



THE LEGACY OF SURREALISM IN CONTEMPORARY ART



# THE LEGACY OF SURREALISM IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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## Introduction

In setting out to illustrate the legacy of Surrealism as it appears in the painting, sculpture, and drawing of the artists of our time, it is necessary to describe our mission, so broad is the influence of this present art and literary movement.

Surrealism claimed to be a way of life rather than an artistic style and its practitioners sought to broaden the logical and matter-of-fact view of reality by fusing it with subconscious, individual and dream experience. Their methods were diverse instead and not stylistically identifiable.

André Breton, the French poet and chief exponent of Surrealism defined the movement as: "Purely psychic automatism through which we undertake to express, in words, writing, or any other activity, the actual functioning of thoughts, thoughts dictated apart from any control by reason and any aesthetic or moral consideration. Surrealism seeks upon belief in the higher reality of specific forms of association, previously neglected, in the omnipresence of dreams, and in the disinterested play of thinking."

Based on this definition three categories emerge: 1. the illogical juxtaposition of specific forms or objects, 2. the dream world, 3. automatism. These categories provide a loose structure into which a divergent group of artists may be placed. Some of the unselected for this exhibit may pertain clearly to a general definition of Surrealism, while other works will require further attention because their relationship appears so far removed. This in itself satisfies a Surrealist impulse on the part of the curator, for the intention is not to define but to explore. The hope is that Surrealism might be perceived as something humans intuitively understand, an attitude rather than a conviction, a method rather than a product.

Also, in keeping with the objectives of the Ben Shahn Galleries, the exhibit participants include the established artist as well as the younger, unaffiliated. In this regard we wish to thank the artists, dealers and collectors for their generosity and cooperation in making this exhibit possible.

Special thanks go to Margaret Culmore, catalog editor and to Bill Ruby for compiling the artists' biographies. Martin Schmeil designed the catalog which was made possible by a grant from the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities.

Nancy Ehrenkrantz  
Gallery Director

# The Fantastic and Surrealism

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# The Fantastic Surrealists

## Sheri Kravitz Newberger

"A road of mental adventure  
which climbs steeply  
One peak and it's instantly  
overgrown"

Artists today are examining and reinterpreting styles of the recent past. Of central interest is the innovative experiment of the 1920's called Surrealism. Concerned with the fantastic, the mystical and the mythical, its tenets never entirely disappeared from artistic vocabulary. Under the guise of other art forms, its philosophies have been reiterated repeatedly. This has been possible because, as Patrick Waldberg explains, "it is not a question of a school or a formal movement, but of a spiritual orientation."<sup>1</sup> Involved with man's innermost thoughts, dreams, desires and desires, it sought to reveal these hidden and unconscious facets by mechanical means.

Surrealists "were seeking a guiding light, a way to make a new truth clear."<sup>2</sup> Fearing just come through a devastating war, they turned away from a shocking reality to an inner world of fantasy. As described by Joseph Carter, "It is the nature of all wars to destroy the world, as it is to a greater or lesser degree, but the length of World War I and the magnitude of its slaughter, accompanied by revolution, starvation, and pestilence, and followed shortly by an enormous economic depression, all combined to erode the ordinary man's trust in the shape of things as they were."<sup>3</sup> Many turned to art to save them from this near and unreluctant way of life. They looked for something that could not be destroyed by bullets, starvation, disease, loneliness or fear. Waldberg tells, "Confronted by the collapse of moral values, the disintegration of human life resulting from it and the bankruptcy of the intellect, the Surrealists sought to restore to life a sense of the Sacred, Life, Change and the Dream were the new gods they set up against Reason and the God of their fathers."<sup>4</sup> Max Ernst, twice seriously wounded in the war, stated, "How to overcome the disgust and fatal boredom that military life and the horrors of war create? Sleep? Daydream? Love? Or, have faith in the therapeutic virtues of a contemplative life?"<sup>5</sup>

As conceived by the French poet André Breton, "Surrealism was born not to finish a revolutionary movement. The Surrealists had two passwords: 'To change life' (Proust) and 'To transform the world' (Marx)."<sup>6</sup> Breton had studied with Freud and worked as a military psychiatrist. His interest in dreams and automatic writing led to the formation of a group of artists who "sought to revolutionize art completely so that both the kinds of subjects represented and the stylistic references of the painting itself were to be unconcerned with reality/fantasy."<sup>7</sup> With its roots in the findings and methods of psychoanalysis, Surrealism evolved through innovative techniques to a new appreciation of the mind's capacity for the fantastic. Its political aspect became submerged in an avalanche of creativity.

The incorporation of the fantastic in art had many precedents. Hieronymus Bosch used nightmarish visions to warn men against sin and indulgence; yet his complex medieval symbolism is often obscured by the obvious delight of his figures in sensual pleasures. Carter and Riley agree, "His strongest impact was felt in the art of Surrealism. His horrific and fantastic dream images, his sense of the bizarre, as seen especially in *Pap Garden of Delights* had inevitably come, but his visual reminder of fantasy was the major reason for the Surrealist's adoration of Bosch."<sup>13</sup>

William Blake studied the teachings of the 17th Century mystic Jacob Boehme who believed that through imagination man could choose between heaven and hell. Blake's concern with mythology, spirituality and emotionalism is evident in his ethereal, floating figures presented with "visionary radiance."<sup>14</sup>



William Blake  
*The Ancient of Days* (Reproduction of *Envisioned a Prophet*, 1793)  
Blake's visionary work covered  
1765 to 1809, Washington, D.C.



Hieronymus Bosch  
The Fight Between Carnival and Lent  
c.1500  
Oil  
The Prado Museum, Spain

At its peak during the years between the two world wars, the Surrealist movement, "had a strong identity as a closed group obedient to automatic theories. It was dominated by the person and the ideas of Breton, and it was motivated by an exaltation of totally new and stimulating ideas flowing from Breton's interpretation of Freud's experiments."<sup>14</sup> Breton, himself, explains, "Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought."<sup>15</sup> As a movement of poets, "The poets went to discover the secret of a universal, forgotten language of symbols, which speaks from through our dreams, and some fragments of which have survived in fairy-tales, in legends and myths. The painters went to bring to light the hidden and previously unseen landscapes of the mind."<sup>16</sup>

As a group, Surrealist artists used a variety of styles and techniques and can only be grouped together by inspiration. Relying on the revelations of dreams and subconscious motivation can only lead to highly individualized interpretations. Members of the Surrealist community were only those acknowledged as such by Breton. However, ideas spread and many artists not formally Surrealist, such as Picasso, recognized and experimented with Surrealist concepts.

Surrealists are usually divided into at least two groups. Wassily Kandinsky differentiates, "There are the 'describers', who were inspired by Géricault. These he also calls 'naturalists of the imaginary.'<sup>17</sup> The other group, the 'emblematics,' he considers, "the class of painters for whom calligraphy, animation and movement are the essentials, regardless of the subject represented."<sup>18</sup> The latter, including the artists Ernst, Masson and Légal, produce fantastically altered or abstracted images using unusual techniques. Edward Lucie-Smith similarly separates Surrealists into, "Verbal Surrealists—Sal, Tanguy and Magritte who paint dream-images in a linear, highly detailed, unspontaneous way; and the calligraphic Surrealists, where the design evolves on the surface by means of a process akin to automatic writing."<sup>19</sup>

Surrealists, as explained by Herscher Chapp, "looked back, in painting, to the great thinkers and painters of imaginary subjects, to the Romantics and Symbolists and, farther afield, to the sculpture of primitive peoples, especially the fantastic figures and masks of Oceania."<sup>20</sup> Wassily reveals, "Of Christian art, they recognized only the Eastern; in heraldic, Of Europe, they retained only the arabesque period—especially Catalan and Moorsese—while favoring the more popular and primitive art. They valued most of that was borrowed by Pre-Columbian America, as well as the art which was flourishing at the beginning of the century—in Brazil, America, Oceania, the American Indian and the Eskimo."<sup>21</sup> He divides, "The Surrealists would have gladly sacrificed all Romanesque art, the cathedrals, the shrines of the Loire and Versailles in favor of the statues on Easter Island."<sup>22</sup>

