Marcel Duchamp's Belle Haleine and its View From Feminist Art History

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Marcel Duchamp's *Belle Haleine* and its View From Feminist Art History

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Abstract

The thesis discusses Marcel Duchamp's 1921 Readymade, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, *and* it explores his life and his alter ego, *Rrose Selavy,* along with his life as an artist. Duchamp's connection with his mother and his troubled relationship with women, in general, are also explored. The movements Readymade and Dada are explained in a broad sense. On their own and in connection with Duchamp, with the question of whether *Belle Haleine* belongs to the Readymades or the Dada. The thesis explores his playful side and the side of his art that makes fun of the mainstream media and products.

Belle Haleine and its name play along with Duchamp's friend Man Ray and their artistic relationship along with other works by Duchamp like *The Fountain* and the mostly male perspective sources found and discussions of his works, which never mention the feminine part of his work, or discussed very briefly. Very little research has been done in relation to *Belle Haleine,* and the feminist works of Marcel Duchamp are almost nonexistent. this thesis strives to change this.

Using the visual analysis of *Belle Haleine* and continuing talking about Man Ray in the context of the perfume and the portrait taken by him that's on the label of the perfume gives the thesis the grounds to stand on in regard to Marcel Duchamp and the lack of feminist perspective on his work, while also answering the question of the movement *Belle Haleine* belongs to. The second chapter also explores the name plays of *Belle Haleine,* mentioning Helen of Troy.

In chapter three, Duchamp's possible inspirations and the environment he worked in are discussed as the connection he might have had with Coco Chanel and her and the possible link between Chanel Number 5 and *Belle Haleine* and *Coco* Chanel's Boyish character meets Duchamp's Feminine one.

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1. Introduction

The thesis will analyze Marcel Duchamp's multiple personas but will concentrate on Rrose Sélavy. Rrose Sélavy's *Eau de Voilette* will be the subject of the thesis. Since Marcel Duchamp is recognized for his work with Readymades, the thesis will explore how his adoption of several gender identities shapes gendered identities and reveals social roles, making them just as artificial as the readymade itself. The thesis will examine how Readymades have historically been associated with the male gender, not the female, and will attempt to modify this. The object is Marcel Duchamp's alter egos, specifically Rrosé Selavy, and the critical model is the readymade in the interactional identity.

This thesis will discuss the Readymades and Dada from a feminine or feminist perspective, with a particular emphasis on Marcel Duchamp's *Belle Haleine* and how little has been written about it. From a feminist perspective, this means that while Duchamp's works like *Fountain* of 1917 have received significant attention and discussion, his works like *Belle Haleine* have not.

The thesis will take into account and borrow ideas from sources that address issues related to Dada, Readymades, and Duchamp. More precisely, Marcel Duchamp and his more male and normative works have received much research. His alter personality Rrose Sélavy and the results they collaborated on have languished in the background for a long time. The thesis will try to shed some light on Rrose and their collaborative works.

I'll use more readymade examples and more of Duchamp's artwork as my approaches, comparing them *to Eau De Voilette* and attempting to problematize readymade models, gender,

and gender roles and conventions within the time period in question. The topics covered in each of the works range from the readymade in general to Dada in New York, Duchamp in New York and Paris, and why Duchamp produced more work in New York than in Paris, to the subversion of genre and gender stereotypes.

2. The Origins of *Belle Haleine*

This thesis is going to discuss Marcel Duchamp and (Rrose Sélavy's) readymade *Eau De Voilette. This object* is supposed to challenge the worldview of art and the way we perceive everyday mainstream objects and tests the line between the two.

A little biography is required Before diving into his artistic world. Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp was born in Blainville, Normandy, on July 28th, 1887. He was a son of a notary and a sibling of the cubist brothers Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon. Duchamp married twice but had many partners throughout his long life; he passed away on October 2, 1968, at the age of 81. His work has been labeled as Cubism, Dada, Conceptual art, and Readymades, but as we will soon come to find out, his art was not just one "ism."

Before discussing the readymade, It is essential to talk about Marcel Duchamp. Margaret Iversen discusses the Readymades in her article "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph." This article's main idea is to understand the object value of the artwork, which Iversen does by relying on Kant's notion of "disinterested beauty" and the relation between subject and object. She builds on the idea that an object can compensate for a subjective sense of deficiency, and by arguing this, Iversen invests Readymades with meaning independent of any aesthetic value. Each object suggests a particular kind of subject. Of course, psychoanalysis aims to find this kind of connection. For instance, the fetish object suggests a subject that is divided along the lines of acknowledging and denying castration. Another illustration of this would be the glossy perfection of items in fashion magazines, which suggests a narcissistic subject who fears and guards against the ravages of the body in parts. Alternatively, the spotless new kitchen suggests a subject striving to suppress a craving for gorgeous dirt; You'll observe that the object in each of

these situations does not, in a sense, "match" the subject; rather, there is an inverted relationship because the item is intended to make up for a perceived lack on the part of the subject. [1]. This article makes this part of the thesis easier to Understand and gives it more ground to stand on.

Another article that makes a point of the thesis and help with explaining the Readymades and Duchamp is Helen Molesworth's Readymades in her "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades" She states that the readymade has arguably contributed more to the reorganization of aesthetic categories than any other art movement. of the 20th century. The Disavowal of an ontological concept of art was one of its many repercussions. It was made evident that the concept of "Art" was formed contextually by these machine-made objects, which Duchamp initially selected and later exhibited in galleries and museums. Additionally, it has been suggested that Duchamp's explicit rejection of art's (supposed) unmediated visuality, along with the addition of words.[2]

Duchamp's "disinterest" is a way of refusing aesthetic criteria values. His works beg questions such as are aesthetic qualities necessary? Does a replica have the same value as an original? Does a signature mean more than the object on which it is placed? With Duchamp's works, one could say that the signature and the idea behind the object, which stands in for it and replaces its aesthetic value, does have more value than any process of making.

Duchamp was versatile in every way, whether it came to his art or his life. This is what Jindřich Chalupecký and Paul Wilson build on the position that:

> "Duchamp constructs objects with the precision of an engineer, and Duchamp reduces the creative act to the selection of banal objects. There is Duchamp the provocateur and Duchamp who refuses even to exhibit; Duchamp the Dadaist and Duchamp of the optical

[1] Iversen, Margaret. "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph." *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 44–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/4134520.

