

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

No. 26

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, March 27, 1968

PRESS PREVIEW:

Monday, March 25, 1968

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Dada, the early 20th century movement that reacted against the materialism of the time and the horrors of World War I, and Surrealism, which developed in the early 20's out of the nihilistic ferment of Dada inspired by Freudian explorations of the unconscious, are surveyed in an exhibition of more than 300 works at The Museum of Modern Art from March 27 through June 9. A sampling of objects, paintings and sculpture created since World War II indicates the artistic heritage of these movements, both in the continuing work of older artists and in the work of later generations.

DADA, SURREALISM, AND THEIR HERITAGE, directed by William S. Rubin, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, is the first comprehensive exhibition anywhere of these movements since the Museum presented its now classic show in 1936-37, a generation ago.

Dada, appearing almost simultaneously among artists and intellectuals in New York, Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover and Paris during the second decade of the century, was described by its leaders as an anti-art movement, an intellectually oriented nihilism toward art, primarily anti-Cubism. But, as Mr. Rubin points out in the book\* accompanying the exhibition, while "the anti-art created by Dada pioneers such as Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia seemed to reject out-of-hand the premises of modern painting as they stood on the eve of World War I,... 'anti-art' depended from the first on the very presence of the 'pure painting' against which it reacted, and it incorporated more of that 'art-art' than its authors knew."

\*DADA, SURREALISM, AND THEIR HERITAGE by William S. Rubin. 252 pages; 300 ill. (six in color). Hardbound, \$9.95; paperbound, \$4.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York; distributed to the trade by New York Graphic Society Ltd.

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# DADA in New York City

In New York the leaders of Dada were Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Man Ray. "Marcel Duchamp was the principal pioneer of Dada. In a period when painting had assumed deep conviction as a way of life, Duchamp gave it up in the midst of success as 'not a goal to fill an entire lifetime.' Emerging from the Cubist context of Parisian painting in 1912, he shortly sacrificed paints, brushes, and canvas almost entirely to create an 'anti-art' of 'Readymade' objects and images on glass. By 1920 he had become an 'engineer' and, after 'incompleting' the Large Glass three years later, he retired to a life of chess, punctuated occasionally by the creation of ironic machines, environmental installations for Surrealist exhibitions, and a variety of gestes." Among the 13 works by Duchamp in the exhibition are a number of his rare oils and objects as well as replicas of such famous ready-mades as Bicycle Wheel and Bottle Rack, a replica of The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. (the Large Glass) and motorized constructions of 1920 and 1935.

Picabia came to New York in 1917 to visit the Armory show. Like Duchamp, he worked out of the context of Cubism, but in a less sophisticated manner. Many of his pictures in the show have never been exhibited in this country before. These include examples of his finest "machine" images, Paroxyme de la Douleur (1915) and Machine Tournez Vite (1916-1917), work that reflects his "black humor," and pictures in which found objects are used as collage elements, such as the hairpins that serve as eyes and matches that represent hair in The Match Woman II (1920).

Man Ray, a young American painter, often replaced the traditional painter's brush with an air brush and also created ready-mades such as Gift, a flatiron with tacks, and The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse, a mysterious object (actually a sewing machine) wrapped in sackcloth and tied with a cord. In the 20's he be-

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came known for Rayographs, photographs made without a camera by placing objects on or near sensitized paper that was then exposed directly to the light.

DADA in Europe

In Zurich, where the term Dada was coined in 1916, it was primarily associated with the pioneering work of Arp; accident and automatism were used to challenge inherited assumptions of style and to suggest the possibility that experience dredged from the unconscious could be given expression in graphic form. Arp's most important works of this period were wood reliefs: "The forms of the Portrait of Tzara and Enak's Tears, while describing nothing specifically, multiply associations to physiological and botanical processes, to sexuality, and, through their very ambiguity, to humor." The 13 works by Arp range from a 1916 wood relief to a marble and a bronze of the 1950's.

The Berlin group of Dadaists was particularly interested in typography which it exploited in a daring and inventive way. Their most significant contribution was the elaboration of the "photomontage," actually a photo-collage. "One could attack the bourgeoisie with distortions of its own communications imagery. The man on the street would be shocked to see the components of familiar, realistic photography used to turn his world topsy-turvy, and the familiar lettering of his newspapers and posters running amuck." Grosz's savagely anti-war satires, and collages by Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann, are included in this section of the show.

