

# MAN RAY

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Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien

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Press Information

## **MAN RAY**

Man Ray (1890–1976) is renowned by the great majority today as a photographer. But in fact he was one of the most productive and versatile artists of the twentieth century. While he has long been celebrated as an icon in the USA, in Europe scanty attention has been paid to his complete oeuvre until now.

The exhibition in the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien aims to reverse this situation by spotlighting the universal artist Man Ray. Around 200 works from international lenders, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Tate London, the Collection Marion Meyer in Paris and the Fondazione Marconi in Milan, show Man Ray's pioneering intermedial and therefore extraordinarily contemporary approach. Painting, photography, drawing, assemblage, aerography, film, book and object art – there is practically no medium in which Man Ray didn't work: accordingly, this gives rise to a multifaceted, poetic and often humorous panorama, enabling us to get to know the "complete Man Ray" for the first time.

Man Ray was born in 1890 as Emmanuel Radnitzky in Philadelphia and died in 1976 in Paris at the age of 86; in his delight in experiment and sheer unending wealth of ideas he shaped how and what is seen as "art" today. Even during his schooldays Man Ray was fascinated by technical drawing. The exhibition starts out with Man Ray's early work, hardly known in Europe, which includes abstract-technical studies as well as the paintings he produced during his stay in the artists' colony in Ridgefield (1913–1915) and are strongly influenced by Fauvism and Cubism. The search for his own visual vocabulary continued on his return to New York, where he turned his attention to photography and the artistic potential of everyday objects. His collaboration and lifelong friendship with Marcel Duchamp produced congenial works that question concepts like "original" and "documentation" and blurred sexual boundaries, for instance by posing in front of the camera in female clothing.

Seite 2 von 14

In their work together Man Ray and Duchamp were already anticipating in the 1910s the dawn of concept and body art.

In 1921 Man Ray came to Paris – the Dadaists and Surrealists were delighted to welcome him amongst them. Without aligning himself to a group, however, he worked closely together with Tristan Tzara and André Breton. Gradually Man Ray advanced to become one of the most successful photographers in the city. Besides his artistic work he also accepted commercial commissions and photographed innovative fashion series for magazines such as “Harper’s Bazaar” and “Vogue”. His experiments in the dark room led to the “discovery” of rayography – Man Ray’s form of the photogram, a cameraless photographic technique – and to the development of solarisation, together with the artist Lee Miller, who was his partner from 1929 to 1932.

The main room of the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien is devoted to intermedia – a practice taken for granted today in contemporary art. Man Ray evidently hovered effortlessly between object, photography, painting and drawing – always endeavouring to lend the most fitting artistic expression to his current idea. He transformed objects like household utensils or musical instruments into mysterious objects, which he transposed into photography and paintings (and vice versa). Man Ray’s films are shown in a cinema designed especially for the exhibition; produced in the 1920s, they had a formative influence on the aesthetic of the avant-garde film.

In the late 1930s Man Ray returned to painting and addressed the threat to Europe from the Nazis in paintings that are today nothing less than prophetic; the show gathers together the most striking examples – including “La Fortune”, the billiard table that seemingly decides the future of Europe.

In conclusion, the exhibition deals in depth with the still enduring reception of Man Ray, thus spotlighting the modernity of his visual imagery and compositions. Like hardly any other artist, Man Ray has shaped our (everyday) culture in music videos, fashion, cosmetics, films, graphic novels, furnishings and advertising campaigns.

Hence the exhibition stresses Man Ray's role as pioneer of intermedia, an artist who never felt he belonged to a style or artists' group, who time after time re-invented himself in the embodiment of his ideas in extremely diverse media, and thus even today evades any kind of categorisation.

