

759
THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN.

MAN RAY

A thesis submitted to:
The faculty of History of Art and Complementary Studies
in candidacy for the diploma
Faculty of Fine Art.

By
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1
APPENDIX

SECTION 2
APPENDIX

I N T R O D U C T I O N .

Man Ray was a man of many and varied talents but in reading for this thesis I was particularly impressed by his pioneering spirit as an artist especially in the field of photography, his courage, humour and originality in his life and his work.

In the first section I have tried to outline his life, and in the second to deal in more detail with his photographic work.



Man Ray 1930.

Man Ray was born in Philadelphia in 1890. At the age of seven years he moved to New York with his family. Already he showed a strong interest in drawing and painting, to the neglect at times of other regular studies and to the consternation of his parents. However at High School he received a sound grounding in both freehand and mechanical drawing, and on his graduation day in 1908 it was announced that he had received an architectural scholarship to a prestigious university.

His parents were obviously delighted and Man Ray himself remembers being "resigned" to a career as an architect. But in the following few months of the summer, before he entered college, he painted and drew and his misgivings about entering university grew. Finally he announced his plans to abandon the scholarship and earn his living. In making this decision to throw in a secure and probably lucrative career in order to support himself and follow that most insecure and uncertain of careers, painting, Man Ray exhibits that typical independence of thought which is evident throughout his life. And he appears to have had fairly firm, almost moral grounds for his decision, besides his need to paint.

1. "I was against architecture because it is no longer an art as it was in the Renaissance. Today it's engineering, everything is done to either impress or humiliate people — a big public building, corporations — or to crowd people in the most economical way possible. I am not at all interested in the outside appearance. I am interested in the interiors of buildings. Give me enough space, light and heat, and I'll take care of the rest myself."

Now began the period of job-hunting and for the next few years Man Ray became a news stand attendant, engraver, draughtsman, lettering and layout man, and draughtsman yet again. During this restless time he also started to attend night classes in various art schools, but he mostly found that he was bitterly disappointed with the methods of teaching and the academic and

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water-colours of nudes, this exhibition revealed the seriousness of his commitment and the maturity of his style. At the same time they come between the abstract Tapestry of the previous year and the far more realist Dream (1912) and Promenade (1912) and testify to his freedom of expression and complete lack of concern with stylistic evolution.

The Following year marked two important turning points in Man Ray's life. One was the International Exhibition of Modern Art, or the Armory Show as it is sometimes known. The Armory Show was the American public's first large scale introduction to advanced European Art (Brancusi, Braque, Duchamp, Kandinsky, Leger, Matisse, Munch, Picabia, Picasso, the Impressionists etc.). This show was a discovery, a new departure point and, above all, a great encouragement to Man Ray. It confirmed all his own intentions rather than influencing him in any particular way.

The other was that in the Spring of 1913 Man Ray moved to an artists' colony called Ridgefield near New York, but on the Jersey side of the river. Here in Ridgefield he met, and eventually married Donna Lacroix, divorced wife of sculptor Adolf Wolff. This highly cultured French woman introduced him to translations of works by poets such as Rimbaud, Mallarme, Baudelaire, Lautreamont and Apollinaire. This was an intensely active and creative time for Man Ray. His house in Ridgefield had become a meeting place for painters, poets, musicians, chess players and Radicals.

His painting shows the impact of the Cubist style he saw in the Armory Show; Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz (1913), The Village (1913), but, as ever, in the same year he also completed works in totally different styles: Adon Lacroix Asleep (1913) and Dual Portrait (1913).

In 1914 Man Ray prepared works for a show he was promised in the Danial Gallery directed by Alison Hartpence, a friend of Man Ray's. The show was scheduled for the autumn of 1915 and necessity turned Man Ray into a photographer. He needed photographs of his works for collectors, friends and the press.

Dissatisfied with the reproduction that professional photographers made, he decided to master the technique himself.

3. ^s
"Translating color into black and white required not only technical skill, but an understanding as well of the works to be copied. No one, I figured, was better qualified for this work than the painter himself. I had never shared the contempt shown by other painters for photography; there was no competition involved, rather the two mediums were engaged in different paths."

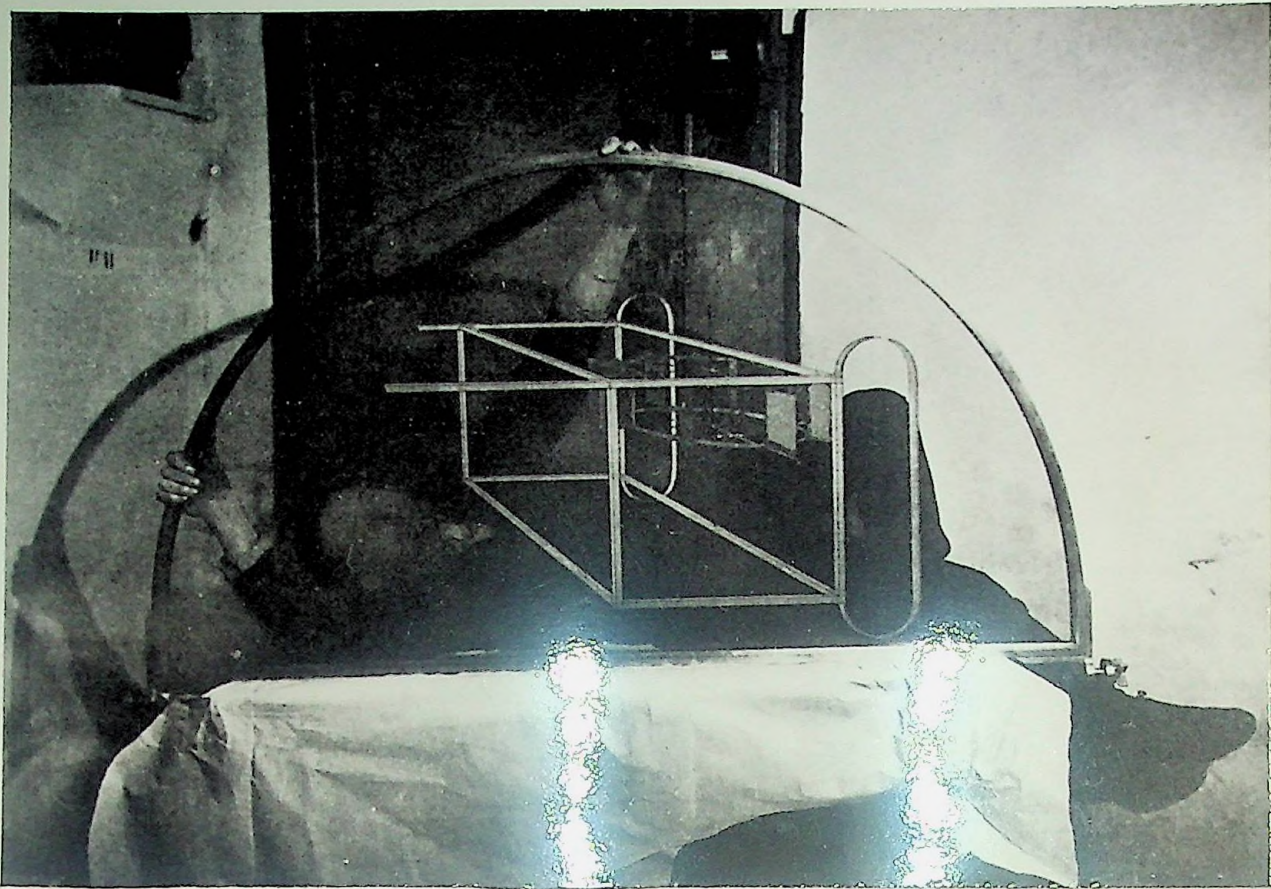
He knew absolutely nothing of photography at the time, but went ahead and acquired a camera and the other necessary paraphernalia and following the given instructions made the necessary reproductions. He reasoned with himself that Da Vinci and Durer had experimented with optics and devices to facilitate their work and, had the camera been invented, would have used it without compunction to save themselves hours of laborious drawing. The results of his work were surprisingly satisfactory and he made vague plans to explore the other mysteries of photography later.

That summer Man Ray also met Marcel Duchamp, whose Nude descending the Staircase had caused such furore at the Armory Show in 1913.

