

Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde

2010

Distributed by [Choices, Inc.](#), 3740 Overland Ave., Ste. F, Los Angeles CA 90034; (310) 839-1500

Produced by Mel Stuart

Directed by Mel Stuart

DVD, color and b&w, 60 min.

Sr. High - Adult

Art History, Art, Modern Art, Popular Culture

Reviewed by Tom Ipri, University of Nevada Las Vegas

 **Highly Recommended**

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Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde originally aired as an episode of PBS' American Masters in 1997 and provides a succinct overview of the life of the talented Man Ray, a painter, photographer, sculptor, and film maker, who is perhaps best known for his photographic portraits of famous artists, such as Igor Stravinsky, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Pablo Picasso. The film, engagingly narrated by Stockard Channing, surveys Ray's life while being attuned to the need to frame his life and work in a cultural and historical context. The often underappreciated Ray is given flattering treatment as director Mel Stuart makes a compelling case regarding Ray's importance in the 20th Century art world.

Although Stuart does nothing new with the biographical documentary form, relying on archival footage, talking head interviews, and interviews with Ray from later in his life, he executes these conventions effectively. The film follows a strict chronology from Ray's childhood in Brooklyn, to his artistic success in Paris, to his later years in California, to his return to Paris where he died in 1976 at the age of 86. His photography and friendly personality drew other artists to him, and he became a major chronicler of the cultural figures of the time until he had to flee Paris during World War II. The film deftly explains the relevant artistic movements and provides ample examples of Ray's work and those of some of his contemporaries.

In addition to providing an overview of Ray's artistic life, *Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde* also gives insight into his personal life, focusing on his friendships with other artists, such as Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst, and on the loves of his life including the model Kiki and his student Lee Miller with whom he had a rather turbulent relationship. The film also shows clips from an interview with his widow Juliet Browner.

Man Ray: Prophet of the Avant-Garde packs a lot of information in just under an hour and is a perfect introduction to the life, works and personality of Ray.