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## The Museum of Modern Art

### MAN RAY'S RADICAL EXPERIMENTATION IN PHOTOGRAPHY IS EXPLORED

*Man Ray, Photographer*  
March 16-August 22, 2000  
Ground Floor

Man Ray was a tireless innovator who participated in the Dadaist and Surrealist art movements. *Man Ray, Photographer* samples the full range of the artist's highly original and influential photographic experiments. On view from March 16 to August 22, 2000, the exhibition presents a selection of approximately 35 photographs including photograms, nudes, still lifes, and portraits of members of the artistic and intellectual avant-garde. *Man Ray, Photographer*, organized by Virginia Heckert, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow, Department of Photography, is part of Making Choices, the second cycle of MoMA2000, which focuses on the years 1920 to 1960.

In 1915, Man Ray (born Emmanuel Rudnitzky, American, 1890-1976) took up photography to document his artistic creations in a wide range of mediums. Shortly after he left New York for Paris in 1921, his exploration of the medium took center stage in his art and came to play a prominent role in his participation in the Surrealist movement.

Man Ray's photographic achievement was made evident in *Photographs by Man Ray: Paris, 1920-1934*, a book privately published in 1934 by critic and collector James Thrall Soby, later a leading MoMA curator, Trustee, administrator, and a founding member of its Committee on Photography in 1940. Donated to MoMA by Soby in 1941, the more than 100 photographs reproduced in the book were the first major gift to the newly established Department of Photography. *Man Ray, Photographer* is largely drawn from this remarkable collection.

Surveying the variety of Man Ray's photographic work, the exhibition presents a significant selection from his landmark portrait gallery, including pictures of Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, Sinclair Lewis, and Tristan Tzara. Also prominently featured is his mastery of two techniques, both of them known since the early days of photography but so imaginatively exploited by Man Ray that they came to be identified with his work. In the Sabattier effect (popularly known as solarization), the exposure of the negative to light during development causes a partial reversal of tonal values. In Man Ray's pictures, notably in female nudes such as *Sleeping Woman* (1929), the result is an elegant, haunting sensuality.

The second technique is the photogram--Man Ray justifiably called his photograms "Rayographs"--in which objects are placed on photo-sensitized paper, which is then exposed to light. The idea of making photographs without a camera, the playful incongruities of the everyday objects that populate the Rayographs, and the otherworldliness of their shadowy traces appealed to the absurdist sensibilities of the Dadaists and came to exemplify the Surrealist quest for spontaneity and fantasy. An untitled

Rayograph of 1922 incorporating the silhouette of a kissing couple is a telling example of Man Ray's inventive use of the photogram technique. Exposing the photographic paper at least three separate times, the artist created an ethereal pictorial space in which it is impossible to say which of the superimposed elements lies in front of the others.

#### **SPONSORSHIP**

*Making Choices* is part of MoMA2000, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, Mrs. Melville Wakeman Hall, and The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying MoMA2000 are made possible by Paribas. The publication *Making Choices: 1929, 1939, 1948, 1955* is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of *Making Choices* is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by SohoNet.

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