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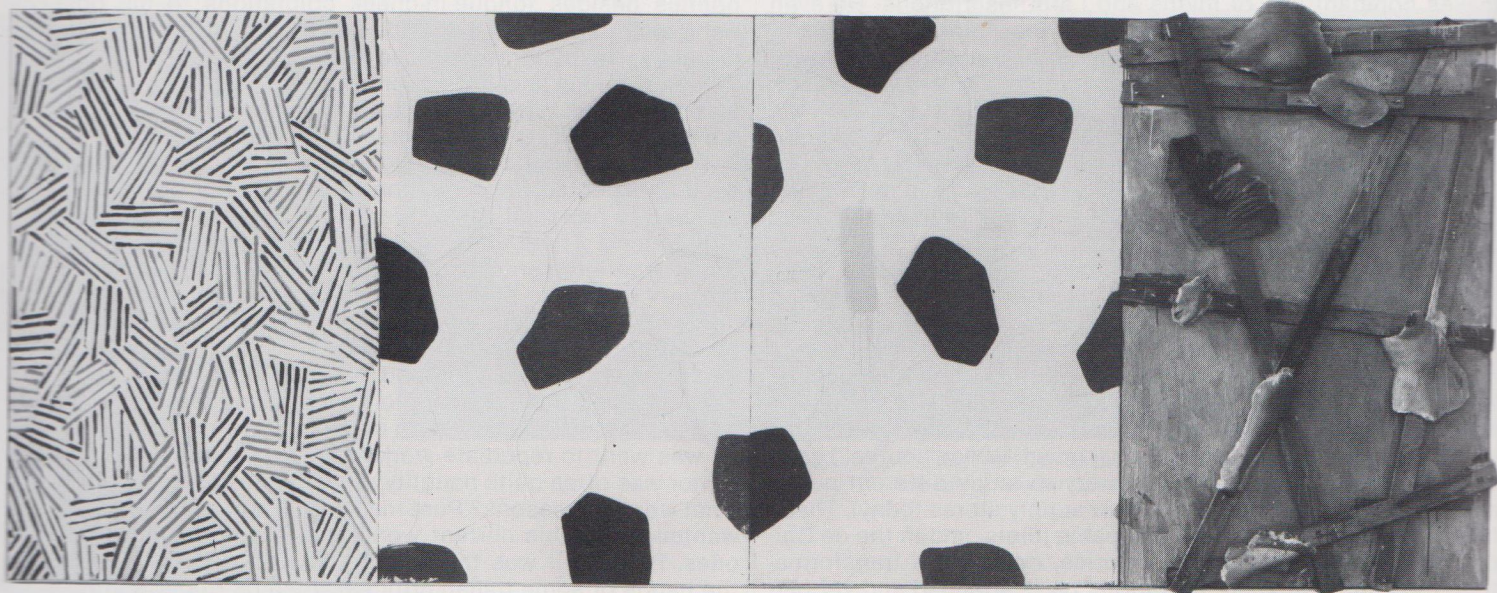


Fig. 1. Jasper Johns, *Untitled*, 1972. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects (4 panels), 72 x 192". Collection Dr. Peter Ludwig, Cologne. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

JASPER JOHNS' *UNTITLED* (1972) AND MARCEL DUCHAMP'S *BRIDE*

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Jasper Johns' *Untitled* (1972) presents a narrative derived from Marcel Duchamp's concept of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23).

Fig. 2. Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas with plaster casts, 51 x 44 x 3 1/2". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

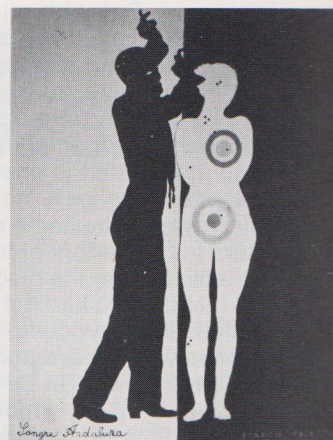
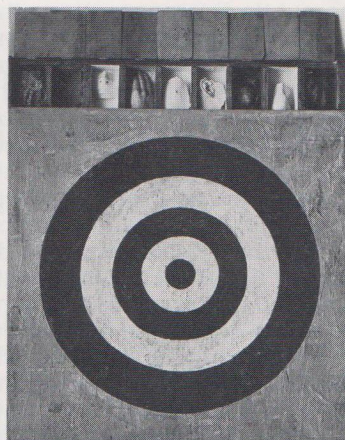


Fig. 3. Francis Picabia, *Spanish Night*, 1922. Private Collection.

In 1972 Jasper Johns painted an enormous (6 by 16 ft.), enigmatic work which is now in the Ludwig Museum in Cologne (Fig. 1). This untitled work features a peculiar amalgam of pictorial elements: a panel of hatching strokes, two fields of flagstone patterns, and a panel of illusionistically painted casts of female body parts attached to wooden boards. Johns has said that he recognized the body cast panel to be "psychologically loaded" and that he sought to counteract this emotional charge through the use of more abstract patterns for the other motifs.¹ On several occasions, he has emphasized the correspondences he established between the size and scale of the elements depicted and in the reiteration of certain shapes.² Despite these attempts at unification and emotional neutrality, the panels remain stubbornly disjunctive and the overall effect of the work strangely haunting.

Johns' statements are perhaps evasive. The cohesiveness of the work resides not in its formal structure but in its iconography. The *Untitled* of 1972 presents a narrative derived from Marcel Duchamp's concept of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*. Through an analysis of the encoded language of the three disparate motifs of Johns' untitled work, the relationship between Johns' painting and the mythology of Duchamp's *Bride* will be revealed.

It has long been recognized that Duchamp served as a major source of influence and inspiration for Johns, who himself acknowledged Duchamp as his mentor. Johns has dated his preoccupation with the older master to 1958-59 when he began an extensive personal investigation of Duchamp and his Dada-

ist circle. Based on discussions in the current literature, the year 1964 would be seen as having witnessed the culmination of Duchamp's impact upon Johns, with the execution of Johns' homage to Duchamp in the painting *According to What* and with the publication of Max Kozloff's insightful article, "Johns and Duchamp," in *Art International*, which gave the relationship between the two artists its critical/art historical seal of approval and recognition. Interpretations of Johns' more recent (post-mid-Sixties) art with regard to Duchamp have all but ceased, the artist seeming to have assimilated Duchamp's influence and then moving on to other concerns.