"But no artist more completely personified the inter-war Dada and Surrealist avant garde than Max Ernst," Mr. Rubin says. Twenty-six of Ernst's works dating from 1916 to 1964 are in the exhibition. "In the extraordinary variety of his styles and techniques he is to Dada and Surrealism what Picasso is to 20th century art as a whole."

The machine-gown reliefs of Arp and the collages of Ernst already con-

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stituted a compromise with Duchamp's rigorous aesthetic nihilism; the personal forms of Dada developed by Kurt Schwitters in Hanover represented an even further attrition of that early Dada ideal. Schwitters called his work merz to distinguish it from other forms of Dada and felt no embarrassment about his delight in art. Unfortunately his transformation of his house into a merz bau or merz structure, an early prototype "environment," was destroyed by bombs in 1943, and his projected merz-stage was never realized (a work embracing all branches of art into a single unit). Nine works are shown, including constructions, collages and various materials combined on canvas.

### SURREALISM

Many of the essentials of Surrealism -- the experimentation with automatism, accident, biomorphism, and found objects within the framework of an overriding commitment to social revolution -- had been present in Dada to some degree, but in a chaotic state. These were systematized within the Freud-inspired dialectic of Surrealism. Automatism led to the biomorphic abstractions of André Masson and Joan Miró, the fixing of dream images influenced René Magritte and Salvador Dalí, while Max Ernst -- the "complete Surrealist" -- oscillated between them.

Of the 22 works by Miró in the exhibition 15 have never before been seen in this country. The monumental loosely painted, automatic improvisation The Birth of the World (1925) is almost totally unknown in Europe as well. Such pictures as this led André Breton, founder of Surrealism, to characterize Miró as "the most Surrealist of us all"; they also emphasize his role as a forerunner of the "informal" abstraction of recent decades.

Masson's use of the discoveries of automatic drawing took the form of the remarkable sand and tube-painted pictures of 1927, three of which are shown. Glue was spilled on the raw canvas and drawn out over the surface with fingers. Sand was poured over the surface and, after the stretcher was tilted, remained only in those areas.

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"The first year of Surrealist painting following the publication of the manifesto (1924) had witnessed the total dominance of the automatism so emphasized in its text. But late in 1925 the Belgian painter René Magritte, under the influence of de Chirico (eight of whose works are shown), renewed 'dream image' illusionism, and about a year later Tanguy adapted the biomorphology of Arp and Miró to the same spatial theater."

The prosaic style Magritte established in 1925 remained essentially the same to the end of his life. Nine of his paintings, dating from 1925 to 1962, are included of which seven have never been exhibited in this country before. Tanguy's characteristic manner which crystallized in 1927 paralleled the persistence of his vision, a "mindscape" resembling desert wasteland or ocean floor. Fourteen pen and ink, oils, and gouaches are in the exhibition.

"Not until Dali burst upon the scene in 1929, however, did this form of Surrealist painting become dominant." Dali's first mature works came in 1929, "in a series of brilliant small pictures whose hallucinatory intensity he was never to surpass. In some of these, The Lugubrious Game, for example, the photographic realism of the painted passages is indistinguishable from those parts of the surface which are actually collaged bits of photographs and color engravings. In equating his painting technique with the verisimilitude and surface finish of photography, Dali here brought full circle the 'perversion' of collage that was initiated by Ernst."

The years 1925-28 were the finest and most productive of Ernst's career, according to Mr. Rubin, and almost all the series he undertook then, such as the Forests, Hordes, Shell Flowers, were in some way dependent on frottage. The artist described the technique: "I derived from the floorboards a series of drawings by dropping pieces of paper on them at random and then rubbing them with black lead....The drawings thus obtained steadily lost the character...of the wood, thanks to a series of suggestions and transmutations that occurred to

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me spontaneously....My curiosity awakened, I was led to examine in the same way all sorts of materials that I happened upon."

"The rubbing -- more inherently accidental than automatic drawing -- provided random patterns that Ernst altered in varying degrees as he envisioned Gestalts of fantastic landscapes, animals, and hybrids. Drawings such as The Ego and His Own reveal both an imagination and a sensibility to the aesthetic possibilities of light and dark that rival Redon's" Mr. Rubin says.

#### SURREALIST SCULPTURE

"Just as pioneer Surrealist painting depended on Cubism for its point of departure so Surrealist sculpture presupposed the art of Picasso, Brancusi and Lipchitz," Mr. Rubin continues. Out of these sources, and out of the morphologies and technical devices they themselves had used earlier, Arp, Giacometti and Ernst produced a body of sculpture that may be defined as Surrealist, including Giacometti's extraordinary and prophetic Cage never before exhibited in this country.