[2] Molesworth, Helen. "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades." *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 50–61. https://doi.org/10.2307/777927.

> devices; Duchamp the cynic and Duchamp the Platonist; Duchamp the punster and Duchamp the man of long silences; Duchamp who condemns the sensory aspect of art and Duchamp who creates theatrical diorama; the Duchamp who is determined not to be an artist and the Duchamp who is, in his own words, nothing but an artist." [3]

This quote stands to show just how versatile he was, the many talents he had, and the projects he pursued.

The shadow of absurdity fell across Duchamp's work during the First World War in New York," write Jindřich Chalupecký and Paul Wilson in "Marcel Duchamp: A Re-Evaluation;" they state that So the Readymades from the first few years after the war are a primary manifestation of nonsense. In fact, it is no longer appropriate to call them Readymades at all; for a while, the original readymade involved nothing more than giving a new interpretation to finished products; the more recent ones were largely artificially constructed. In particular, they were no longer intended to spur viewers into understanding them symbolically.

In sum, Duchamp was a protean figure whose identity fluctuated. He changed religions, ideologies, hobbies, and the way of making art. Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp's female alter ego, is one of these. It is interesting when they say that Duchamp was nothing but an artist when he was a renowned chess player. Still, just an artist must be how he saw himself; it is essential because there is not one aspect of his life where he only saw himself as one of anything.

In *"*Fragmentation, Transformation, and Self-Realization: Duchamp and The Formation Of The Creative Imago," Bradley Bailey states that Rrose Sélavy first appeared as a signature on the *Fresh Widow* of 1920, then later "in person" as a model on the *Belle Haleine*[4]. Since his

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[3] Chalupecký, Jindřich, and Paul Wilson. "Marcel Duchamp: A Re-Evaluation." *Artibus et Historiae* 6, no. 11 (1985): 125–36. https://doi.org/10.2307/1483262.

[4] Bailey, Bradley. "Fragmentation, Transformation, and Self-Realization: Duchamp and the Formation of the Creative Imago"*Source: Notes in the History of Art* 27, no. 2/3 (2008): 49–55. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23208136.

arrival in New York in 1915, Marcel Duchamp has been involved in a variety of identities, which is one of the most fascinating aspects of his kaleidoscopic life and career. Naturally, this tendency on Duchamp's part has caused academics and critics to focus more on Duchamp, the man, than on Duchamp, the artist, which is viewed by many as being excessive. However, those who are familiar with Duchamp's intricate game of identities will notice right once that it is impossible to determine where the artist ends and the man begins. (Bailey 49). Here Bailey further proves the identity and gender games Duchamp was involved in and

The fact that Duchamp appeared in Man Ray's photograph dressed as a woman, a performance he repeated in Paris later that same year, would seem to imply that Duchamp was at this point deeply involved in the *coniunctio oppositorum*, which in alchemy is symbolized by the sexual union of the King and Queen, who merge to become an androgynous fulfillment of both genders. Many scholars have already demonstrated that the rose, water, and vessel are all extremely relevant to the name Rrose Sélavy. The appearance of the rose after the liminal stage in which he spells with one R implies that Duchamp was initiating a new phase of transformation during which he worked on stabilizing the tension between his masculine identity and his psyche. This process exemplifies both Duchamp's aesthetic preferences and his journey toward self-realization, states the author.

Duchamp challenged not only sculpture and painting but the very location of the artistic gesture. The idea here is the person of Rrose Sélavy, not any object. In the article “Rrose of Washington Square: Marcel Duchamp, Fanny Brice, And the Jewish Origins of Rrose Sélavy,” Bradley Bailey expands on this topic and takes us on the journey of how Duchamp became

Rrose, his Jewish heritage, and the shift from Catholicism to Judaism and the origins of the name Rrose. Rose is practically separate from Duchamp's other identities, argues Bailey.[5]

Rrose appears for the first time in 1920 in the title of one of their most cryptic works, Why *Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* of 1921; without any figurations Rose's name is still spelled with just one R, as it was with *Fresh Widow*. *The Cacolydic Eye,* a 1921 artwork by Francis Picabia that his visitors had developed the practice of signing as though it were a guestbook, is the earliest recorded instance of the extra R. The name Sélavy is a play on the French phrase "C'est la vie," and it also plays with the expression "La Vie En Rose," which means seeing the world through rose-colored glasses. Duchamp felt it was brilliant to start a word, a name, with two r's, like the two Ls in Lloyd, as an absurdist doubling. Also, since Rose was the most popular name he could think of. The French verb "to wet'' "to sprinkle," which recalls Duchamp's *Fountain*, the *Belle Haleine* perfume bottle, or even the French expression "ça s'arrose, la vie," which means "drink it up" or "enjoy life," was also produced by the two Rs, in Rrose. This pun is called "arroser la vie." Although neither Amelia Jones nor Barbara Bloemink has mentioned the possibility that the name Rose Sélavy was derived from popular Jewish names, Bloemink believes that, due to physical similarities, Duchamp's conception of Rrose was based on his close friend Florine Stettheimer, an American Jew who painted a well-known double portrait of Duchamp as his male artist. Amelia Jones has noted that Duchamp may have been interested in Jewish female sources for his alternate identities.