William Rubin feels, "The common denominator of all this painting was a commitment to subjects of a visionary, poetic, and hence, metaphoric order."<sup>11</sup> However, the descriptive, dream-like subjects were not as embraced with fantasy as the calligraphic, often more abstract, work done by Ernst, Masson and Miró. Tanguy, although descriptively dream-like, can be considered as fantastic. Rubin states, "If Tanguy's style is realistic, his visual poetry is abstract."<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that many feel that, "Surrealists never made non-figurative pictures. No matter how abstract certain works by Miró, Masson, or Arp might appear, they always allude, however elliptically, to a subject."<sup>13</sup> In other words, "To me a form is never abstract; it is always a sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else. For me painting is never form for form's sake."<sup>14</sup>

The Surrealists were able to achieve fantastic ends by the creative use of innovative techniques. They sought to prompt the mind through both established and invented methods. Early techniques used by Breton and his poets included, "Dreams, invocations of a world beyond the world, shock tactics and surprise effects, recourse to the obscure, molar automatisms of the subliminal self, to modes of thought based



George de Soto  
The Double-Cross of Spring, 1935  
Oil on canvas  
22 1/2 x 27 1/2"  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of James Thrall Soby



Five Tongues  
Umberto Boccioni, 1912  
Bronze  
40 x 28"  
Morgan Stanley Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

an analogue, to the techniques of the mediating frame—such were the hidden springs that fed the glistening fountain which precariously upheld and cradled the egg of Surrealism.”<sup>11</sup> Surrealist artists, beginning with these same expressive techniques, creatively expanded the ways to release hidden responses.

Max Ernst was considered by Breton to be the first Surrealist painter. He invented a method of collage in which, “he used the borrowed elements primarily for their image value, joining them in irrational, disconcerting ways.”<sup>12</sup> It is an approach completely different from that of the Cubists. “The external object had broken with its customary surroundings, its component parts were somehow emancipated from the object in such a way as to set up entirely new relationships with other elements, evading from the principles of reality while still drawing upon the real plane.”<sup>13</sup> Out of the depths of his dreams and distorted childhood memories, Ernst used innovative techniques to create fantastic creatures. Sometimes threatening and sometimes protecting, they became the personification of Ernst, himself.



Max Ernst  
*L'Apprenti-sorcier* (The Apprentice Sorcerer), 1919.  
Cut and paste photographs, paint and pen and ink collage.  
1919, 1920.  
The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York.

The importance of free association and other ways of breaking psychological barriers in the creation of fantasies are addressed in the statement by Ernst, "In my opinion it goes so far as to remember, when you stop to contemplate the spots on walls, certain aspects of walls, on the hearth, on clouds or ceilings; and if you consider them carefully you will discover most admirable inventions which the painter's genius can turn to good account in composing pictures (both of animals and men), landscapes or monsters, demons and other fantastic things that will do credit to you."<sup>11</sup>

Methods of drawing were also used by Ernst and Surrealists in pursuit of Breton's "psychic automatism."<sup>12</sup> As the poets invented "automatic writing," so the artists developed "automatic drawing" (drawing details, "The simplest of [these drawing techniques] is rapid drawing—executed, as to speak, with the eyes closed—in which the personality of the artist is expressed directly from the subconscious, a method that demands an unusual state of tension, and one in which André Masson exalted."<sup>13</sup> The Surrealist group perfected a game called "The Exquisite Corpse" in which, originally, poets each added words to a paper without knowing what others had already written. Brequel explains that among the artists, "three or four people drew on a horizontally-folded piece of paper, each adding a single part of the human figure without knowing what the previous person had drawn."<sup>14</sup> Tanguy was particularly associated with this method.

William Rubin recognizes the importance of Surrealist inventions when he concludes, "The work of most of the younger Surrealists is best characterized by their invention of new automatic techniques that rounded out a gallery begun earlier with automatic drawing, 'collage', and the exquisite-corpse."<sup>15</sup> He adds (Ernst's use of "occultism," a can of paint with a hole in the bottom attached by a string over a screen which allows it to ooze freely in strong designs, although he refuses to acknowledge this as a precedent of Pollock's drip-style. He also mentions forage, or the furms and smoke trails left by a lit candle, used by Wolfgang Paalen (later seen in work by Yves Klein) and sculpture, or poured enamel, invented by Matta and Goussier Olivier Ford. Masson's use of sand was another Surrealist technique.

Mechanical means and planned methods were not the only inspiration of Surrealists. Miró explains, "In 1925, I was drawing almost entirely from hallucinations. At the time I was living on a few dried figs a day. I was too proud to ask my colleagues for help. Hunger was a great source of the hallucinations. I would sit for long periods looking at the bare walls of my studio trying to capture these shapes on paper or canvas."<sup>16</sup> In evaluating all this work it should be recognized that after these techniques provided inspiration, artists carefully completed their paintings with discipline and attention to the rules of composition.

As the movement progressed, many fell a "dislike of what was felt to be the excessively insistent demands of the movement for acts and professions of allegiance, and a near-fear of Breton's incipient

authoritarianism.<sup>124</sup> Depleted by suicide and alcohol and drug abuse and given impetus by the approaching second World War, many fled to the United States and Mexico and New York became the center of Surrealist activity.

Smeigel explains, "As Surrealism lost its significance as an organized movement in art, its influence began to penetrate to other movements where its problems it had not touched in a different form."<sup>125</sup> Lucia-Smith feels, "Abstract Expressionism, despite its name, owed less to European Expressionism than it did to Surrealism."<sup>126</sup> Smeigel agrees when he discusses Gorky, whose "work shows most clearly the decisive influence that Surrealism had on many painters (Rothko, Kline, Motherwell, Bazalos and others) who after the war became the founders of the new American school of painting."<sup>127</sup>



TOYEN TEAGUE, *Woodcut Series*  
*Toyen Teague, 1904-1982, New York, NY, USA*  
Figure 100-07  
100 pages, color images  
100 x 100  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

William Sautin, who rejects any Surrealist role in the formation of Abstract Expressionism, felt in 1968, "Since there has been no such thing as Dadaist or Surrealist art properly speaking, whatever either of these movements has done so assimilated into the cumulative vocabulary of art that much of what is done today is touched by it in one way or another."<sup>10</sup> However, according to Breughel in 1974, "Surrealist ideas continue to exist in what Jean Schuster has called 'latent Surrealism', meaning a special disposition among some people to express, without the limiting stratagems of group orthodoxy, a certain attitude and problems that were always inherent in Surrealism."<sup>11</sup>

Today, this controversy has little relevance as contemporary artists specifically adopt styles of the past. Most painters freely borrow from the Surrealist idea of psychic revelation. A work that is classified as "Surrealist" can also meet other criteria: even if abstract in representation, it must relate some (or) reality, mythological or fantastic images should appear dream-like; devices may be used to evoke subconscious responses. No leader stands now, as did Breton, to decide the validity of a claim to Surrealism. We, ourselves, must apply these criteria and make final decisions.

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20. William S. Rubin, *Docs, Surrealism and Urban Heritage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988), p. 84.
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23. Clipp, p. 402.
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26. Waldberg, 1980, p. 88.
27. Waldberg, 1980, p. 90.
28. Clipp, pp. 370-1.
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30. Smagol, p. 27.
31. Rubin, p. 128.
32. Clipp, p. 434.
33. Smagol, op. cit., p. xiii.
34. Smagol, p. 8.
35. Lucia-Smith, p. 267.
36. Smagol, p. 47.
37. Rubin, p. 186.
38. Smagol, p. 8.

# Automatism in Surrealism

Jane Hare

Contemporary art is indebted to the ideas and techniques of Surrealism. The concept of "automatism", biomorphism, the use of found objects, incongruous juxtaposition, an interest in psychology, and rejection of taste and traditional values are common concerns in art today.<sup>1</sup> Automatism was an essential idea in Surrealist doctrine. The historical concept of automatism in Surrealism, its influence on the Abstract Expressionists, and its continued use in current art will be explored.

