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Dada (/ˈdɑːdɑː/) or Dadaism was an art movement of the European avant-garde in the early 20th century, with early centres in Zürich, Switzerland, at the Cabaret Voltaire; New York Dada began circa 1915, and after 1920 Dada flourished in Paris. Developed in reaction to World War I, the Dada movement consisted of artists who rejected the logic, reason, and aestheticism of modern capitalist society, instead expressing nonsense, irrationality, and anti-bourgeois protest in their works. The art of the movement spanned visual, literary, and sound media, including collage, sound poetry, cut-up writing, and sculpture. Dadaist artists expressed their discontent toward violence, war, and nationalism, and maintained political affinities with radical left-wing and far-left politics.



There is no consensus on the origin of the movement’s name; a common story is that the German artist Richard Huelsenbeck slid a paper knife (letter-opener) at random into a dictionary, where it landed on “dada”, a colloquial French term for a hobby horse. Jean Arp wrote that Tristan Tzara invented the word at 6 pm on 6 February 1916, in the Café de la Terrasse in Zurich. Others note that it suggests the first words of a child, evoking a childishness and absurdity that appealed to the group. Still others speculate that the word might have been chosen to evoke a similar meaning (or no meaning at all) in any language, reflecting the movement’s internationalism.

The roots of Dada lie in pre-war avant-garde. The term anti-art, a precursor to Dada, was coined by Marcel Duchamp around 1913 to characterize works that challenge accepted definitions of art. Cubism and the development of collage and abstract art would inform the movement’s detachment from the constraints of reality and convention. The work of French poets, Italian Futurists and the German Expressionists would influence Dada’s rejection of the tight correlation between words and meaning. Works such as Ubu Roi (1896) by Alfred Jarry, and the ballet Parade (1916–17) by Erik Satie would also be characterized as proto-Dadaist works.[15] The Dada movement’s principles were first collected in Hugo Ball’s Dada Manifesto in 1916.

The Dadaist movement included public gatherings, demonstrations, and publication of art/literary journals; passionate coverage of art, politics, and culture were topics often discussed in a variety of media. Key figures in the movement included Jean Arp, Johannes Baader, Hugo Ball, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, Emmy Hennings, Hannah Höch, Richard Huelsenbeck, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Hans Richter, Kurt Schwitters, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Tristan Tzara, and Beatrice Wood, among others. The movement influenced later styles like the avant-garde and downtown music movements, and groups including Surrealism, nouveau réalisme, pop art and Fluxus.

Grand opening of the first Dada exhibition: International Dada Fair, Berlin, 5 June 1920. The central figure hanging from the ceiling was an effigy of a German officer with a pig’s head. From left to right: Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch (sitting), Otto Burchard, Johannes Baader, Wieland Herzfelde, Margarete Herzfelde, Dr. Oz (Otto Schmalhausen), George Grosz and John Heartfield.



Overview

Dada was an informal international movement, with participants in Europe and North America. The beginnings of Dada correspond to the outbreak of World War I. For many participants, the movement was a protest against the bourgeois nationalist and colonialist interests, which many Dadaists believed were the root cause of the war, and against the cultural and intellectual conformity—in art and more broadly in society—that corresponded to the war.

Avant-garde circles outside France knew of pre-war Parisian developments. They had seen (or participated in) Cubist exhibitions held at Galeries Dalmau, Barcelona (1912), Galerie Der Sturm in Berlin (1912), the Armory Show in New York (1913), SVU Mánes in Prague (1914), several Jack of Diamonds exhibitions in Moscow and at De Moderne Kunstkring, Amsterdam (between 1911 and 1915). Futurism developed in response to the work of various artists. Dada subsequently combined these approaches.