The work of Marcel Duchamp, however, has continued to inform that of Jasper Johns to an extent and in a manner that has not yet been acknowledged. The elusiveness of this influence has largely been due to the lack of recognition granted the impact of Duchamp's major literary work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* or the *Green Box*, upon Johns. Yet this is by no means the fault of the artist. Johns himself announced the importance this work held for him when he published in the periodical *Scrap* in 1960 a book review, the only such article of his career, of Richard Hamilton's typographic version of the *Green Box*.³ Hamilton's publication was significant in that it made the whole of Duchamp's notes available for the first time in English, and in that it arranged Duchamp's random notes for the *Large Glass* in narrative fashion so as to follow the sequence of events in the encounter between the *Bachelors* and the *Bride*. Although in his 1960 review Johns focused upon the "thought-in-art," intellectual aspects of Duchamp's writing at

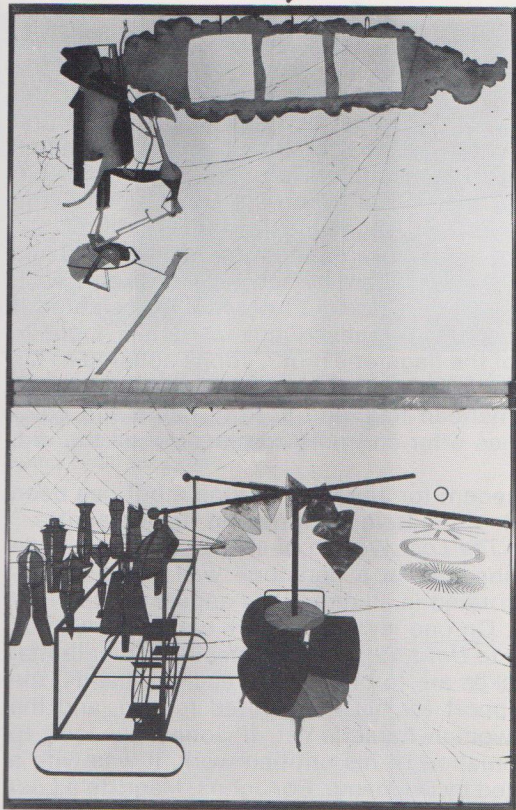


Fig. 4. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23. Oil and lead wire on glass, 109 1/4 x 69-1/8". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier.

the expense of the "love story" and its emotional implications, both Duchamp's formal ideas surrounding the creation of works of art and his narrative were to be of great and equal importance for Johns.

While the *Green Box*, in all its aspects, became a veritable sourcebook for much of Johns' recent art, another, more immediate source of inspiration can be identified within Duchamp's oeuvre for the *Untitled* of 1972 and related works. In 1966 Duchamp unveiled in his studio his final major statement on the *Bride Stripped Bare*—the *Etant Donnés: 1° La chute d'eau 2° Le gaz d'éclairage* or *Given 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas*—which translated the mechanomorphic language of the *Large Glass* into more realistic terms. The surprising revelation of this work, which Duchamp had labored upon in secret for twenty years, evidently added fuel to Johns' already substantial flame, provoking him into a further examination of Duchamp's art and thought. The result of this investigation was the series of paintings based upon the theme of the *Bride Stripped Bare* which will be considered here, including that major painting in the series, Johns' untitled work of 1972.

The Body Casts

In the right-hand panel of *Untitled*, Johns attached casts of female body parts painted in naturalistic flesh tones to wooden boards. Each board has been numbered from one to seven, labeled "L-R" (left-right) for spatial orientation, and secured with long nails and wing-nuts to the canvas. The casts and their corresponding boards have also been color-coded, each having

been dribbled and splattered with its own color—either a primary, a secondary, or gray. The supporting canvas has been painted in pinkish brown encaustic. An iron imprint is in the lower left and a circular imprint, probably one made with the edge of a can, is in the upper right.

Johns has said that the body casts were derived from "bits and pieces of four or five friends."⁴ When the body parts are examined, however, it becomes apparent that together they form, essentially, a single figure.⁵ Beginning with the head, there is a cheek, which in typical Johns fashion lacks eyes and here even a nose; a fragment of a torso with one breast and a navel; a pair of buttocks complete with bikini suntan line; a dimpled knee; the back of a leg; and then two sets of feet. In the lower left is a pair of feet wearing green shoes with legs crossed at the ankles. To the upper left, a single bare left foot steps upon a large black sock on a wood slat floor, a left hand pressing down beside it. These two representations of feet suggest fragments of a sequential narrative, i.e., a before and after; the woman has gone from proper and withholding in her little green pumps to boldly bare in an environment of discarded clothing.

The radical fragmentation of body parts in the right-hand panel of *Untitled* is paralleled only by one other work by the artist, the *Target with Plaster Casts* of 1955 (Fig. 2), which included fragments of male rather than female anatomy. These works of seventeen years apart share something beyond the use of body casts. Apparently, during several successive stages in the evolution of this panel of *Untitled*, two targets were silkscreened upon the canvas, both white against a brown ground, one centralized, the other cut off at the bottom edge.⁶ The body parts were attached to the canvas across them. While the artist has preferred that his use of the target in the earlier work be viewed as a kind of preconscious Dadaism, since he dates his awareness of Dada to about four years after its execution, his projected use of the target in the untitled work of 1972 seems to indicate that Johns was prepared, if only for a time, to make a deliberate, self-conscious reference to the earlier movement in which target imagery proliferated. One such Dadaist precedent is Francis Picabia's *Spanish Night* of 1922 (Fig. 3). In this work, the black silhouette of a male dancer reaches out to the white form of a woman who has targets painted over one breast and her abdomen. The woman has evidently been shot at, since little holes have been punched in the canvas in the vicinity of the targets.

Both the Picabia and the later work by Johns derive from the same source in Duchamp—his notion of the Shots.⁷ In the execution of the *Large Glass*, Duchamp dipped the heads of matchsticks in paint and shot them at the glass from a toy cannon, then had holes drilled at the indicated marks (Fig. 4). In the *Green Box* Duchamp described this operation as follows:

Shots. From more or less far, on a target . . . The figure thus obtained will be the projection . . . of the principal points of a 3 dimensional body.

Within the sexual workings of the *Large Glass*, the Shots are the orgasms of the Bachelors which enter the domain of the Bride at the final moment before her orgasm, just after she has been stripped bare. The Shots were to penetrate the Bride and bring her to the state of orgasm, while at the same time shooting her dead as punishment for the sexual act. Duchamp chose not to complete this portion of the *Large Glass*, leaving it blank save for the nine small holes, thus leaving his Bride, quite literally, hanging in the form of the *Pendu femelle* (Hanged Female Thing) to the upper left. In the painting by Johns, the violent splattering of paint upon the casts and wooden bars in the right-hand panel are Shots which have landed on target—on the three-dimensional body of the Bride stripped bare.

In this panel of *Untitled*, then, Johns brings to completion an unfinished portion of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. He gives pictorial expression to the culminating moment in the encounter between the Bachelors and the Bride. Whereas Duchamp's unfinished work speaks of the impossibility of union, Johns' collage presents the consummated union met with violence and dismemberment. It can, further, be noted that Johns' translation of the sexual martyrdom of the Bride from the mechanistic form language of the *Large Glass* and from its literary form in the *Green Box* into more illusionistic terms finds its precedent in

the illusionistic tableau of Duchamp's *Etant Donnés*, unveiled just a few years before.

In the stage before Johns silkscreened the targets onto this panel of *Untitled*, he took a blank canvas and ripped it in two places so that the wall and stretcher bars were visible behind.⁸ In *Disappearance* of 1961 Johns folded a canvas, in *Decoy* of 1971 he pierced it with a neat little hole, but never are his canvases so violated as to be ripped. A precedent for a torn canvas, or nearly so, is found in Duchamp's *Tu m'* of 1918 in which a trompe-l'oeil tear, held together by safety pins, is penetrated by a bottle brush, an image that has been interpreted as a reference to intercourse between the Bachelors and the Bride.⁹ Duchamp does not, however, rip the canvas—it is illusory—so that the virginity of the Bride is again held intact. The tearing of Johns' canvas below the body casts further suggests that his intention in this panel was to represent the violation of the Bride.

