The Mystery of the Ordinary

1926–1938

MoMA

MAGRITTE

The Mystery of the Ordinary

1926–1938

Edited by **Anne Umland**

with essays by
Stephanie D'Alessandro
Michel Draguet and Claude Goormans
Josef Helfenstein with Clare Elliott
and Anne Umland

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*, organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Menil Collection, Houston; and the Art Institute of Chicago. The exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art is organized by Anne Umland, The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Curator of Painting and Sculpture, with Danielle M. Johnson, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture; at The Menil Collection, by Josef Helfenstein, Director; and at the Art Institute of Chicago, by Stephanie D'Alessandro, the Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art.

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Continuing our long tradition of support for the arts, Bank of America is pleased to be the National Sponsor of *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*.

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We hope you enjoy this exhibition and are able to share this special experience with your family and friends.

Brian T. Moynihan
Chief Executive Officer, Bank of America

FOREWORD

Between 1926 and 1938, René Magritte pioneered a radically new, non-academic approach to figurative painting. Earlier, he had experimented with a series of quasi-abstract styles; now, he set himself the task of making, in his words, "everyday objects shriek out loud," and of creating works that would "challenge the real world." By 1938—thirteen years into this remarkable venture—he delivered an important lecture that highlighted his own accomplishments as a Surrealist painter.

The exhibition *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938* explores the evolution of the artist's vision during this time. It investigates the key strategies Magritte used to *defamiliarize* the familiar, including displacement, doubling, isolation, metamorphosis, "misnaming" objects, and representing visions seen in half-waking states. In so doing, the exhibition reveals the many ways Magritte's art consistently forces us to recognize clearly legible, realistically rendered images as simply representational, and demonstrates the importance of his development during this essential period.

The Museum of Modern Art, The Menil Collection, and the Art Institute of Chicago have long been committed to the art of René Magritte. MoMA was the first major American museum to acquire works by Magritte for its collection, coincident with the artist's inclusion in Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s landmark exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* in 1936–37. Three decades later, in 1965, MoMA presented a major Magritte retrospective, which inspired the artist to visit the United States for the first time. He attended the exhibition opening in New York and then traveled to Houston, Texas, to meet his great patrons and friends, John and Dominique de Menil. Their foundation would later generously support the Magritte catalogue raisonné project, and their personal collection of the artist's works comprises the basis of The Menil Collection's Magritte holdings, which are rivaled today only by those of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. The Art Institute of Chicago has also been a strong supporter of Magritte over the years. By the 1950s Chicago was well known as a city of Surrealist collectors, and Magritte's work had featured in group exhibitions at the AIC since 1949. Building on this interest, in 1966 the

museum hosted the *René Magritte* retrospective organized by MoMA. Since that time, the Art Institute of Chicago has acquired several important Magritte canvases; particularly notable are those from the celebrated Surrealist collection of Edward James. The prospect of presenting these paintings, along with those from the collections of MoMA and the Menil, inspired the present collaborative endeavor. The corpus of works from the three partner institutions provides a major touchstone within this exhibition, as does an important group of loans from the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

We are grateful to Anne Umland, The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Curator of Painting and Sculpture, for the original concept of the exhibition, and to Stephanie D'Alessandro, the Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, for her incisive, collaborative contributions to the shaping of the checklist and the exhibition's catalogue. And two of the signatories below are both appreciative and a little envious of the third, Josef Helfenstein, Director of The Menil Collection, for joining Anne and Stephanie as a curatorial partner. We are also thankful to Charly Herscovici, President of the Magritte Foundation, for so generously facilitating Anne, Stephanie, and Josef's research, and for his support of this catalogue, and to Michel Draguet, Director General of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium—which includes the Magritte Museum—for so enthusiastically supporting our institutions' endeavors. We are indebted to the many private and institutional lenders who have entrusted us with the care of their works during the course of this exhibition.

We acknowledge the generous donors who have made possible the organization of this exhibition, in particular our National Sponsor, Bank of America. In New York, major support for the exhibition was provided by the American Friends of Magritte, Inc., and by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. In Houston, the exhibition is generously supported by Fayez Sarofim; The Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation; The Robert J. Kleberg, Jr., and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation; David and Anne Kirkland; Janie C. Lee and David B. Warren; The Linbeck Family Charitable Trust; The John P. McGovern Foundation; Taub Foundation: Marcy Taub Wessel, Henry J. N. Taub II, and H. Ben Taub; Clare Casademont and Michael Metz; Dedalus Foundation; Baker Botts L.L.P.; Paul and Janet Hobby; Henrietta K. Alexander; Diane and Mike Cannon; and the City of Houston. In Chicago, funding is provided by the Auxiliary Board of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Lead Affiliate Sponsor. Annual support for Art Institute exhibitions is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Goldman Sachs, Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Thomas and Margot Pritzker, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, the Trott Family Foundation, and the Woman's Board of the Art Institute of Chicago; and additional support is provided by the Prince Charitable Trusts. We also appreciate the support of the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, which provided a generous indemnity.

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Art

Josef Helfenstein
Director, The Menil Collection

Douglas Druick
President and Eloise W. Martin Director,
The Art Institute of Chicago

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The organization of this first intensive exploration of René Magritte's breakthrough Surrealist period from 1926 to 1938 has involved the assistance and collaboration of many individuals. We have been extraordinarily fortunate in the generous help we have received and the goodwill with which it has been given. Our deepest gratitude must go to the many lenders listed on page 13, both public and private, without whom this exhibition could not have been realized.

The thoughtful, enthusiastic support of Charly Herscovici, President of the Magritte Foundation, has been most sincerely appreciated. Without his location of essential loans and his keen interest in our research, publication, and exhibition, we could never have succeeded. We thank him most wholeheartedly for all his efforts on our behalf. Michel Draguet, Director General of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels—which includes the Magritte Museum—has also been a vital ally; we are grateful for the core group of loans he has made available to the exhibition and for his constant, ongoing support.

