

# SURREALISM AND THE OBJECT

30 OCTOBER 2013 – 3 MARCH 2014

Surrealism occupies a singular place in the history of the 20th century avant-garde because of its international influence and longevity. With "Le Surréalisme et l'objet", the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to Surrealist sculpture, the Centre Pompidou invites visitors to see the movement in a new light. From Marcel Duchamps's readymades to Miró's sculptures of the late 1960s, the exhibition retraces the various stages in the story of the Surrealist "challenge" to sculpture through the use of everyday objects.

When it was founded in 1924, Surrealism's very name expressed its aim of surpassing the real. In his founding *Manifesto*, André Breton called for a primarily tributary creation of an "interior model", where dreams, the subconscious and automatism in creation inspired a poetry designed to deny reality and throw it into turmoil.

A second chapter in the history of Surrealism began in 1927 when its most active members joined the French Communist Party.

The Surrealists' commitment to this political ideology implied absorbing the reality that formed the theoretical and philosophical heart of Communism. Breton then called on Surrealists to found a "physics of poetry". The Surrealist object asserted this enduring consideration of reality. In militant Surrealism, it appeared as the obvious response to this new political and philosophical context. Through more than 200 works, the exhibition highlights key moments in this way of thinking, and its fertile posterity in contemporary art.

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## READY-MADES AND MANNEQUINS

Ten years before the creation of Surrealism, in 1914, Giorgio De Chirico and Marcel Duchamp invented two objects that were to gain enduring currency in the imagination of the movement. The former introduced the image of the mannequin into his painting; the latter bought the bottle rack that became his first ready-made. From Hans Bellmer's *Doll* (1933-1934) to the dummies lining the "streets" of the 1938 "International Exhibition of Surrealism", mannequins made a regular appearance in Surrealist events. The *Manifesto* of 1924 presented the mannequin as one of the most propitious objects for producing the "marvellous" sought by Surrealism, and for arousing the sense of "the uncanny" inspired in Sigmund Freud by his discovery of a doll in a tale by Hoffmann. In 1938, the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* [shorter dictionary of Surrealism] made Duchamp's ready-made an "object raised to the dignity of a work of art by the artist's will alone": the prototype of a Surrealist object crystallising the dreams and desires of its "inventor". **(room 1)**

## OBJECTS WITH A SYMBOLIC FUNCTION

Dalí gave an initial definition to what he called "Objects with a symbolic function" in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* in 1931: "These objects, which lend themselves to a minimum of mechanical functioning, are based on the fantasies and representations that can arise from the performance of subconscious acts. [...] Objects with a symbolic function leave no place at all for formal preoccupations. They depend only on the amorous imagination of each person, and are extraplastic." Through its latent eroticism and form, more like a children's toy than traditional sculpture, Alberto Giacometti's *Suspended Ball*, discovered by Salvador Dalí and André Breton in the Pierre Loeb Gallery in 1930, prefigured this definition. **(room 2)**

## ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

In the late Twenties, Alberto Giacometti joined the circle formed around the journal *Documents*, founded by primitive art historian Carl Einstein and the philosopher Georges Bataille. His works then took on violent, sacrificial themes, typical of the direction Bataille gave to his review. His latest sculptures, shown in the spring of 1930 at the Pierre Loeb gallery, impressed André Breton, who proposed that he join the Surrealists. Giacometti took part in the group's events until 1935, producing object-sculptures inspired by the "interior model" Breton enjoined the artists of the group to submit to: "For years, I only produced the sculptures that came to my mind fully-fledged, and I limited myself to reproducing them in space, without changing anything." **(room 3)**

## THE DOLL

In the mid-Twenties, Hans Bellmer approached Lotte Pritzel, a wax doll-maker, who a few years earlier had been asked by the Viennese painter Oskar Kokoschka to make a dummy as a substitute for Alma Mahler when she ended their relationship. At the beginning of the Thirties, a series of events led Bellmer to start work on his own *Doll*. In the winter of 1932, his mother sent him a case full of his childhood toys, including some dolls with disjointed members. At the time when Bellmer was moving closer to George Grosz, the painter of Dadaist automatons, he discovered the doll Olympia in Offenbach's opera based on the Tales of Hoffmann (*The Sandman*), which brought Kokoschka's "fetish" to mind. He made his first doll, staging it in photographs that were then reproduced in the journal *Minotaure* in December 1934. A crucial landmark in Surrealist "mannequinerie", Bellmer's *Doll* was imbued with the erotic dimension associated with these female effigies, from the myth of Pygmalion to modern silicone dolls. **(room 4)**

