

Illustration (BA) - Research in Context

Name: Chloe Booton

Student Number: 2004818

Words: 2,134

**Question 3: “If ever one art movement consumed the entire illustration genre, it was surrealism.”
(Heller, S and Chwast, 2008, p.70) Discuss with reference to contemporary illustration**

The surrealists of the late 1910's and onwards idealised the unusual. They created thought-provoking pieces, distorting mundane objects, using dreamlike voids and expressive shapes to symbolise and communicate topics that would continue to inspire conceptual illustrators today. I will be exploring the surrealist movement, the artists that lead surrealism and debate why conceptual illustrators are inspired by the works of the movement today.

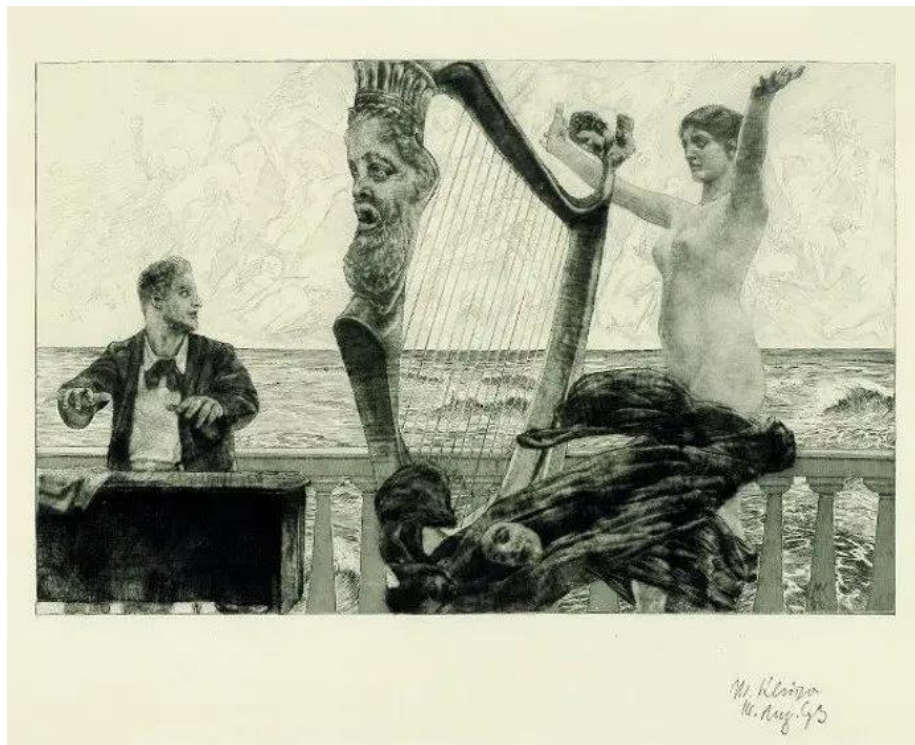


Fig one

Klinger, M (1895) 'Invocation'

An important influence on the surrealist movement, Max Klinger. Klinger focused on symbolism, and disproportionate scales in his prints. It was these aspects of his creativity that continued to inspire surrealists such as Max Ernst and Giorgio de Chirico. "Klinger creates an extremely disquieting dream reality" (De Chirico, 1920) I am confident that his work inspired the surrealists that would go on to inspire conceptual illustrators alike. Max Klinger's etchings visualise different insights by combining elements, a technique that was shared throughout both movements, symbolism, and surrealism. Klinger's 10 sheet series of etchings titled: Paraphrases on the finding of the glove. This series explores his own feelings of "romantic yearnings" (Erbuer, Arthur.io) in dreamlike otherworldly scenes. Showing a vulnerable approach to fantasy and reality, In Fig 1 we see a woman emerging from the ocean as she shares the gaze with a man who is playing a piano that has a piece of cloth placed on top. These various elements seem to evolve through each sheet and become increasingly dreamlike and

nightmarish as if Klinger were portraying a story in each sheet, a story that seemed nonsensical to the average viewer, which is something that many surrealists appreciated.