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The partnership between The Museum of Modern Art, The Menil Collection, and the Art Institute of Chicago began three years ago with The Museum of Modern Art's proposal that our institutions collaborate in the research, project planning, and securing of loans for an exhibition focused on Magritte's defining Surrealist years. We are grateful for the dedication, creativity, and consummate professionalism of our colleagues at each institution. Most particularly, we consider ourselves fortunate to be part of an outstanding collaborative team that includes a distinguished group of museum conservators. At The Museum of Modern Art, these include Michael Duffy and Anny Aviram; at The Menil Collection, Brad Epley and Katrina Bartlett; and at the Art Institute of Chicago, Allison Langley. In addition to the core research group for the project, we are grateful to a number of additional staff in our institutions' conservation departments for supporting our work: at The Museum of Modern Art, Jim Coddington, Chief Conservator; Cindy Albertson, Kress Fellow; Lee Ann Daffner, Photography Conservator; Scott Gerson, Associate Conservator; and Ana Martins, Associate Research Scientist; at The Menil Collection, Erin Stephenson, Mellon Fellow, and Adam Baker, conservation framer and photographer; and at the Art Institute of Chicago, Frank Zuccari and Kirk Vuillemot. The insights, contributions, and suggestions of Mr. Duffy, Mr. Epley, Ms. Bartlett, and Ms. Langley, as well as those from Danielle Johnson, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, have significantly enriched the catalogue.

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Anne Umland
Josef Helfenstein
Stephanie D'Alessandro

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

The Baltimore Museum of Art
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Introduction MAGRITTE'S ESSENTIAL SURREALIST YEARS 1926–1938

Anne Umland, Stephanie D'Alessandro, and Josef Helfenstein

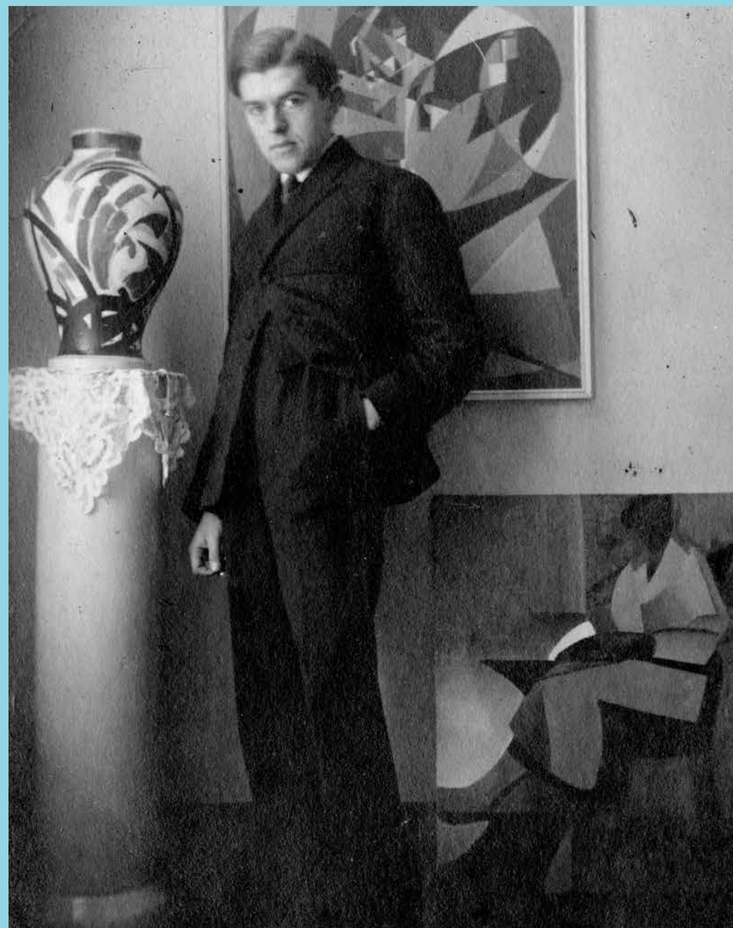


Figure 1. René Magritte at the family house, 16, avenue du Boulevard, Saint-Josse, Brussels, with [*Seated Woman*], 1920 (Sylvester 1:18), and an unidentified abstract painting. Dated on verso March 1921. Photographer unknown. 4 ⅜ x 3 ⅜" (11 x 8.4 cm). Menil Archives, The Menil Collection, Houston

On Sunday, November 20, 1938, René Magritte delivered an important autobiographical lecture titled "La Ligne de vie" ("Lifeline") at the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp, some thirty miles north of Magritte's home on the outskirts of Brussels.[1] Falling just one day shy of his fortieth birthday and at a moment of increasing international recognition for the artist, the occasion provided him with a unique opportunity for retrospective self-assessment and an accounting of his artistic development and goals.[2] Among the most significant leitmotifs of Magritte's lecture was his own defining involvement with Surrealism, to which he referred directly and indirectly several times in "La Ligne de vie."

Despite this definitive acknowledgment of the importance of his own historical relationship with the Surrealists, Magritte's early contributions to the movement remain largely underrecognized.[3] So too do the range and distinctive character of his efforts first created under the sign of Surrealism, beginning with the body of work he produced in 1926 and 1927 for his inaugural one-person exhibition in Brussels, and concluding in 1938, the year of "La Ligne de vie."[4] The outbreak of World War II the following year marks a caesura. After the war, Magritte's relation to Surrealism took on a different character; as was the case for so many people and things, the war left him, and the movement itself, irrevocably changed.[5]

This publication and the exhibition it accompanies look back at Magritte's foundational Surrealist years, focusing with a historically specific lens on the works he produced between 1926 and 1938. The aim is to sharpen contemporary understanding of his achievement: What are the characteristics of Magritte's work that identify him as a Surrealist? How does his work of this period compare to Surrealism's other great painters, such as Joan Miró, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dalí? What is it that makes Magritte unique? Although his figurative vocabulary, along with the traditional character of his chosen materials—oil paint and canvas—and his nominally "academic" technique, have led some to dismiss Magritte's art as retrograde, the body of work he created during this intensely innovative thirteen-year period reveals that this is anything but the case. An investigation of these paintings shows that his famously deadpan style and approach to subject matter—the antithesis, in many ways, of Dalí's lustrous, richly glazed surfaces and hallucinatory imagery—were but part of a methodically deconstructive practice, aimed at casting doubt on conventional systems of representation, both verbal and visual, in ways that remain utterly distinct.

