

Collage

Workshop

What is collage?

Collage is derived from the French word *coller* (to glue), the process involves cutting, tearing, and arranging disparate elements such as images, textures, text, colour, materials, illustrations, photographs, to form a new composition that expresses a specific meaning.

Collages can be physical or digital, and can be realistic, abstract, or surreal, all serving as a visual expression of an idea.

(Study.com)

Development of collage

Collage has a very long history with examples being discovered as early as 64AD in Egypt. We will briefly consider it from a 20th century, western perspective.

We will look at:

- Dada
- Surrealism
- Pop Art
- Contemporary practice

Dada

Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque are credited with inventing the technique of collage in fine art around 1912, by incorporating everyday materials like newspaper into their Cubist works to challenge traditional art. The Cubists used collage to further their explorations of the ambiguities of space and representation.

However, the Dadaists saw in it the potential to advance their absurdist philosophy and political activism. Its use of prefabricated or readymade materials negates the importance of artistic skill, and the fact that collage is frequently sourced from mass-produced advertising and journalism collapses boundaries between “high” and “low” culture. This is a postmodern trait.

Also, the act of making a collage is literally iconoclastic (Greek for “image-breaking”). Cutting up source material implies a rejection of its world-view, a disruption of the way that newspaper, scientific text, or advertising organises information. It presents a refusal of the ideas or directives it was intended to convey. The recombination of these elements gives free play to the artist’s desire to re-shape the world, which for the Dadaists, often resulted in images that range from bizarrely humorous to downright disturbing.

(smarthistory.org)



Raoul Hausmann,
The Art Critic.

1919–20. Tate © ADAGP, Paris and DACS,
London 2025

Destroy traditional art values

Dada artists felt that World War I called into question every aspect of a society capable of starting and prolonging a war, including its art. The Dada aim was to destroy traditional values in art and to create a new art to replace the old. As the artist Hans Arp later wrote:

'Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts. While the guns rumbled in the distance, we sang, painted, made collages and wrote poems with all our might.'

In addition to being anti-war, Dada was also anti-bourgeois and had political affinities with the radical left.

(tate.org)

Hannah Höch,
*Cut with the Kitchen Knife
Dada through the Last
Weimar Beer-Belly
Cultural Epoch in
Germany.*

1919-20, photomontage and collage with
watercolor, 114 x 90 cm (Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie)



Surrealism

The basic mechanism of collage, which is the irrational juxtaposition or the bringing together of radically incompatible things, was foundational for Surrealism.

Inspired by Freud's writings on psychoanalysis, the Surrealists considered dreams as a principal means to gain access to the unconscious. They published many accounts of their own dreams in the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste*.

Dadaists initially used collage techniques of juxtaposition to violate established expectations and rationality. However, for the Surrealists, the disruptions and dislocations of collage were not just arbitrary iconoclasm; they were direct manifestations of unconscious thinking.

