

# Fake Man Ray prints are hanging on museum and collectors' walls, leading specialist warns

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 [telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/11/30/fake-man-ray-prints-hanging-museum-collectors-walls-leading](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/11/30/fake-man-ray-prints-hanging-museum-collectors-walls-leading)

Dalya Alberge November 30, 2019

Sophisticated fakes of photographic prints by Man Ray, the pioneering 20th-century photographer, painter and filmmaker, are circulating a “Wild West” market, according to a major investigation by a leading specialist.



While the artist's prices have reached the millions, Steven Manford, a Man Ray expert and photo historian, is warning that the problem of Man Ray fakes is “wrongly” thought to have been resolved in the 1990s: “Nothing could be further from the truth. Many works in circulation are sophisticated creations, detectable only with bona fide connoisseurship and scrupulous research.”

For the last 20 years, he has “regularly encountered fakes”: “Some were sold by dealers, some sold at auction. More than a few are in important museums, others are in private collections.”

He warns that, while some fraudulent photographs are being created from digital files rather than negatives, the potential of new technology points to “unimagined” future problems - “especially for a generation that, for the most part, no longer knows what a darkroom is and what photographic paper looks like.”

His scholarly findings are published in the latest journal of the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR), which conducts impartial research with an international network of eminent scholars.

He writes: “This article is a caveat emptor, an alert about the continued existence of dubious and fake photographic prints.”

Man Ray's photographic masterpieces include ‘Noire et Blanche’, 1926, a dramatic juxtaposition of the face of the singer and model Kiki de Montparnasse against an African

mask. In 2017, Christie's Paris sold a print of it for 2.7 million euros, breaking the world record for a classic photograph.

Mr Manford's 13,000-word IFAR study refers to a 1998 article by the late Stephen Vincent into fakes made years after the artist's death in 1976: "The truth was shocking. Many of the photographs had only been printed six years earlier, at the latest, but the works were passed off to collectors, auction houses and museums as having been printed during Man Ray's first Paris years, spanning 1921 to 1940."

He notes that Vincent's investigation remains the source for documenting the "Man Ray Bokelberg fakes", named after German collector and photographer Werner Bokelberg "who had the poor luck and bad judgement to purchase at least 60 such fake...photographs".

He adds: "Twenty-plus years have elapsed since that scandal became public... What is striking is how little has changed.... Today, fraudulent prints are still floating around, still in museums, still on collectors' walls, and still being exhibited, published and offered by dealers and auction houses."

He concludes that Vincent wrongly assumed that the fraud was "relatively isolated", limited to one or two printers, working with a few conspirators: "Not so. Having focussed my research and professional practice on the authentication and dating of Man Ray photographs for a quarter century, I can say that the problem was - and is - more serious. The fraud didn't end in 1998, nor did it begin with the Bokelberg scandal..."

"The 'Bokelberg fakes' were in fact just one group of problematic Man Ray photographs. The scams involve numerous participants working independently, some using primitive tools, others more sophisticated. In short, the creation of false Man Rays has been broader and more varied, has gone on for a longer period of time, and has today contaminated more collections and museums than reliance on the original reporting would have us continue to believe."

He concludes: "Those who thought that all the fake Man Rays suddenly vanished or went into the garbage bin after the Bokelberg scandal of 1998 were wrong."

Noting sales of photographs without any paper trail, bills of sale or verifiable provenance, he criticises the absence of a more rigorous authentication process for Man Ray and also, Lewis Hines, another photographer targeted by forgers: "Within the art market, the demand for authentication research of photographs remains limited. The photo market remains the Wild West."

In the IFAR journal, he details numerous examples, each printed after Man Ray's death but "marked, manipulated or altered in such a way as to lead the viewer to believe that the photograph was made during the lifetime of the artist and therefore by Man Ray or the studio of Man Ray".

He told *The Telegraph* that, in publishing the research, he hopes to "help collectors, museums and the marketplace avoid mistakes".