Deborah Johnson continues Bailey's investigation of Rrose and digs deeper into her heritage and Duchamp's process of creating and being her; Johnson aims to analyze Sélavy's

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[5] Bailey, Bradley. "Rrose Of Washington Square: Marcel Duchamp, Fanny Brice, And The Jewish Origins Of Rrose Sélavy." *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 27, no. 1 (2007): 39–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23207984.

persona and imagine how Man Ray, Duchamp's project collaborator, might have had a crucial influence in her emergence and appearance. According to Johnson, Duchamp undoubtedly grew to embrace (R)rose Sélavy's identity because he frequently signed his private letters with her name or the porte-manteau word“Marselavy” (Marcel+Sélavy.) In addition to signing over twenty works, “Rrose” also signed paperwork, copyrighted *Fresh Widow*, published *The Green Box,* founded two companies, wrote journal essays and a collection of puns and was asked to be Robert Desnos' spouse. Their last work*, Etant donnés* (1946-66), was cosigned Duchamp-Rrose Sélavy. She served as a model for Duchamp's most persistent motif, argues Johnson androgyny, to the extent that she is a long-term performance piece of him in drag. This proves that critics and art historians have not only seen Rrose through a masculine lens but also counted her as an object that Duchamp used in his art. This is problematic because to consider this true, we have to rethink Duchamp’s whole life and not look at Rrose as Duchamp’s live alter ego, but as just a stop he made along his artistic pathway. This is not what has been proven for years. Looking at Rrose as his alter ego also gives us the means to judge their (Rrose and Duchamp) art differently.

Is It Accurate to consider Rrose a mere “motif”? Or even to rely on androgyny to understand them? Rather than thinking in terms of androgyny, art historians have focused on masculinity to analyze the Readymade. Hubre provides some background on the *Fountain,* as does Franklin, but only through the masculine.

For most of his life, Duchamp played parts and fit different roles; as mentioned, even when it came to religion, he switched from one to another. According to scientists, alter egos are usually a way to live out a better version of the self, or if a person has a mental disorder, which Duchamp was unaware of, a question remains: why did Duchamp create so many alter egos? He was always into colloquial, creating anti-common thoughts and objects; everyday objects were

not enough for him; he could qualify as the Leonardo Da Vinci of the 20th century with his polymathy. This could explain his numerous alter egos; he was very anti-aesthetic and disliked aesthetics, so everything he did was done with that mindset, opposition disturbance to make people uncomfortable as a way to get them to think. He also always wanted to try something new and always pushed the boundaries, never settling.

Paul B. Franklin is another author who examines the Readymades' gender, drag, and queerness, as well as Duchamp's own, from the uniquely ‘’male perspective.’’ Franklin emphasizes that men used public restrooms to engage in sexual activity and suggests that this is why Duchamp chose the urinal; this interpretation, however, ignores Duchamp's feminist gender politics. Franklin contends that Marcel Duchamp was heterosexual and that although the intertwined histories of *pissoirs* and male-to-male public sex may not have been included explicitly in Duchamp's life story, they are a crucial component of his readymade *Fountain*, a mass-produced urinal that he bought from a plumbing supply store, signed "R. MUTT 1917," and declared a work of art.

One of the most influential and revolutionary pieces in the history of modern art is *Fountain*. Franklin claims that despite this, no one has ever placed this infamous discussion in the context of the *pissoir* arguments that took place in Paris and New York, as well as their crucial significance in the burgeoning homosexual male subcultures of these two global cities.

"The Magazine as Readymade: New York Dada and the Transgression of Genre and Gender Boundaries" by Emily Hage[6] analyzes New York and Paris. Her research contends that New York Dada's editors exploited the magazine medium to challenge preconceived boundaries

[6] Emily Hage. “The Magazine as Readymade: *New York Dada* and the Transgression of Genre and Gender Boundaries.” *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012): 175–97. https://doi.org/10.5325/jmodeperistud.3.2.0175.

between print genres and gender roles by treating the movement as readymade. In doing so, they offer a sometimes ambiguous but ultimately critical response to both commercial culture and the Dada movement. She claims that the editors of New York Dada (1921), Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, exploited the magazine medium to challenge preconceived notions of the boundaries between print genres and gender roles. Doing this provides a sometimes confused but ultimately critical response to both commercial culture and the Dada movement. This analysis broadens current perceptions of Dada art journals and the readymade, one of the movement's defining and most profoundly impactful tactics, by seeing the entire publication as a work of art rather than concentrating only on particular words and images therein. This one-issue art publication, edited by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, is an attempt by New York to join the international Dada art movement. In order to support their conclusions about the nature of Dada in the United States, academics have drawn on specific passages from the book, such as Duchamp's *Belle Haleine*, Tristan Tzara's (non)authorization of Dada in America, and the Baroness Elsa von.

The subject of Amelia Jones' "*Clothes Make the Man*": The Male Artist as a Performative Function concerns the relationship between clothing and gender but again from the perspective of the ‘’male’’ gender. Duchamp toyed with sexuality, identity, and gender with the use of clothing, which was permitted. He utilized his body as a canvas for his art, which was allowed with clothing; he became a completely different person with clothes, cosmetics, and certain accessories. Jones examines how inventive clothing has either maintained or challenged traditional masculine identities by applying these broad notions about clothing and identity, particularly those that are gendered, to the figure of the Western male artist.

After tracing the self-construction techniques used by modernist male artists in the nineteenth century, when the art world stabilized and came to accept more stringent definitions

of the artist as white, male, and anti-bourgeois, Jones discusses the idea of male artistic identity that has come under increasing scrutiny since the turn of the century.

Jones looks at how Duchamp fits into these concepts; it is essential to note that, according to Gerard J. Pape in his essay "Marcel Duchamp," Lucie Duchamp experienced depression after learning she had not given birth to a girl. I argue that had to have significantly impacted Duchamp's sexuality, identity, and sense of self. Another question to consider is whether he adopted a feminine character as a result of his severe identity and self-esteem issues. Duchamp, according to Pape, battled low self-esteem his whole life, which regularly led to incapacitating depression episodes. Duchamp always had cordial but distant interactions with women. According to Pape, he felt a mixture of hopeless rage and despair toward them. The birth of Yvonne and Magdalene, his sisters, added to Marcel's sense of being cheated out of his mother's early-childhood care. The fact that the mother favored the two girls also infuriated him. Marcel struggled for a significant chunk of his adult life with aggressive and erotic cravings as a result of his early annoyance with his mother and sisters. Marcel made a concerted effort to deal with his quiet wrath and unmet need for intimate proximity, even as he wanted to show himself as calm, controlled, and detached, stressing in interviews that everything was okay. Despite being conflict-free in his conscious visualizations, his art shows defensive efforts.[7]

In the same article, Pape brings Robert Jagoda to discuss Duchamp's gender further confusion: where Jagonda states that when he was a toddler, Duchamp's mother gave birth to Suzanne, who became a companion for sexual exploration, looking for his sister's penis and missing it, then,