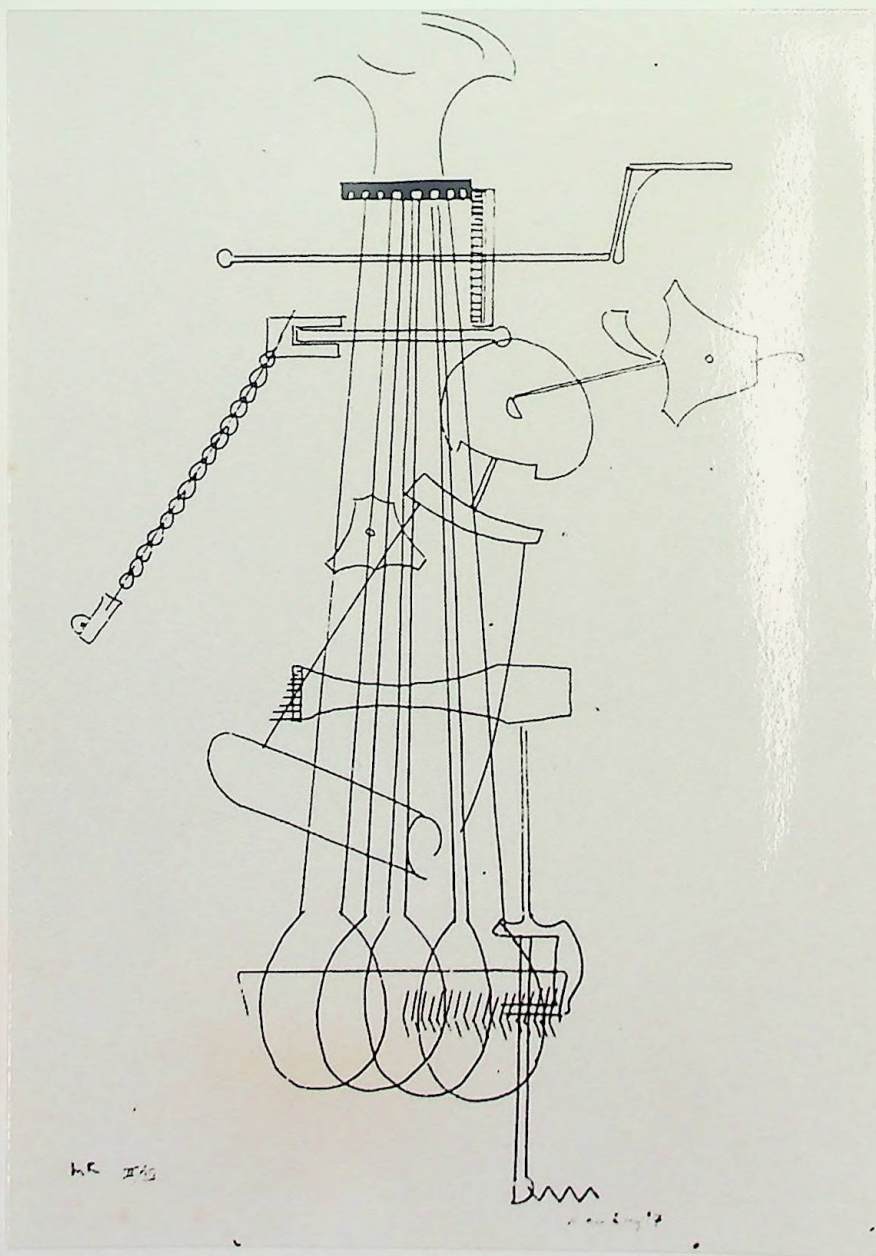
The critics' reactions to Man Ray's one man show in the Daniel Gallery in November 1915, was with one or two exceptions, hostile, and the sales were nil. However by a stroke of luck a wealthy collector, A. J. Eddy, bought six canvasses for two thousand dollars after the show had closed.

The sale meant another change in Man Ray's life. He'd had enough of the back-to-nature life and he and Donna moved back to New York and settled in a studio in the Centre.

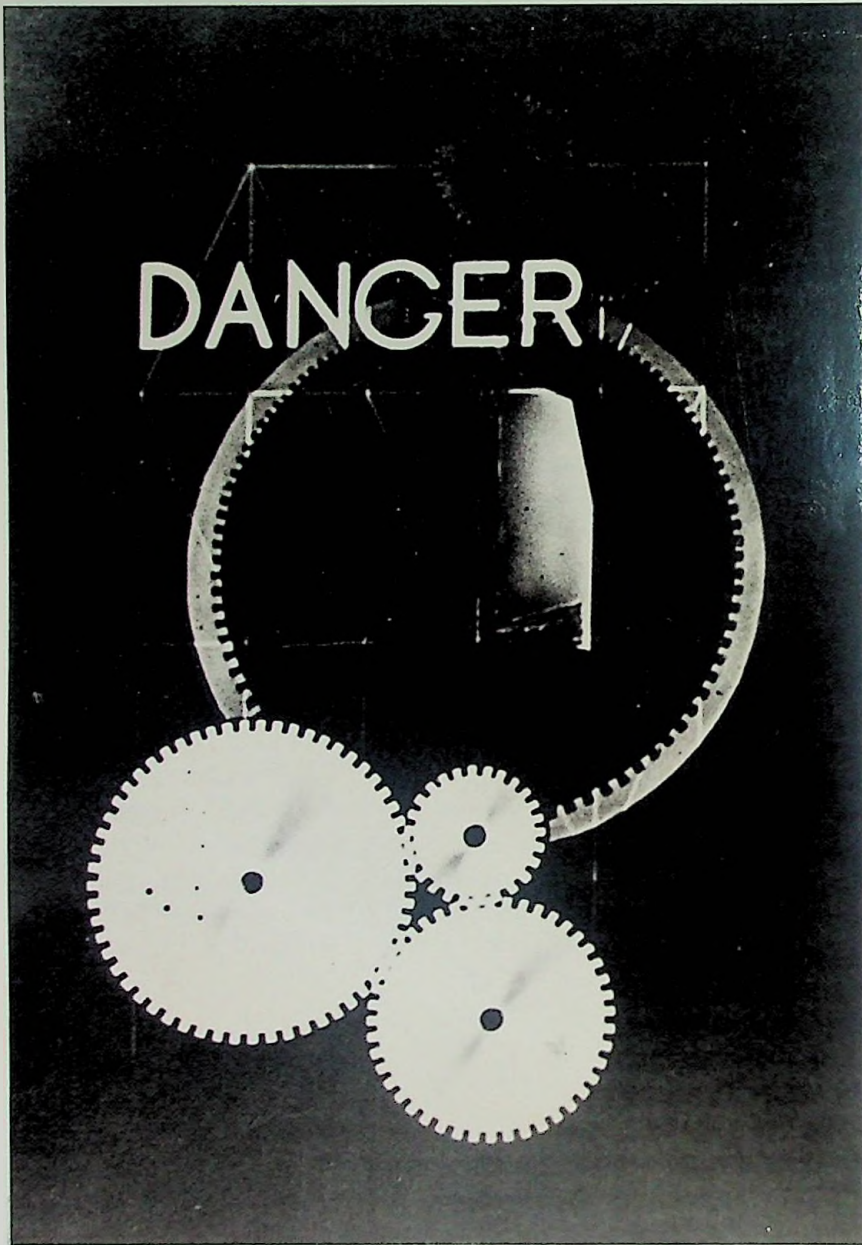
In Europe by this time the Dadaists were stirring and the avant garde works of the moment were shaking up the art world in New York. Man Ray felt in need of a break after two years' concentrated painting in the country and he was beginning to investigate photography and collage more deeply. With Duchamp,



Marcel Duchamp lying behind the Glass 1917



The Eggbeater (cliche verre) 1917



Danger/ Dancer 1920



New York Dada, April 1921

Arensberg, and others he founded the Society of Independent Artists whose main goal was to do away with the jury selection board system in operation for all large exhibitions.

He was included in the "Forum Exhibition of Modern Painters" in 1916, and had another show at Daniel's the same year. In 1917 he painted his last oil painting for many years to come. By now he was totally involved in exploring airbrush painting and collage. This was also the year of intensive Dada activity in New York by a group of French expatriates. Man Ray was a supporter of the Dadaists spurred on no doubt by his close association with Duchamp, with whom in 1920 he collaborated in founding "The Societe Anonyme" with Katherine S. Dreir. This was to be a Museum of Modern Art which kept close contact with the Dada movement for years. Man Ray's role was to be chiefly photographer and this was probably one of the earliest commercial arrangements he entered into on a photographic basis. The following year Man Ray and Duchamp published the first and only issue of New York Dada (1921) in which he included some of his own photographs. But in general Dadaism never became as strong a movement in New York as in Paris and other parts of Europe. The atmosphere in New York was not at all receptive, and in fact more depressing than anything else. Man Ray's work was becoming less and less painterly and more three-dimensional: Danger/Dancer (1920), New York Dada (1921).

His marriage to Adon Lacroix had broken up. Duchamp had left for Paris early in 1921. There seemed to be no reason for Man Ray to stay in New York any longer. The spirit of Dadaism in Paris beckoned him from hostile New York. He had no money but on the advice of Strieglitz, went to see a visiting art collector in New York then, a Mr. Howald, and offered him a choice of one or several paintings if he would finance his journey to Paris. Mr. Howald gave him a cheque for five hundred dollars and said he would see him in Paris the following year and would make his choice then.

