

SURREAL! Imagining New Realities

Texts on the Exhibition Sections and Works

Desire and Melancholy

The surrealists focused on sexual experience and love from the very first. Sharing Freud's understanding of libidinous energy as "free," desire was regarded as a perpetually active force. Key psychoanalytical issues such as perversion, loss, and melancholy also formed repeatedly subjects of interest.

Hans Bellmer, first encountered the surrealist group in the mid-1920s in Paris. In his work, the object of desire and the desiring object are both equally capable of occupying the roles of perpetrator and victim. In an etching from the 1960s, a bourgeois man wearing a monocle and top hat appears wholly consumed by his own imaginings. The bare bottom of a woman excites the man's fantasies and threatens to burst through his conventional accessory. In his self-portrait, the Swiss artist expresses intrapsychic dynamism by way of a serene and spiritual gaze at his viewers.

Bellmer's fellow countryman **Kurt Seligmann**, who became an official member of the surrealist group in 1935, created nightmarish visions in deeply symbolic work full of deformed figures. References to historic predecessors, from Albrecht Altdorfer (1480–1538) to Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741–1825), can be found in his *Jean sans terre nettoyé par le vide* (*Landless John Cleansed by the Void*). His illustrations for Yvan Goll's (1891–1950) poem of the same name also reference the refugee status that led Seligman to the United States, where he continued his association with the surrealist circle and took up magic and occultism, in 1939.

"Paranoiac Critique"

Salvador Dalí is considered one of the main representatives of surrealism. His design technique, known as the paranoiac-critical method, is intimately linked to Freud's teachings. The "paranoiac" aspect refers to inner associations, which are organized into an image following critical assessment that gives shape to inner visions. These are usually real motifs that provoke different interpretations by way of unusual combinations or dimensions – ambiguous images that deceive and seduce the eye.

In "Interprétation paranoïaque-critique de l'image obsédante de l'Angélus de Millet," a rhinoceros is enthroned above a bust of Voltaire, who, as a philosopher of the Enlightenment, represents reason. A couple based on Millet's painting *The Angelus* (1859) the signatures of two contemporaries (painter Georges Mathieu and editor of *Minotaure* Albert Skira) and Dalí's

reference to St. Augustine, who found truth through love of his neighbor, confirm the (for Dalí?) meaningful amalgamation of irrational faith and critical rationality.

Dalí's deeply symbolic imagery and the many references he cites in his theories on philosophy, poetry, and psychoanalysis are manifested in *Portrait imaginaire de Michel de Montaigne*, the watercolor *Pedro Calderón de la Barca*, and his likeness of Sigmund Freud. The latter, which also includes mythological scenes, is an impressive expression of the interests and passions of the so-called father of psychoanalysis.

Automatism in Painting and Drawing

André Masson's painting and drawing style is characterized by quick and animated gestures. Even his early paintings, such as *Le jeunes filles (The Young Girls)*, are wholly committed to the theme of transformation. Masson's proximity to cubism is still clearly visible in this work: The piece owes its dynamic composition primarily on the use of broken surfaces and the strongly contrasting brightness levels within the color scheme. The subject appears to erupt across the surface from a point in the lower edge of the image, the dynamism enhanced by a rough, brown-red sketch in the center.

Alongside his oil paintings, automatic drawing also has a special place in Masson's oeuvre, even after his 1929 break with Breton. In keeping with the surrealists' attempts to provide visual equivalents for unconscious feelings, he rendered "metamorphoses in the sense." The male figure in *L'homme-cheval (Dessin automatique) (The Horse-Man/automatic drawing)* that stretches diagonally across the sheet (Fig.), speaks to a search for "a motion that passionately erupts in itself." The erotic quality of the depiction is less a result of the motif of the male nude, than it is of the artist's attenuated use of line, which appears to prance across the paper, thickening in some areas before ending in delicate tips. The artist's hand is merely a tool guided by his subconscious: In this sense, Masson's pictorial works are more closely related automatism.

Empty Imagery

Writer, composer, painter, and theoretician **Alberto Savinio** (Andrea de Chirico), co-founded the Italian "scuola metafisica" in 1916 and had ties to the surrealist movement, for which he acted as a wellspring of ideas, from the 1920s onwards. He turned to painting which he used in part to study the metaphysical reality of the world of things beyond sensual experience, in 1927.