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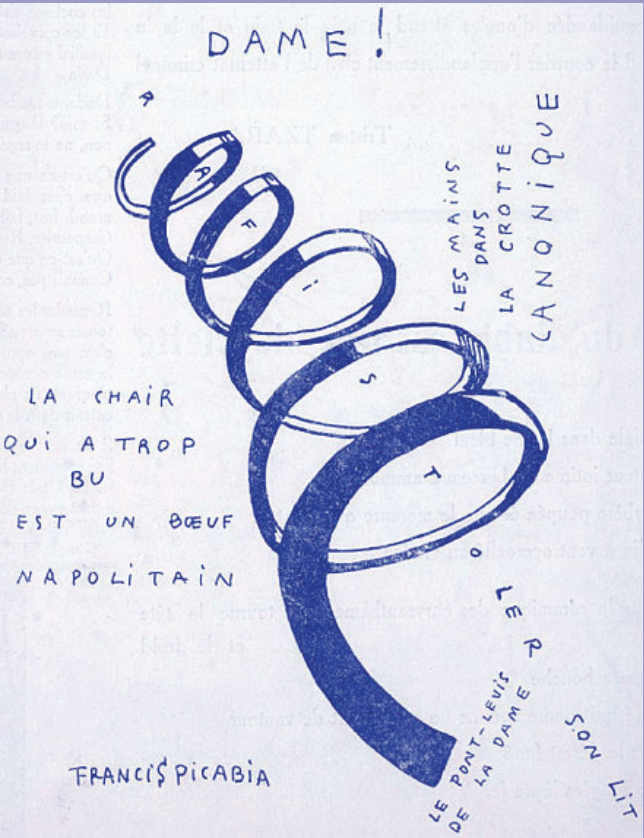
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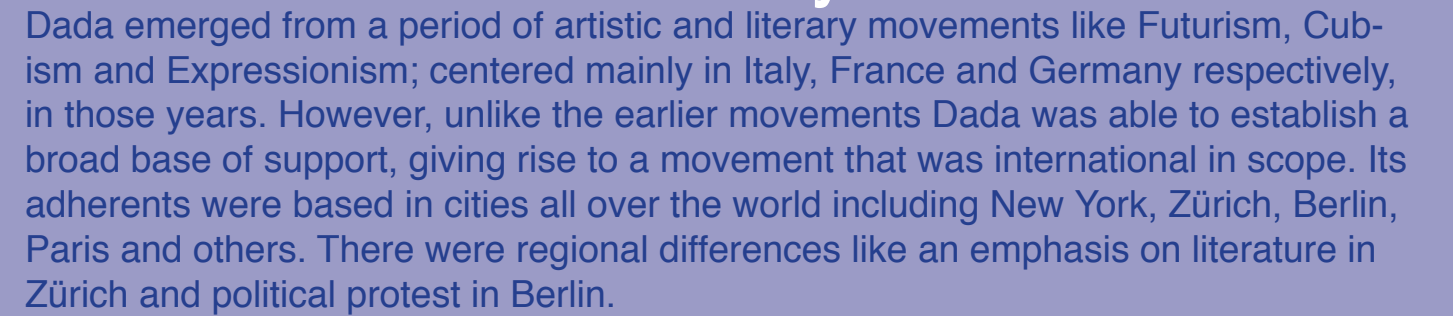
FRANCIS PICABIA

Dada emerged from a period of artistic and literary movements like Futurism, Cubism and Expressionism; centered mainly in Italy, France and Germany respectively, in those years. However, unlike the earlier movements Dada was able to establish a broad base of support, giving rise to a movement that was international in scope. Its adherents were based in cities all over the world including New York, Zürich, Berlin, Paris and others. There were regional differences like an emphasis on literature in Zürich and political protest in Berlin.

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“We had lost confidence in our culture. Everything had to be demolished. We would begin again after the tabula rasa. At the Cabaret Voltaire we began by shocking common sense, public opinion, education, institutions, museums, good taste, in short, the whole prevailing order.” — Marcel Janco

After the cabaret closed down, Dada activities moved on to a new gallery, and Hugo Ball left for Bern. Tzara began a relentless campaign to spread Dada ideas. He bombarded French and Italian artists and writers with letters, and soon emerged as the Dada leader and master strategist. The Cabaret Voltaire re-opened, and is still in the same place at the Spiegelgasse 1 in the Niederdorf.

After the fighting of the First World War had ended in the armistice of November 1918, most of the Zürich Dadaists returned to their home countries, and some began Dada activities in other cities. Others, such as the Swiss native Sophie Taeuber, would remain in Zürich into the 1920s.

