

Man Ray-festo: a slice of Africana

By [Eden Silverthorne](#) | DAILY LOBO

“This will be the most important traveling exhibition that we’ve ever brought to the UNM community,” said Luanne McKinnon, UNM Art Museum director.

“Man Ray, African Art and the Modernist Lens,” a traveling art exhibit, will premier on Friday from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

The show explores the role of photography in changing the perception of African objects from ethnographic artifacts to fine art. It features more than 100 photographs by Man Ray and his international avant-garde contemporaries Charles Sheeler, Walker Evans, Cecil Beaton, Alfred Stieglitz, and James L. Allen. The photographs will hang alongside the original African objects they feature, McKinnon said.

A display of books, avant-garde journals and popular magazines illustrates the photographs circulated and promotes ideas about African art and culture to an international audience.

“The work of Man Ray elevated (African sculpture) into the realm of fine art,” McKinnon said. “He basically plucked the ... African sculpture out of the context in which it had been formerly recognized, which was ethnographic.”

The exhibit is organized into four sections: “African Art American Style,” “African Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” “Surrealism and Beyond” and “Fashioning a Popular Reception.”

In the last section, Man Ray’s works blend African art, photography and high fashion.

“What Man Ray did was help begin this conversation in which the appreciation of all things African was absorbed into mainstream culture,” McKinnon said. “The very last part of our exhibition really shows how that matriculated out.”

Sara Otto-Diniz, curator of Academic Initiatives at the UNM Art Museum, said the exhibit fits into the museum’s mission to educate the masses.

“This exhibition provides a particularly thought-provoking thesis,” Otto-Diniz said. ‘Man Ray, African Art and the Modernist Lens’ is the culmination of 12 years of scholarships by independent curator Wendy Grossman. ... Juxtaposing photographs with the objects represented in them offers all visitors an opportunity to better understand the interpretive nature of photography.”

Six speakers, local and national, will give talks at the show space through April that are free to the public.

“We’ll have speakers from across the country and across campus to speak here at the Art Museum on a variety of subjects relative to this Man Ray exhibition,” said Angela Berkson, office manager.

McKinnon said this event is a spectacular collection of work that everyone should see in their lifetime.

“If a student has the opportunity to see very, very rare early photographs ... and rare pieces of African sculpture and African art, that’s an extraordinary thing in itself,” McKinnon said. “It’s not every day that you get to see this many masterpieces of photography in one room.”