

¹ Catalogue: *Los Angeles 1955–1985: Birth of an Artistic Capital*. With essays by Catherine Grenier, Howard N. Fox and David E. James. 378 pp. incl. 304 col. pls. + numerous b. & w. ills. (Editions Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2006), €44.90. ISBN 2-84426-180-9. While richly detailed and informative, this publication, like the show itself, is difficult to navigate, its organisation further hindered by the lack of catalogue numbers.

² See, for example, such a typical recent assumption as that underlying the assertion of M. Dargis: 'CalArts: The School with Antz in its Square Pants', *New York Times* (21st May 2006), p.23: 'There is no exact moment when the cultural epicenter of the country shifted from New York to Los Angeles'.

³ Catalogue: *Lee Mullican: An Abundant Harvest of Sun*. With essays by Carol S. Eliel, Amy Gerstler and Lari Pittman. 136 pp. incl. 83 col. pls. + 34 b. & w. ills. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2005), \$45. ISBN 0-87587-194-1. The exhibition was previously at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (10th November 2005 to 20th February).

Dada

Paris, Washington and New York

by CATHERINE CRAFT

FOUNDED IN ZÜRICH in 1916 and spreading to Berlin, New York, Paris and a handful of other cities before coming to an end around 1924, the Dada movement emerged from its participants' rage at the butchery of the First World War and from a desire to expose the complacency and moral bankruptcy underlying the culture that had supported war on a scale unprecedented in modern Europe. Those involved with Dada embarked on a programme of cultural and social critique, political engagement and radical artistic experimentation encompassing irreverence,

violence and negativity. So thoroughgoing did its rejection of cultural norms appear that museum shows devoted to the movement in the past have often struck a somewhat defensive note. Thus it is some measure of Dada's historical distance that the lavish tribute paid to the movement in the large exhibition *Dada*, already seen in Paris and Washington and now at the **Museum of Modern Art, New York** (to 11th September), salutes the Dadaists' radical intentions but nonetheless unapologetically treats the objects that resulted as indisputable works of art.¹

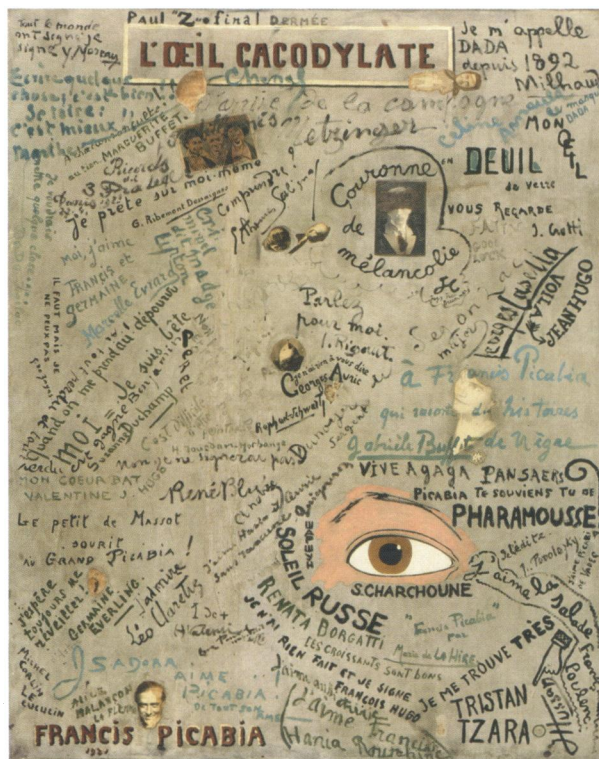
The exhibition and its accompanying publications admirably elucidate Dada's origins and the varied forms it took from city to city. Such figures as Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia (Fig.86) and Kurt Schwitters are predictably well represented, but alongside them there also appear numerous works by lesser-known artists such as Georg Scholz and John Covert (Fig.87) who brought their own wartime experiences and insights to Dada. The project's organisers have also taken a major step towards dislodging the movement from its customary historical position as the nihilistic forerunner of Surrealism by stressing Dada's connections with other types of modern art, most notably Constructivism. While rooting the exhibition in these historical concerns, the curator Leah Dickerman and contributing scholars have nonetheless sought to offer a vision of Dada relevant to the present moment. Dada appears, with a nod at contemporary globalisation, as a self-consciously international movement, its members enjoying a great if often combative camaraderie reinforced by collaborative activities (Figs.86 and 88), joint publishing ventures and an extensive network of correspondence. Particularly noteworthy in the Paris showing,



88. *Untitled (Pathetic symmetry)*, by Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber. 1916–17. Cotton needlepoint, 76 by 65 cm. (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

which displayed dozens of manuscript letters from French collections, was the surprising quiet as visitors went from item to item, reading as much as looking.