[7] Pape, Gerard J. "Marcel Duchamp." *American Imago* 42, no. 3 (1985): 255–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26304017.

could be seen as looking and missing in his work: where one expects to see something, one doesn't see anything. [8]

Duchamp's scholarship has not been discussed while considering his/their gender identity. This thesis aims to fill a gap in Duchamp's works' representation of women. For this, Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews' "The Feminist Critique of Art History" resonates:

> "Why has it been necessary to negate so large a part of the history of art, dismiss so many artists, and denigrate so many works of art simply because the artists are women? What does this reveal about the structures and ideologies of art history, how it defined what is and what is not art, to whom it accords the artist's status, and what that status means?" [9]

Belle Haleine is a fitting work to look at from a feminist perspective. There's always been a way to depict a woman, to convey her femininity for the male gaze; it is interesting to ask, what was Duchamp's aim with Rrose?

According to Judith Butler's book "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," the concepts of real sex, discrete gender, and unique sexuality have served as the main points of reference for many feminists. By questioning the stability of concepts like sex and gender and how they relate to one another, Gender Trouble challenged the very underpinnings of feminist theory and LGBT studies, reshaping feminist debates and igniting queer theory. Gender Trouble aims to explore gender in relation to subject creation by drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of the connections between discourse and power. [10]

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[8] Pape, Gerard J. "Marcel Duchamp." *American Imago*, 255–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26304017.

[9] Gouma-Peterson, Thalia, and Patricia Mathews. "The Feminist Critique of Art History." *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (1987): 326–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/3051059.

[10] Martin, Karin A. *Gender and Society* 5, no. 3 (1991): 420–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/189856.

These identity constructs serve as the epistemic foundations around which politics and philosophy are built. Feminism's politics are apparently created to represent the interests and opinions of "women." The distinction between sexes and genders, as well as the word "sex" itself, appear to imply a generalization of "the body" prior to its sex-specific meaning. This "body" usually exhibits passive qualities and is identified by expressions from sources of culture that are seen as "external" to the body. However, any theory of the culturally constructed body should challenge the notion of "the body" as a dubious generalization when portrayed as inert and independent of discourse.

After having discussed The Readymades, Marcel Duchamp, and Feminist art history, the question left is, Is *Belle Haleine* a Readymade?

3. The many sides of *Belle Haleine*

Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette, a remarkable readymade by Marcel Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy, was designed in 1920 and produced in 1921. The perfume is 11.2 cm (4 3/8 in) wide and 16.5 cm (6 12 in) tall. The perfume bottle, made initially by Rigaud Paris Beautiful Breath - Voilette Water, was purchased and altered by Duchamp.

Although there are numerous ways to view this work of art, this thesis will concentrate on femininity and the gendered interpretation of Eau de Voilette. Focus on the perfume's name first; it is eerily reminiscent of Duchamp, and the scent itself carries a variety of hidden connotations, such as "beautiful breath" and veil water. The name Rose and her ancestry must be examined first. Rose was a popular name during the period in England and France; this has to do with religion, as both Rose and Rosie were popular Jewish names. Despite being of Jewish ancestry, Duchamp considered himself a Catholic.

Duchamp was undoubtedly not associated with any one movement. *Belle Haleine* involved defying viewers' assumptions and intricately ingrained notions of what art may be. Duchamp challenged the idea that art had to be something unique or expensive by transforming an ordinary object into a piece of art. Instead, he contended that art could be found anywhere, even in the most ordinary objects. Man Ray, Duchamp's close friend, shot the photo of Rrose that is included on the label. It is interesting to note that the cork has a string attached to it that is fastened to the bottle's neck and might as well be a woman's strand of hair. The cork, with its numerous impressions that make it appear to be a diamond, gives us the feeling that it has also maybe been altered and fiddled with. According to Dada Scholars, this perfume also plays with femininity in a way that mocks it, which is typical of Duchamp. He posed as Rrose on a woman's

perfume to sell it, which still occurs frequently today; faces are the ones who sell products. The name "Belle Haleine," which means "beautiful breath"; or "beautiful "Helen," is given to the woman depicted on the scent.

"Here a man masquerades as a woman, adopting the cultural signifiers of femininity as artifice, to sell a commodity - the perfume - which itself was then produced as a surface to sell another commodity - the magazine," writes Emily Hage in her article “The Magazine as Readymade: New York Dada and the Transgression of Genre and Gender Boundaries.” The magazine she refers to is the one whose cover the perfume graced. Hage claims that by placing Rrosé on the perfume that would be on the surface of a magazine, Marcel Duchamp is either selling Rrose or himself. Another intriguing feature is that he once again bent the norms by portraying himself as a drag character on items catering to ladies at the time.

The name came to represent a movement whose ultimate goal was its destruction, a movement that represented not the opening of a new school but the rejection of all schools, a movement that was merely a protest, a state of mind, or a soulful gesture rather than a movement at all, according to Donna M. Kristiansen. Its name was "Dadaism." This viewpoint holds that all literary criticism is meaningless, and the same is true of all classifications, laws, and systems. Dada was created out of a mistrust of group dynamics and a desire for freedom.

Dadaists hold to their independence because, in their opinion, the universe is neither specified nor defined; instead, it is a collection of the viewer's infinite combinations. Consequently, logic is regarded by Dadaists as an inorganic illness that is restricted by the senses and reveals the limitations of human thought. There isn't an overall logical structure. Dadaism is the complete opposite of all that is. "A significant amount of destruction must be done. We must clean and sweep. There is a general lack of morale; the warmth and sympathy that morality has

bestowed upon us are nothing more than "two fat balls that have grown into elephants." "Morality is a chocolate shot into the veins of all men," someone once said. Good is not superior to bad. The decision between cake or cherries for dessert and between paradise and hell is equivalent. A Dadaist cannot understand the word "improvement" since it conjures up images of the pointless, nasty hammering and sawing that characterize life.[11]

