Juliet Dancing, Man Ray

Juliet Dancing
Man Ray
American, Los Angeles, 1945
Gelatin silver print, 13 9/16 x 9 in.
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Background Information

After dinner we went to a night club where some of the best jazz of the period was being played. We danced. Juliet was like a feather in my arms.

With these words, Man Ray described his first meeting with Juliet Browner, a dancer who had studied with the modern dance pioneer Martha Graham. Browner, who was the subject of many of Man Ray's portraits, had worked as an art model for Abstract Expressionist painters (referring to artists working in the mid-1900s who valued process, spontaneity, and works that reflected the artist's psyche). When this photograph was made, Browner had recently moved to Los Angeles at the age of thirty to pursue a career in the movies.

In this deliberately out-of-focus image of Browner dancing, her white skin and flowing dress catch the light in waves of movement. Through gesture, posture, use of diagonal line, and graphic strokes of light, Man Ray captured the sensuality and fluidity of movement—like a feather floating through the air.

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 1910s. He began using the name Man Ray after his family changed its surname to Ray in 1912. 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** (cameraless photographs), which he called **Rayographs**. In the 1920s, he also began making moving pictures. Man Ray's four completed films—*Return to Reason, Emak Bakia, Starfish*, and *Mystery of the Chateau*—were all highly creative, non-narrative explorations of the possibilities of the medium.

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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 America and not for the filmmaking, painting, sculpture, and other media in which he worked. In 1951, Man Ray returned to Paris. He concentrated primarily on painting until his death in 1976.

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Questions for Teaching

Take the time to look closely at the photograph.

What do you see here? *(a blurry woman in motion)*

What can we tell about this figure? *(She is dancing.)*

Examine the posture (body) and gesture (hands). Notice what the subject is doing with her head, torso, arms, legs, and feet. When someone is posed in this way, how do you think the person feels? *(She looks like she is having fun. She is smiling, twisting, and leaning back while dancing.)*

What do you notice first? What do you notice next?

How much of the composition is taken up by the figure? *(About two-thirds of the composition; she appears monumental.)*

How much space did the artist leave around the figure? *(just enough space to frame her)*

Where do you find strong diagonal lines? *(the figure's arms and legs, ruffles on the skirt, position of the figure in the composition)*

Man Ray took this photograph of the dancer Juliet Browner. She was about thirty years old when this photograph was taken. She had recently moved to Los Angeles from New York to work in film. Later, Man Ray and Juliet Browner married. They worked together for thirty-five years until he passed away. Does knowing that the woman dancing later married the artist change the way you see this picture?

What do you think Man Ray was trying to communicate or describe by making this photograph? Use reasoned statements to support your opinions.

Education

The J. Paul Getty Museum