

Tears, Man Ray

Tears

Man Ray

American, Paris, 1930–1932

Gelatin silver print

9 x 11 3/4 in.

84.XM.230.2

Judging from his inclusion of this image in other photographic compositions, Man Ray must have considered *Tears* one of his most successful photographs. A cropped version of it with a single eye also appears as the first plate in a 1934 book of his photographs.

The picture is a metaphor for the artificiality of art making, a scene that is staged for its truthfulness. Like a silent-screen star, the woman plaintively gazes upward to indicate her distress. However, the large, glistening teardrops are melodramatic, an exaggerated sign of sadness that makes a mockery of the sentiment, suggesting a connection with Man Ray's abandonment by his lover Lee Miller in 1932.

To Surrealists like Man Ray, the eye was an important symbol of inner vision, a concept central to their philosophy. For the artist, it seems to have had a more personal identification as well, appearing in his assemblages, films, and photographs.



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About the Artist

Man Ray, (American, 1890–1976)

Born in Philadelphia, Emmanuel Radnitsky grew up in New Jersey and became a commercial artist in New York in the years 1910–1919. He began to sign his name *Man Ray* in 1912, although his family did not change its surname to Ray until the 1920s. He initially taught himself photography in order to reproduce his own works of art, which included paintings and mixed media. In 1921 he moved to Paris and set up a photography studio to support himself. There he began to make photograms (a photographic image made by placing objects directly onto the surface of a photosensitive material such as photographic paper and then exposing it to light), which he called "Rayographs."

Shortly before World War II, Man Ray returned to the United States and settled in Los Angeles from 1940 until 1951. He was disappointed that he was recognized only for his photography in

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America and not for the filmmaking, painting, sculpture, and other media in which he worked. In 1951 Man Ray returned to Paris, where he concentrated primarily on painting.

Questions for Teaching

Using as many details as possible, describe what you see in this image. (In this image a woman's face is shown in an extreme close-up. Mascara is heavily applied to her eyelashes. Her eyes are not making contact with the camera but rather are turned up towards the upper left. Almost perfectly spherical tears are suspended on the woman's face. The edges of the image are somewhat blurry, but the center of the image—occupied by the woman's eyes—is in perfect focus.)

This image was taken during a difficult time in the artist's life, not long after breaking up with his lover Lee Miller. How does this biographical detail affect the way we view the image? (In many ways, this image poses more questions than answers. While it is clear that artificial tears have been placed on the woman's cheek, there is no reference in the image to why she is "crying." Since Man Ray was in the midst of an emotionally difficult time in his own life, it may be that he wishes to project his own sadness in the image. This biographical information helps to answer some of the challenging questions posed in this image.)

Although this is an untraditional composition, this image expresses many strong formal qualities. Which of the elements and principles of art are most strongly represented here? (The eyebrows form a curved *line*, beginning in the bottom-left corner and *moving* across the image to the upper-right corner. There is a repetition of *shapes* and *forms* in the tears, nostrils, irises, and pupils. These rounded forms are an interesting contrast to the harsh linear *pattern* created by the regular spacing of the eyelashes.)