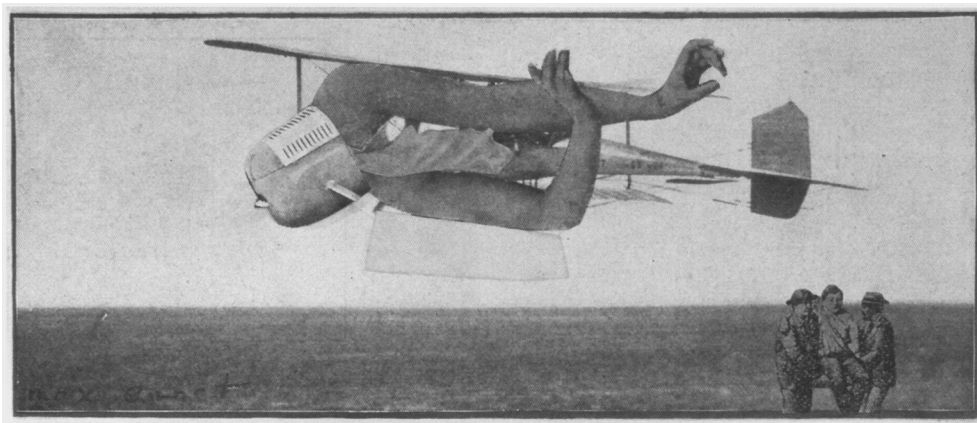
It is difficult to recall an exhibition in recent memory that has been subjected to such profoundly differing installations. In Washington, Dada was presented as a largely historical phenomenon (the first room of the exhibition contained no art at all but, instead, displayed archival photographs and films of the War), progressing chronologically and geographically. In contrast, the Centre Pompidou rejected this linear structure, opting for a chessboard grid of individual rooms devoted to specific themes.² This contrast dramatically



86. *The cacodylic eye*, by Francis Picabia. 1921. Oil with photomontage and collage on canvas, 148.6 by 117.4 cm. (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).



87. *Water babies*, by John Covert. 1919. Board, 64.1 by 58.4 cm. (Seattle Art Museum; exh. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).



89. *Untitled*, by Max Ernst. 1920. Photomontage, collage and pencil on photographic reproduction mounted on board, 6 by 14.6 cm. (Menil Collection, Houston; exh. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

affected the meaning of specific works, many of which assumed strikingly different roles from one venue to the next. For example, Picabia's *The cacodylic eye* (cat. no.365; Fig.86), a canvas the artist set up to receive myriad signatures and doodles from friends visiting him while he recovered from an eye problem, was placed in the 'Anti-Painting' room in Paris, where it appeared as a transgressive assault on the prerogatives of fine art, but in Washington, installed in the Paris Dada gallery near Max Ernst's group portrait *At the rendezvous of friends* (no.345), the work became exemplary of the social networks that the exhibition's organisers stress as key to Dada's character.

There is no reason why Picabia's painting cannot be both a critique of painting and a demonstration of group solidarity; this interpretative flexibility is a crucial element of Dada, one that also touches upon its quarrelsome relationship to history. Interestingly, neither Paris nor Washington provided a wholly satisfactory approach to the movement. The latter's version of the exhibition certainly made the circumstances of the movement's emergence clear and provided a sense of urgency to works often taken to be merely absurd or gratuitous, although the perils of straightforward chronology surfaced at the show's conclusion with an indecisive presentation of works echoing the diffuse historical end of Dada itself. At the Pompidou, the freewheeling, densely packed configuration of objects generated an exciting sense of creative immediacy, but the thrill of spectacle exceeded any sense of critical insight into the nature of individual works and the historical events that prompted them.

