

FROM: ILLUSTRATION A VISUAL HISTORY

STEVEN HELLER
& SEYMOUR CHWAST

- 124. René Magritte
La Reproduction Interdite, 1937
- 125. Artist unknown
Cover illustration
Flair, 1950
- 126. Viktor Koen
Reinventing Physics
The New York Times
Book Review, June 2005
- 127. Herbert Bayer
Thr Leben hängt an einem Faden, 1937

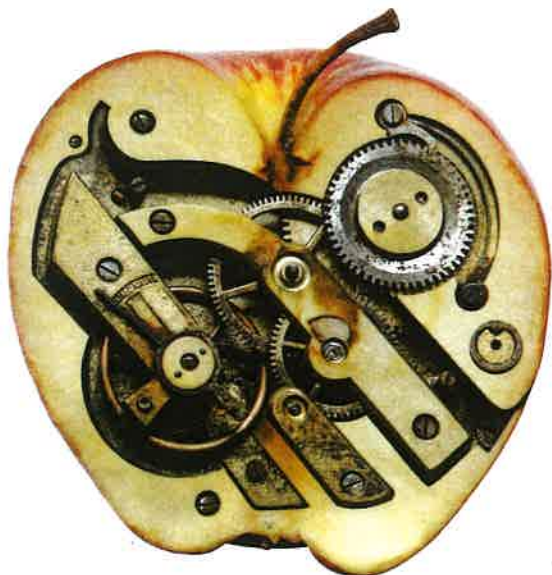


Surrealism

If ever one art movement consumed the entire illustration genre, it was Surrealism, but that was not its primary intent. Surrealism, founded by André Breton in 1924—the year of the publication of the first Surrealist Manifesto—was a reaction to Expressionist and Dada art that had become too politically motivated and, therefore, less interested in plumbing the deeper recesses of the subconscious mind. Breton believed that art and literature, which was Surrealism's primary impetus, could be made through free association and dream studies. The goal was to induce physical and mental vertigo that both stimulated and sabotaged perception, and this launched a Surrealist revolution (Breton's flagship journal was called *La Révolution Surréaliste*). Yet surrealist illustration was created long before the term—and movement—Surrealism was coined. The macabre and nightmarish cartoons by French caricaturist J. J. Grandville, published around 1850, prefigured contemporary science-fiction art and provided a unique vehicle for making political and social commentary during a censorious period in French history.

Grandville was not alone; other cartoonists and illustrators were interested in fantasy and engaged in dislocated and dreamlike imagery, which paved the way for a language of Surrealism. By the late 1930s, Surrealism had become a fashion, the vernacular for many commercial artists in various disciplines. Both mysterious and





126



127

accessible, Surrealism provided a semi-abstract means to visually express complex ideas, sometimes in a simplistic manner.

By the 1938 Paris International Surrealist Exhibition, many exponents had translated their dreams into painting, photography, and cinema. The most chilling and classic film was *Un chien andalou*, created by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. Dalí also designed the dream sequence for Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. Collage, with its enforced dislocations, became the primary medium for surreal pursuit, but not the only one. Painted and drawn landscapes evoking an extraterrestrial sensibility were common. While Dalí is the most notorious of the Surrealists for his paintings and antics, René Magritte was more influential to a larger group of illustrators (see p. 145). His narrative and symbolic canvases, whereby incongruous juxtapositions are frequent and the absurd is commonplace, proved a perfect means to visually convey political, social, and psychological ideas. Surrealism became a quick and easy solution for piquing visual interest.

Surrealism provided the illustrator with an opportunity for logically illogical, discordant objects to share center stage. Birds could fly on the ground, while statues could move like animate objects, humans could appear as flowers, and characters could ride someone's eyes as though they were wheels. In the surreal world, nothing had to follow rules of proportion or composition, and this ultimately made for some sublimely inventive art—and some horrid derivations.