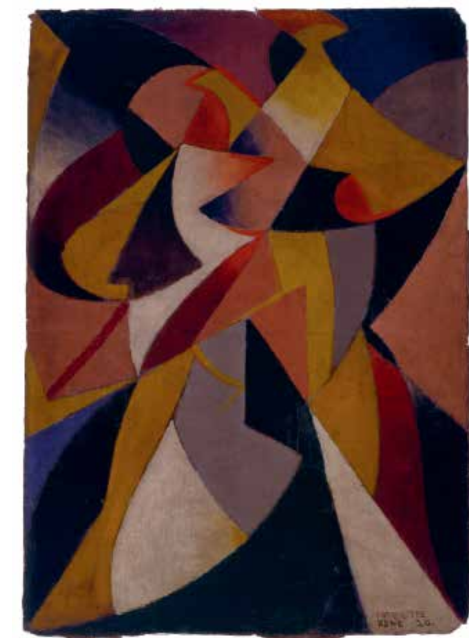


Figure 2. René Magritte. [*Head of a Man*]. 1920. Oil on canvas, 25 x 18" (63.5 x 45.2 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston. (Sylvester 1:14)

Prior to 1927 Magritte was best known (to the degree that he was known at all) as a graphic artist and a painter of stylized, post-Cubist paintings that demonstrated he had absorbed the anti-illusionistic lessons of the avant-garde (figs. 1, 2).[6] His first one-person exhibition, presented at the Galerie Le Centaure in Brussels from April 23 to May 3, 1927, introduced a dramatically different René Magritte.

Figure 3. Giorgio de Chirico. *The Song of Love*. 1914. Oil on canvas, 28 ¾ x 23 ⅜" (73 x 59.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Nelson A. Rockefeller Bequest

It included forty-nine paintings and twelve *papiers collés* created between January 1926 and April 1927. These works bore witness to Magritte's deliberate decision, as retrospectively described in "La Ligne de vie," to introduce into his pictures "objects with all the details they show us in reality."[7] Magritte contextualized this shift from semi-abstract to figurative painting in relation to a variety of factors: the Surrealist movement itself, which, he asserted, "claims for our waking life a freedom similar to that which we have in dreams"; the works of artists such as Giorgio de Chirico (fig. 3), Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Pablo Picasso, whom he acknowledged as key precursors of "what is now called 'Surrealist Painting'"; and Magritte's own discovery and subsequent rejection of Futurism.[8]

Magritte additionally noted that his decision to paint objects that could "be clearly apprehended" was precipitated by a specific moment of insight: the artist recalled "a prolonged contemplative experience [. . .] in an unpretentious Brussels brasserie [. . . where] I was in a frame of mind such that the moldings on a door seemed to me to be imbued with a mysterious quality of existence and for a long time I stayed in contact with their reality."[9] By the late 1930s descriptions of such catalytic visual encounters were a well-established Surrealist trope. Max Ernst's quasi-autobiographical treatise "Au delà de la peinture" ("Beyond Painting") offers an early case in point that was surely known to Magritte.[10] A portion of Ernst's text was first published in the October 1927 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (under the title "Visions de demi-sommeil" [Visions of half-sleep]), on the heels of Magritte's move to Paris.[11] It was published again, in expanded form, in 1936 and yet again in 1937, just one year prior to Magritte's crafting and delivery of his "La Ligne de vie" lecture.[12] The parallels between Magritte's talk and Ernst's "Au delà de la peinture" alert us to the highly constructed and selective character of "La Ligne de vie": it is by no means a transparent, straightforward, or factual account, but rather one in which the fictional and nonfictional are continuously entangled, in the artist's effort to project a logical consistency onto the narrative of his own development as a Surrealist painter up until 1938.[13] The alignments between the two texts also suggest that Magritte may have conceived his lecture, at least in part, in response to Ernst's previously published accounts.

Thus the differences, as well as the similarities, between Magritte's and Ernst's narratives provide insights into both artists' approaches.[14] Ernst memorably opens "Au delà de la peinture" with a description of a vision he had in his bedroom as a young boy, in a state of half-sleep: "I see before me a panel," he writes, using the vivid present tense, "very rudely painted with wide black lines on a red ground, representing false mahogany and calling forth associations of organic forms."[15] This verbal picture of a *faux bois* panel that provoked associative visions of new, imaginary forms is followed by another image, of Ernst's father drawing on the same panel with a "fat crayon" while "panting violently." In the lines that ensue, Ernst identifies the occasion as "the night of my conception." This associates his elliptical descriptions of artistic activity and generation with copulation. It also identifies the overall scenario as an unusual Freudian "primal scene," in which the child observes his own making.

