

Lecture Notes

Syllabus 3/9/05 – FANTASY & SURREALISM



01_Birthday – 1923 – Chagall

FANTASY

Fantasy not a school – just a style.

- Precursor to surrealism. Singular artist not belonging to group, school or movement. Unique art pursuing own ideas.
- Born in Russia. Went to Paris til WWI made it too dangerous to stay, so returned to Russia. Chagall a contemporary of Tatlin and Goncharova.
- This is a remake of painting originally painted in Paris.
- Wife visits him on his birthday in 1916 and he painted this to celebrate that
- Idea of fantasy comes out in this painting :
 - Strange distorted perspective of objects and view out the window
 - Gives us a state of mind and feeling he felt when he got the kiss from the woman he loved on his birthday
- Rousseau was a fantasy painter too. Style related to surrealism and symbolism.
- Surrealism idea flows from unconscious and state of mind. The surrealists look to Chagall as inspiration.

METAPHYSICAL PAINTERS: DeChirico and Carra retained forms of Renaissance reality, perspective space, recognizable environment & sculptural figures and object, but used various juxtapositions to produce surprise and shock and create an atmosphere of strangeness, sometimes fear and horror.

Not a movement but still had strong influence on Surrealism's exploration of intuitive and irrational.



02_Melancholy and Mystery of a Street – 1914 – Giorgio

deChirico

METAPHYSICAL SCHOOL

- Metaphysical School trying to raise questions about “existence” and “being”
- Example of deep perspective used for effect
- Influenced by Neitzche and the question Is God Dead. DeChirico's concept of paintings was as a symbolic vision – an expression of deep-seated motivations within the psyche
- Earth tones but distorted, weird feeling, mysterious



- **03_ The Great Metaphysician – 1917 – Giorgio deChirico**

METAPHYSICAL SCHOOL

- Semi deserted Italian piazza with distorted perspective
- Odd mechanized parts = new machine age
- Disquieting feeling / uneasiness with machine age



- **04_ The Drunken Gentleman – 1917 – Carlo Carra**

METAPHYSICAL SCHOOL

- Futurist and Metaphysical painter
- Talk about classical civilization but throws them into a new time that challenges the situations

DADA INTO SURREALISM: Dada is the end of religion and tradition, and is not searching for truth. Negative and destruction revolt of dada was a deliberate reaction to the fact that the organizing principles are useless and the only thing left is chaos and randomness. Surrealism pulls out a path to the unconsciousness & starts searching for truth. 1924 Surrealism is launched. They didn't reject Dada they just became Surrealists.



- **05_ The Elephant Celebes – 1921 – Max Ernst**

DADA INTO SURREALISM

- What is it? Pot? Furnace boiler? Iron on top. Snout or trunk. Headless nude beckoning. Teapot spouts behind her. Totem Pole. Fish in sky. Strange juxtapositions! It's the chance encounter of the sewing machine and umbrella on a dissecting table!
- Mechanomorph: Machine growing/morphing/transforming into an animal. A practice that both Dada and Surrealism claimed.
- It's an odd assortment of stuff, and it's up to the viewer to sort it out



- **06_Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale – 1924 –Max Ernst**

DADA INTO SURREALISM

- Juxtaposition of strange things again – like “pass me that piano”.
- Nonsensical images from dreams. Important c/o it explores/reveals subconscious.
- Ernst got inspiration from dreams. Important source for surrealists.



- **07_The Horde – 1927 – Max Ernst**

DADA INTO SURREALISM

- **FROTTAGE** – rubbing on a textured surface. Saw in these random pattern lines some kind of image, and created a horde of strange monsters. Technique allows you to lose a bit of conscious control and then you see things you didn’t expect so it comes from unconscious



- **08_Europe After the Rain – 1940-2 – Max Ernst**

DADA INTO SURREALISM

- **DECALCOMANIA** - one surface with paint/ink applied on it, then another surface put on it, then two surfaces pulled apart. Same technique as ink blot test.
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SURREALISM:

- a higher reality
- Pure psychic automatism: automatic drawing. Breton defines it as “thought’s dictation”
- Breton, founder of surrealism, witnessed Freud applying his theories of psychoanalysis in WWI:
 - psyche split into 2 parts
 - Conscious – awareness
 - Unconscious –
 - Id – alter ego, desires you don’t act on as they would be inappropriate.

