MARCUS AND RROSE

Cross-Dressing, Alter Egos, and the Artist

Rachel Paige Katz

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The practice of what is most traditionally known as cross-dressing or Transvestitism, or more currently coined "Gender-bending" or "Gender-fucking," is not a recent phenomenon. While it certainly has become more globally acknowledged with the formation of the LGBT movement,[1] in actuality it dates back all the way to the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, amongst other cultures.[2] Cross-dressing is found in myths, literature, and laws throughout history, citing cases of both men dressing as women and women dressing as men. There is a plethora of reasons why transvestitism was practiced, ranging from psychological to cultural to career choice, and people have been made famous for it as well as condemned. This exhibit will focus on two particular people, Marcel Duchamp and Oreet Ashery, both contemporary, who made a similar choice: to cross-dress for the sake of their art. However, before we look at their cases, we first must look at transvestitism in history and so that we can examine both Duchamp and Ashery in context.

Transvestitism has an extremely long history, with little documentation or compilation. It dates as far back as the female pharaoh Hatshepsut who reigned in Egypt in the 18th dynasty from approximately 1479-1458 BCE after her half brother/husband, Tuthmose II, died, leaving the throne to his young son, Tuthmose III. Tuthmose III ruled alongside of Hatshepsut, in the beginning, however, after a few years of co-regency, Hatshepsut declared herself Pharaoh with full titles. In order to bolster her authority, she donned the traditional false beard of pharaohs, as well as male clothing, both of which are seen in the majority of the statues in her likeness.[3]

The tradition of transvestitism has a different history for both males and females. Each sex has had multitudes of motives, yet the motives are often quite different. Men who dressed as women did so in ancient Greece for theater, as women were not permitted to perform on stage;[4] cross-dressing was also seen within the plays themselves, like Aristophanes' "Thesmophoriazusae," dated to 411 BCE.[5] Men also cross-dressed in both ancient Greek and Roman cults as part of ritual and ceremonies as the "'symbolism of initiation corresponds to the sense of an essential opposition between the male essence, personified in the community of young men, and the female element.'"[6] These initiates would don women's robes at the beginning of the rites, and during the culmination of the ceremony would replace those with men's robes. Cross-dressing is also seen in Greek myths, for example, the childhood of Dionysus.[7]

Women in the ancient world, besides cases like Hatshepsut who dressed for power, had certain rituals where they would dress as men. In Sparta, on a bride's wedding night, it was customary to shave her head and dress as a boy before going to wait for her husband on her marriage bed.[8]

However, transvestitism was not always widely acceptable. In the Old Testament, Deut. 22:5 states "A woman must not put on man's apparel, not shall a man wear woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord your God." Most laws that were recorded in the Old Testament were done so because of practices that had been common at the time. For example, the commandment to worship only one God was done so because of the polytheism that was rampant in the

[1] LGBT is the acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transsexual/Transgender. The phrase was coined in the early 1990's, though the movement itself has been active since the 1960's. Information on Gay and Lesbian rights can be found in the timeline section of Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States (see bibliography).
[2] Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 23-24.
[3] Ian Shaw, Ancient Egypt: A Very Short Introduction (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 89.
[4] Ed. Paul Cartledge, The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 120.
[5] Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae, English & Greek, (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1920).
[6] Bullough, 25.
[7] Ibid, 28.
[8] Ibid, 26.

ancient world. If it was not an issue, or if it were uncommon, then it would not have garnered mention at all.

By the Middle Ages, most cultures in Europe had a philosophy akin to that of the Old Testament, with very rare exceptions to the law.[9] These prejudices developed both from the laws of the Old Testament which factored into strict Christianity as well as "differing attitudes towards females and males."[10] Women were seen as "not only intellectually but morally inferior to men,"[11] and medieval theorists closely developed their philosophies from Aristotle, who claimed he had scientific evidence of the inferiority of females.[12]

As the female gender was seen universally as the weaker of the two, men who dressed as women were seen as weak and abnormal, whereas it was more culturally permissible for women, and sometimes admirable, to dress as men, as long as the reasons were not sexually "deviant."[13] "The church accepted the transvestism of certain holy women who needed to dress as men, or even be taken for men, in order to lead a holy life."[14] There are many stories about female saints who dressed as men, like Saint Eugenia, Saint Euphrosyne, and Saint Theodora, among many others. All of the stories have different details but each one features the Saint dressing as a man for reasons that are either out of her control or otherwise very acceptable circumstances, like traveling in a dangerous territory by herself. "They were women content to live as men for various reasons but mostly in order to preserve their virginity and to become closer to God."[15] Joan of Arc is one of the most famous of these women, who donned men's clothing yet was open about her actual sex. In order to fight in the French Army, Joan wore men's clothing for two reasons: one, in case the group was captured, that she wouldn't be raped, and two, because the clothing offered more security than women's clothing in battle.[16] However, Joan remained honest about her true gender, and eventually was captured, tried, and executed by the English government on account of both her cross-dressing and heresy.

Again, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gender roles became more flexible, where it was more acceptable to dress as the opposite sex, but still not entirely welcome.[17] While carnival festivals in Europe permitted cross-dressing, as was the tradition of "mumming" which "involved men dressed like women and women like men going from house to house…during the Christmas season in England,"[18] there was still some apprehension, which resulted in trials. But there was still less animosity over female cross-dressing than men dressing as women, except, again, in specific circumstances. This exception was the great revival of theater, which had seen a hiatus through the Middle Ages, as theater was not condoned by the Church. Most famous in this realm were the works of Shakespeare in the sixteenth century, all of whose plays featured women with large roles, and yet women were *still* not permitted to perform on stage, a prohibition dating back to the aforementioned era of the ancient Greeks. Hence, the birth of the "male actress."[19] A similar phenomenon was also seen in Japan in certain religious plays in monasteries.[20] Men, however, who dressed as women merely for pleasure, aesthetic, sexual, or otherwise, were typically tried in court for fear of homosexuality, which was illegal.[21]

Transvestitism at this time for women, through the eighteenth century had many motives and was not at all rare;[22] women dressed as men for patriotism, in order to fight in wars, i.e. the Dutch

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[9] Ibid, 45.
[10] Ibid, 46.
[11] Ibid, 46.
[12] Ibid, 46.
[13] Ibid, 68.
[14] Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Joan of Arc: Heretic, Mystic, Shaman, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986) 106.
[15] Ibid, 57.
[16] Trans. Craig Taylor, Joan of Arc: La Pucelle, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006) 16-17.
[17] Bullough, 74-75.
[18] Ibid, 75.
[19] Ibid, 77.
[20] Ibid, 83.
[21] Ibid, 90.
[22] Ibid, 134.

