

**MAN RAY & PICABIA**  
**MARCH 25 - MAY 15, 2021**

**VITO SCHNABEL GALLERY**  
**43 CLARKSON STREET**  
**NEW YORK, NY 10014**



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



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

Beginning March 25, 2021, Vito Schnabel Gallery will present *Man Ray & Picabia*, a historical exhibition that brings into dialogue seminal works by two early modern masters and legendary artists of the avant-garde. An intimate presentation, the exhibition focuses on only nine paintings that span the late 1920s to the mid-1950s - a careful selection designed to invite contemplation on the nature of artistic revolution. The canvases on view manifest Man Ray and Francis Picabia's prodigious engagement with the medium of painting across multi-faceted careers marked by irreverence toward convention and an ability to cycle through the phases of modernism to arrive at exceptionally original results. This rare grouping includes paintings that have not been on display to the public for decades.

*Man Ray & Picabia* will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring an essay by writer and Man Ray specialist Timothy Baum.

While Man Ray and Francis Picabia met in 1915 through their mutual friend Marcel Duchamp, the exhibition on view at Vito Schnabel Gallery proposes an imaginary dialogue, one that exposes surprising affinities through juxtapositions. Although only casually acquainted, these two giants of art shared a footing in the emergence of Dada a century ago, helping that movement along and ultimately synthesizing it into a radical rethinking of what art can contain, be, and do. In painting, each prevailed as a purveyor of bold, radical thought; each was in search of a distinctive, original form of expression. As Timothy Baum asserts, Man Ray and Picabia were "Dada brethren."

Man Ray found his artistic beginnings as an ambitious young painter whose early canvases echoed the influence of the European avant-garde. Eager to merge objects of the observable world with the flat, pictorial space of two-dimensional representation, he was propelled by Dada to move from New York to Paris, proclaiming, 'Dada cannot live in New York. All New York is Dada, and will not tolerate a rival.' Picabia, who had already absorbed and discarded the styles of Impressionism and Cubism, found in Dada a provocative spirit that mirrored his own and incited an abrupt disjuncture that led to the thrilling aesthetic leaps of his mature career.

When Man Ray relocated to Paris in 1921, he joined the Dadaist group and became a prominent member of avant-garde circles. He participated in the Salon Dada in 1922 and exhibited in the first Surrealist exhibition at Galerie Pierre in 1925. During this period, Man Ray became widely known for his photographic work, which supported him financially in France. But by 1937, he had abandoned photography and returning to painting, executing some of his most significant Surrealist compositions. When war broke out in Europe and the Germans invaded France, Man Ray fled for America, settling in Los Angeles before returning to Paris permanently a decade later in 1951. On view in the exhibition, *Non-Abstraction* (1947), created during the artist's stay in California, reveals within a single canvas Man Ray's mastery of his preoccupations and, equally, the steps of his processes. Man Ray assimilated aesthetic styles and traversed mediums with ease, rejecting the division between painting, assemblage, photography, and film to dance among them all within works that often refer to other pieces from his own hand. Rendered in a bold palette, *Non-Abstraction* refuses categorization and settles almost magically in a space between figuration and abstraction. With its black eyes, sculptural evocation of a nose, and pair of ruby red lips, this work unmistakably nods to the artist's earlier and most famous work, *A l'heure de l'observatoire, les amoureux* (1932-34), which depicts Lee Miller's disembodied mouth floating above the Paris skyline. But with *Non-Abstraction*, Man Ray dares to further reduce and subvert, adding a version of a silhouetted form from one of his own Surrealist photographs to the lower edge of the canvas.

Man Ray's *The Tempest* (1948) belongs to a series of paintings titled *Shakespearean Equations* that the artist realized in Los Angeles and exhibited in his painting retrospective at the Copley Galleries in 1948-49. The subject matter here borrows from the *Mathematical Equations* series of Surrealist-inspired photographs Man Ray created almost 20 years earlier of 19th-century mathematical models housed in the Institut Henri Poincaré in Paris. Transforming that photographic imagery with new creative energy, *The Tempest* achieves its dream-like quality through an assemblage of cubic forms rendered before a velvety red ground. Simultaneously flat and volumetric, Man Ray's painting achieves an uncanny sense of hovering - optically but also psychologically for the viewer gazing at it.

The Copley Galleries exhibition featured paintings dating back to 1914, including *A l'heure de l'observatoire, les amoureux* (1932-34) and *Black Widow (Nativity)* (1915). Placed in between these two major pieces was *The Tortoise*, an intimately scaled work executed in 1944, also on view in the exhibition at Vito Schnabel Gallery. Grey and white amorphous shapes, outlined in black, overlap to form an abstract yet recognizable figure.

Equally revolutionary, Picabia was perhaps less delicate than Man Ray in signaling his evolution. After having immersed himself in Dada in both Zürich and Paris, the artist firmly renounced his ties to the movement in 1921 - the very year Man Ray arrived in the city - and decamped to the French Riviera, where he in time began the series of paintings known as the *Transparencies* (ca. 1928-1932). Ushering in a bold new pictorial complex of layered and superimposed imagery, the *Transparencies* series is represented in this exhibition by three works. The mesmerizing composition *Mendica* (c. 1929-34) is rendered in a limited palette of deep emerald, brown, and chartreuse. Dominating the canvas, a body with muscular contours summons the idealized male nudes of Classical Antiquity, while black paint delineates three translucent faces and other disparate human forms. Using both opaque color and translucent washes of pigment, Picabia experiments with layers of glaze and varnish to create a craquelure surface of jarring, exaggerated effect.

As the Second World War ensued, Picabia entered a new phase of 'realist' painting in the 1940s. His sensual and provocative *Femme à la chemise bleue* (1942-43) exemplifies one of the artist's late, defiant stylistic shifts. This work is part of a series that drew inspiration from popular kitsch imagery - press photographs of famous actresses and singers, and magazine illustrations derived from such sources as *Mon Paris*, *Paris Magazine*, *Paris Cinéma*, and *Paris Sex Appeal*. A sheer blue dress exposes the flesh-colored curves of Picabia's femme. One strap from her camisole slips down beneath her arm, revealing her shoulder and bare breast. Her body is demurely posed, her eyes downturned. With its richly saturated blues and harsh, acidic lighting sharpening the sitter's features, Picabia's painting forges a subversive aesthetic path that still resonates in 21st century painting. Fittingly, this canvas occupies a wall of its own in the exhibition, as if to suggest a bridge leading from the two artists whose works are on view, to an era ahead in which painting continues to thrive in spite of conjecture about its demise.

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