Zürich

There is some disagreement about where Dada originated. The movement is commonly accepted by most art historians and those who lived during this period to have identified with the Cabaret Voltaire (housed inside the Holländische Meierei bar in Zurich) co-founded by poet and cabaret singer Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball. Some sources propose a Romanian origin, arguing that Dada was an offshoot of a vibrant artistic tradition that transposed to Switzerland when a group of Jewish modernist artists, including Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Arthur Segal settled in Zürich. Before World War I, similar art had already existed in Bucharest and other Eastern European cities; it is likely that Dada's catalyst was the arrival in Zürich of artists like Tzara and Janco.

Ball said that Janco's mask and costume designs, inspired by Romanian folk art, made “the horror of our time, the paralyzing background of events” visible. According to Ball, performances were accompanied by a “balalaika orchestra playing delightful folk-songs.” Influenced by African music, jazz was common at Dada gatherings.

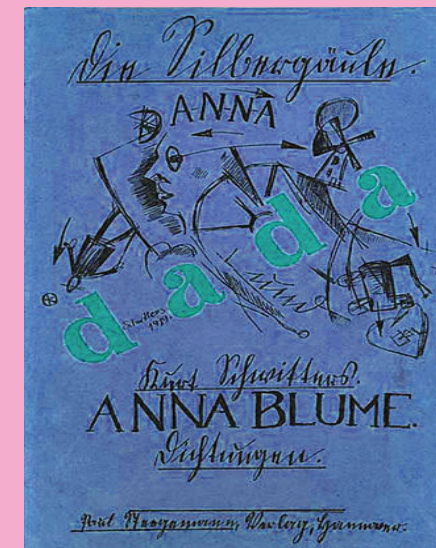
Berlin

Raoul Hausmann, who helped establish Dada in Berlin, published his manifesto *Synthetic Cino of Painting* in 1918 where he attacked Expressionism and the art critics who promoted it. Dada is envisioned in contrast to art forms, such as Expressionism, that appeal to viewers' emotional states: “the exploitation of so-called echoes of the soul”. In Hausmann's conception of Dada, new techniques of creating art would open doors to explore new artistic impulses. Fragmented use of real world stimuli allowed an expression of reality that was radically different from other forms of art.

In February 1918, while the Great War was approaching its climax, Huelsenbeck gave his first Dada speech in Berlin, and he produced a Dada manifesto later in the year. Following the October Revolution in Russia, by then out of the war, Hannah Höch and George Grosz used Dada to express communist sympathies. Grosz, together with John Heartfield, Höch and Hausmann developed the technique of photomontage during this period. Johannes Baader, the uninhibited Oberdada, was the “crowbar” of the Berlin movement's direct action according to Hans Richter and is credited with creating the first giant collages, according to Raoul Hausmann.



“A child's discarded doll or a brightly colored rag are more necessary expressions than those of some ass who seeks to immortalize himself in oils in finite parlors.”
— Raoul Hausmann



“Berlin was a city of tightened stomachs, of mounting, thundering hunger, where hidden rage was transformed into a boundless money lust, and men's minds were concentrating more and more on questions of naked existence... Fear was in everybody's bones” — Richard Hülsenbeck

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The Berlin group published periodicals such as *Club Dada*, *Der Dada*, *Everyman His Own Football*, and *Dada Almanach*. They also established a political party, the Central Council of Dada for the World Revolution.

New York

Like Zürich, New York City was a refuge for writers and artists from the First World War. Soon after arriving from France in 1915, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia met American artist Man Ray. By 1916 the three of them became the center of radical anti-art activities in the United States. American Beatrice Wood, who had been studying in France, soon joined them, along with Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Arthur Cravan, fleeing conscription in France, was also in New York for a time. Much of their activity centered in Alfred Stieglitz's gallery, 291, and the home of Walter and Louise Arensberg.

The New Yorkers, though not particularly organized, called their activities Dada, but they did not issue manifestos. They issued challenges to art and culture through publications such as *The Blind Man*, *Rongwrong*, and *New York Dada* in which they criticized the traditionalist basis for museum art. New York Dada lacked the disillusionment of European Dada and was instead driven by a sense of irony and humor. In his book *Adventures in the arts: informal chapters on painters, vaudeville and poets* Marsden Hartley included an essay on "The Importance of Being 'Dada'".



