

***MAGRITTE: THE MYSTERY OF THE ORDINARY, 1926–1938* EXPLORES THE ARTIST'S BREAKTHROUGH SURREALIST YEARS WITH PIVOTAL WORKS FROM THE 1920s AND 1930s**

Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938

September 28, 2013–January 12, 2014

The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Gallery, sixth floor

NEW YORK, September 17, 2013—*Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*, on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 28, 2013, to January 12, 2014, explores the evolution of René Magritte's work from 1926 to 1938, an intensely innovative period in which he developed key strategies and techniques to defamiliarize the familiar—to make, in his words, “everyday objects shriek out loud.” During this time the artist was closely aligned with the Surrealist movement, and his uncanny depictions of ordinary objects constituted an important new direction in Surrealist art. Bringing together around 80 paintings, collages, and objects, along with a selection of photographs, periodicals, and early commercial work, the exhibition offers fresh insight into the beginnings of Magritte's extraordinary career as a modern painter and Surrealist artist. In addition to works from MoMA's collection, the exhibition includes many loans from public and private collections in the U.S. and abroad. *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938* at MoMA is organized by Anne Umland, The Blanche Hooker Rockefeller Curator of Painting and Sculpture, with Danielle Johnson, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture. The exhibition is organized by MoMA, The Menil Collection, and The Art Institute of Chicago, and travels to The Menil Collection from February 14 to June 1, 2014, and to The Art Institute of Chicago from June 22 to October 12, 2014.

The first-ever concentrated presentation of Magritte's early Surrealist works, *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938* begins with paintings and collages Magritte created in Brussels in 1926 and 1927, in anticipation of and immediately following his first one-person exhibition at the Galerie Le Centaure, which launched his career as Belgium's leading Surrealist painter. It follows Magritte to Paris, where he lived from 1927 to 1930 in order to be closer to center of the Surrealist movement, and concludes in 1938, the year Magritte delivered “La Ligne de vie” (“Lifeline”), an important autobiographical lecture that provided an account of his career as a Surrealist.

Like all of the artists and poets associated with the Surrealist movement, Magritte sought to overthrow what he saw as the oppressive rationalism of bourgeois society. His art during these essential years is at times violent, frequently disturbing, and often filled with discontinuities. He consistently interrogated conventions of language and visual representation, using methods that included the misnaming of objects, doubling and repetition, mirroring and concealment, and the

depiction of visions seen in half-waking states. All are devices that cast doubt on the nature of appearances—within Magritte's paintings and within reality itself.

Painted for his exhibition at Le Centaure, *The Menaced Assassin* (1927) is one of Magritte's largest and most theatrical compositions. The vacantly staring figures and common, everyday objects, all rendered in Magritte's flat, deadpan style, underscore what the Belgian abstract artist Pierre Flouquet characterized as the painting's "banal crime." In another painting from this period, Magritte depicts his "accomplice," the Belgian Surrealist poet and leader Paul Nougé. Here two seemingly identical, formally dressed men are partially separated by a fragmented "door." Through the use of doubling, Magritte challenges the conventional idea that a portrait should represent a singular self or an individual.

These paintings are joined by a group of Magritte's early *papiers collés*, or collages. Such works include what would become signature motifs for the artist: bowler hats, theater curtains, and mysterious landscapes. Among them, *The Lost Jockey* has a singular status; in September 1926, poet Camille Goemans, Magritte's friend and dealer, associated this figure of the mounted jockey "hurtling recklessly into the void" with the artist himself.

After moving to Paris in September 1927, Magritte worked at an unprecedented pace, producing some of his most radical and recognizable work. For his painting *The Lovers* (1928), Magritte invokes the cinematic cliché of a close-up kiss, but subverts its voyeuristic pleasures by shrouding the faces in cloth. The device of a draped cloth or veil to conceal a figure's identity corresponds to a larger Surrealist interest in masks, disguises, and that which lies beyond or beneath visible surfaces.

While in Paris Magritte explored the slippery relationship between words and images. His iconic painting *The Treachery of Images* (1929) presents a skillfully realistic simulacrum of a pipe rendered with the direct clarity of a shop sign or school primer. With the deceptively straightforward pronouncement "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ("This is not a pipe") underneath the pictured pipe, Magritte declares that an image is not the same as what it purports to represent, a claim underscored by the title.

Near the end of his years in Paris, Magritte made *The Eternally Obvious* (1930). In a simultaneous challenge and homage to the traditional artistic subject of the female nude, Magritte divides the female body into five framed and isolated sections. *The Eternally Obvious* is one of three unusual multipart "*toiles découpés*" ("cut-up paintings") that Magritte created in anticipation of a one-man show at Galerie Goemans, Paris, in the spring of 1930. Magritte intended these works to be mounted on glass and specifically referred to them as "objects," thus underscoring their unique position between painting and sculpture. The three works will be shown together in this exhibition for the first time since 1931.

