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## **The Breaking News English.com Resource Book**

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## **Pensioner attacks famous work of art**

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0601/060108-art-e.html>

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**8 January, 2006**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **Pensioner attacks famous work of art**

An angry 77-year-old art hater has been arrested in Paris for hitting a valuable work of art with a hammer. Pierre Pinoncelli smashed several holes in Marcel Duchamp's famous white porcelain toilet, titled *Fountain*. The art work is an upside-down men's urinal and is worth over US\$3 million. The pensioner has a history of attacking the toilet. In 1993 he peed in it, before trying to break it. He stated that by urinating over the work of art, he was changing it back to a toilet, which meant it was no longer art. He said his latest attack was a "charitable act" rather than an act of vandalism.

Museum staff said the 1917 work could be restored to its former glory. *Fountain* was recently voted the most influential modern artwork of all time by 500 leading art experts. It beat Picasso's *Guernica* and Andy Warhol's prints of Marilyn Monroe to the top spot. Duchamp shocked the art world in 1917 when he entered his upside-down urinal at an exhibition of modern art in New York. He signed it 'R. Mutt', which sounds like *armut* – the German word for poverty. Critics rejected it as an example of bad taste. Regardless, Duchamp went on to become a leading figure in the world of modern art.

## **WARM-UPS**

**1. TOILETS:** Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about toilets. After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. What more would you like to know? Are toilets beautiful?

**2. ACTIVISM:** A 77-year-old man attacked a work of art because he hates art. In pairs / groups, talk about why he might hate art. Discuss why people might become activists against the following:

- Modern art
- Postcards
- Computers
- Learning another language
- The word "hi"
- Jeans
- George W. Bush
- Your choice \_\_\_\_\_

**3. ART:** What kind of art do you like? Are you interested in modern art? Do you paint? Do you have any paintings on your wall? What is art / modern art?

Look at this list and decide which of these pieces of modern art is art:

- a. A pile of house bricks
- b. Different colored photographs of a can of soup
- c. Bad language painted on a vase
- d. Splashes and lines of color made by a chimpanzee
- e. A dead cow cut in half in a plastic case
- f. An empty room in which the ceiling light turns on and off at random intervals
- g. A cartoon comic strip
- h. An all black painting

**4. ART OPINIONS:** Do you agree with these opinions on art? Discuss them with your partner(s).

- a. Modern art is not real art.
- b. An upside down toilet is not a work of art.
- c. Art isn't important.
- d. Art is only for rich people.
- e. Children should spend much more time at school painting.
- f. Everyone is an artist.
- g. You need to be crazy to become an artist.
- h. Real art is paintings by Renoir and Picasso.

**5. MODERN ART:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with modern art. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. A pensioner was arrested for attacking a famous work of art.              | T / F |
| b. The work of art was an upside-down white porcelain urinal.                | T / F |
| c. The pensioner has a history of attacking the work of art.                 | T / F |
| d. The elderly man said he attacked the work to test his new hammer.         | T / F |
| e. Art lovers are sad that the work cannot be repaired.                      | T / F |
| f. Picasso's <i>Guernica</i> was voted most influential modern artwork ever. | T / F |
| g. 'R. Mutt' was one alias used by a famous artist.                          | T / F |
| h. Art critics in 1917 hated the work of art.                                | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| a. angry       | most recent  |
| b. several     | dismissed    |
| c. peed        | beauty       |
| d. latest      | furious      |
| e. act         | numerous     |
| f. restored    | important    |
| g. glory       | top          |
| h. influential | action       |
| i. rejected    | urinated     |
| j. leading     | brought back |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. An angry 77-year-old art hater    | of attacking the toilet        |
| b. The art work is an upside-down    | as an example of bad taste     |
| c. The pensioner has a history       | glory                          |
| d. In 1993 he peed in it,            | at an exhibition of modern art |
| e. an act                            | before trying to break it      |
| f. restored to its former            | has been arrested in Paris     |
| g. the most influential modern art   | the world of modern art        |
| h. he entered his upside-down urinal | of vandalism                   |
| i. Critics rejected it               | work of all time               |
| j. a leading figure in               | men's urinal                   |

