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| Man Ray (b. 1890; d . 1976) |
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| Born Emmanuel Radnitzky, Man Ray was one of the key innovators in modernist photography, film, and object making. He began his artistic career as a painter, and while his interest in the medium endured, it was photography that brought him financial and critical success. In New York, Man Ray was introduced to the avant-garde while visiting Alfred Stieglitz’s ‘291’ gallery and the Armory Show (1913). He met Marcel Duchamp in 1915 and, along with Picabia, the three men founded New York dada. In 1921 Man Ray moved to Paris where he continued to produce experimental and provocative works, and was associated with the Paris dada group. Man Ray also developed his lucrative portrait and fashion photography business, photographing cultural giants such as James Joyce and Pablo Picasso, earning commissions from magazines such as *Vogue*. From 1924 photographic images became central in Surrealist publications, and Man Ray’s intensely innovative approach was highly regarded by the founder of the group, André Breton. Man Ray developed a poetic that suggested the union of reality and imagination; he used found images, documentary images, film stills, and straight and experimental photography, including solarisation (a process he developed with Lee Miller). World War II forced him to leave Paris for the United States, but he returned in 1951, where resided until his death. |
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From 1924 photographic images became central in Surrealist publications, and Man Ray’s intensely innovative approach was highly regarded by the founder of the group, André Breton. Man Ray developed a poetic that suggested the union of reality and imagination; he used found images, documentary images, film stills, and straight and experimental photography, including solarisation (a process he developed with Lee Miller). World War II forced him to leave Paris for the United States, but he returned in 1951, where resided until his death.  Man Ray’s parents were Russian-Jewish immigrants who moved to New York in 1897, where Man Ray spent his youth. Following High School, Man Ray attended art evening classes sporadically, and worked as a commercial artist (as a technical illustrator) for several Manhattan companies. He began to use the name Man Ray in roughly 1911, partly due to anti-semitism prevalent at the time. He studied drawing under Robert Henri at the ‘anarchist’ Ferrer School in 1912, and began a period of rapid artistic development. In 1913 he moved to ‘Grantwood,’ an artists’ colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey with Samuel Halpert, another student of Henri. There he produced Cubist inspired paintings, wrote and published poetry, and drew political cartoons for Emma Goldman’s ‘Mother Earth News.’ In 1913 together with Alfred Kreymborg at Grantwood he founded the ‘Others’ art group; participants included William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy and Marianne Moore. The group came into contact with émigré artists who had fled the war in Europe, and in 1915 Man Ray met Marcel Duchamp after joining the colony. The two men would became life-long collaborators. In 1916, along with Duchamp and Katherine Drier, Man Ray founded the avant-garde exhibiting society, the ‘Societé Anonyme,’ where he made objects, collages, assemblages, and began experimenting with photography.  In 1921 Man Ray moved to Paris where he became part of the Paris Dada group. In December 1921 he had a solo show at Librairie Six, the bookstore owned by Philippe and Mick Soupault. Man Ray recounts the story in his autobiography of how, on the afternoon of the exhibition opening, he bought a flat iron and some nails from a hardware shop while out for a stroll with Eric Satie. He glued the nails to the work surface of the iron to create the object *Gift*, placing it in the show on his return to Librairie Six. Man Ray opened a photography studio and experimented with photographic techniques including photograms (cameraless pictures) which he called ‘Rayographs’ and, in 1922, he published *Champs Délicieux,* a photographic album of 12 rayographs with a preface by Tristan Tzara. Commissions for portrait and fashion photographs provided Man Ray with a steady income, making him wealthy as he progressed through his artistic career.  When André Breton launched Surrealism in 1924, Man Ray began a long term association with the movement. He produced photographs, original and found, for surrealist journals such as *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924 – 29) and *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (1930 - 33) as well as objects, paintings and films. It was Man Ray who suggested that Eugène Atget’s photographs of Paris were published in *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1926, recognising them as images of the city as a site of the marvellous. He took on assistants who would become key avant-garde photographers in their own right; Berenice Abbott (1923 – 26), Jacques André Boiffard (1926 – 29) and Lee Miller (1929 – 32). With Miller he experimented with the technique of solarisation, where the image is part positive and part negative. Man Ray’s notable films are *Le Retour à la Raison* (1923), *Emak-Bakia* (1926), *L’Étoile de Mer* (192 8-29), *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (1929) and, with Duchamp *Anémic Cinéma* (1926). In 1929 Man Ray’s experimental photography was exhibited in the seminal Film und Foto show in Stuttgart. The modified photograph *Le Violon d’Ingres* (1924) is typical of his oeuvre, it transforms the classical nude and is sexually charged. Its tension stems from the fact that it is at once humorous, celebratory and disturbing. It involves word play in the title, suggesting that the woman is a mere ‘hobby’ as well as rape (viol is French for rape). Man Ray was successful as a painter and photographer in Hollywood on his return to the United States in 1940. He returned to Paris in 1951 where he continued to work until he died in his studio at the age of 86. |
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