

ABOUT THE TITLE: I QUIT PLAYING CHESS IN ORDER TO BECOME AN ARTIST

Transition from art to chess...

Marcel Duchamp

The chess is the ideal work of art.

Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*

Why chess game? Why art? Why Marcel Duchamp?

I have been playing chess all my life. I learned to play this game in order to develop strategic thinking. My father was saying: *Life is like a chess. If you know how to play chess you will know how to deal with real life.* I played with passion and with belief, until I came to understand that this game is not a positive approach to deal with life. I would say this play is not just a play; it forms our ways of thinking in ways that are negative for humanity.

After I came to the question: why do we humans play chess? I started to look at it from different angles. To understand this game I became more interested with the roles and it gave me the tools to understand and read it better. Then I found out that lots of artists use the chess as an expression.





Mauricio Cattelan's, *Chess Set*



Tracey Emin, *Portable Chess Set*



Damien Hirst, *Mental Escapology*

For what and what are the meanings of this usage?

With this research I'm trying to find out where the artist stands in the pyramid of class society. This approach leads me to analyse the artist's position and have a look at their statements. In doing research, I found it interesting to talk about Marcel Duchamp, as he had one of the most shocking statements in his lifetime. It is a good point to start to analyse the important of artist statement and on the way to learn from him the chess game.

This game has a long history behind it and I was wondering why was it important to have this kind of strategic mentality? For whom and for what purposes was it developed? What is behind this game? On the way I tried to understand statement of Marcel Duchamp, were he stopped doing art and announced that: Chess is the ideal work of art. In my opinion this statement emphasized the importance of concept/idea in art and shows us that thinking is an important issue for making it. Here I would like to challenge Duchamp and bring awareness that not any kind of thinking is useful for classless/equal society and not all thinking is good. I'm challenging the chess mentality through my essay and imposing the question: If the aspects of our daily life related to the same kind of strategy of this game, is it giving us a winner-looser mentality? These are the questions I ask all artists; these are the questions, which are making me analyze history of art and in general history of humanity.

Our petty daily work is difficult but useful

Bertolt Brecht, *The measures taken and other Lehrstucke*

Marcel Duchamp playing chess with a nude woman in Pasadena



Marcel Duchamp was one of the important figures in history of art. He was a French/American artist whose works are most often associated with the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. Art historians recognize Duchamp as the major influence on 20th century art. His point of view, works and philosophy have inspired many artists, for many years for now. He enlarged the borders of art and broke the image of artist as craftsmen at that time. For this importance I found it interesting to bring back the history and talk about his late decision to stop making art and become a victim of the chess. I would like to analyze his statement and think about his message; to try to read his statement differently. Here I will talk not about his art works but about the game of, which he found so important to focus on.



Marcel Duchamp

After the First World War ended in 1918 Duchamp was thinking strongly about chess, making his own chess set. In the early 1923 a rumour circulated through the art worlds of Paris and New York that Marcel Duchamp had decided to stop making art in order to devote his life to playing chess; He went so far as to suggest that the activity of

playing chess be considered a component of his artistic expression. I have come to the conclusion that while all artists are not chess players he memorably remarked, All chess players are artists. At the age of 36 he stopped making art and from that time until he died in 1968, he created few new works, at least publicly. For the most part he was taking part in exhibition of his old works; (although he was working on the installation which was known after his death as *Etant donnés* 1946-1966)

Joseph Beuys has approached the theme of silence and Bergman's film in the Fluxus action entitled *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp Is Overestimated* back in 1964. In this multi-levelled action, Beuys would recite lines from the film script, while the slogan that gave the act its name was being written on a sheet of cardboard. According to Beuys, the act was a criticism of Duchamp's anti-art concept and the artistic silence that followed. Duchamp stopped artistic production in 1923, as in his opinion art was no longer a meaningful activity. The action juxtaposed Bergman's destructive and oppressive silence with Duchamp's heroic silence.

For Beuys, Duchamp's idea of the end of art was a dead- end, the end of a utopia, which he found unacceptable. According to Beuys, the criticism of the traditional art institution that Duchamp expressed through his readymade was incomplete: if an everyday, anonymous industrial object can become art, it follows that the maker of that product is actually the artist. And if several people make this object jointly, it follows that everybody is an artist, not just painters, sculptors, pianists, dancers or singers! In Beuys' opinion, Duchamp's readymade led to a radical change in art, not to its end. The notion of art became extended to involve various forms of production and economy, and ultimately the whole of society was to be perceived as a social sculpture. Beuys' extended notion of art is an alternative to Duchamp's silence: The conclusion that it is no longer possible to make art is incorrect: it is the other way round; making art can only continue life. But in that position we must adopt a clearly extended notion of art. According to this construction, art cannot be passive silence; it must be a constructive force enabling creativity to be channelled as a social resource.

I am still a victim of chess. It has all the beauty of art and much more. It cannot be commercialized. Chess is much purer than art its social position.

Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*

As masterful a player as Emmanuel Lasker regarded chess as neither an art nor a science but rather a war in which the pieces served as troops and the players the generals. This stemmed from the notion that chess was invented as a war game and so, that is the manner in which it should be executed. Undoubtedly reality is reflected in the idea that chess originated either as an aid or substitute for warfare.

