

MAN RAY PHOTOGRAPH MAN RAY PHOTORAPH

The early work that most harbors the essential characteristics of Man Ray's mature artistic creations is...

—Frances Naumann, "Man Ray and America," unpublished doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, cited in Sotheby's auction catalog, 1995.

Man Ray said that 'There is no difference for me between literature and painting. A painting must be an idea.' In 1944 he wrote: 'In whatever form it is finally presented: by a drawing, by a painting, by a photograph, or by the object itself in its original material and in its original dimensions, it is *designed to amuse, bewilder, annoy or inspire reflection.*'

—Conclusion to introductory essay, Sotheby's auction catalog, 1995. Omission noted. Italics by J.T.P., for emphasis.

"Photograph Man Ray" —A rubber stamp mark identifies the man who pushed the button that made the shutter snap to produce the photograph that changed the world. Photograph Man Ray indeed! —What are we to make of this curious construction?

"Photograph Man Ray" —Chances are, you are holding the photograph when you read the words, for that is where they appear. "Man Ray Photograph" is more like it, however. Because that, my friends, is what it is, a photograph by Man Ray. But not really: It is the back of a photograph. So then, you can't really flip it —neither the phrase, nor the photograph...not if you are Man Ray trying to be honest.

"Photograph Man Ray" —Other combinations are not bad, mind you. "Man Photograph Ray" sounds like a news story. "Photograph Ray Man," like a note to oneself. "Ray Photograph Man," a regional locution.

"Photograph Man Ray" —If you have the luxury of a comma to play with, things do get more promising. "Man, Photograph Ray." Well? —Yeah, that's Mellow guy, cutting to the chase. "Man Photograph, Ray": It's nice that he's telling Ray what it is. Ray's like that. Sometimes, you have to tell him what it is. "Photograph, Man Ray" is really getting there. It has a lot of possibilities. Including, but not exclusive to, the aforementioned, photograph "by" Man Ray.

"Photograph Man Ray"—Best thing about a comma, it enacts an elision, stands in for an omission. There's a lot of things can hide in a comma. It would not be at all unusual, for example, to hide a verb in there. Were we reading "Man Ray Photograph," it might mean, could mean, "Man Ray 'is' Photograph." And that is ridiculous. Except, of course, for the fact that, to some people, he's not even that. To others, much much more. And it's a nice compromise formulation. But

there are many verbs, and it could be any one of them. It could be "eat." We just don't know. But none of this is a problem, if only because rubber stamp manufacturers in Paris in the nineteen-twenties didn't do commas. (Or, did they?)

"Photograph Man Ray" —Compare his studio *mark official*: "*Man Ray 31 Rue Campagne Premiere Paris*." Sensible. It not only allowed you, citizen of the 1920s, to find him—it also said, "World [or rather, those who are looking at the back of my photograph], I am somewhere. I am at a place. This place is mine. I will be here/there. I am solid. No itinerant I: I have a studio." To us now, however, it merely says that he, Man Ray, was somewhere, once upon a time. Or more: Something happened t/here, and then, and it is depicted on the other side of this photograph. But is it depicted? And is it a different kind of thing entirely from that which warrants that other stamp, the *non-official* "Photograph Man Ray"?

"Photograph Man Ray" —All right then. Let's. —It is—isn't it?— an order from on high. From the Man himself.

"Photograph Man Ray" —Given my limited psychic abilities, we must rely instead on the hard visual evidence. —Those images on the other side. And so we begin: What are all those sitters in the portraits thus stamped looking at? They're not looking at the camera. Whatever it is, is offstage. I can't see it. Hmmm. They're not looking at Man Ray. —No one would look at Man Ray that way. My eyebrows are raised. What is it? There's something. —"Photograph Man Ray" is a neurotic construction. There is something hidden here. Lee Miller was there. And that's amazing. But what else? Or does there even have to be a something else?

"Photograph Man Ray" —But the thing is, the sitter is looking far away. And the studio just isn't that big. Or is he? When we plot the sitter's gaze, the mystery deepens. He stares off to the right. And what is off to the right at 31 bis Rue Campagne Premiere Paris, as the sitter stations against the backdrop walls, but a set of steps. He stares unto stairs, this sitter. Stairs leading up. Or leading down, depending on how you look at it. —To the bedroom.

"Photograph Man Ray" —Please note: This is not a situation where the nude will ascend the staircase backwards. It is quite another. Because, between the sitter and the stairs, there is Man Ray. Not perfectly between, but off to the side and nearly between, as if to dare. Were the sitter to break into a mad rush up the stairs, Man Ray could stop him. Yes, in fact, Man Ray is a small man, but a Zeiss Ikonflex III twin lens camera with a Tessar 8cm lens, mounted to a tripod and swung, is a formidable weapon.