Though most of its members were poets and artists, Surrealism initially evolved, not as an art movement, but as a way of life devoted to liberating man philosophically, politically and psychologically—a rebellious reaction to the horror and absurdity of war and to a modern technological society. "Dada and Surrealism were born out of the artists' weariness of a society gone haywire and clinging to rational explanations of increasing irrational twentieth century experience, chief among which was World War I."<sup>2</sup> Dada emerged in Zurich in 1917, mocking society, intellect and art. Dada philosophy was nihilistic. Surrealism developed in France in 1929 under the leadership of Andre Breton composed of former Dada members and some of its ideas. The Surrealists, though disillusioned, were basically optimistic and wanted to change the world.<sup>3</sup> Breton, Freud, and Marx were all at work during the early 1900's. The Surrealists incorporated the theories of these great thinkers into their ideas and techniques. Freud most directly influenced the Surrealists through *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Wit and It's Relation to the Unconscious* (1925). There was a loss of faith in logic and reason, therefore "Bart's dreams and theories of freely associated images thus seemed of more significance than his intellectual formulations in revealing his true nature."<sup>4</sup>

Surrealist painting was inspired by two Freudian discoveries, the dream and free association. These essentials were translated into two types of painting: the dream images of Magritte, Tanguy, Ernst and Dalí, and automatism/visual free associations which inspired the intuitive, unpremeditated works of Miró, Masson and Miya. Both kinds of painting were done throughout the movement, though automatism dominated the early years.<sup>5</sup> Although most of the Surrealists used a combination of the incongruent, the fantastic (dreams), and automatism, "psychic automatism" was an essential element in Surrealist painting. Andre Breton wrote that "a work of art will measure up of the Surrealist only inasmuch, 'underground' at least there flows a current of 'Automatism!'"<sup>6</sup>

Around the turn of the century, people became intrigued by automatic writing, an occult fad. "The automatic writer holds pencil to paper and then waits for it as though on its own, no conscious effort is made, whatever writing comes forth presumably does so under the guidance of something other than one's conscious mind. If one has a psychological basis, the writing is seen as emanating from the person's unconscious mind. If one has an other worldly basis, the writing is seen as a message from the spirit world."

Gertrude Stein, in the 1880's before she became a literary figure in Paris, experimented with automatic writing. Stein and a fellow student began by copying words the other dictated, while simultaneously reading other material, the reading occupied the conscious mind, the writing was left to the unconscious. She later went on to reading a story aloud to avoid paying attention to whether her hand was writing, instead of taking dictation, her hand was free to write "automatically" (an unconscious activity).<sup>2</sup>

Automatische  
zu einem 1880  
in ein  
41" x 47"  
Museum exhibition for New York



The Surrealists were devoted to liberating man's creativity through the unconscious. Automatic drawing, adopted from the Cubists, was a method used by Surrealist painters to explore the creative powers of the unconscious. Matis maintained that "automatic was Surrealism's most liberating innovation, for it enabled the unconscious mind to speak spontaneously."<sup>1</sup>

Automatic drawings, like automatic writing, were begun with no subject matter or composition in mind. Mind explained, "Rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting, and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush. The firm becomes a sign for a woman or a bird as I work . . . The final stage is unconscious."<sup>2</sup> The artist's pen, brush, or charcoal would travel rapidly across paper or canvas, at random, until possible images were found—objects, animals, figures. These works were spontaneous, intuitive, imaginative and free.

The Surrealists were constantly inventing new automatic techniques to release the unconscious. In 1924 Max Ernst developed his "frottage" (rubbing) technique. He did a series of drawings from wooden floorboards by dropping pieces of paper on the boards and rubbing them with lead. Ernst observed from this experience, "I marveled at the results and my curiosity awakened, I was led to examine in the same way all sorts of materials that I happened upon: leaves and their veins, the ragged edges of sackcloth, the pale, white markings on a "modern" painting . . ."<sup>3</sup> Ernst began incorporating the technique into his painting. Prints made by scraping paint off canvases lying on a variety of textured objects (e.g. suggestions of birds, flowers or trees to Max Ernst's imagination). William Sauter between the years 1920-1933 was the most productive in Ernst's career, and most of the work was a result of the automatic technique, "frottage".<sup>4</sup> Ernst later invented a technique called "bolection" which involved dragging a piece of paint with a hole in it at the end of a string and producing rhythmic drawings.

André Masson made sand and tube paintings. Glue was applied to canvas; sand adhered only to the areas where the sticky glue had been drawn. Masson would then squeeze paint directly from the tube to emphasize forms of birds or figures.

By 1928, automatism was no longer the dominant force in Surrealist painting. Seeking to recapture the spontaneity of earlier automatic drawings and paintings, new automatic techniques were invented: decalcomania, "frottage", "bolection".

Ernst perfected the process of decalcomania when he adapted it to oil painting. Originally gouache was spread on paper while another sheet was placed on top and randomly pressed or rubbed. When the top sheet was removed a monogram of fantastic images resulted. Artists also drew with pencils creating their forms with smoke and flames. Matis was involved in inventing "bolection" (pouring). Enamel paint was poured on canvas where it puddled, dried, and dripped, producing new, strange shapes.



Older Coffin  
From the Middle Kingdom, 1800-1850  
(New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)  
1875 x 1875  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



André Breton  
*Landscape with Figures*, 1928  
Gouache, paper, oil pencil and charcoal on canvas  
19 1/2 x 26 1/2"  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

These automatic techniques were vital to the Surrealists as methods of spontaneous release from the unconscious and of providing them with new creative imagery. The influence of Surrealist automatism was also vital to the Abstract-Expressionists.

Hitler's rise to power and the threat of war forced many influential European artists to flee to America: Max Ernst, Mondrian, Duchamp, Breton, Hans Hofman, Matisse and Joseph Albers. The center of artistic thought and activity had now shifted from Paris to New York. These artists brought with them a rich European heritage. The emergence of the New York School (Abstract-Expressionists) was profoundly affected by the arrival of the European artists, especially the Surrealists.

In their search for new themes, Gorky, Pollock, Rothko, Gellies and other Abstract-Expressionists turned to Surrealism for abstract imagery and subconscious meanings to express their art. Exploring the possibilities of automatism, these painters were attracted to its liberating toward abstract biomorphic forms, its directness and freedom. Of particular interest were the paintings of Miró and Matisse which illustrate these tendencies.

Matisse made himself available to the New Yorkers and was influential in promoting the possibilities of automatism. He painted large-scale canvases (over 10 feet) where paint was dripped, wiped with rags, scraped and stained. These techniques so often seen in the mature styles of the Abstract-Expressionists must have influenced these artists who often met with Matisse and saw his work.<sup>11</sup>

André Gorky, considered a member of the Surrealists by Breton, became an Abstract Expressionist and was especially inspired by the spontaneity of Matisse's biomorphic imagery and automatic techniques. Gorky, like the other Abstract Expressionists, was committed to European oil painting and admired the works of Matisse, Picasso, and Mondrian. Gorky spent years studying these masters. "The Abstract Expressionists were interested in 'painting-as-painting' more than Surrealist philosophy." The New Yorkers did not consider automatism "sufficient in itself". Robert Motherwell says, "It is much more a poetic reason with which to invent new forms. As such, it is one of the twentieth century's greatest formal inventions."<sup>14</sup>

André Gorky  
Surrealist faces, oil on  
canvas  
11 x 14"  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Acquired through the Lila P. Blum Bequest





Walt Butler  
Dancer at Night, 1968  
Watercolor  
48 1/2 x 48 1/2 in. (124 x 122 cm)  
The Brooklyn Museum,  
Brooklyn, New York, 47 1988  
Museum Collection Fund

Mark Rothko's elegant, atmospheric watercolors (1941 - 1944), suggesting underwater images, were inspired by the automatic drawings of Miró and Masson. Many of these Surrealist works using abstract forms and mythic symbols reveal characteristics that would follow into Rothko's mature Abstract Expressionist paintings of the 1950's. Adolph Gottlieb was also influenced by myth, biomorphism and automatism in his gridless "Pictographs" (1947).<sup>17</sup>

Jackson Pollock and the Abstract Expressionists used the spontaneity of automatism to make it a "painterly style of drawing."<sup>18</sup> Using "automatic drawing" to tap the unconscious, Pollock rhythmically dripped, poured and spilled paint over canvases to create his own individual style. His drip technique was an "epitome of Automatism".<sup>19</sup> The famous "all-over" composition, often attributed to Pollock, evolved from Surrealism's legacy, "psychic automatism".<sup>20</sup> The significance of automatism—spontaneity, intuitive power, gestural energy, and directness can be seen in the inventive work of various artists in the exhibition.

