Education Resource Kit

Year Levels 7–12

Exhibition: Man Ray and Max Dupain

Dates: 6 August 2025 – 9 November 2025

Heide venue: Main Galleries

Exhibition Curators: Lesley Harding and Emmanuelle de l'Ecotais

MAN RAY *Eye and Tears* (1930s); printed 1972.

Man Ray and Max Dupain: Exhibition Introduction

This exhibition brings into dialogue the contemporaneous work of renowned American-born artist Man Ray and the eminent Australian photographer Max Dupain. While the two men never met, their individual paths led them to corresponding ways of seeing the modern world, especially in the artistically progressive decade of the 1930s. What they held in common, alongside an attraction to modernist techniques and themes, was a capacity to produce rich imagery comprising only the most essential elements. Unorthodox, uninhibited and adventurous, they both made pictures that appear at once spare and elevated, bringing fresh insights to conventional subjects and presenting new ideas by way of their creative inventions.

One of the most original and avant-garde artists of his generation, Man Ray (1890–1976) spent his productive working life in Paris, where he was a key contributor to the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. Although he utilised a range of mediums across his career, he is most famous for his innovations in photography, including the technique of solarisation—which he reinvented for modern purposes with Lee Miller—and the development of his camera-less photographs, which he called 'rayographs'.

Max Dupain (1911–1992) had a long and celebrated career based in Sydney, where he opened his first commercial studio in 1934. Perhaps the first truly modernist photographer in Australia, Dupain was alert to the latest advancements in the field internationally and began to work with surrealist concepts, to frame and crop his images in inventive ways, and experiment with solarisation, photograms and photomontage—processes that would become a feature of both his artistic and commercial output for the ensuing years.

Featuring more than 200 photographs, *Man Ray and Max Dupain* explores the parallels and points of departure in the artists' work across a range of subject matter, from the nude figure, still life and portraits, to fashion and advertising. It also considers the artists' respective collaborations with their creative and romantic partners, Lee Miller and Olive Cotton.

Notes for teachers

This education resource provides both selected exhibition wall texts and abridged essays from the *Man Ray and Max Dupain* catalogue. These have been provided to give students an understanding of the artists' experimentation with surrealist imagery and innovative photographic techniques.

Designed for students Years 7-12, this resource can be used to assist with preparation for the gallery visit, and to support engagement back in the classroom when reflecting on the exhibition.

The learning activities include talking points, ideas and considerations to facilitate discussion on some of the following aspects of the exhibition; the creative practices of Man Ray, Max Dupain, their work with Lee Miller and Olive Cotton; Surrealism, portrait photography and rayograms.

Biographies

Man Ray

Man Ray was born Emmanuel Radnitzky in South Philadelphia on 20 August 1890, the eldest child of Russian Jewish immigrants Melach 'Max' and Manya 'Minnie' Radnitzky. During his schooling in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, he spent time at Alfred Stieglitz's Gallery 291 and after graduating in 1909 decided to pursue a career as an artist. He began calling himself Man Ray (always both words together) when his parents shortened their last name in 1912.

In the spring of 1913 he moved to an artists' colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey and met his first wife, the Belgian poet Adon Lacroix. They married in 1914, separated in 1919, and divorced in 1937.

During this formative period Man Ray came under the influence of major figures in the European avant garde. In 1920 he founded the Société Anonyme with Marcel Duchamp and Katherine Dreier, and the following year published the first and only issue of *New York Dada*. He moved to Paris in the summer of 1921, settling in the bohemian Montparnasse district where he met and fell in love with the artists' model Alice Prin (popularly known as Kiki de Montparnasse).

For two decades between the world wars Man Ray was a leading photographer in France. In late 1921 he rediscovered the camera-less process of the photogram, which he termed the 'rayograph', and later developed the solarisation technique with fellow surrealist photographer Lee Miller, with whom he had a relationship from 1929 to 1932.

In 1940 Man Ray fled Nazi occupied France, ending his relationship with the Guadeloupean dancer and model, Adrienne Fidelin, whom he had been with since 1936. He lived in Los Angeles from 1940 to 1951, before returning Paris in 1951 with the dancer Juliet Browner, whom he married in 1946. Man Ray continued to work on new paintings, photographs, collages and art objects, and exhibit internationally until his death from a lung infection in Paris on 18 November 1976.

Max Dupain

Maxwell Spencer Dupain was the only child of George and Ena Dupain, born in Ashfield, Sydney, on 22 April 1911. Dupain's interest in photography was sparked in 1924 when his uncle gave him his first camera—a Kodak Box Brownie. At seventeen he joined the Photographic Society of New South Wales where his contact with the photographer Harold Cazneaux influenced his first photographs in the romantic Pictorialist style.

After graduating, Dupain began an apprenticeship in Cecil Bostock's photographic studio in Sydney, and spent the evenings studying painting and drawing at the Julian Ashton Art School, and later at East Sydney Technical College.

In 1934 Dupain opened his own photographic studio at 24 Bond Street, Sydney, with his childhood friend and fellow photographer Olive Cotton as his studio assistant. Inspired by happenings in

Europe, Dupain soon traded soft Pictorialism for a modernist approach and by the late 1930s was recognised as a leading modernist photographer.

Dupain and Cotton married on 29 April 1939 and moved the studio to Clarence Street, Sydney, before separating in 1941 and divorcing in 1944. During this period Dupain was working as a camoufleur with the Royal Australian Air Force, and later as a photographer for the Commonwealth Department of Information.

After the Second World War Dupain turned towards a more 'realist', documentary style of photography. He married Diana Illingworth in 1946 and the following year returned to the business with a fresh focus on architectural and industrial subject matter. In 1948 he and Diana purchased two adjacent bush blocks in Castlecrag, where they raised their two children, Danina and Rex.

