

Iconic Value



Fountain became an icon after it received a lot of publicity when the New York Society of Independent Artists refused to exhibit it because “some contended it to be immoral, vulgar... To others it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing”¹ The society prided itself on being an exhibition “in which all artists may participate independently of the decisions of juries”² therefore a scandal erupted as the art world had mixed reactions to the question posed by Duchamp – was this art? “**Fountain** isn’t merely one of

Duchamp’s ready-mades. It has become a recognisable icon in the history of modern art.”³

Fountain received the honour of being voted “the most influential artwork of the twentieth century by 500 British art world professionals”⁴ in 2004 due to its distinct form, notoriety and nonsensical shock tactics which still convey relevant comment on consumerism within today’s society. Duchamp understood the value of replication of artworks as both

“souvenirs” raising his publicity, aiding in the preservation of his work and to challenge the role of the artist by allowing other artists to make replicas. After the original **Fountain** was lost, Duchamp allowed 17 replicas to be made, most of which are now in famous galleries and collections. It is regarded as an icon of the dada era and the most iconic readymade art work, which allows both commercial (as the replicas are highly sought after) and art historical (most notable artwork of a significant modern art movement) value to be placed on it. Author Sophie Howarth describes **Fountain** as “one of Duchamp’s most famous works and is widely seen as an icon of twentieth century art”.

The iconic value placed on **For the Love of God** is very different from that of **Fountain**. **For the Love of God** became an icon of modern art due to Hirst’s notoriety as a modern artist, which came as a result of his shocking artworks, whereas **Fountain** became an icon because it represented a whole new way of thinking within the art world. Through excessive self-promotion, Damien Hirst’s art has become a brand, “Hirst can be assured of his place in history...not because of the quality of his work but because he has almost single handedly remade the global art market in his image.”⁵ His works are seen as being at the forefront of modern art, reinforcing his status as an influential artists and creating a demand for his work. Wim Pijbes, head director of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, describes the demand for Hirst’s artwork, and **For the Love of God** in his collection, “we do old masters but we are not a yesterday institution. It’s for now. And Damien Hirst shows this in a very strong way”.



Exhibition curators see Damien Hirst's work as exciting and new, and therefore valued contributions to exhibitions. They hope to attract new visitors to their shows by displaying something from the Hirst brand rather than perceived 'has-been' work like *Fountain*. *For the Love of God* is Hirst's most talked about work since his 1992 *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*; its blatant extravagance created ripples around the art world, "if anyone but Hirst made this object we would be struck by its vulgarity"⁶ such as we are by the cheap rhinestone knockoff pieces of *For the Love of God* which are sold in their thousands online. It seems we now accept Damien Hirst's work as serious, influential, iconic pieces of art simply because of his celebrity status. That being said, "the work we hate today is often the work we end up liking and admiring in the future,"⁷ so it is possible that, like Duchamp's *Fountain*, *For the Love of God* may become a relevant statement piece on the current consumerism in the art industry and in the future have art historical value placed on it.

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