The surrealists regarded **Giorgio de Chirico's** early works as exemplary; but rejected his later work. de Chirico considered himself the "master of his dreams," therewith flouting Breton's directive to give precedence to the unconscious above all else, and de Chirico split with surrealism in 1928. The irrational nonetheless continued to play an important role in de Chirico's

imagery: In sparingly populated landscapes with skewed architecture and illusory shadows, present meets past and the artist's muse encounters antique myth.

In *Le Muse inquietanti* (*The Disquieting Muses*), the Greek patron goddess of the arts, draped in white cloth with a head of wood, takes the shape of a mannequin (*manichino*) – this artists' tool which is usually used to help depict an ideal replaces its realistic image.

In much the same vein, de Chirico's self-portrait depicts an eternally questioning and searching man who attempts to capture and represent reality in a synopsis of sensual perception and psychological conception.

The Magical Gaze

Paul Delvaux borrowed aspects of landscapes and cities found in the works of Giorgio de Chirico and Yves Tanguy. Alongside depictions of locomotives and trains representing progress, the industrial revolution, and sexual intercourse, the female figure is another of Delvaux's preferred motifs: In *Le Bois sacré*, a procession of frozen nude women stare at the viewer from within the picture. This direct engagement enhances the dramatic impact of the image; Delvaux also used this effect in *Le Reflet* to reinforce the surreal elements of the picture. Breton pointed out that Delvaux's women are always one and the same, remarking that like "sap ... from great root-system of dream-life," the surrealist force, "also rises ... in the paintings of Delvaux."

The Belgian artist did not become affiliated with surrealism until 1937. Just one year later, he took part in the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* at Galerie Beaux-Arts, and one of his works was reproduced in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* published on the occasion of the group exhibition. Delvaux valued the creative freedom that surrealism promised – but thought little of the group's rules, and largely eluded Breton's demands. Delvaux returned to de Chirico's magical-metaphysical pictorial realities in the 1940s.

"In the Heart of the Concrete"

Yves Tanguy became part of the inner circle of surrealists in 1925, and dedicated himself to the experiment of automatic drawing. Quickly sketched figures sparsely populate the image space, which is structured with suggestions of landscape or horizon lines. Shadows accentuate bodies and space, occasionally leading to doubling, which, borrowed from the surrealist pictorial canon, reveals a distorted and alienated reality. This can be witnessed in an illustration for *Un poème dans chaque livre* by Paul Éluard. The subject also appears in a 1930 drawing that was reproduced in the manifesto for the premier of Luis Buñuel's surrealist film *L'Age d'or*. The *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* published alongside the surrealist group exhibition at Galerie Beaux-Arts features a drawing by Tanguy on its cover. On the subject of Tanguy's hollow forms and matrices

that float like protozoa across the expanses of his image space, Breton noted that “with these shapes, we are not in the realm of the abstract but at the heart of the concrete.”

Tanguy adhered to his surrealist pictorial language all his life, and remained a strong influence within the surrealist movement and on the development of a younger generation of artists such as Oscar Dominguez and Roberto Matta even after his 1939 emigration to the United States.

The Reality of Irrational Objects

The reinterpretation and transformation of objects into pure fantasy objects is a key component of surrealism. They represent inner experiences, express wishes and fears in the form of fetishes, evoking desire as well as revulsion, as though encountered in a dream.

Meret Oppenheim's objects, such as her fur-lined teacup and spoon (1936), demonstrate this ambivalent effect. Her work was defined by the subject of metamorphosis from the start: In object assemblages, designs, and in works in which multiple translucent layers of color form the background of transcendental pictorial narratives.

Oppenheim traveled to Paris in 1932, where she encountered surrealism by way of, among others, Alberto Giacometti. Her reputation as a muse was echoed and underscored in many works by her artist friends. All the while, her own androgynous self-portrayals testified to her critical posture towards female clichés. The figures in her later works continued to elude attempts at gender assignation.

Alberto Giacometti became acquainted with the surrealist circle in Paris in the late 1920s. These shared interests culminated in a double-page spread of Giacometti's study *Objets mobiles et muets* (*Moving, Mute Objects*). The sketches demonstrate fundamental problems of three-dimensional representation. Giacometti viewed his works as conscious and faithful translations of concrete states of being, while Breton insisted on the artistic achievement of a super-reality.

Painted Irritations

René Magritte first encountered the surrealists in late 1929. His image-objects revealed the associations with which they were linked or, as he put it, connected “in the shadows of consciousness.” While the objects are still recognizable as such, their changed materiality, dimensions, and placement shifts our perceptions of them as familiar.