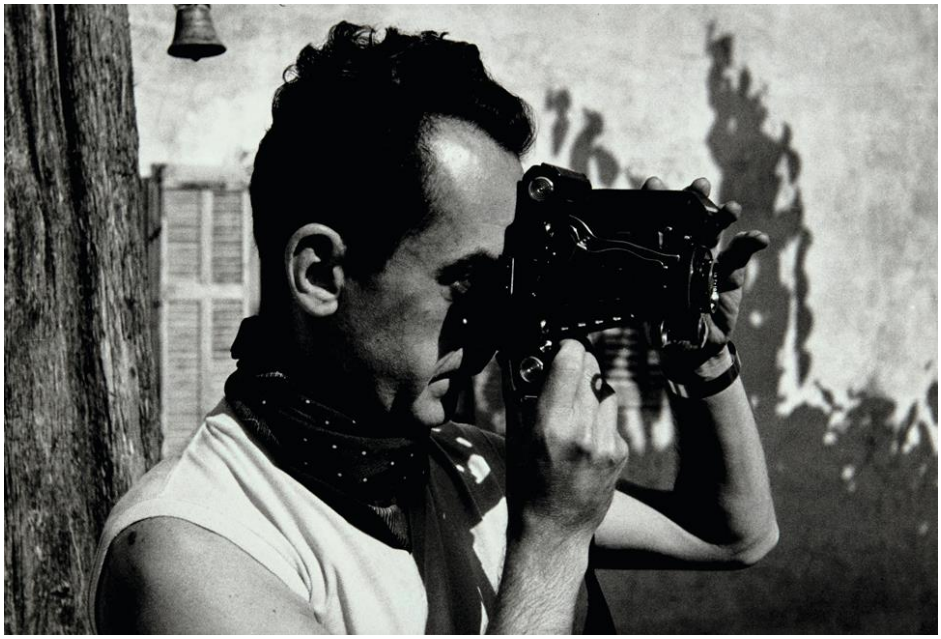
From the 1970s onwards major exhibitions and publications followed, as well as representation in all major public collections in Australia. Dupain remained a spokesperson for Australian art photography up until his death at Castlecrag on 27 July 1992

The Eye That Sees
By Lesley Harding

This exhibition brings together the work of two artists who never met, but whose individual paths led them to corresponding ways of seeing the modern world and whose contemporaneous photographs have perceptible likenesses and parallels, especially those from the artistically progressive decade of the 1930s.

What Man Ray and Max Dupain held in common, alongside an attraction to modernist techniques and themes, was a capacity to produce rich imagery comprising only the most essential elements. Unorthodox, uninhibited and adventurous, they both made pictures that appear at once spare and elevated, bringing fresh insights and alternative perspectives to conventional subjects and presenting new ideas by way of their creative inventions.

Both men enjoyed success and accolades during their lifetimes, but it is reasonable to say that while the American–born, French–based artist Man Ray's work was well known to the Australian photographer Max Dupain from the late 1920s, the reverse is unlikely to be true.



MAN RAY *Self portrait, Mougins* 1936

May Ray was a painter, sculptor, filmmaker and writer, but it is for his innovative photography that he best known and celebrated today, and the medium in which he was arguably most successful.

Man Ray was destined to become an artist, in the way of people who can't *not* be creative. He started his career drawing and painting and his aspirations in that regard eventually led him to Paris, where he confirmed his métier. Some six years earlier he had met Marcel Duchamp, a collaborator in so-called New York Dada, who would become a lifelong friend and shared his interest in the 'readymade': taking everyday objects and assigning them an alternative purpose or life as a work of art. While Duchamp famously flipped a urinal on its side and called it *Fountain* for an exhibition in

1917, in one deft manoeuvre giving it a new point of view, Man Ray instead assembled sculptural objects from ordinary materials and photographed them.

Man Ray arrived in Paris in 1921, and soon relinquished the paintbrush for the camera, initially working out of his hotel room with a makeshift darkroom before opening his own studio in Montparnasse in 1922, where he steadily found success with his portrait photography, which included both images of a paying clientele and portfolio-building pictures of artists, writers and cognoscenti.

In tandem with the revenue-generating work, Man Ray's imaginative spirit and disregard for convention saw him make rapid advancements in his artistic photography over the course of the following decade.

In late 1921 and 1922 he revived and comprehensively explored the rich possibilities of the photogram and, so enamoured with the technique's potential, he literally made it his own, describing the results as 'rayographs'. Placing everyday objects on photosensitive paper and imposing different and changing light sources, he produced many striking, declarative and alluring abstract images that exist in an enigmatic realm between representation and imagination, inviting us to see the prosaic in a new and poetic way.

Man Ray's involvement with the burgeoning surrealist movement in Paris witnessed similarly exciting advancements. André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, published in 1924, formalised the movement's tenets and gave examples of its applications. Man Ray's idiosyncratic use of the photographic medium aligned perfectly with Breton's concept of automatism and direct access to the unconscious. By the time of the historic first surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in 1925 he was a leading figure, whose unconventional photographs and attendant boundary-breaking spirit inspired others in Paris and beyond.

In Man Ray's hands the possibilities of photography lay less in its function as a witness to reality, pure and factual, than in its potential as a conceptual tool, where the combination of the mind and the subject, the artist's intent and the image brought about an outcome greater than the sum of the parts.

MAX DUPAIN *No title (Self portrait)* c.1938

Twenty years younger Man Ray, Max Dupain was born in Sydney in 1911. He determined his future career while still in his teens and came of age at a time of rapid developments in international photography. Like Man Ray he took drawing and painting classes, attending Julian Ashton's Art School and East Sydney Technical College, but his formal training occurred on the job when he joined the studio of the commercial photographer Cecil Bostock in 1931 after finishing school.

