

Akim Monet Fine Arts, LLC



[Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968)]

Mental Chess Board

Wood box reproducing Marcel Duchamp's *Mental Chess Board* from 1937 and containing an exhibition catalogue (64 pp 13 ³/₈ x 4 ¹/₄ in; 340 x 107 mm, complete with the price list); a portfolio containing reproductions and facsimiles of Marcel Duchamp's works, also including H. Vuibert, *Les Anaglyphes Geometriques*, Paris Librairie Vuibert, 112 (with 3D glasses); a book of articles on Duchamp by Andre Breton and Arturo Schwarz (inserted, on separate sheet, a reproduction of *Le Grand Verre*); an audiocassette of Duchamp speaking "Priere d'ecouter" with, on top of it, a miniature reproduction of Enrico Donati's breast from 1947; a single photograph of "Marcel Duchamp at the Age of 85 for View"; a colophon.

14 ¹/₂ x 14 ¹/₄ x 2 ¹/₄ in (37 x 36.5 x 6 cm)

1991

Numbered 417/850 on the inside cover

Edited on the occasion of the exhibition "Marcel Duchamp," Antwerp: Ronny Van de Velde, 1991

PROVENANCE

Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp

EXHIBITED

Disruptive selection, Fall 2019, Popcorn Gallery Akim Monet Fine Arts, Los Angeles
Assisted Readymade, Winter 2022, The Lone Star Gallery Akim Monet Fine Arts, Dallas

NOTES ABOUT MARCEL DUCHAMP'S 1937 MENTAL CHESS BOARD

In the early 1920s, a rumor quickly circulated throughout the American and European art world that the celebrated French painter, Marcel Duchamp—who was best known for the controversy that had surrounded the showing of his *Nude Descending a Staircase* at the Armory Show in 1913—had quit making art in order to play chess.

Whereas the account was within the artistic communities of New York and Paris, it is true that he made a conscious decision to stop painting, and that he increasingly devoted more and more of his time to playing the game of chess. Indeed, in the early 1920s, after having abandoned the most ambitious work he had attempted to that point in his career—*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, which he had worked on intermittently in New York from 1915 through 1923—Duchamp returned to Europe and seems to have seriously contemplated the possibility of becoming a professional chess player.

Over the course of the next twenty years, he engaged in regular tournament play and, for a brief period, was considered one of the strongest players on the French national team. Both pursuits—painting and chess playing—were activities taught to him by his older brothers, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Jacques Villon. In 1910, he painted *The Chess Game* (Philadelphia Museum of Art; Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection), a large canvas in bright Fauve colors depicting his brothers intently engaged in a game of chess, their wives relaxing in the lush garden setting of their home and studio in Puteaux.

A year later, when Duchamp began his first experiments with Cubism, he again turned to chess as his subject, executing a series of drawings and two paintings entitled *Portrait of Chess Players*, images that, again, depict his brothers intently engaged in a game of chess. But in this series, Duchamp was not content to blindly follow the dictates of a predetermined cubist style. "I wanted to invent or find my own way," he recalled years later, "instead of being the plain interpreter of a theory." His solution was to fuse the subject of his earlier painting of his brothers playing chess with the movements and action of the chess game itself, thereby rendering physical the product of an essentially cerebral activity (the opposite approach of most cubist painters, who generally departed from the visual analysis of a purely concrete form).

Throughout his life, Duchamp was committed to challenging the authority of an old French saying, "*Bête comme un peintre*" ("Stupid like a painter"), which presumed that painting was a totally mindless activity.

"I was interested in ideas," he said of his paintings of the cubist period. "I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind."

Duchamp accomplished this (and more) when he introduced the concept of the readymade, where commonplace everyday objects were elevated to the status of art by virtue of having been selected and signed by the artist. As is well known today, Duchamp chose an assortment of artifacts to serve as his first readymades--bicycle wheels, bottle racks, a snow shovel, etc.--but with chess and art forming such an important part of his everyday activities, it was inevitable that he would one day consider a chessboard as a candidate for inclusion within this same special class of objects.

Wherever Duchamp lived, a chessboard was always close at hand. In 1937, he hung a blank wood chessboard onto the wall of his studio, which, according to Robert Lebel (Duchamp's biographer and the first historian to compile a catalogue raisonné of the artist's work), Duchamp used to facilitate the playing of 'mental chess games.'