That Johns would indeed have been aware of the interpretations of Duchamp's work being referred to here, that he was doing his homework, as it were, on the Dadaist circle of Duchamp, Picabia and Man Ray, seems to be corroborated by his use of the iron imprint in this panel of *Untitled*. The iron imprint recalls the series of works based upon the flatiron motif by Man Ray, beginning with the notorious *Gift* of 1921 (Fig. 5), the flatiron with projecting nails, a replica of which is owned by Johns. The *Gift* has been interpreted in the literature both as an instrument to be used for the stripping of the Bride and as a phallic symbol,¹⁰ each of which would be appropriate to the content of the right-hand panel of *Untitled*. That the latter significance is in operation in Johns' painting is found in that the iron imprint at the lower left is cut off, as is the imprint of the can at the upper right, thereby establishing a correspondence between the two forms; a phallus is paired with that which it penetrates, a circle or hole, thereby reiterating the theme of sexuality that pervades the panel.

In 1975-76 Johns executed thirty-three etchings for a book entitled *Fizzles* published in collaboration with the writer Samuel Beckett. The majority of Johns' etchings were based upon the format and motifs of the *Untitled* of 1972,¹¹ and included prints after each of the body casts on the right-hand panel. For the opening page of the book, rather than executing an engraving after the cast of the female face, Johns used the imprint of his own cheek. The image created is strikingly similar to that found in Duchamp's self-portrait *With My Tongue in My Cheek* of 1958, which features a plaster cast of the artist's cheek and jaw. A self-identification between Johns and the older master is suggested. For the closing page of the book, in the etching after the hand, foot, sock, and floorboard motif, Johns used the imprint of his own hand and foot, significantly for that element identified as symbolic of the stripped bare Bride. Distributed over the pages of the book between the images of Johns' cheek and foot are the etchings derived from the casts of female anatomy. This seems to indicate that it is Johns' body that is found on the intervening pages, suggesting on the one hand that his Bride is androgynous, and on the other that this androgyny, and possibly even the Bride herself, are aspects of himself as well, recalling Rose Selavy, née Marcel Duchamp.

Johns' seeming self-identification with Duchamp's martyred Bride appears to embody an autobiographic aspect which is, inescapably, "psychologically loaded." The whole of Johns' etched work for the book is, in fact, laden with a depressive emotional quality that is strongly reflective of the existential pessimism of Beckett's prose. In Johns' hands in *Fizzles*, and perhaps implicit in the *Untitled* of 1972 as well, Duchamp's narrative assumes at once more private and more global dimensions, becoming an essay on life, sexuality, and death, a kind of philosophical meditation on the condition of modern man.

The Flagstones

The central panel of *Untitled* features two fields of flagstone patterns, the one on the left in oil, the other in encaustic. The encaustic panel has a rather thick, heavy surface, with the flagstone pattern being incised into the wax and with bold black underdrawing visible below the surface. Johns cut out

pieces of silk in the shapes of some of the flagstone and attached them to the surface of each of the two panels. The two panels represent fragments of the same configuration; the flagstone shapes on the left-hand panel are repeated in the right-hand panel, only shifted about two feet to the right. If the two panels were to be overlapped according to these guidelines and were rotated ninety degrees to the left, the resulting pattern would be identical to that found in *Harlem Light* of 1967, the work in which Johns first introduced the flagstone motif.

Johns has said that he discovered the motif while riding in a car through Spanish Harlem where he saw it painted on a wall. When he went back to find it he could not, so he recreated it from memory.¹² In each work subsequent to *Harlem Light* in which he made use of the flagstone motif, Johns adhered to his initial invented format, treating it as though it were as fixed in its design as the American flag, and both in name and color scheme the flagstones offer an ironic comment upon the red, white, and blue.

An intriguing precedent for Johns' flagstone motif has been identified in the work of the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte.¹³ In Magritte's painting *The Lost Woman* of 1927-28 (Fig. 6), a nude female figure is embedded in a flagstone wall while disembodied male hands rotated in all directions appear to reach for her against the wall. On one level, this work can be viewed as holding the very key to *Untitled*. It would seem to indicate that Johns' hatching strokes are to be read as reaching hands, the rock wall as the support for his fragmented female, and the body parts as the woman herself. Yet, if Johns did look to Magritte in the formulation of his untitled work, it was with a mind and eye activated by Duchamp. For Johns, Magritte's *Lost Woman* would have appeared as a two-dimensional counterpart to Duchamp's nude woman of the *Etant Donnés* for whom a masonry wall also plays a vital part.

Behind the weathered wooden door of the *Etant Donnés*, framing the scene of the nude Bride in the landscape, is a gaping hole in a heavy stone wall (Fig. 7). In an early study for the *Etant Donnés* executed 1948-49, the painted leather body fragment of the Bride is directly surrounded and almost pinioned by large, biomorphic rock forms. Duchamp wrote in the *Green Box*:

The bachelors serving as an architectonic base for the Bride the latter becomes a sort of apotheosis of virginity. [The Bride is a] Steam engine on a masonry substructure on this brick base, a solid foundation, the Bachelor-Machine. . . .

For both Johns and Duchamp, the rock wall serves as a symbol for the Bachelors.

Understanding Johns' flagstones as a reference not only to the Bachelors but to the *Etant Donnés* as well is furthered through a consideration of *Harlem Light* of 1967 (Fig. 8), a work executed just one year after the unveiling of the *Etant Donnés* in Duchamp's studio. As was mentioned earlier, the same rock wall appears in this work as in *Untitled*, except that here the two panels are united, are rotated ninety degrees to the left, and are more expressionistically painted. The work is executed in oil. Examination of the compositional structure of *Harlem Light* reveals that the work operates on two distinct levels in space. To its upper right, the flagstone pattern overlaps a black patch which continues onto the surface of the adjoining panel, seeming to indicate that a view is being offered through or behind the wall onto the open, luminous space of the rest of the composition. The two vertical 12-inch rulers, one painted in the upper right and the other silkscreened in the lower left, seem to define the limits of this extended field. Three color blocks in red, yellow, and blue appear on the central panel. Since such paintings as *Out the Window* (1959), *By the Sea* (1961) and *Land's End* (1963), all works with landscape titles, this distribution of color appears to be Johns' indication of landscape. It appears that through a language of abstract forms, Johns has provided an equivalent to the experience of looking through the door and masonry wall of the *Etant Donnés* onto the open, sunny landscape behind.

Harlem Light gains full meaning when the significance of the imprint of the window in the right-hand panel is traced to a precedent for the use of a window found in Duchamp's oeuvre, the *Fresh Widow* of 1920 (Fig. 9). Although the title of Duchamp's

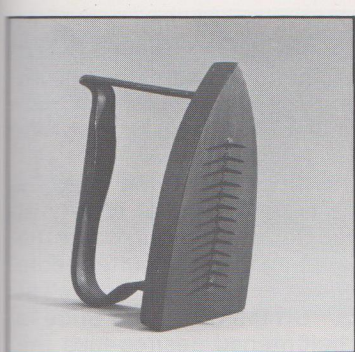


Fig. 5. Man Ray, *Gift (Cadeau)*, c. 1958 (replica of 1921 original). Painted flatiron with thirteen tacks, 6-1/8 x 3-5/8 x 4 1/2". The Museum of Modern Art, James Thrall Soby Fund.