The logic of disinterest was stretched to its breaking point by Duchamp. This connection has been drawn, according to Arthur Danto, who claims that "Kantian aesthetics is fundamentally anti-subjective since Duchamp's anti-aesthetic brings with it an implicit anti-subjectivity." The readymade can be viewed as a specific instance of aesthetics since it resembles reductio del absurdum, which forces us to think about how aesthetics and art relate to products and the appetitive.[12]

A perfume bottle that might have been very ordinary and normal was transformed into a fantastic notion by Duchamp. As was already established, Duchamp's strict anti-aesthetic tendencies are also apparent here. The creation of the scent has little regard for beauty or aesthetics. This is a tool for thought, not a feminine object. In chapter one, Margaret Iversen talks about this phenomenon and claims that the object has to compensate for the subject's sense of a lack. Because it is not a commonly used, mass-produced perfume but rather a ready-made bottle with a few alterations, the perfume, in this case, is meant to operate as a thinking tool. Despite the fact that Duchamp was anti-aesthetic, It is safe to claim that this bottle isn't, particularly so. The concept Duchamp was seeking was more important. Duchamp was

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[11] Kristiansen, Donna M. “What Is Dada?” *Educational Theatre Journal* 20, no. 3 (1968): 457–62. https://doi.org/10.2307/3205188.

[12] Iversen, Margaret. “Readymade, Found Object, Photograph.” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 44–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/4134520.

aware that in 1921, featuring a trans woman on a perfume label would have been against all conventions, rules, and expectations.

In this case, is the duplicate worth the same as the original? Does the location of the performance and the performing artist have more influence than the creative process is discussed? Yes, the artist, the location of the show, and the original are appreciated more highly than the creation itself because there is little to no making apparent in this piece. Having stated that, we encounter another issue: Readymades are constantly bought, usually presented while being turned upside down or sideways. Dada's main objective is to rebel against aesthetics and the bourgeoisie by denying the logic and rationale we find in this perfume; therefore, it is difficult to categorize this work as "Readymade" in light of that.

Dada or the Readymades, which is it? It blends the two, making it challenging to choose one over the other.

The readymade is a constrained scenario that puts into complete contrast our firmly entrenched notions of artistic creation. Is craft necessary? Is the presence of the artist's signature or a gallery display enough to qualify something as art? Are aesthetic attributes necessary? Does a copy have the same worth as the original work? Or does this distinction vanish as a result of the readymade? This reductive approach puts pressure on our expectations of the artist's work by eliminating all indications of a personal choice or expressive gesture. The readymade deconstructs the framework of art through its captivating physical presence. Said if a toilet or a bottle rack can provide formal satisfaction, anything may. Art is no longer a relevant category in its own right. However, the readymade supports the traditional art world as a channel for the dissemination of ideas. An artist with a distinctive aesthetic sensibility thought he could transform the discovered object into art by using it to express an important aesthetic idea. The

readymade sets itself apart from what Arthur Danto calls "bare real things" as a signifier. Before analyzing the traditional conceptual approach to the readymade, I will first lay down the radical and incongruous consequences of the formalist viewpoint. [13]

When a common object is removed from its utilitarian surroundings, its potential for practical use is removed, and it is placed on a stand-like items that are typically used for aesthetic analysis, its formal design is brought to the forefront of consideration. The distinction between the artist and the layperson vanishes, and every man is endowed, according to a quote from Arturo Schwarz:" First of all, the difference between the artist and

> the layman ceases to exist, and every man is endowed with the faculty of creating beauty (In the case of the Ready-mades, simply by deciding that a common object is to be elevated to the status of a work of art). And secondly, the very distinction between life and art is abolished."[14]

In the same article, Duchamp's confusing writing, in which he emphasizes his iconoclastic status and defends the most oppressive kind of traditional aesthetic value, can be connected to opposing impulses. Thanks to the conservative interpretation of the readymade, which was partly provided by Duchamp, supporters of the Institutional Theory of Art, currently the leading contender for a definition of art, have been able to pass the Dada barrier and move back in the direction of secure categorization.[15] In the same article by Goldsmith, he says that, In a way, since there is no physical building required, the readymade becomes the ideal vehicle for pure ideas. The artist creates a work of art out of pure willpower without ever getting their hands filthy. The idealism

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[13] Goldsmith, Steven. "The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: The Ambiguities of an Aesthetic Revolution." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 2 (1983): 197–208. https://doi.org/10.2307/430663.

[15] Goldsmith, Steven. "The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: The Ambiguities of an Aesthetic Revolution." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, 197–208.

of the "Readymades" is in part ironic because it results from the lack of any conscious construction approach on the side of the artist. (Goldsmith 201-202)

Undoubtedly, there is a discussion to be had on *Belle Haleine* and Rrose Sélavy's name problem. The fun side of Duchamp also emerged in this regard. The fictitious surname Sélavy is strikingly similar to the French surname Halevy, which means "the Levite." The surname Halevy signifies a family's ancestry, just like that of the members of the tribe of Levi who assisted the priests, or kohanim, with the congregation. Levy, Levin, Levine, Levitov, Lewis, and several other surnames have corresponding meanings. Critics have acknowledged Duchamp's apparent interest in Jewish female roots for his different personas, even though they haven't discussed the possibility that the name Rrose Sélavy was drawn from well-known Jewish names The French translation of Belle Haleine is "Beautiful breath'' is not exactly correct. In many esoteric writings, the breath is connected to initiation. In Hindu tradition, the breath is closely tied to the word because of its initiatory significance.

Hindu magicians are known for their ability to hold their breath, and Prama bestows this power on yoga practitioners. The yogi can disconnect from the outside world through yama (breath control). The passing of sexual identity is connected to breathing in the shamanic tradition. The alchemical meaning of the veil and water strengthens Belle Haleine's initiatory importance. Examining a play on the phrase "violet water," The word "veil" is used in vain by alchemists in the senses of the veil (velum, to hide) and unveil uncover, reveal, disclose, or cover again with a veil). The barrier was impenetrable to alchemists but transparent to the adept, who lifted the curtain from his eyes and intellect.[16]

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[16] Schwarz. (n.d.). Marcel Duchamp alias Rrose Sélavy alias Marchand Du Sel alias *Belle Haleine*. Artslab.com.