## **WHILE READING / LISTENING**

**GAP FILL:** Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

### **Pensioner attacks famous work of art**

An angry 77-year-old art \_\_\_\_\_ has been arrested in Paris for hitting a valuable work of art with a hammer. Pierre Pinoncelli \_\_\_\_\_ several holes in Marcel Duchamp's famous white \_\_\_\_\_ toilet, titled *Fountain*. The art work is an upside-down men's urinal and is \_\_\_\_\_ over US\$3 million. The pensioner has a \_\_\_\_\_ of attacking the toilet. In 1993 he peed in it, before trying to break it. He stated that by \_\_\_\_\_ over the work of art, he was changing it back to a toilet, which \_\_\_\_\_ it was no longer art. He said his latest attack was a "charitable act" rather than an act of \_\_\_\_\_.

Museum staff said the 1917 work could be \_\_\_\_\_ to its former glory. *Fountain* was recently voted the most \_\_\_\_\_ modern artwork of all time by 500 \_\_\_\_\_ art experts. It beat Picasso's *Guernica* and Andy Warhol's prints of Marilyn Monroe to the top \_\_\_\_\_. Duchamp shocked the art world in 1917 when he \_\_\_\_\_ his upside-down urinal at an exhibition of modern art in New York. He \_\_\_\_\_ it 'R. Mutt', which sounds like *armut* – the German word for poverty. Critics \_\_\_\_\_ it as an example of bad taste. Regardless, Duchamp went on to become a leading \_\_\_\_\_ in the world of modern art.

*porcelain*

*urinating*

*hater*

*history*

*vandalism*

*smashed*

*meant*

*worth*

*spot*

*rejected*

*leading*

*signed*

*restored*

*figure*

*influential*

*entered*

## **LISTENING**

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### **Pensioner attacks famous work of art**

An angry 77-year-old art hater has been \_\_\_\_\_ in Paris for hitting a valuable work of art with a hammer. Pierre Pinoncelli smashed several holes in Marcel Duchamp's famous white \_\_\_\_\_ toilet, titled *Fountain*. The art work is an upside-down men's \_\_\_\_\_ and is worth over US\$3 million. The pensioner has a \_\_\_\_\_ of attacking the toilet. In 1993 he peed in it, before trying to break it. He stated that by \_\_\_\_\_ over the work of art, he was changing it back to a toilet, which meant it was no longer art. He said his latest attack was a "charitable act" rather than an act of \_\_\_\_\_.

Museum staff said the 1917 work could be \_\_\_\_\_ to its former glory. *Fountain* was recently voted the most \_\_\_\_\_ modern artwork of all time by 500 leading art \_\_\_\_\_. It beat Picasso's *Guernica* and Andy Warhol's prints of Marilyn Monroe to the top spot. Duchamp shocked the art world in 1917 when he \_\_\_\_\_ his upside-down urinal at an exhibition of modern art in New York. He signed it 'R. Mutt', which sounds like *armut* – the German word for \_\_\_\_\_. Critics rejected it as an example of \_\_\_\_\_. Regardless, Duchamp went on to become a leading figure in the world of modern art.