Diving into the surrealist revolution “Where form is discontinuous and uncertain.” (Stich, S, 1990, pg. 12) We see a time before surrealism where artists present unique forms of shapes and concepts to shock and intrigue the viewer. Surrealism was born after a rebellion against the norm during the aftermath of the World War 1. “World War 1 had destroyed many artist’ and intellectuals’ belief in the light of reason.” (Schneede, 1979, pg.11) It is here that we see a collection of creatives who wanted to give people a kick into their subconscious and destroy reason through a force of change in conceptual ideals and reality. “Rejection of the Western ideals of a single truth, universal order, and progress form the basis of Surrealist art” (Stich, S, 1990, pg. 12). To express what they were thinking and feeling while using art as a medium to conceptualize their own ideas and their own illusions instead of presenting something that people were already familiar with, artists wanted to give people the same strange sense of confusion and outrage that they were feeling after losing their precious time to World War 1 this movement was coined as ‘Dadaism’ a movement that was followed by surrealism. The surrealist movement truly began in the 1920’s although elements of surrealism work became apparent leading up to this period it was revolutionised to ditch the politically motivated theme of ‘Dadaism’ by focusing more on the subconscious.

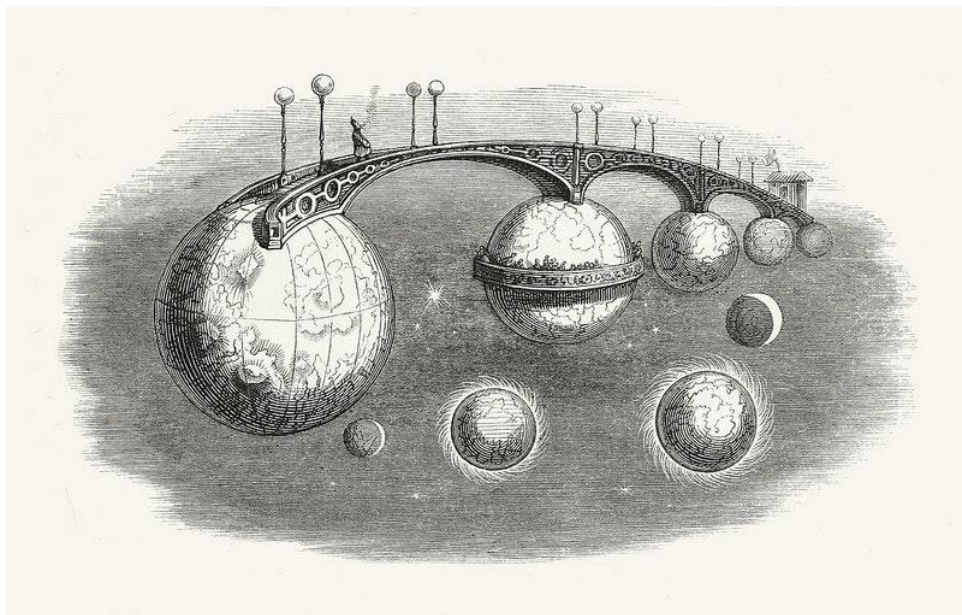


Fig two:

Grandville, J (1844), *'A bridge that leads from one world, to the next, from another world.'*

The fantastical scenes that J.J Grandville would portray in his works would soon to renown him as a surrealist of his time. “Surrealistic illustration was created long before the term and movement” (Chwast, S, 2008) Leaving J.J Grandville as a perfect example of this through his dreamlike illustrations and science-fiction art. In fig two, we see a bridge hopping from one planet to the next to denote “planetary insignificance” (Mainardi, P, 2018) This piece to me

felt like Grandville's attempt at distinguishing humankind's importance and our own importance in the universe, leaving us to be less insignificant than we feel.

The definition for surrealism is “beyond reality.” In surrealism we see dreams of artists, poetic thoughts and theories expressed by pushing art boundaries and exploring different worlds. Surrealists would use techniques such as automatic writing to evade control of the artistic process. Automatic writing was used to unlock thoughts by giving up control as to what the artist was writing, by writing unconsciously. “The unconscious was central to surrealists.” (Little, S pg. 118) as well as dream studying, the act of journaling each dream and searching for symbolism. We see paintings of worlds filled with absurd concepts of psychology and irrationally dreamlike scenes that were disturbing but intriguing to behold as each surrealist painter strived for creative freedom “to revolutionise human experience.” (Tate Research Publication, 2016.)

Illustrators today are enamoured by the surrealist movement for these reasons alone, the movement inspires illustrators to break through conventional art rules, rules that suggest correct composition, proper proportion, the rule of thirds and so on by introducing opportunity for the “logically illogical” (Chwast, S , 2008) to create art with elements of whatever the artist dreamed of, surrealism loved the bizarre which is why we could argue that illustrators are inspired by this revolution. As we create and view stories of sci-fi and fantasy today and illustrate and conceptualise them it is great to enact fuel from the subconscious and think of various sequences and strange arrangements that convey intriguing visuals for the viewer as practice, to continue to break conventional norm and not bore people to death by presenting them the same things they have seen before.