Man Ray arrived in Paris in July 1921 and was to spend the next nineteen years there, though I doubt if he suspected that then. From the beginning he was introduced right into the centre of the French Dadaists by Duchamp, meeting Rigaut, Breton, Soupault, Aragon, Eluard, Dali and Picabia in his first few weeks. Within the year he had a show at Librairie Six, a bookshop owned by Soupault. The opening was a very Dada affair and the catalogue contained texts by Tzara, Arp, Ernst, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and some of the other Dadaists mentioned before. The opening went well and the show lasted for two weeks but nothing was sold. By now he was low on funds and falling back more and more on photography. He sent his Revolving Doors collages (1916-17) to a dealer recommended by Picabia but nothing came of that either. In one last effort he sent Catherine Barometer (1920) and Boardwalk (1917) into the Salon des Independants. The critics ignored them and they were dismissed as the usual publicity bid by the Dadaists.

That was Man Ray's last effort to enter the art world, as far as his painting was concerned, for years to come.

4. "I now turned all my attention to getting myself organized as a professional photographer getting a studio and installing it to ^{do}/my work more efficiently. I was going to make money — not wait for recognition that might or might not come. In fact I might become rich enough never to have to sell a painting, which would be ideal — anyone who expressed any enthusiasm for my work could have it for the asking. And I put my philosophy into practice at once — I began giving my works to any who expressed the regret they did not have the money to buy them."

Throughout the 1920s Man Ray concentrated on photography. Notwithstanding this he always managed to squeeze in a couple of hours' painting a day and by 1929 his success as a photographer was allowing him to devote more time to painting again. In the 30s he produced Observatory Time — The Lovers (1932-4), Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade (1938) and Fair Weather

(1939), among others. He also spent much of his time drawing during the 30s, especially during 1936-37 and around then he started painting seriously again.

Preparations for war were taking over Europe in the late 1930s. Man Ray found himself at another crossroads in his life. Photography had become purely remunerative for him.

In 1940 he was compelled to leave Paris, as far as he knew for good. He left nearly everything behind him, and arrived in New York totally depressed and hoping to go into retirement rather than get caught up in the commercial art world there. He decided to go away on a long vacation and accepted a lift from a friend going as far as the west coast. Finally, arriving in Los Angeles, he decided to stay.

5. "I explored the town. It was like some place in the south of France with its palm bordered streets and low stucco dwellings. Somewhat more prim, less rambling, but the same radiant sunshine. More cars, of course, yet they seemed to whizz past apologetically so as not to obstruct the scene. And I seemed to be the only one on foot, sauntering along leisurely, avoiding the more populated districts. One might retire here, I thought, live and work quietly — why go any further?"

And so he stayed. At the house of a friend he met Juliet Browner who was some years later to become his wife. With her he located a perfect studio, right in the centre of Hollywood, but secluded by a courtyard and trees. He also bought a car. Once again he appeared to have landed on his feet, as he himself wrote:

6. "Well, now I had everything again, a woman, a studio, a car. The renewal of my existence every ten years, as predicted by an astrologer, was running true to form.

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Having provided for my immediate material needs, I could now concentrate on the long range project of re-establishing

myself as a painter; there was plenty to do. Besides the reconstruction of lost works, I had sketches and notes for new ones which I hadn't had time to realize in Paris. When finished I could truthfully use one of my favourite expressions: I had never painted a recent picture."

As well as carrying out these plans, Man Ray began to visit galleries, meet new faces, circulate in general. Offers for exhibitions began to arrive. Man Ray discovered an unexpected talent for speaking at lectures and discussions. He visited old friends, Max Ernst in Arizona, Henry Miller in Big ~~Sea~~^{Surf}, Bill Copley in San Diego. He spent ten years in all in California and it seems to have been an entirely different and stimulating environment, a long holiday, a new life.

7. "I had a wonderful time, this was the first time in my life when I really felt I was on vacation. I met new friends in a new country, I was born again, I've almost as many lives as a cat."

In California Man Ray devoted his time mainly to painting and making objects. The paintings of these years fall into three main groups, re-elaborations of earlier paintings, paintings developed from old notes and projects, and entirely new paintings.

He recreated, among others, Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade II (1940) and Fair Weather II (1940) as well as some of his much earlier New York work such as Promenade (1915) from which came Promenade II (1941), Promenade III, IV, V (1948) and The Sweepers (1959). In 1942 he also recreated the ten collages of Revolving Doors (1916-17) but in oils, though similar in size and colour. By 1942 however he seems to have got tired of making replicas and they become much rarer. He made a series of paintings entitled Shakespearian Equations (1948) derived from the photographs of mathematical constructions taken in the Poincare Institute in Paris in the early 30s.

8. "Among the photographs I brought back to Hollywood was a batch of prints I had made in the thirties as a basis for a series of paintings. These were of objects in wood, metal, plaster, and wire made to illustrate algebraic equations, which lay in dusty cases in the Poincare Institute. The formula accompanying them meant nothing to me, but the forms, themselves were as varied and authentic as any in nature. The fact that they were man made was of added importance to me, and they could not be considered abstract as Breton feared when I first showed them to him, — all abstract art appeared to me as fragments: enlargements of details in nature and art, whereas these objects were complete micro ~~cosms~~ When about fifteen were completed, I gave the series the general title: Shakespearian Equations, and for individual identification the title of one of Shakespeare's plays quite arbitrarily or the first that occurred to me. Thus, the last one was called All's Well That Ends Well."

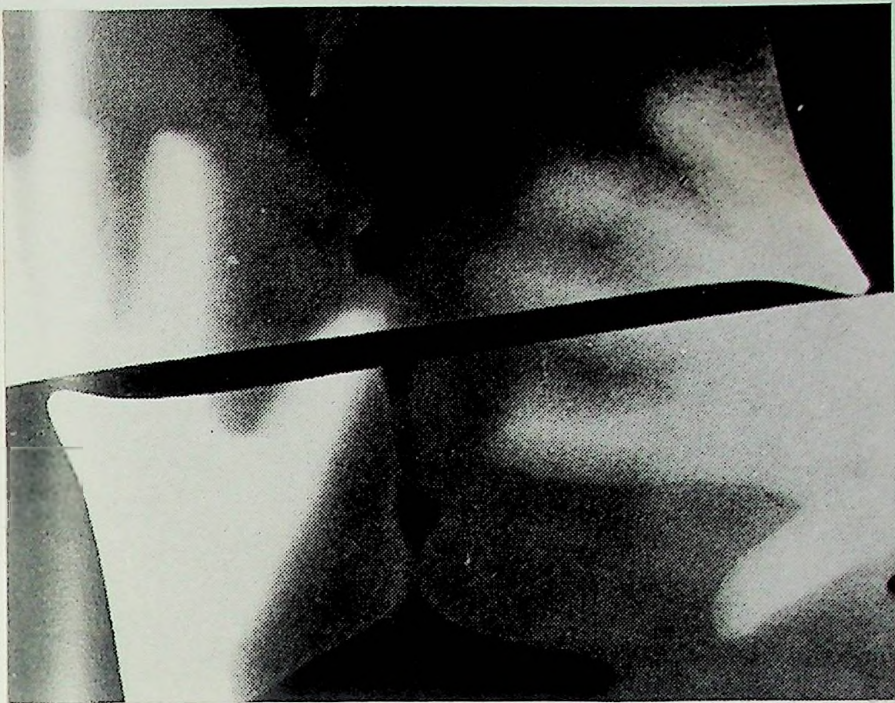
The origin of this series of paintings derived from the series of photographs could well be traced further back still to Man Ray's early discovery of Lautreamont's Chant de Maldoror, wherein the poet spoke of the beauty of mathematics, mentioning

" your cabalistic ciphers, your terse equations, and your sculptural lines"

which Man Ray had returned to himself. There seems indeed to have been much harking back to his early life in America after years as an exile, completion of a cycle.

At the end of the war many of Man Ray's friends had returned to Europe. Man Ray had never mixed well with the Hollywood society. He had never felt quite comfortable among them; he was also now seeing those he had known best leave, one by one. Hollywood lost its glamour and then a new landlord raised the rent. Calculating that a year's rent would pay the fare back to France, and hoping that things would be back to normal again, the year being 1950, Man Ray and Juliet upped and left immediately, having made their decision.

Rayograph: Man Ray
kissing Kiki, 1922.



Le baiser 1930

Two Faced Image 1959.





Kiki's lips 1925.

After the prodigious amount of paintings, objects, photographs and Rayographs that Man Ray had produced during his ten years in California, he slowed down again somewhat now that he was back in Paris, and decided to put his energies into painting. Many of these paintings of that time (1951-7) in Paris are variations on abstract themes such as Meeting (1952) and the Mythologies (1952-56) series. He was still innovating as is illustrated by Talking Picture (1957) which incorporated a loudspeaker and Fragile Glass (1957), a framed glass palette.

I wonder how cynical he was becoming of fame, and of the art market, when he framed the rag he cleaned brushes with, Le Sans Col (Tel Quel) (1960) and his blotting pad in the Blotting Paper Series (1959).

