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Man Ray's exhibition 'Views of the Spirit' to open its door on May 25 in Colaba

By Benita Fernando | Mumbai | Posted 14-May-2017

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The first exhibition of Man Ray in India shows the American legend in all his iconoclastic beauty and innovative genius



Glass Tears 1932. © Man Ray Trust – ADAGP/courtesy MONDO GALERIA | TARQ

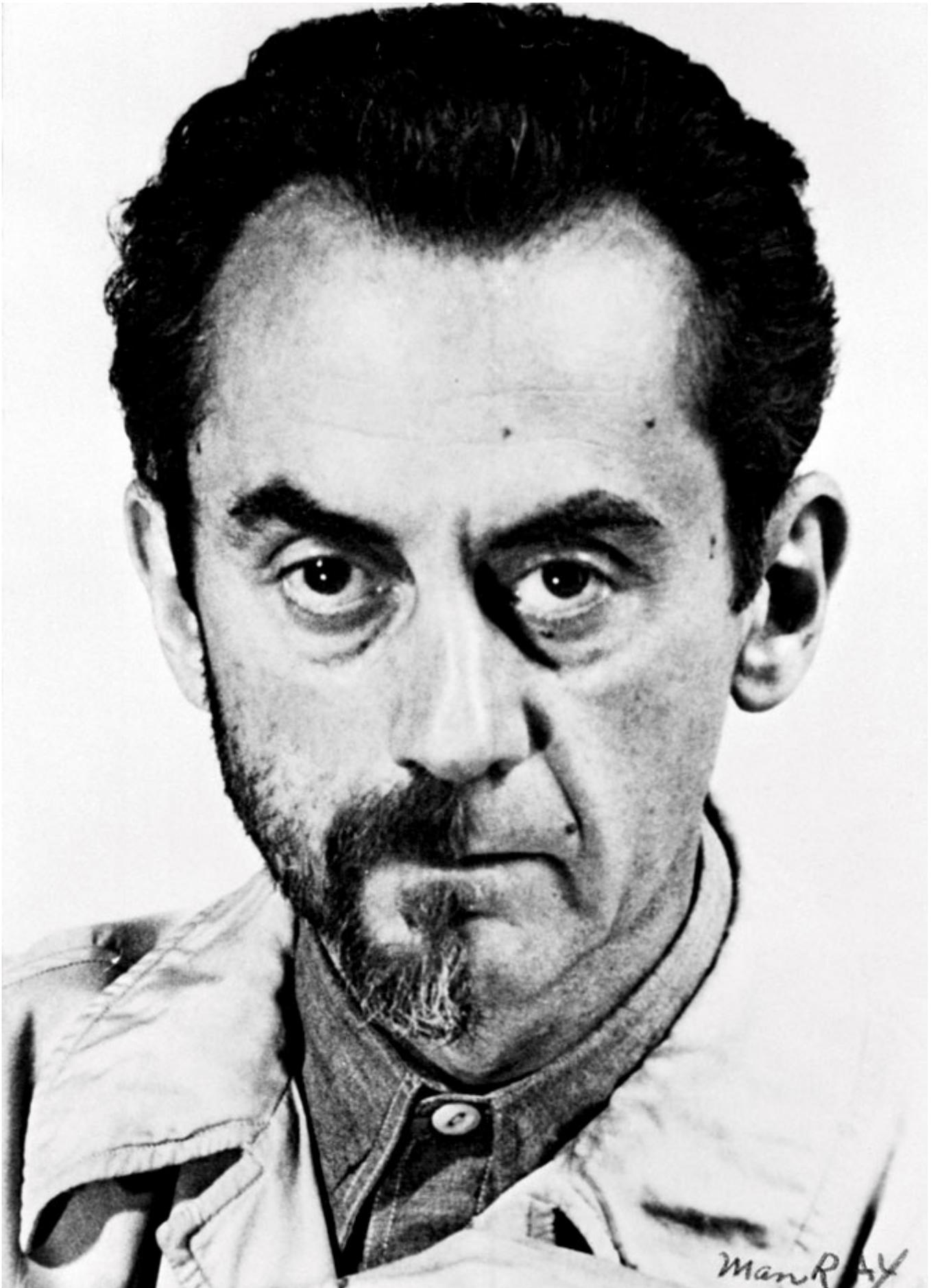
Travesty, masquerade and innovation - these are the words that come to mind when you think of Emmanuel Radnitsky, who condensed his name to the two syllables that redefined 20th century photography. Man Ray, as he called himself, was born to Russian Jewish immigrants in South Philadelphia, USA, in 1890, and became a leading name of the Dada and Surrealist movements.