Fig three:

De Chirico, G (1911) 'The Return of the Poet'

A good example of a surrealist pushing boundaries and ignoring the rules of art, Giorgio De Chirico painted *The return of the Poet* with oil on canvas. “Although the picture has depth, it lacks spatial continuity” (Schneede, M, 1976) A piece that leaves us bewildered by the lack of rules in its composition. The unsettling dark shadows of the buildings in front, juxtaposed to the tower in the centre that is highlighted with illumination makes for an interestingly vague layout. displaying close to zero detail on the landscape itself as well as the architecture. De Chirico focuses on the “metaphysical” (Schneede, M, 1976) a word that feels almost unexplainable because of its long history, but we see that in Fig three Chirico presents the metaphysical by focusing beyond the natural world and the natural order through inaccurate colouring and dimensions strangely presented to highlight the opposite of reality by basing his work on reality with his own personified twist.



Fig four:

Dali, S (1946) The Temptation of Saint Anthony

Many surrealists would often conceptualise past psychology theories, history, altarpieces, poems and stories and Dalí was no exception. “Temptation of Saint Anthony is based on the temptation in the Isenheim altarpiece.” (Schneede, M, 1974) I feel like a lot of surrealists would conceptualise these pieces of writing in order to create interesting narratives for the viewer, hideous depictions with complex symbols connected to the spiritual world would often lead the way for good representations for what the artist wanted to communicate. I especially liked this piece because of the layers of characters we see in the painting, the various shapes I would not dare imagine pairing together in this religious dream of an archaically beautiful but horrifying narrative. Each elephant in Fig four have their own symbolic meaning, “the first elephant carries the chalice of lust” (Schneede, M, 1974) it is a painting of symbolic and nature of spiritual capabilities, fallen towards medieval ideals that are shocking and horrifying for its time.



Fig Five:

Lawrance, F (2022) Slumberland

In reference to contemporary media, I wanted to explore ‘Slumberland’s’ use of surrealistic portrayals. In the movie the bed comes to life and starts to walk throughout the city. The way this scene is shot felt like a nod to Salvador Dali’s painting in Fig four, the spiderlike legs wandering throughout the city eerily swaying through traffic, after watching this scene for the first time it gave me a sense of familiarity, like I had seen something like this bizarre before. It appears that Illustrators, movie directors and games designers alike are all inspired by surrealism as we see these unusual worlds everywhere without realising it. On the contrary, I feel like as creatives we have strived for the unusual without surrealistic intent to shock or fill our audience and our viewers with creative child-like wonder.



Fig Six:

Tanning, D (1952) Some Roses and their Phantoms

An interesting twist on the classic white tablecloth painting that many artists are familiar with, instead of portraying a beautiful fruit bowl and a glass of wine we see mysterious creatures and spoiled roses. Fig Six “represents a domestic world” (Mundy, J, 2003) the painting itself feels lifeless and dull, similarly to a domestic life. Although the textures seem to give the painting some life especially on the curious creature poking up from the table appearing sad, we see somewhat of a poetic tale that is spinning.

Anything that we see today that is unusual, bizarre and absurd could be closer to the art movement, surrealism than you think. Television shows, movies and video games reference surrealistic ideas in order to encapsulate the audience and shock the viewer. We always love discussing our dreams that often fall on deaf ears as they are so interesting to us but not to the people, we tell them to. They are hard to make sense of so the idea of creating art inspired by our subconscious is something that as artists we cannot let go of. Narrating dreams to create the most interesting pieces inspired by a movement that made it possible, as illustrators we love

to story tell, and storytelling something interesting is better than something that is boring, real and mundane.

