Warm Ashes: The Life and Career of Mary Reynolds

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By nature a modest, self-effacing woman who preferred being in the background, Mary Reynolds nonetheless found herself at the center of the Surrealist movement, as both artist and advocate. As the artist Marcel Duchamp described her, she "was an eye-witness of the Dadaist manifestations and on the birth of Surrealism in 1924.... [and] was among the 'supporters' of the new ideas. In a close friendship with André Breton, Raymond Queneau, Jean Cocteau, Djuna Barnes, James Joyce, Alexander Calder, [Joan] Miró, Jacques Villon, and many other important figures of the epoch, she found the incentive to become an artist herself. She decided to apply her talents to the art of bookbinding."[1] The bindings preserved in the Mary Reynolds Collection at The Art Institute of Chicago are an eloquent testament to her significance as an artist.

Duchamp was a key influence on Mary Reynolds's life and art. For nearly three decades, Reynolds and Duchamp enjoyed a union that was "thought by their friends to be happier than most marriages."[2] From the late 1920s on, Duchamp had two addresses in Paris: his own small apartment on rue Larrey and Reynolds's house on rue Hallé. He had long before stopped making art publicly, but continued to be immersed in the "new forms of rebellion" that would lead to Surrealism. Reynolds joined him in this activity, and it is the resulting Surrealist vocabulary, with its wit and surprise, that most informs her work.

**Early Life: 1891–1921**

Mary Louise Hubachek Reynolds was born in 1891 in Minneapolis into a well-to-do family; her father, Frank Rudolph Hubachek, was a lawyer; and her mother, Nellie Brookes Hubachek, a homemaker. Educated in Minneapolis public schools, Mary Hubachek went east in 1909 to attend Vassar College, from which she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1913. By all accounts, "Mary Hub," as her college friends referred to her, was "a lovely person...so gentle and...she had many friends among us."[3]
After graduation, she moved back to Minneapolis, where she took postgraduate courses at the University of Minnesota. Her only sibling, brother Frank Brookes Hubachek, was also a student there at the time. They had been close since childhood. Brookes, as he was known, acknowledged in 1963, "While it would doubtless be difficult for an observer to agree, Mary and I were cut from the same cloth." [4] Their mutual affection and respect only grew through the years.

During this period, Mary Hubachek met Matthew Givens Reynolds, the son of a St. Louis judge. Not much is known about their courtship; however, it must have progressed swiftly from casual dating to a serious relationship. The two were married at her family's country home on July 24, 1916. The marriage was a happy one; they were perfectly suited to each other and very much in love. During their engagement, Matthew Reynolds had accepted a position with an English insurance company that specialized in ocean shipping, and he moved to New York. After the wedding, the couple settled in Greenwich Village, the center of Bohemian life in the United States at the time. Populated by artists, writers, designers, and nonconformists of all types, the Village was exciting, energetic, and a slightly dangerous place with much to amuse the young couple. This free and easy, spirited living appealed to Reynolds, who clearly was trying to break free of the orthodoxy of her upbringing and define herself. People and situations that some would have found shocking, Reynolds found exhilarating.
When the United States entered World War I, Matthew Reynolds enlisted. Commissioned in November 1917, he left for the front a mere sixteen months after his wedding day. Reynolds commanded a battery of field artillery with the famous 33rd Wildcat Division, which was instrumental in breaking through the Hindenburg line, a turning point in the war. Although he survived the horrors of trench warfare, Matthew Reynolds died of influenza on January 10, 1919. His widow was devastated. She stayed with a close friend from Vassar, Elizabeth Hilles, for a time after receiving the dreadful news. Hilles, who considered Mary Reynolds one of her "dearest and closest friends," remembered Reynolds "was struggling with the problem of the future, and I felt that she would never recover from her loss. She said one day, 'Bess, you can fill your life with causes, but I can't. I've never cared for anything but people, and all my dreams were fulfilled in Matthew. Now my life is empty.'"[5]

Reynolds briefly returned home to Minneapolis, but it was not a happy visit.[6] Her parents were determined that she should get on with life, remarry, and begin a family. She was equally as determined to chart her own course. Matthew Reynolds had embodied all of her dreams. She could not simply move on so soon to a life without him. This falling out with her parents was serious and propelled her back to New York and shortly thereafter to Paris. As was true of many war fatalities, Matthew Reynolds's body was not sent home for burial. Consequently, his widow felt the need to travel to Europe, where he had spent his final year, to be close to his spirit. For Reynolds, this was a way of emancipating herself from the unbearable expectations of home as well as confronting her loss. The move was to be a pivotal change in her life. The writer Janet Flanner, Reynolds's intimate friend, noted that Reynolds became "part of the colony of about 5,000 Americans to whom Paris...seemed liberty itself."[7]

