to oppose the accepted norms and practices in the art industry of the early 1900s and to change the way one thinks about art. Duchamp is quoted as saying, "I don't believe in art. I believe in artists."¹⁶⁴ The readymade is the physical incarnation of Duchamp's words. The object was not created by the artist, but it was chosen by the artist to represent a concept or thought of the artist. There is no aesthetic value of the artist, positive or negative. One can see this in *Fountain*. The urinal, placed on its side, is void of its intended purpose as a lavatory fixture, but at the same time, magnified in its meaning as a work of art.

This is well documented as the motivation behind his famous readymade *Fountain* when it debuted. Duchamp saw the readymade as a means to move art from the aesthetic to the

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Caputo, "What's Up," *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 1, 2009.

intellectual. In so doing, Duchamp presented a controversial artwork and, with it, was able to upend preconceived notions and definitions of art.

Although one cannot be certain, there was an apparent awareness on the behalf of Duchamp that he had a legacy as the father of the readymade. When his readymades were reproduced and exhibited in the 1950s and 1960s, a new generation of artists was introduced to the intellectual and controversial nature of the readymade firsthand at the exhibition. Duchamp wanted the art industry to be rattled by new artists and their work. However, Duchamp is also quoted as saying, "The individual - man as a man, man as a brain, if you like - interests me more than what he makes because I've noticed that most artists only repeat themselves."¹⁶⁵ Therefore, it seems that Duchamp would want artists to constantly push past what is known to what is possible. Readymades, in many ways, provide potential means to that end.

Hirst used the formula to his advantage. There was a certain amount of understanding that 80 years of readymades brought to the art world. He also is a product of the pop culture of the 1980s. He saw the way in which controversy equaled success, and Hirst recognized that readymades equaled controversy. Hirst used this successful formula to build his personal brand. He removed himself more and more from the artwork itself and created multiple studios employing dozens of staff in order to produce work which could be exhibited, filmed, photographed, discussed, and, of course, sold. Ever the self-promoter, Hirst bypassed the dealers and started auctioning his work directly to the collector, generating unheard of prices for his pieces. It does not really matter if Hirst wanted the money to produce more art or made more art to produce more money. Hirst may not have even fully comprehend all his motivations. Regardless, Hirst used the *Fountain* formula to gain fame and amass fortune.

¹⁶⁵ Pierre Cabanne, and Marcel Duchamp, "Interview: Marcel Duchamp," *The American Scholar* 40, no. 2 (1971): 274.

Duchamp understood the power of controversy to garner attention as it shifted widely accepted definitions of art from the aesthetic to the cerebral. He knowingly created a new formula for shock in the readymade with the reaction of both viewers and critics of his *Fountain*. He would go on to create other readymades, but none perhaps as powerful as his first, which made a lasting impression in the minds of aspiring artists. The importance of the *Fountain* formula is that it created a set of rules for artists to utilize to rise above a sea of other fellow artists. It also created a means to redefine the conception of art. Duchamp did the heavy lifting in redefining what is art, but it is an ever-moving mark. It is not to minimize the work of any artist, or to place it on a pedestal. As Duchamp intended, the readymade is devoid of taste – good or bad. While many artists have utilized the formula, Hirst was perhaps the most successful in combining the steps and getting the desired outcome since Duchamp himself. He embraced the macabre to bring a new level of controversy to the readymade to achieve maximum astonishment. Once attention is controlled, he knew how to keep it focused on him by increasing each piece's rebellion against societal norms and accepted artistic images. The only difference between these two men's works and careers is their motivations. Where Duchamp was a man of intellectual conviction, which led to his upside-down urinal, Hirst is a man of opportunity, seizing popular reaction to gain a following. In that way, both men are a product of their times. Duchamp was at the onset of modernism, and Hirst is thriving in a post-modern world by learning from the *Fountain* formula.

Illustrations

Figure 1. *Fountain* (1917 Armory Show, New York: Marcel Duchamp, 1917), urinal, glazed ceramic with black paint, 15 in. x 19 1/4 in. x 24 5/8 in. Photo courtesy of Dave Lovell.