The 1920s and 30s had seen a significant shift for photography across the globe, with the most impactful changes emerging in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917. The Constructivists such as Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky worked with photomontage and photograms and pioneered new ways of looking through the viewfinder in the early 1920s: bird's eye and worm's eye (high and low) vantages, fragmented imagery and abstraction, exaggerated formal relationships, and less reliance on narrative or naturalism.

New smaller cameras also encouraged greater flexibility both within the studio and beyond, while modernity and its motifs and themes seemed ripe for experimentation and a diversity of interpretations.

While Dupain lacked the very particular momentum that comes from being a part of an organised movement or circle, he did have a supportive group of friends and colleagues, some of whom he'd met in art classes, and by the time he opened the studio he had access to the latest developments in art and photography via a regular intake of books and journals by subscription or from a handful of more progressive bookshops. *Photographie*, *Cahiers d'art*, *Minotaure*, *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*, *Modern Photography* and *Photograms of the Year* were just some of the international periodicals then available in Sydney.

The 1931 edition of *Modern Photography*, which Dupain first encountered in 1933,[i] was informative early on, as much for the reproductions as for the introductory essay by G.H. Saxon Mills, an advocate for New Photography. He argued for the superiority of the camera's viewpoint over human vision—referring to it as 'the eye that sees'—and for its ability to expose values that are everlasting in things that are temporal, revealing a deeper truth. The 'fresh eye of the camera', Saxon Mills observed, is 'undimmed by human preconceptions, brightly and triumphantly and gloriously aware'.[ii]

Among the illustrations in this issue were two images by Man Ray (one a solarised profile portrait of Lee Miller, printed in reverse of the way the image is known today), together with photograms by Kurt Schwitters and Oscar Nerlinger, a photomontage by Paul Schuitema, and a host of advertising photographs recruiting modernist techniques and surrealist imagery.

Dupain was clearly looking closely at Man Ray's work in the publications he had to hand, as his thoughts were well assembled when he reviewed the artist's book, *Man Ray Photographs 1920–1934* for *The Home* magazine's October issue in 1935.

Dupain was receptive and admiring, but he was less interested in the psychological and unconscious aspects of Man Ray's brand of Surrealism and more inclined towards the way he had been testing photography's limits: 'Man Ray appealed to me because he was radical', he explained. 'He didn't give a stuff for his contemporaries or his peers … he went ahead and did what he had to do'.[iii] Dupain was of an equivalent mindset.

Dupain's resultant shift from Pictorialism to modernism was fairly swift. Formal values of light, pattern, shape and relationship became more important to his work, as did cropping, framing and subject matter. The misty, languid landscapes of his early practice were replaced by consciously modern pictures composed in the studio, and during the development process.

There were few truly modern photographers in Sydney or indeed in Australia in this period, so while he had one eye on overseas advancements Dupain independently developed a signature style in his art practice, and in his portraits and advertising work that appeared with increasing regularity in the luxury lifestyle magazine, *The Home*, in particular. As they had for Man Ray, Dupain's commercial

assignments necessarily included portraits, and while he disliked taking photographs for the social pages of magazines he also published more experimental forays in the genre.

For both Man Ray and Max Dupain the Second World War interrupted their artistic trajectories. Man Ray made a hasty retreat to the United States in 1940 when the Nazis occupied Paris where, having decided to devote himself to 'art' he turned down numerous offers of photography work. He returned a decade later, having felt that America was not cosmopolitan enough or sufficiently receptive to his kind of avant-gardism, and continued exploring his ideas across a range of media, revisiting and reinterpreting many of his earlier iconic works.

Meanwhile Dupain was called into the war effort to work as a camoufleur in Darwin and New Guinea. For him the disruption proved a point of no return, and his career thereafter took a turn towards documentary and more objective photography, his surrealist explorations largely consigned to the past.

Despite rarely leaving Australian shores—he thought all he needed and more was on his doorstep—Dupain was not a provincial artist. While he made certain images that may be iconically 'Australian' because of the subject matter and his instinct for tapping into a shared national consciousness, his work was not distinct from Man Ray's work in Paris, but engaged and in dialogue with it, as part of the expanded field of modernism and its borderless world of ideas.

Pre-Visit and Exhibition Discussion Questions

1. The camera as 'the eye that sees'
Sometimes cameras can see things that our eyes miss, showing us the world in new ways. Man Ray and Max Dupain believed that cameras could see things differently to how our eyes see them— they could spot special details and show us deeper truth about ordinary objects.

- **When you look at these photographs, what do you think the camera noticed that you might have missed?**

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2. Creative isolation vs. global connection
Man Ray was part of organised art movements in Paris with other revolutionary artists, while Dupain worked largely alone in 1930s Australia, learning about international developments through magazines like *Photographie* and *Cahiers d'art.*

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of developing ideas in isolation while studying others' work?**

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- **How do you stay connected to creative communities today?**

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3. Essential elements only

Look at Man Ray and Max Dupain's compositions in the exhibition. Consider how they decided what to include, and what to leave out.

- **What could make a simple image more powerful than a complex one?**

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- **How could you apply this approach to your own creative work?**

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4. Provincial vs. universal

Despite rarely leaving Australian shores, Dupain wasn't considered a provincial artist because his work engaged and in dialogue with international modernism.

- **What makes art transcend its geographic origins to connect with people everywhere?**

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5. Artistic influence:

Man Ray's 1934 book of photographs inspired Dupain to experiment with his own photography. Think about an artist, musician, or creator who has influenced your own creative work or interests.