Revolt against Spain (1558-1648); for economic reasons, meaning that it was either cheaper to buy men's clothing, or in order to get work as men as women were not permitted to hold many, if any, jobs; and as mentioned before, saints and virgins also at times wore men's clothing.[23] In terms of dressing as men for work, this excuse was used perhaps the most of all. Women used men's clothing to get jobs on ships, or even to publish books like George Sand.[24] However, much like men who cross-dressed without being able to produce a legitimate excuse, women too were found in court.

In more contemporary times, we find our featured artists. By the time Marcel Duchamp was born in 1887, the sodomy laws had been repealed in France (1791), which meant that no one could be tried for being a homosexual in the event that they wore women's clothing. By the time Oreet Ashery was born in 1966, most women were wearing pants on a regular basis and there were support groups for transvestites who merely cross-dressed for personal pleasure.

Both artists have different reasons for choosing his or her alter ego. Duchamp's quest for his new identity began after he finished his first mechanized work of art in 1920. He became fascinated with movement, "not only in his art or in the act of moving himself halfway around the world four times in four years, but in the most intimate way possible. Duchamp now devised for himself a uniquely bizarre movement—into another identity."[25] At first Duchamp had wanted to take a Jewish identity, but couldn't find his niche within that particular group—none "tempted"[26] him. Instead, he chose to change his sex. He originally picked the name Rose Sélavy; Rose was the "most 'awful name in 1920.'"[27] The name in French meant, "Pink, that's life." By the end of 1920, Duchamp had copyrighted his first work of art under her name—his, or rather her, *Fresh Widow*. However, soon, Duchamp changed her name to Rrose, rather than Rose, to complete the more apt pun "Eros, that's life."

Duchamp for a long time skipped over any explanation for Rrose. He merely told reporters that he "'wanted two identities, that's all.'"[28] However, Alice Marquis in her biography of Duchamp offers an explanation:

> Just at the moment when, at the age of thirty-three, Marcel was blocked in completion of his crucifixion fantasy, he engineered a resurrection: as Christ reappeared in a symbolic and metamorphosed form, so the artist Marcel had to die (i.e., stop work) and then reappear in a totally altered fashion. Now it was Rrose, a separate personality who was crude, rude, and vulgar, right down to her name, who expressed sexual impulses…Her boldness contrasted harshly with Duchamp's reticence. Her vulgarity canceled Duchamp's elegance.[29]

Rrose was born out of the need to expand Duchamp's career. He felt limited in his own body and needed to expand his horizons, which he found through his own portrayal as a woman. "Was Duchamp homosexual? No. Was he bisexual? No. Neither was he homophobic. He had any number of homosexual and bisexual friends. Did he dress in drag regularly? No—only when making a work of art."[30] Duchamp used Rrose to create works of art that were more avant-garde than those he created under his own name. All of his French puns were published under her name, as well. The fact that he chose a female pseudonym goes against history, in that typically both men and women both choose male pseudonyms.[31] However, the fact that he chose not to conceal that Rrose was Duchamp and Duchamp was Rrose is probably why it was more acceptable; it was known the Rrose was truly a man, and thus he attitude and

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[23] Rudolph M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, Tradition of Female Transvestism, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1989) 30.
[24] George Sand, whose real name was Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin, was a French female novelist, who adapted a male name in order to publish her work.
[25] Alice Marquis, Marcel Duchamp—Eros, C'est La Vie, a Biography, (Troy, New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1981) 179-180.
[26] Ibid, 180.
[27] Ibid, 180.
[28] Ibid, 189.
[29] Ibid, 200.
[30] Lanier Graham, Duchamp and Androgyny, (Berkeley, CA: No-Thing Press, 2003) 36.
[31] Kirsten Anderberg, "Women Writers in Alternative Media Using Male Pseudonyms," *Indymedia UK*, 19 Sept. 2004, 12 Apr. 2008 http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/09/297934.html.

personality enhanced the folly. Duchamp did not need to worry about breaching the art world with Rrose; she was famous because he was famous. However, if Duchamp had kept his alter ego separate from himself, the true question is, would she have become as famous as she is?

Ashery began to dress as Marcus Fisher for very different reasons. From an early age, Ashery had conflicting feelings about the socio-political tones of Israeli culture. She began her alter ego, Fisher, when her "oldest childhood friend from Israel stopped speaking to her because of his increasing Orthodoxy, Ashery funneled her frustration and sadness into a new art project: Since she could no longer communicate with her friend as a secular woman, she transformed into an Orthodox man."[32] Her choice of name was similar to Duchamp's in that it was coined as a pun: "Mar-Cus" means "Mr. Cunt" in modern Hebrew.

Ashery first began to use Fisher to go into all gay male dive bars in London, as well as the beach, and Turkish men's clubs. She wouldn't tell anyone that she was a woman, and would remain in character as Fisher.