By contrast, the detached tone of Magritte's account of his "prolonged contemplative experience" at the Brussels brasserie, along with that experience's relatively prosaic character, seem particularly marked when held up against Ernst's psychosexually overdetermined text. Magritte locates his moment of visual revelation not in the sexually charged, intimate sphere of the bedroom, but in an "unpretentious" brasserie, a place of public discourse and conviviality. Equally significant is "the mysterious quality" of the "moldings on a door"—presumably made from real wood as opposed to Ernst's "false mahogany"—that captured and rewarded Magritte's intense and extended gaze. By staring at the moldings for a "prolonged" period, he was able to apprehend their *ordinary* mystery, reinforcing his conviction to "only paint objects with all their visible details."[16] Ernst's act of looking at a painted representation of a mahogany panel, contrarily, produced visions of newly imagined things. He went on from this moment, which he described as "primal," to pursue ever more new possibilities for automatically generating images, using found materials like "floor-boards [. . .] leaves and their veins, the ragged edges of a bit of linen," and so on.[17]

In a later section of "Au delà de la peinture," Ernst cites Louis Aragon's influential essay "La Peinture au défi" ("The Challenge to Painting"), which identifies Ernst as the first to create "the two forms of collage most removed from the principle of the *papier collé*—the photographic collage and the illustration collage," as evidence of his own pioneering role as the inventor of Surrealist collage.[18] A few pages later, Ernst itemizes the various "conquests" of collage, among which, he notes, was "*surrealist painting*, in at least one of its multiple aspects, that which, between 1921 and 1924, I was the only one to develop, and in which, later, while I advanced alone, feeling my way, into the yet unexplored forests of *frottage*, others continued their researches (Magritte, for example, whose pictures are collages entirely painted by hand, and Dalí)."[19] Illustrated directly above this passage is Ernst's painting *La Belle Saison* (*The Beautiful Season*)—an enlarged 1925 version, in oil on canvas, of a small 1920 collage (fig. 4).[20] The preceding pages feature numerous large, collagelike paintings, created—according to the captions—between 1921 and 1924: *Oedipus Rex*; *Célébes* (*sic*); and *La Révolution la nuit* (*Revolution by Night*), to name just a few.[21] All bolstered Ernst's claim to having invented not just one important new artistic tradition but two: Surrealist collage *and* Surrealist collagelike painting.

la belle saison. 1925.

la quantité exacte des possibilité de bonheur humain à toute époque. La quantité d'humour noir contenue dans chaque collage authentique s'y trouve dans la proportion inverse des possibilités de bonheur (objectif et subjectif).

Ceci infirme l'opinion de quelques-uns qui ont voulu voir dans la prétendue absence de tout humour dans la peinture surréaliste, la différence essentielle entre celle-ci et les œuvres dadaïstes : notre époque serait-elle plus rose que les années 1917-1923 ?

QUELLE EST LA PLUS NOBLE CONQUÊTE DU COLLAGE ?

C'est l'irrationnel. C'est l'irruption magistrale de l'irrationnel dans tous les domaines de l'art, de la poésie, de la science, dans la mode, dans la vie privée des individus, dans la vie publique des peuples.* Qui dit collage, dit l'irrationnel. Le collage s'est introduit sournoisement dans nos objets usuels. Nous avons acclamé son apparition dans les films surréalistes (je pense à *l'Age d'or* de Buñuel et Dali : la vache dans le lit, l'évêque et la girafe jetés par la fenêtre, le chariot traversant le salon du gouverneur, le ministre de l'intérieur collé au plafond après son suicide, etc.). En faisant succéder sans choc des collages aux collages, nous fûmes surpris par la clarté de l'action irrationnelle qui en résultait : *La Femme 100 têtes*, le *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel*, la *Semaine de bonté*. N'oublions pas cette autre conquête du collage : la peinture surréaliste, au moins quant à l'un de ses multiples aspects, en l'espèce celui que, entre 1921 et 1924, je fus seul à élaborer** et dont plus tard, pendant que, seul, j'avançais à tâtons dans les forêts encore inexplorées du « frottage », d'autres ont continué les recherches (Magritte, par exemple, dont les tableaux sont collages entièrement peints à la main, et Dali).

42

Figure 4. Page from *Max Ernst: Œuvres de 1919 à 1936* (*Max Ernst: Works from 1919 to 1936*), showing *La Belle Saison* (*The Beautiful Season*, 1925). Paris: Éditions Cahiers d'art, 1937. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

Magritte protested Ernst's characterization of his own work in a letter he wrote to André Breton, the leader of the Paris Surrealists, most likely in the spring of 1937.[22] Therein Magritte asked Breton to write about him, and specifically requested that Breton correct Ernst's "too facile comment" that Magritte's paintings were "collages entirely painted by hand."[23] Magritte complained to Breton that Ernst was disparagingly implying that his work involved nothing more than a simple juxtaposition of images, discounting the very particular character of his approach to "objects," which involved what Magritte described mysteriously as a "mental operation."[24] Though he didn't mention this, Ernst's text also implied that Magritte, too, was a "conquest," passively pursuing a course of action initiated by Ernst.

Magritte acknowledged in "La Ligne de vie" that for him (as indeed for most artists associated with Surrealism) "the placing of objects out of context" was a "basic device" for defamiliarizing the familiar.[25] Juxtaposition, in other words—which Ernst broadly described as "collage"—played a fundamental role. But to suggest, as Ernst did, that Magritte's paintings were nothing more than "hand-painted collages,"[26] and as such akin to his own collagelike works, elides the substantive differences in style and strategy that make them instantly recognizable and completely unique.

Consider, for example, the relation between Ernst's *Pietà ou la révolution la nuit* (*Pietà or Revolution by Night*, 1923; fig. 5) and Magritte's *Le Sens de la nuit* (*The Meaning of Night*, 1927; plate 11). This is one of several cases in which Magritte seems to point directly at the older artist's work in order to "correct" him.[27] Magritte's painting is far simpler than Ernst's; the palette is distinctively subdued, as is the facture, and there is a degree of spatial illusionism that at first glance appears to be straightforward but on further inspection reveals itself to have been subtly manipulated. More significantly, while Ernst presents us with three distinct subjects, Magritte offers a pair of seemingly identical figures, presented back to back. While these bowler-hatted men would years later come to be seen as stand-ins for Magritte himself—the bourgeois artist, going about the business of painting in a deliberate, dispassionate way—here, at their moment of entry into the artist's œuvre, they play a different role. The reiteration of the figure forces recognition of both as purely and merely representational. Neither is "real," despite their convincingly modeled, three-dimensional forms. Masquerading as ordinary, they reveal themselves to be extraordinary, their very "normalness" a key to what makes Magritte's art so memorably strange.

