{ ACT IV • SCENE TWO }

Hybrids and Automatons

Man Ray enjoyed associating disparate entities, creating playful visual links and amalgamations. Using tactics such as extreme fragmentation, superimposition of external details, and even the creation of human-object hybrids, Man Ray destabilizes the role of the human figure to the point of staging surrogates as stand-ins for a human presence.

A comparison of Man Ray's photograph of the bulbous mathematical model [fig. 161] with his earlier *Pêche* (Peach), 1931 [fig. 162], and *La Prière* (Prayer), 1930 [fig. 163],

illustrates the artist's fascination with the metamorphosis and eroticization of form. Playing on the ambiguity of the body's position, *La Prière* suggests the libertine sexuality of political philosopher Marquis de Sade as well as the erotic yet depersonalized relationship that bonds the photographer and his model.[1] In *Anatomies,* 1929–30 [fig. 164], one of Man Ray's spectacular studies of the photographer Lee Miller, his lover, model, and assistant, the artist attenuates her neck to maximum plasticity, transforming the female fetish into a phallic emblem.

Going beyond the possibilities of posing and cropping his subjects, Man Ray actively manipulates certain images, drawing on the surface of the photographic print

[fig. 161] ***Mathematical Object,* 1934–35. Gelatin silver print** [fig. 162] ***Pêche* (Peach), 1931. Gelatin silver print**

1 By the early thirties, admiration for de Sade was widespread in Surrealist circles. Man Ray was introduced to Sade's work by his neighbor, writer Maurice Heine, who brought the original 1785 manuscript of *120 Days of Sodom* to Man Ray's studio to be photographed.

[fig. 163] ***La Prière* (Prayer), 1930 (printed 1960). Gelatin silver print**
[fig. 164] ***Anatomies,* 1929–30. Gelatin silver print**

and thereby objectifying his human subject. Man Ray was inspired by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's Neoclassical *La Grande baigneuse* (The Valpinçon Bather), 1808, and *Le Bain turc* (The Turkish Bath), 1862, to create his iconic *Le Violon d'Ingres,* 1924 [fig. 166]. He inked or rayographed f-holes onto Kiki's back and hid her arms, highlighting the similarity of the model's body to a musical instrument. Man Ray merges Ingres's turbaned woman and his mandolin in an action that recalls Duchamp's penciling of a moustache and beard on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* to create his iconoclastic *L.H.O.O.Q.* of 1919. The work's title, alluding to the French idiom for hobby, "Violon d'Ingres," might refer to Man Ray's practice of toying with Kiki and her image. Man Ray's work also evokes violin-shaped figurines, mother goddesses, or 5,300-year-old Cycladic fertility deities.

Another work involving the marking of a photograph is the anticlerical *Monument à D.A.F. de Sade* (Monument to D.A.F. de Sade), 1933 [fig. 167], in which Man Ray inscribed an inverted cross—in his words "the cross of the Black Mass"[2]—on the close-up image of a woman's buttocks. Man Ray juxtaposed "the ideal of geometry, represented by crosses, one hard-edged and the other, collapsed and deformed, composed of the creases of flesh within it."[3] The unblemished surface of the buttocks and thighs creates the illusion of a plaster cast, reminiscent of Man Ray's use of a relief of the classical Three Graces [fig. 149]. By using a clearly artificial process to superimpose the cross onto a human form, Man Ray exerts his control over the figure in the image and thus objectifies it.

Man Ray's tendency to hybridize body and object is particularly evident in his *Indestructible Object* [fig. 165], a photograph of an eye affixed to a metronome pendulum—an emblem of the body controlled by a mechanical object. Also known under the title *Object to be Destroyed,* Man Ray first made the work in 1923 and later recreated it for a 1933 exhibition, this time using a photograph of the eye of Lee Miller. At the same time, he made an ink drawing of the object titled *Object of Destruction,* with the instruction "with a hammer well aimed, try to destroy the whole at a single blow."[4] Thus both object and bitter words are charged with the emotional weight of the recent end of Miller and Man Ray's relationship. Man Ray's invitation to destroy the work was finally carried out by young anti-Dada demonstrators at a 1957 Dada exhibition in Paris. According to Janine Mileaf, this work should also be considered within the specific context of the ethnographer and practicing sadomasochist William B. Seabrook, with whom Man Ray collaborated around 1930. "Seabrook's interaction with Man Ray likely resulted in the conception of *Object to be Destroyed* as an intermittent surrogate for the desires of the lover and the loved, the aggressor and the aggressed."[5]

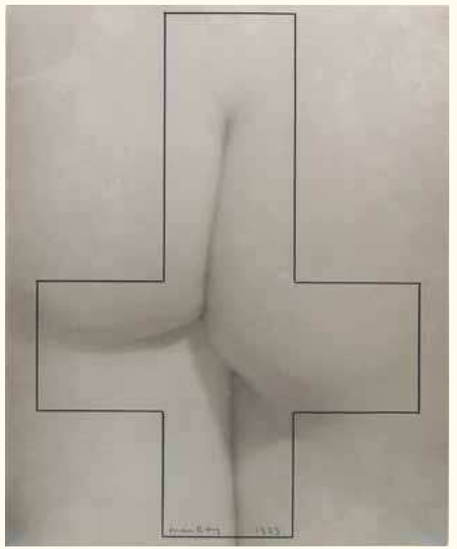
[fig. 165] ***Indestructible Object,* 1923/1963. Assemblage: metronome and photograph**

