

PRESS RELEASE

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FROM MAN RAY TO MARIEN: An Idea of Surrealism

Tribute to Marcel Zerbib: "Objets de mon affection"

Man Ray : Surrealistic Objects

Marcel Mariën : Introduction to Belgian Surrealism

21 January - 20 March 2021

Avenue Louise 430 in Brussels

MARUANI MERCIER



MAN RAY | Juliet, Marcel Zerbib et Man Ray Aux Deux Magots, Paris, ca. 1952
silver salt, vintage print, N° Inv. MR-PH/VP-PMR-1952
20 x 25 cm | 8 x 10 in

INTRODUCTION

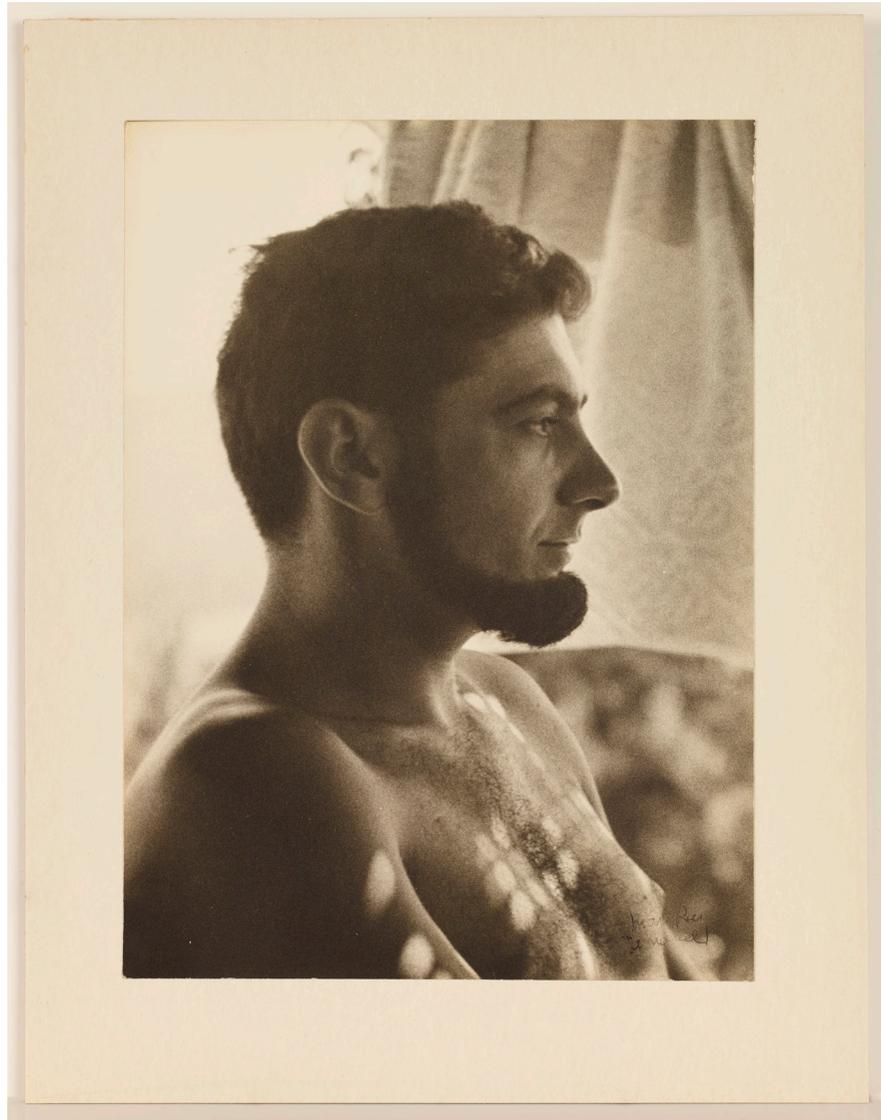
MARUANI MERCIER is honoured to present *FROM MAN RAY TO MARIEN: An Idea of Surrealism*.