All who study the life and work of Magritte are indebted to the vast corpus of critical commentary and primary documentation assembled and published by David Sylvester, author of many essays, exhibition catalogues, and books on the artist, and editor of the definitive Magritte catalogue raisonné.[28] That multivolume reference is a model of its kind, providing an essential scholarly foundation upon which we hope to build in the present project, by bringing intense

Figure 5. Max Ernst. *Pietà ou la révolution la nuit* (*Pietà or Revolution by Night*). 1923. Oil on canvas, 45 ¾ x 35" (116.2 x 88.9 cm). Tate, London

focus to specific groups of works by Magritte, made in specific places, at specific moments in time.

In the first of the four essays that comprise the core of this publication, Anne Umland investigates the body of work Magritte produced in Brussels between January 1926 and his departure for France in September 1927, a crucial period for Magritte's self-definition as a Surrealist, and a time of close, collaborative involvement with Paul Nougé, leader of the Brussels Surrealist group.[29] The second essay, by Josef Helfenstein with Clare Elliott, focuses on works created during Magritte's almost three years of living just outside Paris, in the suburb of Perreux-sur-Marne—a moment of creative growth for the artist and the most productive period in his career. Following this Michel Draguet and Claude Goormans consider the works Magritte produced after a combination of personal and financial factors forced him to leave France in June 1930 and return to Brussels, where he lived for the rest of his life. The volume's final essay, by Stephanie D'Alessandro, concentrates on the weeks Magritte spent working in London in 1937, and on the series of paintings he produced between 1937 and 1938 for the eccentric British collector and great Surrealist patron, Edward James, an opportunity that solidified the future public persona of the artist, and the perception of his work.

The overarching intent of this project is to position individual works created by Magritte between 1926 and 1938 within an expanded frame of references and relations. Throughout, the authors have aimed to make use of the insights gained by looking closely at Magritte's works with conservators, and to take into account the material qualities of individual objects, considered in themselves as primary evidence of the most important kind.

Admittedly, such tactics might not have met with Magritte's approval. To focus on the physical particularities of his work, understood materially and historically; to build, whenever possible, on insights gained by looking at individual objects with conservators; to situate individual works within the context of their times—such approaches run counter to Magritte's own post–World War II statements and practice. He repeatedly discounted the significance of what he characterized as mere "technical problems," insisting always that it is not the mode of realization but the *idea* that matters.[30] Furthermore, beginning in 1946, the number of "variants" he produced of successful compositions increased dramatically—although he began this practice as early as 1926, it became more exclusively market-driven in the postwar years.[31] As a result, works from the 1920s and 1930s and related variants from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s are often treated interchangeably in the Magritte literature, despite their many differences in composition and scale, and in the circumstances of their making.[32] This lack of attention to the specific historical contexts of these variants, and the substitution of one for another, tends to obscure the important weight of the artist's very intentional strategies of doubling, duplication, and replication.[33] All can be said to undermine notions of "originality" and "uniqueness" in ways consistent not only with Surrealist rhetoric, but with Duchamp's concept of the readymade, underscoring the rich complexity of Magritte's modern artistic identity.

"I don't want to belong to my own time, or, for that matter, to any other," Magritte told the artist and critic Suzi Gablik in 1966, a year before his death.[34] Nearly thirty years earlier, in "La Ligne de vie," he was in a very different frame of mind, and careful to locate himself in relation to his moment (fig. 6). His opening salvo: "Mesdames,

Figure 6. Photograph of Magritte, as reproduced in the program of his lecture "La Ligne de vie" ("Lifeline"), 1938. Photographer unknown. Library of the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Messieurs, Camarades"—"Ladies, Gentlemen, Comrades"—announced his left-leaning sympathies, although he was careful during the course of the lecture to distinguish himself, and the Surrealists, from political parties of every stripe.[35] His references to "that pain in the arse called Hitler,"[36] and to the Italians and Germans bent on "murder[ing] the young Spanish Republic,"[37] signal his keen awareness of the troubling political tensions that would culminate, in 1939, in the start of World War II. "Surrealism is revolutionary," Magritte told his audience, "because it is relentlessly hostile to all those bourgeois ideological values which keep the world in the appalling conditions in which it is today."[38] Between 1926 and 1938, his art shared in those revolutionary aspirations. Rooted in the commonplace, it sought to act on perceptions in ways that rendered reality disturbing and strange, and that made, in Magritte's own words, "everyday objects shriek aloud."[39] His paintings from this period are invitations to look closely and to pay careful, critical attention to what is seen, both in each image and, when turned away from them, in the surrounding world. If Magritte's work has performed as he intended, one may find that, as Nougé memorably wrote in 1931, "the world has been altered. There are no longer any ordinary things."[40]