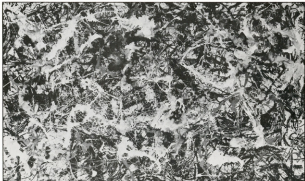
William Anastasi recalls Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism as he works the surfaces of canvases with oil sticks and acrylic paint with his eyes closed, resulting in turbulent brushstrokes and marks. Anastasi calls these compositions, "filled drawings".

Linda Kartheis and Cyrla Moser make "automatic drawings" using spontaneity and intuition to invent their images. Like Miró, Masson and Masson these artists explore the creative power of the unconscious mind set free by automatism.

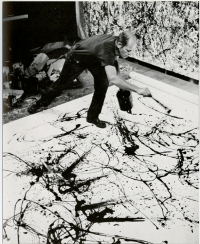
Harry Kramer and Merrill Wagner, with no subject in mind, use vigorous strokes in their all-over paintings. Kramer's gestural work is seen not in thick paint and color.

The gestural images in Ralph Miller's paintings reveal primitive figures hidden in leaf-like forms. These images were found in the spontaneous, unpremeditated, direct act of drawing.

Automatism is as important to some artists today as it was to the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists. The freedom, directness and spontaneity of automatic techniques still appeal to contemporary artists who use automatism in their own way.



Jackson Pollock  
Convergence, 1952  
Oil on canvas  
80 1/2 x 150"  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.  
Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1956.



Walt Disney  
October 1955, Disneyland

Photograph courtesy of Photographic Arts Society

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# Apropos of "Readymades"

Marcel Duchamp

IN 1913 I HAD THE HAPPY IDEA TO FASTEN A BICYCLE WHEEL TO AN ORDINARY SCHOOL ADDRESS OF "T" TUBES.

A FEW MONTHS LATER I OBTAINED A SIMILAR REPRODUCTION OF A WINTER FISHING LANDSCAPE, WHICH I CALLED FISHERY (B) AFTER AROUND TWO SMALL (B) TUBES, ONE RED AND ONE YELLOW, IN THE WORKSHOP.

IN NEW YORK IN 1915 I BOUGHT AT A HARDWARE STORE A SNOW SHOVEL ON WHICH I WROTE "IN ADVANCE OF THE BROKEN ARM."

IT WAS AROUND THAT TIME THAT THE WORD "READYMADE" CAME TO MIND TO DESIGNATE THE FORM OF REPRESENTATION A POINT WHICH I WANT VERY MUCH TO ESTABLISH IS THAT THE CHOICE OF THESE "READYMADES" WAS NEVER DICTATED BY ESTHETIC DELIBERATION.

THE CHOICE WAS BASED ON A REACTION OF INSTANT INTEREST WITH AT THE SAME TIME A TOTAL ABSENCE OF GOING (INTO) LASTE . . . IN FACT A COMPLETE UNDIFFERENCE (ONE IMPORTANT (CRUCIAL) TERM IS) WAS THE SHORT SENTENCE WHICH I OCCASIONALLY INSCRIBED ON THE "READYMADE."

THAT SENTENCE INSTEAD OF DESCRIBING THE OBJECT LIKE A TITLE WAS MEANT TO CARRY THE BUREAU OF THE SPECTRA FOR TOWARDS OTHER PERSONS MORE VERSAL.

SOMETIMES I WOULD ADD A GRAPHIC DETAIL OF PRESENTATION WHICH IN ORDER TO SATISFY MY CRAVING FOR ILLUSTRATIONS, WOULD BE CALLED "READYMADE AIDS."

AT ANOTHER TIME WANTING TO EXPOSE THE BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ART AND READYMADES I INSCRIBED A "TECHNICAL 'READYMADE'": USE A REFRIGERATOR AS AN IRONING BOARD.

I REMEMBER VERY SOON THE CHARM OF REPEATING INDIVIDUALLY THE "T" TUBES FORM OF REPRESENTATION AND DECIDED TO LIMIT THE PRODUCTION OF "READYMADES" TO A SMALL NUMBER YEARLY. (WAS AWARE AT THAT TIME, THAT FOR THE SPECTRA FOR THERE MORE THAN FOR THE ARTIST, ART IS A (WANT) FORMING DRUG AND I WANTED TO PROTECT MY "READYMADES" AGAINST SUCH CONTAMINATION.

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE "READYMADE" IS ITS LACK OF UNPLEASANT . . . THE REFLICA OF A "READYMADE" DELIVERING THE SAME MESSAGE IN FACT NEARLY EVERY ONE OF THE "READYMADES" EXISTING TODAY IS NOT AN ORIGINAL IN THE CONVENTIONAL SENSE.

A FINAL REMARK TO THIS (GONNAC'S) DISCOURSE: SINCE THE TUBES OF "T" WERE USED BY THE ARTIST AND MANUFACTURED AND REPRODUCED BASED (PRODUCE) IT CAN BE CONCLUDED THAT ALL THE PAINTINGS IN THE WORKS ARE "READYMADES AIDS" AND ALSO WORKS OF ASSEMBLAGE.

Marcel Duchamp

1960

Reprinted by permission of the publisher The ARTIST, incorporating ART AND ARTIST'S MAGAZINE, 1-4 July 1980. A new paperback edition of the Museum exhibition art, New York, October 19, 1980.

# Surrealism in America

Nancy Einreihofen

America was formally introduced to Surrealism, with all its magic images, psychological implications and philosophical passion, in 1939. It was that year the Museum of Modern Art in New York City launched an exhibit of work by the European Surrealists. In his preface for the catalog of that exhibit, Director Alfred Barr emphasized the artists' passion and the idea that Surrealism was not just an artistic style but for many, "... a way of life, a cause to which some of the most brilliant painters and poets of our age are giving themselves with consuming devotion." This devotion and the fact that Surrealism did not adhere to a specific style account for its adaptability to various cultures. To examine its impact on American art we must begin with the movement's founder and the development of Surrealism before 1939.

The French poet, André Breton, was familiar with Freudian theory and understood its potential use in the creative process of the twentieth century artist. During World War I, Breton worked in a psychiatric center treating shell shock victims. The interpretation of dreams was an important part of his work and he would later apply these techniques to the making of art. Free-association would be used to provide rich, non-verbal material for the construction of poetry. "Together with his friend and fellow poet Philippe Soupault, Breton began experimenting. They shut themselves up in a dark room, tried to simulate a semi-conscious, dreamlike state of mind and wrote down whatever words, images and sentences occurred to them."<sup>1</sup> The result was a fine example of automatic writing containing an assortment of images and considerable emotion. These writings were published in 1921 under the title "Les Chances Magnétiques" and constitute the first Surrealist text.

Although Surrealism began as a literary movement, it achieved its greatest fame in the visual arts. It was a revolution against old thinking habits, a way to uncover the unconscious and a new world of human experience. The human spirit would be liberated through the discovery of a world in which reason had no control. Since reason had structured the society that organized and waged war, reason could not be trusted to govern the future. If the rational, organized systems were ineffective, perhaps salvation could be found in the irrational.

Destin-believed Surrealism to be a revolution whose goal was "to change life" for the new period of history. "In the last analysis, this new way of thought is based chiefly by the anxiety inherent in an age like ours, where human brotherhood is at a premium while the best organized systems, including social systems, seem to have become petrified in the hands of their advocates. This way of thought has broken loose from the bonds of all that man has ever discovered to be definitive, and it swept on safely by its own momentum."<sup>1</sup>

Destin's strong convictions along with his ability to articulate the concepts of Surrealism enabled him to gather together a group of artists and writers dedicated to the art that could change the world. Their regular meetings in Paris cultivated expanded the applications of Surrealist methods and solidified the greater sense of mission. Surrealism became a positive creed reinforced with publications and exhibitions in the *Galerie Surrealiste*.

In order to trace the legacy of this Surrealist ideology we will examine two manifestations of Surrealism: the juxtaposition of incongruent objects painted in a meticulously real fashion and exemplified in the paintings of René Magritte and Salvador Dalí; the exploration of the unconscious through automatic methods as seen in the work of Joan Miró and Yves Tanguy.

The work of René Magritte (Belgian, born 1898) exemplifies the pictorial aspect of Surrealism. In part indebted to the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, Magritte's paintings strive for a visual disorientation through the precise rendering of familiar objects out of context or familiar scenes with incongruent elements. Proper man in Bowler hat fall like raindrops from the heavens; a giant rock floats weightless above the sea; a locomotive moves full steam ahead from inside a fireplace. These and other images challenge our rational perceptions and, as Magritte himself points out, evoke the mystery of all existence.

