

Sommer Griffiths

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Question 4: From the series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme movement, or a selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests and construct a 2500 word essay.

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The 1920s saw the rise of surrealism, an avant-garde cultural movement that was trying to connect dreams and reality and access the unconscious mind. It rejected reason and emphasized imagination in philosophy, literature, film, and art. Surrealism flourished during this period due to its unique combination of post-war trauma, social change, and technological advancement. The surrealist investigation of the subconscious was especially relevant during this period of experimentation and the search for new interpretations of the world. I take pleasure in investigating surrealism and producing artworks that delve into dreamlike landscapes, enabling individuals to indulge in a realm of imagination and escape from reality. It's a movement of unrestricted creativity, reflection, and opposition of standard practices. Beginning surrealism as an art student can be a fascinating and fulfilling decision since it provides a special forum to grow a different creative voice. The surrealism movement, its distinguishing traits, and the philosophical and psychological foundations that shaped its evolution will all be covered in this essay. It will demonstrate how Surrealism continues to enthrall and challenge audiences by looking at the movement's influential figures, foundational works, and enduring legacy. It provides a prism through which to examine the mysteries of the human mind and the limitless potential of creativity.

Surrealism was an influential cultural, creative and literary movement that emerged in the early 1900s, primarily in Europe. After the devastation caused by World War I, Dada's rejection of conventional values and rationalism, which many artists served as the foundation for the movement's formal start in the early 1920s 'The challenge was to make great art, and to do this they must find a subject matter worthy of art, a subject matter that can be expressed only in art'. Surrealism emerged as a platform for addressing the war's societal and psychological scars, offering a means of escape and reinvention through creative expression. The 'Golden age' of 1920s/1930s Surrealism, as an art movement, was intrinsically linked to the political situation of the time, particularly leftist ideologies such as communism. Surrealists saw their work as a form of revolution, aiming to question societal norms and free the human imagination from the limitations of capitalism and traditional morality. Many, including André Breton, attempted to reconcile surrealism with socialist ideals, believing in art's transformative power to inspire social change. André Breton is credited with pioneering surrealism in art. He formally launched the movement in 1924 with his Surrealist Manifesto, which defined it as a way to express the unconscious mind through art, writing, and other forms of creativity. (A lecture given in Brussels on 1st June 1934 at a public meeting organized by the Belgian Surrealists) Stated by Breton, "As a living movement, that is to say a movement undergoing a constant process of becoming and, what is more, solidly relying on concrete facts, surrealism has brought together and is

still bringing together diverse temperaments individually obeying or resisting a variety of bends.” this explains how Over time, surrealism is a dynamic movement that changes and develops. It brings together thinkers and artists with a variety of creative styles and personalities. To keep the movement vibrant and new, some follow closely surrealism's principles while others question or reinterpret them. This diversity of viewpoints keeps surrealism current by examining both individual feelings and actual events in fresh and creative ways. Breton aimed to combine dreams and reality, drawing inspiration from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories examine the unconscious mind, human behavior, and psychological development which greatly influenced psychology, art, and literature. Pioneers in art such as Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, and René Magritte joined the movement and used unusual techniques and dreamlike imagery to translate surrealist concepts into visual forms. The idea of the unconscious, a hidden aspect of the mind that affects feelings, thoughts, and actions, was fundamental to Freud's work. According to Freud, the psyche is composed of three parts the id (instinctual desires), the ego (the rational self), and the superego (the moral conscience). According to him, psychological distress is frequently the result of unresolved conflicts between these components. Along with introducing ideas like repression, defense mechanisms, and dream analysis, Freud also highlighted the influence of early childhood experiences on personality. According to his research on dreams, which was published in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), dreams serve as a window into the unconscious, using symbolism to disclose unspoken desires and unresolved conflicts. Even though some of Freud's theories are contentious and have been challenged over time, his work established the groundwork for modern psychotherapy and continues to influence disciplines like surrealism, which heavily references his study of the subconscious. René Magritte was drawn to surrealism with his Interest in the Unconscious Motivated by Freud's theories, Magritte used his art to question rational thought and expose the hidden layers of reality, his approach to surrealism was intellectual and poetic, frequently employing visual puns, illusions, and juxtapositions to explore deeper questions about truth, reality, and the power of art.

