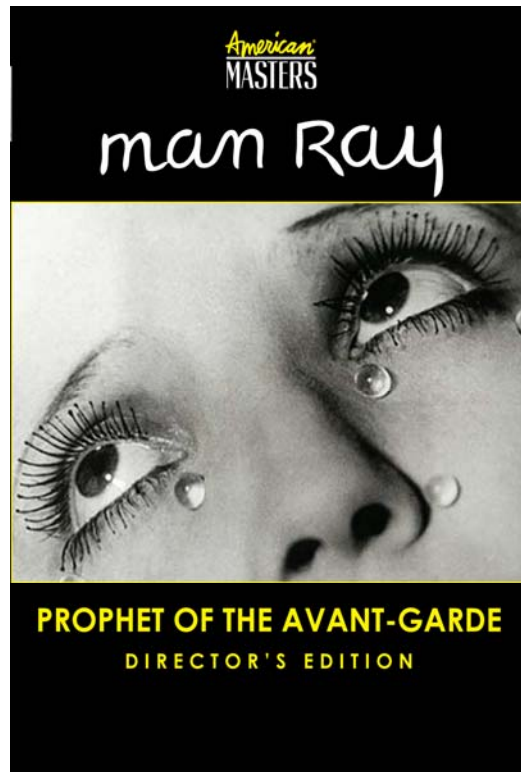



MAN RAY: PROPHET OF THE AVANT-GARDE

Guidebook



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Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde

Through interviews with Man Ray, artists, art historians, and the artist's friends, *Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde* offers an in-depth of the Dadaist and Surrealists artist's life and his works. Born Emmanuel Radnitzky to a family of Russian-Jewish immigrants in 1890, Man Ray moved with his family from Philadelphia to Brooklyn a few years later. Despite his family's desires to see Man Ray attend college, from an early age Man Ray took an interest in art and decided to pursue this as his career. In his later years Man Ray did not place much importance in discussing the details of his childhood and told reporters not to ask questions whose answers could be found in books. While details of his adult life are much more readily available, those of Man Ray's childhood remain murky until his life as a professional artist began. As a result of the virulent anti-Semitism he faced, Radnitzky began signing his artwork as "Man Ray" in 1912, the name by which the painter, photographer, and filmmaker would be known for the rest of his life. After scandalizing his family by bringing home a nude model, Man Ray moved to Manhattan and began his career as a professional artist. While in Manhattan, Man Ray's art decorated the cover of the anarchist journal of Emma Goldman, a renowned anarchist whose views influenced Man Ray's thinking on the surrounding world and on his art.

The 1913 Armory Show in New York represented a turning point in Man Ray's life and artistic career. With artworks such as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, Henri Matisse's *Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)*, Paul Cézanne's *Baigneuses*, and Pablo Picasso's *Le guitariste*, the Armory Show was largely responsible for introducing avant-garde art to American viewers through the display of artworks in the styles of cubism, fauvism, futurism, and impressionism. The Armory Show met with derision from the general public, many of whom felt that what it showcased was not "real" art. The *New York Times* called the show "pathological" while the *New York Herald* argued that the show represented a body of aliens that was "imperiling the republic of art." Critics also argued that the art demonstrated anarchy and insanity on the part of the artists. The exhibition continued to Chicago and Boston where it faced similar responses and protests. While most Americans, including President Theodore Roosevelt, lamented the new direction of art that the Armory Show represented, it had a profound impact on Man Ray and influenced the future directions of his work. Shortly after visiting the Armory Show, Man Ray created works in the expressionist and cubist styles. Inspired by Cezanne, Man Ray rented a home in the country where he married the Belgium poet Adon Lacroix and concentrated on his art. He met Marcel Duchamp, whose work he had greatly admired since the Armory Show, and who had inspired Man Ray's new directions in art. While the two did not speak the same language, according to Man Ray, they understood one another through their mutual artistic interests.

Shortly thereafter, Man Ray separated from his wife Adon Lacroix and returned to New York. It was in New York that he became acquainted with a new art movement emerging from Switzerland: Dada. Dadaists denounced the ideologies of nationalism, capitalism, and colonialism that they believed caused the First World War that was tearing apart the European continent. A group of artists led by Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara among others, represented an artistic anarchy. Dadaists rejected previous forms of art, which they viewed as constraining and complacent in its contribution to society and war. Instead, according to Man Ray, Dadaists sought to create new art for the modern age and make useful objects into something useless.

Man Ray started a group of Dadaists in New York to collaborate with the European artists, however, their artwork was never well-received in the United States. Man Ray wrote to Tzara that: “dada cannot live in New York. All New York is dada, and will not tolerate a rival, – will not notice dada.” After the rejection of his own work, and of the Dadaist movement in New York, Man Ray decided to move to Paris.