> After walking spontaneously to clubs and the streets, these spontaneous interventions gave way to selective ones documented on video from afar. The main three interventions were SoHo, London - a haven of diversity where Marcus was testing the limits of multiculturalism and street-fashion. The second intervention was at a beach in Tel Aviv - Marcus went to a secular beach rather than the assigned orthodox beach and tested the limits of Otherness. The third intervention was in a men-only Turkish cafe in Berlin, where Marcus was welcomed with slight bemusement and tested the boundaries of masculinity and religion.[33]

Because London's Orthodox community is segregated from the hustle and bustle of secular London, Fisher seemed out of place, especially at unkosher cafés in SoHo, where Ashery thought that it "'was depressing when Marcus wouldn't get served.'"[34]

However, contrary to Duchamp's situation, Ashery felt that Fisher began to stifle her career, so she staged *Marcus Fisher's Wake* in 2000, which can also be seen in the exhibition. But Fisher just wouldn't die: "Marcus still haunts me, demanding to be seen…it seems that he is here to stay. He is part of me, he is the space where I question with others what is it to be or to relate to a Jew, here, now."[35] After the reemergence of Fisher, she went into the north of Israel in May 2003 to participate in the festivities being held for the memorial of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai in order to film *Dancing with Men*. In this film, she is dressed not necessarily as Fisher but as a generic Orthodox man, and literally dances with the other Orthodox men, who by the laws of modesty do not touch women other than their wives. The experience seems homoerotic, due to its very own nature: a giant dance party, only for men. This description of the community as very gender segregated and thus homoeroticized can be seen in much of the work Ashery does as Fisher. She looks deeper into the homoerotic roots of Orthodox Jewish men most recently when Fisher is seen in Ashery's project called *Say Cheese*.[36]

Ashery publishes all of her work in her own name, merely using the male persona and pseudonym to perform. This is because the entire point of her artwork that she creates as Marcus Fisher is that she is *truly* a woman, breaching into the world of men. She uses Fisher to explore her own heritage as a Jew, rather than a Jewish woman, because according to her, the world of Jewish men is "where the fun is, and the privilege."[37] While some of her work would remain controversial if published under Fisher's name, (like *Say Cheese*, along with her still images *Self Portrait as Marcus Fisher I-IV*, which feature Ashery as Fisher with her breast exposed, or with a prosthetic penis) other pieces, like the aforementioned *Dancing with Men* would just be another random video of Hassidic Jewish men dancing

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[32] Matt Wolf, Passing as Marcus Fisher, *Heeb Magazine*, November 2004 #7.
[33] Oreet Ashery, "Background Text," 19 Apr. 2008 http://7actsoflove.org/archive/background_text.html.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ashery.
[36] This project featured Marcus in a series of interactions with different people, each of which resulted in a single photograph. Each interaction took place in a bedroom, specifically with Marcus and the participant in bed. The photographs are funny, serious, sexy, and sad in turn, as all are entirely different, but the similarity is that they are all a little bit awkward in that the behavior is not befitting that of an Orthodox man.
[37] Ashery.

together that was posted on the internet, with no apparent point.

While both artists use an alter ego in the form of cross-dressing for the sake of their careers, as explained, each has an entirely different motive. Duchamp chose Rrose after already being successful whereas Ashery created Marcus at the beginning of her career. The art that each created was through a lens of gender issues; Duchamp felt that he couldn't publish his work as Sélavy in his own name, because it was truly *her* work, whereas Ashery uses Fisher to explore the Otherness and homoeroticism of Orthodox Judaism as experienced by a male. Ashery's situation is different to Duchamp's as she performs in live space as her alter ego; her art is film using other people as participants. It varies from film to film whether these people know that beneath Fisher's façade is a woman. With Duchamp's art, he only *dressed* as a woman for the few photos that Man Ray took of Sélavy. When he was composing his puns, he merely put on Sélavy's mind.

But just as cross-dressing has had a separate history for men and women, with different laws and social acceptance, each artist had entirely separate reasons, specific to his or her own gender, to choose an alter-ego at all. Neither would have been able to accomplish their goals without the use of cross-dressing, which as we have seen—with men wearing women's clothing for the sake of art and women wearing men's clothing for the sake of a career—is almost as old as art itself. Both Ashery and Duchamp allowed their creativity to be filtered through gender norms and gender roles, which will be examined further in the catalogue. However, there are vast differences between the two which need to be addressed; while men haven't been as readily accepted as cross-dressers throughout history, Duchamp's alter ego is more readily accepted than Ashery's for political reasons. While Rrose Sélavy may be sassy with her puns, there is nothing overtly political about Duchamp's work. As a part of the Dadaist movement, Duchamp used his art to challenge popular culture and art itself. Ashery, on the other hand, is extremely political. All of her art deals with gender issues as well as religious ones. She has received both good press, commending her creativity and openness, as well as bad reactions to her pieces, deemed vulgar or crude. However, as it is the modern age, artwork is mostly accepted no matter the form; people are allowed to have their opinions, but the artist is still allowed to produce his or her art.

I have chosen to juxtapose these two artists, because they are similar in certain aspects of their careers and use of alter ego, and these differences are interesting to examine. Ashery even uses comparisons between her Fisher and Duchamp's Sélavy within her own work, sometimes as a device to explain, and other times as a comparison. Each work of art in this exhibit was created by the artist's alter ego, and as you walk through the exhibition, the catalogue will explain each work of art and why the artist used his or her alter ego to create it.

In terms of how to walk through this exhibit, there isn't one particular order. You could choose Rrose Sélavy's side to begin, or Marcus Fisher's side; however, to look at the exhibit chronologically—Rrose's side first—would be beneficial. As Ashery tends to reference Rrose in her works, two of which are exhibited, it would be advantageous to see Rrose and Duchamp first. The floor plan in the back of this catalogue has a bird's eye view of the exhibit with arrows directing you around the exhibit, but it is not necessary to follow in order to understand the exhibit itself.

