



The Fountain Archives

Interview with Saâdane Afif

by Catherine Somzé

Et si les objets pouvaient parler ?

7 r e v i e w s **9**

Saâdane Afif
The Fountain Archives
par Raphaël Brunel
Triennale de Vendôme (F), du 23 mai au 31 octobre

FA 0406, page arrachée / non sur page; 24 x 38 cm
In: Arturo Schwarz, Dada e Surrealismo racoperti, Skira editore, Milano, 2009; page 176.
Courtesy Saâdane Afif 2015.

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Le terme 'Fountain' trouve son origine dans une réflexion sur la possibilité de produire dans une logique économique qui est celle du multiple une seule œuvre unique et unique. C'est pour cela que l'œuvre a été produite pour cela sur l'industrie de l'édition. Mais au-delà des questions liées à la répétition et à la reproduction, il y a une autre question qui motive Saâdane Afif dans son entreprise, c'est la manière surabondante que cette archive symbolise de renouvellement et de réinvention. Elle témoigne des multiples commentaires qui permettent de dégager une sorte de redéfinir sans cesse le point de vue sur l'œuvre. On retrouve également les enjeux du travail d'Aff, son intérêt pour l'intervention, comme une forme d'émancipation de l'œuvre¹, comme moyen de la remettre en jeu et de faire évoluer l'intention initiale de l'œuvre. À ce jour, plus de cent œuvres ont été réunies. Le processus s'achèvera à la 100^e acquisition, comme un hommage au célèbre conte oriental et à son réservoir de richesses.

L'histoire pourrait s'arrêter là si Saâdane Afif ne poussait la perversité jusqu'à augmenter et enrichir

ce corpus de représentations déjà dense en y incorporant les revues d'art qui illustrent les articles sur son projet à l'aide d'une image de la Fontaine de Duchamp. Il s'agit d'un travail de recherche et de construction sur son propre travail se constitue progressivement une collection dans la collection, une mise en abîme de l'œuvre. L'œuvre est alors transformée en œuvre double. La page sur laquelle est imprimé ce texte est ainsi aménagée à être à son tour arrachée et encadrée pour servir d'illustration pour l'accompagnement de ce numéro de 02 à regagner les étagères de cette archive en cours d'édification.

Nous avons l'habitude d'y revenir plus en détail dans nos interviews.

2 Ce document photographique paraît pour la première fois en 1917 dans la revue allemande Der Sturm. L'œuvre originale ayant disparu, une copie en papier a été réalisée par la suite du vivant de l'artiste par l'éditeur Arturo Schwarz et d'après le cliché de Steiglitz. L'œuvre originale a été achetée par Afif, demandé à des artistes, amis ou proches, de faire des copies d'après les paroles de chansons, les expositions et les événements politiques ou de concert.





This year is the hundredth anniversary of *Fountain*, a white porcelain urinal signed by French artist Marcel Duchamp under the pseudonym “R. Mutt.” According to a now famous poll from 2004 held among five hundred experts in the art field, *Fountain* was deemed the most influential modern artwork ahead of Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* and Andy Warhol’s *Double Marilyn*.

Yet, its authorship is debated — unsurprisingly since the object is a “ready-made” — and it does not exist anymore. *Fountain* has come to us thanks to the now iconic photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz and the replicas authorized by Duchamp in the mid-1960s. The Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris has one, as well as Tate Modern in London, along with some fifteen other national institutions and private collections around the world. *Fountain* owes its legendary status to copies and illustrations. Not bad for a lost mass-produced item of plumbing from the past century.

No better choice then to celebrate the centennial of such a peculiar object — lost yet significant — than Berlin-based French artist Saâdane Afif who received the Marcel Duchamp prize in 2009. With its emphasis on processes and its seeming disregard for materials, his practice can be seen as an updated version of Duchamp’s own. Hence his place among “post-conceptualists.”

“Quote.”

Afif, who came to international attention with shows in Paris at the Palais de Tokyo in 2005 and in Kassel during the twelfth edition of Documenta in 2007, made a name for himself with projects that mimicked the music industry. He commissioned songs inspired by his art, hung them on walls, and let musicians play them during openings. He added the name of the commissioned writers to his own when advertising the work through posters, which he also deemed an integral part of his artistic practice. He was asking the quintessential modern art question: “What is art?”