Two Faced Image (1959) is a striking forerunner of Pop art and derives from a 1922 Rayograph of Man Ray and Kiki Kissing, and a thirties photograph. This was one of his largest paintings ever and sadly one of his last large ones. In the sixties and seventies he spent much of his time exploring his interest in optics through object making and drawing. He died in Paris on the 18th November 1976.

1. "The Rigour of Imagination" Arthur Schwartz.
2. "Man Ray" by Man Ray .
3. "Man Ray" by Man Ray .
4. "Man Ray" by Man Ray .
5. "Man Ray" by Man Ray .
6. "Man Ray" Roland Penrose.
7. "Man Ray" by Man Ray.
8. "Self Portrait" Man Ray.

(i) "I do not photograph nature, I photograph my fantasy, rather than give a conventional image of a landscape. I prefer to take my handkerchief, twist it as I wish and photograph it as I please." (1)

And again:

"I would photograph an idea rather than an object and a dream rather than an idea." (2)

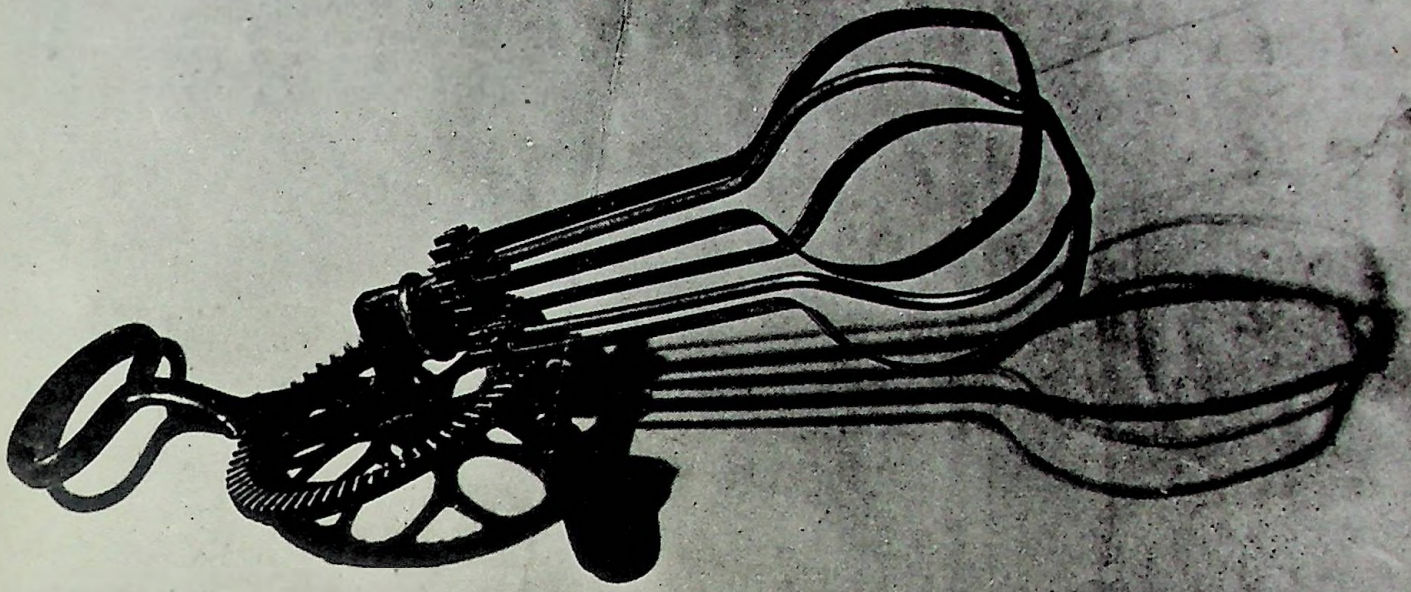
These statements are Man Ray's answer to the historical controversy between the painter and the photographer; they are also an indirect rebuttal of Picabia's statement. "You can photograph a landscape but you can't photograph the shapes I have in my head." (3)

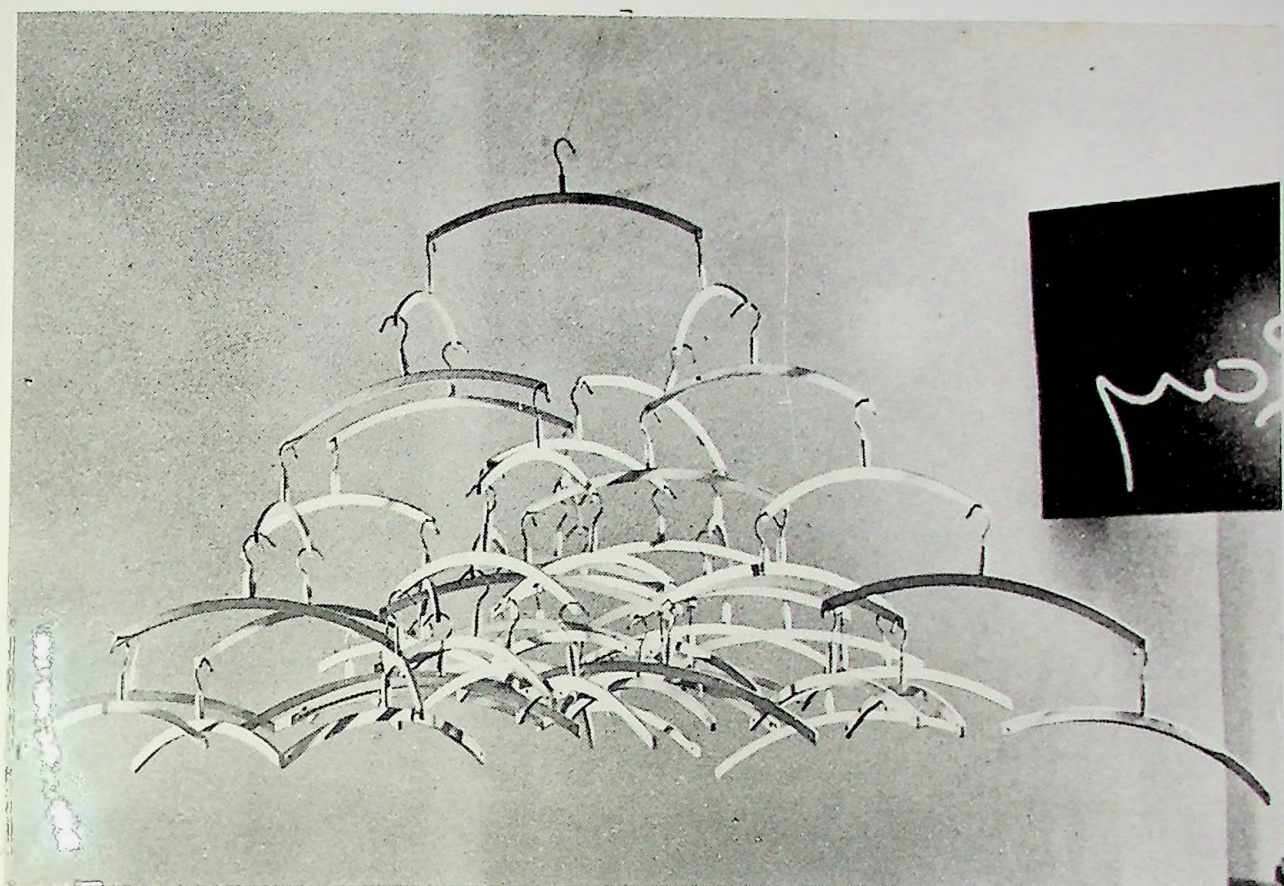
Man Ray thought otherwise — you can photograph the shapes in your head and you can transform a photograph into a mirror capturing and retaining the dreams and shapes in your head. In 1926 he wrote:

"After all photography is not restricted to the mere role of a copyist. It is a marvellous explorer of aspects that our retina will never register." (4)

In order to reveal the "shapes in his head" Man Ray was compelled to invent new techniques and develop new applications for forgotten photographic tricks. Rayography, solarization, over-development, over-enlargement, etc. are some of Man Ray's best known contributions to a craft that in his hands became an art. Paradoxically, Man Ray was thus responsible for a large number of technical innovations in photography, notwithstanding the fact that the technology of photography was one of the aspects that interested him least.

Photography was something that Man Ray had never consciously decided to take up. Even at later points in his life when it was that for which he was best known and when he was making a comfortable income from it he





Obstruction 1920

still considered it as secondary to his painting, his first great love, though this was only as a personal preference. He did not believe in competition or conflict between painting and photography. They were merely two different means of expression.

It was, as I have mentioned before, Man Ray's first one man show in 1915 which prompted him to make photographic reproductions of his work for the press and publicity. The means for photographic reproduction available at that time were still fairly new and thus appeared complex and intimidating to many painters who might otherwise have experimented in this other visual medium. Man Ray regarded it purely as a utilitarian means of reproduction and refused to be awed by it. I think that at that time for a painter to take such a practical and inquiring attitude towards a medium that had, since its invention, approximately seventy years earlier, been held in an ambiguous and not always favourable light by many painters, was indicative of Man Ray's whole approach to photography and instrumental in the freedom of style and experimental way in which he was in future to utilise this medium.

