

The Museum of Modern Art

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SURREALISM FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

An exhibition of SURREALISM FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART will open at Musees Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium on June 15, remaining on view until July 30. Directed by Carolyn Lanchner, the Museum's Research Curator of Paintings and Sculpture, the exhibition is traveling to 6 European cities, having previously been shown at the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna, Austria (February 8 - April 9, 1978) and the Dusseldorf Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, Germany (April 28 - June 4), and will be seen at: the Zurich Kunsthau, Zurich, Switzerland (August 17 - October 1); Sonja Henie - Niels Onstad Foundations, Oslo, Norway (October 22 - December 3); and the Louisiana Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark (December 19 - February 11, 1979). An extensive catalogue with text by Mrs. Lanchner and excerpts from the writings of various Surrealist artists as well as from various writers on Surrealism such as Andre Breton, Tristan Tzara, Louis Aragon and William Rubin accompanies the exhibition.

The exhibition, comprised of 62 paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints and photographs, presents Surrealism by means of a representative selection of works owned by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Almost all the major artists regarded as Surrealist, as well as predecessors of Surrealism such as de Chirico, are included in the exhibition; the earliest work is de Chirico's Still Life of 1916 and the latest is Duchamp's Couple of Laundress' Aprons of 1959. Most of the work was executed between the years 1924 and 1945.

Among the major works included in SURREALISM FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART are: de Chirico, The Great Metaphysician

(1917), Dalí, The Persistence of Memory (1931--the first Surrealist work acquired by the Museum), Ernst, Rendezvous of Friends - The Friends Become Flowers (1928), Gorky, Garden in Sochi (c.1943), Magritte, The Menaced Assassin (1925), Masson, Leonardo da Vinci and Isabella d'Este (1942), Miro, Seated Woman I (1938), Picasso, Painter and Model (1928), and Tanguy, Slowly Toward the North (1942).

The Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1929, was very much a part of the process of transmitting the work and artistic concepts of the European avant-garde of the entre-deux-guerres period to the generation of American artists that reached maturity in the Depression years. The Museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., was a prime evangelist of the modern movement, "a chief initiator in introducing Americans to the arcane mysteries of modern art," in Ms. Lanchner's phrase. Others closely associated with the Museum, particularly James Thrall Soby and James Johnson Sweeney, were also instrumental in this transatlantic process. Sweeney's 1934 Plastic Redirections in 20th Century Painting was the first American book to discuss Surrealism (in a chapter called "Superrealism") while Soby's 1935 After Picasso was the first American book wholly devoted to Surrealism and was followed by the many notable monographs Soby has written on Surrealist writers. In 1936 the Museum organized FANTASTIC ART, DADA AND SURREALISM, an exhibition which, together with CUBISM AND ABSTRACT ART in the same year, had an immeasurable importance for the development of modern art in America. Many of the major Surrealist painters and sculptors were represented in both these exhibitions, and there are several works in the present exhibition that were first seen at the Museum during the course of these two shows.

The catalogue essay by Ms. Lanchner stresses the impact of European modernism on the development of art in the United States with a particular

emphasis on Surrealism. Discussing the nature of the change in the relationship between European and American art that occurred just after World War II, Ms. Lanchner notes: "With the emergence of Abstract Expressionism toward the end of the forties, American art, which had always been on the debit side of the ledger, took off, and the how of picture making became a definitely exportable American product. But if this product was surely stamped 'made in America' it was just as surely compounded of European alloys." Among these European influences Surrealism contributed to the development of the "New American Painting" in a particularly significant way. In fact, the influence of Surrealism on American artists such as Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and David Smith, among others, provided the historical culmination of a whole period of American exposure to the artistic accomplishments and often the personal presence in this country of the European avant-garde, dating from the 1913 Armory Show and continuing through the "virtual exile" of the Surrealists in America during World War II. "With the advantage of hindsight and recognizing as given the fortunate historical accident of the existence of a generation of artists capable of transmuting received conventions of painting, one can view the mid-century emergence of American art as a natural consequence in a logically unfolding development - a consequence finally triggered by, more than anything else, certain Surrealist ideas."

"Historical hypotheses are, of course, nothing if not suspect," writes Ms. Lanchner. "But an 'if' that must inevitably arise is the question of how different might have been the evolution of painting in the second half of this century, had the fecundating influence of the Surrealists not been transplanted to America. Impossible to answer and impossible to regret. As Americans we are happy to have joined the mainstream recognizing, to paraphrase Clement Greenberg that major art, whatever

its national coloration, is coterminous with international art."