Although Picasso was very much a part of the Surrealist scene in Paris he was never formally part of the movement. The most surrealist of his images are the compound object-personages depicted in the linear works of 1933, such as Minotaur. Oils, collages and pen and ink drawings dating from 1929 to 1940 are shown. Most of the Picassos relevant to Surrealism were exhibited in the Picasso sculpture show at the Museum last fall.

#### SURREALISM in The 30's

Among the new recruits to Surrealism in the 30's, the most talented, Mr. Rubin says, was Victor Brauner, represented by three works. During the same time, the Belgian painter Paul Delvaux modified the illusionism of de Chirico and Magritte in a more detailed illustrative manner as seen in Hands, an oil of 1941.

The work of the younger Surrealists is best characterized by their inven-

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tions of new automatic techniques; decalcomania, used by Tanguy and Dominguez; "fumage," evoking a picture from the burns and smoke trails left by drawing with a lit candle, used by Wolfgang Paalen, and "coulage," where pouring ripolin enamel, only partly controlled by the artist's guiding hand, "finds" its own silhouettes as seen in Gordon Onslow-Ford's Without Bounds (1939). These techniques rounded out the battery begun earlier with automatic drawing, frottage, and the exquisite corpse.

"Oscar Dominguez was the first to exploit the possibilities of decalcomania. By spreading gouache on a sheet of paper, laying another sheet on top of it, pressing here and there, and then peeling the second sheet off, he produced effects suggesting exotic flora, mineral deposits, spongy growths -- a veritable spelunker's dream. The fantasies generated by this technique recommended it immediately to other Surrealists and, as it was a way of image-making that required no technical ability, it was immediately adopted by the poets as well as the painters. In order to achieve more contoured, defined images, Dominguez and Marcel Jean also experimented with the use of stencils in conjunction with decalcomania, but it was only with Ernst's adaptation of the technique to oil painting in such fantastic landscapes as Europe After the Rain that the poetic possibilities of decalcomania were realized as significant art."

Surrealist activities in the 30's were also characterized by a proliferation of objects. The Surrealist object was essentially a three-dimensional collage of "found" articles that were chosen for their poetic meaning rather than their possible visual value. Marcel Jean's Horoscope, a painted dress-maker's dummy with plaster ornaments and watch; Dali's Venus de Milo of the Drawers, a female body objectified as bedroom furniture; Meret Oppenheim's classic Fur-Covered Cup, Saucer, and Spoons which confused the texture of one article with the form of another; and Magritte's Bottle, a Freudian female "receptacle" painted as a nude, are among the objects in the show. Most of

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the objects in the exhibition have never been seen in America before.

The largest and most complicated of these objects is Dali's re-creation for the exhibition of The Rainy Taxi, originally shown at the International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris in 1938. It consists of a pre-war taxi cab inside of which a complicated system of tubing produces a localized rainstorm that drenches two mannequins, a driver with a shark's head and a distracted female passenger seated among heads of lettuce, snails and leeches. It has been placed in the Museum Garden and is visible from the exhibition galleries.

#### SURREALIST INFLUENCES in the 40's

"By 1942 New York and its environs had become the focal point of Surrealist activity," Mr. Rubin says. "The painters constituted the nucleus of a historically unparalleled group of 'artists in exile.'"

The last Surrealists were Matta, Lam and Gorky. Matta, represented by 8 works, made the last major strictly pictorial Surrealist statement; Gorky, also represented by 8 works (1943-7), was the last important artist to be associated with Surrealism, but his mature style can be fully comprehended only in the light of his long apprenticeship to the European modernist tradition; and Lam, represented by 4 works, was the first Surrealist to make primitive and ethnic sources central to his art.

The Heritage section of the exhibition presents a limited selection of two groups: the surrealizing works of the 1940's which constitute the early phases of the careers of some great Abstract Expressionists including Pollock, Ferber, Gottlieb and Rothko; and the works of the later 1950's and 60's in which are founded on a revival metamorphosis of certain essential ideas in Dadaism, as seen in recent work by Niki de Saint Phalle, Lucas Samaras, Christo, Jasper Johns, Kienholz, Claes Oldenburg and Jean Tinguely.

"In both groups," Mr. Rubin says, "it is important to remember that the

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later works transcend these influences and stand on their own as independent works of art. The lineage of the early Rothko or Newman in regard to Surrealist 'poetic-painting' of Johns, Rauschenberg and Tinguely with regard to the work of Duchamp, no more delimits their quality than does the debt of Cubism to Cézanne."