From photographing his works, Man Ray soon made the short step to trying his hand at portraiture. This step was financially prompted; he had his camera and had become proficient at reproducing paintings, but only his own. He thought it beneath his dignity to photograph the work of others. So he made photographic portraits and as the results were pleasing more and more friends came to him to have their photographs taken. These included Berenice Abbot, Myrna Loy, Djuna Barnes, Elsa Schiaparelli, Marcel Duchamp, Edgard Varese and Joseph Stella.

But they were still friends and his income was still meagre and he soon had to compromise with his reluctance to photograph the work of other painters. Marcel Duchamp was always an exception to this rule of Man Ray's and an early



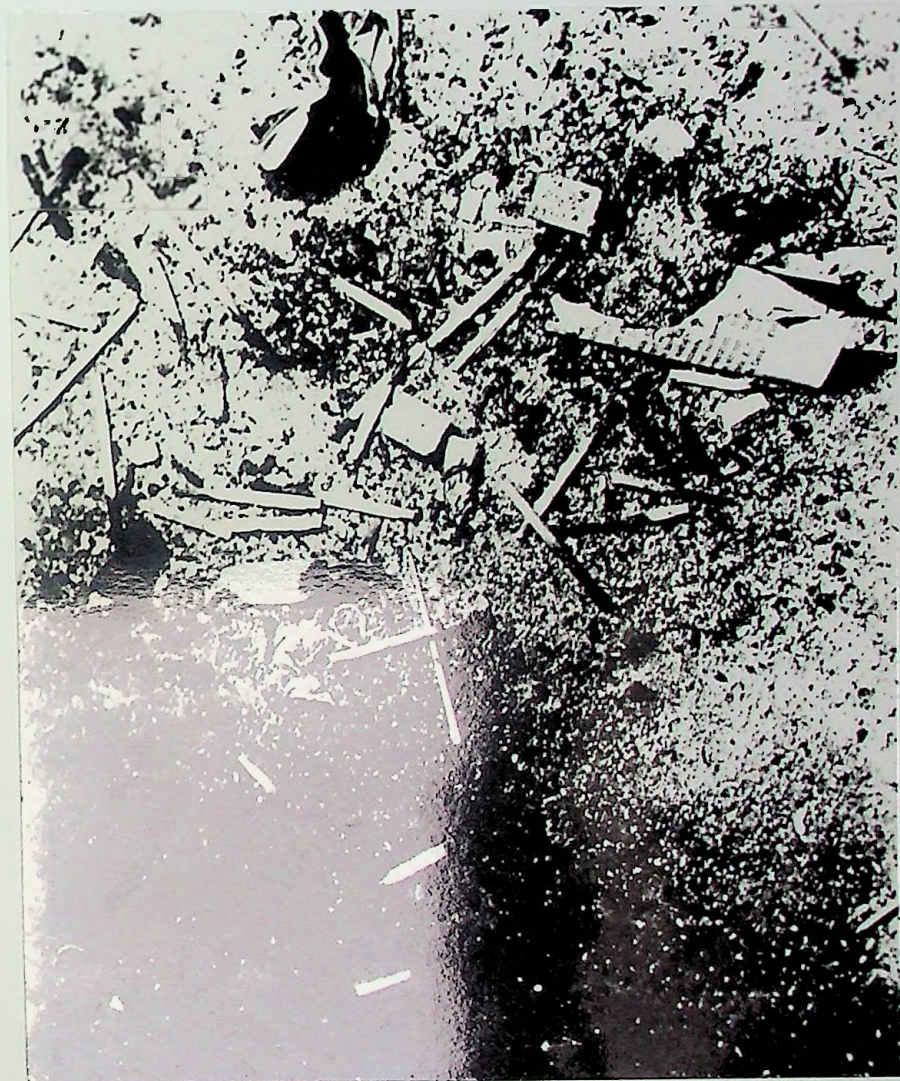
Trans Atlantique 1920.



Eighth Street 1920



Eighth Street 1920



Trans Atlantique 1920.



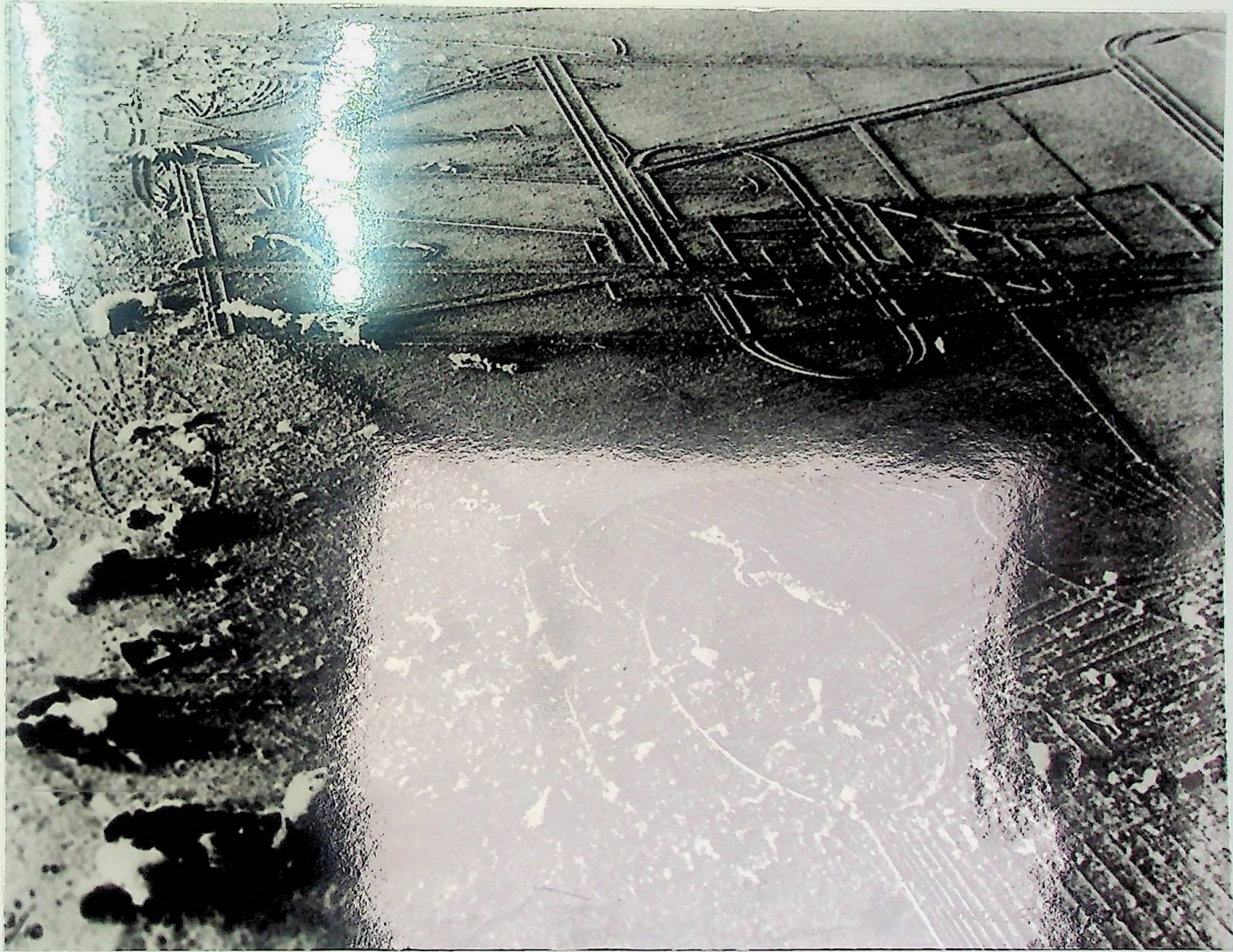
Moving Sculpture 1920

photograph shows Duchamp lying behind a section of the original Large Glass. This photograph was taken in 1917.

