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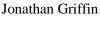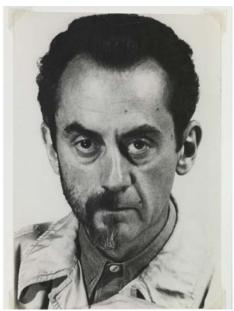## Man Ray's love-hate relationship with Hollywood
The Surrealist artist struggled to balance the competing demands of his passion and his wallet

Jonathan Griffin

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Man Ray was by no means the first artist to flee wartime Europe for the more benevolent climes of Los Angeles. However, when he hastily departed occupied France in 1940, leaving behind his lover Ady Fidelin and most of his artwork, the American-born artist complacently assumed that his celebrated status as a grandee of the Surrealist movement would automatically accompany him back across the Atlantic. But when he stepped off the boat at Hoboken, the gaggle of journalists at the foot of the gang plank was waiting not for him but for Salvador Dalí, who was on the same ship.

On arriving in Los Angeles he knew almost no one in the city. He looked up a friend of a friend, a young dancer and ex-model named Juliet Browner. Man Ray was 50; Browner was 28. They fell in love very quickly, and Browner became his muse and frequent subject. Soon after meeting, they found an apartment together on Vine Street, in the middle of Hollywood, which Man Ray also set up as a studio. Next, he bought a metallic-blue Graham-Page sedan, a "super-charged" model in which he happily tore around town, avoiding the local traffic cops. "Now I had everything again," he later wrote, "a woman, a studio, a car."

While Los Angeles was a pleasant place to live and love, it was not, for Man Ray, a fulfilling place to work. He discovered that he was better known for his society and fashion photography (a lucrative sideline in Paris) than for his Surrealist paintings or his experimental "Rayographs", made by putting objects on photographic paper and exposing the paper to light. Even though he initially refused all portrait commissions, stating his determination to return to painting, it was not long before he was persuaded again to take up his camera. His earnings from his first year in America amounted to just $400, and he soon accepted – if reluctantly – that portrait photography could fund his more outlandish artistic pursuits. On display at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills, in an exhibition called "Man Ray's LA", are a selection of formal portraits and personal snapshots taken between 1940 and 1951, during this 11-year exile under the unforgiving Californian sun.

"Self-Portrait with Half Beard" (1943)

Man Ray was acutely conscious of his public persona, and used self-portraits to project certain ideas about himself. Here he presents himself as the intense, Surrealist genius, fixing the camera with his dark eyes while daring us to laugh at his ludicrous facial hair. The bisected face reflects his sense of himself as divided, both an artist and a commercial photographer. He used the picture to illustrate a polemic he published in the Surrealist magazine View grumpily titled "Photography is Not Art" in which he bemoaned photographers' obsession with technique over artistic content.

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"Igor Stravinsky with Juliet and Selma Browner" (1945)

Igor Stravinsky, a Russian composer, was one of the few European emigrés who managed to make a success of his time in Los Angeles, following the adaptation by Walt Disney of his ballet "The Rite of Spring" (1913) for a dinosaur sequence in the animated film, "Fantasia" (1939). The Stravinsky home in West Hollywood was known as a social hub, especially for ex-pats. In this casual shot the great composer, in glasses and beret, is seen at one of his garden gatherings

with Browner (far right), Man Ray's girlfriend, sitting across from her sister Selma. Man Ray's vacated stool stands in the foreground.

"Ava Gardner in costume for Albert Lewin's 'Pandora and the Flying Dutchman'" (1950)

Many of Man Ray's portraits were of film stars. In 1950 Albert Lewin, a film director, asked Man Ray not only to photograph actress Ava Gardner in costume, but also to paint her as her character in the film, Pandora. While a different painting was eventually used in "Pandora and the Flying Dutchman", a colour print of this photograph appears on the bedside table of the villain, and one of Man Ray's sculptural aluminium chess sets was featured in a quasi-Surrealist dream sequence. Man Ray apparently used a telephoto lens to shoot this image from across the studio, lending Gardner a somewhat unattainable remoteness. The photograph's real interest, for us and the artist, is not so much technical however as it is conceptual: a staged photograph of a famous persona in character as another fictional persona. Man Ray understood the mythic nature of the Hollywood star system, and was happy – for a price – to perpetuate it by bringing together fantasy and reality, as he often did in his Surrealist art.

"Man Ray with Duchamp" (1948)

On the occasion of a visit from his old friend, Marcel Duchamp, an artist, Man Ray took this seemingly candid – but actually carefully staged – double portrait. The pair sit on a step beneath a sign for the rue de la Vieille Lanterne, a Parisian street, although the sign was a fake. In fact, neither artist was truly Parisian. Man Ray was born Emmanuel Radnitzky in Philadelphia, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, while Duchamp, since 1915, had spent more time in New York than in Paris. The city, in 1948, was still considered the centre of the international art world (though that was about to change), and continued to exert a strong gravitational pull on Man Ray.

"Jennifer Jones" (c. 1944)

On her 25th birthday, Jennifer Jones won the 1944 Academy Award for Best Actress, for her title role as a 14-year old saint in "The Song of Bernadette" (1943). This photograph, in which the actress works demurely on a piece of cross-stitch, was part of a shoot for Harper's Bazaar. Aside from their technical proficiency, such celebrity portraits show little of Man Ray's radical experimentalism. As Katherine Ware writes in a recently republished monograph on Man Ray, "Enhancing the celebrity of others was a role about which the artist had become increasingly bitter." In Paris Man Ray had balanced the competing demands of his wallet and his art but in Hollywood he found that he was compelled by financial hardship to carry on playing a game that had once seemed fun but which now was growing tiresome. Though they are rather tame, these portraits are fascinating testaments to a trailblazing artist's struggle with the mainstream, and his frustrated desire both to inhabit it and transcend it.