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Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy, 1920-21
Man Ray (b. 1890)
21.6 x 17.3 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Gelatin silver print photograph

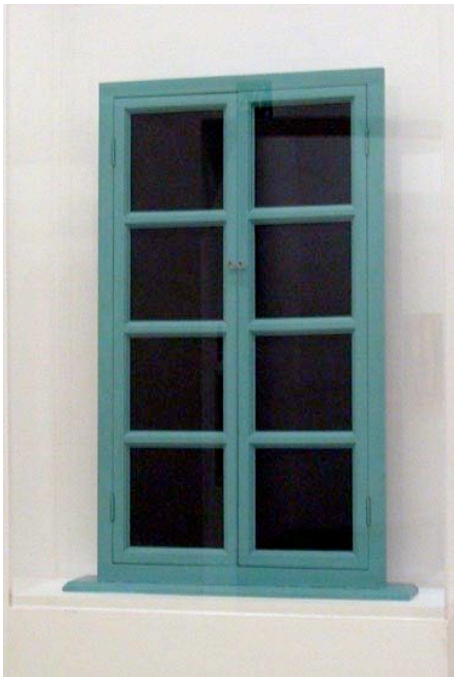
This photograph was the first public appearance of Rrose Sélavy. The ambiguity of gender—is it Duchamp in drag or is it actually a woman? —could be related back to Duchamp's L.H.O.O.Q., which he made the year before; a print of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* with a mustache and beard drawn onto it. Is the figure a male or a female? "Like his work, he now became a dual figure, male in one guise and female in the other, his identity as a person of one sex completed in his mind by the imagination of a partner who was his own mental projection of erotic desire idealized."[1] Duchamp, in the clothes he wore, became the allegory of Eros.

In the photograph, Duchamp as Sélavy takes an air of seduction, engaging the viewer with her direct gaze. The seductiveness is also in the style of photograph, "having been photographed with portrait conventions used in advertisements and celebrity photos of the time, conventions for eroticizing the female image to sell commodities or the female herself as commodity."[2] She wears fashionable and feminine clothing, with a hat, fur stole, and jewelry.

[1]Jerrold Seigel, The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995) 143.
[2] Amelia Jones, Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp, (New York: Cambrige University Press, 1994) 147.

Fresh Widow, 1920
Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887)
1.9 x 53.4 x 10.2 cm
Museum of Modern Art, NY
Painted wood with "panes" of waxed leather over glass

This is the first piece of work that Duchamp signed as Rose Sélavy, even before he added the additional "R" to her name. It is one of his ready-mades: a carpenter built the miniature French window, and then Duchamp removed the panes of glass and replaced them with pieces of leather, that he insisted be shined everyday as if they were shoes. The base of the piece bears her name in thick black letters, connecting her irrevocably with the piece. The pun of the title speaks of Sélavy, in that she was connected to most of Duchamp's puns. However it can be looked at further. Once one looks past the superficial layer of the two phrases, "French window" and "Fresh widow," which obviously sound similar, there is a deeper level of meaning. In French, the word for guillotine is *la veuve*, which means "widow" as well. Thus, one can look at this window, entitled Widow, to be a sort of guillotine for Duchamp himself. That he chose to sign this piece as Sélavy could be seen as his self-inflicted castration from his masculine identity in order to achieve his maximum capability through his feminine half.

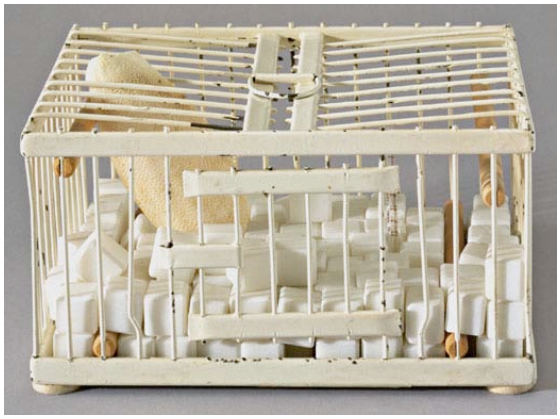


Another interpretation looks at the composition of the piece: the darkened windows that once used to let light through now are entirely opaque. One could view the window as a metaphor for the situation of a widow; a widowed woman is someone who has been stripped of her spouse and relationship which tied her to the external world. This window could be seen as a metaphor for how the death of her husband pushed her into solitude.

Resources: Arturo Schwartz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, Vol. 1, (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997).
Jerrold Seigel, The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy? (Replica of the 1921 original) 1964
Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887)
Museum of Modern Art, NY
Birdcage containing a thermometer, a piece of cuttlebone and marble cubes

Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy? is another one of Duchamp's famous ready-made pieces. This particular piece is, perhaps not as "readymade" as others, but as Duchamp called it himself, "A highly constructed 'semi-ready-made.'"[1] The piece is a birdcage filled with what looks to be sugar cubes, but in reality are cubes of marble, a cuttlefish bone, and a thermometer. The questions one must ask, of course, are, why



is Sélavy mentioned, and what do any of the things involved have to do with sneezing? Duchamp returned many times to the theme of the "liberty of indifference," which is displayed by "oscillating density."[2] To explain, oscillating density is when an object looks as if it should weigh a certain weight but in reality is either much lighter or heavier than expected. In this piece, the birdcage looks as if it is light and filled with sugar cubes, but when lifted, the marble is incredibly heavy and extremely unexpected. The title is only revealed once you lift the piece and look underneath, where in bold black lettering it states *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* Duchamp himself addressed this odd question by giving us the answer to the question, which is "You can't sneeze at will!"[3] Thus, the question of the entire piece as well as the purpose which is to make it look "liftable" is seemingly a joke. In stating that, we have our answer as to why Rrose Sélavy is involved; as stated in the introduction, Sélavy embodied what Duchamp didn't, and in this case it is her "prankster" side. The piece was actually a commission from Dorothea Dreier, who gave him a *carte blanche* to do whatever he pleased, after having commissioned a previous piece with too many specifications. However, once the piece was finished, Dreier who "loved birds and hated cages,"[4] was appalled, and though she paid Duchamp the money, asked that he find a different buyer.

[1]Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, and David Hopkins, Marcel Duchamp, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999) 164.
[2] Arturo Schwartz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, Vol. 1, (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997) 205.
[3] Ibid, Vol. 2, 690.
[4] Alice Marquis, Marcel Duchamp—Eros, C'est La Vie, a Biography, (Troy, New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1981) 186.
References: Jerrold Seigel, The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995) 169-170.

