

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

THE OBJECT TRANSFORMED
June 29 - August 21, 1966

WALL LABEL

The transformed objects chosen for this exhibition have in common the fact that they were once actual objects. Each of them once functioned with reasonable efficiency, which may have helped to bring about their demise.

Most objects are neither so trivial as to merit removal and destruction, like a packing crate, nor so significant that they impinge on our consciousness by being explicitly beautiful, but even the most commonplace object can produce a strong emotional response. Hidden associations may be revealed when an object is associated with another, or otherwise taken out of its familiar context, or when a detail is removed or altered. If the resulting visual metaphor is sufficiently powerful, even the most ubiquitous artifact may be transformed into an object of emotional rather than practical utility: a work of art.

The Surrealists exploited such transformations with unrelenting humor. Meret Oppenheim's cup, plate and spoon covered with fur (1936), and Man Ray's nail-studded iron (1921) force on us physical associations of singular incompatibility. The meaning of these objects depends to some extent on our recognizing the originals within the transformation: knowing that they are, or were, an authentic cup and iron is necessary to a just appreciation of their new effectiveness.

Transformations are sometimes achieved by adding unexpected materials, such as the copper plates which entomb Tony Palladino's table-top radio. But perhaps the most unnerving transformations are the result of outright destruction: Lucas Samaras, for example, covers a book with pins and nails and inserts between its pages a razor, a knife and a broken pane of glass; seldom has a book been more dangerous to open. Like many of the ideas and images current in the theatre, the transformed objects in this exhibition are apparitions of everyday reality, complete with overtones of grim absurdity. For the 20th Century they may be the most appropriate kind of still life.