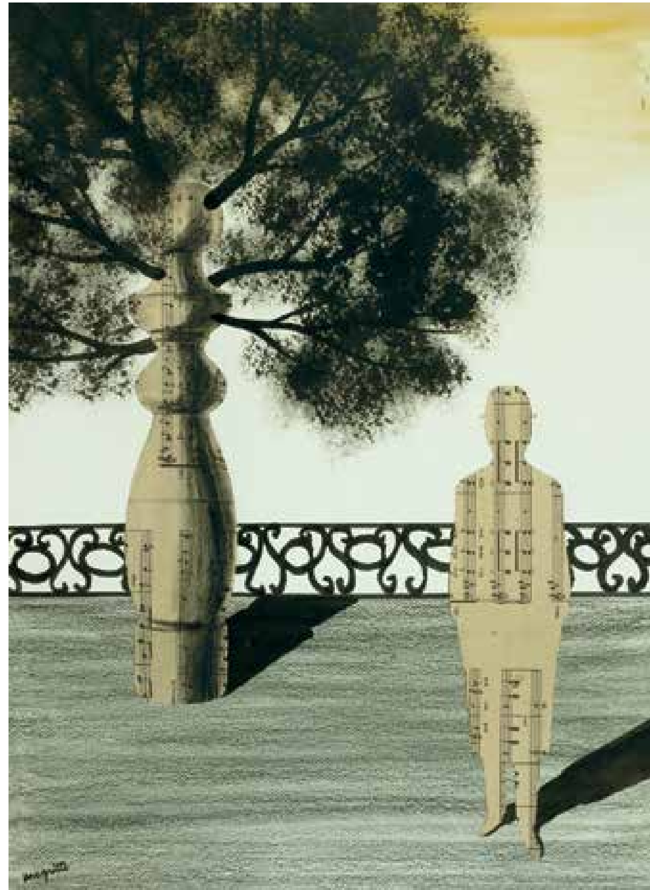
Notes

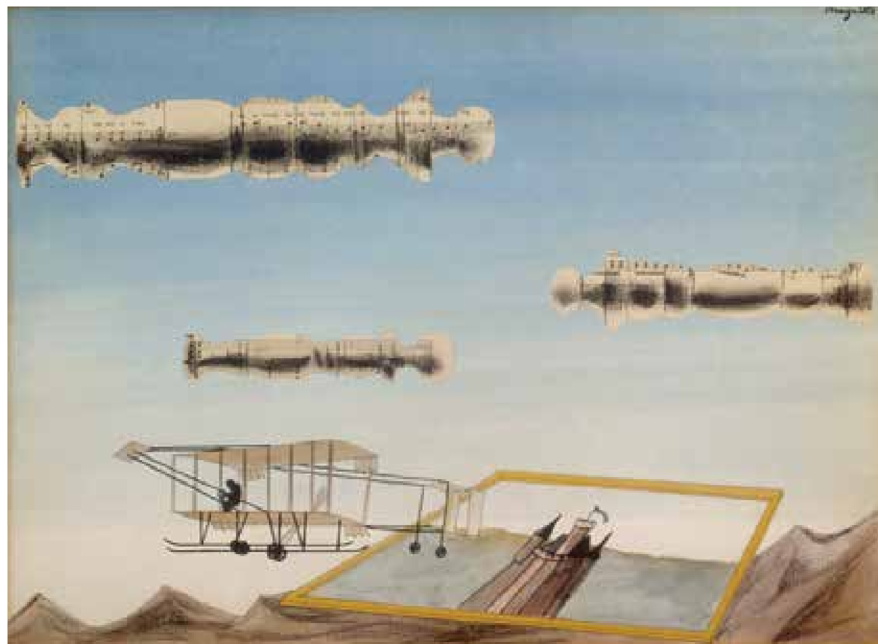
References in the following notes in the form "Sylvester 1:8" refer to the volume and catalogue numbers of works in the six-volume Magritte catalogue raisonné. Likewise, references in the form "Sylvester 1, p. 304" refer to the volume and page numbers of corresponding texts. The first five volumes of the catalogue raisonné, published 1992–97, were edited by David Sylvester; the final volume, published 2012, was edited by Sarah Whitfield. For complete publication information for all six volumes, see the "Selected Bibliography," p. 252.