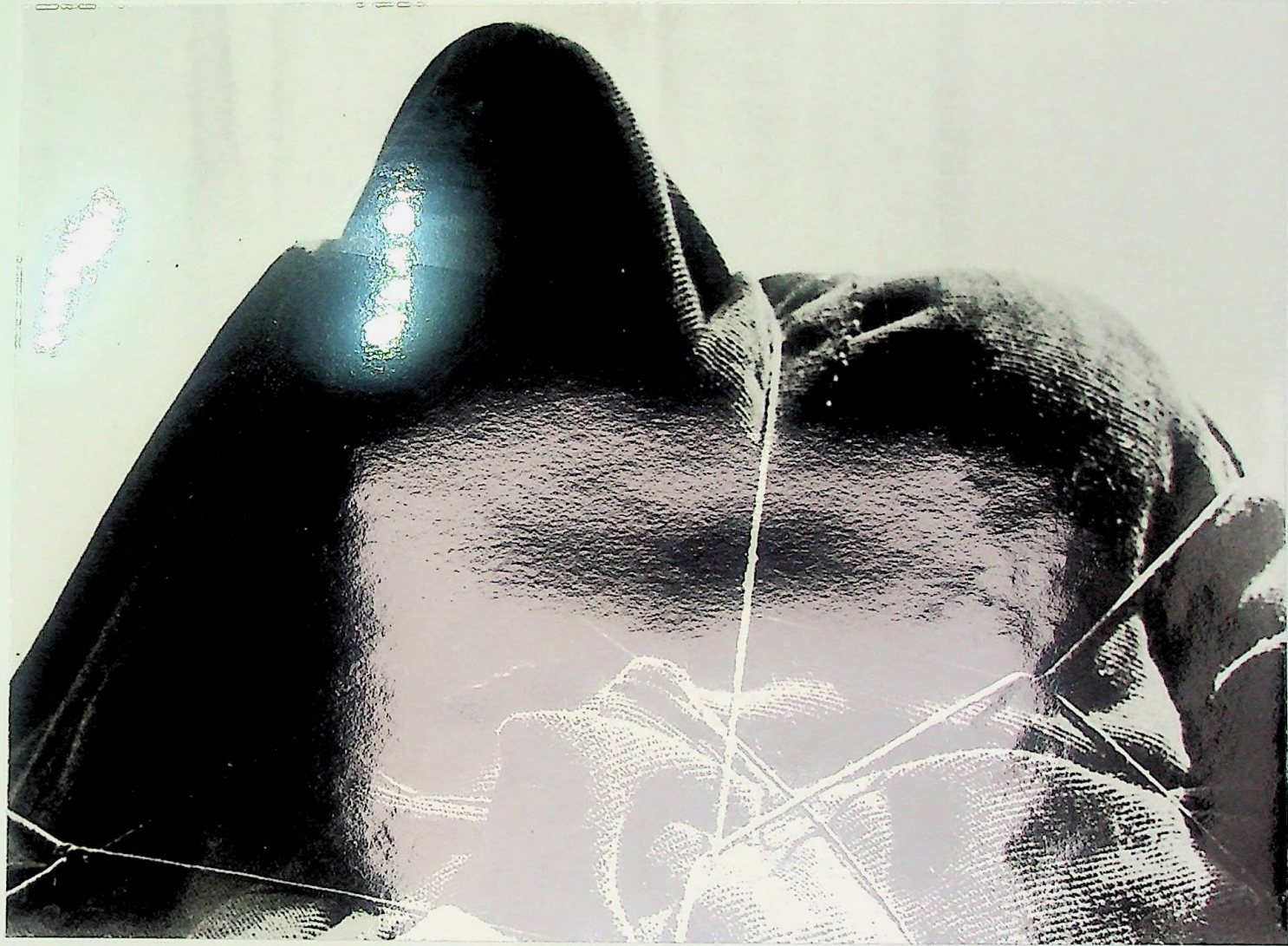
It was as a photographer who would be useful in providing reproductions of paintings for post-cards that Man Ray became involved in the founding of the Societe Anonyme with Katherine Dreir and Marcel Duchamp in 1920. He seems to have calmly regarded it as a chance to make some money, probably thus pacifying his scruples as a painter.

(ii) Photography, naturally, was Man Ray's method of recording his constructions and objects. Although not all Man Ray's Dada photographs were pictures of his objects, practically all his objects were subjects for photographs. Indeed up to the late 1940s most of Man Ray's objects were assembled chiefly to provide unusual subjects for unconventional photographs. Once they had served this purpose, they were discarded, dismantled or lost. Such was the case with probably the first Dada photographs Man (1918), An eggbeater, and Woman (1918) a construction of reflectors and laundry pegs, both objects transformed by light and shadow and captured by the camera. Other objects that suffered the same fate were Compass (1920), The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse (1920) and Obstruction (1920). These were all constructions purely for the camera. In other instances Man Ray would photograph a found object such as Eighth Street (1920), a crushed tin can, or a situation such as Trans Atlantique (1920), crumpled cigarette butts and ashes, or Moving Sculpture (1920), linen drying in the wind. These all became an object or situation once the camera had recorded them and the photograph became a record of an object or situation rather than a photograph of a mundane, everyday thing.

The famous Dust Breeding (1920) showed the thick accumulation of dust on Duchamp's Large Glass. All the subjects of these photographs share a common origin. No professional photographer would have dreamed of photographing



Dust Breeding 1920.



The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse 1920.

them. The conceptual origin of these Dada photographs can be traced to Duchamp's readymades, the designating something a work of art by naming and signing it, rather than to the work of other unconventional photographers, at that time.

Taking Paul Strand, for instance, whose work Man Ray had seen at Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in 1916. Strand chose to photograph non-traditional subjects, but he was an advocate of straight photography. He worked within the aesthetics of photography while Man Ray rejected the very idea of aesthetics.

With both the pattern of shadow is important but to take two works and compare them one can see where the affinity ends. In Strand's Photograph X, the presence of a fence is revealed only by shadow. In Man Ray's Man, on the contrary, the pattern of shadows underlines the reality of the eggbeater, demystifies the photographic technique, and humorously dramatizes the banal kitchen utensil.

Just as his painting was free from influences of other painters, so was Man Ray's photography free from the influences of other photographers, even though he regularly visited Stieglitz's 291 Gallery and became a close friend of its founder. Stieglitz was a member of a group called the Photo-secessionists who declared that their aim was to advance photography as applied to pictorial expression. In doing so they were influenced by the more conservative aspects of American painting of the time. Jerald C. Maddox wrote:

"Examining the work with more than fifty years of hindsight one realizes that its efforts were directed more to picture making than to photograph taking. Almost all the images exhibit the same weak romanticism and sentimentality found in so much American painting of the period." (5)

Man Ray's views were definitely at odds with the Photo-Secessionists. For him painting was so strongly one thing already that photography could not have emulated it and had to stand on its own two feet.

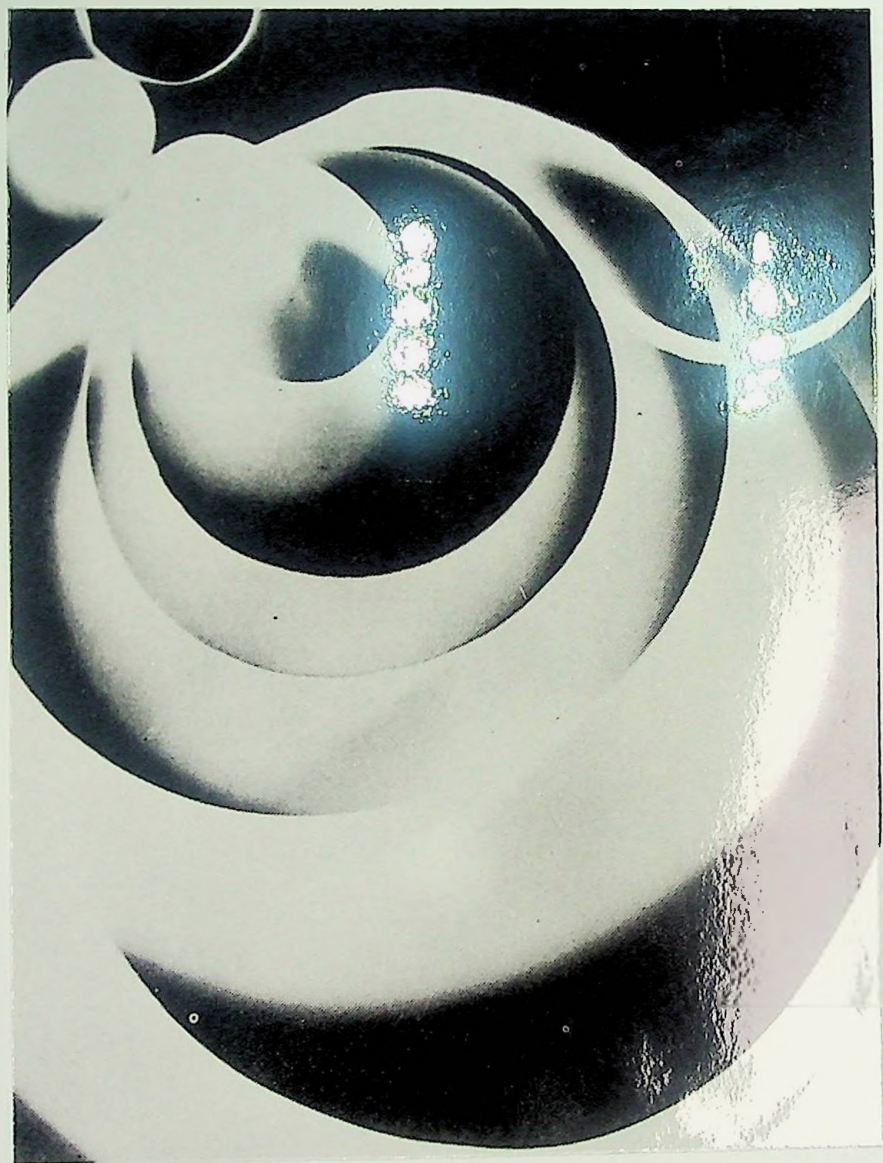
(iii) Since painting remained his guiding passion, once Man Ray had mastered the intricacies of the camera, he turned his attention to mastering his use of the play of light and the versatility of the sensitized glass plate. He independently hit upon the technique called *cliche-verre* and his first *cliche-verre* dates from 1917, although the process was not known outside a restricted group of specialists before 1922 when an article on the process appeared in an issue of the *Print Collector Magazine*. The process involved drawing on a smoked glass plate and obtaining an infinite number of positives from the resultant negative.