- **How can studying other artists' techniques help develop your own artistic voice while still creating something original?**

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Rayographs

Man Ray's imaginative spirit underpinned the rapid developments in his artistic practice during the 1920s. In December 1921 he began making photograms, also known as 'camera-less' photographs, which involves placing objects on top of photosensitive paper and then exposing the paper to light very briefly in the darkroom. The white and paler areas of the print are where the objects rest, and the darkest are the areas of space around them, creating an inverse image.

This mode of working allowed the artist to harness chance and blur the boundary between abstraction and realism. While it was not a new technique, Man Ray comprehensively explored its rich creative potential, experimenting with transparent materials that allowed for shadows and different shades of grey and making abstract images suggestive of alternative realities. He was so enamoured with its possibilities that he literally made it his own, coining the term 'rayograph' to describe the resulting prints. The rayograph's economy of means, unpredictability and transformative power advanced the Dadaist instinct for spontaneity and disruption and the desire to make art from the everyday, while at the same time anticipating Surrealism's automatism and dreamlike visions.

There were plenty of examples of photograms by artists from around the world when Max Dupain began trialling the technique, but he recognised Man Ray's superior proficiency with it, describing him as 'a pioneer of the twentieth century who has crystallised a new experience in light and chemistry'. Dupain's own undertakings honoured Man Ray's—he even titled several of his prints 'rayographs'—but he also investigated extensions of the method by bringing figurative imagery and organic elements like water into the photogram's abstract field, and further exploring ambiguous scale and depth.

Rayographs
By Judy Annear

In 1922 Man Ray published a portfolio of twelve rayographs—*Champs Délicieux*. The camera-less photographs he was making were distinctly different from those made by his antecedents or subsequently by others.

Champs Délicieux epitomised Man Ray's dada and proto–surrealist spirit through the rayographs' spontaneity, poetry and depthlessness.

Camera-less photography was nothing new but the post First World War confluence of European artists wishing to move away from the 'sticky medium of paint' with its attendant histories and hierarchies enabled numerous breakthroughs in thinking around contemporary art in all its forms. The economy of means and the unpredictability of the outcome in making a rayograph was considered radical. Yet this was not a purely aesthetic discussion and included broader socio–political issues emerging from the devastation of war.

Man Ray's lifelong friendship with Marcel Duchamp, which began in New York in 1915, encouraged his playful and anarchistic tendencies. The objects he started making then often had mundane origins but his photographic documentation of them already tended to the poetic. The spiral form and its potential for movement recurs throughout *Champs Délicieux* with Man Ray's incorporation of objects such as a gyroscope, a spring, paper circles and French curves. There are ovals, triangular shapes, a metal strainer and a grater, tongs, a key, a gun.

MAN RAY *Champs delicieux* no 5. 1922

Man Ray also used glass objects, the translucency of which fleetingly cast shadows, creating further depth. He played with the density of other materials such as fabrics or the human form and how light interacted with them. The wash of shadowy objects floating in velvety darkness, half visible in their mundane aspects, revealed themselves as having entirely unforeseen imaginative lives. This excited all who saw these unique prints. Their direct kinship to the automatic writing so beloved of dadaists and surrealists was confirmed.

Twelve years after *Champs Délicieux*, in 1934, Man Ray published *Photographs by Man Ray 1920–1934* with American collector James Thrall Soby. Of the 104 monochrome images, twenty were rayographs. Max Dupain found the exposure to Man Ray's work liberating.

Access to such work and ideas in Australia was limited and often marginalised. Or the look of the work was picked up as a useful style in advertising to signal the latest desirable object. Dupain had in his possession copies of French and German publications on modern photography from the late 1920s. Diverse examples of modern experiments in photography were reproduced including those by Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy and so on, but this new monograph was a revelation. Dupain absorbed and experimented. Over the next five years he produced some of his most beautiful photographs including many rayographs, for example, the remarkable *Rayograph with Water*, c.1936.

MAX DUPAIN *Rayograph with Water* c.1936

It is clear from looking at this image that Dupain had used the simplest of means to produce a tantalising and abstract object. The water dropped onto the photosensitive paper and illuminated by raking light creates the illusion of looking down on material of a greater density. Because there is no reference to scale, this material might be any liquid (we only know it is water because Dupain titled it so). It could equally be an island or an iceberg, or a model, surrounded by a flotilla of small outcrops. Stratified by light, the water becomes a semi-translucent geological artefact.

Pre-Visit and exhibition discussion questions

1. Poetry from Ordinary Objects

Man Ray used everyday items like keys, graters, springs, and gyroscopes to create his rayographs.

- **How can mundane objects from your daily life (for example phone chargers, keys, plastic drink bottle) become 'poetic' when seen differently?**

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2. The Power of Not Knowing

Man Ray's rayographs often make viewers feel unsure about what they're actually looking at.

- **When you look at Dupain's *Rayograph with Water*, what do you see beyond just water?**

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- **Why might mystery be more powerful than clarity in Dupain's *Rayograph with Water*?**

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- **When you look at the rayographs in the exhibition, how does not knowing the actual size of the objects in them change what you imagine you're seeing?**

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3. Direct Creative Action

Instead of using cameras, Man Ray placed objects directly on light-sensitive paper and 'painted with light'. This was immediate, unpredictable, and couldn't be completely controlled.

- **What would you gain or lose by giving up control in the art making process?**

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Surrealism

Officially launched in 1924 with the publication of André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, the Surrealist movement had a lasting effect on the development and diaspora of modernism; an effect that still has reverberations in art and culture today.

When Man Ray arrived in Paris in the summer of 1921, he had already established his Dadaist and proto-surrealist credentials and was embraced by 'the young revolutionary crowd'. His idiosyncratic use of the photographic medium made visible Breton's concept of automatism and direct access to the unconscious, while his anti-establishment stance aligned with Surrealism's disregard for rationalism and convention and enthusiasm for chance and imaginative wonder.

