

# Part 22 Horology *in* Art

By Bob Frishman, FNAWCC (MA)

Marcel Duchamp, along with Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, ignited the early twentieth-century revolution in paintings and sculpture. Suzanne Duchamp (1889-1963), his younger sister, lived in France and participated in those groundbreaking developments, but she is little known today.

In February of this year at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, I came upon her 24" x 36" oil-on-canvas *La Noce* within a special temporary exhibit. At first, I wondered if she was somehow related to the Marcel Duchamp of *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, and the infamous urinal, *Fountain*. The wall label at the Brunswick, ME, art gallery confirmed the family connection.

Suzanne and her eventual husband, artist Jean Crotti, created *Tabu Dada*. This was a brief offshoot of the anti-reason Dada movement that arose from the horrors of World War I. In the mid-1920s she created figurative, sometimes primitive, images with artificial perspectives, strong lines, and bright colors. *La Noce*, a fanciful Russian wedding portrait painted in 1924, is a fine example. It echoed highly detailed and vividly colored folk-art scenes by earlier Russian artists that were reverse-painted on glass.

A recent display of Suzanne's works on paper, mounted at Francis M. Naumann Fine Art in New York City, was accompanied by a printed catalog that provided much information about her life and oeuvre. Emma Anquinet, the booklet's author, suggests that *La Noce* satirized traditional portraiture and that it also addressed the theme of Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Les Noces*. Suzanne probably saw this show in Paris where it premiered in 1923. Stravinsky's and Duchamp's compositions were inspired by Russian weddings that forced local peasant women into village marriages to help sustain that country's rural populations.

Marcel also explored marital concepts for his oversize glass construction, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, completed in 1923. Suzanne was in frequent communication with him, and her painting may be a playful reference to this abstract artwork on permanent view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*La Noce* by Suzanne Duchamp. COURTESY OF FRANCIS M. NAUMANN FINE ART LLC.

In Suzanne's painting, now returned to its private owner in Paris, I find her style similar to that of Marc Chagall's views of Russian village life. These sometimes included his old-world family's Vienna regulator, a subject I intend to explore in a future article. The clock in Suzanne's wedding scene is a stylized floor standing model reminiscent of provincial Swedish and Morbier French tall clocks. Something like it may well have been part of the stage set for the popular Stravinsky ballet.

The Duchamp clock is equal in height, size, and prominence with the four main human characters in her painting. As in other artworks I have featured, the clock provides the symbolic and metaphorical imagery of time's passage and marks the important place of timekeepers in our ancestors' households.

## About the Author

Bob Frishman has repaired, restored, collected, sold, and researched antique timekeepers since 1980. His business, Bell-Time Clocks, is based in Andover, MA. He lectures regularly about the history, science, and culture of mechanical timekeeping and has authored many articles for the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*. He can be reached via [www.bell-time.com](http://www.bell-time.com). He recently received an NAWCC Fellow award and is chair of the Ward Francillon Time Symposium Committee.