1. *Ligne de vie* (lifeline) is a term used by palmists to refer to the line or crease on the palm of a person's hand that indicates the length of his or her life. Danielle Johnson suggests that Magritte may have enjoyed his punning title's quasi-mystical connotations and the way it introduces the idea of reading meaning into abstract symbols and signs. For an invaluable discussion of the lecture's significance and its different published versions, see David Sylvester and Sarah Whitfield, "Magritte's Lost Lecture," in Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque and Frederik Leen, eds., *René Magritte, 1898–1967* (Ghent and Brussels: Ludion, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, 1998), pp. 41–43. For a similar discussion, see Sylvester 2, pp. 67–72.
2. Between 1936 and 1938, Magritte participated in many significant one-person exhibitions and group shows of Surrealist art, including: *René Magritte* (Julien Levy Gallery, New York, 1936); *René Magritte: Peintures, objets surréalistes* (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1936); *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* (Galerie Charles Ratton, Paris, 1936); *The International Surrealist Exhibition* (New Burlington Galleries, London, 1936); *René Magritte* (Huize Esher Surrey, The Hague, 1936); *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1936); *Surrealist Objects and Poems* (London Gallery, London, 1937); *René Magritte* (Julien Levy Gallery, 1938); *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* (Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1938); *René Magritte: Surrealist Paintings and Objects* (London Gallery, 1938); and *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* (Galerie Robert, Amsterdam, 1938).
3. The Magritte catalogue raisonné is an indispensible foundation for Magritte studies and includes essential information about his interactions with the Surrealist movement. The 1920s and 1930s are treated primarily in volumes 1, 2, and 4, with supplements and newly discovered works in volumes 5 and 6. Beyond this resource, there have been few in-depth studies of Magritte's relationship to the larger Surrealist movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Lisa Kim Lipinski suggests that being labeled a "Surrealist" helped Magritte's career but may limit our understanding of his art; she also examines his critical reception in the interwar period. See Lipinski, "René Magritte and Simulation: Effects Beyond His Wildest Dreams," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2000, pp. 19–56 and 58–121. Gérard Durozoi includes Magritte in his survey of Surrealism, but does not fully address his relationship to the larger movement, instead treating him primarily in the context of the Belgian circle of artists. See Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. by Alison Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 147–59 and 271–86. On Magritte's "Les Mots et les images," see Kim Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts: Theory and Reception* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 255–59. For an examination of Magritte's work of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in relation to Salvador Dalí, as well as for a discussion of how Magritte fit into the Surrealist movement and contributed to its development, see Danielle M. Johnson, "Salvador Dalí and René Magritte, 1928–1938," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2012.
4. This is not to suggest that others have not considered this period in Magritte's work to be critical. In fact, as Michael Draguet has noted, David Sylvester believed that "the period of the development of Surrealism, in the second half of the 1920s" was "the key moment of Magritte's development." See Draguet, "Reconnaissance Without End," in Sylvester, *Magritte* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2009 edition), p. VII. The 1992 Hayward Gallery exhibition selected by Sylvester and Whitfield provides a case in point: of the 168 works included in the exhibition, well over half were created between 1926 and 1938, although the exhibition itself covered Magritte's entire career (1920–67). The present project is the first to focus exclusively on this important period and body of work.
5. For an account of Magritte's unsuccessful attempts in 1946–47 to promote his conception of "sunlit Surrealism" with Paris Surrealism's leader, André Breton, see, for example, Sylvester 2, pp. 131–47.
6. Sarah Whitfield provides a useful synopsis of Magritte's entire life and career, including the years prior to his involvement with Surrealism. See "Chronology," in Daniel Abadie, ed., *Magritte* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), pp. 275–97.
7. Magritte, "La Ligne de vie" (1938), trans. in Ollinger-Zinque and Leen, eds., *Magritte, 1898–1967*, p. 47. (All following "Ligne de vie" references and page numbers are from this volume.) This 1998 translation was adapted from that in Sylvester 5, pp. 9–22.
8. "Ligne de vie," p. 45.
9. Ibid.
10. For another discussion of the relation between Magritte and Ernst, particularly Magritte's appropriation and reconceptualization of Ernst's work, see Patricia Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 108–47.
11. Max Ernst, "Visions de demi-sommeil," in *La Révolution surréaliste*, nos. 9–10 (October 1, 1927): n.p. In a letter to Paul Nougé, written in the fall of 1927, Magritte mentions *La Révolution surréaliste*, undoubtedly referring to this October 1927 issue. He asks if Nougé has received it and notes that while this number disillusioned him a little, he has not had the chance to examine it at length. See Magritte, letter to Nougé, September 1927, in Marcel Mariën, ed., *Lettres surréalistes: 1924–1940* (Brussels: Les Lèvres nues, 1973), no. 105.
12. Max Ernst's "Au-delà de la peinture" was published in the journal *Cahiers d'art*, nos. 6–7, year 11 (1936): 149–84; and again, without changes, in the monograph *Max Ernst: Œuvres de 1919 à 1936* (Paris: Éditions Cahiers d'art, 1937), pp. 13–46. See Ernst, "Beyond Painting" (1936), trans. by Dorothea Tanning, in *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting (and Other Writings by the Artist and His Friends)* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), pp. 3–25.
13. A lucid discussion of autobiographical writing in relation to Max Ernst is in Julia Drost, "Biographical Notes," in Werner Spies, ed., *Max Ernst: Life and Work* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2006), pp. 20–21. For characterization of "La Ligne de vie" as "an account of the experience of life and art that has made Magritte a surrealist painter," see Sylvester and Whitfield, "Magritte's Lost Lecture," in Ollinger-Zinque and Leen, eds., *Magritte, 1898–1967*, p. 41. A 1987 sale of contents from Magritte's studio included "a presentation copy [of Ernst's *Œuvres de 1919 à 1936*] inscribed by Max Ernst to René Magritte on the half title." See *The Remaining Contents of the Studio of René Magritte* (London: Sotheby's, July 2, 1987), lot 1012.
14. Allmer addresses "La Ligne de vie" in relation to "Au delà de la peinture," focusing more on the similarities between the texts and "Magritte's possible appropriation and adaptation of these texts for his own autobiographical writings." See Allmer, *Magritte: Beyond Painting*, p. 112.
15. Ernst, "Visions de demi-sommeil," p. 293. See also Ernst, "Beyond Painting," in *Ernst: Beyond Painting*, p. 3.
16. Magritte, "Ligne de vie," p. 45.
17. Ernst, "Beyond Painting," in *Ernst: Beyond Painting*, p. 7.
18. Louis Aragon, "The Challenge to Painting," in Pontus Hultén, ed. and trans., *The Surrealists Look at Art* (Venice, Calif.: Lapis Press, 1990), p. 63. The essay was originally published in *La Peinture au défi* (Paris: Galerie Goemans, Librarie José Corti, 1930), p. 22. Quoted in Ernst, "Beyond Painting," in *Ernst: Beyond Painting*, p. 12.