"Reason dogs the steps of art with its measuring instruments, attempting to canalize methodically the disquieting torments with which art nourishes man's spirit despite all obstacles. . . . Reason is the daemon of the Inimitable Laws, the guardian angel of the Absolute. Everything it touches becomes determinate, coming within the scope of an unambiguous order that is utterly different from that indeterminate world in which man plunges into experiments with only his senses and his fantasies to keep him afloat. But Magritte tries to reduce the opposition between the rational on one side and the irrational on the other. His pictures resemble images of dreams—the dreams of reason—for dreams can sometimes possess a frightening precision. Magritte has proved that precision, far from being an assurance of alleviation, is on the contrary a powerful means of renewing the metaphysics of admiration and terror."<sup>2</sup>

Precision is a hallmark of Salvador Dalí's work as well. The precision that brings his dream landscapes into focus also persuaded us to trust in their evidence.

Salvador Dalí (Spanish, born 1904) arrived in Paris in 1926 and there discovered Surrealism. Joan Miró, a fellow-Catalonian, introduced Dalí to the group who in turn attended the premier of Dalí's film "Un Chapeau Andalou". This film, which had been made in collaboration with Luis Buñuel, pleased the Surrealists immensely. The film was followed by an exhibit of Dalí's paintings which prompted André Breton to comment that at last the "mental windows have been opened nearly wide". The relationship between Dalí and the Surrealists would however quickly sour due to Dalí's difficult behavior.

Dalí produced his significant paintings between 1929 and 1939, however during this period Breton and others began to express reservations about his ego-centric, often bizarre behavior.

René Magritte  
The Great Mirror, 1928  
Oil on canvas,  
37 1/2 x 30 1/2"  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.





Salvador Dalí  
The Persistence of Memory, 1931  
Oil on canvas  
9 1/2 x 13"  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

At the same time the group was dismayed, they were also fascinated with Dalí's ability to illustrate psychotic symbols and hallucinations. Pictures of barren landscapes with limp watches were interpreted as representations of sexual impotence, guilt and paranoia. While the Surrealists focused on Dalí's Freudian images, a wider public praised him for his obvious technical proficiency. In the end, his influence for better or worse would be widespread.

The second manifestation of Surrealist ideology, that is, the work resulting from the exploration of automatic methods, is illustrated by the paintings of Miró and Tanguy.

Joan Miró (Spanish, born 1893) arrived in Paris in 1919 and was counted among the most prominent of the Surrealists from 1923 on. The imagery in Miró's paintings, the amoebic forms, the dancing genitalia, the wild, invented inventions were inspired, according to the artist, by hallucinations resulting from starvation during his lean Paris years.



"Freud has demonstrated that at these unfathomable depths there reigns the absence of contradiction, the relaxation of emotional tensions due to repression, a lack of the sense of time, and the replacement of external reality by a psychic reality obeying the pleasure principle alone. Automatism leads us in a straight line to this region."<sup>1</sup>

Miró's fascination with primitive cultures and the art of children would persist throughout his life. His exhibition in 1941 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City brought his concerns, his art and his methods before American artists. The biomorphic imagery and mythological content of these paintings stimulated the exploration of the unknown world.

In discussing the strange worlds created by Miró and Tanguy, André Breton wrote:

"The fact that the young painters of today have opted unambiguously for automatism has by no means precluded them from devoting their fullest attention to the most far-ranging problems. Though, in their forays into the realm of science, the accuracy of their pronouncements remains largely unconfirmed, the important thing is that they all share the same deep yearning to transcend the three-dimensional universe."<sup>2</sup>

Joan Miró  
*Elemental Figures*, 1954-55.  
 Oil on canvas.  
 24 x 30 1/2"  
 Copyright Joan Miró Foundation,  
 Gallery, New York.

Yves Tanguy  
Monsi, Agence Bourgeois, 1921  
Oil on canvas  
28 1/2 x 28 1/2  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



André Breton described the paintings of Yves Tanguy (French, born 1894) as words of a language which we cannot yet hear but which, at some future time, we will learn to speak and write. He saw Tanguy's paintings taking us to the heart of existence. "What differentiates Tanguy's position from that of the painters who have preceded him is that to express life his starting point is not the tree's invariable bark but its heart, from which the rings of sap radiate. Affective life can be seen, when studied, no other culminating points and drifting spaces bathed in a curious light. The time landscape changes every minute; it does not consist of simple, independent, easily recognizable objects, but of imprints into which other imprints continuously melt."

Yves Tanguy's lunar landscapes are occupied by strange amorphous shapes that have no equivalent in nature. His dream-space paintings are said to be among the finest examples of the "Surrealist ambition to create a spontaneous visual imagery of the subconscious."<sup>11</sup>

With the outbreak of World War II and the German army's move into France, many of the Paris Surrealists relocated to America. Just as the war caused the shift of the center of the art world from Paris to New York, so did it also spur the dispersal of Surrealism. The importance for American art was the arrival in New York of artists Yves Tanguy, Roberto Matta Sotomayor, André Masson, Max Ernst and Man Ray. Now the leaders of the Surrealist movement were available for lectures and exhibitions with the young Americans, especially a loosely knit group later to be known as Abstract Expressionists. The American artists, along with the Europeans, viewed their work and discussed the revolutionary philosophy that closing the gap of colonial modernism and rooting Surrealist concepts in American soil.

One of the first and most important exhibits to bring the Europeans and Americans together was the "First Papers of Surrealism". Held in 1942 at the Whitebox Field Station on Madison Avenue, the exhibit included artists Masson, Matta and Ernst along with Giacometti, Gorky and Motherwell. Another important meeting ground during this period was Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, Art of This Century. In addition, a number of artists gathered weekly during the winter of 1940-42 at Matta's Sixth Street studio to view each other's work and analyze the images.

There were some parallels between the Europeans and Americans. Both groups had read Freud and Jung, for example, and had a deep interest in myths, the unconscious and dreams. There existed in the American character, however, a puritanical trait that resisted some of the sexual fantasies in Surrealist painting and brought the showmanship antics of Salvador Dalí and others under suspicion. Antivedant feelings arose also because the American artists felt a need to establish themselves apart from the European father figure. A paradox may be seen in the thrill of Lamanade's on the one hand and the fierce need to break from the demigods and establish independence on the other. Meyer Shapiro identified a key word in this paradox when he said that what the Americans learned from the Europeans was how to be ferocious. It was this courage and daring that in the end fostered autonomy and the mutation of Surrealist ideas.

One other very important player in the Surrealist drama in America was the French artist Marcel Duchamp (born 1889). An incredibly complex artist whose output, though small, integrated a wide range of art hypotheses and whose invention of the "readymade" (a manufactured object assigned the dignity of an art object through the context in which the artist placed it) can be said to have influenced several American movements, Pop Art among them. Duchamp arrived in New York later than the other Surrealists (1912) but quickly made his presence known as he collaborated with Breton in assembling a large Surrealist exhibit.

Perhaps Duchamp was the ultimate Surrealist, maintaining his freedom, keeping all the doors open, finding nothing as sacred. His influence is wide-ranging because he never adhered to a particular style but connected the making of art to the living of life. He held no single view of art's function.



**Marcel Duchamp**  
Bicycle Wheel (1928) (see also 1917) (steel version, after last original of 1928)  
Assemblage (metal/steel), 28 1/2" diameter, mounted on painted wood  
Wheel, 28 1/2" (diameter), 18 1/2" high  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
©2002 The Soler and Marval Joint Collection

James M. Smith's "Wellington" calls to mind Duchamp's "Fountain" in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Smith's perfectly finished construction only two feet tall makes us speculate on the hands that were the doorknobs and the feet that scuffed the panel. With impossible detail, Smith creates a miniature world that distill the viewer, the Alibi through the looking glass, into it.



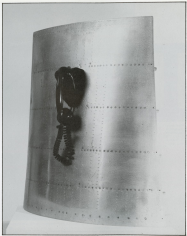
The influence of Marcel Duchamp and his "readymades" can be found in the sculpture of Donald Lipski and John Armleder. Both artists make use of the found object while expressing entirely different sensibilities; both create their work by juxtaposing incongruent found objects but the results are profoundly different. Lipski's work is physical and obviously physically manipulated while Armleder engages in a conceptual manipulation. Lipski's are hands-on pieces, their assemblage dictated by the materials. Armleder's pieces are removed, a cool and neutral commentary.

