Tomkins grants us a never-before-seen glimpse into the life of the talented, controversial artist Marcel Duchamp. Over the course of several years, Tomkins developed a friendship with Duchamp that transcended the journalist-subject relationship, and this bred familiarity and ease between the two conversationally. As a result, we readers see Duchamp discussing profound and mundane aspects of his life and career. These discussions build a greater understanding of his works by adding components, piece by piece, to his artistic thought process and his desire to engage in what he called “slow work” (p. 44). He took time to create his art, had a sense of humor about it, and was acutely aware of the fields of perspective and psychoanalysis (p.54-65). Ultimately, he participated in and spearheaded multiple genre shifts with Cubism, Dadaism, conceptual art, and what he lovingly called “readymades” (p.51).

In these unedited transcripts, we see an artist that has moved with and ahead of the times; one who has anticipated the trends in the art world and has intentionally redirected his work to be more authentic, more engaging, and to challenge our accepted ideas of what art really is. Remarking that “tradition is the prison in which you live” (p. 83), Duchamp knowingly set himself apart from the previous centuries of genre art. Photo courtesy of www.wikipaintings.org.

**Discussion**

1. Tomkins went through about six hours of tape, which he then edited into a dialogue. Do you find this dialogue cohesive? What stood out to you while you read the interview?
2. 2013 is the centenary of the first readymade, *Bicycle Wheel*, and the debut of *Nude Descending a Staircase* at the inaugural Armory Show in New York. Discuss the impact these pieces made on the art world, and if you're personally familiar with them, you.

3. There exists to this day a pet theory that the readymades were not in fact found objects but made by Duchamp himself. Based on Duchamp's discourse about the readymades, does this seem plausible?

4. Duchamp gave this interview when he was 77 years old. Do you detect any regrets, any joys, or a sense of satisfaction during this retrospective interview?

5. Duchamp thought of the artist as a “mediumistic being”; someone external to whatever experience a viewer might call art. Is this debatable? Can an artist truly divest themselves from the subject of the art and strictly present the piece through a chosen medium without influencing how the piece is ultimately viewed? And, how would Duchamp answer this?

6. Duchamp appears fairly forthcoming about his work and projects. Yet, several times during his career, when he was purportedly not working, including during his ‘retirement’ that took place concurrently with this interview, we have found out after the fact that he was working, usually on a large piece. Do you think his privacy was crucial to his work? Contrast this method with the current cultural phenomenon of previewing one’s art (think press releases, early album, movie, and art previews, and the ever-popular “what are you working on next?” interviews).

7. Tomkins has remarked that Duchamp “broke down the limitations on art, the boundaries, and it seems to me that this has today become a kind of an article of faith on the part of younger artists. That they are not constrained by any traditions, that they have to defend their own way completely and that they're no good unless they do. He’s not the only one, but I think he was one of the artists that was instrumental in this whole process of doing away with the idea that there was a way of doing things in art and that you had to learn it and follow it”. Is this a relatively true statement? Can you think of any other artists that catapulted these same principles to the fore of art practice?

**Further reading**