Man Ray shortcut this further by drawing on the negative itself. In doing so he was placing photography at the service of painting and giving a new lease of life to a process that had first been practised in England, around 1820, and had been enthusiastically adopted by Corot, Millet, Delacroix and others around 1850. This etching with light, which Man Ray was to return to in the early 1940s delighted him and satisfied his craving for techniques that eliminated technicalities and gave more freedom to the play of his imagination.

(iv) It was four years, a trans-atlantic crossing and change of life, and an accident between the camera-less *cliche-verre* and the camera-less Rayographs of 1921. With the Rayograph too, Man Ray was "trying to do with photography what painters were doing, but with light and chemicals, instead of pigment, and without the optical help of the camera."⁽⁶⁾

Man Ray was living in Paris then and one night as he was developing some fashion photographs, which was how he was supporting himself then, he hit upon Rayography as he later called it, purely by chance:





"One sheet of paper got into the developing tray — a sheet unexposed that had been mixed with those already exposed under the negatives and as I waited in vain a couple of minutes for an image to appear, regretting the waste of paper, I mechanically placed a small glass funnel, the graduate and thermometer in the tray, on the wetted paper. I turned on the light; before my eyes an image began to form, not quite a simple silhouette of the objects as in a straight photograph, but distorted and refracted by the glass more or less in contact with the paper and standing out against a black background, the part directly exposed to the light. I remembered when I was a boy, placing fern leaves in a printing frame with proof paper, exposing it to sunlight and obtaining a white negative of the leaves. This was the same idea, but with an added three-dimensional quality and tone graduation. I made a few more prints setting aside the more serious (commercial) work for Poiret, using up my precious paper. Taking whatever objects came to hand; I made a few more prints, excitedly, enjoying myself immensely. In the morning I examined the results, pinning a couple of the Rayographs — as I had decided to call them — on the wall. They looked startlingly new and mysterious. Around noon, Tristan Tzara came in He spotted my prints on the wall at once becoming very enthusiastic; they were pure Dada creations, he said, and far superior to similar attempts — simple flat textural prints in black and white — made a few years ago by Christian Schad, an early Dadaist." (7)

Technically Christian Schad's schadographs as he called them were more like the early contact photographs by Fox Talbot, using lace leaves etc. Schad used found objects laid on the paper to form any composition that pleased him. Man Ray, however, as he developed the technique further used only three-dimensional objects and did not lay them flat on the paper but moved them about in space between the light source and the paper. He was painting with light literally and obtained the

most surprising effects and endless gradations of tones from luminous white through all the greys to deep black. The object too invariably lost its familiar silhouette and gained a totally unpredictable outline and density. Rayography seemed to reveal the imaginary aura of an object.

Tzara suggested to Man Ray that he should assemble a portfolio, which he did and a few months later in December 1922 Les Champs Delicieux was published. Tzara wrote the introduction.

"When everything known as art had become thoroughly rheumatic the photographer turned on his thousand candle-power lamp and by degrees the sensitive paper absorbed the black silhouettes of ordinary objects. He had invented strength of a tender and new photographic flash which exceeded in importance all the constellations destined for our visual pleasure. The mechanical distortion, precise, unique and right was fixed, smoothed and filtered like hair through a comb of light." (8)

A typically profuse Surrealist appraisal, but the Surrealists really were enthusiastic about Man Ray's innovation. Robert Desnos, Louis Aragon, Georges Ribemont-Dessaigues, and André Breton have all written with praise of Rayography. Georges Ribemont-Dessaigues enthused in 1924;

"Man Ray is a subtle chemist of mysteries who sleeps with the metrical fairies of spirals and steel wool. He invents a new world and photographs it to prove that it exists,"

Thus echoing Man Ray when he said that he photographed his fantasy. Louis Aragon summed up the nature of Rayography as " (Rayography) is a philosophical operation without any real relationship to photography," (9)

fully answering Duchamp's plea for an art more conceptual than retinal.

(v) Man Ray appealed very strongly to the Surrealists and was the first — and for many years the only — Surrealist photographer. His were the photographs that appeared most

frequently in the Surrealist periodicals and publications. The first issue of the first Surrealist periodical La Revolution Surrealiste carried seven of his photographs including The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse (1920), a film still from The Return To Reason (1923) and Export Commodity (1920). Most of the following nine issues carried his photographs both independently and as illustrations to texts and on the covers.

In the years that followed before the second World War he contributed photographic work to many publications, art and fashion periodicals, fashion magazines, weeklies and monthlies in France and elsewhere, as well as books. La Surrealisme au Service de la Revolution replaced La Revolution Surrealiste in 1930 and Man Ray contributed to this until it ceased publication in 1933, which was when Albert Skira started the well-known and lavish Minotaure art-periodical, which was very close to the Surrealists and contained yet more of Man Ray's work. All in all his contributions to publications during this period are too numerous to be recorded here. Among the many Surrealist books in which his work appeared are Nadja (1928), L'amour Fou (1937) and Anthologie de L'Humour Noir (1940) by Andre Breton, the Abbreviated Dictionary of Surrealism (1938), Facile (1935) and La Photographie N'est Pas L'art (1937). In these last two Eluard and Breton 'illustrate' Man Ray's photographs, reversing the conventional collaboration in which the artist illustrates the work of the poet. "Here comes the magic-lantern-headed man," (10)

wrote Breton in his preface to La Photographie N'est Pas L'art. The twelve photographs in this book each seem to reflect a different facet of Man Ray's extraordinary vision. There were three female portraits, Miriam Hopkins, Sex Appeal, and Artistic Open Air. But Man Ray has reached far beyond his light-hearted comment back in 1915 as he first handled a camera, "I might even become a specialist in women. It was a bigger market ... "

There was a self-portrait of a bronze of his head wearing window



Kiki de Montparnasse 1922.



Tomorrow 1924



Le violon d'Ingres 1924.

pane spectacles entitled In The Eyes Of Others, two photographs which poked fun at professional photographers: Fashion Photography — Winter Collection — a tree whose buds are protected from the winter cold by small paper bags, and Integral Photograph And One Hundred Per Cent Automatic — a blurred photograph of an insect's moving feet. There were two photographs commenting ironically on the excessive rationalization of society: Well Ordered Mind — an ant hill, and Utilitarian Air-Emptyer — a sky scraper. The Cover Of A Note-Book Purchased From a Begger is an example of Man Ray's faculty for seeing and revealing the beauty of the most ordinary object. Certainly it was with justification that they called him 'the magic lantern headed man.'

- (vi) It has been said, time and time again, that Man Ray revolutionized nude photography. Surrealism, the only movement that advocated a liberation of man that would not be limited to a social revolution but would embrace a cultural and hence a sexual revolution, found a perfect interpreter in Man Ray. Each of Man Ray's female nudes is, to quote Andre Breton "a total of desires and dreams" "light and shade served to model these perfect incarnations, not only of what is most modern in poetry, music and dance, but of what is most eternally young in the art of love " (11)

It seems to have been within Man Ray's power to go beyond the conventional portrait, transcend immediate likeness to profound likeness and catch that moment when all the elements are in balance. He was a great hunter of the fullness of beauty, of beauty at a point where it can be no greater without toppling into self awareness.

Kiki De Montparnasse (1922), Le Violon D'Ingres (1924), and Tomorrow represent three different handlings of the same theme.

Kiki De Montparnasse is an almost academic study of the

nude standing modestly against a screen. The story goes that Man Ray photographed her just as she emerged from undressing and was not therefore posed. But it would have been a study for any classical painter.

Le Violon D'Ingres is a back view of the same model, apparently inspired by Ingres' painting Nude From The Back (1807). The pose is the same but on Kiki's back Man Ray superimposed the images of the F-shaped sound holes of the violin, transforming the photograph into a Surrealist image in which the woman's body becomes that of a violin. Perhaps it is not carrying the imagery too far to suggest that the title Ingres' Violon, which is an idiomatic French expression, meaning one's hobby, is given to remind us that photography was merely Man Ray's hobby, as the violin was Ingres' and that his real interests lay elsewhere.

