

Materials & Techniques of Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres*

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Part of a “surreal legacy,” photographs by Man Ray have been shrouded by suspicion since his death in 1976. The custody of key prints, negatives and stamps used by the artist over the course of his career have roiled the market; most famously in 1998 when the discovery of a large group of fakes attracted worldwide press coverage. Within this context, the exhibition of notable print belonging to New York collector Roz Jacobs of the iconic *Le Violon d'Ingres* at the Pace/MacGill Gallery in 2009 provided a unique opportunity to research Man Ray's papers and techniques.

Le Violon d'Ingres first appeared in the surrealist journal *Littérature* edited by Philippe Soupault and André Breton in June, 1924. The print used to illustrate *Littérature*, remained in Breton's collection and was eventually acquired by the Pompidou in 1993. The “Breton” print is unique in that the *f*-holes on Kiki's back are hand painted. By contrast, the *f*-holes in the Jacobs print are rendered photographically. Though Man Ray asserted the Jacobs print is an “original,” there are no accounts of this print prior to its exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in 1962, the same year Roz Jacobs acquired it directly from Man Ray.

Research on the print involved an assessment of the paper reflectance, texture, mounting, fiber content, inscriptions, stamps and remarkably large size (48.3 x 37.5 cm / 19” x 14.8”). Methods of fabrication, focusing on Man Ray's darkroom technique, were also examined and documented. Primarily through paper fiber analysis based on Paul Messier's reference collection of photographic papers, the Jacobs *Le Violon d'Ingres* was found to be consistent with papers made in the 1920's, thus eliminating the potential for production in the 1950's or '60's – a period when Man Ray actively began making prints for the nascent photography market. Through comparison with other prints, this research also discovered that the Jacobs print, reproduced through one or more copy negatives, is the source for nearly every other print of *Le Violon d'Ingres* found in collections worldwide.

This project provided a powerful demonstration that though photography is a reprographic medium there are nevertheless singular prints possessing unsurpassed aesthetic and cultural value. This presentation is based on an essay that appears in [The Long Arm of Coincidence: Selections from the Rosalind & Melvin Jacobs Collection](#) published by Pace/MacGill Gallery in 2009.

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