Duchamp's readymades can be seen influencing Mark Stah but we can also see Magritte's legacy finding form in three dimensions. As Rebecca Smith commented walking into a Mark Stah exhibition "One has the sensation that someone has taken away Magritte's contributions and told how to make day with whatever he could find at Woolworth's. The results are big plastic racks floating on the wall stove-eye level white benches or between them are such items as a stainless-steel towel rack, paper cup dispenser or Kleenex dispenser. It's possible to extract several kinds of qualities from this work. The decorative is juxtaposed with the functional, the artificial with the real, man-made nature with man-made commodities, and these combinations are not unaffectioning."

James M. Smith  
Wellington Series, 1979  
Assemblage  
8 1/2 x 20 1/2  
Collection of John O'Connor,  
Wayne, New Jersey



John Aronson  
Guitar Multiple, vol. of 11, 1987.  
Printed using linocut and block. Menly Maser Butler  
88 x 28 1/2"  
Courtesy of John Simon-Gallery, New York.



David Laibin Broken Steps #10, 1986.

Materials and Medium: 20" x 24" x 1/8" Aluminum Sheet

Courtesy of Barbara and Bill Sablosky, New York



The juxtaposition of incongruent objects is a device used in painting as well as in sculpture and the artists practicing this technique evoke the surrealism both the ordinary and the fantastic.

Greg DeSater presents a seemingly ordinary fellow who accepts calmly the weight strapped to his arm. His attitude combines with the realism of the presentation to make us hesitate before rejecting the rationality of the scene. A similar technique is used by Ellen Lanyon. However, comparing Lanyon's "Manxpan Over Niagara" with Michael Chandler's "The Ball of Inconscience" we find similarities and differences. Both paintings contain inanimate objects hovering over large bodies of water but while Lanyon's painting provokes a double-take ("What is that doing there and what does it mean?"), Chandler seduces us with acceptance ("Look what's there. How curious"). The response to Chandler is signified by the use of collage and by the paintedness of the surface.



Greg DeSater  
1964 (1964) (reproduced 1988)  
Oil on canvas  
70 x 50"  
Galerie of Experimental, New York

Alan Lanyon  
Blossoms/Over Flowers, 1979-1980  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 50"  
Courtesy of Magnum Photography, New York



Michael Chandler  
The Miller's Experience, 1980-1981  
Oil on canvas  
60 1/2 x 77 1/2 x 31 1/2"  
Courtesy of Magnum Photography, New York





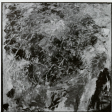
George Herms  
Rubble! Rubble! 1966  
Mixed media  
24 x 18 x 1"  
Courtesy of Engelhard Gallery, New York

Collage technique is not peculiar to the Surrealists but did find wide use among them and connects it aptly once again with the found object. The collages of George Herms combine found language with discarded junk in a seemingly random placement. These works are illogical yet metaphorical and while we see the individual parts and know their histories, we also comprehend a complex system of relationships.

As discussed earlier, the method of automatic writing found visual expression in automatism, or the free expression of the unconscious mind. The Abstract Expressionists made use of this method to produce grand gestural abstractions as well as calm, meditative pieces.

Harry Kramar, born in 1906, is a couple generations removed from Abstract Expressionism but firmly connected to that aesthetic. His paintings record the impulsive response to the medium and the process of painting. Ralph Wilson, almost ten years Kramar's junior, spoke of the companionship of form and content: "I am finally drawn to the painted image as opposed to the image which is painted, the image that emerges through the process of painting."<sup>17</sup>

Space Shuttle  
STS-51-L Mission, 1981  
Orion Service  
20x30"  
Courtesy of Space Shuttle Gallery, New York.



Space Shuttle  
STS-51-L Mission, 1981  
Orion Service  
20x30"  
Courtesy of Space Shuttle Gallery, New York.



Automatism can be used to influence very different works and also different methods as observed when we compare the painting of Merrill Wagner and William Anastasi. Wagner begins her painting with a single mark on the surface of the canvas which visually spurs another mark. These two marks, their relationship to each other and to the ground determine the third gesture and so it goes until the surface is activated and instinctively complete. Anastasi, on the other hand, engages in what he calls "blind drawing". With his eyes closed, Anastasi works the surface with paintsticks and with brushes and acrylics. In the case of the "cabeza" series (the title is from a one hundred letter word at the beginning of James Joyce's "Finnegans Wake") the letters outlined serve to anchor the abstract all-over grounds which are developed blind.



Merrill Wagner  
No. 1982A, 1982.  
Condition paper,  
10 1/2 x 10 1/2"  
Collection of the artist



Michael Smeader, *Billboard (4)*, finished series 1981-1987. Oil stick on canvas, 87 1/2 x 87". Courtesy of Bone Collector Gallery, New York

As noted in the discussion of tiled and Targov, automation can be utilized to produce delineated images as well as abstracter abstractions. Examples of this approach can be found in the work of Raphael Collazo, Linda Karshan and Babal Veiris. The images that emerge in the work of these three artists seem familiar yet cannot be identified. We feel we know them yet have no labels. We sense strong sexual references but these are not graphically defined. In writing about the paintings of Veiris, Judy Tully observes: "The paintings of Babal Veiris are not of this world. They inhabit an atmosphere and respond to a gravity system different than Earth's. Funny and humor tug the forms. The painting harbors a still-life landscape that looks back and forth between science fiction and Surrealism."<sup>11</sup> What comes into play while viewing these works is the unconscious. We read these paintings in much the same way as they were made, that is, without conscious use of reason.



Babal Veiris  
about thirty around the sky, 1987.  
Oil on canvas.  
70x 80  
Courtesy of Stephen Rosenberg Gallery, New York.

Lydia Ravitch  
United, 1988.  
Graphics of an artist,  
1954 x 1987  
Collection of the artist



Raphaela  
United, 1988.  
Mixed media on paper  
10 x 10"  
Courtesy of Top Gallery, New York



Cyrlle Moesler's large scale drawings combine automatic marking and the emergence of unconscious imagery. The marking of these drawings which are often to sightless rhythms, causes the artist to become immersed in the work itself and calls to mind the all-over painting technique of Jackson Pollock. Certain motifs pop-up here and there in Moesler's field and are repeated in a variety of forms. We may assign names to the motifs such as "leaf" or "table" or "gate" and assign meanings to them as well. But all these speculation for the symbols and their meanings are ambiguous.

The creation of forms that emerge from the subconscious is not limited to the mediums of painting and drawing but also assumes three dimensions. In this regard we may examine the sculpture of David Hare, Gloria Krich and Susan Rodgers.



Cyrlle Moesler  
Eye No. 100  
Drawing and painting, acrylic, gouache  
80 x 100  
Collection of the artist

David Hare was one of the first American artists to be intimately connected to the Surrealists. His cousin, Kay Sage and her husband Yves Tanguy provided introductions to the Surrealists in New York. Hare worked closely with André Breton and Marcel Duchamp and edited *NYP*, the first American journal of Surrealism.

Hare's sculpture has been called by Robert Goldwater anti-rational or at least unreasonable. His whole method is to leave himself open to association, his whole purpose is to allow himself to wander freely.



Donald Judd  
Formal Writing, 1966  
Sculpture, steel and brass,  
81 1/2 x  
Courtesy: Marlborough  
Gallery, New York

The images of the subconscious might be led by mythology which perhaps explains the fascination-Gloria Koch, among others, holds for primitive cultures and their art. The Surrealists were attracted to those cultures they saw as being ruled by the magical, instinctive or mythological. The Surrealists executed a map of the world drawing each country to the scale of its importance to Surrealist concepts. Mexico, considered a land of myth, is larger than the United States and while England does not exist at all, Ireland is enormous. Most of Europe has been omitted but, in the Pacific, New Guinea is as large as China.



Super Phallus  
Robert Rauschenberg, 1966  
Sculpture, steel  
89".

Courtesy of Greenbaum Gallery, New York.



Isuro Machi - Carmides, 1981. Sculpture, patina bronze. "Africa 80's & 90's" - Collection of the artist.