Curator: Lisa Ortner-Kreil

Biography

## **MAN RAY**

Emmanuel Radnitzky was born on 27 August 1890 in Philadelphia as the eldest of four children. In 1898 the family moves to Williamsburg, Brooklyn. After his graduation in 1908 he turns down a scholarship for studying architecture at the University of New York. Instead, he sets up a studio in his parents' home and does various jobs, working amongst other things in an advertising office and a publishing house for technical books. During this period he regularly visits Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery in Manhattan, where he comes into contact with the medium of photography for the first time. In 1912 the Radnitzkys officially change the family name to "Ray", and Emmanuel becomes "Man". Man Ray enrolls at the progressive and anarchic Ferrer Center in Harlem; among the courses he attends are those of George Bellows and Robert Henri.

In early 1913 Man Ray visits the "Armory Show" several times. In the spring of the same year he moves to an artists' colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey, focusing his work there on landscape and nude studies influenced by Cubism and Fauvism. In August 1913 Man Ray meets the Belgian poetess Donna Lecoeur (nom de plume Adon Lacroix) in Ridgefield; they marry on 27 August 1914. In autumn 1915 Marcel Duchamp visits the artists' colony: the life-long friendship of Man Ray and Duchamp is sparked off during a tennis match. In October 1915 the Daniel Gallery in New York organises Man Ray's first solo exhibition.

In winter 1915, Man Ray and Adon Lacroix move into an apartment-cum-studio on Lexington Avenue in New York. Under the influence of Duchamp's ready-mades, Man Ray begins to take interest in industrially made objects and to integrate them into his works. In 1917, Man Ray begins to experiment with airbrush technique and produces a great number of aerographs.

After Duchamp leaves New York in June 1921 for Paris, Man Ray endeavours to raise the financial means to move there as well. Supported by his patron Ferdinand Howald,

Seite 5 von 14

on 14 July 1921 he sets out towards Le Havre, reaching Paris on 22 July. Duchamp introduces Man Ray to the Dadaist circle, which includes Louis Aragon, André Breton, Paul Éluard and his wife Gala, Jacques Rigaut, Philippe Soupault, also Tristan Tzara. In December 1921 Man Ray opens his first solo exhibition “Éxposition Dada Man Ray” in Paris. He meets the model Alice Prin (professional name Kiki de Montparnasse); they stay together as a couple until 1928. Kiki becomes his main model.

In 1922 Man Ray is experimenting with the historical technique of the photogram and calls his “discovery” rayography. In the following years Man Ray directs his artistic focus onto photography and becomes one of the most successful portrait and fashion photographers. The photographer Berenice Abbot is his assistant from 1923 to 1926. Man Ray produces four short films between 1923 and 1929. Lee Miller and Man Ray are involved in a liaison from 1929 to 1932 and together experiment with photography; in August 1929 this results in their discovery of solarisation. The ground-breaking “Éxposition Internationale du Surréalisme” is held in Paris in 1938, Man Ray is involved, and also responsible for the lighting design. Because of the Nazi invasion in France Man Ray leaves Paris in June 1940 and returns to New York.

In September 1940 Man Ray moves to California where he meets Juliet Browner. Both move into an apartment-cum-studio on Vine Street, Los Angeles. Man Ray turns down further commissions for fashion photography and creates new versions of the works left in France that he thought were lost. In 1945 the exhibition “Objects of My Affection” opens in the Julien Levy Gallery in New York. Man Ray and Juliet Browner, Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning get married on 24 October 1946 in a double wedding in Los Angeles. In 1948 Man Ray presents his cycle of paintings “Shakespearean Equations” in the exhibition “To Be Continued Unnoticed” in the Copely Galleries in Beverly Hills.

In March 1951 Man Ray and Juliet Man Ray leave the USA heading for Paris. They move into an apartment-cum-studio on rue Férou. Man Ray once more devotes more attention to painting. In 1957 during the exhibition “Éxposition Dada 1916–1922” in the Galerie de l’Institut in Paris Man Ray’s “Objet à détruire” is destroyed by members of an anarchic student group. In 1961 Man Ray is awarded the gold medal at the Biennale

della Fotografia in Venice. The first comprehensive retrospective opens in 1966 in Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In the same year Man Ray receives the “Kulturpreis” of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie, and in 1976 the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French Government.