## **AFTER READING / LISTENING**

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'modern' and 'art'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "MODERN ART" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about modern art.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| • hater     | • former      |
| • porcelain | • of all time |
| • worth     | • shocked     |
| • peed      | • signed      |
| • changing  | • taste       |
| • act       | • figure      |

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you like modern art?
- c. What do you think of the idea of an upside-down toilet being worth three million dollars?
- d. Do you prefer modern art of older art?
- e. What do you think of the art produced by people from your country?
- f. What punishment do you think Pierre should receive?
- g. Do you think Pierre is also a modern artist in trying to turn *Fountain* back into a real toilet?
- h. If you bought *Fountain*, where in your house would you put it?
- i. Do you think Pierre is a hero or a villain?
- j. Why do you think an upside-down toilet was voted more important than a Picasso painting?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What adjectives would you use to describe Pierre?
- d. What parts of our lives would you like to protest about?
- e. Have you ever taken part in any form of activism?
- f. Why do you think Duchamp called his work *Fountain*?
- g. Do you think everyday things can be elevated into works of art?
- h. Do you think the world has gone crazy when people pay huge sums of money for old toilets while people in Africa starve?
- i. What is the most ridiculous piece of art you've ever seen?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## SPEAKING

**ROLE PLAY:** What penalty should Pierre Pinoncelli receive for his vandalism? Team up with classmates who have the same role to develop your ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

Role A – Xavier de Jude

You are a famous modern artist. You think *Fountain* is the greatest work of art of all time. No one has the right to destroy it. It brings pleasure to millions of art lovers. Pierre is a vandal. He should go to prison for five years and be banned from all of the world’s museums and galleries.

Role B – Pierre Pinoncelli

You think human values have become twisted. You don’t understand how an old toilet can be valued at US\$3 million when people around the world are in poverty. You think people who pay to see *Fountain* are the criminals. They should give the money to charity. You are helping people see how crazy the world has become. You believe you are a hero.

Role C – Inspector Henri de la Chapelle-sur-Mer

You are a French policeman. You don’t care whether the toilet is a work of art or an old piece of junk. Pierre committed a crime. He tried to destroy a very valuable object of art. He should be fined and go to prison for his crime.

Role D – Jo Public

You think Pierre is a hero. You believe the art world is full of people trying to make a name for themselves by doing and saying silly things. Most modern art is child’s play. Real artists have talent. Turning a urinal upside down requires no talent. Pierre is a great man who wants to improve our world. He should get a prize.

After the role play, discuss whether you really believed what you were saying in your role. What punishment do you think Pierre should receive?

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. ART:** Write an essay about art. Explain why it is important. Write about how it affects our lives. Read your essay to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

**4. LETTER:** Write a letter to Pierre Pinoncelli. Tell him what you think of his attempts to destroy the work of art. Ask him questions about his actions. Show your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone have similar thoughts and questions?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. T      c. T      d. F      e. F      f. F      g. T      h. T

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| a. angry       | furious      |
| b. several     | numerous     |
| c. peed        | urinated     |
| d. latest      | most recent  |
| e. act         | action       |
| f. restored    | brought back |
| g. glory       | beauty       |
| h. influential | important    |
| i. rejected    | dismissed    |
| j. leading     | top          |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. An angry 77-year-old art hater    | has been arrested in Paris     |
| b. The art work is an upside-down    | men's urinal                   |
| c. The pensioner has a history       | of attacking the toilet        |
| d. In 1993 he peed in it,            | before trying to break it      |
| e. an act                            | of vandalism                   |
| f. restored to its former            | glory                          |
| g. the most influential modern art   | work of all time               |
| h. he entered his upside-down urinal | at an exhibition of modern art |
| i. Critics rejected it               | as an example of bad taste     |
| j. a leading figure in               | the world of modern art        |

### GAP FILL:

#### Pensioner attacks famous work of art

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Museum staff said the 1917 work could be **restored** to its former glory. *Fountain* was recently voted the most **influential** modern artwork of all time by 500 **leading** art experts. It beat Picasso's *Guernica* and Andy Warhol's prints of Marilyn Monroe to the top **spot**. Duchamp shocked the art world in 1917 when he **entered** his upside-down urinal at an exhibition of modern art in New York. He **signed** it 'R. Mutt', which sounds like *armut* – the German word for poverty. Critics **rejected** it as an example of bad taste. Regardless, Duchamp went on to become a leading **figure** in the world of modern art.