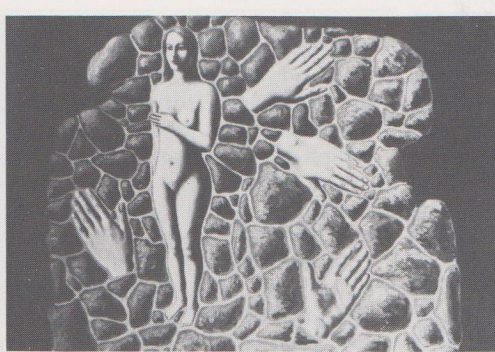


Fig. 6. René Magritte, *The Lost Woman*, 1927 or 1928. Private Collection.



Fig. 7. Marcel Duchamp, *Etant Donnés: 1° La chute d'eau; 2° Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-66. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969.

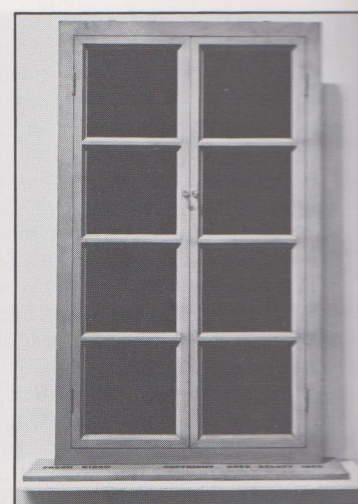


Fig. 9. Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920. Painted wood frame and glass covered with leather, 30 1/2 x 17-5/8 x 4". The Museum of Modern Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier.

Fig. 10. Jasper Johns, *Wall Piece*, 1968. Oil on canvas with collage, 110 1/4 x 72". Private Collection. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

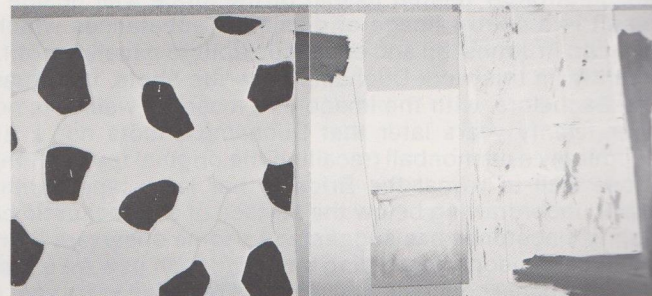


Fig. 8. Jasper Johns, *Harlem Light*, 1967. Oil on canvas with collage, 78 x 172". Collection Philip Johnson, New York. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

work operates on multiple levels of meaning, the one which is most relevant here involves the definition of the word widow in French—*la veuve*—which in colloquial French usage signifies guillotine.¹⁴ The *Fresh Widow* can be identified as a guillotine since our gaze, which generally “penetrates” a window, is “cut off” by this French window’s black leather panes; given Duchamp’s preoccupation with eroticism, the combined imagery of penetration and cutting provides a metaphor for castration. If this interpretation is extended to *Harlem Light*, the window, which is open, tilted, and raised to a lofty height through the addition of another segment of canvas, can be seen as the guillotine and the black square inscribed below it as the box to catch the severed organ.¹⁵

Johns’ intention in *Harlem Light* seems to have been to illustrate what would happen to the Bachelors, as symbolized by the phallic glowing gas lamp held upright in the hand of the nude Bride of the *Etant Donnés*, should the union of the Bride and the Bachelors be consummated. *Harlem Light*, therefore, presents a kind of “male counterpart” to the *Untitled* of 1972 which concerns itself with the consequences that this union would hold for the Bride. Both works speak of violence and mutilation in the sexual act and reflect Duchamp’s similarly pessimistic and ironic view of eroticism.

Wall Piece (Fig. 10) is Johns’ next painting after *Harlem Light* to feature the flagstone motif. Executed in 1968, it is a two-paneled work whose right-hand flagstone panel prefigures the left-hand flagstone panel of the *Untitled* of 1972, complete with the cut-out pieces of silk. The left-hand panel of *Wall Piece* features the silkscreened image of a fork and spoon suspended from a long wire, an image derived from Johns’ six *Screen Piece* paintings of 1967-68. As in the *Screen Piece* series, printed

alongside the fork and spoon motif are the words “fork should be 7” long,” although the photographic reproduction of the fork in each of these works is actually about twelve inches in length. In the *Wall Piece*, the long brushstroke to the right of the fork and spoon panel alludes to the rulers of varying lengths included in the *Screen Piece* paintings, while the violet patch to the extreme left, which was evidently painted through a wire mesh, reinforces the notion of the screen.

A source for the hanging fork and spoon motif is found in the *Green Box*. Duchamp wrote, “Hook. At the top of the glass (from below) = a sort of fork . . . must fall . . . (this fork will be an ordinary hook considerably enlarged).” This note refers to an idea Duchamp had for the *Large Glass* which he subsequently abandoned: to suspend a hook or fork from the top of the Bachelor Machine so that it would fall astride the glass and penetrate it with its prongs at a central point between the Chocolate Grinder and the Glider, activating each. A screen is a transparent object often found (in the real world) in conjunction with a pane of glass and upon whose surface (in the art context of a silkscreen) a printed image will appear groundless, much as an image on glass. Johns’ screen serves as a surrogate for the lower portion of Duchamp’s *Large Glass* while the photographically reproduced silverware serves as a substitute for the “sort of fork” intended to fall before it. Duchamp’s reference to the enlargement of the scale of the hook finds a counterpart in Johns’ tampering with the scale of the fork. Further, the inclusion of rulers of varying lengths in the *Screen Pieces*, the allusion to the ruler in *Wall Piece*, as well as the two rulers of *Harlem Light*, may find their source in Duchamp’s assertion that in contrast to elements within the domain of the Bride, “The principal forms of the Bachelor Machine . . . are mensurable.”

Johns' *Wall Piece*, then, emerges as a kind of double image or confounded mirror image of Duchamp's Bachelor Machine. While the right-hand flagstone panel can be understood to derive from the masonry wall of the *Etant Donnés* tableau, the screen motif on the left-hand panel stems from concepts surrounding the lower portion of the Philadelphia glass.¹⁶ In the two disparate panels of *Wall Piece*, Johns therefore juxtaposes his equivalents for the two very different manifestations of the Bachelor Machine found in Duchamp's two major works: the *Etant Donnés* and the *Large Glass*.