Before the double R of rose was introduced in 1921, the early Rose Sélavy was "Rose C'est la vie"—or that's life, as Duchamp indicated—with Rose able to be translated as the flower, rose, or the color pink, or as "Rose sel à vie" (Rose-salt of the earth), as "to beat life," "to toast life," or, in everyday speech, to piss on life. Another interpretation of the verb arraser is to make wet in the context of sexual stimulation, and in this context, the word "rose" can also be used to refer to film pornography (cinéma rose) and the color of sexual flesh; lastly, with the addition of the double R to the word "rose." Cros, c'est la vie, or eros sex-Is life are all references to Rose Sélavy. Her given name, Rose, may have satisfied the broader cultural implications of the "ugly name" to which Duchamp referred because "Rose" was a common scent for affordable perfumes (known as rosewaters) that were then migrating from the demimonde into the middle class. Throughout the early half of the 20th century, Ashkenazic Jews—the demographic majority of American Jews—used it as a diminutive for the Hebrew name "Ruth," though. The Hebrew Bible's first female convert to Judaism, Ruth, also has a connection to Sélavy that doesn't appear random. Duchamp makes Rose several "others" — in other words, female, Jewish, androgynous, transgressive, and rebellious, by transforming her into Rose-C'est Levy or Rose Sélavy. As a result, the name Rose effectively stands for “otherness.”

Rose is further “othered” by doubling the R to read Rrose, an addition that Duchamp explained in response to a query about his feminine identity in a 1949 interview: "C'est la vie, Sélavy, was a play on words that led to the creation of the name. The most typical place name I could think of is Rose. After that, I found starting a term or name with two rs quite creative, much like Lloyd has two /s."[17] In this way, *Belle Haleine* plays with the everyday mundane use

[17] Bailey, Bradley. “Rrose Of Washington Square: Marcel Duchamp, Fanny Brice, And The Jewish Origins Of Rrose Sélavy.”, 39–45.

of objects and makes fun of the norm; it recalls not only everyday perfume but the liquid spittle of breath. While "*Belle Haleine*, refers to the beautiful Helen of Troy and literally "beautiful breath."

The legendary Helen of Troy becomes a celebrity advocating a brand-new product, typically taken to mean a celebrity endorsing a brand-new product. According to Nancy Ring, the image is a mash-up of elements frequently seen in glossy magazines and celebrity endorsements of consumers of goods and perfume advertising. popular culture. Is—features on particular people, celebrity endorsements of consumer goods, including perfume advertising." Hage notes that the image of the woman on the bottle enhances the fictitious perfume. To "sell" a commodity—the perfume—which is subsequently generated as a surface to sell another commodity—the magazine—a person assumes the cultural signifiers of femininity as an illusion. Yet other than these brief mentions to the magazine, Hage says nothing in the context of New York Dada about the significance of the fact that this image is placed on the cover.[18]

On the bottle, in addition to Rrose and *Belle Haleine*, another line reads Eau de Voilette; this seems familiar, and at first glance, "violet water" is something different; it is. Eau de Voilette is a play on the famous Eau de Toilette (toilet water), but as discussed, the perfume is labeled as Veil water, not toilet water. Yet again, another way Duchamp makes fun of the mainstream beauty products that only women could use in the 1920s. Another aspect as we move down the perfume is the "RS" on the bottle; interestingly, the R is reverse as the letters face each other; Rrose Sélavy's monogram was added with a standard S and a reversed R in Leonardesque

[18] Emily Hage. "The Magazine as Readymade: New York Dada and the Transgression of Genre and Gender Boundaries." *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 175–97, 2012.

mirror lettering.[19] A case could be made that the R and the S are the two opposite identities of Duchamp, Rrose, and Marcel. It is interesting what the ornaments on the opposite sides of the letters, the little flowers, do since it is skeptical that the only reason they're on the bottle is strictly aesthetic reasons, given Duchamp's relationship with it. Lastly, on the bottom of the bottle, two cities are engraved, New York and Paris; both cities are significant to Duchamp, but why put both cities on the bottle? One of the possible and obvious answers is that the perfume was made in both cities, but this seems unlikely given that the perfume was just bought and then tweaked. The answer is that Paris was originally on the label, and Duchamp added New York with the same font and size.

It would appear that Duchamp was deeply engaged in the coniunctio oppositorum, symbolized in alchemy by the sexual union of the King and Queen, who merge to become an androgynous fulfillment of both genders. C. G. Jung used the phrase "union of opposites" to describe the Coniunctio oppositorum. Although the broad concept of "opposites" isn't given its independent motif in Thompson's Motif-Index, many instances of the theme appear in various national groups' folk traditions in that book. The apparent intrinsic connection or unity of opposites is a crucial aspect of opposites. Cold/warm, upper/lower, spirit/body, heaven/earth, fire/water, bright/dark, active/passive, volatile/solid, precious/common, good/evil, open/hidden, east/west, living/dead, masculine/feminine, sun/moon are only a few of the opposites that Jung lists at the beginning of Mysterium Coniunctionis.

A more detailed look at the portrait in the middle shows us the marble necklaces on Rrose's neck and the beret-type black hat on her short, curly dark-brown hair. The eyes have a

[19] Gottlieb, Carla. "Self-Portraiture In PostmodernArt." *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 42 (1981): 267–302. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24657865.

hint of black eye makeup on them. An exciting aspect of the face is the mole on the left side of her face, just under her eye, which Duchamp did not have, indicating that the mole was also painted on. She is rather confidently looking away from the camera, not making eye contact with the viewer. She seems to be wearing a puffy-sleeved blouse or even a dress that appears to be velvet. The smaller bottle engraved with Rrose's portrait gives a reminiscence of the *Venus of Willendorf,* with its shape and the face on the top. Venus of Willendorf in a perfume bottle form. Since this perfume is an artwork, a statue in a way, and not an everyday beauty object, it can be tied to other artworks. Other aspects that connect with Venus are the outline lines and the patterns on Venus' head.