2 Bourgeade, *Bonsoir, Man Ray,* 84.

3 Klein, *Alias Man Ray,* 90.

4 The drawing was reproduced in Man Ray, "Object of Destruction," *This Quarter* 5, no. 1 (September 1932): 55.

5 Janine Mileaf, "Between You and Me: Man Ray's *Object to Be Destroyed*," *Art Journal* 63 (Spring 2004): 6.



[fig. 166] ***Le Violon d'Ingres,* 1924 (printed later). Gelatin silver print**
[fig. 167] ***Monument à D.A.F. de Sade* (Monument to D.A.F. de Sade), 1933. Gelatin silver print and ink**

[fig. 168] ***Femme assise*** **(Seated Woman), 1939. Oil on canvas**

Man Ray's propensity to dehumanize or objectify is evident in several paintings and objects in which articulated wood mannequins stand in for human beings. Man Ray's lifelong fascination with the automaton or robot oscillates between the symbolism of the dehumanization of man and the possibility that geometry could serve as the faithful representation of proportion and anatomy. These themes are expressed in the twenties through the media of photographs and film, while in the late thirties and forties paintings develop the subject of the "geometric human."

A year before his departure for the United States, Man Ray's imposing 1939 *Femme assise* (Seated Woman) [fig. 168] depicts a figure composed entirely of simple geometrical forms, of cones and cylinders. Man Ray recalled, "When I was a child I often dreamed of strange people that were geometric forms . . . in my dreams these personages were very colourful."[6] However, on the eve of World War II, Man Ray's Vitruvian Man was no ideal of human proportion but rather a collapsed, dehumanized automaton.

Mannequins, whether of the kind used by artists as drawing aids or those typically found on the shop floor, were a fertile ground for Surrealist creativity. Artists of the movement, including Man Ray, were invited to decorate shop mannequins for the 1938 *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* held at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The mannequins were installed in the exhibition in a line, as if on parade, and behind them a selection of Surrealist tracts and photographs, including, intriguingly, several of Man Ray's 1934 photographs of the mathematical models. Scientific objects and mannequins representing mathematical order are often perversely sexualized, as in the erotic encounters of Mr. and Mrs. Woodman in his 1947 photographs.

Man Ray creates human drama using artists' wooden mannequins in an untitled photograph from 1926 featuring a mannequin with a cone and sphere, geometric objects drawn from his own 1920 chess design [fig. 169; fig. 179, p. 193]. This scene reappears in the disconcerting 1950 oil painting *Aline et Valcour* [fig. 171], which takes its title from the eighteenth-century novel by the Marquis de Sade. Written while incarcerated in the Bastille in the seventeen-eighties, the novel is formulated around the opposition between Christian virtue and libertinage.[7] The painting illustrates the relativity of moral standards; the mannequin looks away indifferently from the gruesome sight of the blindfolded severed head of model Tanja Ramm, which has been placed under a glass dome.[8] By presenting the woman as an objet d'art and imbuing the inanimate mannequin with a human demeanor, Man Ray creates a cryptic dream image and reverses the traditional roles of humans and objects in the scene.

These same forms—the sphere, cone, and mannequin—also appear in a composition he realized between 1942 and 1946 in a photograph [fig. 170], watercolor, and oil painting [fig. 172]. With a checkered board as the stage and his

6 Schwarz, *Rigour of Imagination*, 72.

7 The novel contrasts a brutal African kingdom with a South Pacific island paradise known as Tamoé, led by the philosopher-king Zamé.

8 Schwarz, *Rigour of Imagination*, 121.

own chess forms adopted as literal and metaphorical players, Man Ray created theatrical tableaux in which the two wooden figures take on the guise of spirited chess pieces, personifying the king and queen jockeying for position and control. In the album accompanying the 1944 exhibition *Objects of My Affection,* he included a photograph of one of his chess sets with the annotation "chessmen begin with Cézanne and terminate in end-games."[9] While acknowledging his indebtedness to the French artist in the formal geometric qualities of his chess designs, he also makes reference to the final, high-risk stage of the game, equating the imminent success or failure of having few pieces left on the board with his own situation. For the artist, such artistic endgame strategies with a subtext of inevitable loss may well have reflected his own anxieties while exiled in Hollywood during the war.

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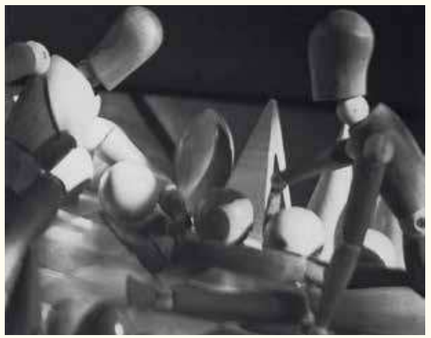
9 See fig. 134, p. 155.



[fig. 169] ***Untitled*** **(Mannequin with Cone and Sphere), 1926. Gelatin silver print**
[fig. 170] ***Endgame,*** **1942. Gelatin silver print**

[fig. 171] ***Aline et Valcour,*** **1950. Oil on canvas** [fig. 172] ***Endgame,*** **1946. Oil on canvas**