A decided conflict between past and present is one of Dada's most distinctive but elusive characteristics. The catastrophe of the First World War discredited any conventional idea of historical continuity for most of Dada's participants. This experience underlies the wildly diverse character of much Dada art, in which, as Hugo Ball put it, 'all the styles of the last twenty years melt together'.³ The loss of a sense of being connected to the past was traumatic but also liberating, with artists using collage and abstraction (as well as representation) not as part of some unfolding progres-

sion of Modernism but rather as discrete strategies to be taken up, combined and then abandoned as necessary. The vehement protests of Berlin Dada have aged much better than most political art, in part due to the capacity of artists such as George Grosz to find in the already classic styles of Modernism both metaphoric and metonymic parallels for the fragmentation of life brought about by the War and the broader experience of mass modernity. Similarly, Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber borrowed liberally from pre-War notions of spirituality in abstraction, but the resulting works (Fig.88) often manage to convey a quiet humility rare in modern art, a visual intimacy attuned to the meditatively repetitious craft processes that were employed to create them.

Collage travelled far from its origins in Cubist *papiers collés* (and the populist assembled images of soldiers that so fascinated the Berlin Dadaists) to serve the needs not only of Hannah Höch's trenchant attacks on societal hypocrisy but also Max Ernst's incisive, haunting collisions of technology and eroticism (Fig.89). Collage appears consistently throughout Dada not merely as the technique its participants overwhelmingly favoured but as a virtually philosophical position. It is fascinating to see how successfully most Dada works can operate both individually and coextensively in larger ensembles – such as Dada fairs and journals – that encompass other artworks as well as texts and objects. Every Dada work is, it would seem, potential material for another Dada work, and as such must ideally be both resolved internally yet somehow open and provisional. It is this remarkable poise and visual resilience that underlie the extreme divergence in the Paris and Washington installations; in the first, most of the works resisted being lost in the sheer welter of objects, while in the second, they were called upon to stand up to the demands of isolated attention.

It is fair to say that the Dadaists were obsessed with history. Chronicles of the movement began to appear even as it was still developing, while the survival of the letters displayed at the Centre Pompidou testifies to deliberate and concerted acts of preservation.

That so many Dadaists shouted out destruction while carefully keeping every possible scrap of their activity is less a sign of hypocrisy than a recognition of sorts. While the mystical status of art was a clear target for attack, most of the Dadaists seemed to have believed that there was still something to be gained in trying to make art. Vulnerable as were the human bodies that produced them, and subject to misunderstanding, rage, destruction and simple deterioration, the works created by Dada's artists survived because care was taken to save them. That spark of attention can at times give Dada the appearance of something like a vast archive. At the same time, it is this fragile balance between concentration and dispersal, between ruin and exuberance, that has constantly drawn artists back to its impulses to learn how to stare into the face of war and death and make something of it.

¹ Catalogue: *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*. By Leah Dickerman, with essays by Brigid Doherty, Dorothea Dietrich, Sabine T. Kriebel, Michael R. Taylor, Janine Mileaf and Matthew S. Witkovsky. 520 pp. incl. 403 col. pls. + 217 b. & w. ills. (National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Distributed Art Publishers, New York, 2005), \$65. ISBN 1-933045-20-5. The Pompidou published a separate catalogue: *Dada*. By Laurent Le Bon. 1,024 pp. incl. 1,851 col. pls. + 164 b. & w. ills. (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2005), €39.90. ISBN 2-84426-277-5. Also published in conjunction with the exhibition: *The Dada Seminars*. Edited by Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky. 312 pp. with 141 b. & w. ills. (National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Distributed Art Publishers, New York, 2005), \$25. ISBN 1-0933045-14-0.

² The exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art after this review went to press, but according to preliminary reports, the installation there follows a modified chronological approach with less emphasis on historical material than Washington and with the exhibition so arranged that visitors may enter either at the section devoted to Zürich or at the one for New York, with the expressed intention of avoiding the impression of a definitive beginning or end.

³ H. Ball: *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, Berkeley 1996, p.57.

Pierre Huyghe Paris and London

by LYNNE COOKE
Dia Art Foundation, New York

A SOLITARY MARIONETTE, slumped on the floor of a darkened space, provided the climax to the *Prologue* of Pierre Huyghe's much anticipated exhibition *Celebration Park* at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC and, in modified form (without the *Prologue*), at **Tate Modern, London**, from 5th July to 17th September.¹ The journey that led to the forlorn figure was long: it required visitors to negotiate a series of mechanically operated doors in order to pass through vast empty galleries adorned with neon statements – these 'disclaimers', as the artist termed them, warned against routine assumptions concerning mid-career retrospectives, the very assumptions that an art af-