This unprecedented exhibition celebrates the extraordinary collaboration and friendship between **Man Ray** and his gallerist **Marcel Zerbib**, which began when they met in 1951.

With the collaboration of Marcel Zerbib's estate, this exhibition pays tribute to the prolific gallery owner 40 years after his death. For the first time, the unique Surrealist sculptures by Man Ray featured in the historical catalogue *Objets de mon affection* from 1968 are exhibited together. Man Ray developed the concept for these objects back in the 1920s, and it was Marcel Zerbib's initiative to turn them into editions in the 1960s. As the title of the catalogue implies, these rare ready-mades and assemblages were particularly precious to the artist, and he counted them among his favourites.

The exhibition includes further museum quality artworks by Man Ray, including an iconic example of assemblage entitled *Obstruction*. It was created before the Arturo Schwarz edition, which is on permanent display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. First created in 1920, *Obstruction* is the first mobile included in art history, well before the works of Alexander Calder. Other remarkable works displayed at the gallery include *Abat-Jour* (1919/1964) and *Indestructible Object* (1923/1965) published by Edition MAT, a groundbreaking project by the artist Daniel Spoerri to produce works by avant-garde artists in series. At the time, Man Ray's humorous art was an entirely new concept for the art world, and thrived under the support of his patrons.

Man Ray was a significant influence for burgeoning Surrealists, including **Marcel Mariën**. Exhibited for the first time at MARUANI MERCIER, Mariën was the youngest of the Belgian Surrealists and played an important role as the author of one of the first works devoted to the movement, *L'activité surréaliste en Belgique* (1979). Mariën's *L'oeil d'Othello* (1971) in this exhibition demonstrates the affinity between the two artists, who both had a preference for using everyday objects and symbols in their work. This sculpture of an upright hand with its index finger outstretched and pointing upwards, rendered in a deep shiny black, echoes Man Ray's *Puériculture II* (*Rêve*, January 1920), an edition he produced with none other than Marcel Zerbib. *FROM MAN RAY TO MARIEN* emphasises the similarities and differences between these two pivotal artists and is a fitting testimonial to the avant-garde movement.



Man Ray
Portrait de Marcel Zerbib, ca. 1958
silver salt, vintage print, N° Inv. MR-PH/VP-1958
24,6 x 18,2 cm
Signed and dedicated at the bottom right "Man Ray à Marcel"

PART ONE

Tribute to Marcel Zerbib : "Objects de mon Affection"

PREFACE by MARION MEYER

President of Man Ray International Association
Certified Expert at the European Chamber of Expert-Advisors in Fine Art (CECOA)

'MAN RAY, masculine noun, synonymous with joy, to play, to enjoy.' Marcel Duchamp

It was with this definition that Marcel Duchamp described Man Ray. These synonyms also apply perfectly to Marcel Zerbib. Joy for his thirst for life; playing with language and words; enjoying every moment.

Demobilised in 1944 in Paris, Marcel Zerbib began by working as a broker for Parisian booksellers. Then with his friend and partner, the gallery owner and art dealer Heinz Berggruen, they published artists' books in close collaboration with Max Ernst, Hans Bellmer, Robert Matta, Dorothea Tanning, among others... Besides bibliophile books, he produced editions of bronze sculptures with Max Ernst, four sculptures and one bronze with Matta, as well as lithographs with Serge Poliakoff. In 1949 he founded the publishing house Les Editions premières and opened his first bookshop Les Pas Perdus at 2 bis, rue des Ciseaux in Saint-Germain des Près in Paris. Rapidly, he became one of the intellectual pillars of the post-war left bank. It was Max Ernst who introduced him to Man Ray as soon as the latter arrived in Paris in 1951. This was the beginning of a long friendship and a prosperous collaboration.