Before leaving the two central panels of *Untitled* it is enlightening to consider a particular manifestation of the theme of the *Bride Stripped Bare* in Duchamp's oeuvre that bears striking visual and iconographical relationship to Johns' flagstones as they appear in his untitled work of 1972—Duchamp's design for the cover of the *First Papers of Surrealism* catalogue of 1942 (Fig. 11), which was also used for the cover of the 1963 Duchamp retrospective exhibition in Pasadena. On the front cover is a reproduction of a photograph of five rifle shots that Duchamp took at the masonry wall of Kurt Seligmann's barn in Sugar Loaf, New York; the cover is perforated to conform to the shots, recalling Picabia's *Spanish Night* of 1922. The back cover presents a reproduction of a photograph of Gruyère cheese, an image strongly related to that of the stone wall beside it. The result is a double-image of dissimilar substances which finds an echo in Johns' oil and encaustic double-paneled motif. Significantly, in this work Duchamp links the Shots, the orgasms of the Bachelors, with the image of a masonry wall. It is not until over twenty years later that Duchamp shoots not a rifle but seemingly a cannonball (recalling the original toy cannon) at the stone wall to reveal the Bride in her landscape behind. The black underdrawing below the surface of the encaustic panel of Johns' flagstones has suggested to some observers that something or someone was hiding below.¹⁷ It can now be understood that this panel conceals that which is revealed to its very right—the martyrdom of Duchamp's Bride.

The Hatching Strokes

The remaining panel of *Untitled* features the first occurrence of a motif which has occupied Johns' painting to the present day: the crosshatches or hatching strokes. Painted in oil on canvas, this panel presents a densely packed field of short parallel lines rotated in all directions. Upon the surface of the work, orange, green, and purple strokes are seen with intervals of white in between. Hidden from view, and barely visible below the areas of white, are faint touches in red, yellow, and blue.

Various interpretations have been forwarded in the literature for the hatching stroke motif. The network of lines has largely been identified as "art about art," most writers describing the motif as deriving from and embodying ironic comments upon earlier art historical movements and manifestations, among them Picasso's primitivizing crosshatch paintings of 1907-08, Cubo-Futurist stylizations, the frenzied brushwork of Abstract Expressionism, alloverness in art ranging from Monet to Pollock, and contemporary pattern painting.¹⁸ Any or all of these suggestions may be valid at some level of meaning and in certain works, since it appears that in works subsequent to the *Untitled* of 1972 the lines have been employed to various ends, as though the artist discovered in the simple pattern of lines of his own invention a versatile motif in which to encode multiple meanings and interpretations.¹⁹ In its initial manifestation in the *Untitled* of 1972, however, and in several related works, the lines seem to embody a particular iconographical significance.

The stories Johns has told regarding the origins of the motif seem to provide clues as to its interpretation. As with the flagstones, Johns has said that he conceived the idea for the hatching stroke motif while riding in a car, this time on the Long Island Expressway. A car passed by in the opposite direction painted with these marks and Johns decided that he would use them for his next painting.²⁰ A second story surrounds Johns' hatching stroke painting, *The Barber's Tree* of 1975. Johns has said that the work was inspired by his having found in *National Geographic* magazine a photograph of a Mexican barber painting a tree with marks resembling his own hatching strokes, and the photograph exists to prove it.²¹

As is recorded in a passage in the *Green Box*, the idea for *The*

Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even first came to Duchamp while on a car trip with Apollinaire, Picabia, and Gabrielle Buffet on the Jura-Paris Road through an area known as the Zone. Johns' painting *Zone* of 1962 may well commemorate this journey, as does Apollinaire's poem by that title which opens his anthology *Alcools*.

Duchamp came to conceive of his *Bride* as having multiple identities, although two manifest themselves most clearly at the time of her sexual arousal—those of the motorcar and the tree. On the one hand, the *Bride* is a motor with "quite feeble cylinders" whose desires are "sparked" by a "love gasoline" at the time of her "electrical stripping." On the other, the *Bride* is an "arbor" or "tree-type" and her heightened desires take the form of a sprouting of branches and blossoming which Duchamp termed "cinematic."

In their frenetic topsy-turviness of direction and movement, Johns' hatching strokes in the *Untitled* of 1972 are intended to serve as analogues for sexual arousal. The network of lines is used to give pictorial expression to an extra-pictorial concept described by Duchamp in the *Green Box*, the "cinematic blossoming" of the *Bride* stripped bare.

Duchamp wrote in the *Green Box*, "This cinematic blossoming which expresses the moment of the stripping, should be grafted onto the arbor-type of *Bride*." The photograph of the man painting the tree with hatch-like strokes in *National Geographic* probably struck Johns because it provided a ready-made personification of the tree-type *Bride*.²² The painting *The Barber's Tree* of 1975 (Fig. 12), which was inspired by this photograph, features a single, unbroken field of messily painted, overlapping hatching strokes, with crayon marks trailing over the surface. This work can be understood to represent the aroused or tree-type *Bride*, not only because its source of origin resides in a tree, but because of the additional suggestion offered by its colors. The painting is rendered in a predominantly pink and red palette unusual for Johns but which echoes the rosy pink "flesh color" (as Duchamp described it) employed for the representation of the cinematic blossoming of the *Bride* as it appeared on the plane of the *Large Glass*. In the *Large Glass*, the cinematic blossoming, which Duchamp asserted was "the most important part of the painting (graphically as a surface)," was contained within the form of the Milky Way or Top Inscription running across the top of the glass, which was also intended to encompass the messages sent from the *Bride* to the Bachelors at the time of her arousal. *The Barber's Tree* therefore carries multiple allusions to the aroused state of the arbor-type *Bride*. A barber's tree or pole is, moreover, a rather classic phallic symbol, so that male sexuality is also present, as will be explored further shortly.

Johns' hatching stroke paintings were not his first works to give expression to the sexual arousal of the *Bride*; it formed the content as well of his painting *Passage II* of 1966 (Fig. 13), although in very different form. This painting has already been interpreted in the literature as containing references to Duchamp, first because its title has been thought to relate to that of Duchamp's *Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, and second because the motif of the pinioned cast of the woman's (the critic Barbara Rose's) leg has been seen as reminiscent of Duchamp's *Pendu femelle* (Hanged Female Thing) of the *Large Glass*. The connection between this work and Duchamp, however, is still more extensive. *Passage II* presents Johns' interpretation of Duchamp's verbal ideas surrounding the execution of the Top Inscription, or those messages transmitted from the *Bride* to the Bachelors at the time of her cinematic blossoming. While in the *Large Glass* these messages were encoded within the cloudlike form which emanated from the *Bride* and surrounds the Three Draft Pistons, in the *Green Box* Duchamp's instructions for this portion of the glass were as follows:

(Blossoming) ABC. . . To make an Inscription of it . . . Moving inscription, i.e. in which the group of alphabetic units should no longer have a strict order from left to right—each alphabetic unit will be present only once in the group A B C . . . At A there will be (a sort of letter box) . . . Determine the alphabetic units (their number, form, significance . . .) represent sculpturally this inscription in movement.