The fantastic aspects of Surrealism range from the wild, visionary waterscapes of Vicki Teague-Cooper to the incredible imaginings of Jack Fossell. In "Well", Vicki Teague-Cooper creates a wide expanse, a never-never land occupied by a solitary androgynous figure. These are lonely, silent paintings compared to the ruckus of Jack Fossell's world. In "Ultimate Pleasure" Fossell illustrates the fury with which Americans pursue leisure activity. There is a sense of desperation externalized but we are kept from the edge by Fossell's humor.



Vicki Teague-Cooper

oil, 1981

Oil on canvas

16x 14"

Courtesy of Steinglass Gallery, New York



Fernand Lévy  
*Without the Observed* 1967.  
Oil on canvas  
75 x 117  
© 1994 by the artist's estate



Max Kozel  
*The Man's Head*, 1987  
 Mixed media on canvas  
 60 x 60"  
 Courtesy of Greenbaum Gallery,  
 New York.



John Kimmel  
*Ultimate Narration*, 1987  
 Mixed media on canvas  
 80 x 100"  
 Courtesy of Siegelman Gallery, New York.

We see the fantastic has other faces and methods as we observe the paintings of Lucio Poggi and Max Coyer. Both artists relate to Surrealism in their portrayals of dreamlike settings and impossible contexts. Poggi seeks to get in touch with subconscious images. By meditating and drawing from a trance-like state Lucio Poggi creates his paintings automatically, with no external input. Max Coyer's connection to Surrealism appears to be on both an intellectual and emotional level. Coyer has long been interested in the appropriation of images from art history and considers our time to be a synthetic age. Two years ago Coyer executed a series of paintings inspired in part by the drawings of Jean Cocteau. While manipulating art historical references in sophisticated and conceptual ways the artist also expresses a deep concern for the intuitive and the metaphysical.

It has been the mission of the Ben Scharf Gallery to examine the art of our time and it has been our conviction that the process is enriched when it proceeds without eye toward history. While Surrealism ended as a movement after World War II, the Surrealist eye is present and vital in the paintings and sculpture produced today. André Breton predicted this when, in 1929, he wrote: "I believe that men will long feel the need to release to its true source the magical river that flows from their eyes, bathing with the same light and the same hallucinatory shades those things that are and those things that are not. Without being wholly aware of how they have made the startling discovery they will locate one of these riverbeds high above the summit of any mountain. The region where the enchanting vapours of what is still unknown condense will be revealed to them in a lightning flash, and they will fall in love with it."<sup>1</sup>

#### Footnotes

1. Colin Tompkins, *The Sensitive Suburb*, Princeton, Time-Life, 1989, p. 85.
2. André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. two, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 217.
3. Marcel Jean, *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, New York, Viking, 1980, p. 161.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 171, p. 172.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
7. Harold Stearns, ed., *The Defiant Contemporaries in Context*, Stanford Press, p. 112-11.
8. *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, February 6, 1987.
9. *Hyper-intelligence*, *Ph.*, *Traveller's* *artwork*, 1988, p. 11.
10. *Just Face*, *State*, *Hyper-intelligence*, New York, Stephen Swearing Gallery, 1988, p. 1.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, p. 1.

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There are many antagonists of Surrealism today, and it is interesting to note how many critical forces may be said to be arrayed against it, arraying it, the critics who have the most part grip against Surrealism turn out to be, understandably, those who participate in the positivistic, scientific, and rationalistic tendencies of our speech. It is also true that Surrealism as a provocative tendency from the start, with its subversive Pope André Breton, evoked this non-provocatory approach. What we see today is a variety of arresting displays of the almost senseless dialectic between Surrealism and a parade of realisms. Despite this conflict, one might say almost due to its force and feeling, Surrealism has had a necessary triumph in its persistence in art and literature.

Let us mention that Marxists have had a variety of troubles with Surrealism, even though many Surrealists, including Breton and Aragon, became communists at a point in their career and added an interesting chapter to left-wing aesthetics. We see today, even in such an ardent and subtle Marxist thinker such as Jeremy Gilbert-Potts, very little taste for the Surrealist adventure in the arts. Gilbert-Potts, who has some admiration for Breton and the collage novels of Aragon, has much contempt for the literary side of Surrealist painting. Actually, we prefer to see the literary in Surrealist painting, and the painterly in Surrealist literature, both today and in the 30's, as part of the interdisciplinary matrix which makes the movement so exciting and complex. And, one must note, it is Gilbert-Potts who has assailed much contemporary political art as mere self-righteousness parading at insight. We might say that an exhibition of contemporary Surrealist art might well function as a critique of such "realistic" political artists as Hans Haacke. Haacke's sense of the evil corporate world is a kind of contemporary political painting. The Surrealists of our period—David Saks, Julian Schnabel, Francesco Clemente, for example, not always identified as such—have often found the world to be less evil than the evil discovered in psychic forces themselves. These so-called Neo-expressionists have consistently used automatism, free associative techniques, montage, collage, and a barrage of juxtapositions and incongruities, to remind us of George Bateman's great Surrealist insight into the dialectic between psychic and social forces. On the other hand, the realist "political" artist such as Haacke, seems to point some innocent artist arrayed against the malignant forces of a Marxisian universe. His vision is simple, the Surrealist vision is multiple and more nuanced. Paradoxically, as Gilbert-Potts himself has pointed out in *Art's Magazine*, in an article on the political in art, the so-called realist is actually underestimating the complexity even of late capitalism.

In poetry, Surrealism continues to be the most-readily tendency in the last few decades. John Ashbery, now hailed as our most important poet, learned most of all from the great professor of the Surrealist movement, Arthur Rimbaud, whose dream techniques and hallucinatory modes inspired Breton. Ashbery has written an important article on Surrealist art and his own ideas concerning a "new realism" often coincide with Surrealism. We might say that Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch and other young members of the so-called New York School of Poetry, were all equally, earnestly involved in domesticating French symbolism and Surrealism and making a species of "everyday" or "popular" Surrealism. In this, their efforts have to be comprehended within the matrix of New York "Pop" art. Jasper Johns and John Ashbery are both Surrealist, erotic artists of the unconscious. Both of them have too often been looked upon as mere presiding gods of elegance, *Cuba Libre* style. After all, O'Hara once said Cubism for technique and Surrealism for content divided up the twentieth century avant-garde adventure. Too often, the poets of this period have not been recognized for their Surrealist content.

The Surrealist love of collaboration is one that must be underscored as one looks at the survival of Surrealism today. Robert Hughes has argued that Surrealism was a failure, and he implies that its lack of political success in revolution is a sufficient evidence in attesting this failure. Actually, Surrealist painting has indeed succeeded in revolutionizing our visual world. The critic Benjamin Sachs has averred that advertising techniques are the last degraded remnants of Surrealism. (But surely, this is a cynical sleight-of-hand, when Sachs's own critical vocabulary grows out of the same Walter Benjamin who learned from Breton and Aragon.) Much other contemporary critical assaults of Surrealism are indeed informed by the Surrealist critique itself. The collaboration between painting and poets, as celebrated in a Hitchcock Show a few years ago, has not been the only inflection of the culture, but certainly one could not imagine earthworks, communal carnivals such as Christo, and much-there today without a sense of the overwhelming presence of Surrealism.

Let us conclude by noting that the Surrealist in contemporary art is everywhere but still invisible or neglected. The national tendency in American art tends to promote a staid suburban realism. Robert Rauschenberg, an important establishment critic, and Helen Frankenthaler, the poetry critic for the New Yorker, have both on their own contributed vitriolic debates against the satirical, Surrealist element in contemporary American literature. And yet almost all that is vital in our literature accepts the psychoanalytic insight that the unexamined unconscious is dangerous. It is not enough to note that American art has a constant note of deaculturation and uses techniques which are, classically, Surrealist. It is important to note that this tendency is a kind of senseless complaint against the homogeneity of much middle-class American life. The nomadic, the marginal, the disenfranchised and the dispossessed all come back to life in the desecrating of contemporary American Surrealist art and literature.

## Biographies of Artists

### **WILLIAM ANASTASI**

William Anastasi was born in Philadelphia in 1933. He attended Temple University, and the University of Pennsylvania. He has had many one-person and group exhibitions including a 1981 one person exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Apart from fireworks in the studio and finished has also been involved in many performances. Fireworks can be found in many public collections including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

### **JOHN M. ARMLEDER**

John M. Armleder was born July 24, 1948. He presently lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland.

