

dog.<sup>27</sup> The sarcasm was mild, yet the cover seemed to say that the public is blind to modern art, an opinion echoed in the magazine by the poetess Mina Loy, who stated, "Only artists and serious critics can look at a greyish stickiness on smooth canvas" (p. 7). This opinion apparently reflected that of the professional critics, most of whom considered the general public incapable of making sound judgments and took the absence of a jury, even worse, the hanging in alphabetical order, as a denial of their mission. As Francis Naumann remarks, one of their frequent rationales in discrediting the Indeps was the following: what would happen if magazines accepted everything submitted to them for publica-

---

27. *The Blind Man* (or *The Blindman*, depending on how one reads the graphic design on the cover), no. 1, is dated April 10, 1917, the day of the show's opening. Henri-Pierre Roché, Duchamp's writer friend from Paris who had arrived in New York in November 1916, signed the editorial, within which he enthusiastically embraced the cause of the Indeps, quoting at length from the Society's program: "The great need, then, is for an exhibition, to be held at a given period each year, where artists of all schools can exhibit together—certain that whatever they send will be hung and that all will have an equal opportunity." All contributions to *The Blind Man* sincerely rejoiced at the prospect of "equal opportunity" given to artists of all schools, even to those, as Roché said, "who might as well never have painted at all" (p. 5). The tone of sincerity that runs through the magazine is important, because it is precisely sincerity that was invoked to forgive in advance every possible extravagance and clumsiness (as it would still be, after the event, what might excuse Richard Mutt in the eyes of Katherine Dreier). (See Camfield's discussion of Dreier's letter to William Glackens, dated April 26, in "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*," p. 74.) Roché made it very clear: "Never say of a man: 'He is not sincere.' Nobody knows if he is or not. . . . Rather say: 'I do not understand him.' The *Blind Man* takes it for granted that all are sincere" (p. 6). However, given the irony implied by the magazine's title and Frueh's caricature, one wonders whether one should not apply to Roché himself the warning he gave to his readers: "Nobody knows if he is [sincere] or not." I think not. Like everybody else in his milieu, Roché was genuinely thrilled at the sudden freedom granted to artists. But he might have been ironic when, quoting from the Society's program again, he said: "For the public, this exhibition will make it possible to form an idea of the state of contemporary art." Whereas the artists were assumed to be sincere, the public was assumed to be blind.

tion?<sup>28</sup> With this remark as background, R. Mutt's sweet revenge begins to appear. *The Blind Man*, Independents' Number, had been concocted by a merry threesome nowhere identified as such: Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood, and Marcel Duchamp.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, however, the readers were called upon to make the next number. This "notice" (or was it a "warning"?) was printed on the cover: "The second number of *The Blind Man* will appear as soon as YOU have sent sufficient material for it." And Roché's editorial explained what the procedure was to be: "The *Blind Man*'s procedure shall be that of referendum. He will publish the questions and answers sent to him. He will print what the artists and the public have to say. He is very keen to receive suggestions and criticisms. So, don't spare him" (p. 4). The editors would exert no selection on the articles. Just as anyone having paid his or her six-dollar dues would become an artist in the Society, so—as Beatrice Wood recalls in her memoirs—anyone having contributed four dollars toward the budget of *The Blind Man* would become an art critic.<sup>30</sup> The second issue came out around May 6, when the show closed, and this time its editors were identified on the cover, but with three initials as cryptic and pseudonymous as the "R." in R. Mutt: P. B. T., standing for (Henri-) Pierre (Roché), Beatrice (Wood) and Totor, diminutive of Victor, the nickname Roché had given to Duchamp. On the cover, there was a reproduction of Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder*, which the hanging committee would certainly have accepted, and inside the magazine (pp. 4–5) an unsigned contribution entitled "The Richard Mutt Case" revealed the mysterious R. Mutt's first name. Though it was probably Beatrice Wood who wrote

---

28. Naumann, "The Big Show, Part II," p. 50.

29. No editor's name appeared on the cover. For reasons of legal liability, however, the last page carried the information, "Published by Henri Pierre Roché," in spite of the fact that Roché, not being an American citizen or an immigrant, was in no position to be legally liable. In the trio's initial project, Beatrice Wood was to stand alone as publisher but was forbidden to do so by her father, infuriated at the prospect that she would put her name onto "such filth."

30. Naumann, "I Shock Myself," p. 136.