In Johns' painting, the color names, some represented sculpturally while others illusionistically wind their way back in space,

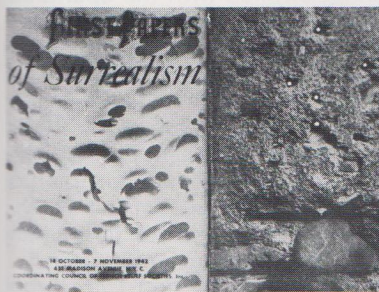


Fig. 11. Marcel Duchamp, *First Papers of Surrealism* (cover), 1942. *The Museum of Modern Art Library.*

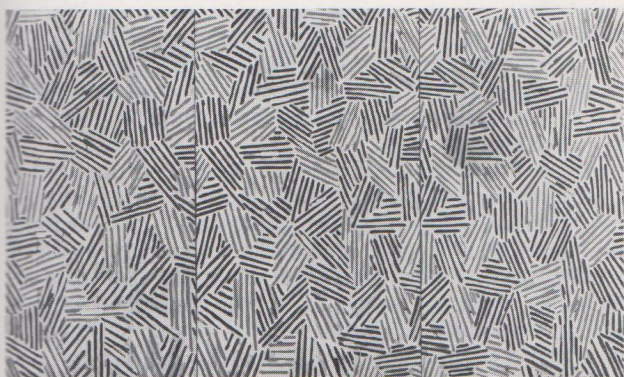


Fig. 14. Jasper Johns, *Scent*, 1973-74. Oil and encaustic on canvas, 72 x 126 1/4". Collection Dr. Peter Ludwig, Cologne. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

Fig. 15. Jasper Johns, *Corpse and Mirror I*, 1974. Oil and encaustic on canvas, 50 x 68-1/8". Private Collection, New York. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

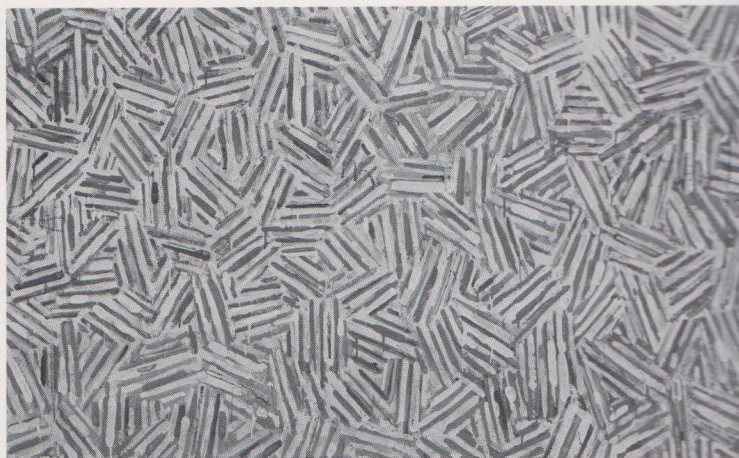
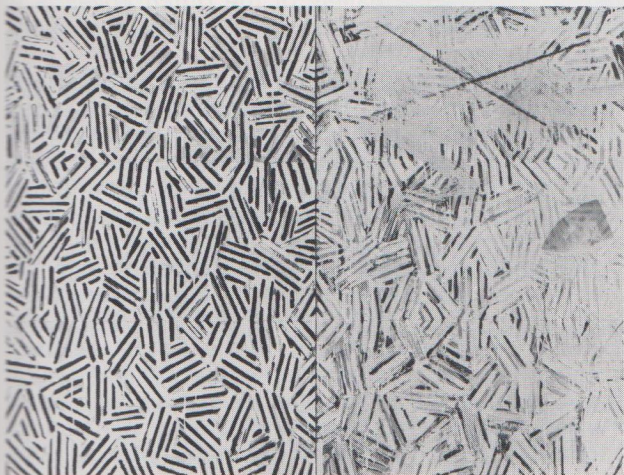


Fig. 12. Jasper Johns, *The Barber's Tree*, 1975. Encaustic on canvas, 34 1/4 x 54 1/2". Collection Dr. Peter Ludwig, Cologne. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

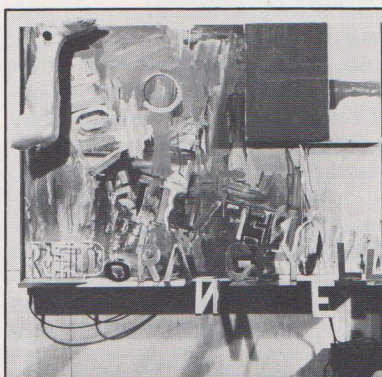


Fig. 13. Jasper Johns, *Passage II*, 1966. Oil on canvas with objects, 59 3/4 x 62 1/2 x 13". Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

can be seen as the alphabetic units in motion, the power box to the lower right as the "letter box," and the pinioned leg once again as the *Pendu femelle* from whom the inscription emanates. In his verbal interpretation of this note, Richard Hamilton wrote, "The *Top Inscription* will run over the blossoming like news flashed across Times Square in letters of light"²³; in Johns' pictorial interpretation, he wrote the word "red" in neon. For a painting of 1972 which included a photographically reproduced image of the principle elements of *Passage II*, among them the color names and the leg, Johns used for his title the word "Decoy"; according to the narrative of the *Bride Stripped Bare*, the Bride's messages to the Bachelors in the form of the *Top Inscription* were intended as a lure to provoke, like a decoy, their Shots.

The next painting after the *Untitled* of 1972 to make use of the hatching stroke motif was Johns' *Scent* of 1973-74 (Fig. 14) in which the motif is extended over three panels. In contrast to the single, random field of the hatched panel of *Untitled*, each of *Scent*'s three panels is subdivided into three vertical rows, with repetitions in the patterns of the rows occurring at intervals. The use of color in this work is the same as in *Untitled*; the secondary colors appear on the surface over a hidden structure of the primaries. Although *Scent* is generally interpreted as having been executed as a comment upon Jackson Pollock's late painting of that same title,²⁴ Johns' painting can also be related back to Duchamp. A passage in the *Green Box* in which Duchamp explores the notion of painting on glass reads as follows:

—In the greenhouse (on a glass plate, colors seen transparently). Mixture of flowers of color i.e. each color still in its optical state: Perfumes [underlined three times] (?) of reds, of blues of greens or of grays heightened towards yellow blue red . . . (the whole in scales).

This note, which goes under the heading "*Breeding of Colors*," appears significant to the use and layering of color in both the *Untitled* and the aromatic *Scent*, the idea of the greenhouse and flowers being appropriate to the image of a blossoming. Duchamp's note, however, carries further importance for Johns in that in the left-hand panel of *Untitled* and in *Scent* Johns seems to have translated Duchamp's verbal instruction for a painting on glass into the language of paint on canvas. That Johns was responsive to the notion of painting on glass has already been

noted in relation to the *Screen Piece* motif in which Johns' silk-screen serves as a surrogate for the lower portion of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. In the two later paintings, Johns' canvas seems to serve as a substitute for its upper portion—for the domain of the Bride.

In paintings executed subsequent to the *Untitled* and *Scent* the hatching strokes seem to encode many different meanings. A number of these later paintings, however, can be understood as elaborations upon the theme of the Bride Stripped Bare and as having as their subject masturbation, the sexual encounter, and desire. In these works, the network of lines serves once again as analogues for sexual arousal.