Through the use of symbolic, dreamlike imagery and the denial of reasoning, surrealism enables artists to address existential issues, trauma, and intense emotions. This poetic, nonliteral method aids in the expression of emotions and concepts that are challenging to put into words. When expressing strong or complicated emotions that frequently reject logical explanation, like fear, love, anxiety, or grief, this method works especially well. Artists can externalize internal states through surrealism, producing visual metaphors for emotions that might otherwise go unspoken. Surrealist paintings frequently mimic the

illogical and fluid nature of dreams, a deliberate strategy for eliciting raw, unfiltered emotion. Dreams, free of the constraints of reality, allow the mind to process fears, desires, and memories in symbolic ways. Joan Miró's works, for example, convey a childlike sense of wonder and whimsy while also exploring darker, subconscious themes. His use of abstract forms and vivid colors in paintings such as *The Harlequin's Carnival* (1924-25) evokes a range of emotions, from joy to disquiet, as the viewer navigates the painting's ambiguous world. The movement's focus on spontaneity and free association also reflects the unpredictable, fluid character of emotions, which makes it an effective means of encapsulating their core. Frida Kahlo is often associated with Surrealism, though she rejected the label. Her art has a distinct style that combines surrealist elements with intensely personal experiences. Her work titled **"What the Water Gave Me"** (1938), is one of Frida Kahlo's most surreal and symbolic paintings, reflecting her inner emotional world and life experiences. Kahlo's legs and feet are shown in the painting submerged in a bathtub, and the water's surface acts as a window into her subconscious. with a collection of items and figures referencing personal symbolism examples being Kahlo painting a volcano island in connection of Reflecting Kahlo's own struggles with physical pain and survival, the volcano and tree represent the cyclical nature of life and death, destruction, and regeneration. Figures in *Nudity and Duality*, provide examples of dualities in her life, such as life versus death, love versus heartbreak, and suffering versus resiliency. *Roots and Plants* -Stress her strong ties to heritage, the natural world, and the cycle of growth and decay. By fusing surrealist dreamlike elements with intensely personal symbols of physical pain, emotional turmoil, and cultural identity, the painting functions as a metaphor for Kahlo's psychological landscape. It serves as a visual journal of her intricate inner life. "We exaggerate and intensify (in form, curvature, color etc.) what we deem of importance, and we neglect or pass over what does not interest us", Her art can evoke a wide range of interpretations depending on the viewer's perspective. To some, Her art may appear to be a collection of objects, colors, and forms that are appreciated solely for their aesthetic or decorative value. However, for the artist, each work frequently holds a deeper meaning, serving as a visual narrative or a vessel for expression. Surrealism has frequently been criticized for its male-dominated narrative, but studying the significant contributions of female artists to the movement provides a new perspective. The often-overlooked contributions of women to Surrealism serve as a reminder that the movement was more than just one vision; it was a dynamic, multifaceted cultural force. Their art reframes our understanding of Surrealism, offering alternative perspectives on identity, the body, and the psyche, and encouraging us to reconsider the movement's broader cultural and social implications. Women such as Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Dorothea Tanning, and Meret Oppenheim had a significant impact on the movement's direction, their work addressed issues such as identity, the body, sexuality, and psychological

transformation, frequently challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Surrealism frequently represented women as muses or objects of desire and lust, evoking male fantasies. Feminist surrealists like Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo subverted this trend by depicting women as active participants in mystical, dreamlike narratives, claiming autonomy over their representation.

Although surrealism is most frequently linked to visual art, it also had a significant impact on theatre, cinema, literature, and even music. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories were the main influence on the rise of surrealism as a significant literary movement in the early 20th century. To explore the irrational, the subconscious, and the bizarre, surrealist writers attempted to free language and expression from the limitations of reason, logic, and traditional narrative structure. André Breton established out the principles of the movement in his *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), which promoted the liberation of human experience through the unconscious, and dream imagery. His 1928 book *Nadja* explores themes of love, insanity, and the philosophical reflections by combining fiction, autobiography, and surrealist elements. The narrator (a version of Breton himself) describes his encounter with Nadja, as a representation of spontaneity, the irrational, and the unconscious mind. Nadja personifies the surrealist ideal because she gives the impression of being a woman torn between sanity and insanity. While writers like André Breton expanded their influence in literature by creating works that defied logical structures. Luis Buñuel's films, such as *Un Chien Andalou*, explored the subconscious through disjointed narratives and unexpected visuals. *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), co-created by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, is considered as one of the most recognizable Surrealist films. The film, known for its provocative imagery and detached narrative, delves into the unconscious mind, drawing on Freud's psychoanalysis and dream logic. The absence of a linear storyline and the use of shocking symbols, such as the infamous scene of a razor slicing through an eyeball, exemplify the Surrealist desire to challenge traditional norms and provoke raw emotion and curiosity. French poet Paul Éluard (1895–1952) was an influential participant in the Surrealist movement. Éluard examines love, the human body, and the mind in his surrealist poetry collection *The Immaculate Conception* (1930). His poetry, which aims to access the subconscious, is replete with vivid, dreamlike imagery. Instead of providing a straightforward interpretation, the poem encourages the reader to interact freely and unrestrictedly with the language and imagery. *The Immaculate Conception* is an example of surrealist writing's attempt to push the boundaries of acknowledged meaning and expression in order to free the imagination from the constraints of reality. The Surrealist movement, which was mainly visual and literary, intersected with the musical realm in a fascinating and little-studied but important way in

