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MARCEL DUCHAMP'S ART AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF MODERN PARIS*

JAMES HOUSEFIELD

ABSTRACT. Modern artist Marcel Duchamp's concept of the readymade remains influential though controversial. I propose a new interpretation of the readymades as a coherent series of works that re-create the landscape of Paris in the artist's New York City studio. Using techniques that parallel the conceptual and visual transformations of space performed by cartography and by landscape painting, Duchamp created a personal, monumental, and three-dimensional "map" by replacing Parisian monuments with small-scale objects. The readymades thus expand on the quest of modern artists for innovative ways to represent landscape and, at the same time, offer geographers new ways of seeing landscape. *Keywords:* Marcel Duchamp, landscape, modern art, monuments, Paris, readymade sculpture, urban geography.

Although Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) ranks among the most influential artists of the twentieth century, geographers have paid scant attention to his work.¹ Much of Duchamp's reputation is based on his idea of the "readymade," a mass-produced object that the artist did not make but selected (and, sometimes, modified). One of the most notorious of the readymades remains his 1917 *Fountain*, a common urinal that the artist signed with a pseudonym (Figure 1). Until the 1960s, the readymades were primarily exhibited alone or in small groups. Only Duchamp's close friends and patrons could have seen groups of the readymades together in his New York City studio, a context that gave the objects personal levels of meaning. Generations of critics and artists interpreted the readymades solely as avant-garde acts of anti-art, works that replaced the notion of physical artistic craft with an intellectual act of choice. With the readymades, however, Duchamp engaged questions of geography and landscape not typically associated with sculpture. This essay

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✦ DR. HOUSEFIELD is an assistant professor of art history at Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas 78666-4616.