**The Early Paris Years**

In April 1921, Reynolds arrived in Paris, settling in Montparnasse, a community that reminded her of Greenwich Village. Duchamp reminisced that "Montparnasse was the first really international colony of artists we ever had. Because of its internationalism, it was superior to Montmartre, Greenwich Village, or Chelsea."[8] Reynolds quickly came to know many of its most interesting residents. She became a fixture on the party circuit, even introducing the artist Man Ray and the composer Virgil Thomson to each other in 1921, shortly after they had each arrived from New York.[9]
When the American socialite Peggy Guggenheim, Reynolds's close friend, married novelist, poet, and painter Laurence Vail in 1922, the Paris avant-garde was stunned. Everyone had assumed that Reynolds and Vail were engaged to each other. \[10\]

It was probably as a result of her relationship with Vail that Reynolds gained access so quickly to the café society. Vail was known variously as the "King of Montparnasse" or the "King of Bohemia." The American literary critic Malcolm Cowley recalled: "Laurence was in the center of things. If you knew anyone, you knew Laurence." \[11\] Vail introduced Peggy Guggenheim to both Reynolds and the writer Djuna Barnes, another of his entourage. All three became close, lasting friends. Guggenheim described Reynolds and Barnes as being among the most outstanding beauties of Montparnasse: "They [each] had the kind of nose I had gone all the way to Cincinnati for in vain." \[12\]

Reynolds and Duchamp initially met in New York when both were living in Greenwich Village. They renewed their acquaintance in Paris in 1923, spending considerable time socializing at the Boeuf sur le Toit and other cafés while their involvement deepened. The relationship did not run smoothly, however, for Reynolds. Duchamp cherished his freedom and his unconventional, even shocking, life. He insisted that their relationship be kept secret. If they ran into each other in public, Reynolds was not to acknowledge him. Duchamp continued to see others and expected her to do the
same (she did not). This created tremendous conflict for her that took its toll. Reynolds began to drink excessively. She finally confirmed in 1924 to writer and critic Henri-Pierre Roché, one of Duchamp’s most intimate friends, that Duchamp was, indeed, her lover, but lamented his lack of fidelity and continued attraction to “very common women.” She suspected Duchamp was "incapable of loving" and unable to commit to one person. Some twenty years later, the wife of the sculptor Antoine Pevsner spoke of meeting Reynolds when Peggy Guggenheim brought her unexpectedly to dinner. "We were amazed," recalled Virginia Pevsner, "to learn that Mary had been with Marcel Duchamp for nearly 20 years. During that time, Pevsner had seen Duchamp 2 or 3 times a week and Marcel had never said a word." Beatrice Wood captured this part of Duchamp's character most closely when she stated, "Everybody loves him. He belongs to everybody and to nobody." 


Though Duchamp remained an enigma to most, he and Reynolds seem to have found their common ground after Duchamp’s short-lived marriage to Lydie Sarazin-Levassor in 1927. Duchamp finally relented and allowed their relationship to become public. He later described it as "a true liaison, over many, many years, and very agreeable"; although he did qualify it by remarking that they "weren’t glued together, in the ‘married’ sense of the word." Although they never married, from 1928 until the Nazi occupation of Paris separated them, Reynolds and Duchamp were seen
together, lived together, vacationed together. In her memoirs, Peggy Guggenheim wrote: "Every time Mary was asked why she didn't marry Marcel, she would say Marcel didn't want to. Every time Marcel was asked, he would say Mary didn't want to."[18] There was probably some truth in each statement. Reynolds wore her wedding band from her marriage to Matthew Reynolds her entire life. It appears that, in some way, Reynolds was just as unavailable to Duchamp as he was to her.

Many Reynolds: "Reliure"

In the 1920s, women in search of a fashionable vocation in the arts turned increasingly to bookbinding. In 1929, Mary Reynolds followed this trend and studied bookbinding in the atelier of master French binder Pierre Legrain.[19] With the patronage of prominent Paris couturier Jacques Doucet, Legrain had become one of France's most innovative and influential bookbinders of the early twentieth century. Although trained as a decorator and furniture designer, Legrain developed a new vocabulary of ornament in bookbinding that was decidedly fresh and contemporary. He introduced innovative materials that were lavish and exotic: precious gems and metals, skins such as lizard, python, and even crocodile and shark.[20] Legrain viewed the book cover as a continuous plane upon which to place his designs. He explored the design possibilities of typographic form, placing varying fonts and letters in modernist juxtapositions. The influence of De Stijl, which was emerging in the Netherlands during the same time Legrain was developing his design tenets, can be seen in his nontraditional approach, simplification of design elements, and use of geometric devices. Prior to Legrain’s sweeping modernization, French bookbinders had copied the ornate and elaborate bindings of the Louis XIV period, with its complex tracery and elegant materials. The modern style introduced to bookbinding by Legrain was rapidly and enthusiastically embraced by French connoisseurs and collectors and widely imitated by other bookbinders.