- Ego – rational, controlling influence. The policeman that keeps the Id in line. Works while awake, but sleeps when you do, too.
- Surrealistic Collage used not to construct a reality but to bring unrelated stuff together and let imagination trigger new associations
- Recurring themes in surrealism: life, birth, sex, procreation, Minotaur, metamorphosis, transformation, change



- **09_Battle of the Fishes – 1926 – Andre Masson**

SURREALISM

- Surrealism launched in 1924.
- This is full fledged surrealism
- Created by technique growing out of Dada's experiments: Pure psychic automatism – automatic drawing where you suspend consciousness and draw
- Let glue drip, dropped sand and then tried to bring out an image



- **10_Pasiphae – 1943 – Andre Masson**

SURREALISM

- Meandering line created with an automatist technique
- Paciphae is mother of Minotaur, son of King Minos. Minos angered Zeus. To get back at him Zeus sends bull to mate with Paciphae and she gives birth to hideous monster, Minotaur, half bull / half man. Bull on top. Man on bottom. Minotaur perfect symbol for surrealism c/o it's a man with id's repressed drives on the top with animal urges.
- Paciphae ripped open with entrails pouring out
- Jackson Pollack redid this painting. He was very influenced by Masson and got to know him.



- **11_Minotaur – 1933 – Picasso**

SURREALISM

- Minotaur was Surrealist publication. This was a cover for one of the issues of this publication edited by Breton. (Emory Univ. has a complete set)
- Picasso did a number of paintings exploring surrealist themes, sexual violence among others.



- **12_Guernica – 1937 – Pablo Picasso**
SURREALISM? MCCLINTOCK SAYS NOT REALLY!
 - Major Picasso work of the 30s and one of the masterworks of the 20th century.
 - Picasso worked a variety of styles.
 - Style is linked to surrealist content: sex, beasts, irrational nature of man, Minotaur on left. Image of irrational beast.
 - Shares surrealism qualities thematically (such as Minotaur figure) HOWEVER it's not technically surreal c/o
 - it's inspired by real specific event.
 - very deliberate and socially / politically relevant. Returns to cubism as style.
 - This is not from unconscious mind. It's Picasso's protest/response to bombing of Guernica in 1937 Spanish Revolution. Gen. Franco overthrew govt in Spain and formed alliance with Hitler and Mussolini. Hitler eager to try saturation bombing as new military technique. Franco said there were dissidents hiding in Basque villag in Pyrenees so they tried out bombs there. Evaporated the entire town.
 - Picasso asked to do mural in World Exposition. Painted in B & W since that's how news spread. Even looks like newsprint.
 - Woman on L. shrieks, dead child. Dismembered bodies. Horrific scene.
 - Arason sez Minotaur iconography is ambiguous: could be any of the following:
 - Symbol of bullish brute force?
 - Sexual potency and aggression?
 - Symbol of Spain?
 - The artist himself?



- **13_Harlequins Carnival – 1925-5 – Joan Miro**
SURREALISM
 - Picasso befriended Miro and became mentor for Miro
 - Harlequin a reference to Picasso
 - Two types of Surrealism
 - Illusionistic: most well-known, “pictorial” illusionistic form. Dali is pictorial.
 - Biomorphic: Masson and later Miro and Matta are 3 artists who belong to a more abstract form of surrealism called Biomorphie imagery - derived from freeflowing abstraction based on automatism.
 - Miro inspired by hallucinations. He often fasted til he experienced hallucinations.
 - This is great example of fairly perspectival space but with crazy content.
 - Recurring surrealist themes are all here: life, birth, procreation, sex (see eggs, sea creatures, metamorphosing lines). Ladders suggest longing for some kind of destination.



- **14_Painting – 1933 – Joan Miro**

SURREALISM

- Good example of Biomorphie Surrealism based on automatism
- Thought's dictation
- Generalized washed background with scumbled edges, muted earth tones, figures floating in some kind of nonobjective space
- See touch of Picasso's Guernica since he looked up to Picasso
- Bull's horns? Could be there as reference to Minotaur, or to Picasso
- Supposed to be an automatist dream



- **15_Still Life with Old Shoe – 1937 – Joan Miro**

SURREALISM

- Abstract images reflect the times. Franco took over and lots of people in prison and artists in exile/misery.
- Dark pigment, fork poking into rotten fruit, other images of decay and foreboding feeling
- Trying systematically to discover unconscious as they believed a higher reality would be revealed



- **16_The Poetesse – 1940 – Joan Miro**

SURREALISM

- Worked on series of constellations. Lyrical and intricate. Created when he withdrew to an island and listened to Bach and Mozart.



- **17_Disasters of Mysticism – 1942 – Roberto Matta**

SURREALISM

- Chilean artist who travelled around, ending up in NY during WWII and became member of Surrealist circle
- This work phallic or sexual? Certainly about primordial inner mind landscapes and human psyche. Matta called them INSCAPES.
- Employs similar technique as Miro's Old Shoe. Smoky, eerie look .
- Abstract imagery such as volcano – lines on R. going everywhere – could be crossing of electric impulses in brain firing neurons



- **18_Paranoic Critical Visage - 1931 – Salvador Dali**

SURREALISM

- Paranoic Critical Method = method Dali devised to enable him to see things transformed that aren't visible with normal conscious mind, triggered by common normal things.
- This is a black and white drawing from a Nat'l Geographic type magazine or tribal people. If you turn it on it's side it becomes a strange face. This is the whole idea of Paranoic Critical Method.