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917; photograph by Alfred Stieglitz



Rose Sélavy, the alter ego of Dadaist Marcel Duchamp

During this time Duchamp began exhibiting "readymades" (everyday objects found or purchased and declared art) such as a bottle rack, and was active in the Society of Independent Artists. In 1917 he submitted the now famous *Fountain*, a urinal signed R. Mutt, to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition but they rejected the piece. First an object of scorn within the arts community, the *Fountain* has since become almost canonized by some as one of the most recognizable modernist works of sculpture. Duchamp indicated in a 1917 letter to his sister that a female friend was centrally involved in the conception of this work: "One of my female friends who had adopted the pseudonym Richard Mutt sent me a porcelain urinal as a sculpture." The piece is in line with the scatological aesthetics of Duchamp's neighbour, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. In an attempt to "pay homage to the spirit of Dada" performance artist Pierre Pinoncelli made a crack in a replica of *The Fountain* with a hammer in 2006.

Paris

The French avant-garde kept abreast of Dada activities in Zürich with regular communications from Tristan Tzara (whose pseudonym means "sad in country," a name chosen to protest the treatment of Jews in his native Romania), who exchanged letters, poems, and magazines with Guillaume Apollinaire, André Breton, Max Jacob, Clément Pansaers, and other French writers, critics and artists.

Paris had arguably been the classical music capital of the world since the advent of musical Impressionism in the late 19th century. One of its practitioners, Erik Satie, collaborated with Picasso and Cocteau in a mad, scandalous ballet called *Parade*. First performed by the Ballets Russes in 1917, it succeeded in creating a scandal but in a different way than Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* had done almost five years earlier. This was a ballet that was clearly parodying itself, something traditional ballet patrons would obviously have serious issues with.



Man Ray, c. 1921–22, *Rencontre dans la porte tournante*, published on the cover of *Der Sturm*, Volume 13, Number 3, 5 March 1922

Dada in Paris surged in 1920 when many of the originators converged there. The first introduction of Dada artwork to the Parisian public was at the Salon des Indépendants in 1921. Jean Crotti exhibited works associated with Dada including a work entitled, *Explicatif* bearing the word *Tabu*. In the same year Tzara staged his Dadaist play *The Gas Heart* to howls of derision from the audience. When it was re-staged in 1923 in a more professional production, the play provoked a theatre riot (initiated by André Breton) that heralded the split within the movement that was to produce Surrealism. Tzara's last attempt at a Dadaist drama was his "ironic tragedy" *Handkerchief of Clouds* in 1924.

Georgia

Though Dada itself was unknown in Georgia until at least 1920, from 1917 until 1921 a group of poets called themselves “41st Degree” (referring both to the latitude of Tbilisi, Georgia and to the temperature of a high fever) organized along Dadaist lines. The most important figure in this group was Iliazd, whose radical typographical designs visually echo the publications of the Dadaists. After his flight to Paris in 1921, he collaborated with Dadaists on publications and events.

Yugoslavia

In Yugoslavia, alongside the new art movement Zenitism, there was significant Dada activity between 1920 and 1922, run mainly by Dragan Aleksić and including work by Mihailo S. Petrov, Ljubomir Micić and Branko Ve Poljanski. Aleksić used the term “Yougo-Dada” and is known to have been in contact with Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters, and Tristan Tzara.

Italy

The Dada movement in Italy, based in Mantua, was met with distaste and failed to make a significant impact in the world of art. It published a magazine for a short time and held an exhibition in Rome, featuring paintings, quotations from Tristan Tzara, and original epigrams such as “True Dada is against Dada”. The most notable member of this group was Julius Evola, who went on to become an eminent scholar of occultism, as well as a right-wing philosopher.



A Bonset sound-poem, “Passing troop”, 1916

Japan

A prominent Dada group in Japan was Mavo, founded in July 1923 by Tomoyoshi Murayama, and Yanase Masamu [de; ja] later joined by Tatsuo Okada. Other prominent artists were Jun Tsuji, Eisuke Yoshiyuki, Shinkichi Takahashi and Katué Kitasono.

Butoh, the Japanese dance-form originating in 1959, can be considered to have direct connections to the spirit of the Dada movement, as Tatsumi Hijikata, one of Butoh’s founders, “was influenced early in his career by Dadaism”.