Jacques Doucet and Duchamp had been friends since the early 1920s. It is likely that it was through this connection that Reynolds became an apprentice in the most fashionable and busiest bookbindery in the city. Reynolds spent just one year in Legrain's atelier—long enough to learn the basics of book construction. Because Legrain was a designer, not a binder, artisans in his atelier realized his designs. Reynolds, therefore, would have studied the craft itself directly with binders in his employ; she learned the language of design, however, from Legrain himself. One sees this in her nonconformist use of exotic materials and her manipulation of letterforms.
Over the next decade, Reynolds refined her skills, binding only for friends. Kathe Vail, the daughter of the writers Laurence Vail and Kay Boyle, remembered that "Mary Reynolds made a beautiful binding for [Laurence Vail's 1931 novel] Murder! Murder![21] Later, Henri-Pierre Roché was so taken with a binding that she executed for his book Don Juan that he considered asking her to bind his son's personal illustrated diary. It was during this period that Reynolds and Duchamp undertook their first recorded collaborative work. In 1935, they conceived and executed a binding for Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi.[22] By January 1939, Reynolds felt comfortable enough with her work to list her occupation as "Bookbinder" on her business cards: MARY REYNOLDS / RELIURE / 14 R. HALLÉ, PARIS XIV.

Fortunately, Reynolds did not have to live on the income from her bookbinding business. Although often referred to as an "heiress," Reynolds, in fact, lived simply on the income from a modest trust established by her parents and her pension as a war widow. Because she did not have to work, she could experiment and explore her chosen medium. Her involvement with Dada and Surrealism and passion for new ideas enabled her to develop a remarkable visual vocabulary. Duchamp described her bindings as being "marked by a decidedly surrealistic approach and an unpredictable fantasy.[23] Reynolds's technique, however, did not always equal her artistic ideas—a matter of concern to Duchamp when he and Brookes Hubachek began considering what to do with her oeuvre after her death. The artist expressed to her brother the "hope that you will find a place where they will be kept together as artistic bindings although the 'specialists' might object to the liberties Mary sometimes took with the technical achievement."[24] Reynolds focused on the design, regardless of whether the binding structures worked well. Her ingenuity was not bound by tradition. She followed in the manner of Legrain, considering the covers and spine of the binding to be a single, continuous plane upon which to work. Reynolds considered the design both two-dimensionally, as in the case of Raymond Queneau's Odile, as well as three-dimensionally, as is the case of Jarry's Docteur Faustroll.
Legrain felt that the binding should relate to the contents of the work it contained, that it should "evoke not the flower, but its fragrance."[25] Reynolds subscribed to that theory on most occasions, though frequently with a twist, as in the binding for Brisset's *Le Science de dieu* or the Man Ray/Paul Éluard work, *Les Mains libres.*
In other cases, such as Queneau's *Saint Glinglin*, it is very difficult to relate the design of the binding to the intellectual content of the book.

*Saint Glinglin*

While Legrain's influence is important, Reynolds's ironic wit and Duchamp's artistic ideals and the resulting Surrealist vocabulary most define her work. The pun was one of Duchamp's favorite devices. Reynolds borrowed this tool from him with great success in a number of her extraordinary bindings. For instance, while creating the drawings used in *Les Mains libres*, Man Ray described his hands "as dreaming."[26] Reynolds created a physical pun by placing delicate kid gloves slit open and laid on the front and back covers of the binding. The cut-open gloves symbolically freed the hands and allowed them to dream.
Les Mains libres

She employed the pun again for Jarry's *Le Surmâle* with her use of a metal corset stay bursting out of a delicate butterfly.

*Le Surmâle*
The application of boa-constrictor skin to create the fronds of a jungle plant on William Seabrook's *Secrets de la jungle* juxtaposes the fear associated with the large jungle reptiles with the cool protection afforded by the jungle canopy. Reynolds created an illusion of danger with her choice of materials.