In Paris, Man Ray quickly became a part of a community of like-minded artists, many of whom participated in the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. It was in Paris that Man Ray began photographing many of the famous artists of the era, including James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, and Gertrude Stein. Man Ray also took a celebrated photograph of the French author Marcel Proust on his deathbed, an honor assigned to him by the Parisian artistic community. Not content with traditional photographic portraiture, Man Ray placed his subjects in unexpected circumstances and poses. He also developed a new Dadaist photographic technique that he later extended to film, known as “rayographs,” in which he produced images without either a camera or negative by exposing photo paper covered with objects. Man Ray made further breakthroughs in photography during his time as a fashion photographer by being the first to turn fashion photography into an art.

Man Ray’s romances inspired his artwork, and his partners acted as his models and muses for his paintings, sculptures, photographs, and experimental films. His lover Kiki of Montparnasse posed for one of Man Ray’s most well-known pieces, *Violon d’Ingres*, a play on words in French that means “hobby.” In a photograph inspired by the French painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, the nude model’s back resembles a cello. Man Ray painted the *f*-holes of the instrument onto the photographic print and then rephotographed this print to create a new version of Ingres’ classical nudes. This image represents Man Ray’s respect and admiration for the old masters while constantly pushing the boundaries of established art. Man Ray also mentored and collaborated with his lover, the American photographer Lee Miller. During his return to the US for the duration of the Second World War, Man Ray met and married Juliet Browner, a dancer from Brooklyn who remained his wife until his death in 1976.

Like many avant-garde artists of his time, Man Ray’s achievements were not recognized until after his death. Man Ray said that he “always wanted to be accepted, not understood,” and while fellow artists recognized his achievements and contributions to Dadaist and Surrealist painting, photography, film, and sculpture, many people did not understand the significance of his works until after his death. Man Ray truly was a “free man” as he claimed, and throughout his life he insisted upon making the art that he felt needed to be made rather than the art that the public expected or accepted. Man Ray’s legacy lives on through his art and his persistence in the face of an often unsympathetic audience.

Classroom Activities

Discussion

1. What is Dadaism? What is surrealism?
2. Discuss the relationship between art and world events using the examples of Dada and Surrealism. Why did these movements, which emphasize non-usefulness and irreverence, come about at a very serious time in history?
3. Why did Man Ray change his name? Why do you think he avoided many questions about his past?
4. Why did Man Ray move to Paris? Was he more successful in Paris than he had been in New York? Why? What were the responses to Dadaism in Europe and the United States?
5. How much was Man Ray influenced by the time in which he lived? What would the response to his works have been if he lived in another time period?
6. Much of the Dadaists work was rejected as “non-art” by viewers and artists outside the movement. How do you respond to such claims?
7. Discuss the impact of Dadaism on art in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries.

Activities

Dadaist poem

Tristan Tzara, one of the founders of Dadaism, provides instructions for making a Dadaist poem. Have students follow his instructions below, and share their results with the class. Have the class discuss the process of making the poem. In what ways does this poem turn something useful into something not? What are the different results achieved by the students?

Making a Dadaist Poem - by Tristan Tzara.

1. Take a newspaper.
2. Take a pair of scissors.
3. Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.
4. Cut out the article.
5. Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.
6. Shake it gently.
7. Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.
8. Copy conscientiously.

And here you are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar.

Making Dada Art

Have students participate in making Dadaist art. In order to fulfill the Dada directive of making something useless out of something useful, have students select a common object they use in their everyday lives (for example, students can select things in the classroom such as chairs, staplers, pencils, paper, chalk, maps; etc). Working in groups of 2-3 students, have students create, name, and describe to the class their artwork. Discuss as a group the process of making the artwork, the reasons students chose their piece, and responses of the rest of the class to the piece.

Analyzing Responses to Dada

While the 1913 Armory Show represented a turning point in Man Ray's career, most observers rejected the art on display. Have your students read the attached article from the New York Times that dates March 13, 1913 and discuss the following questions.

- What is the perspective of the author?
- How did Kenyon Cox feel about the show?
- How was the Armory Show received?
- What are the general feelings of the audience? Does the article demonstrate more than one perspective on the show?
- Why does the article place such emphasis on the relationship between money and art? Why is it so important to the viewers?
- What is the history of the artistic movements presented at the Armory Show?
- How do the show and this article reflect concurrent historical events?
- Why were people so fearful of anarchism?
- Does the response to this show parallel contemporary responses to art and music? Why or why not?

Additional Resources:

Online:

<http://www.manraytrust.com/>

<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=2036&page=1>

<http://www.rolandcollection.com/films/?prm=a12-b96-c543-d2-e0>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/man-ray/prophet-of-the-avant-garde/510/>

<http://www.manray-photo.com/catalog/index.php?language=en>

<http://www.surrealist.com/>

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