Belle Haleine, Eau De Voilette (Sweet Breath, Veil Water), 1921
Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887) and Man Ray (b. 1890)
Bottle height: 15.2 cm; box: 16.3 x 11.2 cm
Collection Yves Saint Laurent - Pierre Bergé
Assisted readymade: Rigaud perfume bottle with artists' label in cardboard box

This perfume bottle Duchamp called a "semi-ready-made" or "assisted-readymade." It was constructed by both Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp together; the culmination revealing a perfume bottle featuring Duchamp dressed once more as a woman. The Rigaud perfume bottle was originally titled *Un Air Embaumé,* which means "a fragrant air," but Duchamp chose to pun on one of two things: *Eau de Violette* meaning "violet water" or *Eau de Toilette* which is a French type of perfume. But by displacing a few letters, Duchamp created *Eau de Voilette,* "veil water." *Belle Haleine,* seemingly the name of the company, means "Beautiful breath" and is a pun on *Belle Hélène* or "Beautiful Helen," meaning Helen of Troy. Through these puns, if not by her initials on the logo, her face on the bottle, and her full name on the

box, Rrose Sélavy is behind this creation. As mentioned in *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*, Man Ray used a type of photography that was being used to market women or products advertised by women. He used the same sort of photography in this photo as well, which features Duchamp in a feather hat, extravagant necklace, and ruffled collar, with long curly hair and kohl-rimmed eyes. Thus, Duchamp used himself to "sell" the perfume, which was then used to actually sell the magazine *New York Dada*, where it was featured on the cover. By using his "femininity" to market the perfume, or product, Duchamp is satirizing the "contemporary codes of commodified feminine sexuality."[1]

But besides using Rrose as a marketing device to make fun of capitalism, Duchamp "unveils," if you will, a deeper meaning in the title. By mentioning "veil" Duchamp invokes thoughts of the act of veiling something, for example, his gender. The clothing he wears in the photograph act as a veil to cover Marcel Duchamp and reveal Rrose Sélavy. From just this, Sélavy seems to be a superficial persona, remaining only on the outside of Duchamp's body. However, the use of "veil water" and "beautiful breath" both refer to something internal. There are many different interpretations of the pun, that Duchamp got the breath from myths and it transformed him into a woman, or that the pun could be on *Eau de Toilette*, referring back to Duchamp's fountain with "toilet water." It could, perhaps, be instead, that he needed the veil to be internalized rather than external, and that the veil water gave Marcel Duchamp-cum-Rrose Sélavy the beautiful breath of life.

[1]Amelia Jones, Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp, (New York: Cambrige University Press, 1994) 173.
References: Arturo Schwartz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, Vol. 1, (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997) 216-217.
Dalia Judovitz, Unpacking Duchamp, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 132.
Photograph: http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/Belle%20Haleine.html

Baggage Tags for Rrose Sélavy, 1922
Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887)
6 x 12 cm
Yale University Collection, Beinecke Library, Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers
5 printed manila tags with twine

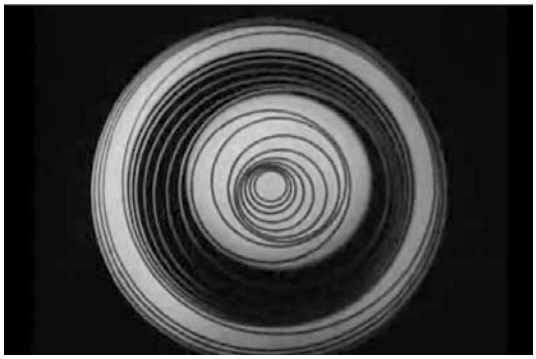
In order to understand most of Duchamp's work as Rrose Sélavy, one needs to have a sufficient grasp of the French language, or at least a very good dictionary. In the one baggage tag not attached to the others, Duchamp hand wrote, *"Ettie qu'êtes, (:Étiquette)"* and then the following in print, "Vous pour moi?"

Without the former written, the latter, "You for me," does not make much sense; "Baggage tags" in French are called "étiquettes de valise," but when the full phrase is translated, it means "Ettie, who are you for me?" Ettie Stettheimer, who was gifted this piece by Duchamp himself for her birthday, was one of three sisters, all of whom were friendly with Duchamp. However, Ettie was the closest to the artist, and "some who knew them thought a full-blown romance, perhaps even marriage was in the air."[1]

Thus, one can look at the phrase written on the tag to be something intimate, perhaps Duchamp asking Ettie what their relationship meant to her. But why would Duchamp use Sélavy to ask such a question? Oddly, in almost all of the correspondences Duchamp had with the Stettheimer sisters, he would sign off with "Rrose," or some mixture of his two names. Despite his not wearing the clothing of Sélavy, she was still a part of his person, and would always be in his mind and actions. So when he sent Ettie her birthday present of baggage tags for Rrose Sélavy, perhaps that was his way of revealing his inner most self to her, despite it being more popularly known as his "façade."

[1]Jerrold Seigel, The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995) 187.
References: Amelia Jones, Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp, (New York: Cambrige University Press, 1994) 159.
Ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, Affectionately | Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp, (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion Press, 2000).
Photograph: http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/dl_crosscollex/photoneg/oneITEM.asp?pid=39002037375012&iid=3737501&srchtype=CNO

Anémic Cinéma, 1925
Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887)
Museum of Modern Art, NY
Film
Only completed film



As previously mentioned, in order to understand much of Rrose's humor, one needs to have a firm grasp of the French language. *Anémic Cinéma* is no different. The film, which concludes with a frame stating "Copyrighted by Rrose Sélavy 1926" with a fingerprint, literally has her fingerprints all over it. The title is a pun itself, specifically an anagram, where the letters of one word rearrange to create another. It could even be seen as a slightly flawed palindrome. The film features Sélavy's puns spinning on discs, with Optical Discs in between each pun. Even if you don't understand the French, the Optical Discs themselves provide a little visual explanation, in that they all resemble breasts, love-bites, and even penises if you're looking. The puns, however, are even cruder. One disc reads, *Avez vous déjà la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée?* which translates to, "Have you already put the marrow of the sword in the oven of the loved one?" very obvious euphemisms for genitalia. Another says, *L'aspirant habit Javel et moi j'avais l'habite en spirale*, which translates as "The aspirant inhabits Javel and I have a spiral-shaped penis," *l'habite* sounding like *la bitte*, which is a vulgar term for penis, and Javel while being a Parisian avenue, is "also a vulgar term for semen."[1] That the discs are spinning dizzily, and slightly off-centered makes the rough translations of each phrase acceptable, because the skewed discs skew the words anyway.