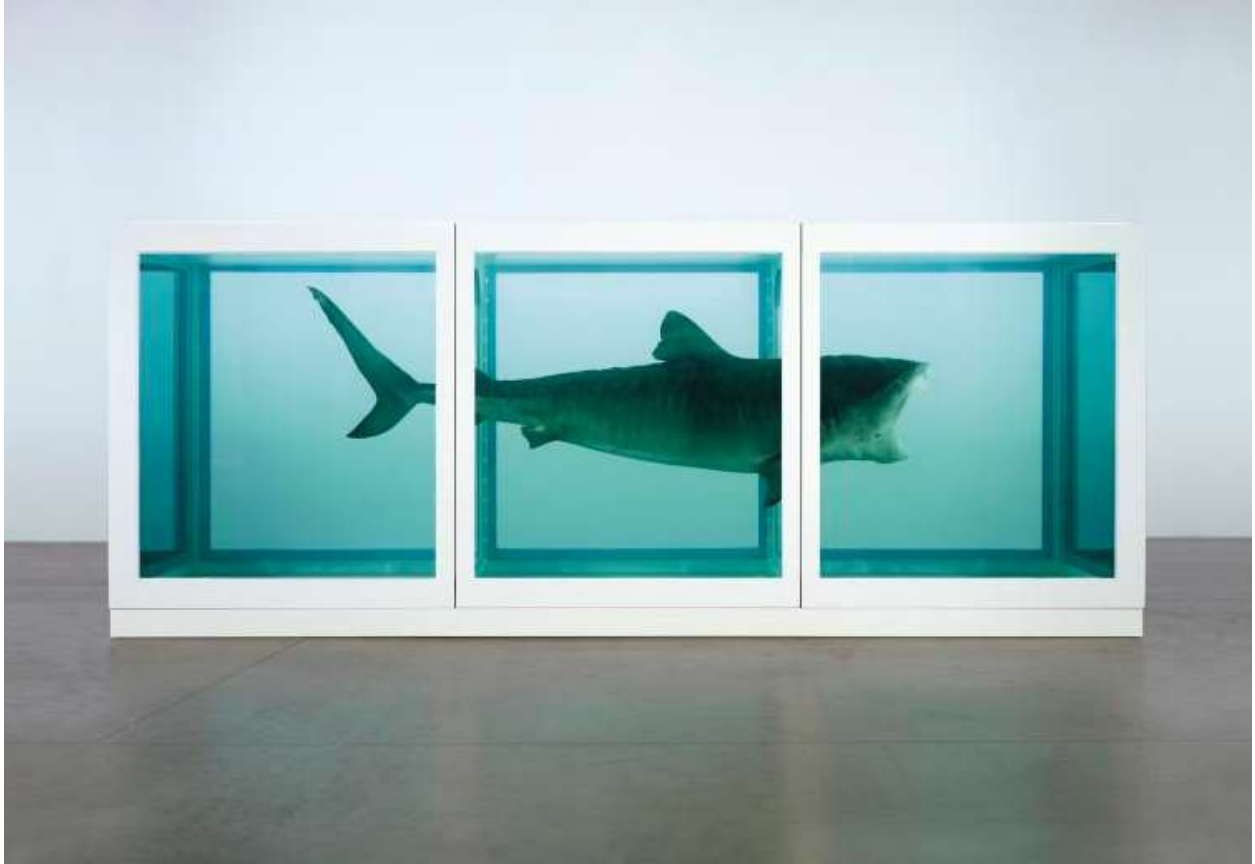


Figure 2. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (Tate Modern, London: Damien Hirst, 1991), Glass, painted steel, silicone, monofilament, shark, and formaldehyde solution, 85.5 x 213.4 x 70.9 in. Photo courtesy of Damien Hirst.



Figure 3. *Mother and Child, Divided* (Tate Modern, London: Damien Hirst, 1993) two parts, each (cow): 74.8 x 127 x 42.9 in | two parts, each (calf): 40.5 x 66.5 x 24.6 in, glass, painted steel, silicone, acrylic, monofilament, stainless steel, cow, calf and formaldehyde solution. Photo courtesy of Damien Hirst.

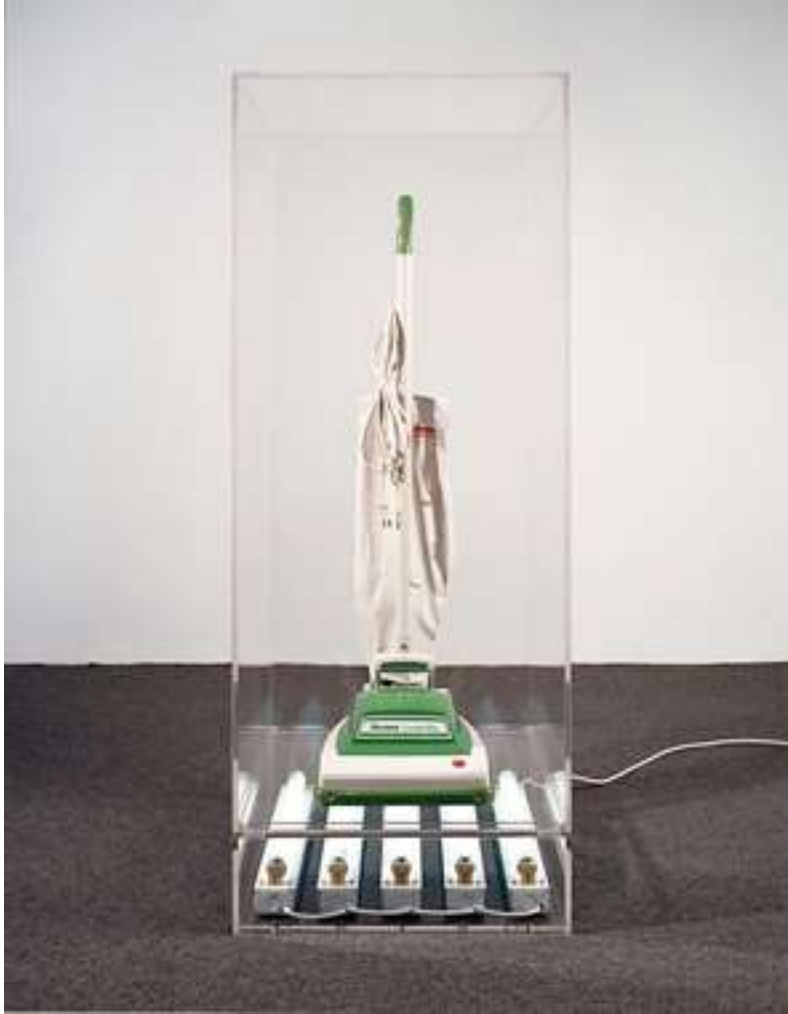


Figure 4. *New Hoover Convertible* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York: Jeff Koons, 1980) sculpture, hoover convertible vacuum cleaner, plexiglass, fluorescent lights, 57 3/4 x 22 1/2 x 22 1/2 in (length). Photo courtesy of Jeff Koons.

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