By the time of the historic first Surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in 1925, Man Ray was a leading figure whose unconventional pictures and attendant boundary-breaking spirit inspired others in Paris and beyond. In Man Ray's hands the possibilities of photography lay less in its function as a witness to reality, pure and factual, than in its capacity as a conceptual tool, where the combination of the mind and the subject, the artist's intent and the image brought about an outcome greater than the sum of the parts.

Surrealism presented Max Dupain with an 'exciting array of options' for advancing his photographic practice, both technical and attitudinal. He experimented widely with its favoured techniques, but also with imagery that transcended the rational and everyday. Yet he was less interested in the psychological and unconscious aspects of Surrealism than in Man Ray's testing of photography's limits. 'Man Ray appealed to me because he was radical. He didn't give a stuff for his contemporaries or his peers … he went ahead and did what he had to do'. Dupain was of an equivalent mindset. 'Let's kick convention right up the arse', he declared, 'and do a new thing'.

Surrealisms
By Helen Ennis

When Man Ray arrived in Paris in 1921 his impressive dadaist credentials ensured an enthusiastic welcome from what he called 'the young revolutionary crowd'.[iv] He was friends with the artists Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp and had already produced a small number of startlingly original, disorienting photographs that exemplified a dadaist approach—photographs, such as *Dust Breeding*, 1920, that rejected conventional subject matter and the use of a stable vantage point.

MAN RAY *Dust Breeding* 1920

During the 1920s and 1930s Man Ray cemented his place as both a commercial photographer, specialising in portraiture, and as an artist using photography in extraordinarily inventive ways. His achievements within dadaist and surrealist contexts were summed up in the book *Photographs by Man Ray 1920–1934*, published by Cahiers d'art in Paris and in New York by James Thrall Soby and Random House. This book thrilled Max Dupain when he was invited to review it in 1935 and helped usher in a phase of radical surrealist-style experimentation in his photography. However, while the surrealisms of Man Ray in France and Dupain in Australia have much in common, as this exhibition reveals, they also differ in several key respects.

Man Ray wasn't one of Surrealism's theoreticians or philosophers (he initially had little knowledge of the French language), but he embraced its revolutionary, liberationist aims.

His approach to photography (and other media) was therefore iconoclastic, disinhibited; rationalism was useless, realism irrelevant. He embraced chance, accident and technical error (such as soft focus), and banished preciousness (he wasn't bound to the 'rules' of the fine print tradition that required the art photographer to make their own prints). The goal was freedom which, as he declared in his text in Soby's book, meant violating the medium and deforming the subject to create new forms.

He used a dazzling range of techniques including multiple exposures, camera-less images, which he called ‘rayographs’ (also known as schadographs and photograms), and solarisations, which result from exposing a negative or a print to intense light during the development process. But his straight photographs subverted conventions, too. He stripped away context and presented his subjects either in isolation or in incongruous juxtapositions with other objects, and chose unfamiliar, disorienting angles that included extreme close-up. In Man Ray’s hands, solarisation was especially well suited to new representations of the human form, the dark, seemingly drawn outlines both defining faces and bodies and rendering them strange.

In 1935 the publisher, arts patron and artist, Sydney Ure Smith, invited Max Dupain to review Soby’s book *Photographs by Man Ray 1920–1934*, for *The Home*.[v] It was the perfect commission for the twenty-four-year-old Dupain who had opened his studio in Sydney the previous year and was already being acclaimed for his sharp focus, graphically commanding images of everyday subject matter. Dupain had seen a small number of Man Ray’s work in the European magazines he avidly consumed, but this was his first exposure to a large and diverse selection of his imagery.

In his review Dupain confidently declared Man Ray’s greatness, a pioneering photographer of the twentieth century, and singled out his portraiture for its simplicity and success in extracting the ‘essence’ of his sitters.

Curiously, but not surprisingly, Dupain’s review did not mention Dada or Surrealism or refer to the leading exponents whose texts were published in Soby’s book. At the time in Australia knowledge of either art movement was extremely limited. There were no dada antecedents that had formed in response to the senseless, catastrophic consequences of the First World War, no groups of like-minded artists working in photography, including in Dupain’s own circle, and no literary manifestations of Surrealism or collaborations between writers and artists. In Dupain’s world, therefore, Surrealism was comprehensible in terms of modernism not as its own entity. He was not interested in Freud and psychoanalysis, or the unconscious mind and dreams as wellsprings for art and responded to Man Ray’s Surrealism in ways that were untheorised, visual, practical, and also attitudinal.

A month after Dupain’s book review was published Ure Smith featured several of Dupain’s surrealist-inspired photographs in *Art in Australia*, representing a dramatic departure from the tame old-fashioned photographs that were the usual fare.

Man Ray’s exciting array of options helped Dupain extend his modernist practice. Between 1935 and 1939 Dupain extensively experimented with photomontages, multiple exposures, photograms and solarisations. Photomontage was beloved by avant-garde artists for its artistic freedom: no natural or fixed reality is assumed because images can be constructed from negatives that don’t have any intrinsic or logical relationship to each other. Taking his inspiration from Man Ray, Dupain also experimented with solarised flower studies, transforming natural forms, such as lilies, into strange spectral-like creations floating in an indeterminate space

MAX DUPAIN *Solarised Lily* c.1935

Pre-Visit and Exhibition Discussion Questions

1. Embracing accidents and technical errors

Man Ray loved it when things went 'wrong' with his photographs—when they were blurry, or when light got in accidentally, or when two pictures got mixed up together. Instead of throwing these 'mistakes' away, he decided they were the most interesting parts of his work.

- **When you look at works like his multiple exposures and solarisations, how do these 'errors' become more interesting than technically perfect images?**

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2. Constructing new realities

Through photomontage artists could create images from negatives that don't have any intrinsic or logical relationship to each other, freeing them from 'natural or fixed reality'.