- **19_Persistence of Memory – 1931 – Salvador Dali**

SURREALISM

- Very important work – may be a self portrait? He did repeat image in different forms of melting forms under the title of the great masturbator.
- Illusionistic Surrealism (not biomorphic) based on Flemish miniature techniques which fascinated him
- Pictorial metamorphosis, transformation and change a fundamental aspect of Surrealism: objects change from hard to soft
- Dali inspired by dreams. Wrote them down every morning. Dreams are clear source to tap into subconscious.
- Ants recur as a motif in Dali works – come from vision as child of fish devoured by ants. Ants are an interesting subject for surrealists.



- **20_Soft Construction with Boiled Beans – 1936 – Salvador Dali**

SURREALISM

- Dali reacting to the Civil War in his country (Spain).
- Horrible creature rending itself apart “in a delirium of auto strangulation”



- **21_Sacrament of the Last Supper – 1955 – Salvador Dali**

SURREALISM

- We did NOT talk about this in class



• **22_Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace & Hummingbird – 1940 –**

Frida Kahlo

SURREALISM

- Breton visited Mexico in the 40s: “She’s the most surrealist artist I’ve ever seen”
- Didn’t characterize herself as surrealist.
- Doesn’t idealize herself
- This painting shows very traditional mixed with symbolic stuff:
 - Thorn necklace = Christ’s crown of thorns
 - Dead hummingbird = love lost (abusive relationship with Diego Rivera)
 - Hair = trad. Peasant Mexican style
 - Butterflies morph into insects
 - Black cat = bad luck, mysticism/superstition
 - Monkey = trickster figure in certain cultures.
- What makes this surreal?
 - Jarring juxtapositions of images that create dream-like vision.
 - Metamorphosis and transformation of insect figures
- What separates it from surrealism?
 - Very personal, deliberate narrative, deliberate symbolism rather than surrealist symbolism which is more mythical



• **23_Garden – 1946 – Leonora Carrington**

SURREALISM

- Brit whose family didn’t want her to become an artist
- Met and fell in love with Max Ernst. Ran away together and went to Paris.
- Ernst imprisoned in Paris and she had nervous breakdown. He dumped her after which she was devastated.
- This painting shows the roots of her more typical style.
 - She was fascinated by Hieronymus Bosch – Flemish mystic painter convinced that society was going to hell and painted warnings that people should straighten up.
 - Garden very much like Renaissance painting. Mysterious trees, foliage, animals like Breugels. 3 bizarre maidens. All from her imagination.



• **24_The Jungle – 1943 – Wifredo Lam**

SURREALISM

- Only artist of color, usually included in surveys of African American art
- Grew up in Cuba, mother half African and European, father Chinese.

- Jungle influenced by cubist figurative distortion, Modigliani's African masks
- Peripherally associated with Surrealism – jumbling of images relating to an exotic, nonspecific jungle, a mixture of different cultural references he grew up with
- Heightened colors
- Influenced by Picasso who loved his work. Breton loved it too.
- Jungle metamorphosized into humans, and humans into trees



- **25_Treachery or Perfidy of Images – 1928 – René Magritte**

SURREALISM

- “The Lost or Forgotten Surrealist” c/o peripheral to main group of surrealists in Paris who then emigrated to U.S. and never totally accepted in the central circle
- Work, however, is terribly well known
- This is not a pipe, it's a painting of a pipe
- Doesn't seem very surrealist. It's not about typical surrealist themes (dreams, the unconscious, automatism, metamorphosis, transformation, birth, death, sex) but it is illustrative of larger concern: ambiguous dreamlike images that DO fit in with surrealism. Focusing on disconnect between what we perceive, what we believe and what is real. That fits because surrealism is about the higher reality.



- **26_The False Mirror – 1928 – René Magritte**

SURREALISM

- What is the false mirror? This is a human eye looking out at clouds. This is really the reflection of clouds not the real thing. He's telling us what we see is false.



- **27_The Portrait – 1935 – René Magritte**

SURREALISM

- Portrait of seemingly normal meal but with disturbing, weird, icky juxtaposition of eyeball



- **28_Object Breakfast In Fur – 1936 – Meret Oppenheim**

SURREALISM

- The ultimate in transformation via juxtaposition of odd things
- Her most famous work of art. Result of discussion with Picasso talking about transforming things.
- While a little funny, it's also disturbing. Imagine putting that in your mouth.



- **29_The Human Condition – 1934 – René Magritte**

SURREALISM

- Painting in front of window is the Human Condition – layers of reality through which we view things
- What's Real? As humans we're always looking thru window and we can't go outside of ourselves.
- Illusionistic Surrealism (not abstract)