Lucie Duchamp's sadness following the birth of Marcel and her regret at not having a female as a child appears to have significantly impacted Marcel's sense of self-worth, subject relationships, sexual identity, and instinctual life. It is possible that Marcel's mother's ambivalent cathexis of her newborn child—as shown by her resentment at her sharing his care with a servant—was a factor in his lifelong fury, despair, and seclusion from women. His life was plagued by low self-esteem, which frequently brought on paralyzing depression. Duchamp always had friendly but cold relationships with women. He had a mix of impotent anger and pessimism toward them. Yvonne and Magdalene's birth added to Marcel's sense of deprivation from his mother's oral care during his early years. He was also upset that the mother seemed to favor the two girls. Because of his early frustration with his mother and sisters, Marcel struggled with aggressive and sensual desires for a significant portion of his adult life. He tried to sublimate himself via chess and art.[20]

[20] Pape, Gerard J. "Marcel Duchamp." *American Imago* 42, no. 3 (1985): 255–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26304017.

Labeling and saying this is why he chose a female alter ego is complex, but it certainly could be true. The lack of love he felt in his family, and the warmth and tenderness he was supposed to get were split between his sisters.

All of a child's needs are met by their carers. In addition to satisfying their physical needs, they require mirroring, attunement, and validation from their caregiver to thrive as adults. Children will grow up with a strong sense of self if their caregivers are emotionally stable and resolute. [21] The ones who are closest to them will radiate wholesome, unwavering love for them. They will be able to describe how love looks and feels. They will strive to maintain this emotion all their lives. Moreover, since they have an excellent model to refer to, they will be able to console themselves, love themselves, and establish solid, healthy connections with those around them.

Ultimately, it is still unclear which Belle Haleine belongs to; it is safe to say that Marcel Duchamp had a mind that exceeded all of the currents, and his work is hard to label. It is unfortunate that so much research is done about the Readymades, Dada, and Marcel Duchamp, and so little is known about Rrose Sélavy and *Belle Haleine.* Most of the Readymade and Dada artists were men, Rrose is one of the exceptions with whom the gender is fluid, and we must look at Rrose and *Belle Haleine* from a feminine historical perspective.

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[21] Cikanavicius. (2019, September 30). *How Lack of Love in Childhood Robs Us of Love in Adulthood*. psychcentral.com. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from https://psychcentral.com/blog/psychology-self/2019/09/trauma-lack-of-love#1

4. World around *Belle Haleine*

As was already said, Belle Haleine is one of the rare Readymades or Dada works that compels us to view events through the perspective of women and invites us to view them through the lens of feminist history. It must first be established to which group Belle Haleine belongs.

Although the mass-produced item has been altered, the fragrance still bears both traits and attributes; while tweaked, the mass-produced object still says Readymades. But the mockery of materialistic views indicates Dada. Dada and Readymades share the ludicrous motif, which makes them both compatible with Duchamp. It is safe to argue that *Belle Haleine* perfectly embodies the boundaries Duchamp spent his life challenging and only makes sense in his context, making it both Readymades and Dada. It is only fair that after learning about Duchamp and his life, one refrains from categorizing his works and instead explores the possibility of additional ones, as was his intention.

Before 1921, which is when the photograph (see Figure 1) was taken, this could be proof that Duchamp was "inspired" to make *Belle Haleine*. The way the woman on the right looks at the camera and smiles subtly are both indications of her femininity.

Her hands crossed her chest to demonstrate control while the hat covered her hair. The hat, the faint smile, and the air of modesty are the first things that stand out when comparing this photo to the one of Rrose on *Belle Haleine*. The portrait's concept, which features a lady promoting a feminine product and popularizing the image of femininity, is the most significant. The idea that women are modest, functional, and unostentatious.

This prompts a question, what was the aim? Did Duchamp make the perfume to compete with labels like Chanel and Guerlain, or was it more of a subtle jab at them? This is significant

because if *Belle Haleine* is a Readymade, the latter is probably accurate. But as with *Belle Haleine* belonging to both Readymades and Dada, there could also be multiple answers here. Duchamp, without a doubt, was poking fun at mainstream media and beauty companies, just like Dada and Readymades (in most cases), but there are other answers to this question, as they will be discussed in the following pages.

As was previously said, Readymades are mass-produced items that have been transformed into thinking tools and placed in a public setting, encouraging you to evaluate their absurdity.

Figure 1"Coco Chanel—Her Pearls and Maltese Cross Cuffs." classicchicagomagazine.com, n.d. https://classicchicagomagazine.com/coco-chanel-her-pearls-and-maltese-cross-cuffs/.

How does *Belle Haleine* fit into this description? As with Duchamp and Rrose's earlier work *Fountain*, an upside-down urinal that referred to the gay culture of the 1920s and the association between male sexual intercourse and public restrooms, Readymades also had a tendency to criticize the aforementioned mass-produced items. But what or whom is *Belle Haleine* mocking or invoking in our minds? As was already said, it was risky to include a trans person in a cosmetic product in the 1920s; it already pushed the boundaries of society. Most of Duchamp's works were satire, and his sense of humor is well known. A quick glance inside his studio apartment would be enough to establish this. There is a coat rack hanging from the ceiling, and he frequently tripped over a coat hanger that he eventually nailed to the floor out of rage. According to Helen Molesworth, all his work, in reality, is avoiding work. She says:

> *"*We have already seen the confusion between the spaces of work and leisure in the photographs of the Readymades in Duchamp's studio. We can also, see that the arrangements of the readymades interject an element of play among a set of otherwise fairly banal functional objects. Additionally, the ob lets blur the boundaries between home and work (typewriter cover, comb, shovel) in that their functions are all bound to the labor of maintenance, a stratum of labor structural both to the space of the home and more tradition ally conceived workspaces." [22]

The relationship between his studio and himself is fascinating. In the same article, Molesworth explores the photograph of Duchamp's studio; she states that it there on the picture, the readymades are shown not on pedestals or in vitrines but rather strategically arranged around a chair and a coatrack that is fastened to the floor in front of a bicycle wheel perched atop a kitchen stool. In a picture, we can see a urinal hanging from a doorjamb in the distance and a shovel hanging from a ceiling in the front. More photos: A grainy view of the studio transformed

[22] Molesworth, Helen. "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades." *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 50–61. https://doi.org/10.2307/777927.

into a maze by Duchamp's *Sculpture for Traveling* (1918), a shadow that looks like it belongs in a film noir, one that is cast by an off-kilter hat rack [23]

If Rrose is merely a theme, as some of the scholars addressed in Chapter 1 have suggested, then there is a connection between the artistic motif Rrose was created as a result of his laziness in wearing a wig and clothes, posing, and placing the portrait on a fragrance that had already been made. However, this is not the case since it has previously been shown that Rrose was more than just a motif; she was an integral component of Duchamp's identity.
However, laziness is not lost here either; it makes the art much lazier since he just snapped a photo of himself/herself and placed that portrait on the perfume.