Man Ray dies at the age of 86 on 18 November 1976 in his studio on rue Férou. He is buried in the Cimetière du Montparnasse.

## THE BOOK ON THE EXHIBITION

### Man Ray

Edited by Ingrid Brugger and Lisa Ortner-Kreil, with contributions by Ingrid Brugger, Kim Knowles, Hans Kupelwieser, Bruce Nauman, Lisa Ortner-Kreil, Veronika Rudorfer, Katharina Steidl and James Welling.

Design: Christian Schienerl, SCHIENERL D/AD

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32 euros, on sale in the shop in the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien and in well-assorted bookshops.



Today Man Ray (1890–1976) is renowned most of all for his photographs: works like “Le Violon d’Ingres” and “Tears” have long been icons of our world of images; his portraits of fellow artists including Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí and his fashion photographs for magazines like “Vogue” and “Harper’s Bazaar” made him one of the most successful photographers in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and were the basis of his world fame. His photographic experiments in the dark room – for instance cameraless rayography or solarisation – are still fascinating today. The exhibition catalogue widens the panorama of Man Ray’s work, which embraces not only photography but also painting, object art, film and book design and testifies to an unparalleled penchant for experimentation. By always placing the artistic idea at the centre, Man Ray anticipated the dawn of conceptual art and practices of contemporary art, making his work appear more up to date than ever today.



The publication contains a detailed essay by exhibition curator Lisa Ortner-Kreil, which analyses Man Ray's intermedial approach and explores his unending influence on our (visual) culture. Veronika Rudorfer, assistant curator of the exhibition, examines Man Ray's early work, which hovers effortlessly between the media of painting, photography and object. Kim Knowles is lecturer in Film Studies at Aberystwyth University; her essay spotlights Man Ray's films, which are foundational for the development of an aesthetic for the avant-garde film. Katharina Steidl, Postdoc at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, localises Man Ray's rayographs in the historical development of the photogram, thus showing his innovative use of the photographic medium. In three artist statements Hans Kupelwieser, Bruce Nauman and James Welling describe Man Ray's influence on their own artistic works. A richly illustrated biography compiled from quotes from Man Ray's autobiography "Self Portrait" published in 1963 lets the artist himself take the stage.

Quotes

## **MAN RAY**

“The tricks of today are the truths of tomorrow.”

“Nature does not create works of art. It is we, and the faculty of interpretation peculiar to the human mind, that see art.”

“All critics should be assassinated.”

“I paint what cannot be photographed, that which comes from the imagination or from dreams, or from an unconscious drive... I photograph the things that I do not wish to paint, the things which already have an existence.”

“To me, a painter, if not the most useful, is the least harmful member of our society.”

“A creator needs only one enthusiast to justify him.”

“It has never been my object to record my dreams, just the determination to realize them.”

“Speaking of nudes, I have always had a great fondness for this subject, both in my paintings and in my photos, and I must admit, not for purely artistic reasons.”

“If I'd had the nerve, I'd have become a thief or a gangster, but since I didn't, I became a photographer.”

“People ask: ‘What camera do you use?’ – I say: ‘You don’t ask a writer what typewriter he uses.’”

“What type of camera do you prefer to work with? – None! I have to modify them all. My cameras are all of my own design. I take lenses apart and put them together again and put them on cameras that were not meant for them.”

“Everything is related to photography, because it all has to be photographed in the end.”

“To create is divine, to reproduce is human.”

“Some of the most complete and satisfying works of art have been produced when their authors had no idea of creating a work of art, but were concerned with the expression of an idea.”

“Of course, there will always be those who look only at technique, who ask ‘how’, while others of a more curious nature will ask ‘why’. Personally, I have always preferred inspiration to information.”

