

## RECIPROCAL READYMADE

*"Se servir d'un Rembrandt  
comme planche à repasser."  
Marcel Duchamp*

Once the artist had become the subject/object of art via self-portraiture and self-referral, it was only a matter of about three centuries before an artist came up with the idea of transforming an already-made, everyday object into a work of art by virtue of his authority as an artist and the application of a signature. Marcel Duchamp, also known as *Rose Sélavy*, turned the tables by turning art back into life in a gesture that was inextricably related to the use of language and the problematization of identity (of the art object and of the artist). His first *readymade* took the form of a very graphically-shaped Bicycle wheel (1913) that had more than a passing resemblance to Rembrandt's "R." Soon grasping the inherent danger of his gambit, Duchamp upped the stakes in one of his notes by positing a *reciprocal readymade*, that is, turning a work of art into an everyday object: "Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board," he suggested. The literal translation loses the ambiguity of the French word "*repasser*," which means "to iron" and, more to the point, to "pass by" or "go past again." Thus it would be more appropriate to say "irony" board, since this is exactly the fate of Rembrandts in museums, to be seen in passing. On the other hand, we could take "Rembrandt" to mean a name that can be commodified for the everyday marketplace: the first "Rembrandt" product in the U.S.A. was patented in 1914 (paints for artists made by a Dutch company, see entry 1, note 2). By the way, it was also in passing by that I found the ironing board above in Hamburg in 1992.



fotos(left+right): jmc



Ready-mades  
→ Reciprocal = Se servir d'un  
Rembrandt comme planche  
à repasser —