It is difficult to assess fully the significance of Reynolds as an artist because of unresolved questions about Duchamp's role in the conception of these works. That he had a role is certain; the extent and import of his involvement is the issue. Some of the collaborative works of Reynolds and Duchamp, such as *Ubu Roi* and *Hebdomeros*, are well documented in the literature about Duchamp.
Hebdomeros

Other projects clearly appear to be the result of their working together on the concept. The binding for *Docteur Faustroll*, for example, conceptually speaks Duchamp's language, specifically suggesting his *Fresh Widow* (1920; The Museum of Modern Art, New York). Duchamp, himself, always attributed the success of the bookbindings to Reynolds's wit and talent. On only a few occasions did he reveal his own contributions to the creative process. While he may not have had an active part in the design of all Reynolds's bindings, one must assume his influence was at least subliminal.

**The 1930s**

The 1930s marked a period of tranquillity, contentment, and artistic achievement for Reynolds. Her relationship with Duchamp had settled into a comfortable intimacy. Her creativity and binding production were at their highest levels. She held an open house almost nightly at her home at 14, rue Hallé, with her quiet garden the favored spot after dinner for the likes of Duchamp, Brancusi, Man Ray, Breton, Barnes, Guggenheim, Éluard, Mina Loy, James Joyce, Jean Cocteau, Samuel Beckett, and others.
Ever protective of his independence, Duchamp always maintained a separate small studio. Even so, he spent most of his time at rue Hallé, and the interior of Reynolds's home was one of their most public collaborations. Man Ray described Duchamp as taking an interest in "fixing up the place, papering the walls of a room with maps and putting up curtains made of closely hung strings, all of which was carried out in his usual meticulous manner, without regard to the amount of work it involved."[27] Anaïs Nin recalled visiting "Marcel Duchamp and his American mistress. A studio full of portfolios, paintings, and her collection of earrings hanging on the white walls, earrings from all over the world, so lovely, every beauty of design duplicated by a twin, some of them twinkling, some cascades of delicate filigree, some heavy and carved."[28] Peggy Guggenheim remembered lovely furniture, maps everywhere, a lighted globe of the earth.[29] One wall was painted a deep blue, with tacks placed at different angles connected with string. The comparison with Reynolds's garden must have been remarkable: an elegant, kinetic interior contrasting with the serene, cool exterior.
The War Years: Occupation and the French Résistance

This idyllic lifestyle was not to last, however. In Germany, the rise of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist Party threatened the European continent. While Reynolds and Duchamp kept an eye on the approaching menace, the rapidity with which their world changed when the Nazis occupied France caught them by surprise. It is difficult to imagine such free spirits living under the tyranny of Nazi-occupied Paris. Those who could, fled; a few stalwarts stayed. Mary Reynolds was among that latter group. Duchamp was far more pragmatic. He made a decision the day after Holland fell to leave for Arcachon on the Bay of Biscay, southwest of Bordeaux. From that time until he was finally able to leave for New York in 1942, Duchamp attempted in vain to coerce Reynolds into leaving her home and cats in occupied Paris and joining him variously in Arcachon, Marseilles, and Sanary-sur-Mer. In a letter to her brother, he triumphantly announced that he had managed to procure a permit that allowed travel into the Unoccupied Zone and was valid for three months and several trips. His intent was to return to Paris whenever possible and prudent to visit Reynolds. He lamented her stubborn refusal to move and listed for Hubachek her many excuses, in Reynolds's own words: "Don't worry, no torture, no boats for six months....Conditions acceptable here and no excitement."[31]
Duchamp termed such excuses "nonsense." He voiced hope that Reynolds would consent to follow him and spend the summer in the Unoccupied Zone. Reynolds, clearly unenthusiastic about such a plan, wrote to her brother: "To keep peace in the family, I am taking steps to join him for a month's vacation. Probably quite futile but nevertheless steps." In another letter, Reynolds sent the following message to Hubachek: "Could not cross ocean, too scared, very comfortable here." She was, in fact, content at rue Hallé. Her garden was yielding beans, cabbages, carrots, onions, and potatoes; the fireplace was still supplied with wood. Early in the Occupation, Reynolds had written to Hubachek that she was "hoping to do a lot of binding." Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. Binding materials were in short supply; the everyday ordeal of living ate up time. Reynolds writes, "I am busy as that one armed painter....also warm and I believe fattening. Am threatened with a job of book-binding but don't know where I'd find the time. Also well out of practice." In an earlier letter to Hubachek, Reynolds had commented, "But even with life reduced to its most primitive form—or because of it—there is so little time." She conceded that she spent much time "tracking down food and [giving] unorganized aid." The "unorganized aid" existed in two forms: financial support of a myriad of friends through a complex system involving dozens of people, and an active role in the French Résistance.

