

SURREALISM

Synopsis

The Surrealist movement was founded in Paris by a small group of writers and artists who sought to channel the unconscious as a means to unlock the power of the imagination. Disdaining rationalism and literary realism, and powerfully influenced by Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists believed the conscious mind repressed the power of the imagination, weighting it down with taboos.

Influenced also by Karl Marx, they hoped that the psyche had the power to reveal the contradictions in the everyday world and spur on revolution. Their emphasis on the power of the imagination puts them in the tradition of Romanticism, but unlike their forbears, they believed that revelations could be found on the street and in everyday life.

The Surrealist impulse to tap the subconscious mind, and their interests in myth and primitivism, went on to shape the Abstract Expressionists, and they remain influential today.

key ideas

*Surrealism has come to be seen as the most influential movement in twentieth century art. Figures like Salvador Dalí and Man Ray not only had an important influence on avant-garde art, but through their commercial work - in fashion photography, advertising and film - they brought the style to a huge popular audience. Following the demise of Minimalism in the 1960s, the movement's influence also returned to art, and since the 1970s it has attracted considerable attention from art historians.

*Surrealism was officially founded in 1924, when André Breton wrote *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme*. In it, he defined Surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought." In this, he proposed that

artists should seek access to their unconscious mind in order to make art inspired by this realm.

*Initially a literary movement, many Surrealists were ambivalent about the possibilities of painting, however, the group's leader, André Breton, later embraced and promoted painting. The work of Surrealist painters such as Joan Miró would be an important influence on the Abstract Expressionists in the 1940s

Concepts and Styles

The original Parisian Surrealists organized group activities as a reprieve from violent political situations and to address the unease they felt about the world's uncertainties. Surrealists were interested in exposing the complex and repressed inner worlds of sexuality, desire, and violence, and interest in these topics fostered transgressive behavior. Many of the artists underwent psychoanalysis to study and uproot their latent feelings and behaviors as a cure for what they believed to be the constraining and repressed codes and morals of society.

The Surrealists generated creative works that exposed the artists' inner minds in bizarre, symbolic ways in order to uncover anxieties and to treat them analytically through visual means. The Surrealists depicted dream imagery and archetypal symbols derived from their unconsciousness. The collage aesthetic was significant to the Surrealists, as they believed it tapped into the subconscious by creating unlikely juxtapositions using imagery garnered from popular culture. The Surrealists employed collage in every medium including film.

Characteristics of Surrealism

The exploration of the dream and unconsciousness as a valid form of reality, inspired by Sigmund Freud's writings.

-A willingness to depict images of perverse sexuality, scatology, decay and violence.

-The desire to push against the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviors and traditions in order to discover pure thought and the artist's true nature.

- The incorporation of chance and spontaneity.
- The influence of revolutionary 19th century poets, such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and Isidore Ducasse.
- Emphasis on the mysterious, marvelous, mythological and irrational in an effort to make art ambiguous and strange.
- Fundamentally, Surrealism gave artists permission to express their most basic drives: hunger, sexuality, anger, fear, dread, ecstasy, and so forth.
- Exposing these uncensored feelings as if in a dream still exists in many form of art to this day.
- Two stylistic schools: Biomorphism and Naturalistic Surrealism.

Artists

Salvador Dalí

was born on May 11, 1904, in Figueres, Spain. From an early age, Dalí was encouraged to practice his art and would eventually go on to study at an academy in Madrid. In the 1920s, he went to Paris and began interacting with artists such as Picasso, Magritte and Miró,

Apart from painting, Dalí's output included sculpture, book illustration, jewellery design, and work for the theatre. In collaboration with the director Luis Buñuel he also made the first Surrealist films---Un chien andalou (1929) and L'Age d'or (1930)---and he contributed a dream sequence to Alfred Hitchcock's Spellbound (1945). He also wrote a novel, Hidden Faces (1944) and several volumes of flamboyant autobiography. Although he is undoubtedly one of the most famous artists of the 20th century, his status is controversial; many critics consider that he did little if anything of consequence after his classic Surrealist works of the 1930s. There are museums devoted to Dalí's work in Figueras, his home town in Spain, and in St Petersburg in Florida.

Rene Magritte

was one of the most well known and famous surrealist painters of all time, yet it was not until his 50s, when he was finally able to reach some form of fame and recognition for his work. He was extremely influential in the transformation of surrealism art, to the pop art movement, with the work he created, and the distinct style which he took with the creations that he made during the course of his career. Much of the work created by Rene Magritte, takes everyday, normal objects, and he would simply rearrange the figures, and locations, forcing the viewer to take a deeper look at what was in front of them, and at what the image truly represented.

Joan Miró

His mature style evolved from the tension between his fanciful, poetic impulse and his vision of the harshness of modern life. He worked extensively in lithography and produced many murals, tapestries, and sculptures for public spaces. In spite of his fame, Miró, an introvert, continued to devote himself exclusively to looking and creating.