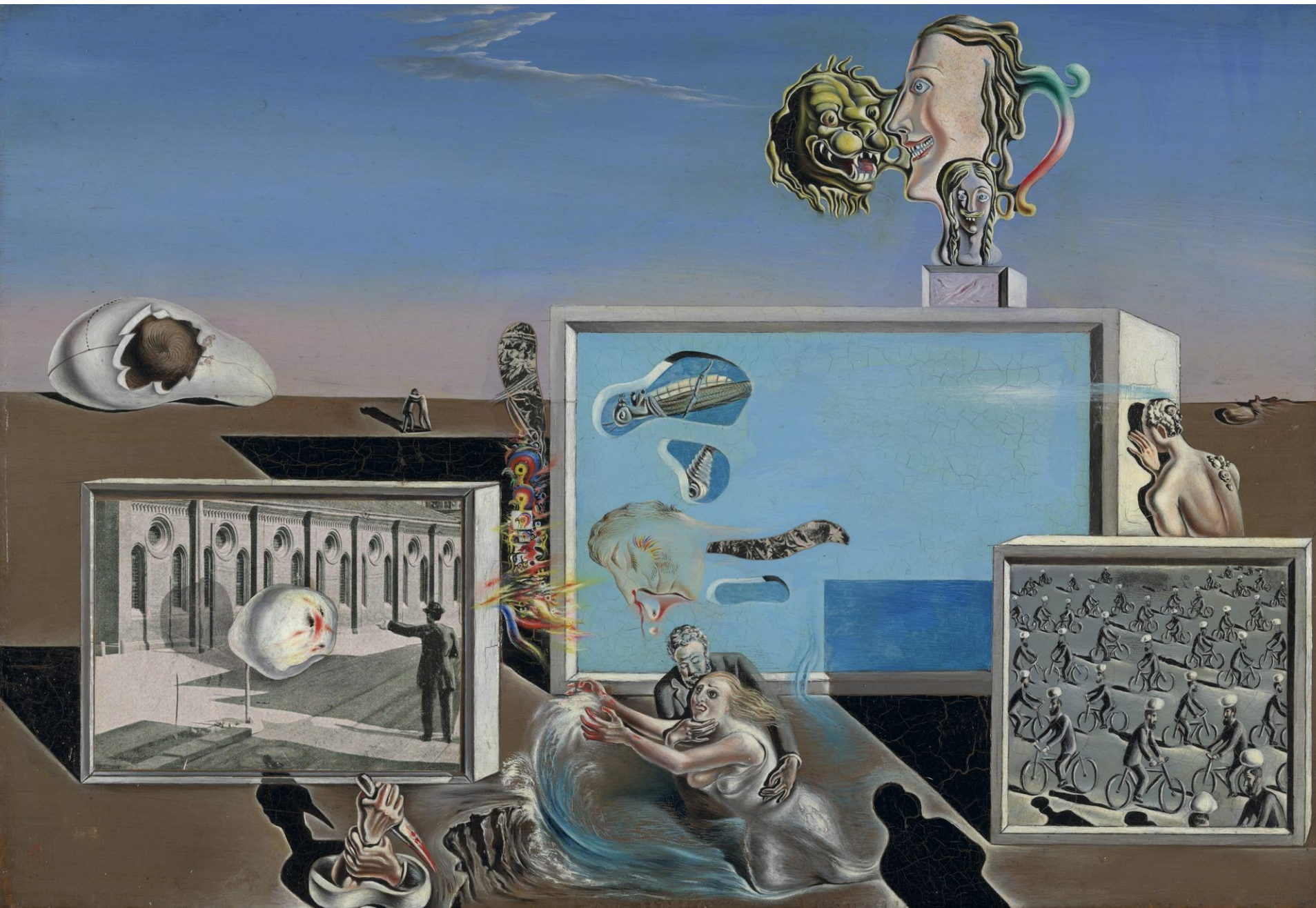
Max Ernst,
*Here Everything
is Still Floating.*

1920, printed paper
collage with pencil on
cardstock, 6 ½ x 8 ¼
inches (MoMA)



A new world with new meaning

In *Here Everything is Still Floating* Max Ernst collaged images of a fish skeleton and a beetle onto a military photograph of an aerial bomb attack, thereby creating a seascape in which a steamboat encounters an enormous ghostly fish. We can identify the individual source images if we look closely, but they have been transformed by their new context, and their original significance is no longer relevant. They have become part of a new world with new meaning.



Salvador Dalí.
*Illuminated
Pleasures.*

1929, oil and collage on
board, 9 3/8 x 13 3/4
inches (MoMA)

The Surrealists saw collage as a means to enact what they considered to be the fundamental poetic activity of the unconscious mind through the combination of disparate entities to create a new thing.

Both Surrealist poets and artists used collage techniques. This irrational juxtaposition of pre-existing elements mirrors the construction of dreams, which also bring together seemingly unrelated things to create strange narratives and scenes.