## FOUND OBJECTS / "EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE DU SURREALISME", 1933

In the 1933 exhibition at the Pierre Colle Gallery, Surrealism affirmed the place now occupied by the object in the Surrealist imagination. Tristan Tzara rewrote the preface of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition: "Unpleasant objects, chairs, drawings, sexes, paintings, manuscripts, objects to sniff, automatic and unmentionable objects, wood, plasters, phobias, memories from the womb, elements of prophetic dreams, dematerialisations of desires [...] Do you still remember that time when painting was considered "an end in itself"? We have moved on from the period of individual exercises. [...] Time passes. Through the emotional characters of your meetings. Through the experimental explorations of Surrealism. We don't want to build any more arks. As sincere partisans of the better, we have tried, physically and morally, to embellish the face of Paris a little. By turning our backs on paintings.[...]" **(rooms 5 and 6)**

## "EXPOSITION SURREALISTE D'OBJETS", 1936

The "Surrealist Exhibition of Objects", shown at the Charles Ratton Gallery in May 1936, was dedicated to the quintessence of a Surrealism with the ability to transfigure and transmute objects, and thereby reality itself. A far cry from any expertise or "artistic genius", the power of the designation "Surrealist" was the very subject of the exhibition. A high point in Surrealist thinking applied to the object, it was a kind of apogee of a Surrealism expressed in its simultaneously poetic and theoretical purity. In the showcase and on the walls, there was little or no sign of the know-how or talent valued by the bourgeois aesthetic. Ready-mades temporarily removed from their functional anonymity, these objects defied all speculation or fetishism – like René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas un morceau de fromage*, which was taken to pieces at the end of the exhibition, restoring the cheese cover to its original use. **(room 7)**

## "EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE DU SURREALISME", 1938

The contestation of the traditional work of art, and the aim of inscribing Surrealism in the concrete world, as witness the proliferation of objects, was also expressed by the conquest of real space. This took the form of staging Surrealist exhibitions in a way that heralded the art of the "installation". Marcel Duchamp, enthroned as "generator/arbiter" of the 1938 "International Exhibition of Surrealism" at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts, was in charge of the exhibition set and stage design. Each of the sixteen participants was invited to "dress" a mannequin taken from a department store window. These mannequins formed a line on either side of the Surrealist Street greeting the visitors. **(room 8)**

## SURREALISM IN EXILE: THE OBJECT AS A CHALLENGE TO SCULPTURE

The Second World War drove the Surrealists into exile. André Breton, Max Ernst, André Masson, Roberto Matta, Yves Tanguy and others moved to the United States. The Forties and the years that followed saw the appearance of a new generation of sculptures, where the ordinary, everyday object became the basic material in assemblages constructed along the lines of the "cadavre exquis" (the free juxtaposition of disparate elements). Max Ernst produced anthropomorphic creatures by assembling plaster moulds of domestic objects (bowls, plates and the like). Alexander Calder's meeting with Joan Miró in 1932 had led him to widen his formal vocabulary to a register inspired by plants and animals. *Apple Monster*, 1938, made from apple tree branches collected near his studio, humorously evokes the Surrealists' fascination with monsters. With *Bull's Head*, 1942, resulting from the assemblage of a bicycle saddle and handlebars, Pablo Picasso was one of the key protagonists of this process. **(room 9)**

## "LE SURREALISME EN 1947" EXHIBITION

The "Surrealism in 1947" exhibition, which opened on 7 July 1947 at the Maeght Gallery, remained faithful to the principle of surpassing art underlying the pre-war invention of the Surrealist object. In the catalogue preface, André Breton wrote of the "recent poetic and plastic works", which "have a power over minds that surpasses that of the work of art in every sense". In 1947, this power was identified with the ability of these objects to act as the leaven of a new mythology. The heart of the exhibition was a room containing "altars" dedicated to "a being, a category of beings or an object that could possess mythical life". Esotericism was the latest argument put forward by Surrealism to distance these objects from the field of the aesthetic. Once again, Duchamp was responsible for the "installation" of the exhibition, laying down general staging principles that were given shape by architect Frederick Kiesler. **(room 10)**

## "EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE DU SURREALISME" (ÉROS), 1959-1960

The eighth "Exposition internationale du Surréalisme" (ÉROS), staged at the Daniel Cordier Gallery in 1959, was devoted to the movement's most secret and constant inspirational power. Duchamp, who said he wanted to add eroticism to the list of "isms" proliferating in the 20th century, dreamed up a "vaginal" doorway, and an animated, olfactory setting: "patchouli at the entrance and a variety of refinements right to the back of the last rooms." The exhibition covered a huge timescale, from Alberto Giacometti's *Suspended Ball* to Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed*, produced in 1955. The "Fetichism crypt" designed by Mimi Parent presented objects emphasising the fact that the Surrealist object was consubstantially linked with eroticism. **(room 11)**

## JOAN MIRÓ: SURREALISM IN FULL SUNLIGHT

Responding to the Surrealist call to found a "physics of poetry", Joan Miró briefly abandoned painting in 1929 to produce a series of *Constructions*, in which Jacques Dupin saw an undertaking that "challenged a plastic tool too easily dominated, after long immersion in troubled waters: the mother-waters of the subconscious and dreams." These *Constructions* were a mixture of collage and ready-made. The group of sculptures Miró created in the mid-Sixties revive the playful verve of the very first "cadavres exquis". In the space, umbrellas, sewing machines, taps and mannequins' legs compose the random poetry "made by everything" called for by the Comte de Lautréamont.

