

"I do not photograph nature. I photograph my visions."

**Man Ray**, the master of experimental and fashion photography was also a painter, a filmmaker, a poet, an essayist, a philosopher, and a leader of American modernism. Known for documenting the cultural elite living in France, Man Ray spent much of his time fighting the formal constraints of the visual arts. Ray's life and art were always provocative, engaging, and challenging.

Born Emanuel Rabinovitch in 1890, Man Ray spent most of his young life in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The eldest child of an immigrant Jewish tailor, he was a mediocre student who shunned college for the bohemian artistic life in nearby Manhattan. In New York he began to work as an artist, meeting many of the most important figures of the time. He learned the rudiments of photography from the art dealer and photographer, [Alfred Stieglitz](#), and began to experiment on his own.

In 1914, Man Ray married the Belgian poet, Adon Lacroix, and soon after met the experimental artist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp was to be one of Man Ray's greatest influences as well as a close friend and collaborator. Together the two attempted to bring some of the verve of the European experimental art movements to America. The most energetic of these movements was "dada." Dada was an attempt to create work so absurd it confused the viewer's sense of reality. The dadaists would take everyday objects and present them as if they were finished works of art. For Man Ray, dada's experimentation was no match for the wild and chaotic streets of New York, and he wrote "Dada cannot live in New York. All New York is dada, and will not tolerate a rival."

Having broken with his wife, Man Ray left New York for Paris in 1921—marking a continuous stream of tempestuous and often doomed romances. Through Duchamp, Man Ray met some of the most exciting artists and thinkers in Paris. Though he didn't speak a word of French at first, he was welcomed into this group and became its unofficial photographer. Among the many models from this period were Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, Salvador Dali, Gertude Stein, James Joyce, and the famous performer, Kiki of Montparnasse. For six years Kiki was Ray's constant model, muse, and lover.

Among the most famous of his photographs of the time are the many of Kiki. Man Ray's photographs of Kiki often use the outline of her body to represent other objects. This interest in minimalism and abstraction carried over to Man Ray's experiments with what he termed "rayographs." A "rayograph" was made by placing a three-dimensional object or series of objects on top of a piece of photographic paper and exposing it to light. These images lyrically and impressionistically represented objects such as ropes, light bulbs, and thumb tacks. Many artists responded positively to Man Ray's daring combination of minimalism, chance, and absurdity, and in 1922 he published his first book of them entitled THE DELIGHTFUL FIELDS

Throughout the 1930s Man Ray continued to paint, sculpt, and make portraits along with the surrealists, whose freewheeling dispositions were similar to his own. Though deeply immersed in the artistic life of France, [World War II](#) forced Man Ray to leave Paris, and he moved to Hollywood. In Hollywood, many expatriate artists, musicians, and writers took up residence. He spent ten years there working as a fashion photographer. With his brave use of lighting and minimalist representation, Man Ray produced fashion photographs unlike any that had come before—and forever changed that discipline.

Man Ray longed, however, to be back in Paris, the city that had nurtured his creative life. So, after the war, married to a young dancer named Juliet Brown, he moved back. He spent the next twenty-five years there, creating paintings, sculptures, films, and photographs. He died on November 18, 1976 at the age of eighty-six. One the great artists and agitators of his time, Man Ray will be remembered not simply for the fascinating and experimental works he left behind, but for the crucial role he played in encouraging the revolutionary in art.

## **Ray, Man**

American, 1890-1976

A tireless experimenter with photographic techniques who participated in the [Cubist](#), Dadaist, and Surrealist art movements, Man Ray created a new photographic art which emphasized chance effects and surprising juxtapositions. Unconcerned with "Craft," he employed solarization, grain enlargement, and cameraless prints (photograms) which he called "Rayographs"—made by placing objects directly on photographic paper and exposing them to the light. Man Ray was, with MoholyNagy, the most significant maker of cameraless photographs in the 1920s and 1930s.

As a painter, sculptor, and filmmaker, as well as a photographer, Man Ray brought his diverse techniques to bear upon one another in the attempt to create "disturbing objects. His life and art spoke of freedom, pleasure, and the desire for extended awareness and means of expression. His work has been a significant influence on [Bill Brandt](#) and [Berenice Abbott](#) (both of whom studied with and assisted him), and more recent photographers using multi-media techniques.

Man Ray was given that name by his family when he was 15, and wished to be known only by that name. He was born in Philadelphia, and later moved with his family to New York City where he attended the Academy of Fine Arts and the Ferrer School. He had an early desire to become a painter, studied architectural drawing and engineering and began his career as a graphic designer and typographer.

In 1910 he met [Alfred Stieglitz](#) at the 291 gallery and became acquainted with the work of important modern artists Stieglitz exhibited. Man Ray took early portraits in a style influenced by Stieglitz as well.

He was given a one-man show of paintings at Charles Daniel's gallery in New York in 1915. The same year he met [Marcel Duchamp](#) who encouraged his making assemblages and collages. Around 1920 he began photographing his paintings for record purposes, but soon started to explore the photographic medium for its own sake. He became a member of New York's proto-Dada group about this time along with Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and others.

Man Ray moved to Paris in 1921 where he made his living as a professional fashion and portrait photographer while pursuing more creative work on the side. He became internationally famous as the photographer of Parisian artists between the wars. He made portraits of the entire intellectual elite: Breton, Joyce, Eliot, Schoenberg, [Matisse](#), [Ernst](#), Artaud, Stein, [Brancusi](#), and Hemingway, to name a few.

Soon after his arrival in Paris, Ray made his first Rayograph. He participated in the first international Dada show held in Paris, was a member of the Surrealist movement from 1924, and exhibited at the first Surrealist show in Paris in 1925. In 1932, his work appeared in the major Surrealist exhibition at New York's Julien Levy Gallery. He was included in the Museum of Modern Art's *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* show in 1935.

Ray fled Paris before the Nazi occupation in 1940 and settled in Hollywood where he continued to work and teach for the next 10 years. Photography took second place to painting for the rest of his career, although he experimented with color photography in the late 1950s and early 1960s.