Though Lasker's contention that chess was invented, as a game of war is undoubtedly true, he seems to have post dated its conception by some eight centuries and misplaced it by several worlds. During the High Middle Ages chess became a leisure time activity of the feudal lords, and the pieces began to resemble the aristocracy. A knowledge of 'Nights and Days' was considered a social grace for every genteel and parfait knight. Obviously, one reason for this was the connection between chess and war. Soon the powers of certain pieces were increased, making the game much more lively or, if you prefer, deadly.

Paul JJ Payack, *The Tangles of Time - A Brief History of Chess*

Source from: yourDictionary.com

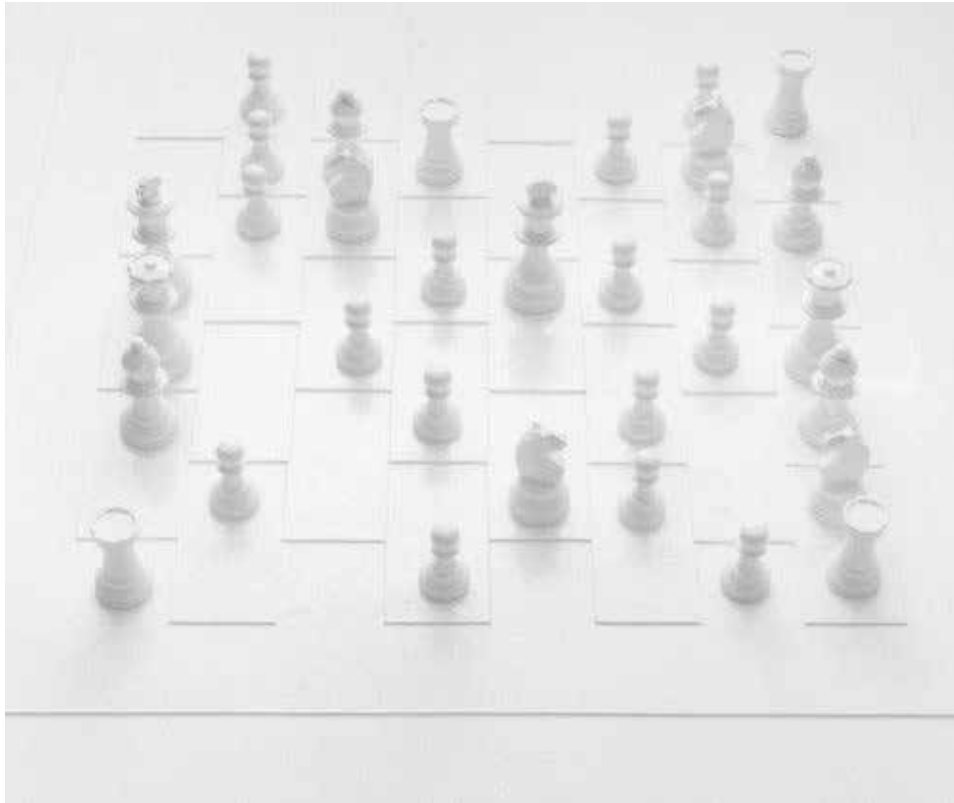
The chess pieces are the block alphabet, which shapes thoughts; and these thoughts, although making a visual design on the chessboard, express their beauty abstractly, like a poem... I have come to the personal conclusion that while all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists

Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*

Play It By Trust presents an all-white chessboard with all-white pieces, and alludes to the ideal of chess championed by Marcel Duchamp as the landscape of the soul. Ono's game demands the ultimate abstraction by leaving all but the first few moves to be played entirely in the mind. With minimal and conceptual means so typical of her art, she reduces the game to its fundamental structure, an opposition defined by black versus white-to provoke a sage contemplation: How to proceed when the opponent is indistinguishable from oneself?

When I created Play It By Trust I wasn't thinking about Duchamp at all. Many artists have worked with chess, but they usually worked with the decorative aspect of the chess pieces. I wanted to create a new chess game, making a fundamental rather than decorative change. The white chess set is a sort of life situation. Life is not all black and white; you don't know what are yours and what is theirs. You have to convince people what is yours. In the chess situation it is simple if you are black then black is yours. But this is like a life situation, where you have to play it by convincing each other.

Play it for as long as you can remember who is your opponent and who is your ownself.



Yoko Ono, interview, *Play it by trust, aka White chess set*

All the figures have its' own order. *King* is the most important peace and others are serving him. Other peaces are the tools to save him and kill for him; inside all others, there are priorities. Some of them has more right, some of them less power, some peaces as a *pawns* who are standing firstly for battle have less power, although they are very important peaces in the chess play, they will be first figures witch player could doom to death. They even can become the Queens but if they will serve good. This is the motivation for them to be best. I will not go deeper into the hierarchy involved here. It should be obvious that this game is constructed on strong assumptions of hierarchies, power and war ideology.

I can understand his point of view according to this game from my personal experience. It has got some capture points, but still there is one big concept that we cannot avoid in chess. This game contains a strong war ideology, hierarchical and priority mentality against which all human critical minds are trying get beyond. If Duchamp is one of them, why there is he proposing that artists learn this game? Why did he himself become a *victim*?

- Do you see symbolism in chess?
- No
- So it's pure pleasure, it related to nothing else?
- It does tend to act a bit like a drug. Drugs are not symbolic, but the addiction that is similar. If you start playing chess when you're young you'll grow old and die playing chess. It's a passion, that's not easy.

Nu descendant l'escalier

Source from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FF2GZo7ARqA&feature=related>

Chess is a terrific way for kids to build self-image and self-esteem

Saudin Robovic, *Mate in two*