His art combines painting and the object. Armleder has participated in solo and group exhibitions throughout Europe, Australia, Israel, Canada, Iceland, South America and the United States.

### **MICHAEL CHANDLER**

Michael Chandler was born in 1947 in Des Moines, Iowa. He was educated at West Illinois University and Illinois State University.

As a child he loved nature and this love has stayed with him.

He has exhibited in such prestigious places as the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts and the Alan Stone Gallery, New York.

The artist's works are included in several collections.

### **RAFAEL COLLADO**

Raphael Collado was educated at the School of Visual Arts and the Art Student's League, New York.

He has shown his works in many exhibitions including the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, and Museo del Barrio, New York.

Collado was also the recipient of an Artists Space Grant.

#### **MAX COYER**

Max Coyer was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1934. He has exhibited his work in both solo and group exhibitions in New York: the Greenbaum Gallery, St. Peter's Church and the Fern Bouckaert Gallery.

The artist's works are part of numerous collections including the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey and the Dinnestad Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

#### **GREG DRASLER**

Greg Drasler was educated at the University of Illinois, receiving a B.F.A. in 1988 and his M.F.A. in 1993.

Among his credits are exhibitions at the BAWB Gallery, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, both in New York, and at the Robinson Center Gallery, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey and Wesley College, Wesley, Massachusetts.

Drasler's work are in many collections including the permanent collection of the University of Illinois.

#### **JACK FORSELL**

Jack Forsell was born in Rockford, Illinois in 1952. He was educated at the Maryland Institute College of Art and the University of Illinois.

He was part of group exhibitions in 1988 and 1987 at the Sagetuch Gallery, New York, and also, had a solo exhibit there in 1987.

#### **DAVID HARE**

Artist and sculptor David Hare was born in New York in 1917. He was educated in the sciences, chemistry and biology.

Hare edited the Surrealist magazine *SVV* with André Breton, Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst from 1942 to 1944.

The artist has exhibited extensively since 1941 in both solo and group exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Art, California, and the Greenbaum Gallery, New York.

His works are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, all of New York.

## **GEORGE HERMS**

A native of California, George Herms has exhibited his art works primarily in California. He is now being represented in New York City by the Siegfried Gallery, so we will be able to enjoy his works on the east coast.

Herms works in many different media, painting, sculpture, collage, performance, photography, and assemblage. His assemblages are the best known of his works.

He has received three grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and has participated in many solo and group exhibitions.

## **RALPH HILTON**

Ralph Hilton (1947-1984) received his M.F.A. from Hunter College, New York, and his B.A. degree from the University of Michigan.

Starting in 1973 he participated in many group exhibitions and his works have been the subject of three one man exhibits, two at P.C. D'off Gallery, New York, and the third at the Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, New Jersey.

He was active in several video and performing art productions. His works are part of the collection of Gordon Dickinson and Co., Paramus, New Jersey, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Dow Jones and Co., Inc., New York.

## **LINDA KASHAN**

Linda Kashan studied the arts at Stockton College, Stockton Springs, near York and the Sorbonne, Paris, France.

She currently resides in London, England.

Mrs. Kashan has shown her works in both Great Britain and the United States in such galleries as the Clarindon Gallery, London and the Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

## **GLORIA KISCH**

Gloria Kisch was born in New York City in 1941. She received her B.F.A. and M.F.A. from City Art Institute, and a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York. She studied at The Boston Museum School, Boston, Massachusetts.

The artist has participated in exhibitions, both solo and group, in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

Kisch's works are part of many collections including the Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles, California, and the Equitable Corporation Collection, New York.

#### **HARRY KRUMER**

Harry Krumer was born in Philadelphia in 1908 and was educated at the Philadelphia College of Art and Yale University. His exhibitions include one-man exhibitions at Greenbaum Gallery and a group exhibition at the National Academy of Design, New York.

Krumer's work is included in numerous collections such as The Cooper Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.

#### **ELLEN LANTON**

Ellen Lanton was born on December 21, 1928. She was educated at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and received her M.F.A. degree from the University of Iowa. A Fulbright Research Grant was awarded to her (1960-61) and she studied at the Courtauld Institute, University of London.

Ms. Lanton has had over fifty solo exhibits to date, and her group exhibitions include the American Federation of the Arts Invitational, as well as installations at the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

#### **DONALD UPPER**

Donald Upper was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1947 and was educated at the University of Wisconsin and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan. He has participated in exhibitions, both solo and group, throughout the United States and Europe.

He uses found objects in his assemblage never trying to hide their origin, but lets the materials suggest the design of the piece.

The artist is also the recipient of two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Upper's work can be found in major public collections including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

#### **CYRILLA MCCENTER**

Cyrilla McCenter was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1947. She received her B.F.A. from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York.

In New York her work has been part of many group exhibitions at Barbara Toll Fine Arts, Columbia University and Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York.

The artist has created several performance art pieces.

Ms. McCenter has received grants from The New York Foundation for the Arts, and The Artists Space.

Her works are part of the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.

#### **LUIGI ROZZI**

Luigi Rozzi was born in Milan, Italy in 1935 and came to the United States in 1962; he presently lives and works in New York City.

The diversity of his work is evident in both his style and use of mediums. Mr. Rozzi produces works in painting, sculpture and video.

The artist has had many one person and group exhibitions and is the recipient of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, 1983.

#### **SUSAN RODGERS**

Susan Rodgers was educated at Sarah Lawrence College (B.A.) and at Columbia University, New York, (M.F.A.), both degrees are in sculpture.

Her works have been exhibited widely in such places as Greenbaum Gallery, New York, and the Sculpture Center, New York.

Rodgers' sculptures are in several collections including Sears Roebuck, and IBM/Allen Inc., New York.

In 1985 she was nominated for the "Awards in the Visual Arts".

#### **JAMES M. SMITH**

James M. Smith was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1948 and was educated at the University of Kansas (B.F.A.) and the University of Illinois where he received his M.F.A. His exhibitions include numerous one person and group exhibitions in the mid-west, New York, and Canada.

Smith's works are part of private, public and corporate collections.

#### **MARK STUHL**

Mark Stuhl was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1955. From 1977 to 1981 he attended the California Institute of the Arts.

After his schooling he worked in the movie industry specializing in special effects.

His works have been exhibited in Europe and the United States. He is presently represented by the Massimo Audella Gallery, New York.

#### **YOKI TEAGUE-COOPER**

Ms. Teague-Cooper was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1951.

She received her B.F.A. at the University of Texas at Austin. Three years later she had her first one person exhibition at the Carver Cultural Center, San Antonio, Texas. Since then she has participated in many one person and group exhibitions in Texas, New York City and the Bronx, New York.

Ms. Teague-Cooper's works can be found at the Museum of Fine Art, Houston, Texas and in the corporate collections of IBM Company, American Express and Chase Manhattan Bank.

#### **BADIS YERLIK**

Born in Athens, Badis Yelikis came to New York to study at the New York Studio School.

Yelikis has exhibited internationally in Switzerland, New York City and in Greece. His group exhibits have been at the Paula Allen Gallery, and the Kaunas Gallery, both in New York. He is presently represented by the Stephen Rosenthal Gallery in New York.

#### **MERRILL WAGNER**

Merrill Wagner was born in Seattle, Washington in 1905. She was educated at Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, and the Art Students League, New York.

Some of her exhibitions have been at The Museum of Modern Art and the John Weber Gallery, New York.

Mrs. Wagner's works are included in the collections of the Bellevue Art Museum and the Tacoma Art Museum, both in Washington, and the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York.

One of her favorite surfaces is slate on which she paints with watercolor, oils and other mediums.

## Lenders to the Exhibition

Maxine Audette Gallery  
142 Greene Street, New York, New York  
Bess-Culler Gallery  
164 Mercer Street, New York, New York  
B.C. East Gallery  
588 Broadway, New York, New York  
Gommery New York Gallery  
420 W. Broadway, New York, New York  
John Olson Gallery  
588 Broadway, New York, New York  
Gruenbaum Gallery  
470 W. Broadway, New York, New York  
John D'Emme  
Rippon, New Jersey  
Stephen Rosenthal Gallery  
170 Waverly Street, New York, New York  
Eric Segalbach Gallery  
588 Broadway, New York, New York



