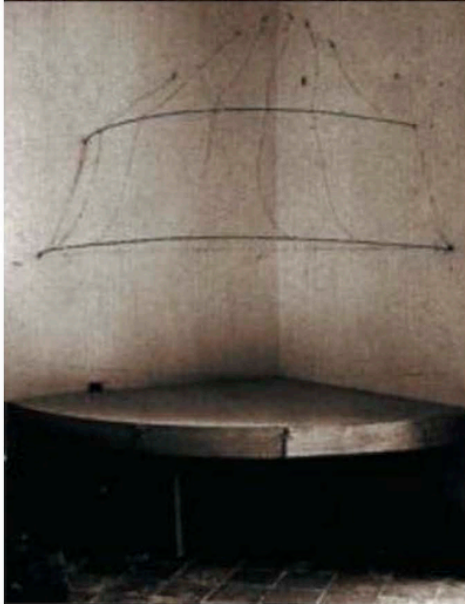


# Duchamp's last work of art

*A fireplace designed by the artist remains intact in his Cadaqués home*

MARINA OROZA 11/08/2008. The corner fireplace designed by Marcel Duchamp was discovered last year in Cadaques, where the artist spent his last summers and was inspired to create his artist's book "Cheminée Anaglyphe". If authorship is confirmed, the fireplace would be the last creation produced by the great master of contemporary art.



Duchamp's fireplace.  
Photo: Man Ray

The discovery took place in the 'objective chance' style surrealists enthused over, during the same summer we buried the ashes of my father Paco –or stepfather as some say, though I dislike it. We scattered the white ashes on the roots of a holm oak. Cupping some water in his hands, my son Lucas remarked, "I didn't know the ashes were so white and so pretty". That same day an Italian man came by my mother Lupe's apartment in Cadaques, accompanied by a well known villager. "We think Marcel Duchamp lived and designed a fireplace here. Is there a fireplace here? May we see it?" Astonished, my mother let the men in. The fireplace was filled up to its chimney with tennis shoes, old newspapers, plastic bags and board games. "We'll call you soon", they said but never called back or returned. My mother thought the men had not found what they were looking for, and only made a passing comment to me. Thinking of the white ashes and overflowing with strange emotions, I recalled the many times I had suggested that my mother use the fireplace, in spite of the hassle of dealing with the firewood...

We had forgotten all about the matter when one day, on our way back from the market, Lucas and I met a friend, an art expert, who spends his summers in Cadaques.

We explained where we lived. "But where exactly?", he asked, "in the apartment with Duchamp's fireplace or the one next door?" Someone had told him, "Vicenç, la xemeneia de Duchamp ;existeix!" ["Vicenç, Duchamp's fireplace actually exists!"] With wide open eyes, Lucas and I listened to what would happen if the fireplace was really Duchamp's: The Philadelphia Museum of Art would purchase it, and we would be able to buy a house... a house, a fireplace, a hearth. In my mind I kept shouting, "We must light the fireplace!" So suddenly the fireplace seemed more beautiful to us, shining like a raw diamond being polished in front of our eyes.

Our art expert friend dropped by and chatted with my mother in the terrace, I served them drinks and covered her with a shawl, for she was cold but had not noticed it. First, he explained, we had to confirm that Duchamp had really lived here, and then whether the fireplace was a work of art. If it was not, we could produce a special edition and include it in an industrial design catalogue. But if it really was Duchamp's fireplace... "Art is invaluable", the expert told the owner, "and I will always stand by you." He later suggested we leave the matter in the hands of an art dealer friend of his.

Had the fireplace belonged to any other artist, no doubts would have arisen. However in Duchamp's case any doubt is a source of inspiration. Decontextualised, turned upside down, given a title, and signed, the fireplace might have become another ready-made. But Duchamp was short on time; the fireplace was his last work. Evidence shows that he did live in this apartment and embark on the building the fireplace. He asked Emilio



Richard Hamilton behind the corner fireplace.  
Photo: Hux Mallá

Puignau to build it, and dedicated a drawing to him, "Un souvenir d'une cheminée de coin au coin de la cheminée" ("a memento from a corner fireplace in the fireplace corner"). The wire frame he put together to show the exact shape he wanted was photographed by Man Ray, and, supposedly, buried under the finished structure. Marcel Duchamp left Cadaques, and died shortly after.

Lucas was in awe scrutinizing the hearth while my sister was rambling about starting to charge an entrance fee. "And what will we put in that corner if they take it away?", she asked. "A little Ikea table, darling", answered my mother.

Richard Hamilton also came to visit. He confirmed the apartment and the fireplace were the ones he had known. He even shed a few tears and let himself be photographed leaning on the chimney.

The art dealer found an artist's book called "Cheminée Anaglyph", of which Marcel had made 100 copies. The book included blueprints of the fireplace and a pair of 3-D glasses to visualize them. And sure enough, through the colored cellophane we could see our fireplace's conical chimney ("la mateixa fandilla"). When lit, it resembles a woman's skirt with a fire burning under it. The sexual connotation is always

present in Duchamp, the artist who relinquished art for ideas.

We are now awaiting the visit of Duchamp's legatee who will decide whether the fireplace is a work of art. The legatee is Jackie Matisse, his stepdaughter –just as I was Paco's.

The fireplace is very beautiful, white, of extremely simple lines, it draws well, it breathes. As I recall, the leaden plug Duchamp made for his shower drain (to block foul smells) is not a plug anymore. It became an art piece and is shown in museums to this day. Perhaps our living room corner will end up fireplace-less, but the corner will survive. In any case, whether they take it away or leave it there, everything we see shall outlive us.

I dreamt I was scuba diving inside the fireplace, and that my son, who was downstairs, dreamt too. But not of a new house, he dreamt of a yacht –he does not feel uprooted in any way. It seems the fireplace, the hearth, has already become a part of our unconscious, breathing on, far from the art world. Marcel Duchamp said he preferred breathing to making art.

That summer I was working on a book, a long poem, which I finally titled Duchamp's Fireplace, the sky's womb in the midst of the Tramontanas, the north winds. *Together with the smoke I rise to the hearth that awaits us, and descend to the white ashes.*

**Marina Oroza** is an actress, poet, and the daughter of the owner of the apartment where Duchamp built his fireplace.