In 2008, Afif started buying books containing reproductions of Duchamp’s *Fountain*. He then ripped out the relevant pages, framed them, and kept what remained of the publications on a shelf. *The Fountain Archives* were born — a project that is about to end and which irrevocably embodies Duchamp’s legacy with its use of found objects, and its enquiry into the way works of art live and die. ZOO interviews him in exclusivity in his studio in Paris where the shelves that used to store the altered publications comprising *The Fountain Archives* are now empty. Along with the framed missing pages, those publications are now on show at the Centre Georges Pompidou to celebrate the creative feats of Marcel Duchamp. Only time will tell whether we will do the same for Saâdane Afif in a hundred years.

Catherine Somzé: What was the trigger for *The Fountain Archives*?

Saâdane Afif: Well, at first it was a hobby really, buying any publication in which a reproduction of *Fountain* had been published. And then I was also thinking about how I could use the economy of the multiple to make unique pieces of art.

CS: Is it, then, at all possible to make something unique out of reproductions?

SA: There is a whole tradition of artists making work that isn’t unique and which is produced in series. These “multiples” are cheaper than unique works and can therefore be acquired by many more people. It’s a different way of spreading your work as an artist. Multiples are often mass-produced.

CS: And how does that production process differ in the case of *The Fountain Archives*?

SA: It relies on mass-production, the book industry, but then produces unique pieces because each of the ripped pages is unique. There is only one of them.

CS: A smart idea, but what allows us to label that as “art”?

SA: It’s playful, really, the way the value of art and the art system are subtly being questioned in that way.

CS: And when did your fascination for Duchamp’s urinal start?

SA: Well, that’s the thing you see. I’m not that interested in the artwork itself. I’m interested in the way in which viewers make meaning of it. Duchamp was the first to acknowledge the fact that there is something of a triangular relationship between an artwork, the artist, and the viewer. It’s the beholder who makes the picture in his or her head really. “C’est le regarder qui fait le tableau” Marcel Duchamp once wrote. Likewise, each book in *The Fountain Archives* represents a perspective on the urinal. And the sum of all the books gives a simultaneous vision of all these interpretations together.

CS: But don’t you think *The Fountain Archive* becomes a kind of mystification of Duchamp’s urinal then? Because it gives it such a prominent role?

SA: The purpose of *The Fountain Archives* is rather to make visible the fact that an artwork itself develops something like fictions around itself, how the work exists through exchanges by a community looking at it, which makes it possible for the urinal to have entered art history. And this is my point; to look at that mechanism. And, in the case of Duchamp’s urinal, it has generated so many commentaries, it’s really astonishing!

CS: So, how would you define your practice? Are you a collector?

SA: I don’t see myself as a collector. I use collecting as a tool in the process of representing the wealth of interpretations Duchamp’s urinal has generated. For that, I set myself a protocol, which was buying the publications, and then ripping the page, or pages, on which the urinal was reproduced and framing them. And then there are the shelves with all the books that I display as sculptures. They can be seen as the negative or the mould of the work. And all these books have been destroyed, because I’ve torn pages out of them. So, it’s an archive without the objects that made me gather them in the first place.

CS: How has this way of working developed?

SA: Process art is a little bit like music production. You write a score, and you follow that score, to extremes, and sometimes it really becomes absurd!

CS: That is?

SA: Some twelve years ago or so, I had this question about being an artist, at home or in my studio, making things that could be exhibited in a museum, and to be included in the art system. I was skeptical about this situation, about this “me, myself, and my studio” thing. So I tried to find a strategy to include the imaginary of someone else in the work. That’s when I started commissioning song texts, something on the side of my work, something like a vibration, a resonance. And the reactions have been so good so far, so I kept on doing it, and now I have about 150 different songs!

CS: So you’re a pop music artist?! [laughs]

SA: Absolutely not! [laughs] I actually don’t care so much about music. What I’m rather interested in is the fact that everybody has agreed to say that a song has a subject matter like “love,” “flowers,” “nature,” “cities,” etcetera. So why could a piece of art not be considered a worthy subject matter for a song? A pop song is also a recognizable format for viewers who go like, “Ok, yes, I get it,” and then it is also part of a production system that can be used to make art. Once the songs have been written, they can be performed. So the idea is to move from the original artwork to the song to the performer. So you have this kind of chain in which in this case a work of art leads to a song, which itself leads to a performance, which itself gives way to another artwork. The goal is to keep this chain going so that it gives way to unexpected situations and possibilities. This is the way you come to new ideas. So for instance now I’m working with Instagram.