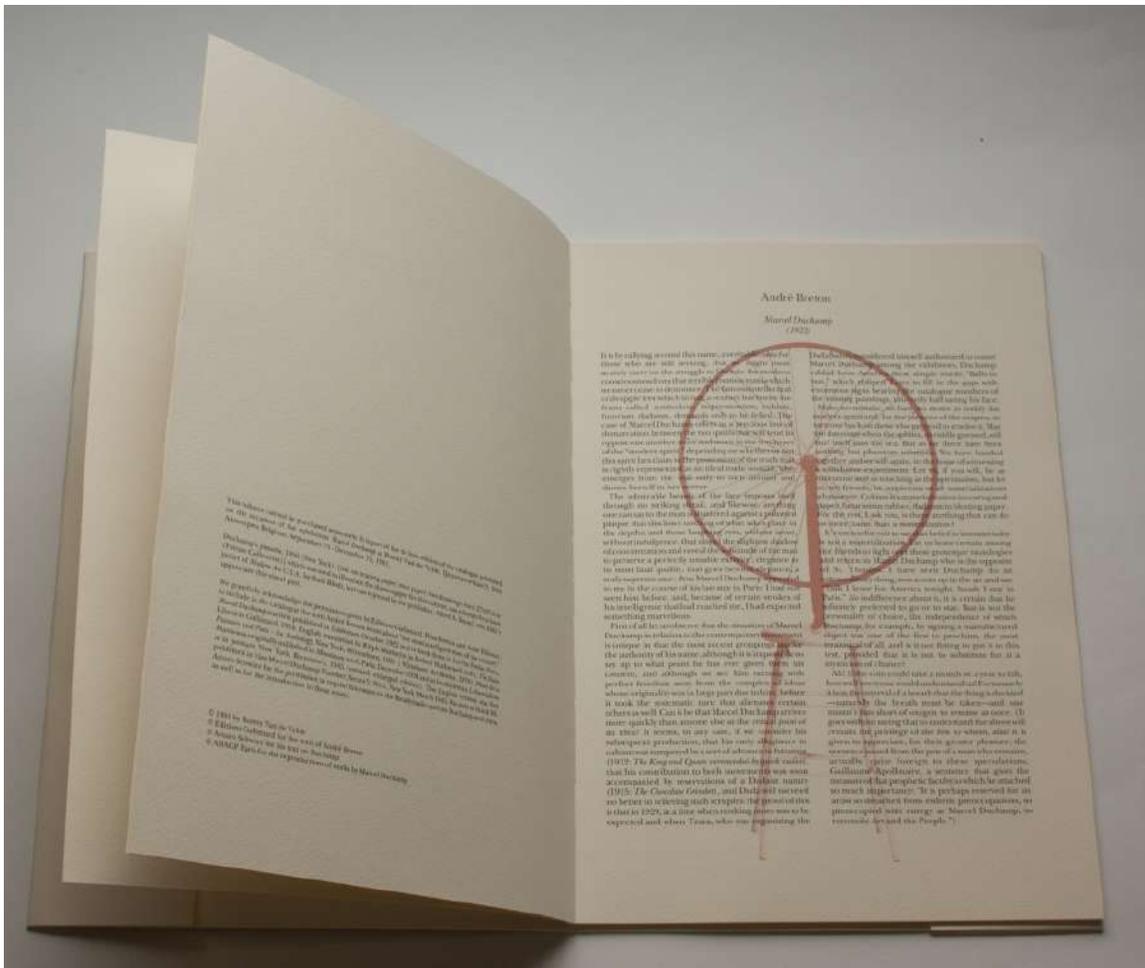
It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the square format of the board defined a position on the wall that--at least in most artists' studios--would have been occupied by a painting. A photograph taken in 1967 shows Duchamp in his Neuilly studio, standing next to his Chessboard, which hangs prominently on the wall and is--considering the fact that he was still famous for having quit painting--a tell-tale visual metaphor for the career he so completely and effectively abandoned almost exactly a half century earlier.

Source : <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/marcel-duchamp-1887-1968-chessboard-echiquier-5729563-details.aspx>



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