In 1974 Johns executed a two-paneled hatching stroke painting in black, white, and shades of gray entitled *Corpse and Mirror* (Fig. 15).²⁵ The left-hand panel features a field of hatches painted in oil and is subdivided into three horizontal sections. The panel on the right, executed in encaustic and newspaper collage, presents a pale, ghost-like mirror image of the left-hand panel and seems to be the "mirror" of the painting's title. This "mirror" has a number of markings upon its surface: a large black "X," a zig-zagging pink brushstroke, and an iron imprint. In 1974-75 Johns executed *Corpse and Mirror II* (Fig. 16), a work painted in oil and in the colors red, yellow, and blue, with other colors peeking out from below the surface. This painting is subdivided in the manner of the first version and is accompanied by a painted frame à la Seurat. The only marking upon its more expressionistically painted right-hand panel is a circular imprint, which when viewed in juxtaposition with the imprint of the flat-iron in the first version is again suggestive of a male/female opposition. It seems that the second version presents a female "corpse" and its initial manifestation a male. This idea is reinforced by a gouache version of the first motif which includes some rapidly drawn brushstrokes in the guise of a man's profile.²⁶

Within the context of the Bride Stripped Bare, both the Bride and the Bachelors can be identified as corpses: the Bride as the "hanged female thing" and in her final martyred state, and the Bachelors as inhabitants of the "coffins" of the Malic Molds within the "Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries." Both the Bride and the Bachelors see images of themselves and become aroused. For the Bride this mirroring, Duchamp explains, occurs in her own imaginings; for the Bachelors, as Duchamp wrote in a passage in the *Green Box* devoted to the Malic Molds:

They [the Bachelors] would have been as if enveloped, alongside their regrets [the Litanies of the Chariot] by a mirror reflecting back to them their own complexity to the point of their being hallucinated rather onanistically.

It is possible that the large black "X" in the right-hand panel of *Corpse and Mirror* refers to the large cross-outs which appear in Duchamp's notes running through the passages on the Litanies of the Chariot and the zig-zagged brushstroke to the aimless, back-and-forth motion of the Glider or Chariot itself.

It is at this point that a second interpretation for the hatching stroke motif can be introduced, one intimately related to the first—that of the hatching lines as analogues not only for the arousal of the Bride but for the Bachelors as well in the form of the Illuminating Gas. In the *Green Box* Duchamp explained that the Illuminating Gas leaves the "gas castings" of the Malic Molds to become "long needles already solid, since before becoming an explosive liquid, it takes the form of a fog of solid spangles of frosty gas, all this by the phenomenon of *stretching in the unit of length*." In the next step of their progress through the Bachelor Machine, these "elemental rods" embark upon a successive passing through of the Parasols or Sieves where they "lose . . . their designation of left, right, up, down, etc., lose their awareness of position." In their dizziness, "the spangles splash themselves each into itself, i.e. change . . . their condition from: *spangles lighter than air, of a certain length, of elemental thickness with a determination to rise, into: a liquid elemental scattering . . .*" Ultimately, the gas concludes its journey in the Shots. As with the cinematic blossoming of the Bride, the Illuminating Gas of the Bachelors represents the final moment of arousal before the state of orgasm. The first version of *Corpse and Mirror* might therefore present a field of spangles of Illuminating Gas and the second version its female counterpart, the cinematic blossoming of the Bride.

The identification of the hatching strokes with the spangles of gas provides an alternate interpretation for the motif as it appears on the left-hand panel of *Untitled*, one that supplements rather than contradicts the interpretation earlier proposed. The left-hand panel might be seen as a mingling of the desires of the Bride and the Bachelors or, more simply, as analogues for their mutual arousal, while the right-hand panel represents the "culmination" of these desires, the Shots of the Bachelors falling upon the nude Bride and bringing her to both orgasm and death. The left and right panels of *Untitled* might therefore be read as fragments of a sequential narrative: before and after.

The final work to be discussed is Johns' painting *The Dutch Wives* of 1975 (Fig. 17). It is a two-paneled work divided in the center by a vertical element of the wooden frame. Both panels are painted in encaustic and in the intervals between the hatching strokes on each of the panels are narrow strips of newspaper collage. Each panel features the same configuration of expressionistically rendered hatching strokes in shades of gray, and the surfaces of both panels are extremely foggy and blurred, with many drips and spills and with considerable overlap in the hatching strokes, which conjures up a deeper space than is found in Johns' other hatching stroke paintings to that time. To the left of center in the right-hand panel are two vertical black marks and to the right of center is a splatter mark with a drip extending from it enclosed within a circle, which is in turn enclosed by an irregular red mark.

A Dutch wife is a wooden board with a hole in it used by a man as a substitute for a partner in sexual activity.²⁷ The hole in this instrument finds a counterpart in the circular imprint upon the right-hand panel of this work. This circle with a drip inside of it resembles an image of fertilization or, in more Duchampian terms, a Shot—an orgasmic splash—having landed on target. The irregular red mark which encircles this target strongly resembles the imprint of Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf* which appeared in many of Johns' paintings of the 1960s. This reference to the *Female Fig Leaf*, an object which Duchamp had modeled against the pudenda of the nude Bride of the *Etant Donnés* and of which Johns owned a replica, suggests that the person who has been shot may be identified as being one with Duchamp's Bride. This supposition is confirmed when one realizes that visible to the left in each of the panels of the *Dutch Wives* is a ghost-like image of the Nude Descending a Staircase,²⁸ an early manifestation of Duchamp's Bride.

Johns' use of the hatching strokes for figuration in this work appears to have been somewhat of an afterthought for the artist as it did not play a role in the earliest manifestations of the motif in the *Untitled* of 1972 or in the multi-subdivided *Scent*. Even in the *Dutch Wives*, figuration takes a secondary role, with the pale replica of Duchamp's descending nude being hardly visible. The hatching strokes are again used to bring pictorial expression to the heightened desires of the Bachelors and the Bride. For the former, the dense, colorless atmosphere connotes a fog of spangles of Illuminating Gas; for the latter, "boughs frosted in nickel and platinum" at the time of the cinematic blossoming. The Shot represents the fatal culmination of these desires. As always, the artist's elusiveness is fraught with allusions; the very title of Johns' work finds both an echo and a rhyme in Duchamp's preoccupation with virgins, widows, and brides.

A preliminary version of this essay was presented at the First Annual Symposium on Contemporary Art at the Fashion Institute of Technology on April 10, 1981.

1. Roberta J. M. Olson, "Jasper Johns—Getting Rid of Ideas," *The SoHo Weekly News*, V (November 3, 1977), p. 25.

2. *Ibid.*; also Peter Fuller, "Jasper Johns Interviewed: Part II," *Art Monthly*, XVIII (July-August 1978), p. 7. A thorough examination of the four panels reveals a wealth of such correspondences. For example, the shape of the large black flagstone in the center of the right-hand flagstone panel echoes that of the torso in the panel of casts; also, the diagonal orientation of the fingers, toes, and wooden slats of what Johns was later to call the "HandFootSockFloor" element finds a counterpart in the directional rhythms of the hatching strokes.

3. Jasper Johns, "Duchamp," *Scrap*, II (December 23, 1960), p. 4, reviews Richard Hamilton's version of the *Green Box*, translated by George Heard Hamilton (New York: Wittenborn, 1960). It is this version of Duchamp's notes which is quoted in the present article.

4. Richard S. Field, *Jasper Johns: Prints 1970-77* (Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1978), p. 22.

5. The fragmentation of the single female figure finds a precedent in Magritte's *L'évidence éternelle* of 1930, Menil Foundation, Houston.