CS: It’s your new project, right? You collect postcards representing fountains that were sent in 1917 and you then post them on Instagram.

SA: The idea was to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Duchamp’s *Fountain* with this collection of postcards.

CS: Does it have a name?

SA: Just *Fountain* — 1917. It’s this idea of those two key words turning around the title, one date and one name, one object. So, that’s how I started. I will make a book with that, which will be released by the end of April. But the processes I’m involved in, most of the time, are not visible. My work is not visual but they do have the potential for being reactivated in different ways and forms, like the song texts, which are now part of the artworks they were based on in the first place. All these works are potentially active but not necessarily visible. So books and

exhibitions are just snapshots of the specific state of an artwork at a very specific moment. The posters I make follow the same logic. They are a very good format to set a date, to set a title, to put down the names of the people I'm working with. They are like a statement.

CS: Do these projects ever end then?

SA: To come back to *The Fountain Archives* for instance, that project may have started as a hobby but it has become so important in my practice; there are so many publications to be found in which the urinal has been reproduced that I need to set myself a kind of benchmark or end point.

CS: Which will be?

SA: I have decided to end when hitting the symbolic number of 1001 with its reference to fiction. It should be this year, 2017, the year of *Fountain's* hundredth anniversary. But you see, what is really fascinating to me now about that project is that for the past three or four years, it has been producing its own commentary, and I have created a special section in *The Fountain Archives*, "Augmented," to distinguish those publications from the rest of the commentaries on the urinal. So there's something switching.

CS: What do you mean?

SA: *The Fountain Archives* is contributing to this sum of fictions created around Duchamp's *Fountain* and this is actually what I'm showing at the Pompidou for the first time. After that I have another show at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.

CS: Which will be slightly different than the one in Paris. Imagine the present interview is accompanied by reproductions of your own work featuring reproductions of Duchamp's *Fountain*. What will happen then?

SA: I will include the reproductions in the "Augmented" section, and will add the magazine to its dedicated shelf in Monaco!

CS: So this interview and this issue of ZOO will become part of your artwork?

SA: Yeah, yeah! I like those funny yet subtle ways of developing the work. This is the slightly perverse part of the game that I love! [laughs]

