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# Bruce Museum

Greenwich, CT

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## Man Ray's Paris Portraits -- 1921-1939

March 13, 1999 through June 20, 1999

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**B**ruce Museum of Arts and Science presents the photography exhibition *Man Ray's Paris Portraits 1921-1939*. On view are over fifty black-and-white photographic portraits by the multi-faceted artist **Man Ray** of leading social and artistic personalities of Paris in the 1920s and '30s. The exhibition takes place in the Museum's Bantle Lecture Gallery.



Man Ray (American, 1890-1976) arrived in Paris in 1921, drawn to a city pulsating with an intellectual and creative energy that attracted writers, musicians, artists, exiles, and free-thinkers throughout Europe and the United States. As one means of supporting himself abroad Man Ray took photographic portraits, and he quickly emerged as the premier photographer of Paris at the time. He photographed virtually all the artistic literati and personalities of Paris in the '20s. In doing so, he created an extraordinary portrait of an age: a time of high creativity, intellectual and sexual freedom and outrageous behavior.

Man Ray turned to the camera as the fastest way to do a portrait. "If it is a portrait that interests me, a face, or a nude, I will use my camera," he remarked. "It is quicker than making a drawing or a painting . . . to express what I feel, I use the medium best suited to express that idea, which is also always the most economical one." His reputation as a master of the photographic portrait was unsurpassed, not only for his technical prowess but also for his innovative poses and imaginative approach. From June 1922 until well into the following decade the magazine *Vanity Fair*



published many of Man Ray's portraits.

Timothy Baum, the collector and scholar on Dada and Surrealist art, has said that Man Ray "did not take photographs, but created them. Each portrait was a separate little adventure; the resultant print of a work of art. No two sittings were alike for him, and every separate sitting was a form of intimate occasion . . . Man Ray, using [his subjects'] physical features as a point of departure, often exited just short of their hearts and souls." It was Man Ray's insight and innovation that attracted subjects from all strata of Paris society and continued his success even following the sobering crash of world economic markets at the end of the 1920s.



The exhibition *Man Ray's Paris Portraits 1921-1939* features photographs of many of the most renowned figures of the day including the co-founder of Cubism George Braque, Kiki of Montparnasse, Eric Satie, Gertrude Stein, and a haunting Marcel Proust on his deathbed. Man Ray captured Marcel Duchamp and Comte Raoul de Roussy de Sales playing chess. James Joyce was photographed at the time of the publication of *Ulysses*. Also included is a portrait of the exquisite femate impersonator Barbette, a high wire and trapeze "artiste supreme" whose real name was Vander Clyde.

Man Ray was one of the most irreverent artists of the twentieth-century. The artist - painter, photographer, filmmaker, printmaker, object-maker, poet, essayist and philosopher - was born Emmanuel Radnitsky in Philadelphia in 1890. Considered a founder of the Dada movement in New York and Paris, Man Ray is also celebrated for his Surrealist work. Man Ray cared nothing for aesthetics and technical dexterity in art and possessed what he called "a certain amount of contempt" for the materials he used. It was perhaps this disdain that aligned him with the Dada artists and his close friend Marcel Duchamp. He loved to "break the rules" and was continuously experimenting with photographic techniques. The rayograph, a camera-less photographic technique, was invented by Man Ray and bears his name.

Another of these techniques was solarization, several superb examples of which are included in the exhibition. Solarization resulted from the partial development of a photograph when a light is quickly turned on and off during development and resulted in a flattening of the tonal range and beautiful, etched black outlines. There are many conflicting versions of the discovery of solarization, including that of Lee Miller, the photographer who was then Man Ray's assistant and one of his favorite models. Solarization, she wrote, resulted when something ran across her foot in the darkness during the development of a photograph, causing her to turn on and off a light. One stunning example of solarization in the exhibition is the portrait of Andre Breton, the founder and 'pope' of Surrealism.

This exhibition is both about the extraordinary people Man Ray photographed and the spirit of an age, Paris in the '20s.

On view concurrently with *Man Ray's Paris Portraits 1921-1939* is another photography exhibition, **Linda McCartney's Sixties: Portrait of an Era**, from March 13 through June 13, 1999 in the Bruce Museum's Arcade Gallery.

From top to bottom: *A Group of Surrealists at Tzara's*, 1930, gelatin-silver photograph, courtesy Timothy Baum, New York; *Gertrude Stein*, 1925, gelatin-silver photograph, courtesy Timothy Baum, New York; *Sinclair Lewis*, 1925, gelatin-silver photograph, courtesy Timothy Baum, New York

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