Pop Art

Pop art is a mid 20th century art movement that uses imagery from popular culture, such as advertising, comics, newspapers and the media and everyday objects.

Pop Art seeks to elevate the everyday and it does so by borrowing the imagery of commercial design for the purpose of either celebrating or critiquing the appeal of mass production and consumerism. (This is another postmodern trait.)



Richard Hamilton, *Just What is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, so Appealing?*

1956, collage, 26 cm × 24.8 cm
(Kunsthalle Tübingen, Tübingen)

Richard Hamilton

The artwork title, *What is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, so Appealing?* mimics magazine article titles. Hamilton's collage is a critique of 20th century consumer culture. Created in 1956, a living room is filled with logos and cut-out images of consumer products. The lampshade is decorated with the Ford logo, a comic book cover hangs as interior decoration, and a tin of ham sits on the coffee table. Found images and mass media ephemera are seen everywhere.

The couple in the room also appear as commodities. The wife, transformed into a nude model, is seen on the couch and the husband is presented as a Herculean body builder. Often interpreted as a kind of idealized, modern-day “Adam and Eve,” the couple are also products on display, no different from the branded and packaged goods that adorn their home. The domestic space, Hamilton asserts, has become a utopia for the advertising industry, and is an arena in which middle class aspirations are on full display.

(smarthistory.org)

Wolf Vostell.
Coca-Cola.



1956, collage,
26 cm × 24.8 cm
Dé-collage,
paper on Masonite,
82-5/8 x 122"

Wolf Vostell

Wolf Vostell's practice involved décollage, This is the tearing apart of an existing image rather than the piecing together of multiple images. This matched his belief that society is surrounded and shaped by destruction. As a lithographer's apprentice Vostell used this approach to manipulate the posters that surrounded him at his apprenticeship.

Vostell took the idea of décollage to the streets, deforming and manipulating posters in public places in order to reflect the violence of post-war Germany and its newfound US-inspired consumerism. His work with décollage throughout the 50s and early 60s transformed the medium into a tool of public engagement and set up an early foundation for the style that he stuck with for the rest of his artistic career.