After the New York showing, DADA, SURREALISM AND THEIR HERITAGE will be shown at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 16-September 8, 1968, and The Art Institute of Chicago, Oct. 19-December 8, 1968.

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Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200

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## DADA, SURREALISM, AND THEIR HERITAGE

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

March 27 - June 9, 1968

Wall Labels

### WORDS AND IMAGES

In one section of the exhibition are examples of the innovations that resulted from the Dada and Surrealist play with words and images. Experiments of this kind -- which date back to ancient and medieval manuscripts -- also occur in Cubist painting, but the Dada and Surrealist poet-painters went far beyond the Cubists.

The union of image and word can start from either direction. "I pasted words and sentences into poems in such a way as to produce a rhythmic design," wrote Schwitters,

"Reversing the process, I pasted up pictures and drawings so that sentences could be read in them."

The "picture-poem," invented by Max Ernst, transformed the flat word-patterns of Apollinaire's "calligrammes" into three-dimensional renderings of words and images on the picture surface. Miro', more abstract picture-poems reflected the vogue of automatism where the act of lettering opened into improvisational drawing. Andre' Breton contributed the "poem-object," a relief assemblage in which various found-objects and fragments of poetry were collaged in complicated relationships.

More recent explorations of this kind, such as the Abstract Expressionist picture-poem by Norman Bluhm and Frank O'Hara, and the painting by the Parisian Letterist Maurice Lemaitre, can be seen in the Heritage section of the exhibition.

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## TECHNIQUES

In their attempt to go "beyond painting" many Dada and Surrealist artists experimented with "automatic" techniques which put a premium on chance, accident, and improvisation. Automatism was given a central role in the definition of Surrealism that Breton offered in his first Surrealist manifesto and became a central tenet of Surrealist thought and action. The spontaneity fostered by automatic techniques helped challenge assumptions of style and habits of the hand, and was felt to enable the artist to render experiences dredged more deeply from the unconscious than prevailing art practices seemed to allow.

## DECALCOMANIA

As used by the Surrealists, decalcomania was a technique in which gouache was spread on a sheet of paper on which another sheet was then laid; by pressing here and there, and then peeling off the second sheet, effects were produced that suggested exotic flora, mineral deposits, spongy growths. The fantasies generated by this technique, which was first exploited by Oscar Dominguez, recommended it to other Surrealists; and since this way of image-making required no technical ability, it was immediately adopted by the poets as well as the painters. In order to achieve more defined images, Dominguez and Marcel Jean experimented with the use of stencils in conjunction with decalcomania, but it was only with Ernst's adaptation of the technique to oil painting -- Europe After the Rain, for example -- that the poetic possibilities of decalcomania were realized as significant art.

## EXQUISITE CORPSE

Among Surrealist techniques that exploited the mystique of accident was a collective game of words or images called the "cadavre exquis" -- exquisite corpse. It was

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based on an old parlor game in which each of several people would write a phrase on a piece of paper, fold the paper to conceal part of the phrase, and pass it on to the next player for his contribution. The game got its name from the results of an initial playing, "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau" (The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine). The Surrealists adapted the word game to drawing, and even collage, by assigning a section of the body to each player, though Surrealist principles of metaphoric displacement led to images that only vaguely resembled the human form.

GRATTAGE

"Grattage" -- scraping -- was the technique by which Ernst accommodated his system of pencil rubbing -- "frottage" -- to oil painting. He laid a prepared canvas on coarse materials such as wire mesh and coiled twine and scraped the surface. This procedure provided random patterns that Ernst then altered in varying degrees as he envisioned fantastic humans, animals, and landscapes.

AUTOMATIC DRAWING

Automatic drawing was the graphic counterpart to Freudian free association. Arp began to draw with no preconceived subject in mind, but as the lines emerged on the paper, they provoked associations with human forms and with plant and animal life. But the artists never accepted "automatic" impulses as adequate in themselves; some form of editing and rearranging always followed.

Arp's improvisation was less rapid than that of Masson and Miro'. Masson's vigorous automatism was exposed first in drawings, then in the sand paintings which he drew directly with paint squeezed from a specially constructed tube. Miro', more easy going automatism led to a group of paintings, the most remarkable of which is the very large Birth of the World in the next gallery. It was "by such pure psychic

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automatism," wrote Andre' Breton; "that (Miro) might pass for the most surrealist of us all." Of course, pure automatism, like pure accident, is inimical to art and Miro' himself noted that the later stages of such pictures were "carefully calculated."