

Charles Henri Ford

Artist Biography

Born and raised in Mississippi, the ambitious poet, writer, and artist Charles Henri Ford (1908–2002) dropped out of high school and began publishing a literary magazine, *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms*, which included work by William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Paul Bowles. Before turning twenty, his first poem appeared in *The New Yorker*. After a brief stint in New York, where he met writers Parker Tyler and Djuna Barnes, he made his way to Paris. Associating with Gertrude Stein's literary and artistic crowd, he met the Russian-born artist and set designer Pavel Tchelitchew, who soon became his life partner. In 1933, a Parisian press published *The Young and Evil*, a highly experimental novel co-authored by Ford and Tyler that was banned in the United States for its blatantly homosexual themes.

Returning to New York in 1934, Ford introduced Tchelitchew to his broad social circle, which included the photographer George Platt Lynes; cultural impresario Lincoln Kirstein; and his sister, the model and actress Ruth. By the end of the decade, Ford had published the first of sixteen full-length books of poems, *The Garden of Disorder*, with an introduction by William Carlos Williams. From 1940 to 1947, Ford and Tyler published *View* magazine. A combination of articles, stories, and images, the periodical was credited with introducing Surrealism to the American public. Contributions by the likes of Joseph Cornell, André Breton, Max Ernst, and Lincoln Kirstein populated the pages. Returning to Europe in 1952, Ford turned his attention to his artmaking practices. He debuted his photography in London in 1955, and his paintings and drawings in Paris the following year, an exhibition for which Jean Cocteau wrote the catalog's foreword.

Ford stayed in Europe for five years after Tchelitchew's death, and when he returned to the United States, in 1962, he became associated with the Pop artists, particularly Andy Warhol. Continuing to make and exhibit his artwork, Ford began experimenting with film. He followed his first foray into that medium, a documentary about an exhibition of his collages named *Poem Posters* (1967), with a Greek myth-inspired film titled *Johnny Minotaur* (1973) featuring voice-overs by Salvador Dalí and beat writer Allen Ginsberg. Ford's active influence in the New York art world continued into the seventies with emerging artists like Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe attending weekly salons at his apartment in the Dakota building on West 72nd Street. Ford spent his remaining decades with his companion Indra Tamang, a teenager he hired when he bought a house in Nepal in the early 1970s and who cared for Ford until his death, in Manhattan in 2002.