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PHOTO ROLL

A peek inside Man Ray's Surrealist world that pushed the boundaries of photography

The exhibition 'Views Of The Spirit' showcases a visual timeline of the legendary photographer's exciting career.



Larmes (Glass tears), 1932 | Glass Tears, 1932. Gelatin Silver print (Estate print) 24 X 30 cm
© Man Ray Trust – ADAGP. Courtesy: Mondo Galeria | TARQ

Man Ray produced his celebrated photograph *Violon d'Ingres* in 1924. The image shows the nude back of Kiki de Montparnasse, a French model, actress and nightclub singer who was hot on Paris' cultural map in the 1920s. On her back are painted sound holes of a violin, lending the image a sexual nuance that examines the rapacious male gaze of wanting to play the woman like an instrument.

On Ray's instruction, the actress posed like the woman in Jean Auguste Baptiste Ingres's painting *The Valpinçon Bather*. Ray was an admirer of Ingres, and perhaps intended to make several references with the image. For one, he was hinting at the informality of the French expression *violon d'Ingres*, meaning a hidden quality or talent in a person – Ingres, besides being a painter, was an accomplished violinist.

When I first came across Ray's *Violon d'Ingres* in 2004, it was obvious to me that Ray's interest lay not just in photography, but conceptual art that used photography as an embellishment to realise its fluid form. Apart from being a forerunner in the Dada and Surrealist movements, Ray was also transforming the way people interacted with photographs.

The legendary photographer's works are now being exhibited for the first time in India at TARQ, Mumbai, in an exhibition titled *Views of the Spirit*.



Les Champs délicieux, 1922. Gelatin Silver print (Estate print) 30 X 24 cm © Man Ray Trust – ADAGP. Courtesy: Mondo Galeria | TARQ

The exhibition, presented in collaboration with Mondo Galeria (Madrid) and Matthieu Foss, showcases a visual timeline of Ray's exciting career, including the *Violon d'Ingres*. "We have the fantastic opportunity to present this show in a gallery context," said Foss, who is also the co-founder and director of the FOCUS Photography Festival in Mumbai. "Most exhibitions of iconic 20th century artists presented in India require government and/or corporate support to cover the costs of shipping, insurance and to provide the ideal climate control conditions. For this reason, there perhaps hasn't been an opportunity for Man Ray's work to be displayed in India, until now."

Views of the Spirit carries roughly the same works that were shown in an exhibition in Madrid in 2014, and later in Peru and Ibiza. "That's the advantage of working with the Estate which handles Man Ray's entire photographic archive," said Diego Alonso, director of Mondo Galeria. "The Estate prints allow us to select from the artist's entire body of work, allowing us to do a curatorial selection moving throughout all his periods and creating relations in between them that would've been impossible if we did not have this vast availability."

Among the works on display in Mumbai will be Ray's well-known portraits of surrealists. Ray was close to the painter Marcel Duchamp, who greatly influenced the photographer and collaborated with him. Through Duchamp, Ray met surrealists, thinkers and cultural shapers in Paris, including Pablo Picasso, Coco Chanel, Ernest Hemingway and Salvador Dali. It was also in Paris that Ray met Kiki, and where his experiments using the outline of her body to represent other abstractions led him to invent rayographs.