www.saadaneafif.com
www.thefountainarchives.net
www.instagram.com/fountain_1917

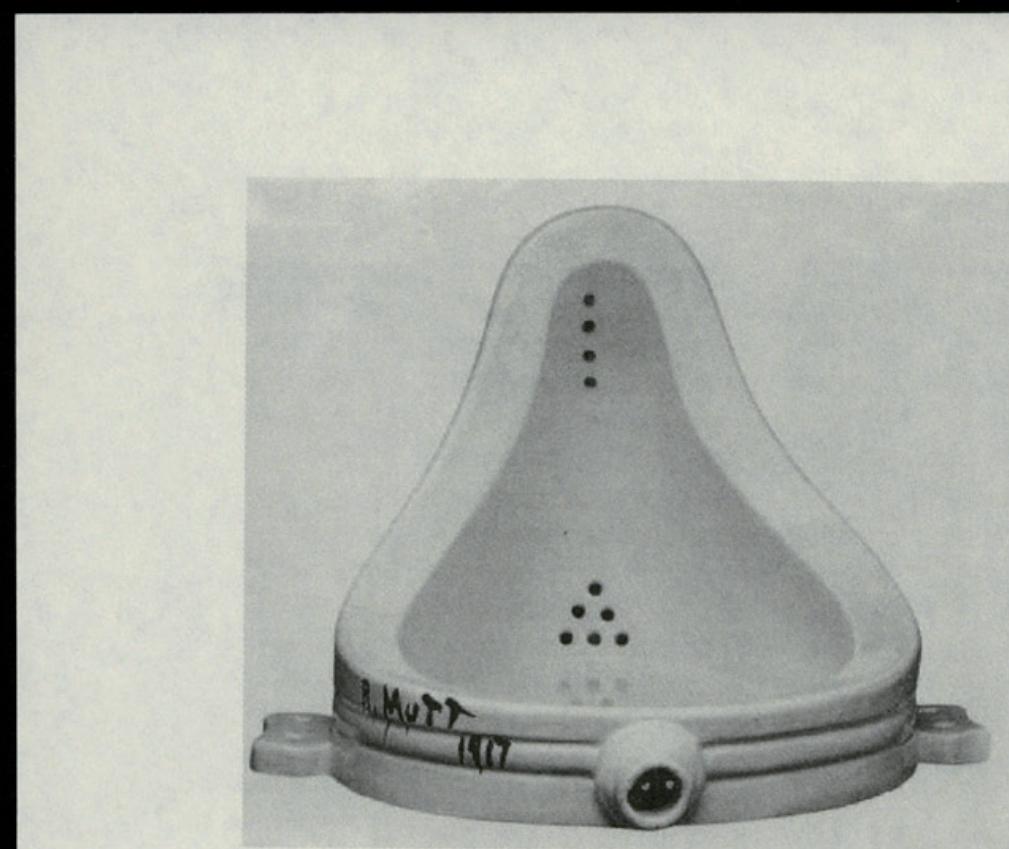


Ilustración 2. Marcel Duchamp, *Fuente*.

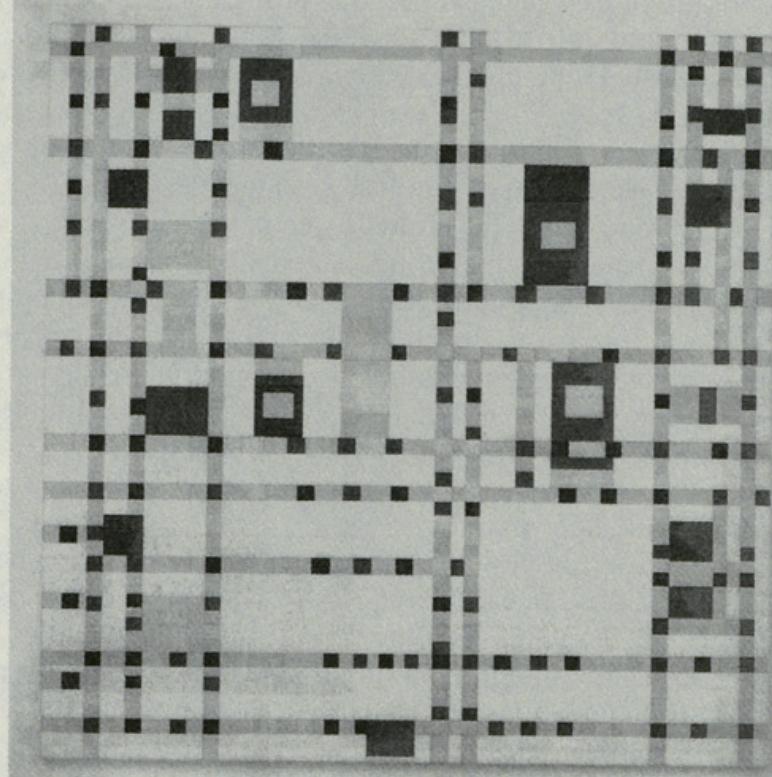


Ilustración 3. Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie-Boogie*



344. HYÈRES-LES-PALMIERS — Fontaine Godillot et Eglise Anglicane
Godillot avenue and Anglican church



89 TROYES. — La Fontaine Argence. — LL.



The Fountain in Public Gardens,
Halifax, N. S.



