

The world of Man Ray

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Photographer, painter, sculpture-artist and film-maker—Man Ray was all in one. In the six decades of his working life, the American, who spent much of his time in France, explored a variety of media, and gained the reputation of being one of the central figures of the narratives of Dadaism and surrealism, the 20th century European avant-garde movements in art and literature.

“Man Ray’s body of work has played a vital role in shaping the language of film, fashion and advertising as we know it today. His influence can be seen even in the way images are used now (*Glass Tears* and *Le Violon d’Ingres*). And yet, not many people know of his work,” says Hena Kapadia, founder and director of Mumbai’s contemporary art gallery Tarq. The gallery, in collaboration with Madrid’s Mondo Galeria and photography specialist Matthieu Foss, is exhibiting Ray’s prolific body of work—a first for India.

Views Of The Spirit: Photographs By Man Ray, which opens today to the public, includes 45 photographs from the early 1920s to the mid-1940s—Ray’s most defining years. “It also features a series of portraits of 20th century luminaries such as Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Coco Chanel that tell the story of Man Ray’s prominent posi-



tion in the avant-garde milieu of 20th century Europe,” says Kapadia, adding that all the photographs are gelatin silver prints made by the estate of Man Ray. “Since they are contemporary reprints (with proof of legitimacy since they come from the Man Ray Estate itself), they are very reasonably priced,” she says, declining to share the price range.

There’s a reason the show focuses only on the photographs. “Man Ray (who was born Emmanuel Radnitzky to Russian Jewish immigrants), was one of the first artists to truly see and help establish photography as an art form. Earlier on, photographers were characterized as recorders of history, criticized by painters and most art critics for merely replicating their surroundings,” explains Frenchman Matthieu Foss, co-founder of the

annual FOCUS Photography Festival in Mumbai and owner of the city’s only dedicated photography and photo art gallery, the Matthieu Foss Gallery. Foss has been a Ray fan since childhood. “I remember being struck at a young age by the beauty and strangeness of *Erotique Voilée*. I was captivated by the contrast between the female body and the machine, along with the androgynous appearance of the subject, Méret Oppenheim,” he says.

What sets Ray apart, believes Foss, is his immense contribution to “photography by inventing new techniques, pushing back the boundaries of composition, scenography and representation”. The techniques Foss is referring to are Rayography and solarization.

Rayography was something of a chance discovery; he created photographs without a camera, placing objects on a photo-sensitive surface and exposing them to light. Solarization, on the other hand, is a process that creates reversed patches of light and dark through overexposure to light.

That’s the thing about Man Ray; he took the genre from a documentary tool to an art form that brought alive the space between the real and fantastical, says Kapadia.

Views Of The Spirit: Photographs By Man Ray is on till 1 July, 11am-6.30pm (closed on Sundays and Mondays), at Tarq, Dhawraj Mahal, CSM Marg, Colaba (66150424).

(clockwise from top, left) *Erotique Voilée*; Ray’s self-portrait; and *Glass Tears*.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY MONDO GALERIA/TARQ