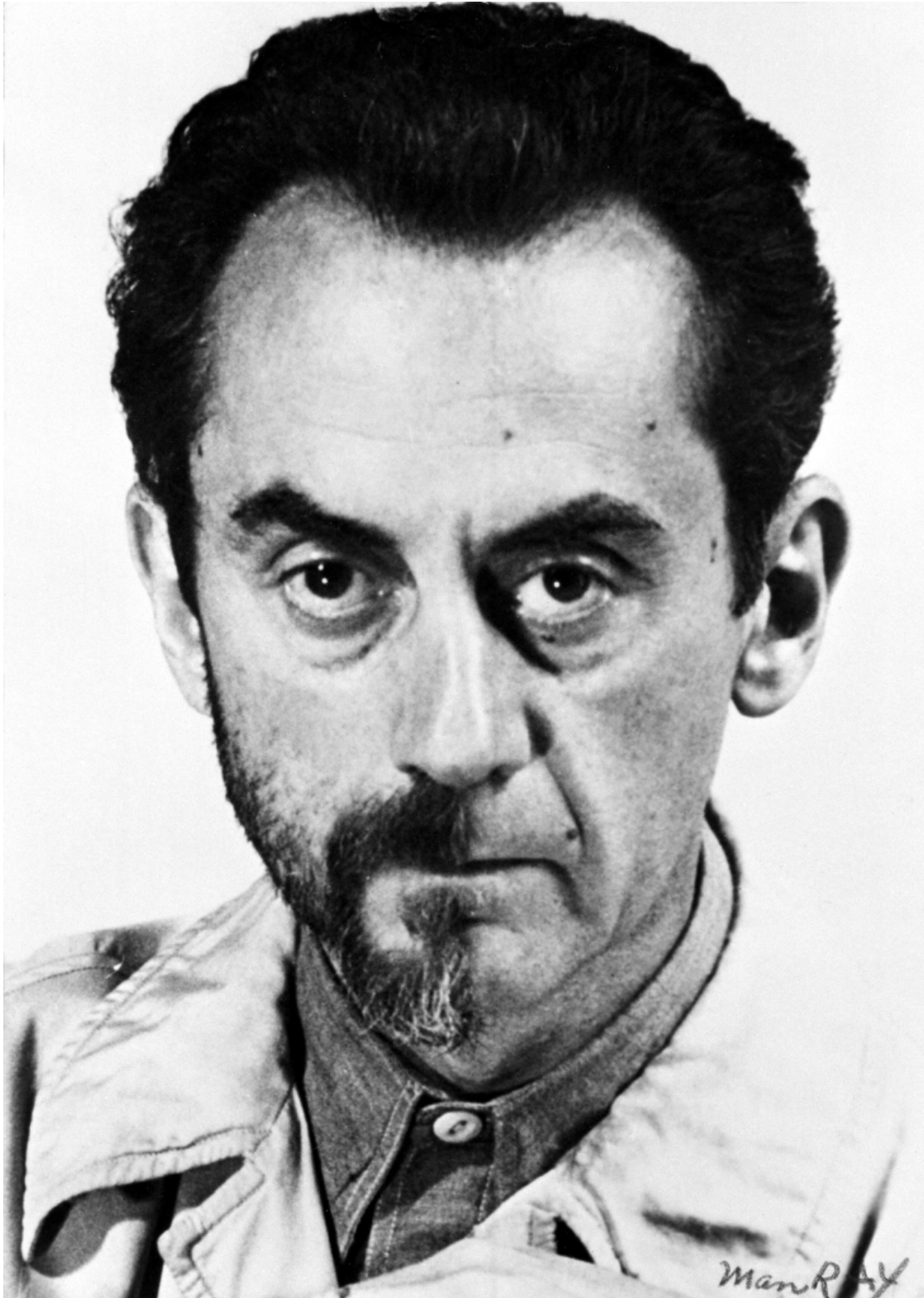
The Gift, 1921. Gelatin Silver print (Estate print) 30 X 24 cm © Man Ray Trust – ADAGP.
Courtesy: Mondo Galeria | TARQ

On exhibit at TARQ, the rayographs were made by placing three-dimensional objects on top of photographic paper and then directly exposing them to light – all this without the use of a camera. Perhaps Ray was keen to do away with the idea that the camera was a tool of nostalgia. Born to Russian Jewish immigrants in Philadelphia, United States, he had once famously proclaimed, “I

want to forget the past,” while asserting that his artistic persona would remain divorced from his lineage. He never attended his parents’ funeral.

While escaping his Jewish identity, Ray’s affiliation to Dadaism and Surrealism left him familiar with African art and India. Though he never visited India, in his early thirties, he photographed Yeshwant Rao Holkar II, the king of Indore, and his wife Sanyogita Devi in Cannes. “One important addition to the Mumbai exhibition is a commissioned portrait of Holkar II, Maharaja of Indore, demonstrating how aware he was of the artistic avant-garde of the 1930s,” said Alonso. “We are happy to open up this window into history with this image.”

The photographs in *Views of the Spirit* are gelatin silver prints, made by the Estate of Man Ray, which has decided to delve into the art market by offering affordable prints. This will be a fantastic opportunity for buyers in India to acquire works of the prolific artist. Certainly, one sought-after print will be *Glass Tears*, which Ray made after his fallout with his lover Lee Miller. In the image, round glass beads stick to the model’s face like tears, making her look distressed, and simultaneously glorifying the vanity of the mascara-lined eyelashes. Hinting at false tears over real, this was among Ray’s most famous works. This and some lesser-known works will be interspaced together in an important show in Mumbai’s famous Art Deco building Dhanraj Mahal, which seems like the ideal heritage home to showcase Ray’s work.



Self-

Portrait with Half Beard, 1943. Gelatin Silver print (Estate print) 30 X 24 cm © Man Ray Trust – ADAGP. Courtesy: Mondo Galeria | TARQ

Views of the Spirit opens on May 26 and runs through July 1, 2017 at TARQ Mumbai.