

A Short History of Piss In Art

- 1.** Arguably the most important artwork of the 20th century, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) is an upturned porcelain urinal that he purchased at a plumbing supply store, signed, and exhibited. Much has been made about Duchamp's use of "found objects" but little connection has been made to its representation of one of the earliest forms of self-expression.
- 2.** Reading a Dadaist manifesto to a small crowd in 1918, poet Tristan Tzara demands "the right to piss in different colours."
- 3.** Jackson Pollock, also known as "Jack the Dripper," urinates in Peggy Guggenheim's fireplace during a party. It has also been suggested that Pollock was a bed wetter and that his drip painting style references early pissing contests he held with his family. No less than five paintings by Pollock are titled *Number 1*.

4. In 1958, a Parisian crowd of upwards of 3000 people pay \$3 each to attend the exhibition *The Void* by Yves Klein. The audience is served a cocktail and led inside the gallery, where they find only bare walls. The police are called and a small riot ensues. The next day, everyone who drank the cocktail pisses blue.

5. At the Festum Fluxorum in Dusseldorf, 1962, Nam June Paik debuts his *Fluxus Champion Contest*. A group of men stand in a circle and urinate into a bucket while Paik stands nearby with a stopwatch. The man who can continue the longest is rewarded by the group singing his national anthem. The first champion comes in at just under a minute.

6. A 1968 score by artist Larry Miller called *Patina* asks the performer to "urinate on an egg until it has a nice patina or until it explodes."

7. In April 1970, at the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco (which he had founded earlier in the year), Tom Marioni presented *Piss Piece*. The artist stood atop a ladder and pissed

into a pail beneath him. The work was presented as a sculpture. He later produced a similar soundwork called *Yellow Sound for Kandinsky* (1991).

8. In the late seventies, Andy Warhol began producing his *Oxidation Painting* series by having young men come into his studio and piss on large canvases prepared with copper paint. A parody of Pollock, for certain, but just as likely chosen to indulge Warhol's voyeuristic tendencies.

9. 1981: David Hammons is arrested for public urination after territorial pissing on a steel sculpture by Richard Serra. The series of photographs documenting the event is titled *Pissed Off*.

10. British art duo Gilbert and George explore the idea of pissing as fraternity in many of their large colour canvases, most clearly in 1983's *Friendship Pissing* and *Urinight*, both images of men pissing criss-cross.

11. Although his work regularly features bodily fluids, such as menstrual blood and semen, when Andres Serrano photographs a crucifix submerged in a glass of urine in 1989 and titles it *Piss Christ*, he sets off a storm of controversy. In the months that follow, many opportunists package their own piss products including *Piss Pope*, *Piss Bush*, and (my favourite) *Piss Don Knots*.

12. For *Piss Flowers*, 1991, British artist Helen Chadwick and her husband David Notarius urinate into heaps of snow and produce twelve white-enameled bronze casts from the resulting cavities.

13. Tony Tasset's *I Peed My Pants* from 1994 is a life-size portrait of the artist confronting the viewer with a large stain in the crotch of his khaki pants. The expression on his face is one of both defiance and shame, inverting the common pissing-as-machismo theme.

14. In a show she curated from the permanent collection of a decorative museum in 1994,

Sophie Calle places a red plastic bucket in a cabinet of ancient chamber pots. A taped recording explains the significance with a highly personal and poignant story of her holding her ex-husband's penis as he pees.

15. Combining his interest in architecture and activism, Toronto artist Adrian Blackwell installs *Public Water Closet* (1998), a public toilet placed at the busy intersection of Spadina Avenue and Queen Street West. The door is outfitted with a two-way mirror, allowing the user to see outside but not be seen.

16. In 1998, Janet Murray mounted a botanical installation in the public restrooms of Toronto's Metro Hall. The self-cleaning water systems of the toilet and urinal provided the plant life with a sustainable ecosystem.

17. Visiting the MoMA to give a lecture on High Art/Low Art in the late nineties, Brian Eno manages (through a narrow slit in the glass display case) to piss in Duchamp's *Fountain*.

Dave Dyment, 2001