19. Ernst, "Beyond Painting," in *Ernst: Beyond Painting*, p. 17.
20. This spread appears in both the 1936 and the 1937 publications of Ernst's "Au-delà de la peinture" (n.p. in the former; p. 42 [fig. 4] in the latter). For a color reproduction of *La Belle Saison* (1925), see William A. Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (Munich: Prestel, 1993), plate 184.
21. Unlike *La Belle Saison*, none of these works have actual collage sources.
22. René Magritte, letter to André Breton, May 1937(?). (The letter itself is undated, but "20 mai 1937" is handwritten, not in Magritte's hand, on the envelope, perhaps indicating the date of receipt.) One passage from this letter has been transcribed in French, and another passage summarized and translated to English; both courtesy David Sylvester's René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné Research Papers, Menil Archives, The Menil Collection, Houston. The original letter is held in the Fonds Breton, Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. The catalogue raisonné uses the date May 20, 1937, for this letter; see Sylvester 2:438, pp. 245–46.
23. Magritte, letter to Breton, May 1937(?).
24. Ibid.
25. Magritte, "Ligne de vie," p. 46.
26. David Sylvester titled a chapter of his 1992 monograph "Hand-painted Collage." See idem, *Magritte: The Silence of the World* (Houston and New York: Menil Foundation, Abrams, 1992), p. 110.
27. See Sylvester 1:137, p. 209 for a discussion of Magritte's *L'Assassin menacé* (1927; plate 12) and Ernst's *La Vierge corrigeant l'enfant Jésus devant trois temoins: André Breton, Paul Éluard et le peintre* (*The Virgin Chastising the Infant Jesus before Three Witnesses: André Breton, Paul Éluard, and the Painter*, 1926). See also Sylvester 1:143, p. 215 for a discussion of Magritte's *L'Importance des merveilles* (*The Importance of Marvels*, 1927) and Ernst's *Célébes* (1921).
28. Sylvester's monograph *Magritte: The Silence of the World* appeared in 1992; in the same year, the first volume of the Magritte catalogue raisonné was published. Also in 1992 the South Bank Centre in London organized a major exhibition that traveled to the Metropolitan Museum, the Menil Collection, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Sarah Whitfield and David Sylvester selected the show and Whitfield wrote the catalogue. See Whitfield, *Magritte* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1992).
29. Sylvester and Whitfield were the first English-language scholars to consider Magritte's relationship with Nougé in any depth. In the first volume of the catalogue raisonné, they write: "As much as anyone, Magritte looked for guidance to Nougé, who by 1927 had become something of a mentor to him, as is evident in the correspondence we quote passim and in Magritte's many approving references to Nougé's writings on him." See Sylvester 1, p. 50. Similarly, Sylvester writes that, judging from the tone of their correspondence while Magritte was in Paris, "Nougé clearly saw Magritte as a budding genius; Magritte clearly saw Nougé as his guru." See *Magritte: The Silence of the World*, p. 109. On Magritte and his friends, including Nougé, as self-described "accomplices" and for Nougé as the leader of the Belgian Surrealists, see Whitfield, "Magritte and His Accomplices," in idem, *Magritte* (London: South Bank Centre, 1992). On Nougé's writing on Magritte, see Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, pp. 301–4; and Johnson, "Salvador Dalí and René Magritte," esp. pp. 37–41, 212–29, 253–56, 269–71, and 275–77.
30. Magritte, quoted in Otto Hahn, "Le Père du pop art," *L'Express*, Paris (November 30, 1964): 60. Repr. in René Magritte, *Écrits complets*, ed. by André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 186.
31. Magritte completed variants of his works from 1926, when he produced several versions of *Le Jockey perdu* (*The Lost Jockey*). The word "variant," however, first appeared in his correspondence with New York gallerist Julien Levy in 1936, the year that Magritte sent numerous small versions of his previous paintings to be displayed at his solo exhibition. On variants in the 1936 Julien Levy exhibition, see Sylvester, *Magritte: The Silence of the World*, pp. 238–40. Magritte began to work with New York dealer Alexander Iolas around 1946 and produced many variants for him from that point on. See Sylvester 2, pp. 119–20.
32. The most notable recent example of such conflations occurred in the exhibition and catalogue produced by the Tate Liverpool in 2011, both of which are organized by themes. See Christoph Grunenberg and Darren Phi, eds., *Magritte A to Z* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011).
33. Allmer addresses Magritte's variants but focuses primarily on those done in the 1940s and later, in response to the market. See Allmer, *Magritte: Beyond Painting*, pp. 180–86. The authors of the 2004 volume *Art Since 1900* suggest that Magritte's early strategies of multiplication and his later willingness to make copies of his work may have derived from his work in advertising, from concepts current in the Surrealist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and from the idea of what would later be called the "simulacrum," or the copy without an original. See "1927a," in Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 212–15.
34. Magritte died on August 15, 1967. Suzi Gablik interviewed him in Brussels during the week of July 27–August 3, 1966. See Gablik, "A Conversation with René Magritte," *Studio International* 173, no. 887 (March 1967): 129. Repr. in Magritte, *Écrits complets*, pp. 645–47.
35. It is unclear whether Magritte was an official member of the Communist Party in the 1930s although it is known that he joined briefly in 1945–46. The catalogue raisonné authors characterize his position vis-à-vis the party as "a fellow traveler" and "strong sympathizer." See Sylvester 2, pp. 33–34. Magritte, like many of the Surrealists, was disenchanted with organized politics by the end of the 1930s, noting in "La Ligne de vie" that "we [Belgian and French Surrealists] put ourselves at the service of the proletarian revolution. It was a failure. The political leaders of the workers' parties proved to be far too self-important and far too lacking in shrewdness to grasp what the Surrealists could contribute." See Magritte, "Ligne de vie," p. 45. For discussions of the complex and ever-shifting relationship between the Surrealists and the Communist Party, see Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 2–4 and 49–55; and Helena Lewis's discussion of the years 1926–38 in *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), pp. 55–160.
36. "Ligne de vie," p. 45.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 46.
39. Ibid.
40. "L'Univers est changé, il n'y a plus de choses ordinaires," originally published in Paul Nougé's "Avertissement," in *E.L.T. Mesens & E. van Tonderen présentent seize tableaux de René Magritte* (Brussels: Salle Giso, 1931), p. 7; trans. in Sylvester 2, p. 8.

1. UNTITLED. 1926. Cut-and-pasted sheet music, gouache, and watercolor on paper, 21 5/8 x 15 3/4" (55 x 40 cm)

2. UNTITLED. 1926. Cut-and-pasted sheet music, watercolor, charcoal, pencil, and ink on paper, 15 3/4 x 21 5/8" (40 x 55 cm)





3. NOCTURNE. 1927. Cut-and-pasted sheet music, gouache, and watercolor on paper, 16 9/16 x 22 1/16" (42 x 56 cm)

4. LE JOCKEY PERDU (THE LOST JOCKEY). 1926. Cut-and-pasted sheet music, watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper, 15 1/2 x 21 5/16" (39.3 x 54.2 cm)

11. LE SENS DE LA NUIT (THE MEANING OF NIGHT). 1927.
Oil on canvas, 54 3/4 x 41 5/16" (139 x 105 cm)

12. L'ASSASSIN MENACÉ (THE MENACED ASSASSIN). 1927.
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13. LES HABITANTS DU FLEUVE (THE DENIZENS OF THE RIVER). 1926.

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14. LE JOUEUR SECRET (THE SECRET PLAYER). 1927.

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