Besides all of the vulgarity, the film's title does have meaning. The cinema is anemic due to its "erotic timidness and its endless but elusive chain of associations trapped between pictorial illusion and verbal allusion."[2] The eroticism is conveyed through the Optical Discs and the words, but lack of human representation gives the film itself an anemic feel, because this erotic feeling is not represented in the typical domain of popular cinema. In regards to Rrose, Duchamp was not exploring gender differences here. Rrose, in this case, was merely being her prankster self, filled with Eros, like her name.

[1] P. Adams Sitney, Visionary Film (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 373
[2] Ibid, 373.
References: Arturo Schwartz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, Vol. 1, (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997) 58.

Boy Marcus, 2000–2006
Oreet Ashery (b. 1966)
7.5 x 11 cm
Brooklyn Museum in *Global Feminisms Remix*
Photograph, from an original 1974 Polaroid Digital print on archival paper.

In *Boy Marcus,* Ashery chose a photo in which the child who represents a young Fisher stares directly at the camera. The head on gaze engages the viewer and one's eye is drawn from the child's eyes to his "exotic" ensemble. "Otherness" in the Jewish religion has had a long history, and in this photograph, Ashery shows Marcus as slightly different looking, captivating the viewer with a wide-eyed stare. He looks slightly scared, almost like the photographer caught him off

guard, but at the same time, looks like he knows nothing about the viewer's lifestyle, and is looking at the viewer as the viewer is regarding him.

Ashery uses this photo to address the childhood of Fisher, along with her own, and her reaction to religion. As Ashery left Israel at 19, meaning she left her army duty, and grew up in a non-religious household, this photograph explores the "other" for her; Orthodox children are basically dressed as their parents—girls in dresses with long sleeves and though boys have more options, here Marcus is shown in traditional, old-fashioned looking black and white, complete with a cap. The jacket, known as a *Lang Rekel* in Yiddish, is a garment customarily worn during the work week by Hasidic, or Ultra-Orthodox, Jews. In portraying Fisher in this outfit, Ashery is creating a conversation about the grip that Orthodox families have on their children. Instead of being able to grow up and develop relationships with whomever they please, the children are forced into a childhood of segregation, due to the religious restrictions and mannerisms that are instilled in them by their parents. This photo is less about gender issues than it is about religious ones; however, when analyzing Marcus Fisher, the two themes go hand in hand.

Resources: Anna Piazza, "A New Home for Feminist Art," *Hofstra Chronicle* 29 Mar. 2007, 20 Apr. 2008 http://media.www.hofstrachronicle.com/media/storage/paper222/news/2007/03/29/BSection/A.New.Home.For.Feminist.Art-2815602.shtml.

Young Marcus Looking, 2000–6
Oreet Ashery (b. 1966)
14 x 9.38 cm
Brooklyn Museum in *Global Feminisms Remix*
From an original 1998 photograph by Chaya Ashery Digital print on archival paper

Ashery's next chronological installment for Fisher features him as a teenaged boy, with the same unsettling stare, sans smile, at the camera. Fisher does not look as exotic as he did as a small child, but he still remains in the traditional Orthodox costume of suit and button down shirt with a *yarmulke*. In the background, there is a festive picture of a Hassidic man dancing, which is a popular theme in Hassidic Jewish art. The theme of dancing and Orthodox Judaism is one that Ashery also addresses in her film *Dancing With Men*, which was referenced in the introduction. She discusses the homoerotic nature of it; that men can only dance with and touch men, due to the practice of *sniut*, or modesty.

The juxtaposition of Ashery as Fisher with this particular work of art in the background creates a dialogue between the two, as it is the only thing seen in its entirety in the photo, besides Fisher. Thus, Ashery is addressing the ambiguity of gender and gender roles in Orthodoxy and within Fisher himself. As an Orthodox Jewish man, Fisher has to deal with *sniut* and with the all male festivities, and as an unmarried youth, has probably never touched a female (save for his mother) in his entire life. Due to the separation of the sexes, these young men are often confused about themselves and their bodies, and may not feel comfortable within their own skin. In this photo Ashery engages the viewer with her gaze, but at the same time, this issue takes almost as large a role as Fisher does in the frame. The viewer's eye is constantly drawn away from Fisher to look at the picture over his shoulder, which represents the ongoing aforementioned dialogue.

References: Could not find.

Self Portrait as Marcus Fisher I, 2000
Oreet Ashery (b. 1966)
120 x 94 cm
Brooklyn Museum in *Global Feminisms Remix*
Lambda print photograph

In this first *Self Portrait* of five, Ashery directly deals with effeminateness in the Hassidic male community. Here, unlike the previous two photographs, Ashery is looking down at her own breast, so the viewer is drawn by her gaze to the object of her attention. But now the question one must ask is, is that Ashery's breast, or a prosthetic that Fisher is holding to his body? Fisher, in this photograph, is a grown man, dressed in the traditional black hat, white collared shirt over a *talit katan*, or prayer shawl worn by traditional Hassidic men to obey the commandment of Numbers 15:38.[1] But the shawl is pushed out the of the way and held by a hand in order to reveal this potentially alien form. "From the way he is holding the breast out to the viewer and the way he is looking closely at it – it is as if to invite us to scrutinize the object as evidence to confound the expectations of the image as male."[2] So that begs the question, is Marcus truly male? Or is Ashery always beneath the surface ready to reveal her female form?

As far as "real time" goes, this picture was created earlier than the two from Fisher's past. While *Young Marcus Looking* may be from an earlier time period, Ashery was not yet Fisher, and it wasn't until after the *Self Portrait* series was made that Ashery returned to the photo taken by her sister to turn it into her alter ego. The *Self Portrait* series was Ashery's first work *as* Fisher, attempting to deal with the abandonment and newly found Orthodoxy of her friend. That playing with gender specific parts while in costume may be an obvious manner of approach, it still is edgy and new in this particular context of Judaism, and is still open for debate as to what it *truly* means. Ashery offers no concrete explanation herself, but rather explains that it was a foray into this new experiment of dressing as Fisher. She didn't even have a true grasp of what Fisher's personality would be like by the time she was making these, and therefore one can only hypothesize about what these photographs as the origin of Fisher could mean for his future.