His self-portrait, a part-bearded and part-shaven face shot in 1943, long after he moved from New York to Paris, bears testament to this. "His self-portrait, in which he is messing with his own face, is an expression of the duality of his character - an artist influencing contemporary culture and fearlessly anti-establishmentarian," says Matthieu Foss, who, along with gallerists Hena Kapadia and Diego Alonso, has co-curated an exhibition of Ray's works - a first in India.

The exhibition, Views of the Spirit, opens on May 25 at Tarq, Colaba, with prints from the Man Ray Trust ADAGP. The exhibition was previously shown by Alonso at his gallery, Mondo Galeria in Madrid, in 2014. "I have been captivated by Ray since I was 14. It was at my parents' home that I saw a catalogue of works by Salvadore Dali, which led me to Man Ray. It is from him that I discovered photography as an art form," says Alonso.

In Ray, he found more than just a path-breaking photographer. Here was an artist experimenting with the limits of the lens, often manipulating images to result in unorthodox compositions. As Alonso puts it, "He was not just copying reality or nature. Besides photography, he was also working with paintings and serigraphs. He was more than a photographer. He was a multimedia artist creating a new language."

Alonso's interest in Ray led him to the photographer's estate, which, around 2010, had digitised Ray's works, and started making modern prints. These prints formed the basis of the exhibition at Mondo Galeria. The exhibition at Tarq is adapted from the original and continues to showcase the full range of Ray's genius - his solarised images, photograms (called Rayographs), portraits and still lives. "Ray's immense contribution was that he was also a documentarian and a tireless observer of his peers in the Dada and Surrealist groups, such as Marcel Duchamp or Jean Cocteau, hence capturing the spirit of these crucial 20th century art movements," says Foss.



Self-Portrait with Half Beard 1943. © Man Ray Trust – ADAGP/ courtesy MONDO GALERIA | TARQ



Matthieu Foss, Co-Curator. Pic/ Sneha Trivedi

The title of the exhibition is indicative of the manner in which Ray approached the medium, treating photography less as a documentarian effort and more as a new conception of art. "He captured the spirit of his friends. He saw the soul of Picasso. If you have a Ray work on your table, you feel the subjects are alive," he says.

Kapadia, gallerist at Tarq, says that visitors should be thrilled to see Ray's works in Mumbai at comparatively affordable price points. The portraits of Dali and Gala, Coco Chanel and Duchamp could be of interest.

There are also works such as Glass Tears, made after his fallout with collaborator, muse and lover, Lee Miller. Miller and Ray's romance and eventual bitterness, before they reunited as friends, is a story that has been spoken of extensively, both in the manner of love affairs and photography history. In Ray's darkroom, Miller discovered solarisation, in which tones are reversed, making light areas appear dark and vice versa; Ray perfected the use of this technique, often making ethereal portraits with it. "Ray was all about possibilities. Miller and he created an art form from an error," says Alonso.

More importantly, the show is sure to stress the democratic nature of photography, going back to a time when open editions were de rigueur. "Ray and even Henri-Cartier Bresson, both of whom practised very different styles of photography, didn't care about commercialising their work," says Foss, adding, "It is wonderful to see that Ray's work has achieved such stature. We hope that this is the first step to having a museum show of Ray's works or the Surrealists in India."

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