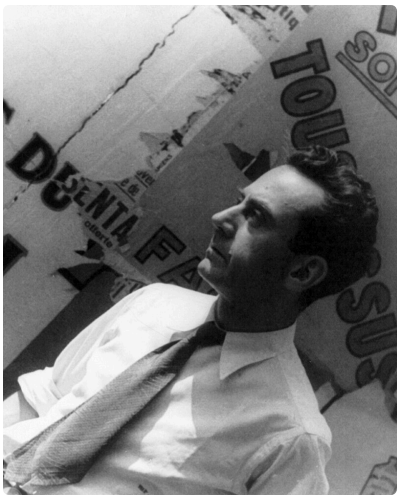
AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Man Ray

American artist and photographer, 1890 to 1976

Man Ray was an American artist who spent most of his career in Paris. He was the only American to play a major role in both Dada and Surrealism. He painted and made films and objects, but he is best known for photographs, including pictures he made without a camera. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.



Man Ray. Wikimedia Commons, public domain. Full credit on page 3.

FURTHER LOOKING

The Met: *Man Ray: When Objects Dream*, the 2025 exhibition of his rayographs. metmuseum.org
J. Paul Getty Museum: *Le Violon d'Ingres* with a short essay. getty.edu
MoMA: *Indestructible Object* with gallery labels. moma.org
Video: Exhibition Tour: Man Ray: When Objects Dream
Reading: Man Ray. *Self-Portrait*. 1963.
Reading: Man Ray and Tristan Tzara. *Champs délicieux: album de photographies*. 1922.

01 Fact Sheet

1890	Born Emmanuel Radnitzky on August 27 in Philadelphia. He grows up in New York, where his father works as a tailor.
About 1912	Starts to use the name Man Ray. Takes art classes at the Ferrer Center in New York.
1915	Meets the French artist Marcel Duchamp. Together they form the New York Dada group.
1921	Makes *Gift*, a flatiron with tacks. Moves to Paris in July.
1922	Publishes *Les Champs délicieux*, an album of rayographs with an introduction by Tristan Tzara.
1923	Makes the film *Le Retour à la raison* with the rayograph method.
1924	Makes the photograph *Le Violon d'Ingres*.
1929	Works with the photographer Lee Miller on solarization.
1940	Leaves occupied France for Los Angeles.
1951	Returns to Paris. Some sources give 1946.
1963	Publishes his autobiography, *Self-Portrait*.
1976	Dies in Paris on November 18, age 86.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

THREE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1921 *Gift*

1922 Rayographs

1924 *Le Violon d'Ingres*

02 Three Key Works

The three works below are public domain in the United States. His later works, such as *Indestructible Object*, are still in copyright, so they are linked under Further Looking.

1921: *Gift*

A flatiron that cannot iron

Gift is a flatiron with a row of tacks glued to the bottom. Like Duchamp, Man Ray took ordinary factory objects and called them art. These are called readymades. The tacks make the iron useless. It would tear any cloth it touched. Man Ray photographed the object himself, and this print is from 1921, the year he moved to Paris.

LOOK FOR The neat, even row of tacks | How a useful tool becomes a joke and a threat



Gift, 1921. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1922: Rayographs

Photographs made without a camera

Man Ray placed objects on light-sensitive paper, exposed it to light and developed it. He called the results rayographs. The Met says he made the first ones in the winter of 1921. In 1922 he published an album of them, *Les Champs délicieux*. The poet Tristan Tzara wrote the introduction. The Met's 2025 show took its title from Tzara's phrase for them, moments "when objects dream."

LOOK FOR White shapes where objects blocked light | Soft gray edges on raised objects



Rayographs, 1922. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1924: *Le Violon d'Ingres*

A model turned into a violin

The model Kiki sits with her back to the camera. Man Ray painted two violin f-holes on the print and then photographed it again. The title is a French saying that means hobby. It points to the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, who played the violin when he was not painting. Man Ray based the pose on Ingres's painting *The Valpinçon Bather*. The photo first appeared in the magazine *Littérature* in June 1924.

LOOK FOR The f-holes that turn a back into an instrument | The turban that recalls paintings by Ingres

See the Getty Museum record for this photograph →



Le Violon d'Ingres, 1924. Wikipedia, public domain in the US.

TRY THIS

Make your own rayograph. In a dark room, lay three small objects on photo paper or sun print paper. Expose it to light, develop it and see which shapes turned white or gray.

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REFLECT

Think About It

Man Ray turned a flatiron, a metronome and a sheet of photo paper into art. Which everyday object near you could become a work of art, and what would you change about it?

03 Sources

WORKS CITED

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Man Ray. *Le Violon d'Ingres (Ingres's Violin)*. 1924. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/104E4A. Accessed 30 Oct. 2026.

"Man Ray: When Objects Dream." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/man-ray-when-objects-dream. Accessed 30 Oct. 2026.

IMAGE CREDITS

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Man Ray. Untitled rayograph from *Champs délicieux (Delicious Fields)*. 1922, gelatin silver print, Art Institute of Chicago, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain in the United States (published 1922, tagged PD-US-expired on Commons). Accessed 23 Nov. 2026.

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