[1] "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, that they shall make themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations." A *talit katan* is a four cornered garment worn for the sole purpose that most people do not wear four cornered garments on a regular basis and thus must wear one intentionally as to be able to wear the fringes.
[2] Dr Rachel Garfield, "Transgressing the Sacred, the art of Oreet Ashery," Jewish Quarterly, Summer 2002, 22 Apr. 2008 http://oreetashery.net/library/ 6.
References: Oreet Ashery, "Background Text," 19 Apr. 2008 http://7actsoflove.org/archive/background_text.html.
Raul Zamudio, "Venus or Penis Envy," NYARTS Magazine, v. 11, No. 7/8 July/August 2006, 23 Apr. 2008 http://oreetashery.net/library/.

Self Portrait as Marcus Fisher IV, 2000
Oreet Ashery (b. 1966)
110x100cm
Home London
Lambda print photograph

This photograph of Fisher belongs to the same series as the previous photograph, and thus can be included in the same conversation. However, instead of dealing with Fisher's

femininity, this deals with his masculinity. As an educated viewer, well versed on the knowledge of the artist, I know that in *Self Portrait I*, Ashery is truly exposing her breast, and in this, she is holding a prosthetic penis out of her pants. However, if one were to look at these photos objectively, could one tell which body part was real and which was fake? I personally do not think so. Then, which photograph seems more natural, with Fisher at the most ease? From body language, Fisher seems more intimate in the first photo, while offering the viewer a chance to examine his breast. Whereas in the second photo, he looks more stiff and uncomfortable with the appendage in his hands. Because it is strange behavior for a Hassidic Jew to expose himself in any sense, neither photograph truly seems "normal," so one can't automatically choose to acknowledge the penis photograph as the "real" one, because neither one is truly real. Each plays with part of the farce of Ashery as Fisher or Fisher as Fisher, and different aspects of Fisher's Judaism. As mentioned in *Young Marcus Looking*, he does not seem to be comfortable in his own skin, and as this picture shows Fisher's flesh rather than Ashery's, that is how I choose to interpret it. However because Ashery chose not to have Fisher's eyes revealed to the viewer, we do not truly know what Fisher is thinking and thus one must interpret the pictures as he or she sees fit.

References: Oreet Ashery, "Background Text," 19 Apr. 2008 http://7actsoflove.org/archive/background_text.html.
Dr Rachel Garfield, "Transgressing the Sacred, the art of Oreet Ashery," Jewish Quarterly, Summer 2002, 22 Apr. 2008 http://oreetashery.net/library/
Raul Zamudio, "Venus or Penis Envy," NYARTS Magazine, v. 11, No. 7/8 July/August 2006, 23 Apr. 2008 http://oreetashery.net/library/.

What's It Like for You? 2000
Oreet Ashery (b. 1966)
Online (http://oreetashery.net/video/whatsitlikeforyou)
Film

What's It Like For You? is Ashery's first film featuring Fisher. By this point, she seems to have developed more of a personality for her alter ego, and here he is seen as an art student dancing in Central St. Martin School of Art. The film is a short music video, only four minutes long, but is rich with material. In it, Fisher goes into a male bathroom, snorts eggshells, draws graffiti on the wall ("Me Waz Ere"), dances in various places, and gets his hair cut to resemble, who else but, Marcel Duchamp from a picture of Man Ray (featured in the photograph in Ashery's hand) where he is sporting a pentagram shaved into the back of his hair. However, instead of a pentagram, Fisher gets a Jewish star. After the hair cut Fisher reflects on the image while removing his beard and transforming into Ashery regarding the photograph. Did Ashery remove the false beard because Duchamp is Duchamp in the photo rather than Sélavy?

The film is wrought with idiosyncrasies with Ashery as Fisher as a male, for example, the graffiti; Ashery chooses not to use a gender specific pronoun, and then after drawing a cartoonish outline of a Hassidic man, Fisher kisses the area where the mouth should be with bright pink lipstick. The film, rather than defining Fisher, explores the boundaries between Fisher and Ashery. It is less about religion and more about the representation of the art and the artist and partially gender. But as stated before, when dealing with Fisher, one can never remove the topic altogether from religion. To explain, at the end of the film when Ashery removed Fisher's beard, she still has the Jewish star shaved into the back of her head, despite her removal of Fisher's façade. But does she still have his Judaism as well?

References: Could not find.

Marcus Fisher's Wake, 2000
Oreet Ashery (b. 1966)
Online (http://oreetashery.net/video/marcusfisherswake)
Film

Marcus Fisher's Wake was the film in which Ashery attempted to kill Fisher from herself. After dealing with Fisher in live performance art, in *What's It Like for You?* and in still photographs, Ashery felt stifled by him, that he was taking over her career. So she organized this film to pay homage to his life in a "mockumentary" format. The film features shoddy filming, a cheesy fake American narrator, old home videos from Ashery's own childhood, video recordings of some of her live art performances (like the SoHo café and the Turkish men's club). The narrator is as consistent as the jerky filming; there are awkward pauses and gaps, but in reality it is the narration that gives meaning to the film.

