

László Lakner

Fragment Marcel Duchamp

30 September – 14 November 2025

László Lakner's oeuvre is saturated with literary and art-historical references. Quotation in his work functions as a unique form of identification: series of major importance in his career are populated by the works, motifs, and texts of artists such as Rembrandt, Leonardo, Kurt Schwitters, Vladimir Tatlin, Paul Celan, and Walt Whitman, alongside the manuscripts, sentences, and volumes of philosophers including Arthur Schopenhauer and György Lukács.

Marcel Duchamp holds a distinguished place among the artists mentioned. Already in his early work *Polytechnical Instructional Cupboard* (1962–64), one finds references to the capillary tubes of Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915–23). A few years later, he paid homage to Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (1921) with a conceptual sugar cube object (*Hommage à Marcel Duchamp [To Rose Sélavy]*, 1969), then in the 1970s, he monumentalized *Duchamp's Comb* in a photorealist painting (1973–74). Marcel Duchamp, as a painter who abandoned painting, became a key reference in theoretical discourses concerning the end and fate of painting. Lakner painted Duchamp's readymade in a photorealistic manner, thus reintroducing it into the field of painting—although in his work of the time, painting itself was no more than a conceptual gesture. During the 1970s, Lakner moved from a conceptuality beyond painting to (conceptualized) painting beyond conceptuality. He collected historical documents and other textual or photographic sources as ready-mades and reinterpreted them in his large-scale, photorealistic series of paintings entitled *Gesammelte Dokumente*.

Following his emigration to West Germany in 1974, handwritten traces preserved in archival documents became central to his art. Initially, he painted these manuscript originals with photographic fidelity (almost following the hand movements of his predecessors), before adopting a freer mode of quotation by the late 1970s. He painted a significant series based on Leonardo's notes and returned again to Duchamp. In 1978–79, he produced nine monochrome paintings quoting Duchamp's manuscripts – this time, instead of imitating Duchamp's handwriting, he inscribed the fragments in his own script: "On these nine paintings, mostly completed in 1978 [...], I made white the subject of intervention and applied it – as old painter's manuals would say – »a la prima«. The substance of the material urged spontaneous action. I enjoyed how the motoric gestures embedded themselves into the thickly painted surface, and how the transcription of signs could be considered identical with painting itself. Everything stemmed from my reading of Duchamp, especially his »*Notes and Projects for the Large Glass*«, which I studied during long sleepless nights in the winter of 1978. I was absorbed by the recurrent problem of light as Duchamp analyzed it there," as he told to Thomas Deecke. (1)

Comparable to Robert Ryman's monochromes, Lakner's white canvases interrogate the limits of painting while retaining the elemental sensuality of impasto. Later, several of these white works were overpainted in gray, and he repeatedly revisited the incised textual fragments within monochrome layers that derived mostly from Duchamp's *Litanies of the Chariot*, associated with the *Large Glass*. Lakner subsequently painted brown and blue variations on the theme. The exhibition at Vintage Galéria presents a selection from Lakner's Duchamp cycle. In these scriptural works, the painterly surface reinterprets Duchampian skepticism toward "retinal" painting through the sensual experience of matter.

Dávid Fehér

(1) László Lakner. *Malerei 1974-1979. Eine Auswahl von Bildern und Objekten*, kat. Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 1979, 25.

László Lakner (1936) is among the foremost of Hungary's neo-avantgarde artists. In 1968 and 1969 he participated in the landmark "Iparterv" exhibitions in Budapest; he exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1972, 1976 and 1990, at documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977, and at the 3rd Biennale of Sydney in 1979. Solo shows were held in 1974 at the Neue Galerie – Sammlung Ludwig in Aachen, and in 1975 at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. He is the recipient of a grant to the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program in 1974, the German Critics' Prize of 1976, a PS1 grant to New York in 1981, and Hungary's prestigious Kossuth Prize in 1998. Retrospectives of his art have been held at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2004-2005), at Modern in Debrecen (2022), and at the Olomouc Museum of Art, Czechia (2024). Works by Lakner are held by the main public art collections in Hungary (including, among others, the Museum of Fine Arts – Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest; Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest; Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; King St. Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár) and by major global art institutions, among them: Centre Pompidou, Paris; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen; Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; and Hara Museum, Tokyo.

Dávid Fehér

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"Duchamp", 1988
oil on canvas, 200x170 cm

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"Fragment Marcel Duchamp", 1990-91
oil on canvas, 200x340 cm

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"Duchamp", 2013
oil on canvas, 148x198 cm

O.T. (Ohne Titel), 1988-1991
oil on canvas, 200x160 cm