- **Looking at the photomontage works in the exhibition, how do these constructed realities challenge your assumptions about truth in photography?**

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3. The power of not understanding everything

Max Dupain encountered Surrealism through Many Ray's work without knowing the theories behind it—he had no knowledge for example of Freud, psychoanalysis, or the art movement's manifestos.

- **How might not knowing a particular way to interpret art actually free you to see it differently?**

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4. Australia's creative isolation and innovation

In 1930s Australia, there were 'no groups of like-minded artists working in photography' and 'no literary manifestations of Surrealism.' Max Dupain had to interpret Man Ray's revolutionary work through his own modernist lens.

- **How might creative isolation actually be an advantage?**

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Portraits

The nineteenth-century bias that deemed photographic portraiture as documentary and not artistic was resolutely usurped with the advent of modernism. Man Ray helped to redefine the genre, preferring to photograph people he knew and harnessing both chance and experience. He asked his sitters to 'move all you like, your eyes, your head; it is to be a pose, but it is to have in it all the qualities of a snapshot'.

Man Ray's portrayals of immediate friends and contemporaries such as Marcel Duchamp, Jean Cocteau and André Breton dance between exposure and concealment, their likenesses variously spontaneous and the result of knowingness and understanding. Other images are strikingly experimental. His photographs of Marchesa Luisa Casati, for example, challenge convention—her striking visage is bestowed with obscuring, speculative potential via Man Ray's use of blur and vibration.

Max Dupain praised Man Ray's ability to be formally exacting yet emotionally expansive in his portraits—conflating physiognomy and personality, aesthetics and technique. Whereas in Man Ray's hands the still life and rayograph may have brought to life the inanimate, his portraits made sculptures of real people suspended in a moment in time. The solarised images of Meret Oppenheim and the negative image of Gertrude Stein respectively elaborate his interest in exploring the plasticity of the figure, and what lies beneath surface appearances.

Dupain was also drawn to notions of the known and the unseen, and the way that portraiture could be a vehicle for both exposure and discretion. His portrayal of the art critic Leon Gellert with a mask invites speculation on the opportunistic nature of the photographic portrait and the studied contemplation of its sculptural equivalent, while his image of the artist Hera Roberts reflected in a mirror unlocks a sense of tension between realism and illusion, together with the performative aspects of the genre.

Beyond Likeness: The Portrait According to Man Ray

By Tamara Abramovitch

A hundred years on, and despite the critical mass of essays, catalogues, and academic studies, Man Ray's portraits continue to radiate a timeless enigma. They speak through faces, bodies, and gazes that remain somehow beyond full grasp. This elusive quality becomes all the more striking when we consider the breadth of what a 'portrait' meant in his work: close-ups and distant shots, straightforward compositions and expressive distortions, celebrities and complete unknowns.

In the nineteenth century, it was above all portrait photography that cemented the belief that photography was merely a technical tool of reproduction, unworthy of artistic status. By rejecting photography's documentary imperative, Man Ray did more than shift the medium's aesthetic—he redefined portraiture itself. The commercial sphere—particularly the world of magazines—played a crucial role in encouraging and legitimising this shift.

Fashion magazines of the time, with their deep investment in femininity, surface aesthetics, and the construction of 'newness', offered fertile ground for Man Ray's exploration of identity and transformation.

The camera, the darkroom, and the printed page became a poetic laboratory, allowing Man Ray to develop a new visual language that helped shape the grammar of editorial photography and, more broadly, the visual codes of modern portraiture that ceased to be about the individual sitter.

With little patience for commissioned studio portraits, Man Ray preferred to photograph people he knew—particularly women—encouraging them to move, to shift, to inhabit the space freely. He sought a natural rhythm, a spontaneous gesture. The power of these portraits lies not only in Man Ray's precision in capturing such moments, but in their suspended temporality.

Max Dupain, both a photographer and a thinker, was committed to understanding the cultural and visual terms of his time. Man Ray was not his only influence, but clearly opened a door: to new techniques, new ways of seeing, and a renewed treatment of the human figure. Beyond his experiments with solarisation and inversion, Dupain was also drawn to the psychological depth and visual intensity of Man Ray's work.

More than homage, Dupain's images reflect a desire to match Man Ray's intensity—to move beyond realism into a portraiture rooted in sensation, and the layered construction of self.

Seen side by side, across continents, the portraits of Man Ray in Europe and Dupain in Australia reflect a shared ambition to elevate portraiture as a dominant modern form; anticipating a visual future we are only now beginning to fully appreciate.

MAN RAY *Joan Miro* 1928 MAX DUPAIN *Arnold Haskell* 1937

These portraits not only trace the contours of individual lives, but capture the very spirit of their time, reflecting the faces of modernity: the artists, writers, visionaries and muses who helped shape twentieth-century culture. Yet, the symbolic treatment of these figures in both artists' work probes questions that remain vital: What does it mean to be seen? To be known? To be human in the modern age? These portraits do not merely record modern subjects—they confront us with the complexity of modern subjecthood itself.

Pre-visit and exhibition discussion questions

1. Photography as art, not just documentation

In the 19th century, portrait photography was dismissed as 'merely a technical tool of reproduction, unworthy of artistic status.' Man Ray rejected photography's documentary imperative and redefined portraiture.

- **When you look at these portraits in the exhibition, how do they go beyond simply recording what someone looks like?**

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2. Identity and transformation over likeness

These portraits shifted from being ‘about the individual sitter’ to exploring ‘identity and transformation.’ Fashion magazines became Man Ray's ‘poetic laboratory’ for developing this new visual language.