The French Résistance was a secret organization of patriots devoted
to undermining the Nazi regime and gaining back France's independence. Along with Samuel Beckett, Gabrielle Buffet (formerly Picabia), and Suzanne Picabia, Reynolds was a leader in the Résistance in Paris, giving refuge to those fleeing Nazi persecution and imprisonment and passing information to the Allies. Gabrielle Buffet remembered, "Around 1941, I began to work with the French Résistance. Mary was the only one to keep papers and documents at home."[38] For someone whose code name was "Gentle Mary," Reynolds was extremely courageous. Her compassion for those in need was further heightened during this period. While writing again to her brother about her contentment in Paris, Reynolds commented, "The only draw back is that the force that would otherwise make me a good life is such a black and ugly one that it can't be ignored even in retreat—and the fact that so much misery exists is sometimes overwhelming."[39]

The artist Jean Hélion was one of those whom Reynolds helped. "I was extremely fond of her, and much indebted to her. She hid me in her house in Paris for 10 days, after I had escaped from a German prisoners' camp, in 1942; when she herself was under police supervision, and she was then running a serious risk. So charming, lovely, and alive, and brave discretely [sic]."[40] Reynolds, herself, was quite circumspect about her Résistance activities in her communications home. Completely committed to the cause, she refused to do or say anything that might compromise her colleagues in the Résistance or their activities.

In trying to explain her stubborn refusal to leave Paris, even in the face of such peril, Reynolds wrote, "For the moment I have a strong feeling that anything I do will be wrong and visiting the sick and caring for the forgotten is just my job—as long as it lasts. I can't seem to leave it of my own free will. Must be a drop of protestant blood coming out late in life."[41] In contemplating the "frenzy" so many were experiencing, Reynolds wrote, "I am trying to profit by the times here....it is a bill in my personal life. I said try—don't laff—to make myself a better character—a little late. It is a curious life of anguish and such luxury as I have not known for a long time—the evenings more or less alone and away from the world like a desert island—and I enjoy that."[42] Her brave work in the Résistance and the care that she gave others provided her with both the anguish and luxury of which she spoke. It was only when the Gestapo was actually at her door that Mary Reynolds fled her beloved Paris.

Throughout the Occupation, Reynolds's friends continued to worry about her safety, frequently contacting both Hubachek and Duchamp for news and reassurance. By 1942, as the war deepened and Hitler's hold on Europe strengthened, concern was at its height.
Kay Boyle's query of Brookes Hubachek was typical: "I was anxious to have some news of Mary. Naturally, all of those of us who love Mary are worried about her increasingly now."[43] Along the same line, Peggy Guggenheim wrote, "Do you have any news of Mary? Is she allright?.... I wish Mary would come [here] too. But I guess she won't and maybe it is too late."[44] Correspondence between Hubachek and Duchamp also reveals their extreme worry about Reynolds's safety and well-being, with Hubachek doing all he could through American and Allied diplomatic channels to get her home and Duchamp continuing to try to persuade her to leave Paris and join him in North America. It is curious that both of these men continued to worry and try to take care of Reynolds when she was clearly doing a good job of it herself and for many others as well. She was neither in any immediate danger nor in a situation that she was unable to handle. Her gentle demeanor led friends and loved ones in the United States to doubt her ability to cope with the crises of war. Outwardly gentle, perhaps, but Mary Reynolds was a woman of strength, character, and determination. Her Résistance activities illustrate this, as does the fact that she was able to get herself out of Nazi-occupied France on her own, without help from either her brother or her lover.

By late summer 1942, it became apparent that Reynolds and her collaborators in the Résistance had been under Gestapo observation for some time. According to Brookes Hubachek, in the months prior to her escape, at least six of her compatriots were caught and killed. Reynolds just missed this same fate. "She left her home dressed in ordinary streetwear and went across the street to a French residence where, an hour later, she saw two carloads of armed German Gestapo surround her house."[45]

