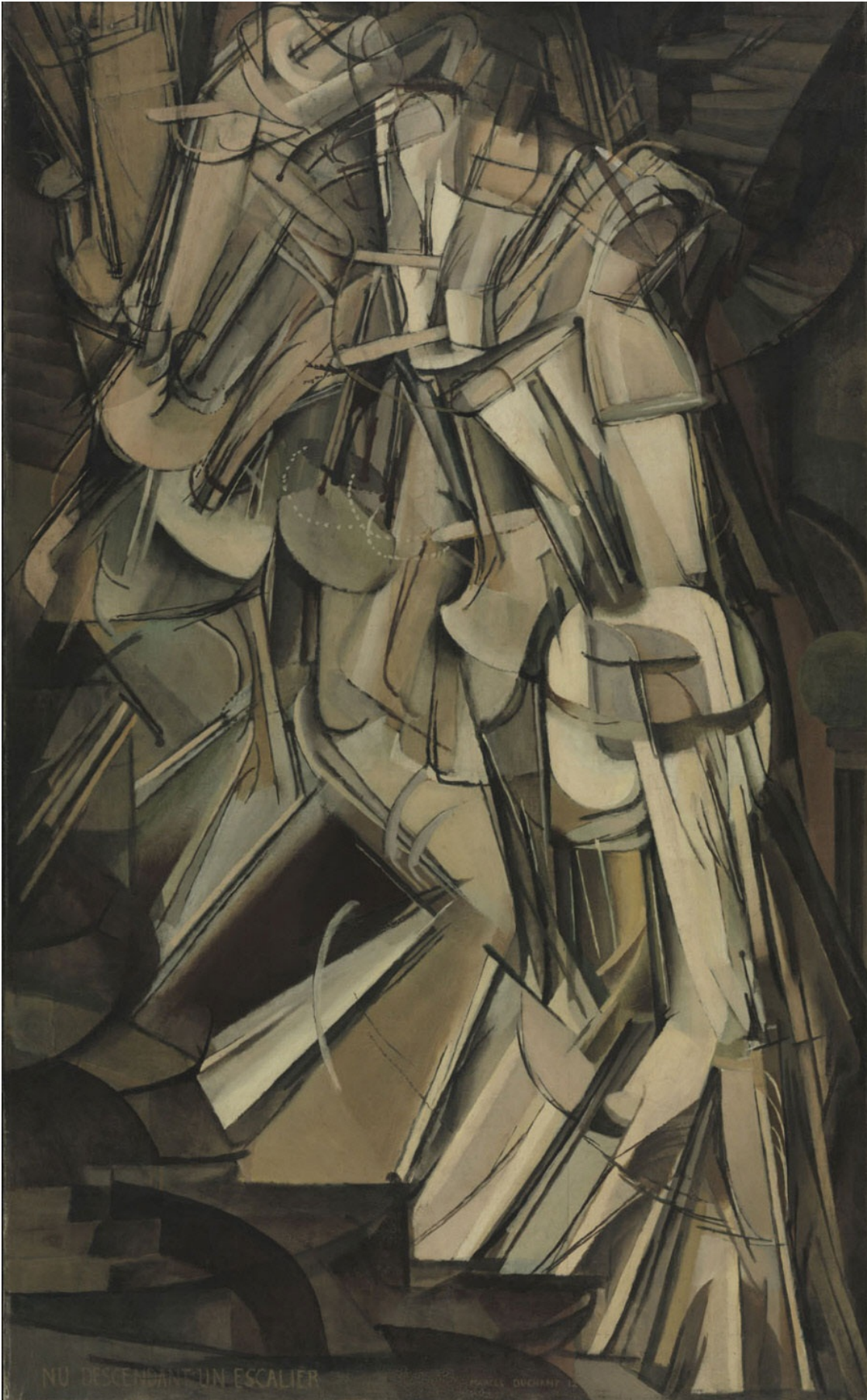


[Collections : Search Collections \(/collections/search.html\)](#)



↓ ↗ ↘ ↙ ↕ e Descending a Staircase (No. 2)

Marcel Duchamp, American (born France), 1887 - 1968

Geography: Made in France, Europe

Date: 1912

Medium: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 57 7/8 x 35 1/8 inches (147 x 89.2 cm) Framed: 59 3/4 x 36 3/4 x 2 inches (151.8 x 93.3 x 5.1 cm)

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Curatorial Department: European Painting

\* Gallery 182, Modern and Contemporary Art, first floor (d'Harnoncourt Gallery) (/floorplan/?

