



Modern and Contemporary Art

***Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)***

1912

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

Oil on canvas

57 7/8 x 35 1/8 inches (147 x 89.2cm)

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*Currently not on view*

1950-134-59

The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950

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**Additional information:**

• **[Handbook of the Collection](#)**

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.