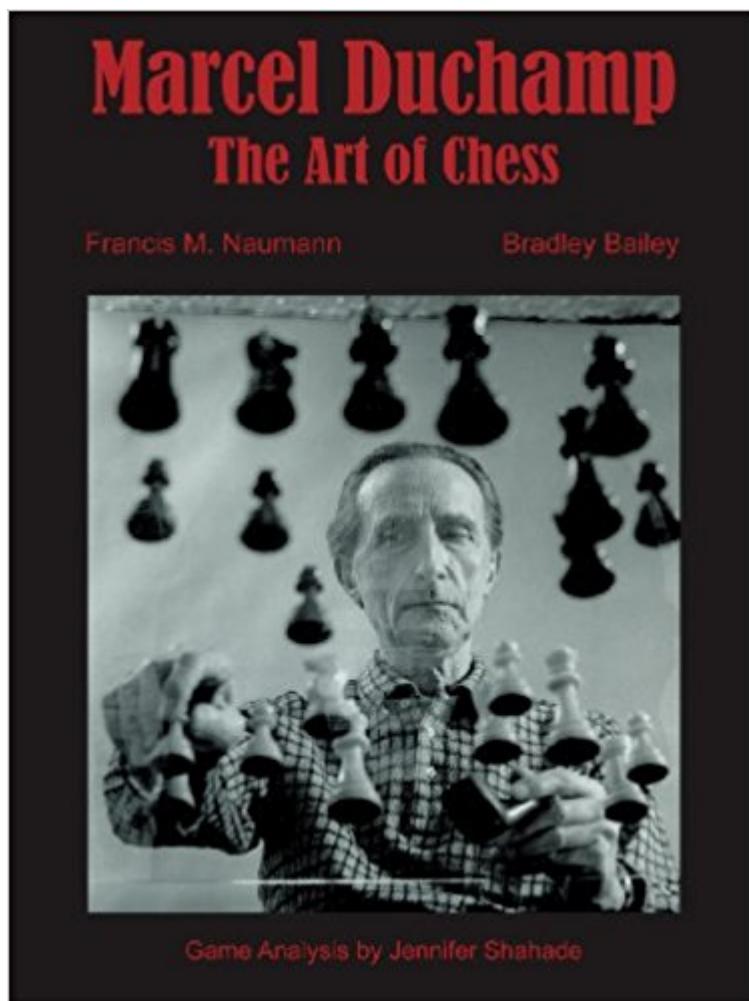


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Marcel Duchamp: The Art Of Chess



Synopsis

Marcel Duchamp was both an artist and a chess player, but until now, little was known of his chess activities. In analyzing Duchamp's games--seeing how he reacted in specific situations during play--we can better understand how his mind worked, and gain insight into the strategies that motivated his work as an artist. Duchamp saw a correlation between art and chess, and actively sought opportunities to combine the two seemingly unrelated disciplines. Not only did he love the game, but he was aware of the reputation of chess as an intensely cerebral pursuit, and to the end of his life, he remained committed to challenging the French adage "d'être bête comme un peintre" ("to be stupid like a painter"), raising his art to equivalently complex, intellectual heights. Naumann shows us just how deeply intertwined the two activities were for Duchamp.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was obsessed with studying Duchamp's practice during my second year at an arts college. This book had a lot of insight to the way he actually played chess which is very interesting.

I should say that, having an avid interest in both chess and art, a fair amount of the material presented here was known to me. The strength of this effort, however, is to present much disparate information as a coherent whole. Francis M. Naumann's essay, in particular, is very well done and constitutes the core of the book. He has reportedly delayed a writing on this subject for many years, and his long consideration of the subject is reflected in his assimilative skills and much good judgment throughout. For example, some past literature on this subject stretches to reach the

conclusion that Duchamp's chess demonstrated, in chessic terms, iconoclastic hypermodernism. That theory simply cannot be supported. Not only does Naumann say so plainly, he barely gets diverted by those who have written otherwise. Bradley Bailey focuses primarily on the relationship between chess and Duchamp's Large Glass. Like so much literature on Large Glass, he has little conclusive to say. Much of what he writes is in effect an argument that, due to various externalities (for example, the number of times that Large Glass was subsequently photographed with some type of chess imagery, to wit: the Eve Babitz game during the Pasadena exhibition), there must be some deep connection. Perhaps so, but what precisely that may be remains obscure at the conclusion of Bailey's essay. Jennifer Shahade's contribution to the book, which was to annotate selected games, is the most frustrating only because it is plain that nobody carefully proofread the chess notation. This is a shame because I gather that Shahade's text strikes a good balance of providing reasonably sophisticated chess commentary, including interesting overall conclusions regarding the strengths and weakness of Duchamp's play, without overloading the artworld types to too much chess detail. The problem, however, is that one cannot follow along, as intended, with the move-by-move game annotation and see the moves from which Shahade draws her conclusions. From a purely chess, rather than art, perspective, this significantly undermines the value of the book.

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