Humanity, the spirit of provocation and derision, and poetry brought these two men together. Another passion they had in common, was to meet around a game of chess. This shared passion gave birth to the publication of a mythical Chess Game. They inspired each other and elaborated editions of unusual objects that Man Ray named his Objets de mon affection. A book conceived in 1968 with and by Marcel Zerbib, brings together some of Man Ray's object-sculptures.

I often attended these meetings between Man and Marcel at the legendary "studio" on rue Férou, where they discussed and refined publishing and exhibition projects, simply spending pleasant moments with friends.

All that remains for me today is the memory and the nostalgia of those meetings.

PART TWO

Surrealist Objects

The exhibition includes further museum quality artworks by Man Ray, including an iconic example of assemblage entitled *Obstruction*. It was created before the Arturo Schwarz edition, which is on permanent display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. First created in 1920, *Obstruction* is the first mobile included in art history, well before the works of Alexander Calder.

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Man Ray

Obstruction, 1920-1964

65 wooden coat hangers with original suitcase

110 x 120 x 120 cm

43 4/16 x 47 3/16 x 47 3/16 in

HISTORY:

First original in 1920, lost

Second original, 1947, lost

Edition of 15 for the Stockholm Museum in 1961, without suitcase and lithography.

Man Ray created a unique piece in 1964, with 65 coats hangers, monogrammed and dated 1964.

Edition of 10 by Arturo Schwarz, in 1965, with suitcase and certificate of Man Ray, lithography notice.

Man Ray offered in 1975, to the city of Rome, un white coat hanger, signed and dedicated.



PART THREE

Marcel Mariën : Introduction to Belgian Surrealism

PREFACE by XAVIER CANONNE

Belgian art historian specializing in contemporary art
Director of the Museum of Photography in Charleroi (Belgium)
Member of the Expertise Committee of the Magritte Foundation

Today we can fully appreciate the work of Marcel Mariën and his contribution to surrealism. For too long wrongly regarded as a second-generation Surrealist - his first works dating from 1937 - he was nonetheless the youngest of the Surrealists in Belgium, establishing the connection between the Brussels group that appeared in 1924 and the continuation of a collective activity after the Second World War, with his magazine *Les lèvres nues* welcoming new names.

In fact, it was in 1937, that this self-taught seventeen years old man encountered René Magritte: the beginning of a long partnership with the painter whose work he had discovered two years earlier in a group exhibition. This period marks also the momentous meeting with Paul Nougé - the theorist and poet of the Brussels group - who in the same lineage as Magritte was to be his mentor, and whose work, which had remained confidential until then, Mariën was the first to reveal.

L'introuvable, a single-glass telescope, was his first object in a long series of assemblages. It was immediately included in the *Surrealist Objects and Poems* exhibition at the London Gallery in December 1937, while he set about writing his first text devoted to Magritte, *La charpente des mirages*, which appeared the following year in the *London Bulletin*. *La chaise de sable*, written in the summer of 1938 but not published until 1940, already sets out by example a series of objects to be made, such as a toothbrush with teeth substituted for bristles, a saw made of wood, a coffin mounted on a cradle, and a straitjacket for the Venus de Milo, foreshadowing the many diverse artworks that he would make through collage and assembly, forming a major axis in his work.

In turn poet, short story writer, philosopher, photographer, filmmaker, collagist and assemblagist, Mariën is also a publisher, offering Surrealism in Belgium to be both one of its main actors and its historian. Mariën is the author of one of the first works devoted to the movement, *L'activité surréaliste en Belgique* published in 1979, which remains an essential reference to this day.

Protean but never heterogeneous, Mariën's work reveals all its coherence, entirely founded on vocabulary, on words, which the artist questions through images and associated objects without hierarchy, confronting them in as many poetic shocks. "There is no object without an image, apart perhaps from the universe, of which one disputes whether it is one or the other, if not both" he wrote in 1990 in the introduction to his work *Le mur illustré*.