- **How do these experimental portraits reveal different aspects of identity that a traditional studio portrait might miss?**

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- **What layers of yourself would you want a portrait to capture beyond your physical appearance?**

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3. Movement and spontaneity in portraiture
Man Ray preferred photographing people he knew, encouraging them to ‘move, to shift, to inhabit the space freely.’

- **How does capturing natural movement change the feeling of a portrait compared to traditional posed photographs?**

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4. Intimate distance:
Notice how both Man Ray and Max Dupain make you feel as if you are standing right there with their subjects, seeing private moments.

- **How do these photographs show someone's inner world rather than their public face? Which images make you feel like you're discovering something usually hidden—-emotions, thoughts, dreams?**

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Collaborators

No discussion of the achievements of Man Ray or Max Dupain in their nascent careers would be complete without reference to the important role played by their collaborators in the studio. Of particular significance for Man Ray was the American photographer Lee Miller, who sought an introduction to him when she arrived in Paris in 1929 and quickly became his apprentice, then studio associate and lover.

Some of Man Ray's most captivating images of this time were of Miller as his model, before the intensity of their relationship saw a dramatic break up in 1932. Man Ray was bereft after Miller's departure, and while it is true that he rarely produced a print without cropping the original composition, he reserved his most brutal cuts for his pictures of her body and face. The close ups and granular images of her eyes, lips, head and neck suggest that there was more than modernist experimentation in play.

Max Dupain and Olive Cotton's romantic relationship started in 1928 while the pair were in senior school; photography was their common interest, and this was strengthened when they both became members of the Photographic Society of New South Wales. After completing a university arts degree, Cotton joined Dupain in his Bond Street studio in Sydney as his assistant in 1934. The period of their professional partnership in the 1930s saw them each create some of their most brave, iconic and celebrated works and advance the cause of modernist photography in Australia.

The Collaborators: Lee Miller and Man Ray
By Anthony Penrose

In the past it was easy to describe Lee Miller as the muse of Man Ray, the beautiful woman who arrived in his life in the summer of 1929, posed for some of his most significant images, facilitated the discovery of the technique he named *solarisation*, became the obsession of his love life, and left him bereft when she returned to her native America in 1932. That facile description ignores a relationship that was an incredibly productive and innovative collaboration of two artists.

We now know Lee was no ingénue when she arrived in Paris. She had started to become familiar with cameras and the process of developing and printing film at the age of about eight or ten years old. Her father Theodore was an enthusiastic amateur photographer with his own darkroom tucked under the stairs of the family home in Poughkeepsie, New York. Later she had her own camera and began taking 'snaps' around the locality. Her transition to the front of the camera began when she modelled for her father, but the breakthrough to professional modelling came when she was discovered by *Vogue* magazine proprietor Conde Nast.

Lee would have learned photographic techniques from every modelling session. Photographer Edward Steichen was very supportive of this inquisitive young woman and when she announced she wanted to go to Paris and become a photographer herself, he gave her an introduction to Man Ray. She had arrived 'readymade' as his assistant with an understanding of all aspects of photography including studio lighting. As a model she knew exactly what the American magazines wanted and very quickly she helped Man Ray raise the standard of his fashion work and increase his earnings.

Apart from Lee's modelling, the commercial work of the studio was something Man Ray quickly handed over to Lee as he wanted more time to devote to his painting. She photographed fashion and pack shots which were frequently published under his name, but she refused to be concerned about attribution.

Normally the mis-attribution of Lee's work to Man Ray did not matter to her as she valued their collaboration so highly, but there was one occasion when it did. Lee had rescued Man Ray's discarded negative of her neck from the rubbish bin, and by applying careful cropping and tonality she created a mysteriously beautiful print. It immediately incurred Man Ray's admiration. But then a bitter fight over attribution started. Was it Man Ray's photograph because he took the original negative, or Lee's because she made the print from the discarded work?

LEE MILLER *Hand in Silhouette* 1931

Lee's work from this period shows her photographic creation of the image trouvé—her counterpoint to the object trouvé, the found object beloved of the surrealists in general and Man Ray in particular for its ability to show how the marvellous can be discovered in the ordinary. In Hand in Silhouette, 1931, the hand stretches towards the umbrella fringe and the viewer is invited to choose the many possibilities for the interpretation of this image. That is the essence of these works by Lee and by Man Ray. Their function is to provoke questions.

Lee arrived in Paris as a natural surrealist, finding the movement fitted her already held beliefs and aspirations. Her fashion work paid the bills but her newly acquire Rolleiflex camera gave her the scope to harvest dreamlike images from the streets.

Pre-visit and exhibition discussion questions

1. Beyond the beauty myth

Until the 1990s Lee Miller was often described as a beautiful woman who posed for Man Ray, rather than his collaborator and photographer in her own right.

- **When you look at Miller's work in the exhibition, how does seeing her as an artist rather than just a model change your understanding?**

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2. Technical knowledge as creative power

Miller arrived in Paris ‘readymade’ as Man Ray's assistant because she understood all aspects of photography including studio lighting from years of experience in her father's darkroom and professional modelling sessions. Her technical expertise gave her creative power in their partnership.

- **What advantages might come from understanding both sides of the camera - being photographed and taking photographs?**

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3. The attribution battle

When Miller rescued Man Ray's discarded negative of her neck and transformed it into a mysteriously beautiful print, a bitter fight over attribution erupted.

- **Who do you think owned the disputed artwork—the person who took the original photo or the person who created the final artistic vision?**

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Collaborators: Olive Cotton and Max Dupain
By Susan van Wyk

Childhood friendship, young love, romantic partnership, a formative first marriage, and a shared passion for photography. The passage from adolescence to adulthood, precocious enthusiast to mature artist, was a journey shared by Olive Cotton and Max Dupain informing not only their personal lives but also the foundational years of creative practice in photography for both.