**Escape**

In September 1942, Reynolds illegally crossed the Line of Occupation and surreptitiously made her way alone to Lyons.[46] There she would wait, living anxiously in a small, mean room for eight weeks, for receipt of an exit visa and the other papers needed before she could continue her dangerous journey. Her most difficult task was to locate a guide who would agree to take her across the border to Spain. A month earlier, the Nazis had tightened their grip on France, shooting any guides caught taking Jews across the border and detaining and threatening others suspected of helping refugees. Reynolds stood out in any crowd. Although she spoke French fluently, she had an American accent. She was repeatedly warned not to speak or risk bringing unwanted attention her way. She quietly continued her negotiations with "passeurs," but was not successful in locating anyone willing to take on such a risk.
In mid-November, the Nazis marched into Lyons on their way to Marseilles. Shortly after their arrival, Reynolds went with her American passport to the Spanish consulate, where she was able to bribe a Spanish official and received a visa in only one day. On November 25, she was visited by the police and realized that she would have to leave immediately. The following day, Reynolds left for Pau where she hoped to arrange to cross the Pyrenees by freight car. Unfortunately, the railway workers who had so heroically been smuggling refugees across the border, had recently been rounded up and sent to concentration camps, foiling this method of escape. Reynolds's only option appeared to be one that she had hoped to avoid: walking across the Pyrenees into Spain. Many of the passes were higher than those in the Alps; the route was fraught with danger from both border patrols and the elements.

After weeks of searching, Reynolds finally located a guide willing to take her across the border for thirty-five thousand francs. Initially, she turned the offer down as being too expensive, but rushed back when she learned that the Gestapo had again found her and left a message with her landlady demanding her appearance at the Kommissariat the following morning. Her traveling companions were two Jewish men, a boy, and a mountain guide. They traveled light, carrying only their essentials. In addition, Reynolds carried a roll of paintings by her friend Man Ray. Prior to leaving for America, he had entrusted her with some of his paintings and books for safekeeping during the conflict. When fleeing Paris, Reynolds had hurriedly gathered a few of the unframed paintings in the hope of being able to return them to the artist, who was in California.

The journey contrasted magnificent views with an arduous physical challenge. Walking heel to toe up ravines and over swollen gullies, the group endured extreme heat at the lower altitudes and sleet storms at the higher elevations. The physical exertion in the thin mountain air slowed their progress. On the eve of the third day, the party joyously reached the Spanish border. Their celebrating was short-lived, however. Two of the refugees were apprehended by the local police and arrested. Reynolds was the only one with proper papers, which in itself aroused suspicion. She was detained with the rest of the group and held six days for questioning. In the end, Reynolds was released, but not allowed to leave because the town of Canfranc, not Isaba, where she was, had been put on her passport as the Spanish port of entry. In order for her to leave, she needed to have the Canfranc stamp. Reynolds's American money and Banque de France draft were of no value to her in Isaba; with no ready currency to use for bribes or travel, she was stranded. Fortuitously, an anonymous Spanish gentleman sought her out in her hotel and
secretly offered her the loan she needed, asking in return only that she post a love letter to his fiancée in Brazil. When Reynolds attempted to give him her greatest treasure—her wedding band—as collateral, he gallantly refused.

On December 14, 1942 Reynolds joyously cabled her brother of her arrival in Madrid. In his euphoric letter to Duchamp relaying this news, Hubachek wrote, “The cable from Madrid was like getting her back from the dead.”[49] Acting upon a suggestion from the U.S. State Department, Hubachek had earlier prepaid Reynolds's fare of $942.90 to cover passage on Pan-American Airways' Yankee Clipper.[50] On the morning of December 31, he received another cable: "Awaiting plane probably January sixth. Love to all and Happy New Year.”[51]

On January 6, 1943, Mary Reynolds boarded the aircraft bound for New York. She arrived with a badly infected leg from a wound sustained during a fall on her walk through the mountains, but her spirits were soaring. The Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.), the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, debriefed her at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, where she stayed until she regained her strength. Reynolds was glad of the opportunity to detail some of the Résistance activities, as well as confirm Nazi border guard locations. She also protested the lack of discretion of some of the radio broadcasts heard in the Occupied Zone that mentioned people by name, gave locations of Résistance activities, and generally threatened the effectiveness of the Résistance and the safety of those involved.

**The Final Years: 1943–1950**

Reynolds and Duchamp stayed in New York for the duration of the war, taking up residence once again in Greenwich Village.[52] They socialized with old friends and other artists exiled in New York, such as the Frederick Kieslers and Alexander Calder. In California, a surprised Man Ray received the role of paintings Reynolds had rescued. He was especially delighted that Observatory Time—The Lovers, now known as The Lips (1932–34; private collection), was among them.[53]

By July 1944, Reynolds was well enough to begin looking for employment. Fine bookbindings were not in demand; in any case, rationing meant that materials she needed were reserved for military use. She received her Civil Service rating and applied for a job with the O.S.S. She hoped that her experience in the French Résistance and facility with languages, including French, German, and Italian, would be of assistance in procuring a job with the foreign service. The interviewer reported her to be, “Tall, good
Although several letters were written on her behalf by some of her brother’s government contacts, and she gained a security clearance, Reynolds was not assigned a position. On August 18, 1944, Major S. W. Little reported the ”File sent to MO Registry as of 27 July marked no interest (age).” Mary Reynolds was fifty-two at the time.