This examination of words, images, their limits and contradictions closely associates Mariën's work to those of Nougé and Magritte, which he extends in his own way by using everyday materials; borrowings from magazines or newspapers, recourse to household utensils, toys, antique plasterwork and articles for jokes and tricks. As soon as those objects reveal unexplored possibilities and unprecedented confrontations, Mariën takes advantage of what comes his way. Their choice is never dictated by any aesthetics a priori, but by the potential of the object and its meaning, Mariën going so far as to colour



it to neutralise the material and convert it into a visual icon. The choice of technique - photography, assemblage or collage - is likewise guided by the sole concern of the work's efficiency, its immediate effect on the spectator, a use of resources comparable to that which he uses in his aphorisms. In this respect, Mariën's photographs are fully representative of the conciseness of his subject matter: rejecting any fascination with technique, resorting to professional models, he imposes a photography on the fringes of the usual criteria of the discipline, even daring to use colour, long reserved for advertising and commercial photography. Even though they are not completely removed, other recurring themes in his work like eroticism or pornography, are here constrained here and diverted by the enigma of the work and its title, using the same for the pornographic images that he transforms from phylacteries, from reproductions of works of art, that he hollows out, no image ever being definitively sacred to Mariën.

In accordance with his surrealist morals, which would lead to some spectacular "coups d'éclat" sometimes followed by action, Mariën's many years of wandering would take him from the United States to Maoist China, a sailor, a health care worker, a bookseller, a typist, a corrector and a scriptwriter, refusing to shut himself away in any lasting activity, any status, to preserve a freedom that material constraints did not spare. In this sense, in his life and in his work, he was an authentic surrealist.

Marcel Mariën

L'Introuvable, 1937

assembly-object mixed technic

5 x 6.5 x 13.5 cm | 1 15/16 x 2 8/16 x 5 5/16 in

Edition 2013 - Edition of 20 (n°1-20) and 5 Artist proof (I-V) Editor : Ronny Van de Velde



Marcel Mariën

L'Œil d'Othello, 1971

signed, dated and titled under the socle : "Marcel Mariën 1971 L'Œil d'Othello"

assembly-object mixed technic

29 x 16.5 x 16.5 cm | 11 6/16 x 6 7/16 x 6 7/16 in

AUGUSTIN NOUNCKELE

Founding member and Managing Director of the Marcel Mariën Foundation

In 1978, two years after the death of Man Ray (1890-1976), Marcel Mariën (1920-1993) paid tribute to the artist in his own way with the work *Good-bye Mr. Man Ray!*: an assemblage inspired by Man Ray's famous *Indestructible object*. The work is then supplemented by the following annotation :

The metronome of *Good-bye Mr Man Ray!* corrects the rather innocent back-and-forth of the eye by replacing it with
an ear, more appropriate to its object. It is nonetheless a tribute, if one knows what a tribute means. (*Silence! I hear
my ear*, wrote Jules Renard). ¹

This first junction point between the two artists, the most obvious one, is in fact only the developed part of several common aspects, which are revealed through the parallelism of their respective works, and in particular their objects.

Beyond their contemporaneity, their participation in the surrealist movement, and their ability to use different media, their practice of assemblage emphasises other similarities. For example, their custom of using everyday objects in their assemblages. It is therefore not uncommon to find works by these two artists with a shared use of the same object, such as *Palettable* and *Le Surréalisme sans la peinture*, *Chess Set*, *La Paix de Hastings*, as well as *Man Ray* and *L'œil d'Othello*. They also tend to repeat themes or images through their various techniques. Man Ray and Mariën frequently transmigrate an object to photography, or vice versa. Thus, Mariën's *La Veuve* progressive is both an assemblage and a photograph, playing with an identical process.

Assemblage in Man Ray's work, although it does undeniably stem from Dadaist tradition, is not limited to André Breton's definition of "a common object promoted to the dignity of an art object by the artist."² It is the artist's decision not to leave the object alone in front of the spectator but to associate it with another. Man Ray often adds a title to his work which participates in its reading, and therefore no longer limits it strictly speaking to the ready-made. Even if he declares: "Sometimes I give titles, but titles that do not explain anything, that are purely imaginary"³, this assertion does not always prove to be accurate. Some of his assemblages have titles that simplify the understanding or the exegesis of the artwork.