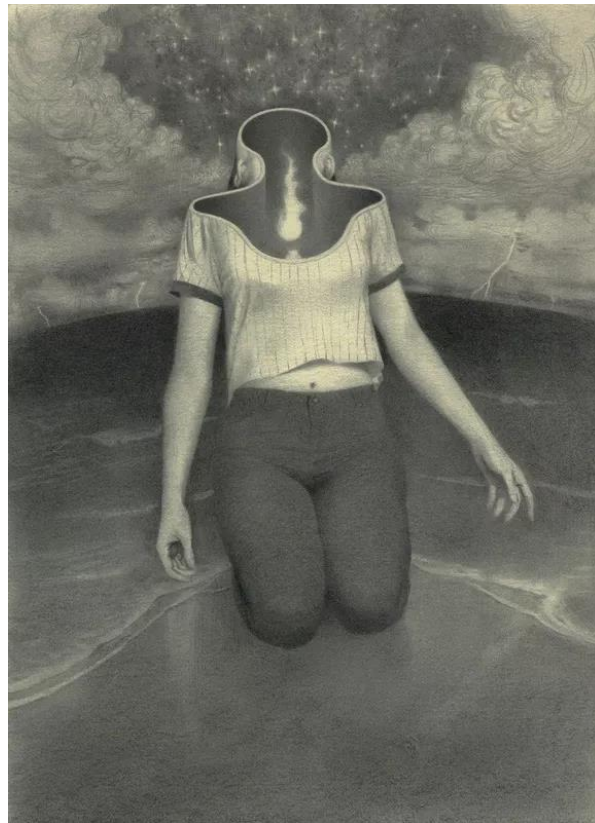


Fig Seven:

Jhonston, M (2018) Initiate

Fig Seven seems to encapsulate the same otherworldly dreamlike scene as fig one, two and four. We see a conceptual illustrator using surreal notions of “psychologically charged” (Artsy, 2022) inspirations to visually express pent-up emotions, to symbolise the subconscious of the artists subjects. The detail, composition and elements scream modern day surrealism and Jhonston does it so beautifully using a pencil. Fig seven feels like the perfect example of how conceptual illustrators are mostly inspired by surrealism, in Jhonstons biography it is said that one of the artists he takes inspiration from is dystopian surrealist ‘Zdzislaw Beksinski’ who reaches great lengths to create nightmarish surrealistic portrayals of apocalypses with hellish paintings.

Surrealism was the first art movement in history to inspire me throughout my journey of understanding art. A movement that I felt connected to the most as it is a movement that supplied me with the most fantastical and intransient workings of artists. The more I continue to learn about these artists and the more artworks I discover, the more I feel inspired to continue to create my own dreamlike paintings based off my own experiences in this world. I have the

most bizarre dreams, and like these artists it is nice to share them in a format that is not boring, nobody listens to your dreams if you merely communicate them.

Bibliography:

Figures:

Fig One: Klinger, M (????) *Invocation* [Etching]. (Viewed: 24 November 2022).

Fig Two: Grandville, J (1844) *A Bridge that leads from one world, to the next, from another world.* [Pencil & Ink on paper]. (Viewed: 26 November 2022).

Fig Three: De Chirico, G (1911) *The Return of the Poet.* [Oil on Canvas]. Private Collection (Viewed: 5 December 2022).

Fig Four: Dali, S (1946) *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* [Oil on canvas]. Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels. (Viewed: 5 December 2022)

Fig Five: *Slumberland* (2022) Directed by Francis Lawrence [Feature film]. Place of distribution: Netflix.

Fig Six: Tanning, D (1952) *Some Roses and their Phantoms* [Oil on Canvas] Tate (Viewed: 6 December)

Fig Seven: Jhonston, M (2018) *Initiate* [Graphite on Natural Stonehenge Paper] Aux Gallery (Viewed 6 December)

Articles:

Erbuer, M. (2022) *Arthur*. Available at: https://arthur.io/art/*++++max-klinger (Accessed: 25 November 2022).

Art Museum. Arizona (2010) Available at: <https://artmuseum.arizona.edu/events/event/max-klinger-the-glove> (Accessed: 25 November 2022).

Surrealism Today (2021) Available at: <https://surrealismtoday.com/miles-johnston> (Accessed: 25 November 2022).

Artsy (2021) Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/artist/miles-johnston> (Accessed: 25 November 2022).

Mainardi, P. (2018) *Public Domain Review*. Available at: <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/grandville-visions-and-dreams> (Accessed: 26 November 2022).

Manty, K. (2020) *Antique Trader*. Available at: <https://www.antiquetrader.com/art/the-wonderfully-odd-world-of-french-artist-j-j-grandville> (Accessed: 26 November 2022).

Tate (2022) Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/surrealism#:~:text=Surrealism%20aims%20to%20revolutionise%20human,the%20disregarded%20and%20the%20unconventional>. (Accessed: 5 December 2022)

Mundy, J. (2003) *Tate*. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/tanning-some-roses-and-their-phantoms-t07987r> (Accessed: 6 December 2022).

Books:

Stitch, S. (1990) *Anxious Visions*. New York: Abbeville Press

Schneede, M. (1975) *Surrealism*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, INC.

Little, S. (2004) *...isms understanding art*. 1st edn. New York: Universe Publishing.

Seymour, C. and Heller, S. (2008) *Illustration A Visual History*. Edition. New York: HNA Books.