Accession Number:

1950-134-59

Credit Line:

The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950

## InsideOut (/exhibitions/841.html)

A replica of this work is featured in Inside Out (/exhibitions/863.html), a series of outdoor exhibitions throughout the region.

### Social Tags [? (/collections/socialTagging.html)]

[cubism \(/collections/browse.html?tagID=7\) \[x\]](/collections/browse.html?tagID=7) [exciting \(/collections/browse.html?tagID=7861\) \[x\]](/collections/browse.html?tagID=7861) [motion \(/collections/browse.html?tagID=797\) \[x\]](/collections/browse.html?tagID=797) [nude descending staircase \(/collections/browse.html?tagID=5341\) \[x\]](/collections/browse.html?tagID=5341) [provocative \(/collections/browse.html?tagID=7862\) \[x\]](/collections/browse.html?tagID=7862) [rhythmic \(/collections/browse.html?tagID=5571\) \[x\]](/collections/browse.html?tagID=5571)

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Label:

On March 18, 1912, Marcel Duchamp received an unexpected visit from his two brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, at his studio in Neuilly-sur-Seine. They informed their younger brother that the hanging committee of the Salon des Indépendants exhibition in Paris, which included themselves, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, and others, had rejected his *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. These Cubist painters had refused to display the painting on the grounds that "A nude never descends the stairs--a nude reclines." Although the work was shown in the Salon de la Section d'Or in October 1912, Duchamp never forgave his brothers and former colleagues for censoring his work.

### Explore the Collections

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Additional information:

### (/publications/378-2-30077.html) **Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections**

This painting created a sensation when it was exhibited in New York in February 1913 at the historic Armory Show of contemporary art, where perplexed Americans saw it as representing all the tricks they felt European artists were playing at their expense. The picture's outrageousness surely lay in its seemingly mechanical portrayal of a subject at once so sensual and time-honored. The *Nude's* destiny as a symbol also stemmed from its remarkable aggregation of avant-garde concerns: the birth of cinema; the Cubists' fracturing of form; the Futurists' depiction of movement; the chromophotography of Etienne-Jules Marey, Eadweard Muybridge, and Thomas Eakins; and the redefinitions of time and space by scientists and philosophers. The painting was bought directly from the Armory Show for three hundred dollars by a San Francisco dealer. Marcel Duchamp's great collector-friend Walter Arensberg was able to buy the work in 1927, eleven years after Duchamp had obligingly made him a hand-colored, actual-size photographic copy. Today both the copy and the original, together with a preparatory study, are owned by the Museum. Ann Temkin, from *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections* (1995), p. 307.

### (/publications/378-2-30233.html) **Twentieth-Century Painting and Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art**

Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* sparked a storm of controversy at the International Exhibition of Modern Art held at the National Guard 69th Regiment Armory in New York in 1913. The painting was perceived by the majority of art critics to be utterly unintelligible, and it soon became the butt of jokes, jingles, and caricatures. The *American Art News* offered a ten dollar reward to the first reader who could "find the lady"<sup>1</sup> within the jumble of interlocking planes and jagged lines, and newspaper cartoonists had a field day with the painting, lampooning it with such titles as "The Rude Descending the Staircase (Rush Hour at the Subway)" and the memorable "Explosion in a Shingle Factory." When Duchamp learned of the scandal, he was delighted, and the widespread notoriety that the painting brought him encouraged the French artist to move to New York two years later.

Duchamp reduced the descending nude to a series of some twenty different static positions whose fractured volumes and linear panels fill almost the entire canvas. The faceted disintegration of the mechanized figure and the monochromatic tonality are typical of Cubist painting of the time. However, the serial depiction of movement goes beyond Cubism in its attempt to map the motion and energy of the body as it passes through space. Duchamp's interest in plotting the static phases of a moving subject has often been compared to the work of the Italian Futurists, who were obsessed with notions of velocity. Another precedent for the work can be found in the time-lapse photography of Étienne-Jules Marey in France and Eadweard Muybridge and Thomas Eakins in the United States. Muybridge's book *Animal Locomotion*, of 1887, which included a sequence of twenty-four images of a naked woman descending a flight of stairs, possibly served as a source for Duchamp's landmark painting. *Twentieth Century Painting and Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (2000), p. 27.

Note:






1) *American Art News*, vol. 11, no. 21 (March 1, 1913), p. 3, and vol. 11, no. 22 (March 8, 1913), p. 3.

\* Works in the collection are moved off view for many different reasons. Although gallery locations on the website are updated regularly, there is no guarantee that this object will be on display on the day of your visit.

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