In July 1930, after the stock market crash and the closing of the Galerie Goemans, Magritte moved back to Brussels, where he continued to pursue new modes of image making. In 1932, *Elective Affinities* made Magritte realize he could create shock by exploring the secret

affinities between objects—in this case, a cage and an egg—rather than through the juxtaposition of differences. With *The Rape* (1934) Magritte proposes a startlingly direct visual affinity between a woman's face and her body; in his words, "The breasts are the eyes, the nose is a navel and the vagina replaces the mouth." André Breton, the French Surrealist leader, considered the image a key Surrealist work, and reproduced it on the cover of the 1934 book *Qu'est-ce que le Surréalisme? (What Is Surrealism?)*.

The Human Condition (1933) brings together, for the first time, two of Magritte's favorite themes: the "window painting" and the "painting within a painting." On a standing easel in front of a window, a *trompe l'oeil* landscape painting on an unframed canvas merges almost seamlessly with the view outside. But the assumption that the easel painting is a "representation" while the surrounding space is "real" quickly reveals itself to be a false premise: the entire composition, of course, is a painted invention by Magritte.

The exhibition also features a number of works produced for the eccentric British patron and poet Edward James, including *The Red Model* and *On the Threshold of Liberty*, two large works that were commissioned in 1937 as part of the decorative painting scheme for James's ballroom. The finished paintings were installed behind two-way mirrors that dramatically revealed the artworks when illuminated from behind, creating a unique and theatrical Surrealist space. Magritte also made two "*portraits manqués*," or "failed portraits," of James, in which the subject's face is hidden from view. *Not to Be Reproduced* (1937) features a variant of the doppelgänger motif. A man looks at himself in the mirror, but instead of reflecting his face back to us, the mirror paradoxically repeats the view of him from the back. *The Pleasure Principle* (1937) is, according to Magritte, "a picture representing the man whose head is a light."

In addition to early collages and an extensive selection of paintings, the exhibition brings together other groups of works from this period, including Surrealist objects, a category of artistic production that gained in popularity throughout the 1930s. Magritte created his first objects while in Brussels in 1932 by covering a pre-existing plaster statue of the Venus de Milo, *The Copper Handcuffs*, and a pre-existing plaster cast of Napoleon's death mask, *The Future of Statues*, with paint. The exhibition also includes photographs that relate directly to the paintings and objects Magritte created during this time period, or that highlight his interest in performing for the camera in ways that parallel concerns expressed in his paintings. A selection of early commercial work and illustrations for books and periodicals is displayed as well.

SPONSORSHIP:

Bank of America is the National Sponsor of *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*.

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PUBLICATION:

Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938 focuses on the breakthrough Surrealist years of René Magritte, creator of some of the 20th century’s most extraordinary images. Beginning in 1926, when Magritte first aimed to create paintings that would, in his words, “challenge the real world,” and concluding in 1938—a historically and biographically significant moment just before the outbreak of World War II—the richly illustrated publication traces the artist’s central strategies and themes. An introductory essay is followed by four focused studies of key groups of works, and an illustrated chronology outlines significant moments in the artist’s life between 1926 and 1938, including travel, connections with other Surrealist artists and writers, contributions to journals, and important exhibitions and reviews. *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938* is published by The Museum of Modern Art and available at MoMA stores and online at MoMAstore.com. 256 pages; 225 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$65. Paperback, \$50, available at the MoMA Stores only. Distributed to the trade by ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada. Distributed outside the United States and Canada by Thames & Hudson.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

Public programs will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*. For more information, please visit MoMA.org

AUDIO TOUR:

The audio tour accompanying the exhibition features commentaries by exhibition curators Anne Umland, Josef Helfenstein, and Stephanie D’Alessandro, along with commentary by MoMA conservators Michael Duffy and Scott Gerson. The audio is available at the Museum on the MoMA Audio+ mobile guide, and is also available at MoMA.org/audio and MoMA.org/m, for download through MoMA.org/mobile, and as a podcast on iTunes. MoMA Audio+ is sponsored by Bloomberg.

WEBSITE:

The exhibition is accompanied by a website featuring images of selected works from the exhibition, along with audio, video, and interactive elements. The site launches on September 28, 2013, at MoMA.org/magritte.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org. **Hours:** Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. **Museum Admission:** \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m. **MoMA.org:** No service charge for tickets ordered on MoMA.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). **Film and After Hours Program Admission:** \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA Membership within 30 days.