



(Clockwise from above) *The Gift*; *Les Arums*; *Les Champs délicieux*; Man Ray in *Self-Portrait with Half Beard*; *Glass Tears* Man Ray Trust – ADAGP / courtesy MONDO GALERIA | TARQ

## The Ray Effect

The works of Man Ray, one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, are being exhibited in India for the first time

POOJA PILLAI

IN THE history of modern art, few have cut such an intriguing figure as Man Ray. The American artist, who happily moved between painting, photography, sculpture, film and prints, is best remembered today as one of the pioneers of the avant-garde in photography. For the first time, Ray's works will be on display in India, in the exhibition "Views of the Spirit", at Tarq, an art gallery in Mumbai. The exhibition is a collaboration between Tarq, Madrid-based gallery Mondo Galeria — which had first showcased it in August 2014 — and Mumbai-based curator Matthieu Foss. "We're showing 45 works by Ray, and all of them are well-known," says Foss, adding, "These photographs are part of our collective memory. Even now, after all this time, I find them quite revolutionary. Ray never commercialised his work by making limited editions. He kept them open, and what we have got here are silver gelatin prints made under the supervision of the Man Ray Trust."

Ray, who was born in the US in 1890 as Emmanuel Radnitzky, was trained as a painter and worked as a commercial artist for a while. However, his growing interest in the avant-garde art of the period and a friendship with the revolutionary modernist Marcel Duchamp, saw him leave behind conventional



painting and get involved with movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism. During this period, like Duchamp, Ray too made "readymades", such as his famous *The Gift*, made in 1921, in which he stuck metal tacks onto the bottom of a flatiron. It was when he moved to Paris in 1921 that Ray also began to establish a reputation as a photographer.

Among Ray's key contributions to photography, made along with his assistant and lover Lee Miller, was his perfection of the solarisation technique, where a photographic print or negative is re-exposed during development. The result was a surreal image in eerie silver tones, best seen in the reclining nude photograph from 1932

called *Primat de la Matiere sur la pensee*. Another significant contribution he made was in shaping "camera-less" photography, in which images called "photograms" are made by placing the objects directly on light-sensitive material and exposing them to light. Ray created striking effects in his "rayographs" by varying exposure times within a



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single image and moving objects during exposure. The final "rayographs" would have familiar objects like a coil of wire or beads become completely unfamiliar, abstract shapes. As part of the exhibition programme, Tarq will be hosting workshops on "rayography", besides screening some of Ray's experimental films.

During his years in Paris, Ray

also became a popular fashion photographer, his work featuring in publications such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, and worthies of the art world, such as Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Andre Breton, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Jean Cocteau, posing before his camera. While the artist never travelled to India, Foss says that he did photograph Indian personalities such as Yeshwant Rao Holkar II and Sanyogita Devi of Indore. A well-known portrait of the two jet-setting royals, taken during one of their sojourns in Europe, is playful in tone and composition. It is a sharp departure from the usual stiff portraits and is perfectly in keeping with Ray's style. This same playfulness can be seen in much of Ray's works, such as the iconic *Les Larmes* (*Glass Tears*), featuring round, glass beads, in place of tears on the model's face, or *Le Violon d'Ingres*, in which he transformed the model's body into a musical instrument by painting the sound holes of a violin on her back. "Ray created a completely different language of photography," says Diego Alonso, director of Mondo Galeria, "He moved into photography, mastered all its techniques and then completely dismantled it to create a whole new form. I wouldn't say that he 'shot' photographs. He created them."

The exhibition is on till July 1