

Museums

Art review: ‘Readymade@100’

By **Michael O'Sullivan** September 11, 2014 

There’s almost always something worth checking out at the [American University Museum](#). As director and curator Jack Rasmussen puts it, the school’s year-round exhibition program — which features four to six new shows every couple of months — is something of a three-ring circus. Just like the big top, it can be hard to know where to look.

American’s current roster of exhibitions is typically eclectic: one [Cuban painter](#); three sculptors (two from [St. Petersburg, Russia](#), one from [Washington](#)); a quartet of [conceptual photographers](#); and a grab bag of [surrealist images](#) from the estate of the late Washington collector H. Marc Moyens. But the funniest, sexiest and smartest show of the bunch is a celebration of the 100-year-old legacy of Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the “readymade.”

Curated by artist, writer and educator Mark Cameron Boyd, “Readymade@100” is a survey of contemporary artworks inspired by the Duchampian concept of off-the-shelf artwork. (In 1914, Duchamp displayed an ordinary commercial metal rack used to dry bottles and called it sculpture. Ironically, the original was mistakenly thrown out as trash, although [replicas](#) of the piece were subsequently fabricated.)

True to its name, “[Readymade@100](#)” features prefab artworks made from material you can pick up at Home Depot: nail-gun cartridges, shovels, a flashlight, hex-head bolts and razor blades. Some of these things work as art objects simply because of the aesthetic way they’re displayed. Kristin Richards’s “Rug 001,” for instance, features 31,876 framing nails laid out in tidy rows, like a patterned carpet. Others take on meaning from a darkly wry title. Andrew Simmons’s framed and mounted razor blade is called, unobtrusively, “Cure for Human Suffering.” Still others possess invisible conceptual heft. Adam Farcus’s “We go to bed, but we don’t sleep too hard” is a flashlight — turned on but positioned head-down so that its beam shines straight into the floor.

Some pieces have a naughty sense of humor. Kate Kretz’s “Brass With Lock” features a set of brass-colored testicles, sold as a novelty item to truckers and other motorists who hang them from their vehicles’ undercarriages. “My First Bra,” by Anne Mourier, is a matching pair of domed glass plate covers, shaped like breasts and sitting atop paper doilies.

“Memorial Modeling” also is on view through Oct. 19.

Readymade@100

Through Oct. 19 at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, 4400 Massachusetts Ave. NW.

202-885-1300. www.american.edu/museum.

Open Tuesday-Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free.

— **Michael O’Sullivan**