

Dada

- artistic and literary movement reflecting a widespread nihilistic protest against all aspects of Western culture, especially against militarism during and after World War I (1914-1918). The term dada, the French word for hobbyhorse, is said to have been selected at random from a dictionary by the Romanian-born poet, essayist, and editor Tristan Tzara. Dada was originated in 1916 by Tzara, the German writer Hugo Ball, the Alsatian-born artist Jean Arp, and other intellectuals living in Zurich, Switzerland. A similar revolt against conventional art occurred simultaneously in New York City led by Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Francis Picabia, and in Paris, where it became the inspiration for the Surrealist movement. After World War I the movement spread to Germany, and many of the Zurich group joined French Dadaists in Paris. The Paris group disintegrated in 1922.

In their efforts to express the negation of all current aesthetic and social values, the Dadaists frequently used artistic and literary methods that were deliberately incomprehensible. Their theatrical performances and manifestos were often designed to shock or bewilder, with the aim of startling the public into a reconsideration of accepted aesthetic values. To this end, the Dadaists used novel materials, including discarded objects found in the streets, and new methods, such as allowing chance to determine the elements of their works. The German painter and writer Kurt Schwitters was noted for his collages composed of waste paper and similar materials. French painter Marcel Duchamp exhibited as works of art ordinary commercial products—such as a store-bought bottle rack and a urinal—which he called ready-mades. Although the Dadaists employed revolutionary techniques, their revolt against standards was based on a profound belief, stemming from the romantic tradition, in the essential goodness of humanity when uncorrupted by society. Dada as a movement declined in the 1920s, and some of its practitioners became prominent in other modern-art movements, notably surrealism. During the mid-1950s an interest in Dada was revived in New York City among composers, writers, and artists, who produced many works with Dadaist features.

ROOTS

Several explanations have been given by various members of the movement as to how it received its name. According to the most widely accepted account, the name was adopted at Hugo Ball's Cabaret (Caf) Voltaire, in Zurich, during one of the meetings held in 1916 by a group of young artists and war resisters that included Jean Arp, Richard Hilsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Emmy Hennings; when a paper knife inserted into a French-German dictionary pointed to the word dada, this word was seized upon by the group as appropriate for their anti-aesthetic creations and protest activities, which were engendered by disgust for bourgeois values and despair over World War I. A precursor of what was to be called the Dada movement, and ultimately its leading member, was Marcel Duchamp, who in 1913 created his first ready-made (now lost), the "Bicycle Wheel," consisting of a wheel mounted on the seat of a stool.

SAMPLE POEM

DADA is a virgin microbe
DADA is against the high cost of living
DADA limited company for the exploitation of ideas
DADA has 391 different attitudes and colours according to the sex of the president
It changes -- affirms -- says the opposite at the same time -- no importance -- shouts -- goes fishing.
Dada is the chameleon of rapid and self-interested change.
Dada is against the future. Dada is dead. Dada is absurd. Long live Dada.
Dada is not a literary school, howl.

--Tristan Tzara