We observe this same distancing from the ready-made in Mariën's work, which, unlike Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), never limits the object to itself. Mariën's contribution to the creation of assemblages is twofold. He used elements from everyday life, but he subjectively associated them, sometimes modifying them in order to give them new meanings. His assembling mechanisms are strongly linked to language, its subtleties and its multiple possibilities. Punch, quotation, condensation, diversion and metaphor are exceedingly present in material but also textual forms. This is why, for Mariën, the title is of constitutive importance to the work.

¹ *Rétrospective des rétrospectives*, Bruxelles, Galerie Isy Brachot, 18 janvier – 25 février, 1989, p. 83.

² André BRETON et Paul ELUARD, *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, Paris, José Corti, 2005, p. 23.

³ Emmanuel GUIGON, *Le surréalisme et l'objet*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 30 octobre 2013 – 3 mars 2014, p. 19.

Beyond the physical association of the objects, both artists also look for the appropriate title, occasionally sharing creative mechanisms. The use of word play is frequently found in Mariën's objects such as *Rapproche-Orient* or *Attrape-sourires*. Similarly, this approach has occurred in Man Ray's *Square Dumb-Bells* or *Pain peint*. If it is the simplest version of wit, the play on words is interesting in that, beyond its playful aspect, it prevents any passivity on the part of the spectator, forcing him to decode the information, the subtlety hidden in the title.

Mariën further complicates the relationships between the elements of his assemblages in some other works. This is the case for *Erogénie*, which illustrates a more subtle form of mind-set: condensation. The title achieves a textual unification between Eros, Greek god of love, and the proper name Eugenie, which refers to Eugenie de Franval, the heroine of a short story by Sade (1740-1814). The skill of this condensation lies not only in the thematic agreement that brings the first two words together, but also in the formation of a third by the association of the first two, itself remaining within the theme of love, as it refers to the word erogenous. From a material point of view, Mariën presents a reproduction of the *Venus de Milo*, except that it is covered with a painted motif not unlike Mondrian's neo-plasticist theory. He combines a geometric motif on a contrapposto sculpture, creating a new, fluid and coherent entity. The quality of the condensation lies in the links that unite the two elements prior to their unification, as well as in the effect that the neologism produces once anchored in a context. The work obtained here is a perfect example of a successful textual and material condensation.

A second aspect common in Man Ray's and Mariën's employ of titles is their use of references. The works *Presse-papier à Priape* and *Diogène liquide* are important examples of this approach. The reference raises the spectator's need for action even further, this time questioning his or her culture knowledge. How can we understand these two titles if we are unaware of the existence of the Greek God Priape, the god of fertility, always represented as an ithyphallic god, and Diogenes (405-323ACN), a Greek philosopher who decided to live in a barrel, embracing a life of homelessness. In these two works, the title could not be dissociated from the object without hindering its reading and understanding.

Mariën also makes use of metaphors. This is the case in *Cave Mariam ou Pourquoi la Vierge l'est devenue*. *Cave Mariam* is taken from the famous Latin expression *Cave canem* or, in French, *attention au chien*. Literally, therefore, *Cave Mariam* means attention to Mary. In the second half of the title - *ou pourquoi la Vierge l'est devenue* - Mariën does not simply deny Mary's virginity: he also proposes that the spectator explains why she is not, thus committing blasphemy. This explanation is suggested by an assemblage representing the naked virgin, using a part of a mannequin showing its lower abdomen and upper thighs. This section, in addition to highlighting the intimate parts, is sexualised by the author who grafts pubic hair onto it. It is by examining this pubis that the attentive spectator discovers that the pubic hair are actually nails. The solution to the enigma is a sexual one, and to understand it is to imagine the effects these nails would have on a resourceful lover.

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