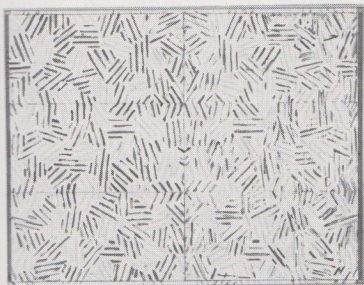


Fig. 16. Jasper Johns, *Corpse and Mirror II*, 1974-75. Oil on canvas, 57-5/8 x 75 1/4". Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

Fig. 17. Jasper Johns, *The Dutch Wives*, 1975. Encaustic on canvas, 51 3/4 x 72". Private Collection. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.



Fig. 18. Jasper Johns, *Voice*, 1964-67. Oil on canvas with objects, 96 x 69 1/2". Private Collection. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

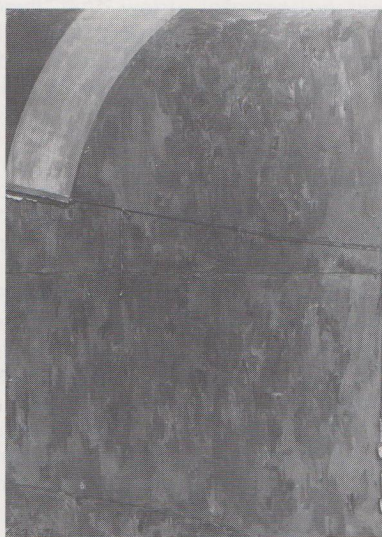


Fig. 19. Jasper Johns, *Voice II* (detail: panel "B"), 1971. Oil and collage on canvas (three panels to be hung in any sequence), each 72 x 50". Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

6. Roberta Bernstein, "Things the Mind Already Knows": *Jasper Johns' Paintings and Sculptures 1954-1974*, Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1975, p. 238, lists seven stages that the panel went through between March and August of 1972.

7. Robert Pincus-Witten, "On Target: Symbolist Roots of American Abstraction," *Arts Magazine*, L (April 1976), pp. 86-89, 91, explores Johns' and Picabia's use of targets and their mutual derivation from Duchamp; William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 188-197, discusses Picabia's use of the target image with regard to Duchamp.

8. Bernstein, p. 238.

9. Arturo Schwarz, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1975), n.p.

10. Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigours of Imagination* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), pp. 207-09.

11. Between 1973 and 1976 the majority of Johns' prints were based upon the *Untitled* of 1972. See Field, nos. 175-190, 194-201, 213-14, in addition to *Fizzles*, his nos. 215-248.

12. Bernstein, p. 223.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

14. Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (London and Paris: Grove Press in conjunction with Trianon Press, 1959), p. 47, and Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970), p. 480, both discuss the *Fresh Widow* as a guillotine.

15. It is interesting to note that Johns' painting *Harlem Light* shares several elements with Robert Rauschenberg's combine painting *Trophy V* (for *Jasper Johns*) of 1965, in the Academy of Fine Art, Honolulu, a large gray painting in which a real window and, beside it, a flattened cardboard box are set within an extended field of painterly activity, upon which has also been collaged a small map of the United States. Whether the Rauschenberg also alludes to Duchampian iconography has yet to be determined.

16. The silkscreened image of the hanging fork and spoon motif which appeared in the *Wall and Screen Pieces* derive from Johns' 1964-67 painting *Voice* (Fig. 18). *Voice* is a gray oil and encaustic work which is divided into two horizontal segments in the manner of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. In this work, a real fork and spoon are suspended from the top of the lower segment, recalling once again the "hook" suggested by Duchamp. In the upper segment, a windshield wiper-like stick seems about to erase the stencilled word "voice." The word "voice" may be an allusion to the messages that the Bride transmits or voices to the Bachelors at the time of her arousal, which Duchamp manifested in the cloud-like form at the top of the *Large Glass* and which he called the Top Inscription. The upper and lower sections of Johns' canvas therefore serve as surrogates for the Bride's and Bachelors' domains of the *Large Glass*.

In Johns' painting *Voice 2* of 1967-71 (Fig. 19), which incorporates multiple silkscreened images of the fork and spoon motif as well as fragments of the flagstone wall, the word "voice" extends in 2-foot-high letters over the three panels of the work. To the upper right of the third panel is the imprint of a metal chair frame which strongly resembles the imprint of Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf* which appeared in many of Johns' paintings of the Sixties, Johns having acquired

the sculpture in replica early in that decade. The allusion to this sculpture, which Duchamp cast against the Bride of the *Etant Donnés*, helps reinforce the interpretation of these works as relating to Duchamp and his Bride.

17. Judith Goldman, *Foires/Fizzles* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977), n.p., wrote "... something is concealed under the paint in the third panel. What has been painted over? Is there a corpse?"

18. Rosalind Krauss, "Jasper Johns: The Functions of Irony," *October*, II (Summer 1976), pp. 91-99, suggests several interpretations for Johns' hatching strokes. Krauss describes Johns' use of crosshatches in the *Untitled* of 1972 as ironic in that rather than being put at the service of representation to describe changes in light and plane, Johns uses the pictorial motif as an abstraction, in and of itself. She further suggests that with the hatching strokes Johns moved to a kind of Art History painting which comments, among other things, on Picasso's 1907-08 crosshatched works and on all-overness in art from Impressionism to Pollock.

19. For example, Barbara Rose, "Jasper Johns: Pictures and Concepts," *Arts Magazine*, LII (November 1977), pp. 148-153, convincingly interprets Johns' hatching strokes in his painting *Untitled* of 1975 as picturing ideas and concepts concerning perceptual systems as per John Gibson's book *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*.

20. Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 59.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 61; a reproduction of the *National Geographic* photograph is also found on this page.

22. Duchamp also executed a work in response to his discovery of a readymade personification of the tree-type Bride. His collage *In the Manner of Delvaux* of 1942 incorporates a central detail from Paul Delvaux's painting *Dawn* of 1937 in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, a work in which the lower portion of four women's bodies are represented as trunks of rooted trees.

23. Richard Hamilton, "The Large Glass," *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 65.

24. Thomas B. Hess, "On the Scent of Jasper Johns," *New York Magazine*, IX (February 9, 1976), p. 67, points out that Pollock's *Scent* was in the collection of Leo Castelli, Johns' dealer, and was therefore known to the artist; see also Krauss, p. 96.

25. Both versions of *Corpse and Mirror* find an intriguing precedent in a 1928 painting by Magritte entitled *L'usage de la parole* (Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne). This painting presents two identical irregular ovoid shapes floating side by side in a landscape, their shadows cast upon the ground below. The one on the left is labeled "corps de femme," the other "miroir."

26. Nicolas Calas, "Jasper Johns and the Critique of Painting," *Point of Contact*, III (September-October 1976), p. 55. I am grateful to Michael Newman for having called this article to my attention.

27. Crichton, p. 61, identifies the Dutch Wife as an instrument for masturbation. Hess, p. 65, pointed out a prominent bit of newspaper collage found on each panel of the painting which can be seen as ironic in this erotic context; it reads, "Organist's Arrest Shocks..."

28. Calas, p. 55. Duchamp's descending nude was pointed out to Calas by Johns' assistant, the painter Marc Lancaster.