In *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, (*The Indiscreet Jewels*) a woman's wrist morphs into female physiognomy. The uncanny impression evoked by the image is amplified the longer it is viewed. Its haunting effect is largely a result of the link between the abstruse and familiar, and in this sense reminiscent of Freud's statement that the uncanny refers back to that which is known and familiar.

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The artist often included textual metaphors in his images, as in his portrait of Paul Éluard, who seems to be on the point of writing the French word *écrire* (to write) on a female nude – a depiction that brings to mind the expression “to have something written all over it” that characterizes and represents Paul Éluard, one of the most important surrealist authors.

Swiss surrealist **Otto Tschumi**, who moved to Paris in the mid-1930s, depicted the mutual conditionality of human and object existence using biomorphic and geometric forms: In *Explorer*, Tschumi depicted himself with technoid physiognomy, like a stylized object made by some alien hand.

The landscape in *Sommertag*, in contrast, looks like an organism, with animated undulations and shadowy hints of architecture on the point of disintegration.

Picasso – Realer than Real

Pablo Picasso, whose work was labeled surrealist as early as 1917, was a predecessor and companion of the surrealists. His endeavor to create an artificial reality that depicted a realer than real essence affirms his affinities with the surrealist conception of art. Picasso's *Vollard Suite* series of prints explores the relationship between man and woman, painter and muse, and the ancient myth of the Minotaur. In works such as *Minotaure aveugle guidé par une fillette dans la nuit* (*Blind Minotaur Guided by a Little Girl Through the Night*), Picasso's model and lover Marie-Thérèse Walter represented the female counterpart to the masculine Minotaur. Half human, half beast, Picasso seemed to identify with the hybrid creature: Bursting with strength while subject to his own animalistic instincts. Attributing sensitivity to the ideal of male sexual potency, Picasso's depiction of the mythological character becomes a synonym for strength and triumph, as well as defeat and need. The motif of the innocent, pure, and fearless female figure is accompanied by the symbolic dove, an indication of her peaceful nature.

Picasso's illustrations of Fernando de Rojas's tragicomedy *La Celestine* (1500) are also about courtship and sexual fulfilment. His etchings and aquatints are impressive genre pictures from scenes in Rojas's play that pay homage to moments of untamed passion – and in doing so, suggest that he is an artist who records events for posterity.

Giving Space to Hallucination

Toyen (Marie Cerminova), a member of the Prague-based Devětsil group dedicated to poetism, first encountered French surrealism in 1920 and joined the movement in the late 1920s. Her work chiefly addressed the social construct of the female role: Sometime around 1922 the artist exchanged her given name for the gender neutral pseudonym Toyen, derived from the French

word *citoyen* (citizen). In close connection to poetry, Toyen developed a unique symbolic visual language that was in close dialog with her poetry that fused feline predators and birds with the human silhouette into mysterious totems.

Conroy Maddox became a member of the British surrealists in 1936. He continued to uphold their concepts into the 1970s, when he stated “surrealism is dead, long live surrealism!” In addition to paintings and collages, Maddox created colorful gouaches: The geometrical likeness of the figures in *Topographical Disturbance* are reminiscent of Victor Brauner’s archetypes.

Rumanian-born **Victor Brauner** founded the Dadaist magazines *75HP* and *Integral* in Bucharest in 1924, during this era he also explored the pictopoem genre, which combines words and geometric forms.

Brauner became associated with the surrealist movement by 1932 at the latest, and his work gravitated toward the realm of hallucination. Alchemical symbols and motifs became characteristic of his iconography. In *Somnambule (Somnambulist)*, the forward-facing ponytail of a faceless head arches over translucent crystalline shapes that appear to glow from the inside, representing the condition of dreaming. In the 1940s, Brauner withdrew further and further into his own imaginary world, in part due to the existential hardship brought on by the war. Figures composed of floral, animal, and human components and with non-European cultic forms (Fig.) became more prevalent in Brauner’s work in the post-war era.

Paris – New York – and Back

Chilean **Roberto Matta** arrived in Paris, where he gained access to the surrealist group through Dalí, in the 1930s. In 1938, the architect began showing paintings in their exhibitions, and from 1942 on occupied a key role in the New York art scene. All the while he remained faithful to the principles of his early years: To translate inner psychical landscapes onto the canvas by means of his technique of psychological morphologies.