"Photograph Man Ray" —Is Juliet at home? She's the wife in this story, and I'd wager to say she's probably not (at home). There's someone else in the room, a different female. And with this female sitter, we must imagine his posture more relaxed. He doesn't look back at the stairs. He looks at the window beside. —Not out the window, not so far, but right there onto the sill, near the verge of the

first step. She looks there too.



Self- portrait in his studio at 31bis Rue Campagne Premiere, Paris

"Photograph Man Ray" — So what's all this about? I'll take him at his word: *Self-portrait in his studio at 31bis Rue Campagne Premiere, Paris*, graced on the reverse with the studio stamp *official*, ruled for reproduction and inscribed on the reverse, "Man Ray 1925" ...There he is, right there where I said he'd be. Only, not exactly. He's alone now, no sitter. There he is, head blurring as he turns from the window sill to his shutter, perfectly timed. There he is, right foot planted squarely upon the first step. But he's not going anywhere. —It is *fait accompli*. Take a look: His is the hunter's pose. And, clearly, it is a trophy shot.

"Photograph Man Ray" — And guess who's coming to dinner? — Another American. You've heard of him: Hemingway. Just Hemingway, or at least that is how Man Ray inscribes it, on the back. As though to remember. No stamp. He doesn't need one. He knows who took the picture. He will keep the photograph until his death more than fifty years later.

The amazing thing—and there is something amazing in this—is that Hemingway would let Man Ray take his picture at all. He was not generous with his image. Actually quite controlling of it. Here he is, in the predawn hours of his own success, placing himself before the eye, the desiring eye, more frankly desiring perhaps than any that had come before—of Man Ray. Sure, the man will need his publicity shots. But here in this photo, we do not see the Hemingway constructed as we know him. He submits to the camera passively, without challenge. This is a Hemingway we could almost love. I wonder, did he know that Man Ray would keep it? A photographer of women, no less. (An American in Paris notwithstanding.)

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*Ernest Hemingway, by Man Ray,
1925*

"Man Ray Photograph" —The
TV Guide taught us that *Children
Shouldn't Play with*

Dead Things. We might take that to include dead people, as well, even artists.
And, certainly, we shouldn't talk to them. But I'll make an exception here:
Fellas (Man and Papa), you should've known better. I look at you in Hemingway
and all I can hear is the sound of keys ajingling in the pockets. The to-be-
continued finish is inappropriate, given what's about to happen.

"Man Ray Photograph" —taunt me. —Twenty-twenty beats the Ikonflex every time.
And I happen to know, call it hindsight, what awaits you. Both of you. And your
world. But, first, just one question (It's been on my mind): Do you think it was
necessary to go back to Europe to reinvent America?

"Man Ray Photograph"—Or maybe you can see it coming? Maybe that's what you're
looking at. The clash of alphas. The crash, out there in the offing. Funny that,
when people say "The Crash," they reference, not foremost but exclusively, that
Stock Market debacle. What about the mangle of body and iron on its heels? And
what about that other crash, with Pollock driving? And how about Warhol's,
didn't cost him anything? And how about the crash people nowadays do when they

which didn't cost him anything? And how about the crash people nowadays do when they bore of the company? Like being tired is a morality.

"Man Ray Photograph" —Let's pretend, for the sake of amusement, that we can replay it, differently this time. The picture is snapped. You, Ernest, get up from your chair, without ever facing us. You go on your merry way. And take up some hobby, like knitting. Man Ray, you forget all about Duchamp and go into hiding for forty years, until Yves Klein redeems you. Jeff Koons never happens, and all that pain and suffering we never think about, which was the preoccupation of the im/mature Modernism to come, neither.

"Man Ray Photograph"—Cheers: one comma, straight up. Isn't that more fun? Let's call it a near miss. Much better than a crash, don't you think? We can even name it, if you want. A good name, something like "Lee Miller."

"Photograph Man Ray" —A dare? A challenge? —You decide.



Lee Miller, by Man Ray, circa 1930.

"Man Ray Photograph" —A challenge? A dare?

...No. Not at all. There is a circularity, agreed, but we prefer to think of it as a fulfillment of Man Ray's own wish. We hope to succeed in amusing you, bewildering you and annoying you. But most of all, we desire to inspire your reflection. And that is a tall order. But we also feel that we have given you something more, and in this we think Hemingway would agree, because less is after all more. Don't you agree?

Regards,

Jack the Pelican

Why not?