

*La photographie  
n'est pas l'art  
(1937)*

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Artist: Man Ray (1890–1976)

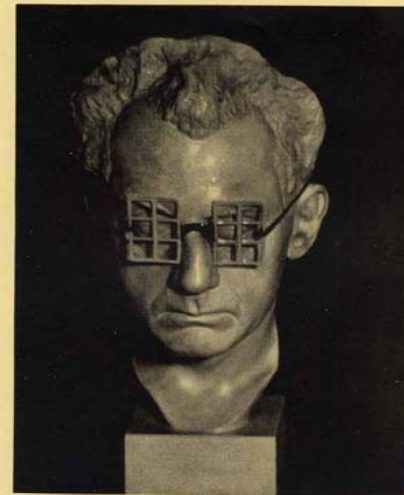
“I do not photograph nature. I photograph my visions.”<sup>1</sup>

~ Man Ray

# The artist:

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Born Emmanuel Radnitzky in Philadelphia in 1890, Man Ray spent most of his early years in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. “A painter, sculptor, and filmmaker as well as a photographer, Man Ray brought his diverse techniques to bear upon one another in the attempt to create ‘disturbing objects.’ His life and art spoke of freedom, pleasure, and the desire for extended awareness and means of expression.”<sup>2</sup> Man Ray also employed deliberate strategies that sometimes included the conjunction of incongruous materials and ideas to raise questions about conventional thinking and perceptions.



*Dans les yeux des autres*

Fig. 1. Man Ray, *Dans les yeux des autres*, 1937 Weingrow Collection

# The book:

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*La photographie n'est pas l'art* was created in 1937, and includes a foreword by André Breton. The Weingrow Collection's copy is a first edition, with all twelve of Man Ray's photographic reproductions included in it. This modest publication merits special attention for its diverse array of images. It has been said that after publishing this book, "Man Ray decided to devote himself as much as possible to painting."<sup>3</sup> However, he continued to practice photography and other forms of expression.

Still, the book's title, which translates as "Photography is not art," does seem to indicate that Man Ray's shift of artistic emphasis may indeed represent a change of priorities. In any case, the title is fitting to his contrarian stance; it is especially amusing and ironic that it graces a work by an artist who helped establish that photography *is* art.



Fig. 2. Front cover of *La photographie n'est pas l'art*, 1937

# The foreword:

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The first two pages of the book contain a poetic foreword by the French surrealist André Breton, titled *Convulsionnaires*. It appears to be a list of Breton's wishes or requests and is divided by headings into two parts—*Men* and *Woman*—with a third part sans heading that introduces Man Ray. The arrangement of the three parts raises questions about Breton's conceptions of gender in relationship to Man Ray and his work. The text was published in French; aspects of the punctuation, layout, and design of the foreword are imperfectly simulated in the English translation of the text, which follows:

# The foreword:

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## convulsionnaires



### MEN:

I would very much like to be a little  
bedroom mouse.

—I'd like to create just for myself living beings  
with the complicity of storms.

—May the wind blow when I'm trying to steer  
my dreams

—May my presence be noticed in several  
places at once.

—I'd like to be able to change sex just as I can  
change shirts.

—Let me wander freely on other planets.

—And I'll let myself lead the life of a bird, a  
tree, a stone as long as I can remember.

—I'd like to find and lose the philosopher's  
stone.

—Make love and never lose control.

—Remove a great number of living beings  
with impunity.

—Afterward resuscitate a very small number  
of the dead.

### WOMAN:

Seduce the entire world like the first sun!  
But only if I don't grow old.



*But here's Man Ray. HERE IS THE MAN WITH A  
MAGIC LANTERN FOR A HEAD.<sup>4</sup>*



# *Cerveau bien ordonné*

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## (Well-ordered brain)

The image shows a colony of ants, working together. Here, Man Ray makes a connection between the ants' seemingly chaotic collective organization for performing tasks and the complex activities of the human brain.

