

*Painting is a language of its own.
You cannot interpret one form of
expression with another form of expression.*

- Marcel Duchamp

In 1923, Marcel Duchamp stopped working on the piece *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, also known as *The Large Glass*. Duchamp, who would later be known for having paved the way for conceptual art, considered *The Large Glass* as his most important work of art. But after having worked on the glass for more than eight years, he had lost interest, and he concluded that the work was to be «definitively unfinished».

Almost 40 years later, in 1961, the head of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Pontus Hultén, wanted to introduce *The Large Glass* to the Swedish public. But this would prove to be easier said than done. Following an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1927, *The Large Glass* had suffered

extensive damage during transport and the glass was shattered. Afterwards, when the piece had been repaired by Duchamp by holding the pieces of broken glass together between two sheets of glass, he declared with great delight that *The Large Glass* – with its arbitrary cracks – was finally a completed work.

Despite the fact that the work was repaired, Hultén was refused when he asked the Philadelphia Museum of Art, who owns the work, if he could borrow it for the upcoming exhibition in Sweden. The glass was too fragile.

For the exhibition in Stockholm, Duchamp and the museum agreed to make a copy of *The Large Glass* that was to be included in the museum's collection. The man who was commissioned to produce the copy was the art critic and jazz musician Ulf Linde. When he initiated what was to be a long and laborious process, the exhibition opening was only three months away.

Linde's claustrophobia ruled out flying to Philadelphia to see the original work, and because of seasickness, he did not want to embark on a long journey by boat. By now Linde described himself as «obsessed» by *The Large*

Glass, and the only way for him to see it with his own eyes was to make a copy.

When he started working on the complex three-metre tall piece in oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust Linde based the work on the limited number of photographs of The Large Glass available to him. All were in black and white, and in books where details often were lost in the coarse halftone pattern from the printing process. As a supplement, Linde had a hand-coloured, but unreliable reproduction made by Duchamp.

Linde quickly identified the limitations of the material, «through great effort, we learned that a reproduction will only reflect a fraction of what's in the reproduced original».

Despite the challenging point of departure, Linde was determined to make an exact replica of The Large Glass. When it was too difficult to determine the correct colour or shading to be applied, Linde – with the utmost respect – contacted Duchamp, who was living in New York. More often than not, the feedback was both cryptic and open to interpretation.

With Linde working day and night The Large Glass did finally get ready for the opening. When Duchamp visited Stockholm to see the show, Linde was anxious about the artist's evaluation of the copy. As Duchamp arrived at the museum he halted, amazed: «How very amusing, but I never thought about the fact that the glass wasn't cracked.»

Linde was concerned about the similarity between the copy and the original, but Duchamp assured him that he was satisfied with the outcome, and that the small deviations were irrelevant. Linde proposed to make adjustments while Duchamp was in Stockholm, but Duchamp preferred to spend his time sightseeing with his wife Teeny. For the inspection at the museum, Linde had managed to get hold of a glass worker, with hopes of getting Duchamp's input on the design of three glass panels that were to divide the work in two sections. When the impatient craftsman wanted exact instructions, Duchamp answered, carefree, that it didn't matter, and that he didn't remember how he had done it anyway. He asked Linde if he could make the decision, since he had never been satisfied with the outcome in the original.

But in one part of the piece, Duchamp insisted on making an immediate change: the cones that were part of the so-called bachelor machine should have been greener. Linde got hold of some of veronese-green paint and turpentine, and Duchamp fixed it within a matter of minutes.

Twenty years later, Linde was still puzzled over this, since the cones weren't green in any of the colour photographs that later surfaced of Duchamp's original.

When the Tate Gallery in London unveiled its replica of The Large Glass in 1966, precisely executed, after Duchamp's notations by artist Richard Hamilton, Linde realised that Duchamp's original must have had details that were not visible in the photographs he had based his copy on, «I was suffering when I saw that the copy at Moderna Museet, and I asked Pontus to put it away, in the storage room. It stayed there for several years.»

As new photographs of the original later was made available, it became painfully clear to Linde that several parts of the work were inaccurate: the chocolate grinder was too dark, the sledge too green, and the bride too heavy

and wrongly shaded. In addition to this, the copy was made with cheap glass that gave a green tinge to the parts that were painted white. But none of this seemed to have bothered Duchamp, who on his own initiative signed the back of Linde's copy: «Certifié pour copie conforme, Marcel Duchamp, Stockholm 1961».

In the years to come, Linde made numerous adjustments to the Large Glass, and in 1982 he concluded the work on the copy, 21 years after the work had been begun.

Ten years later, an additional copy of The Large Glass was included in Moderna Museet's collection, completed by Linde, in collaboration with the artists Henrik Samuelsson and John Stensborg. In the new copy, the deviations in the first copy are corrected, and the piece is in this regard a more precise replica of the original from 1923.

This copy was authorised by the artist's widow 24 years after his death, and is not signed by Duchamp.