



LOS ANGELES

Julian Wasser: "Duchamp In Pasadena Redux" at Robert Berman Gallery

One of the most intriguing factors about appropriation art is the way it calls into question issues of authorship. So it seems only apt to go back to the source and apply those questions to the inventor of the "ready-made" himself, conceptual art pioneer Marcel Duchamp. Unsurprisingly, issues of authorship abound in the invigorating show at Robert Berman Gallery, "Duchamp in Pasadena Redux," which celebrates, and partially recreates, Duchamp's historic 1963 retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum. Beyond its seemingly straightforward concept, the Berman Gallery's restaging essentially presents a hall of mirrors, offering multiple levels of appropriation spanning back over a century, to the conception of the works themselves.

The original Duchamp retrospective was the brainchild of famed LA curator Walter Hopps, who had co-founded the influential Ferus Gallery before moving to the Pasadena Art Museum, and in 1962 had curated the first major survey of Pop Art, "New Paintings of Common Objects." In bringing the iconoclastic conceptualist to Southern California for his retrospective, Hopps had once again presciently captured a signal moment in art history (all in his first year on the job). So in a sense, Hopps is an author of this show as much as anyone. Sent to document the exhibition's opening was young magazine photographer Julian Wasser, and it is Wasser's photographs that form the heart of this exhibition. Having Duchamp's retrospective in Southern California was not just a coup for the burgeoning LA art scene, but testimony to its vitality and coming-of-age, and Wasser's images capture that energy,

as young artistic rebels like Andy Warhol, Dennis Hopper, Billy Al Bengston, Larry Bell, and Ed Ruscha all mingle memorably. Many of Wasser's photographs present moments that now seem iconic, from Duchamp posing rakishly beside his various works to the indelible image of the old artist playing chess with a voluptuous nude Eve Babitz (an event staged by Wasser; the story goes that Babitz was Hopps' mistress and had thus not been invited to the opening). Among other gems, the show presents the contact sheet for this series of images, as well as a trio of rare color prints.

But this show (called "Redux" as it is a restaging of a 2015 version seen in San Francisco) also included credible recreations of many of the original Duchamp works, including both paintings and the infamous readymades, most of them made by artist Gregg Gibbs. All were commissioned by gallerist Robert Berman, who is ultimately the Barnum behind this meticulous, highly entertaining Duchampian meta-museum.

—GEORGE MELROD

"DUCHAMP WITH DOOR SCULPTURE," DUCHAMP RETROSPECTIVE, PASADENA ART MUSEUM, 1963

Julian Wasser

VINTAGE GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 13½" x 10½"

PHOTO: COURTESY ROBERT BERMAN GALLERY