Although Reynolds had always planned to return to Paris after the war, Duchamp wished to remain in New York. He found the pace, the scale, and the opportunities among American collectors inordinately seductive. Once again, he tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade Reynolds to stay with him, this time in New York. Calder remembered that a ”moulting cat adopted her on 11 St., and Marcel thought that might well be the means of keeping her in America.” Her love of cats notwithstanding, Reynolds returned to Paris six weeks after the end of the war. She was euphoric to be home at 14, rue Hallé, among her books, her furniture, her cats.

Although Duchamp rejoined her in 1946, the pull of New York was too great. Reynolds wrote of her ”anguish” to their mutual friends, the Hoppenenots. Duchamp’s departure in early January 1947 left Reynolds widowed again, albeit happy in her adored Paris.

From 1945 to 1947, Reynolds was the Paris representative for the avant-garde magazine View, soliciting among her artist and writer
friends for the editor Charles Henri Ford. Correspondence between Reynolds and Ford reveals many of the well-known problems, especially that of cash flow, associated with this short-lived but influential publication. In a letter to Ford, Reynolds wrote, "So for months I've been murmuring VIEW and feeling like a worm. For an American to beg material which the French pay for is not at all a nice position."[57] She approached writers such as Jean Genet and André Malraux and old friends like Jean Cocteau and Georges Hugnet. She worked tirelessly and enthusiastically; a postscript to a March 3, 1946, letter to Ford reads, "VIEW seems to bloom. 3VVVs for VIEW."[58]

Reynolds does not appear to have continued her bookbinding to any great extent upon her return to Paris. Saint Glinglin appears to be one of the few bookbindings that she created in this period. Perhaps she needed the synergy that Duchamp provided or perhaps the magic of the moment was over. The war had altered not only the physical landscape of Europe, but the milieu of the artists as well. The revolution that was Surrealism was being rapidly eclipsed by a new wave of artists kindling the flames of abstraction. The central figures of Surrealism had been scattered all over the globe as well. Some, like Duchamp, stayed in the United States after the war. Others returned to a Europe whose spirit had been catastrophically broken and would need years to heal. Breton had seen his influence significantly diminished while he was in New York. Reynolds herself seems to have lost the passion for her art. That spot in her soul was filled instead with the quiet guilt of a survivor and the serenity often found in one’s advancing years. Reynolds’s health had also been broken by the deprivations of the war and the hardships endured during her escape. In June 1949, she traveled to La Preste to take a cure. In a postcard to Flanner, she wrote, "We pass 21 days of insomnia, fluttering heart, stomach and nerves and constipation—hoping to kill the coli bacilli before we succumb."[59] The mineral waters of La Preste were believed by many to kill intestinal bacteria coli bacilli. Flanner noted at the bottom of the postcard, "Nearly last words from dear Mary."

By April 1950, Reynolds’s health had deteriorated to the point that she checked into the American Hospital in Neuilly. Upon learning this, Duchamp became acutely concerned; he queried all of their friends in Paris for information about her condition. Of Roché, he asked, "Is it only the kidneys, or kidney? Strange that the infection is not vanishing, even gradually."[60] He asked the Crottis to keep him informed. In a subsequent letter to Roché, Duchamp speculated, "I have never uttered the word cancer, but do you think that there is a dreadful possibility there? Don't hesitate to tell
Duchamp finally made the voyage to France at the end of September. He found Reynolds's condition desperate. "Her brain is so lucid, her heart and her lungs are in an almost perfect state, that one hardly understands that it is impossible to attempt anything in the way of a 'cure."[62] A visit to the clinic at Neuilly revealed Reynolds "had a dreadful tumour [of the uterus] which no one detected and cannot now be operated."[63] Her condition was hopeless. Four days after Duchamp arrived at her bedside, she slipped into a coma. At 6:00 a.m. on September 30, 1950, Mary Reynolds died at home on rue Hallé, with her beloved Marcel Duchamp at her side. Her funeral was held on October 3 at the American Cathedral on the Avenue Georges V.