The film is otherwise silent, with no character addressing the camera other than this person speaking. It is interesting that one cannot define the narrator's gender from his or her voice, just like as one can't necessarily define Fisher's gender from his appearance. The film begins with explaining gender roles in the Jewish religion and within the family setting. The narrator explains that Fisher's mother, or rather Ashery's, ran away from an Orthodox household as a young woman. That Ashery chooses to use true autobiographical details like this, as well as her father cooking for the family, once more blurs the lines between Ashery and Fisher. Is Ashery trying to tell the viewer that Fisher grew out of Ashery's household? Not only is he her alter ego, but he is her alternative reality. After the childhood arc, Fisher is portrayed as both homoeroticised and misunderstood in turns. The narrator depicts him as having a sexual obsession with young, muscular boys wrapping *tefillin*[1] but also depicts him as a confused art student, using footage of Ashery performing on stage as Fisher. The episodes in this film "plumb the depths of queering and othering and confront us with the unambiguities that usually establish a legibility of gender, sexual, religious or ethnic affiliation."[2] Certain details that the narrator discusses create the "otherness" of Fisher, like the eroticizing of wrapping *tefillin*, and other times, Fisher creates it for himself, like his performance on stage beating himself with red straps. At the very end of the film, a picture of Rrose Sélavy is displayed on the screen, almost as a device to explain that Fisher is contrived, if there was any doubt left. But just as Sélavy was a critical part of Duchamp, Fisher, too, is a critical part of Ashery; if it wasn't clear in *What's It Like for You?* at the end of the film, Ashery and Fisher sport the same hairstyle. This means that the lines between ego and alter ego may not be so clear, as the alter ego is still a part of oneself.

[1] Phylacteries.
[2] Renate Lorenz, "Normal Love," Exhibition, 19 Jan 2007-4 Mar. 2007. http://www.normallove.de/htm/engl_film.htm#oben1
References: Oreet Ashery, "Background Text," 19 Apr. 2008 http://7actsoflove.org/archive/background_text.html.
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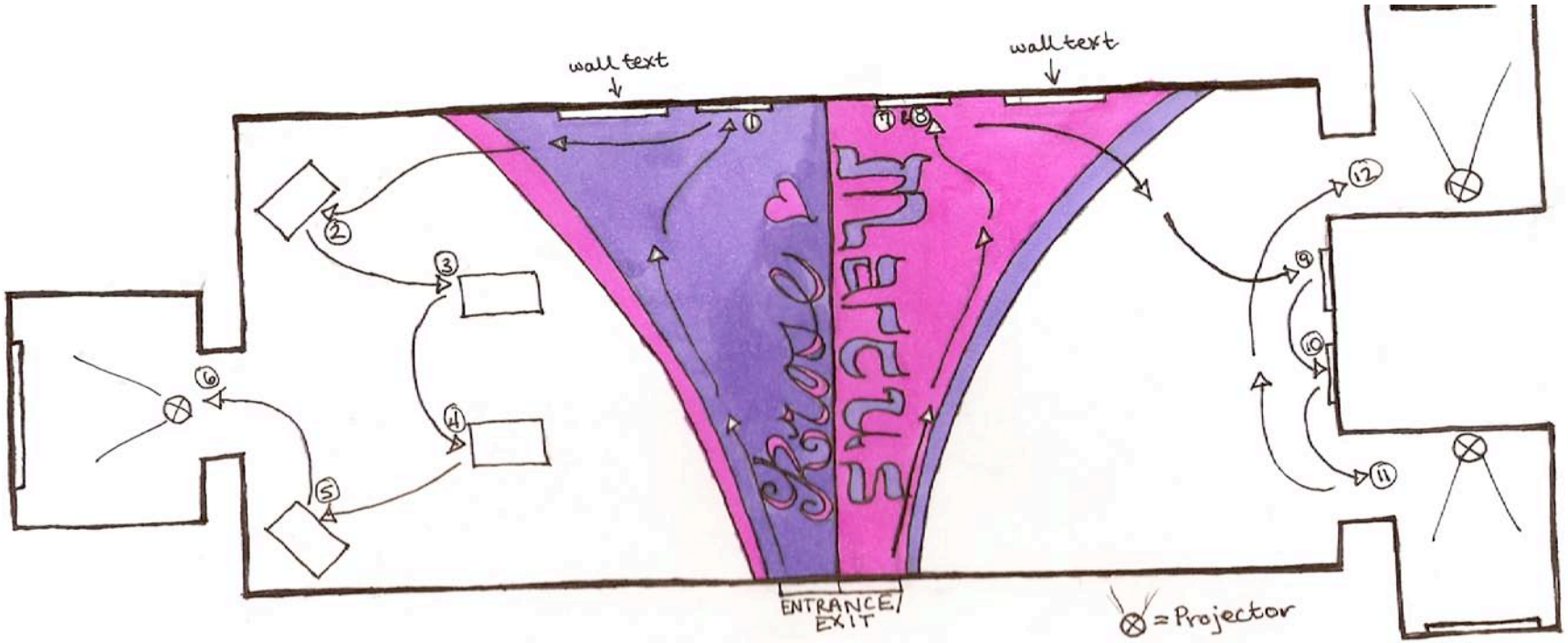

Bird's Eye View layout

1. *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*
2. *Fresh Widow*
3. *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?*
4. *Belle Haleine*
5. *Baggage Tags for Rrose Sélavy*
6. *Anémic Cinéma*
7. *Self Portrait as Marcus Fisher I*
8. *Self Portrait as Marcus Fisher IV*
9. *Boy Marcus*
10. *Young Marcus Looking*
11. *What's It Like For You?*
12. *Marcus Fisher's Wake*

Note: the sculptures by Duchamp are seated on plain white block pedestals under glass covers. Each is lit from the top and the front (2 lights each) and each photograph has two lights focused on it as well. The projectors are hung from the ceiling and project onto the wall indicated.

Marcel Duchamp was born in 1887 in France and is best known for his influence in avant-garde and Dadaist art. Duchamp felt limited in his own body and personality and needed to expand his horizons artistically, and as a result Rrose Sélavy was born. Her name means, "Eros, that's life," and Duchamp used this alter ego to create art that way the converse of him; vulgar, rude, and bold. She copyrighted most of Duchamp's puns and writings, along with many of his ready-mades.

Oreet Ashery was born in Israel in 1966 and moved to London when she turned 19. From an early age, Ashery had conflicting feelings about the socio-political tones of Israeli culture. She began to use her alter ego, Marcus Fisher, when her oldest friend from Israel stopped speaking to her due to his choice to become more Orthodox. Ashery began to explore her feelings and frustrations through Fisher, and continued to create dialogue about gender and religious issues by using this persona.

Note: Only the floor is painted in blue and pink and the above diagram does not include name tags for the photographs, though they would be similar to the headings in the catalogue.