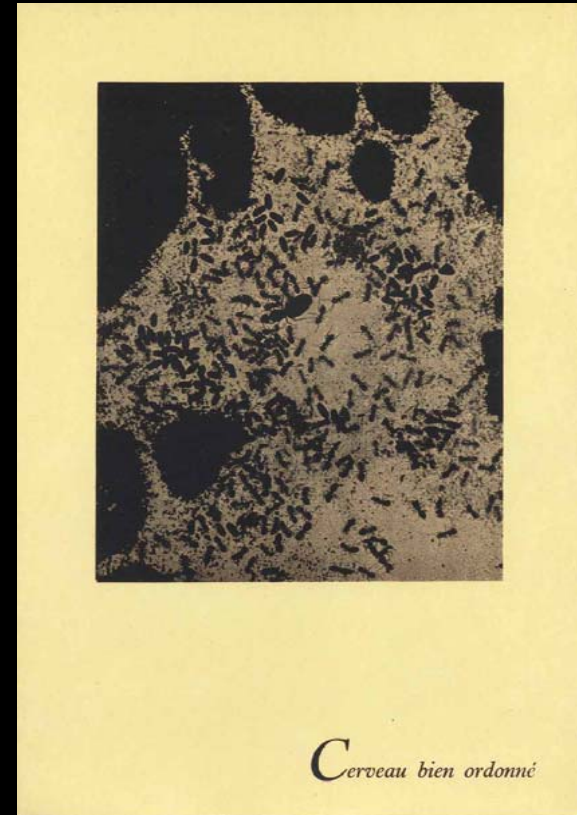


Fig. 3. Man Ray, *Cerveau bien ordonné*, 1937  
Weingrow Collection

# *Quand la nature fait des machines*

## (When nature makes machines)

This photograph of a small frog on a larger frog's back in the water may be perceived in more than one way. In one interpretation, the smaller frog is using the larger one as a form of transportation: just as human beings transport themselves by means of motor vehicles and other machines, animals have their own modes of transportation. Another assessment of the image is that it shows two frogs mating. In this case, the title would point to the mechanics of reproduction in nature, a fitting subject for a visionary photographer.

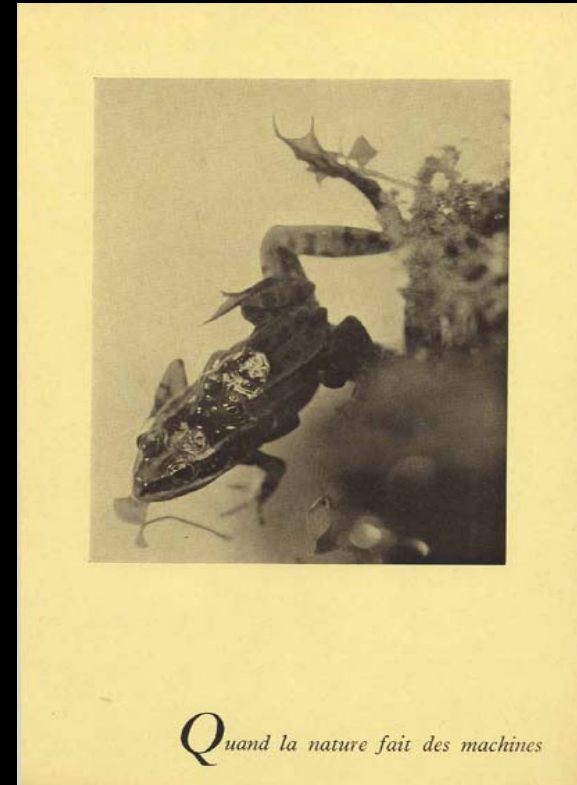


Fig. 4. Man Ray, *Quand la nature fait des machines*, 1937 Weingrow Collection

# *Le sex-appeal*

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## (Sex appeal)

Here the artist uses the female form to depict the essence of sex appeal. This is not an unusual gesture: women's bodies have been admired for centuries, and holding up the female form for admiration is also the intention of this photograph. The model's dramatic gesture and the styling of the photographic setup make her appear goddess-like; the drape-like folds of the apparel heighten the resemblance to a Roman goddess. The garment's slight transparency is emphasized by the subtle glowing light behind the model, which reveals her form in silhouette.

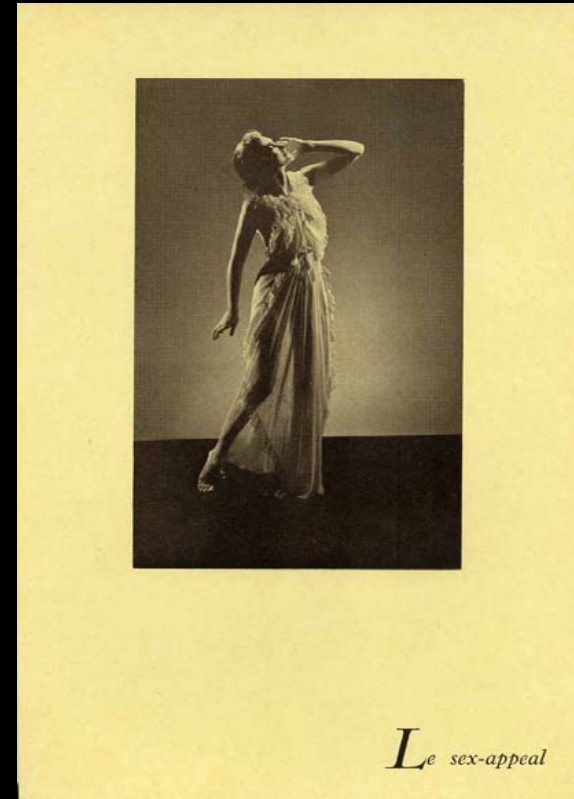


Fig. 5. Man Ray, *Le sex-appeal*, 1937  
Weingrow Collection



# *Myriam Hopkins*

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Man Ray spent eleven years working in Los Angeles. This portrait of the actress Miriam Hopkins, a further progression of his innovative fashion photographs, emphasizes the glamour of Hollywood and reveals Man Ray's connection to the entertainment industry even before his arrival in Los Angeles from Paris in 1940 at the onset of World War II.<sup>5</sup>