Russia

Dada in itself was relatively unknown in Russia, however, avant-garde art was widespread due to the Bolshevik’s revolutionary agenda. The Nichevoki [ru], a literary group sharing Dadaist ideals[51] achieved infamy after one of its members suggested that Vladimir Mayakovsky should go to the “Pampushka” (Pameatnik Pushkina – Pushkin monument) on the “Tverbul” (Tverskoy Boulevard) to clean the shoes of anyone who desired it, after Mayakovsky declared that he was going to cleanse Russian literature.

Poetry

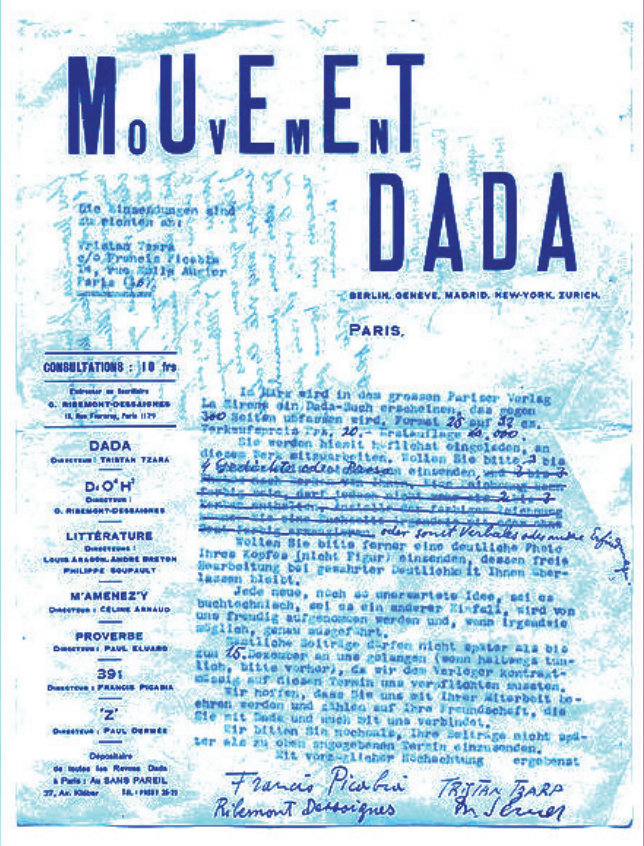
Dadists used shock, nihilism, negativity, paradox, randomness, subconscious forces and antinomianism to subvert established traditions in the aftermath of the Great War. Tzara’s 1920 manifesto proposed cutting words from a newspaper and randomly selecting fragments to write poetry, a process in which the synchronous universe itself becomes an active agent in creating the art. A poem written using this technique would be a “fruit” of the words that were clipped from the article.

In literary arts Dadaists focused on poetry, particularly the so-called sound poetry invented by Hugo Ball. Dadaist poems attacked traditional conceptions of poetry, including structure, order, as well as the interplay of sound and the meaning of language. For Dadaists, the existing system by which information is articulated robs language of its dignity. The dismantling of language and poetic conventions are Dadaist attempts to restore language to its purest and most innocent form: “With these sound poem, we wanted to dispense with a language which journalism had made desolate and impossible.”

Simultaneous poems (or poèmes simultanés) were recited by a group of speakers who, collectively, produced a chaotic and confusing set of voices. These poems are considered manifestations of modernity including advertising, technology, and conflict. Unlike movements such as Expressionism, Dadaism did not take a negative view of modernity and the urban life. The chaotic urban and futuristic world is considered natural terrain that opens up new ideas for life and art.

Music

Dada was not confined to the visual and literary arts; its influence reached into sound and music. Kurt Schwitters developed what he called sound poems, while Francis Picabia and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes composed Dada music performed at the Festival Dada in Paris on 26 May 1920. Other composers such as Erwin Schulhoff, Hans Heusser and Alberto Savinio all wrote Dada music, while members of Les Six collaborated with members of the Dada movement and had their works performed at Dada gatherings. Erik Satie also dabbled with Dadaist ideas during his career, although he is primarily associated with musical Impressionism.



Dadaglobe solicitation form letter signed by Francis Picabia, Tristan Tzara, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, and Walter Serner, c. week of November 8, 1920. This example was sent from Paris to Alfred Vagts in Munich.

Legacy

While broadly based, the movement was unstable. By 1924 in Paris, Dada was melding into Surrealism, and artists had gone on to other ideas and movements, including Surrealism, social realism and other forms of modernism. Some theorists argue that Dada was actually the beginning of postmodern art.

