

MAN RAY

American, born Philadelphia, PA, 1890, died Paris, France, 1976

Marcel Duchamp in a Blond Wig, ca. 1954

Dye diffusion transfer print (Polaroid), 4 3/16 x 3 1/4 inches

Gift of James Geier, 2019.11

Wearing a blond wig and man's suit, Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) smiles at the camera held by his friend and fellow artist Man Ray. Their collaborations, most notably Man Ray's portraits of Duchamp in drag as his female alter ego Rose Sélavy, have long been celebrated in the canon of modern art as examples of identity play and performance prevalent in both Dada and Surrealist visual art and literature. Those images, taken between 1921 and 1923, show Duchamp posed in women's clothing like a fashion model, while this photograph, made over thirty years later, eschews such pageantry, instead emphasizing the casual intimacy between friends. Duchamp sits in Man Ray's Paris apartment looking at ease, resting his weight on his right elbow and leaning forward with a pipe still aglow in his left hand as if he just took a puff.

Typically associated with popular photography, the Polaroid camera Man Ray used to capture Duchamp would have almost instantaneously produced this small photograph—creating more of a personal keepsake than a fine art photograph. While the blond wig harkens back to their acclaimed Rose Sélavy portrait sessions, Duchamp does not truly perform his alter ego here and Man Ray uses an informal mode of photography to reflect the intimate spaces of home, friendship, and the shared history of two artists in the second half of their lives and careers.

—Alissa Schapiro '22 PhD, Art History