

MAN RAY, PICABIA

ET LA REVUE « LITTÉRATURE » (1922-1924)

2 JULY-8 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Centre Pompidou presents "Man Ray, Picabia et la revue *Littérature* (1922-1924)" to mark an addition to its collection sponsored by Sanofi: twenty-six drawings produced for the review by Francis Picabia between 1922 and 1924. The exhibition unveils nine original covers for *Littérature* by Picabia, together with seventeen alternative projects: a series of drawings that previously belonged to André Breton's collection. It also features photographs by Man Ray and original drawings by Max Ernst and Robert Desnos, who also contributed to the review.

The exhibition gives viewers the chance to explore a particularly intense artistic experience, from the time when André Breton took over

sole management of the review in 1922 to its final issue in 1924.

In 1922, to illustrate a periodical that had hitherto been exclusively literary, Breton gave a free hand to Francis Picabia, one of the key figures in the Dada movement, and to the American photographer Man Ray, who had moved to Paris in 1921. Picabia was asked to design the covers for issues 4 to 13 of *Littérature*, while regularly publishing texts and poems in it as well. Man Ray, who became the regular portraitist for the "Littérature group", first published images in the review that later became genuine icons of photographic modernity.

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THE REVIEW AND ANDRÉ BRETON

Created in 1919, *Littérature* started out as a review of "poems and prose" directed by Louis Aragon, André Breton and Philippe Soupault. In 1922, Breton became its sole editor-in-chief and introduced a new formula. He invited Picabia and Man Ray to contribute freely to the review, recruited the young poet Robert Desnos, one of the most active participants in the group's famous hypnotic sleep séances, and published the aphorisms of Marcel Duchamp together with drawings and vignettes by Max Ernst. A process of change came about with every issue – from number 4 with its cover featuring the blasphemous Sacred Heart of Christ to the last, number 13, which included the first view of Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres* [The Hobby] – and a transition became clear: the end of the Dada movement and the beginning of Surrealism. The dream-like quality of Max Ernst's drawings supplanted the provocative compositions of Picabia, who in May 1924, used play on words to lampoon Breton's "Superrealism" in his review 391.

PICABIA: THE "LITTÉRATURE" STYLE

Between 1922 and 1924, Francis Picabia produced twenty-six drawings for the review *Littérature*. All of them evince relative stylistic unity: they are drawn in black ink, with no reworking, and are most often a mixture of line drawing and inked-in areas. With these illustrations, Picabia introduced a graphic style that was both striking and specific (only found otherwise in the three large Ripolin compositions he painted between 1922 and 1923). With a penchant for nudes, the use of silhouettes and the stark contrast of black and white, these drawings, simultaneously figurative and linear, stand apart from the mechanical symbolism of the Dadaist Picabia's mechanomorphic compositions from 1917 to 1920, and show the distance he was taking from the movement.

In ironic response to the Neoclassical wave and "Return to Order" that was all the rage at the time, Picabia diverted references to Ingres towards compositions that were intriguing, comical and irreverent by turn. These covers are rife with scandalous images mingling religion and sex, blasphemous representations and a disquieting

bestiary. Four of the twenty-six drawings are separate from the cover designs, and do not feature the name of the review, only an enigmatic little wheel.

They were probably intended by Picabia as "plates" for the review, but were not chosen by André Breton, who preferred those of Max Ernst.

MAN RAY'S PHOTOGRAPHS FEATURED AS PLATES

At André Breton's behest, Man Ray, the regular portraitist of the "Littérature group", published five photographs in the review between October 1922 and June 1924. Remarkably, four of the five were announced in the table of contents as "plates", meaning that they were works in their own right, not illustrations. In placing such a focus on photographic creation in a literary review, Breton, the future leader of Surrealism, established an important relationship between modernist photography and the avant-gardes.

The very first photograph published is a bird's eye view of part of Marcel Duchamp's *Grand Verre*, where the dust covering it is partially cleaned off.

This photograph, entitled *Élevage de poussière* [Dust removal], was one of the first in the collaboration between Man Ray and Duchamp. The review also published some of Man Ray's first photographs (or "rayographs"), produced by placing objects directly on photosensitive paper, and a reproduction of Picasso's 1919 painting *Les Amoureux*. Finally, in June 1924 *Littérature* published the famous *Violon d'Ingres*. An obvious reference to Ingres' *Bain turc*, this photograph shows Man Ray's ambiguity towards the master of Montauban through the title's play on words and the "rectification" of the drawing on the back. Continuing the Dadaist tradition of irreverence, this portrait of Kiki, simultaneously body and violin, is also the embodiment of various principles that would shortly come to fascinate the Surrealists, such as the association of ideas, chance encounters and double images.

EXHIBITION

CURATORS

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Clément Chéroux
Assisted by Julie Jones
and Anne Lemonnier

PRODUCTION MANAGER

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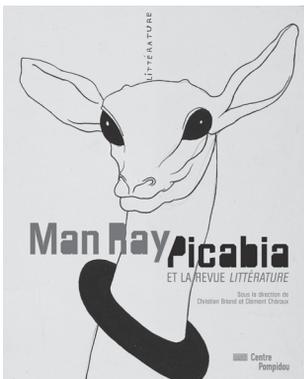
Laurence Fontaine

All 26 drawings by Picabia for *Littérature*, classified as "a work of major heritage value", were acquired through the sponsorship of Sanofi.

CATALOGUE

Man Ray, Picabia et la revue *Littérature*

Edited by Christian Briend
and Clément Chéroux
Published by the Centre Pompidou
168 pp., 130 ill.
Price: €29.90



INFORMATION

01 44 78 12 33
www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

2 July to 8 September 2014
Museum, Galerie d'Art Graphique
Every day except Tuesdays,
11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Ticket desks close at 8.00 p.m.

PRICES

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