“My works were designed to amuse, annoy, bewilder, mystify and inspire reflection.”

“I have never painted a recent picture.”

“Look, they say I’m ahead of the times. I said no, I’m never ahead of my time. It’s the others who are behind the times.”

## **PREVIEW**

### **From the Exotic to the New – The Fascination of Japan**

#### **The aesthetics of the Far East and the dawn of modernism in Europe**

**10 October 2018 – 20 January 2019**

The 2018 autumn exhibition in the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien is devoted to “Japomanie” – the West’s passion for the aesthetics and world of images of the Far East. The exhibition traces its development, starting with the fascination for the exotic and the new and the first stirrings in the 1860s to long after the turn of the century, to its amalgamation into the form vocabulary of Western painting and the influence of its aesthetics on the development of modernism around 1900.

Ever since the 1860s, the elegant and exotic aesthetics of the everyday utensils, the exquisite textiles and most of all the fantastical and richly luminous narrative ukiyo-e – the colour woodcuts – had been invading the European market and fulfilling the public’s yearning for unknown culture and a new vision of aesthetics.

Artists were in the forefront, collecting and integrating the extraordinary form vocabulary of the ukiyo-e and their astonishing themes and motifs into their visual imagery. Monet, Manet, Van Gogh and Degas were the first, followed by the younger artists – Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Vuillard and Vallotton, also Marc and Kandinsky, to name only the most important.

Launching out from Paris, “Japomanie” conquered the whole of Europe – also in Austria, after the impact of the Vienna World Fair in 1873, it triggered a genuine hype surrounding the aesthetics of the Far East, which inspired such artists as Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele.

Subsequently the ideas from the Far East evolved into independent interpretations and realisations in a new language of forms that heralded the approaching modernism of the twentieth century – in which the trends towards abstraction, towards breaking loose from the conventional pictorial space, took their own autonomous development.

The exhibition includes not only paintings and printed graphics, but also objects and furniture, juxtaposing Japanese woodcuts, screens and artefacts to European works influenced by the aesthetics of the Far East, including by Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Gustav Klimt, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, the Nabis and the Blauer Reiter group. Around a hundred exhibits from international public and private collections present a wide-ranging overview of the phenomenon of “Japonisme” that spread throughout Europe from the late nineteenth century to the dawn of the avant-garde movements.

Curator: Evelyn Benesch

## **PREVIEW: TRESOR AT THE BANK AUSTRIA KUNSTFORUM WIEN**

**Michaela Frühwirth: earthward**

**26 April – 24 June 2018**

Michaela Frühwirth's large-format drawings start out from specific places. The drawing process is preceded by intensive research on the context and history of each place and by photographic documentation on site. The resulting drawings are far more than a mere representation of the place under investigation: the frequently long drawn-out process in which her own "places" made of graphite and on paper take shape reflects on one hand the genesis of the material of graphite – a natural phenotype of carbon – and simultaneously enables an in-depth grasp of the circumstances and conditions of the place.

In the exhibition "earthward" in the tresor im Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien Michaela Frühwirth turns her attention to the last active graphite mine in Austria, in Kaisersberg (Styria), and to the entrance to the cave of Chauvet in the South of France, which harbours (pictorial) evidence of human life from the Upper Palaeolithic era. The Kaisersberg graphite mine alludes to the transformative processes of geology and the cultural technique of mining, the cave of Chauvet the act of image making. Graphite has been used for centuries as technical material and dye, and the reference to its source lets it act simultaneously as (artistic) material and medium. This complex reference system is augmented through so-called "footnotes", which accompany the drawings in the form of photographs and videos.

Michaela Frühwirth, born in 1972 in Vienna, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna with Arnulf Rainer and the The Cooper Union School of Architecture in New York. From 2006 to 2007 a resident at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Lecturer in visual arts at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam since 2008. Lives and works in Amsterdam.

Curator: Veronika Rudorfer

Seite 14 von 14