Carla Gottlieb has an interesting take on this topic. In her article *Self-Portraiture in Postmodern Art* she makes the connection of *Belle Haleine* with Helen of Troy, she says:
"It is common knowledge among the European intelligentsia that the libretto by Ludovic Halévy and Henri Meilhac is a satire of the Second Empire, in which the empress Eugénie de Montijo, wife of Napoleon III, played a leading role in politics! She proved to be as fateful a woman for France and Paris as Helen had been for Troy and her Paris. Offenbach's centennial was celebrated in 1919, and Eugénie, who had survived the debacle of 1870/71 by fifty years, died in 1920. The two events could hardly have passed unnoticed by Duchamp. 1919 and 1920 are the two years preceding the creation of Belle Haleine." (Gottlieb 269)>
she is making the connection not only between Helen of Troy and *Belle Haleine* but Jacque Offenbach's Opera, which also happens to be a satire.

[23] Molesworth, Helen. "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades.", 50–61.

It is already clear that Duchamp was a highly impressionable person; it is to no one's surprise that he felt inspired by Offenbach and Helen of Troy, but in what ways? Well, it is unnecessary to go too far; this fact is too specific to be a coincidence.

This demonstrates how Duchamp was influenced by the major industries of the day. One intriguing relationship that may be drawn between Duchamp/Rrose Sélavy and the well-known Coco Chanel is this. During the 1920s, when Coco Chanel was at the height of her career, she met the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, who gained acceptance into the ballet world, and her reputation only grew from there. Chanel and Duchamp are linked in numerous ways. The most noteworthy fact is that *Belle Haleine* and Chanel's first perfumes were both created in 1921. The first fragrance to feature the designer's name was Chanel's.[24] Duchamp might have drawn inspiration from Coco Chanel because of their similar flamboyant aesthetics and disregard for gender norms. The first lady to wear shorts and slacks and to have a "garçon" (boyish) hairdo were both created by Chanel. Duchamp might have felt at home in this. Is there proof that the two knew of each other before we dive into their world? The answer is yes, and it is attributed to Man Ray. Rumor has it that Coco Chanel wanted to have her picture taken by him[25]. As was already established in earlier chapters, Man Ray and Duchamp were close friends and co-creators of *Belle Haleine*, as evidenced by the fact that Man Ray himself took the portrait of Rrose on *Belle Haleine.*

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[24] Sánchez Vegara, Isabel. "Top 10 Amazing Facts You Didn't Know about Coco Chanel."Theguardian.com. February 24, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/feb/24/top-10-amazing-facts-you-didnt-know-about-coco-chanel.

[25] Capiaghi, Alice. "Man Ray in London." Vogue.it, February 6, 2013. https://www.vogue.it/people-are-talking-about/vogue-arts/2013/02/man-ray.

This story begs the question: Since *Belle Haleine* was a Readymade and, in ways, Dada, did this mean Duchamp was mocking Coco Chanel? The answer is no, and I argue that Duchamp respected Chanel; the entire beauty industry was what he was making fun of. Most of Duchamp's work was pushing limits, and Chanel shared this trait with him. It is intriguing to see how this relationship is revealed from a female perspective. Rrose's hair is the same length as *Belle Haleine's*, which is close to the style Chanel popularized. Rrose's hair may have been longer, but Duchamp decided against it; this could be the reason. Chanel may have served as Duchamp's inspiration, despite the fact that he was pushing and criticizing the norms of beauty.
Both of them pushed the limits of femininity and the distinction between the sexes. Duchamp went one step further and created a perfume featuring a trans woman.

This is not his only work that has to do with mockery and puns; his *50 ccs of Paris Air,* which he made for his friend who could not afford much, gave him the air of Paris. This slightly correlates to the *Belle Haleine,* in the sense of it being a bottle that he bought and turned into something else; most importantly, there is a play with air in both these works and the apparent mockery. In the *50 ccs of Paris Air,* it is evident that Duchamp is mocking the idea of famous landmarks and people's desire to visit them. The sneering with *Belle Hal*eine has already been discussed throughout the thesis.

Since discussing Duchamp's other artworks, a vital artwork in this discussion is his *Portrait Multiple de Marcel Duchamp* of 1917, by an unidentified photographer. This photo speaks volumes about his personality; on the image, we can see five Marcel Duchamps creating a circle, starting from his back all the way to both side profiles and 1/3 of his front face. This photo could represent his alter egos, of how he felt most of the time. Often times alter egos help with acquiring the characteristics that the person wants but doesn't have, but what's interesting is that

one of his alter egos is a woman; this could indicate his desire to be more than one gender and, on his passion, to push the boundaries of the normative gender rules.

Ultimately, this is a case of gender and fluidity in Marcel Duchamp's art and the way he pushed the limits. He didn't view gender as a method to confine something; instead, he saw it as a way to blur the lines between the genders, especially when it comes to art. Given that he was equally interested in setting them in opposition to one another, Duchamp's art effectively eliminated gender. She wore hats, dresses, fur coats, and so forth while she was Rrosé.

5. Conclusion

After exploring Marcel Duchamp's world, many questions have been raised and addressed. This thesis sought to locate Marcel Duchamp in the fluidity of his identity and bridge the gap between the masculine and feminine critiques of his art. His problematic relationship with his mother and sisters is understandable when you take into account his early years and the manner in which he was raised. showing up in his art, as well as the way he conducted himself and saw the world.

Belle Haleine-related questions were addressed, such as whether it is a Readymade or a Dada. Also discussed were the characteristics of Duchamp's parody and any possible sources of inspiration for the creation of *Belle Haleine.*

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