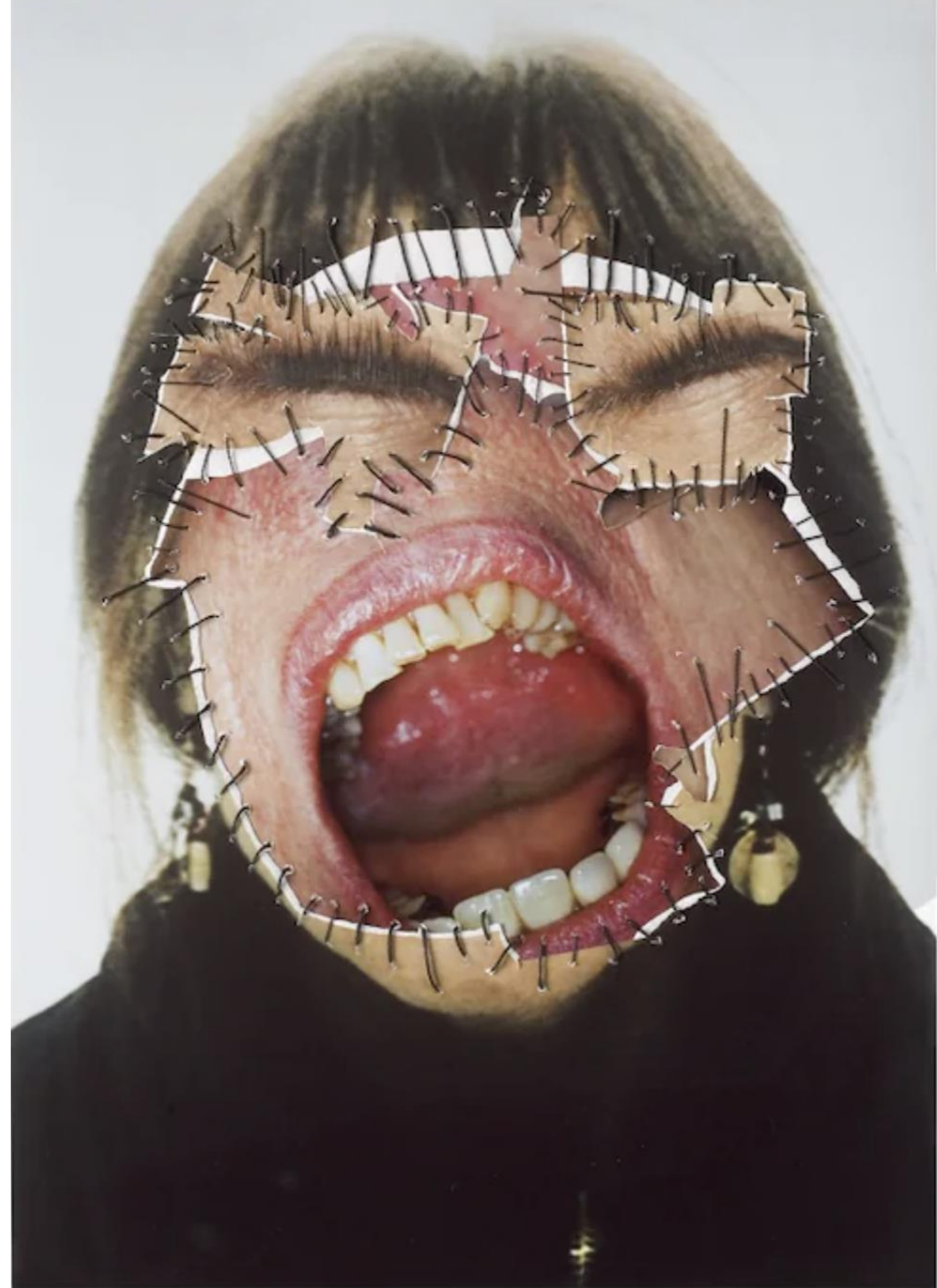
([vice.com](https://www.vice.com))

Contemporary Practice

Collage has come to be a tool and a specialism for many artists, illustrators and graphic designers. Indeed, collages have been popping up in ads - particularly in fashion campaigns - in magazine commissions, and album art, as well as on-line and as animations. Collage remains as relevant and progressive as ever in the 21st century.

(designweek.co.uk)

Annegret
Soltau.
Self Portrait.



Annegret Soltau

German artist Annegret Soltau constructs collage using photographs of her own face and body, stitched with black thread, confronting explicit issues in an imaginative manner.

Central themes in Soltau's work include feminism, body politics and the challenge of human and female identity. She has developed her own innovative techniques that transcend the boundaries of photography - photo-sewing, photo-restitching and photo-etching. In her self-portraits, Soltau questions female role models and sheds light on social norms by visualizing complex emotional worlds, inner conflicts and emotional states.

(staedelmuseum.de)

Collage workshop

For our project today we seek to use the visual language of everyday mass-produced imagery to form a critique of the contemporary condition, i.e. the world we live in today as this is very much how collage was conceived.

In other words ...

Make a collage to promote or protest about a cause you feel passionate about. You need to feel moved by your chosen subject - whether it be love, hate, anger, resistance, etc. as this will have a significant effect on the imagery you choose to use, and how you construct your final composition.

We will aim to finish at 2.30pm (ish) to then discuss your outcomes.

Next week

Please bring mark making implements and tools with you.

This can be anything ...

Think unconventional implements for making marks on paper –
sticks, rags, sponges, straws, brushes, waste materials,
household objects, string, tools, etc.