*M*yr iam Hopkins

Fig. 6. Man Ray, *Myriam Hopkins*, 1937  
Weingrow Collection

# The work:

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Throughout his career, Man Ray produced countless works of art, including everything from paintings to photographs with unusual light exposures. His expertise and talent seemed to come naturally to him and the world has praised him for expressing them. Even after his death, his work still inspires and influences aspiring artists and art lovers alike.

The Weingrow Collection's *La photographie n'est pas l'art* offers a unique view into Man Ray's teasingly and seductively subversive world of ideas, texts, and images, which highlight the tension between nature and culture.

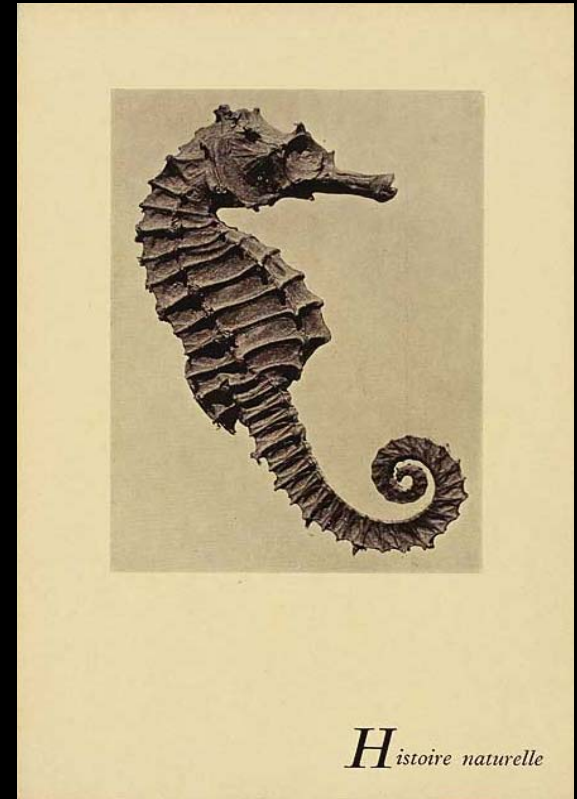


Fig. 7. Man Ray, *Histoire naturelle*, 1937

# Notes and illustrations:

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## ■ Notes:

- 1. Thirteen/WNET and National Public Television/PBS, "Man Ray," *American Masters*, [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/ray\\_m.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/ray_m.html) (accessed December 2, 2005).
- 2. The Escambia School District, Text from *The Encyclopedia of Photography* (1986), [http://www.escambia.k12.fl.us/schscnts/patc/man\\_ray-webquest.htm](http://www.escambia.k12.fl.us/schscnts/patc/man_ray-webquest.htm) (accessed December 2, 2005).
- 3. Simon Finch Art, <http://simonfinchart.com/picture.php?artist=Man+Ray+%26+Andre+Breton&action=Go&picid=52> (accessed December 2, 2005).
- 4. The author gratefully acknowledges David A. Powell, Professor of French, Hofstra University, for translating Breton's forward from the original French.
- 5. Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss, *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006), 47.

## ■ Illustrations:

- 1. Man Ray, *Dans les yeux des autres*, 1937. Man Ray and André Breton, *La photographie n'est pas l'art* (Paris: GLM, 1937). Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
- 2. Front cover. *La photographie n'est pas l'art*, 1937. Bibliophoto.com, <http://www.bibliophoto.com/pages/collector.php?lettre=M> (accessed December 2, 2005).
- 3. Man Ray, *Cerveau bien ordonné*, 1937. Man Ray and André Breton, *La photographie n'est pas l'art* (Paris: GLM, 1937). Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
- 4. Man Ray, *Quand la nature fait des machines*, 1937. Man Ray and André Breton, *La photographie n'est pas l'art* (Paris: GLM, 1937). Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
- 5. Man Ray, *Sex-appeal*, 1937. Man Ray and André Breton, *La photographie n'est pas l'art* (Paris: GLM, 1937). Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
- 6. Man Ray, *Myriam Hopkins*, 1937. Man Ray and André Breton, *La photographie n'est pas l'art* (Paris: GLM, 1937). Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
- 7. Man Ray, *Histoire naturelle*, 1937. Man Ray and André Breton, *La photographie n'est pas l'art* (Paris: GLM, 1937). Courtesy of Simon Finch Art, <http://simonfinchart.com/picture.php?artist=Man+Ray+%26+Andre+Breton&action=Go&picid=52> (accessed December 2, 2005).