

WIDEWALLS

Man Ray and Francis Picabia In Dialog at Vito Schnabel

By Balasz Takac
March 18, 2021



Man Ray - *The Tempest*, 1948. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches (45.7 x 60.1 cm). © Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2021. Courtesy Vito Schnabel.

In 1916, the most exciting art movement appeared and echoed on the international scale as an immediate reaction to the absurdity of WW I. Under the name Dada, a word that Richard Huelsenbeck and Hugo Ball accidentally found in a French-German dictionary, the movement grew rapidly and gathered numerous artists expressing themselves with all means possible, from painting and photography, to performance and literature.

Although marked as anti-art, berzerk, and meaningless, Dada's raw energy enabled artists to express a myriad of emotions and fully plunge into experimentation. Among those who created memorable works of art while affiliated with the movement were the two avant-garde giants, Man Ray and Francis Picabia.

To take a closer look at their intersectional practices through a prism of an imaginary dialog, Vito Schnabel Gallery decided to organize an exhibition simply called *Man Ray & Picabia*, that will bring nine paintings made by the artists in between the late 1920s to the mid-1950s.

The Encounter

Namely, Man Ray and Francis Picabia met in 1915 through their mutual friend Marcel Duchamp. They remained acquaintances. Both eventually became interested in Dadaism, and driven by the radicalism of the movement, the artists started questioning the purpose of art. And so,

they targeted the traditional media such as painting in a daring and quite authentic manner of expression.

Man Ray started as an ambitious young painter influenced by the European avant-garde. After moving to Paris in 1921, he joined the Dadaists and became a proponent of the avant-garde circles. A year later, he participated in the Salon Dada and exhibited in the first Surrealist exhibition at Galerie Pierre in 1925. During this period, the artist gained fame for his photographic work, which supported him financially in France. In 1937, Man Ray abandoned photography and returned to painting, producing some of his most significant Surrealist compositions. When the Germans invaded France, he fled to America, before returning to Paris permanently in 1951.

Francis Picabia, on the other hand, experimented with and eventually discarded Impressionism and Cubism, and found Dada's provocative spirit appealing. This led him to create mesmerizing works of art characterized by the thrilling aesthetic.

The Works

The exhibition will include *Non-Abstraction* (1947) created by Man Ray during his stay in California. This bold canvas nicely illustrates the stylistic preoccupations the artist was dealing with while considering the multidisciplinary approach to art-making.

MAN RAY & PICABIA



Francis Picabia - *Femme à la chemise bleue*, 1942-1943. Oil on board, 40 3/8 x 29 1/2 inches (102.6 x 74.93 cm). © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Courtesy Vito Schnabel.



Man Ray - *Non-Abstraction*, 1947. Oil on panel, 36 1/4 x 27 1/2 inches (92.1 x 68.9 cm). © Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2021. Courtesy Vito Schnabel.

On display there will also be *The Tempest* (1948), part of a series of paintings titled *Shakespearean Equations* made by the artist in Los Angeles. The artwork is inspired by the *Mathematical Equations* photographic series that Man Ray made two decades earlier. The painting *Tortoise*, executed in 1944, will also be on view.

In 1921 after distancing from the Dada movement, Francis Picabia settled in Paris, and the same year in French Riviera he began working on the series of paintings known as the *Transparencies* (ca. 1928-1932). Three of the works from it will be exhibited, one of them being the captivating composition titled *Mendica* (1929-30). The installment will include the works Picabia made in the 1940s during his realist phase, such as the provocative *Femme à la chemise bleue* (1942-43), inspired by the popular magazine illustrations and press images of famous actresses and singers.

Man Ray and Picabia at Vito Schnabel Gallery

The selection of canvases, some of them not seen publicly for decades, will underline the experimental approach to painting undertaken by Man Ray and Francis Picabia in terms of their wondrous flirtation with the dominant stylistic tendencies at the time.

A fully illustrated catalog with an essay by writer and Man Ray specialist Timothy Baum will escort the exhibition.

Man Ray & Picabia will be on view at Vito Schnabel Gallery in New York from 25 March until 15 May 2021.



Francis Picabia - *Mendica*, 1929-1930. Oil on canvas, 63 1/2 x 51 1/8 inches (161.2 x 130 cm). © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Courtesy Vito Schnabel.