Tomorrow is a multiple exposure of a nude which achieves a disturbing effect.

However, the use of special technical devices such as in Le Violon D'Ingres and Tomorrow in his photographs of nudes are rare and it is evident that Man Ray preferred to rely on his ability to catch the right model at the right time and in the right mood. The only notable exceptions are his solarizations.

(vii) Purely by accident around 1928 Man Ray came across the photographic process which has been called solarization. The term was first used in 1840 by John William Draper to denote the chemical change that partially transforms a negative into a positive image when the negative is subjected to a short exposure to light during development. In 1862 the French scientist Sabattier hit on the same phenomenon independently and in France it is known as the "Sabbattier Effect."

In his researches into unconventional portrait photography this process, which accentuated the contours of the visage by a sensitive black line, greatly appealed to Man Ray. Lee Miller who was his assistant then, describes how the accidental



Portrait 1933.



Solarized photograph 1932



Profile and Hands 1929



The Egg and the Shell 1931.

discovery happened.

"Something crawled across my foot in the darkroom and I let out a yell and turned on the light. I never did find out what it was, a mouse or what. Then I quickly realised that the film was totally exposed: there in the development tanks waiting to be taken out were a dozen practically fully developed negatives of a nude against a black background. Man Ray grabbed them, put them in the hypo and looked at them, the unexposed parts of the negative, which had been the black background, had been exposed by this sharp light which had been turned on and they had developed and came right up to the edge of the white nude body It was all very well my making that one accidental discovery but then Man had to set about how to control it and make it come out exactly the way he wanted each time." (12)

"The changes start in the dense areas and progress" wrote Man Ray "You must know when to stop." (13)

Despite the fact that he always claimed that technicalities were of no interest to him, he always set himself unwaveringly to master any new problem that came up in order to release his imagination into new unexplored areas. He worked relentlessly on this new problem until he was able to exert control over it. He commented on this lifelong attitude of his more than once and though in this case he was talking only of photography, I feel that it is relevant to his general attitude all his life. "I was trying to master, to dominate, the technical side of photography to explore new areas. The technique itself was not important to me, I was interested only in the result; the technique enabled me to get away from photography, to get away from banality. What I seek above all is to escape from banality, and here was a chance to produce a photograph that would not look like a photograph." (14)

Always having mastered a particular technique, Man Ray seems to have set about violating it, or at the least, stretching it



Primacy of mind over matter 1929.

Vous le ciel n'est pas sioux
Comme n'est qu'un peu sur la bouche de par
Le soleil se prend dans sa robe

Vous concluez le air pure et toute perfection
Vers l'été d'été
Sur une mer qui a la forme et la couleur de ton corps
Basse de ses tempêtes qui lui font robe neuve
Capricieuse et chaude
C'est ce que continue non

O mes raisons le bon en a plus de dormir
Que mon d'en découvrir de valables à la vie
A moins d'arriver

En passe de devenir carottes
Les rires et les gestes reglent mon album
Pourtant les pages
Et je ris avec toi et je te crois toute seule

Tout le temps d'une rue qui n'en fait pas.

Page 4 from *Facile* (1935)



Photograph from *The Age of Eight* 1934.

to the limits in order to realise new forms, to portray the shapes in his head.

One of his most famous solarized nudes is Primacy Of Matter Over Mind (1929) a magnificent portrayal of the female nude, the body surrounded by an almost dreamlike aura, the contours subtly changed and renewed.

(viii)

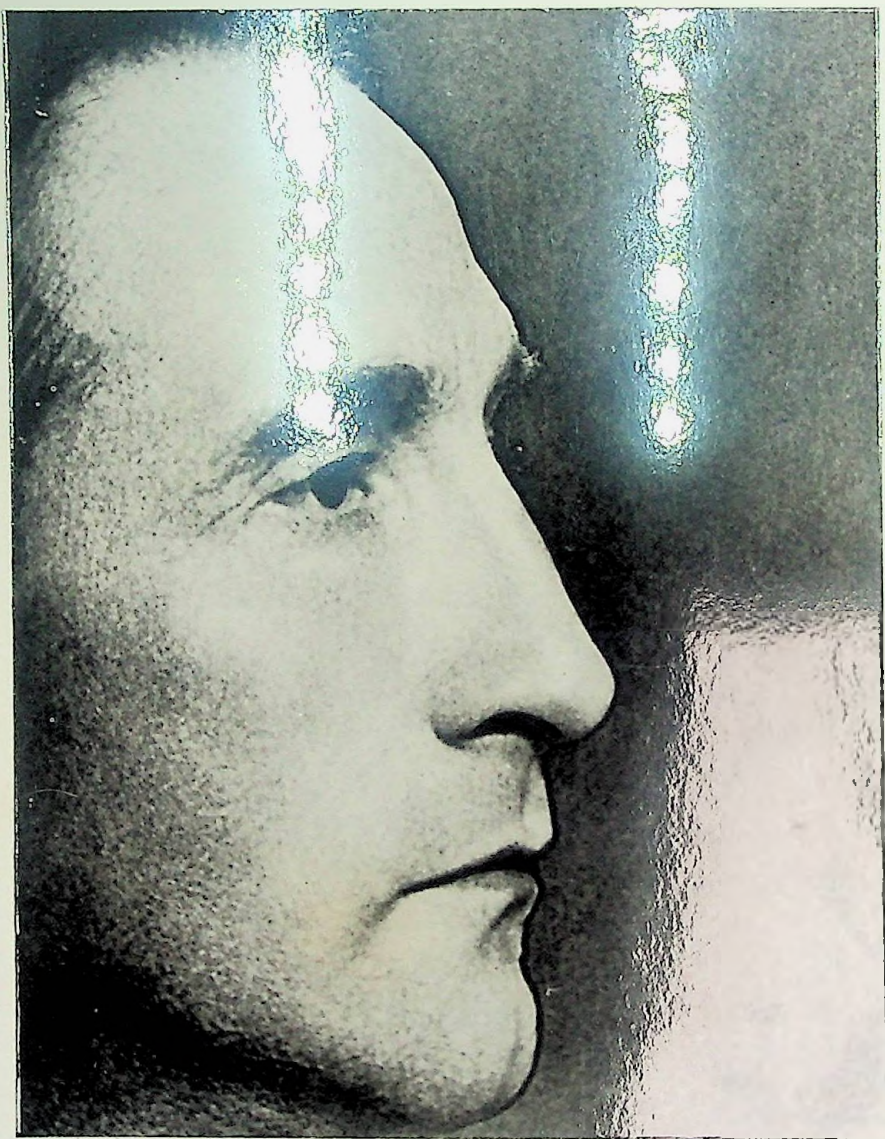
His youthful talent as a portrait painter came to the fore again in the late 1920s and 30s as Man Ray gathered a gallery of impressive portraits of not only his Surrealist friends and fellow artists, but the most notable American and English writers, poets and personalities living in or passing through Paris. Very wisely he only solarized the best of these, making rare and unique portraits of such as Breton (1928-9), Duchamp (1930), Braque (1930), and his own self-portrait (1930).

In addition to his Surrealist friends his portraits include Derain, Juan Gris, Fernand Leger, Henri Matisse, Roualt, Vlaminck, Brancusi, Giacometti, Kandinsky, Picabia, Picasso, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, W. C. Williams, T. S. Eliot, Havelock Ellis, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Sinclair Lewis, and many many more.

That period during the twenties and thirties was an unusually alive and fertile time that produced many of the great names of today and no doubt Man Ray was fortunate to be there and active at such a time. But in any time or place he would have been an innovator, a watcher, the magic-lantern-headed man.

Jean Adhemar, curator of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, who organized an impressive retrospective exhibition of Man Ray's work in 1962, wrote in tribute:

"Man Ray has done much for the cause of photography not only by his proficiency but also by assimilating photography and painting in an entirely new way. Thanks to him the photographer has been accepted by artists as one of them and Man Ray explains to the painters, to Picasso, for instance, that the



Marcel Duchamp 1930.



Portrait d'une poete (Juliet) 1954



Surrealist Chessboard 1934.

painter with his eye that 'sees better than we see' is
one of the best photographers that exist." (15)

- (1) "Man Ray, The Enchanter." Daniel Masclet.
- (2) Idem.
- (3) "Picabia." G. Buffet.
- (4) "Man Ray." Roland Penrose.
- (5) Photography in the First Decade. Jerald C. Maddox.
- (6) "Self Portrait." Man Ray.
- (7) "Man Ray." By Man Ray.
- (8) Preface to "Les Champs Delicieux." Tristan Tzara.
- (9) "The Rigour of Imagination." Arturo Schwarz.
- (10) Preface to "La Photographie n'est pas l'art." Andre Breton
- (11) "The Usages of Woman." Andre Breton.
- (12) "Man Ray." Roland Penrose.
- (13) Self Portrait." Man Ray.
- (14) Idem.
- (15) "Man Ray." Roland Penrose.

MAN RAY

Thesis by Rosaleen O'Donnell.