The figures in *Nid de Nœds (Nest of Knots)*, which seem to desperately and untenably populate a territory bathed in apocalyptic light, refer to surrealist values and to Matta’s political activism, which prioritized human dignity and nonviolence in society.

Dorothea Tanning came into contact with European representatives of surrealism who had fled National Socialism in New York in 1942 and soon became part of their inner circle. Max Ernst, whom she married in 1946, noted that Tanning was able to paint the “entire monstrousness that is swallowing up the age of reason.”

Fears and sexual phantasies are the substantive focus of her work. As seen in, among others, *Le nid (Bateau bleu) (The Grotto [The Blue Boat])*, her surrealist compositions up until the 1950s were characterized by mystical narratives that might also be interpreted as retreats from violence

and abuse. In later works, Tanning frames her images in a more abstract manner in terms of both content and form.

Man Ray – Before and After

Man Ray moved from New York to Paris in 1921 and immediately became involved in the activities of the surrealists, which he documented in his photographs. An expert on photography, he participated in their exhibitions and published in their magazines. In the early 1920s, Ray caused a sensation with his “rayographs,” a term invented by the artist for the process of placing objects directly on photographic paper and exposing them via external light source without use of a camera.

Man Ray’s self-portrait *Before and After* takes a humorous view. With half of his face shaved, the artist presents himself to the viewer as a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, raising question: Which side of the portrait corresponds most to the subject’s personality? It depicts both past and future events, or rather, the period of time in between that documents what has already-happened as well as that which is yet-to-come.

The female body is a recurring subject in Man Ray’s photographs, sculptures, drawings, and paintings. From the mid-1940s on, Ray embedded his images into geometrically structured environments. In *Opus*, he once again challenged classical composition: The red crayon outlines the body, making it stand out from the black web of perspective lines. The arms covering the breasts and loin, as well as the titled head and contrapposto, reference models from antiquity and the Renaissance, and are reminiscent of his earlier photographic references to classical ideals.

Satire

Marcel Jean joined the surrealists in 1933 and was an attentive chronicler of the movement’s development. Looking back at the height of the movement, Jean published *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste* in 1959, and *L’autobiographie du surréalisme* in 1978. The biographer considered the 1938 surrealist exhibition in Paris, with its humorous and absurd interventions, a turning point: No other presentation had ever managed to demonstrate the power of imagination in such an impressive manner.

In one of his erotic grotesques, Jean not only combined the male and the female body, but also geological, vegetal, and technoid structures. The man and woman in this ensemble seem to have surrendered to universal, mutually determined forces, penetrated by them and even assuming their forms.

Maurice Henry joined the surrealist group in 1933. He wrote for *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* and contributed to the large-scale 1938 and 1947 *Expositions Internationales du Surréalisme*.

From the mid-1930s on, he contributed to the propagation of surrealist forms of expression as a caricaturist. In the 1960s, his work remained linked to satire, as seen in *Dépouille du désir* (*Remains of Desire*) and *Le Plaisir* (*Pleasure*).

The work dedicated to Victor Brauner *Quand il s'aperçut de sa méprise, il était trop tard* (when he noticed his mistake, it was too late), also provides insight into Henry's repertoire and practice of critiquing individuals and society by means of grotesque exaggeration.

Photography – a Tool of Poetization

Raoul Ubac first came into contact with the Paris surrealists in 1930, and began collaborating with them more extensively in the second half of the decade. He took part in the surrealist exhibition of 1938 at the Galerie Beaux-Arts and published in *Minotaure*. He broke with surrealism in the mid-1940s.

In *Le Combat des Penthésiléas* (*The Battle of the Penthesileans*), Ubac addressed the mythological story of Penthesilea and Achilles, which ends with the tragic death of the lovers. In this work, the Amazonian queen is shown as a woman deconstructing herself, referencing the inescapability of human demise.

The artist employed his distortive brûlage technique in *Photo Relief*: During the course of this process, the glass negative is exposed to extreme heat. At one arbitrary moment, Ubac interrupted the process of deterioration he had initiated. Contingency plays a decisive role here, yet artistic manipulation is a conscious act. Ubac referred to the method as automatic, and believed that it enabled him to free himself from the arrogance of rationalist approaches. The media-specific characteristics of photography render it particularly well suited to highlight the poetic identity of things and therewith advance the development of surrealist formal vocabulary. From the 1930s on the photographic works of Austrian architect and designer **Herbert Bayer** were strongly impacted by surrealism. The influence of works by Salvador Dalí and René Magritte is clearly evident in *Creation* and *Still Life*. In 1938, Bayer emigrated to the United States, where he, along with Ilse and Walter Gropius, developed the *Bauhaus 1919–1928* exhibition for the Museum of Modern Art. Prior to emigration, Bayer had taught at the Bauhaus in Dessau.