Dupain went on to become one of the most well-known photographers in Australia. In contrast, Cotton's work was unrecognised for decades, an experience that is neither unique nor without precedent in the twentieth century as fellow women photographers, notably including Lee Miller, were often overshadowed by their more famous male partners.

Cotton and Dupain met through family connections in 1924 aged thirteen. The friendship that blossomed between the young Cotton and Dupain was underpinned by their mutual enjoyment of an active outdoor life and a love of music, literature, and photography. By their late teens friendship had shifted to romantic love and this was a pivotal aspect of their lives until the end of their marriage in 1941. Throughout their relationship photography was a constant. Dupain received his first camera when he was eleven and was introduced to photography by his uncle. Cotton's introduction to photography also came at age eleven, thanks to an aunt gifting her a second-hand camera. For both Cotton and Dupain, their first cameras were the ubiquitous Box Brownie—cheap, mass produced, and easy to use. They expanded their skills and visual literacy through participating in camera clubs and photographic societies, and showed their photographs in the salons and exhibitions popular at the time.

Cotton was quietly determined; she lived a life beyond the confines and expectations that limited many women's opportunities in the 1930s. After graduating from Sydney University in1934, it was anticipated that she would go on to a career in teaching. In rejecting this conventional path and electing to pursue a life in photography she revealed the courage of her convictions and her tenacity. The pursuit of a career in photography was far more conventional for a young man and there was nothing particularly groundbreaking about Dupain undertaking an apprenticeship in the studio of Cecil Bostock in the years 1929 to 1932.

When Max Dupain Studio opened in 1934, it had the backing of his family and the practical support of Cotton. In Dupain's studio, Cotton attended to the running of the business and client and model liaison in the studio. This enabled Dupain to focus on the arguably more interesting and certainly more creative work of being the photographer and to avoid the conflict he had recognised in Bostock.

The early years in the studio were a place of hard work, companionship, and friendship. Discussions and debates about the arts, philosophy and religion were part of studio life and there is no suggestion that Cotton was not as active a participant as Dupain. Given the core business of the place, it can be assumed that discussions about photography were also a constant in the discourse.

Travel opportunities and firsthand access to international avant-garde art and artists was limited in 1930s Australia. Consequently, knowledge of European and American exhibitions came largely from printed sources. Magazines showing global photography, as well as books on contemporary art and photography, made their way to Australia and these publications were avidly read and collected by Dupain introducing him, Cotton, and other colleagues and fellow artists to international contemporary practice.

In 1935 publisher Sydney Ure Smith commissioned Dupain to review the now influential artist book *Man Ray Photographs 1920–1934*. The significance of this for Dupain, and how Man Ray and Surrealism impacted his work, underpins the exhibition accompanied by this publication. But what of Man Ray's impact on Cotton? Some photographs she made around 1935 would suggest that she may well have been influenced by seeing Man Ray's images in print. The selection of images that Man Ray included in this influential publication showed other experimental techniques, such as solarisation and photomontage. Dupain is recognised for his use of photomontage in his creative and commercial practices in the late 1930s, however, there are fewer extant examples of photomontages by Cotton.

Her *Untitled (Montage with curves),* c.1940, is one of several examples showing how she investigated the pictorial possibilities of the technique. In this work Cotton's overlaying of images and objects in the darkroom resulted in an abstract, almost indecipherable mosaic comprising form, light and shadow.

OLIVE COTTON *No title (Montage with curves)* c.1940

The 1930s continued to be a creative and productive time for Cotton and Dupain. In 1939 they married, however, their marriage was short-lived, ending in1941. Cotton subsequently took up a teaching position, a role she had initially rejected when she finished university. Dupain continued to operate the studio and when he joined the camouflage unit of the RAAF in 1942, rather than close his studio, he enlisted Cotton to run the business in his absence.

When Dupain returned to the studio in 1945 the trajectories of their respective careers and lives diverged. Dupain went on to establish himself as a preeminent figure in Australian photography, while Cotton ceased to show her work publicly until it was 'rediscovered' in the 1980s.[vi]

Subsequently, Olive Cotton and Max Dupain have both been recognised as renowned practitioners in Australian photography in the twentieth century, their work from the 1930s capturing the zeitgeist of the times.

Pre-visit and exhibition discussion questions

1. Breaking the rules in the 1930s

Cotton rejected the expected career path of teaching to pursue photography instead. For women in the 1930s, this took real courage since photography careers were considered normal for men but revolutionary for women.

- **What career paths today might still require extra courage for certain groups of people?**

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2. The problem of 'rediscovering' women artists

After their divorce in 1941, Cotton stopped showing her work publicly while Dupain became a celebrated figure. Her photographs weren't 'rediscovered' until the 1980s—40 years later.

- **What can we do to make sure women artists today don't disappear from art history?**

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[i] Gael Newton, *Max Dupain*, David Ell Press, Sydney, 1980, p. 22.
[ii] G.H. Saxon Mills, 'Modern photography: Its development, scope and possibilities', *Modern Photography*, The Studio, London and William Edge Rudge, New York, 1931, pp. 8–9. Dupain's marked up copy of the journal is in the Clare Brown papers, MS 93, National Gallery of Australia Library and Archives.
[iii] Max Dupain, interviewed by Helen Ennis, p. 16.
[iv] Jean-Hubert Martin, 'Interview with Man Ray', *Man Ray Photographs*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1982, p. 35.
[v] Max Dupain, 'Man Ray: His place in modern photography', *The Home*, 1 October 1935, pp. 38–39, 84.
[vi] Olive Cotton's career and photographs were included in the groundbreaking research on Australian women photographers undertaken by Barbara Hall and Jenny Mather in the 1980s.