31 DAX. — La Fontaine chaude, débit journalier, 2.400.000 litres à 64° centigrades. — LL.
Edition des Nouvelles Galeries

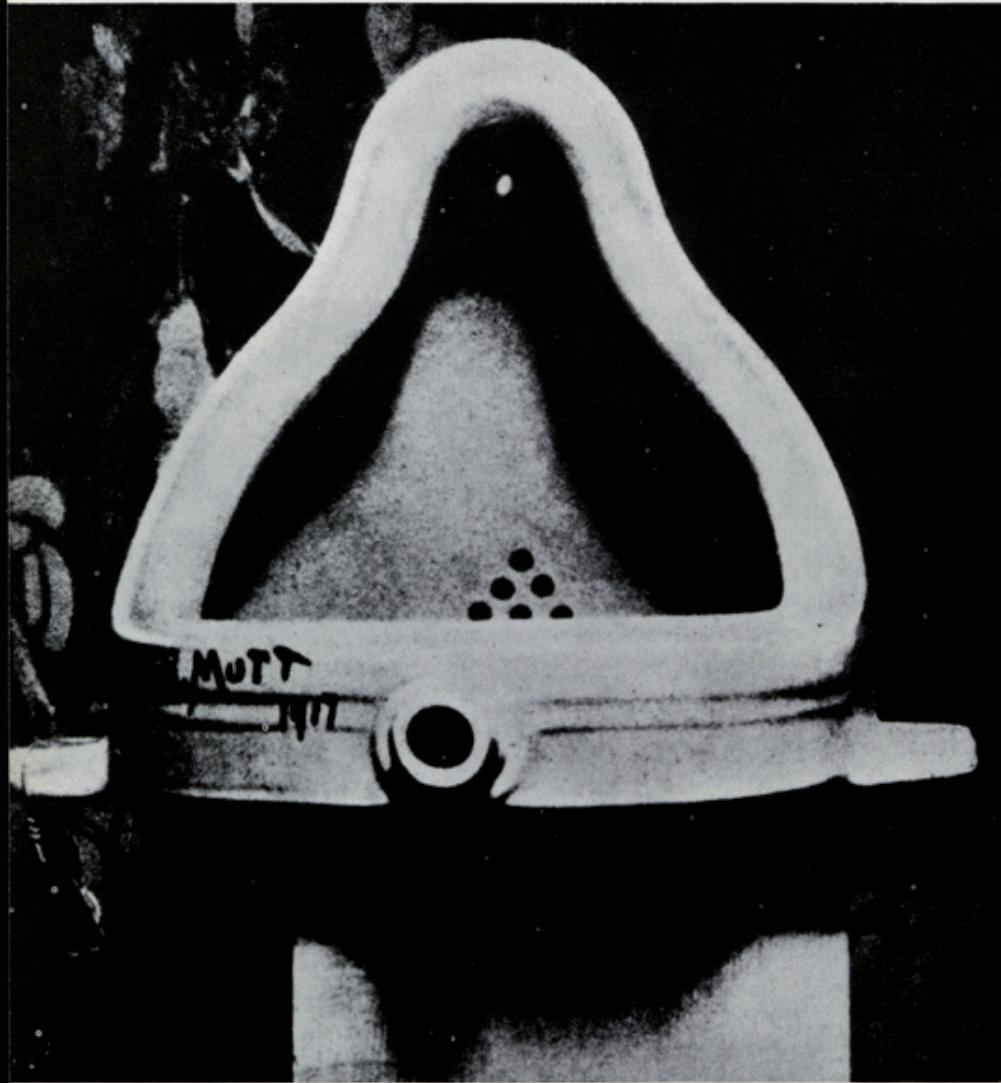


Manzelbrunnen

Stettin



402 Jardin du Luxembourg, Fontaine Carpeaux (détail).
ND. Phot.

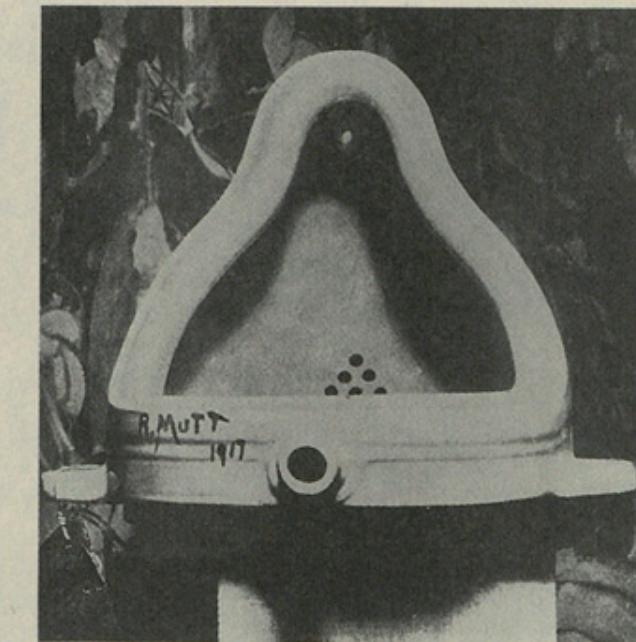


MARCEL DUCHAMP : *Fontaine*, objet exposé au Salon des Indépendants de New York en 1917. Signé R. Mutt.



C'est le dadaïsme qui est responsable de la rupture avec la conception traditionnelle de l'œuvre d'art.

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◀マルセル・デュシャン 泉 レディメ
イド・1917年

►マン・レイ 贈り物 オブジェ・1921-63年

▼マン・レイ 思考に対する物質の優位

ソラリゼーション・1931年