The Lonely Metropolitan is one of Bayer's best-known works, and documents his attitude towards city life. He turned his back on urban living in 1946 when he moved to Aspen, Colorado to work as an architect and landscape designer.

Disassembled Realities Newly Constituted

What Max Ernst described as the “systematic exploitation of the accidentally or artificially provoked encounter of two or more foreign realities,” tapped into new realities and also refers to the photo collage technique.

The work of **Marcel Mariën**, who moved to Brussels to study with René Magritte in 1937, had a decisive influence on the development of Belgian surrealism. In *The Secret of the Alcove*, the artist appears to turn away from the traditional idealized image of women: The surreal object of a revolver with a faucet barrel epitomizes the dual function of the human genitourinary system that includes both the urinary and genital organs. Mariën’s interpretation emphasizes the pragmatism of what is actually at hand, therewith counteracting the sensual exaggeration of femininity.

German painter **Juro Kubicek**, who joined the Berliner Fantasten in 1945, combined the embellished imagery of commercial fashion magazines with black-and-white photographs, sparing use of color, and merged these into surreal yet tame and balanced compositions.

Born in 1900 in the southern French city of Agen, **Pierre Molinier** first came into contact with the surrealists in the late 1950s, and would remain in contact with them for only a short time. Nevertheless, he is considered one of surrealism’s important representatives, and created disquieting atmospheric images and psychographs in miniature addressing the surrealist canon of themes: Fetishism, exhibitionism, cross-dressing, sadomasochism, and necrophilia.

Danish artist **Wilhelm Freddie**, who turned to surrealism in the 1930s, deconstructed the female body in fragmented collages using cutouts from magazines. The brutal character of his creations was the result of his use of found material that was crumpled, torn, and cut to pieces. In Copenhagen, his works were labelled pornographic and confiscated in 1930. Not until 1965 did Freddie’s oeuvre receive the same level of recognition in Denmark as it had decades earlier on the international stage.

Collector’s Corner

An “artist – squared,” is what Marcel Duchamp would likely have called Helmut Klewan. Klewan has contemplated art since his youth, is able to lose himself in it, and studies and chooses it wisely: For his galleries in Vienna (since 1970) and Munich (since 1979) and, naturally, privately until this day – he thus “paints a collection for himself.”

Helmut Klewan has been active as a collector, gallerist, and publicist in the Austrian and international art scenes since the early 1960s, initially at Haus der Bilder in Vienna, an art and antiques gallery owned by his parents. Later, he began to study art history, converse with artist friends, and develop an interest in contemporary art. Klewan’s biography allows for no distinction between art and life – and thus it comes as no surprise that surrealism, also known as

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a “philosophy and attitude towards life,” has a special significance within his collection. In addition to works by many of the most prominent surrealist artists, his selection also includes numerous photographs and portraits that testify to close connections between protagonists in the movement. These pieces document the specificity of their artistic thought and action, Giacometti’s portrait of author Michel Leiris, for example, Picasso’s likenesses of Paul Éluard and Jacques Prévert, and Valentine Hugo’s of poet Arthur Rimbaud.

A seemingly inexhaustible continuum, Klewan’s collecting also provides insight into the persistence of the surreal artistic process in the form of German and Austrian Fantastic Realism as demonstrated by the works of Mac Zimmermann, Edgar Jené, Kurt Regschek, Fritz Janschka, and Heinz Stangl.

The Sigmund Freud Museum would like to thank Helmut Klewan for his cooperation and generous loans, these were crucial in the development of the “SURREAL! Imagining New Realities” exhibition at the founding place of psychoanalysis. We are especially grateful for his donation of Hermann Struck’s 1914 portrait of Sigmund Freud. That same year, the latter wrote to the former, saying: “I find the etching to be a charming idealization. This is what I would like to look like, and maybe I am on the way ... You have translated the rough and angular into rounded and undulating forms ... Every time I look at it, I like it better.”

The exhibition was **curated** by Monika Pessler and Daniela Finzi (Sigmund Freud Museum)