

THEGUIDE.ART

Man Ray & Picabia

April 7, 2021



Man Ray, *Composition*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 18 x 15 inches (45.7 x 38 cm). © Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2021.

This compact and dynamic show of Man Ray and Francis Picabia includes just nine works but, spanning the 1920s to the '50s, effectively documents the often counterintuitive evolution of the artists' careers, both in tandem and in their divergences. Marcel Duchamp introduced Picabia and Man Ray in 1915 – both artists went on to work in Dada circles. Picabia abandoned the movement early, in 1921, and soon thereafter initiated his *Transparencies* series. Here three are on view, including the earth-toned *Helias* (c. 1930), which depicts two chalky white hands, fingers spread over a pair of overlaid faces.

Man Ray stuck around in the movement for a bit longer, showing in Salon Dada in 1922, and also turned to photography, the medium for which he may be best known.

Painting was his first, and perhaps great, love: he abandoned photography to return to the brush in the late 1930s, creating canvases that were inflected by Surrealism and his own photographic sensibility at the same time that they were distinct within the medium. The lines of *The Tortoise*, from 1944, trail fluidly and naturally, and are rendered with the same true blacks and centered subject as many of his photographs. But the painting bears scant resemblance to its title, and the outlines seem to struggle to contain their shifting planes of color. At this time, the divergences between the two artists perhaps become clearest: Picabia's nearly contemporaneous painting *Femme à la chemise bleue* (1942-43) is startlingly figurative, depicting a sultry woman who gazes out from the frame, one breast tumbling out of a sheer blue dress.