

# USE REMBRANDT AS AN IRONING BOARD!

**BICYCLE WHEEL (1913), MARCEL DUCHAMP**



**I**n 1913, the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) threw aside the conventional materials and methods of making art to produce one of the most astonishing and groundbreaking works of the modern period. By mounting a bicycle fork and wheel on the seat of a wooden stool, he invented the first “readymade.”

Duchamp was not the first to use everyday objects in art: the Cubists had done so in their collages, but they had chosen items for their representational or aesthetic value. By selecting two mass-produced objects with no intrinsic significance or beauty, Duchamp challenged the notion of how art is defined, declaring that craft and visual appeal were irrelevant. What mattered was that the artist had chosen something ordinary, completely stripped it of useful meaning, and—by giving it a title—created a new idea for it.

Strictly speaking, *Bicycle Wheel* was an “assisted readymade,” as it involved selecting and assembling two objects, but more single-object

## IN CONTEXT

### FOCUS

#### The readymade

#### BEFORE

**1912** Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque incorporate fragments of items such as newspaper into their collages.

#### AFTER

**From 1916** Members of the Dada movement begin to challenge conventional notions of art, prioritizing the absurd over logic and common sense.

**1964** American Pop artist Andy Warhol produces his *Brillo Boxes*, turning products into works of art.

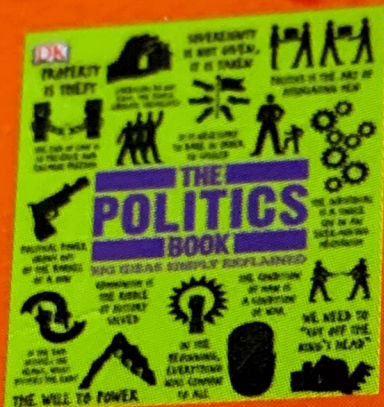
**1993** Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco exhibits a shoebox in a room on its own, a banal and meaningless object intended to draw the visitor’s attention to his or her surroundings.

readymades were to follow, including *Bottle Rack* (1914) and a porcelain urinal, *Fountain* (1917), which was rejected by the New York Society of Independent Artists as “by no definition a work of art.”

### Objects and thoughts

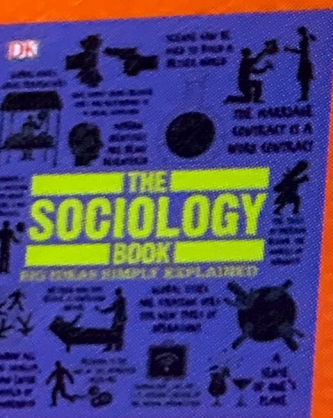
The current version of *Bicycle Wheel* is a replica Duchamp made four decades after he lost the first version, but he felt the “authenticity” of its anonymous components was unimportant. His readymades had profound repercussions later in the century, particularly on Pop and Conceptual art, which often featured mass-produced commercial items. ■





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\$25.00 USA  
\$32.00 Canada



ISBN 978-1-4654-5337-2

Printed in China