By the dawn of the Second World War, many of the European Dadaists had emigrated to the United States. Some (Otto Freundlich, Walter Serner) died in death camps under Adolf Hitler, who actively persecuted the kind of “degenerate art” that he considered Dada to represent. The movement became less active as post-war optimism led to the development of new movements in art and literature.



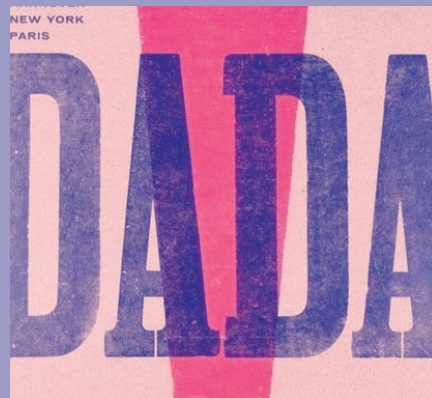
“In the early days, I didn’t even know what to call the stuff my life was made of. You can imagine my delight when I discovered that someone in a distant land had the same idea—AND a nice, short name for it.”
-Musician Frank Zappa was a self-proclaimed Dadaist after learning of the movement



The Janco Dada Museum, named after Marcel Janco, in Ein Hod, Israel

Several notable retrospectives have examined the influence of Dada upon art and society. In 1967, a large Dada retrospective was held in Paris. In 2006, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City mounted a Dada exhibition in partnership with the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The LTM label has released a large number of Dada-related sound recordings, including interviews with artists such as Tzara, Picabia, Schwitters, Arp, and Huelsenbeck, and musical repertoire including Satie, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and Picabia.

Dada is a named influence and reference of various anti-art and political and cultural movements, including the Situationist International and culture jamming groups like the Cacophony Society. Upon breaking up in July 2012, anarchist pop band Chumbawamba issued a statement which compared their own legacy with that of the Dada art movement. At the same time that the Zürich Dadaists were making noise and spectacle at the Cabaret Voltaire, Lenin was planning his revolutionary plans for Russia in a nearby apartment. Tom Stoppard used this coincidence as a premise for his play *Travesties* (1974), which includes Tzara, Lenin, and James Joyce as characters. French writer Dominique Noguiez imagined Lenin as a member of the Dada group in his tongue-in-cheek *Lénine Dada* (1989).



Art Techniques Developed

Collage

The Dadaists imitated the techniques developed during the cubist movement through the pasting of cut pieces of paper items, but extended their art to encompass items such as transportation tickets, maps, plastic wrappers, etc. to portray aspects of life, rather than representing objects viewed as still life. They also invented the “chance collage” technique, involving dropping torn scraps of paper onto a larger sheet and then pasting the pieces wherever they landed.

Photomontage

The Dadaists – the “monteurs” (mechanics) – used scissors and glue rather than paintbrushes and paints to express their views of modern life through images presented by the media. A variation on the collage technique, photomontage utilized actual or reproductions of real photographs printed in the press. In Cologne, Max Ernst used images from the First World War to illustrate messages of the destruction of war.

Assemblage

The assemblages were three-dimensional variations of the collage – the assembly of everyday objects to produce meaningful or meaningless (relative to the war) pieces of work including war objects and trash. Objects were nailed, screwed or fastened together in different fashions. Assemblages could be seen in the round or could be hung on a wall.



Raoul Hausmann, ABCD (self-portrait), a photomontage from 1923–24

Readymades

Marcel Duchamp began to view the manufactured objects of his collection as objects of art, which he called “readymades”. He would add signatures and titles to some, converting them into artwork that he called “readymade aided” or “rectified readymades”. Duchamp wrote: “One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the ‘readymade.’ That sentence, instead of describing the object like a title, was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal. Sometimes I would add a graphic detail of presentation which in order to satisfy my craving for alliterations, would be called ‘readymade aided.’”

Cut-up technique

Cut-up technique is an extension of collage to words themselves, Tristan Tzara describes this in the Dada Manifesto:

TO MAKE A DADAIST POEM

Take a newspaper.
Take some scissors.
Choose from this paper an article of the length you want to make your poem.
Cut out the article.
Next carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag.
Shake gently.
Next take out each cutting one after the other.
Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.
The poem will resemble you.
And there you are – an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd.

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