music. The objectives of surrealist music, like those of surrealist literature and art, are to explore the subconscious, free oneself from the limitations of conventional, logical thought, and unveil fresh perspectives on reality. Traditional compositional elements like set tempos, scales, and time signatures are frequently rejected in surrealist music in favour of non-linear, fragmented structures. French pianist and composer Erik Satie (1866–1925) emerged to popularity as one of the most important figures in early 20th-century music. Many people consider Satie to be an early antecedent of surrealist music. His compositions, especially "Gymnopédies" and "Furniture Music" (*Musique d'ameublement*), have an almost hypnotic or dreamlike quality and demonstrate an anti-romantic, minimalist approach that embraces repetition and simplicity. To create an experience that appealed to the unconscious mind, dreams, and irrationality, surrealism in theatre developed as an aspect of the larger surrealist movement, which wanted to transcend the limitations of logic, reality, and accepted social norms. Conventional plot structures were frequently rejected in surrealist theatre in favour of disjointed narratives that could appear illogical or ridiculous. Many surrealist plays were guided by the logic of dreams rather than the format of traditional storytelling. The unpredictable nature of the subconscious is reflected in the prevalence of nonlinear narratives, fragmented scenes, and absurd circumstances. 'The psychological reasons which lead an artist (and the artist in all of us) to express themselves in pattern are obscure no doubt they can be explained logically'. Modern philosophy has been significantly impacted by surrealism, which has changed conceptions of reality, creativity, and the human mind. Surrealism's emphasis on liberation from societal constraints and celebration of the irrational are closely related to existentialist philosophy, particularly the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Surrealist artists and thinkers advocated for personal freedom, claiming that true creativity emerged when people were liberated from cultural norms and logical reasoning. This is comparable to Sartre's concept of radical freedom, in which individuals are free to create their own meaning in an otherwise meaningless world. Surrealists saw the unconscious mind as a source of genuine expression that was unconstrained by societal expectations. Similarly, existentialist philosophers emphasized the value of authenticity, encouraging people to embrace their unique existence while rejecting inauthentic conformity. The Surrealist practice of automatism, which involves spontaneous, unfiltered creation, exemplifies this pursuit of authenticity, as does existentialism's insistence on embracing freedom despite its inherent challenges.

Ultimately, Surrealism reshaped conventional thought, opening new avenues for creativity and expression that continue to resonate today. Its emphasis on the irrational, subconscious, and dreamlike continues to defy conventions, encouraging humanity to

embrace the unexpected and unknown. Surrealism as a cultural force reminds us of the human mind's limitless potential and ability to transform the world through imagination, courage, and a refusal to accept limitations. Its legacy is not only a testament to its revolutionary spirit, but also an ongoing call to explore the infinite potential of creativity. Surrealism has had a significant and wide-ranging impact on the world, influencing many different artistic disciplines. A cultural force that profoundly altered our understanding of the world, the mind, and human creativity, surrealism was much more than just an artistic movement. It was one of the most revolutionary and transformative movements of the 20th century, and its influence can still be seen in the arts, philosophy, psychology, film, fashion, and political philosophy. By enabling writers and artists to express their inner voices without self-censorship, automatic writing and free association enabled people to explore their emotions, desires, and fears without being constrained by social norms. Through its celebration of the irrational, subconscious, and dreamlike, surrealism reshaped conventional thought and created a safe space for expression and imagination that continue to resonate to modern day.

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