



Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects after the Readymade (Interfaces: Studies in Visual Culture)

By Janine Mileaf

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Finalist for the Robert Motherwell Book Award

Touch suggests a broad range of physical, intellectual, and emotional connections that serve to undermine the dominance of vision in histories of modernism. By exploding notions of the very nature of art, the artists considered in this beautifully illustrated monograph introduced fundamentally new conceptions of subjectivity and engagement for the modernist era. While offering an entertaining and engaging history of dada and surrealism, *Please Touch* presents a persuasive argument highlighting the role of “tactility,” which it defines as a decentralized, fragmented, and intimate form of knowing. In this compelling volume, Janine Mileaf offers the first full-length consideration of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades and their profound legacy in the transatlantic context of dada and surrealism. This book embraces a broad range of art objects: consumer items such as the urinal and bottlerack that Duchamp “sneaked” into art exhibits; flea-market assemblages fabricated by his interwar avant-garde successors Man Ray, André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Meret Oppenheim, and others; and the bricolage boxes of American surrealist Joseph Cornell.

Please Touch is an intriguing exploration of some of the twentieth century’s most important art and artists that will appeal to a broad range of art historians and interdisciplinary scholars.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Mileaf gives accounts of the varieties of tactility in its art-historical and philosophical variations, and her thoughtfully contextualised and imaginative analyses of the objects are an important contribution to current thinking about them, inflecting the familiar with the unfamiliar." —*Oxford Art Journal*

Review

"Explicitly looking through a lens inflected by the recent interest in synaesthetic and haptic approaches to visibility, Janine Mileaf's *Please Touch* delineates a new history of Dada and Surrealism by focusing on a relation of touch (literal or imagined) evoked by the groups' found and constructed objects. Among other things, this novel strategy provides a compelling way of rethinking the transition between Dada (with its humorous or aggressive approach to artmaking) and Surrealism (with its turn to the erotic), and between the European arms of these movements and the US-based versions. Mileaf's book is both lucid and compelling; moving beyond models of art that restrict interpretation to the visual regime by calling upon the sensual effects of the works themselves, *Please Touch* shifts the framework through which histories of modern art will be told." (Amelia Jones, Professor and Grierson Chair in Visual Culture, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University)

"In *Please Touch*, Janine Mileaf directs our focus to the tactile as the necessary sense through which Dada and surrealist artists experienced the object. Even more, she takes tactility as a critical lens through which to re-evaluate long accepted understandings of Surrealism's 'bad boys' (Duchamp, Dalí, Breton, and Cornell) and in turn also opens her analysis to its 'leading ladies' (Mary Reynolds, Suzanne Duchamp, Valentine Hugo, Meret Oppenheim, and Jaqueline Lamba). In Mileaf's account, objects became the motor through which ideas about modernity, beauty, the self and other, were constantly being re-imagined in the context of the every day life pressures of history and politics. Her detective work and the new conceptual frames that she creates for Surrealism are lasting contributions?outside of the individual chapters, and her extensive comparative analysis of the artwork, both of which are admirable, it is her time in the archive and her ability to distil from that experience the larger, field-changing questions related to Surrealism and the object that will make this book a lasting contribution." (Jordana Mendelson, New York University)

About the Author

JANINE MILEAF is an associate professor of art history at Swarthmore College.

Users Review

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Kathy Ahmed:

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