Duchamp stayed on at 14, rue Hallé taking care of Reynolds's affairs, cleaning the house, and most importantly, organizing her bindings, as well as the books, art, and ephemera that she had gathered during her three decades in Paris. These he had carefully packed and shipped to her brother, who had decided to donate the collection to The Art Institute of Chicago in his sister's memory. Hubachek and Duchamp worked assiduously on the organization and publication of the collection for nearly six years. When the collection catalogue, Surrealism and Its Affinities: The Mary Reynolds Collection, was published in 1956, Hubachek made certain that as many of his sister's friends as he could locate received a copy. He obtained names and addresses not just from Duchamp, but from Cocteau, Barnes, Calder, Flanner, and others. Tributes poured in. One of the most touching was from Cocteau, who wrote to Duchamp, "My very dear Marcel—It is rare that death leaves warm ashes. Thanks to you, this is what is happening for Mary. I congratulate and embrace you."[64]

In a letter to Hubachek, Flanner captured the love and admiration Mary Reynolds had inspired from so many in her life.

Perfect memorial to darling Mary. How intimate she was with the artery-stream of Paris, in the pulse of its creators, major and minor. There was something immediate in her sense of appreciation, she seemed to be right at the side of writers and artists as they became themselves, so she was a continuous witness. I loved Mary dearly; her gayety, the special timbre of her voice, her laughter, her smile which was often so contemplative, oh, she was a captivating woman.[65]

The Mary Reynolds Collection is all that Brookes Hubachek and Marcel Duchamp envisioned. As a core collection of published materials by the Surrealists, the five hundred printed pieces include all of the important documents of Surrealism, as well as a multitude
of ephemera, so much of which might otherwise have been lost. But Mary Reynolds's true legacy is that part of the collection that contains her magical bindings, an output of fewer than seventy books. It is in these remarkable works that the spirit of Mary Louise Reynolds lives on.

NOTES

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Marjorie Hubachek Watkins, Mary Reynolds's niece and Brookes Hubachek's daughter, for her unstinting generosity in sharing her fond memories of her Aunt Mary, as well as for her gifts to the Mary Reynolds Archive and her magnanimous financial support of this issue of Museum Studies.

Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence and other original material is from the Mary Reynolds Archive, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago.


11. Ibid., p. 56.

12. Ibid.


22. Gough-Cooper and Caumont (note 6), August 10, 1938.

23. See Duchamp (note 1).
30. Gough-Cooper and Caumont (note 6), May 16, 1940.
31. Letter from Marcel Duchamp to Frank B. Hubachek, Apr. 22, 1941.
32. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Aug. 7, 1941.
33. Letter from Marcel Duchamp to Frank B. Hubachek, May 29, 1941.
34. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Aug. 19, [1940?].
36. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Nov. 18, 1941.
37. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Aug. 7, 1941.
38. Dortch (note 15), p. 44.
39. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Nov. 30, 1941.
40. Copy of letter from Hélio to Katharine Kuh, Jan. 29, 1957.
41. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Jan. 8, 1941.
42. Letter from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Nov. 18, 1941.
43. Letter from Kay Boyle to Frank B. Hubachek, Mar. 2, 1942.
44. Letter from Peggy Guggenheim to Frank B. Hubachek, Jan. 19, 1942.
45. Letter from Frank B. Hubachek to M. L. Boynton, May 13, 1963. Hubachek also wrote in this letter that Reynolds's home “became the gathering point and the dispatching point for the spy poste. It was also a Paris station for the escape route. There was a continuous procession of individuals, microfilm, used parachutes, and so on.”
46. This account of Reynolds's escape relies principally on two sources: a file in Record Group 226, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, National Archives (the Mary Reynolds Archive at the Art Institute has a copy of the file); and the article by Janet Flanner (see note 7), which appeared in the New Yorker in the issues of May 22, May 29, and June 5, 1944.
47. National Archives, Files of the Office of Strategic Services, secret document, Jan. 8, 1943.
49. Letter from Frank B. Hubachek to Marcel Duchamp, Jan. 4, 1943.
51. Cable from Mary Reynolds to Frank B. Hubachek, Dec. 14, 1942.
52. Gough-Cooper and Caumont (note 6), Oct. 9, 1943.
59. Postcard from Mary Reynolds to Janet Flanner, June 30, 1949, Janet Flanner Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
60. Gough-Cooper and Caumont (note 6), June 28, 1950.
61. Ibid., July 17, 1950.
63. Ibid., Sept. 26, 1950.
64. Letter from Jean Cocteau to Marcel Duchamp, Feb. 2, 1957 ("Mon très cher Marcel-Il est rare que la mort laisse des cendres chaud. Grâce à toi c'es[t] ce qui se passe pour Mary. Je te félicite et je t'embrasse."). English translation by Duchamp.
65. Letter from Janet Flanner to Frank B. Hubachek, June 7, 1957.