**(room 12)**

## ECHOES OF THE SURREALIST OBJECT

What is exhibited in art today under the auspices of the object is often based on principles advocated by the Surrealist object. The play on words and images characterising the ready-made inspires the work of Ed Ruscha. The "disturbing uncanniness" of mannequins continues to fascinate Paul McCarthy. The "games" of Hans Bellmer's *Doll* are prolonged in Cindy Sherman's *Sex Toys*. Heim Steinbach places Surrealist psycho-objects on his contemporary consoles. Philippe Mayaux produces a plethora of Marcel Duchamp's anatomical moulds (*Objet-dard* and others), Théo Mercier reinvents the "cadavre exquis" in his souvenir shop for tourists. The iconoclastic, libertarian vigour of Surrealism innervates Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux's practical joke and trick store. And the riddle by Isidore Ducasse, also known as the Comte de Lautréamont: "Beautiful as the accidental encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table" – to which Man Ray responded with a ready-made, perpetuates its magic in Mark Dion's proliferation of postal packages. **(central aisle)**

# EXHIBITION

## CURATOR

Didier Ottinger

## PRODUCTION MANAGER

Cathy Gicquel

## ARCHITECT/STAGE DESIGNER

Pascal Rodriguez

With the support of:



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# PUBLICATIONS

## DICTIONARY

**Dictionnaire de l'objet surréaliste,**  
édités by Didier Ottinger  
Co-published by Éditions du Centre  
Pompidou/Éditions Gallimard  
336 p., 200 ill.  
Price: €39.90

## ALBUM

**Le Surréalisme et l'objet**  
By Emmanuel Guigon  
60 p., 51 colour illustrations  
Price: €9,90

## "MONOGRAPHS/MOVEMENTS" COLLECTION

**Surréalisme**  
By Didier Ottinger  
96 p., 55 ill.  
Price : €11,90

## FOR YOUNGER AUDIENCES

**Le Surréalisme à l'usage  
des enfants**  
60 p., 50 colour illustrations  
Price: €12

# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

## WORKSHOPS FOR YOUNGER VISITORS

### "Cadavres exquis"

Workshops for 6-12 year olds, with  
their families  
Saturdays 11, 18 and 25 January /  
1 and 8 February  
From 2.30 pm to 4.30 pm

### Les Z'hybrides

Workshops for 3-5 year olds, with  
their families  
Saturdays 11, 18 and 25 January /  
1 and 8 February  
From 3 pm to 4.30 pm

## Prices

With family member €10 (1 child +  
1 adult) / Extra person €8 / reduced  
price €8 (ticket provides access to  
the Children's gallery and to the  
Musée National d'Art Moderne)  
Online ticketing [www.  
centrepompidou.fr/billetterie](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie)

## IMPROMPTU

Family "impromptu" session,  
"Surrealist Games"  
Sunday 5 January 2014  
Children's Workshop / Open all day,  
from aged 3 and up  
Free, booking not required

## GUIDED TOURS

Saturdays and Sundays at 5.30 pm,  
Wednesdays at 7 pm  
€4.50, reduced price €3.50 +  
"Museum & Exhibitions" ticket  
at reduced price

## TAILOR-MADE TOURS

- Tours for the partially-sighted  
Saturday 16 November, 10.00 am  
- Lip-reading tour for the hard of  
hearing  
Saturday 16 November, 11.00 am  
- Tour in French sign language for  
the deaf  
Saturday 16 November, 2.30 pm

## AUDIOGUIDE

Languages: French, English,  
Spanish, German and Italian  
A guided tour of the exhibition  
"Le Surréalisme et l'objet".  
You can also discover nearly

90 works from the museum's  
permanent collections  
and an architectural guide  
to the building.  
€5, reduced price €4,  
free for under-13s

**On hire at the ticket office, level 0  
Withdrawal at the audioguide area,  
level 0**

# INFORMATIONS

**01 44 78 12 33**  
[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

## EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

30 October 2013 to 3 March 2014  
Galerie 1, level 6  
Every day except Tuesdays from  
11.00 am to 9.00 pm  
Ticket offices close at 8.00 pm.  
Late night opening: Thursdays until  
11.00 pm  
Ticket offices close at 10.00 pm.

## PRICES

Admission with the "Museum &  
Exhibitions" pass  
Valid the same day for one  
admission to each area  
at the Museum, for all exhibitions,  
and for the View of Paris  
€13; reduced price €10  
Free with the annual Pass and for  
those under 18  
Purchase and printing online  
(full price tickets only) [www.  
centrepompidou.fr/billetterie](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie)

## TWITTER

You can find the exhibition  
on Twitter  
#Surrealisme  
[http://www.twitter.com/  
centrepompidou](http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou)

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