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**Question:** 'If ever one art movement consumed the entire illustration genre, it was surrealism' (Heller: p70 2008). Discuss

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First introduced to the world in 1917, Surrealism was an art movement that 'explored the workings of the mind, championing the irrational, the poetic and the revolutionary' (Tate). The movement came about as a way of coping with the changes in society and dealing with the effects of politics. Many artists such as Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso and Frida Kahlo were influenced by this dream-like concept that Surrealism represented, but could it be that this artist movement even went on to 'consume the entire illustration genre.'

The surrealism movement began in the early 1910's to 1920's, originating as a literary movement in which writers 'experimented with a new mode of expression called automatism' (Met Museum 2004) which allowed them to access the subconscious mind. Many surrealists at the time found interest in fine art pieces which included more abstract and unique visuals; seeing this as the work of the subconscious mind. It wasn't long before artists started taking inspiration from the surrealist movement, many such as Max Ernst moving on from Dadaism. Other artists such as André Manson, Joan Miró and Man Ray started incorporating surrealist techniques into their work. The artist René Magritte, who moved to Paris, became a 'leading figure in the visual Surrealist movement.' (Met Museum) His work introduced the art world to new, illusionary and dreamlike imagery. It could be argued that Surrealism was a reaction to the First World War, which had just ended, and inspired by the more sinister Dada art movement, which aimed to reflect the consequences of war through imagery.

In 1924 the surrealist manifesto was written by Andre Breton; a french writer. 'It was the culmination of the writings of the surrealist group and sought to dispel the 'rationalism' which brought about the First World War.' (The Surrealists) The manifesto inspired many artists and writers alike, taking on his words to create unearthly and illusive creations. In the manifesto, Breton talks about a duality of the mind; the conscious and the subconscious. He says that 'we have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, or finally becoming one.' (The Surrealists) The idea of merging both conscious and subconscious mindsets align well with the surrealist artwork of the time; the 'interior reality' envisioning an array of images while the 'exterior reality' explores their surroundings and reacts to what is happening.

During this time, more and more illustrators were creating work; mainly European artists working on children's book illustration, while the rise of comic books was peaking interests in America. An important illustrator at the time, who's work is still admired today is Beatrix Potter. She was a writer, illustrator and scientist, most famous for The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Although not looking like surrealist art at a first glance, it could be argued that the surrealist movement influenced her drawings and characters



Figure 1: Beatrix Potter, 1901)

This illustration by Beatrix Potter (figure 1) shows Peter Rabbit outside in a garden, talking to a red robin. The piece uses desaturated, natural colours that appear to be fairly washed across the piece with watercolour paint. This is accompanied by the use of thin, delicate line details, which help the viewer understand the content of the piece, such as the wash of green in the background being leaves. What is particularly unique about Potter's illustrations is the characters themselves. Seeing animals communicating with words, wearing clothes and partaking in normally human activities is an uncommon sight and could be something created from the unconscious mind. An infamous motif of most surrealist work is the inclusion of juxtaposition; putting two things together that usually wouldn't work, in order to create an illusive and unsettling atmosphere. Having wild animals wear clothes and live in houses like humans could be seen as a juxtaposition.

Max Ernst was another influential artist during the surrealist movement, now seen as a pioneer of both dadaism and surrealism. He was a painter, sculptor, graphic artist and poet and had no formal artistic training (Tate). While also painting fine art pieces, Ernst also created illustrative pieces. In this piece (figure 2) we can see a large carriage flying over the land, with many people sitting inside the carriage and two bewildered men below on the ground. The piece uses a very minimal colour palette, consisting of varying shades of brown; mainly a tonal piece. This illustration is mostly a collage piece, taking images of several people and items and adding them, such as the cutout image of a statue placed on the carriage and the two men near the bottom of the page, as these parts appear to be in a different drawing style and tone than the rest of the illustration. The collection of varying images displayed on one canvas can be very daunting and illusionary; fitting well with the surrealism genre. It could also be noted that this illustration is



Figure 2: Max Ernst, 1929

telling a narrative story to the viewer; perhaps one with different meanings. The assumption could be made that the people in the carriage are on their way to an occasion or event, perhaps a wedding judging by the gown and suit the two people in the middle of the carriage are wearing. On the other hand, the people in the carriage could be escaping from an event, using the flying carriage to get away from the event. The couple could be wanting to escape the formalities of a wedding, with the two men below searching for the missing couple.

Although many more art movements have occurred and inspired artists, many illustrators today are using surrealist imagery in their work. 'Surrealism taught the world to see art not merely visually and literally; but to appreciate it in a subconscious level as well. Today, surrealism is a familiar form of art that continues to grow globally.' (1<sup>st</sup> Web Designer 2017). After the First World War, many artists and creative people used surrealism as a way to cope with the harsh living conditions of the time, tapping into the unconscious mind as a form of escaping. The same could be said about modern artists today as more, and more stresses and worries, such as politics and climate change become more apparent.

Victo Ngai is an illustrator from Hong Kong who now works in Los Angeles, providing artwork for magazines and newspapers as well as animation studios such as Dreamworks, as well as working for many popular brands. Her work features a wide array of bright and vivid colours, as well as juxtaposing a variety of different objects, people or scenery. This illustration (figure 3) depicts many animals and vehicles on a mountain, being picked up by large human hands. Many of the vehicles in this piece are much smaller than the animals, creating a visual distortion. Although this style of illustration doesn't conform to the traditional styles seen in surrealism, it is clear to see surrealist inspiration, as the objects in this scene are not to their usual scale. This artwork could also be seen as a visual metaphor for how we as humans,



Figure 3: Victo Ngai

treat animals, seeing them with smaller hierarchy. It can also be noticed that the human hand in this illustration is the intrusive element, perhaps illustrating our current environmental issues and how humans have invaded the animal's homes.

This illustration (figure 4) is also by Victo Ngai, depicting a child standing on a very large fish, reaching to hold the moon. The artist has used soft, pastel and dream-like colours such as pale pink and lavender. An interesting aspect of this piece, is that the background can be seen as the sky or the sea, as the artist has used created a soft texture by blending the colours, making it appear as either the sky or the ocean water, creating a visual distortion for the viewer. Again, Ngai is taking advantage of scale in this artwork, the koi fish appear much larger than what is accurate, creating an illusionary and fantasy atmosphere. Compared to the previous illustration by Ngai (figure 3) this piece shows a more harmonious relationship between humans and animals, the koi fish helping the boy reach the moon.



Figure 4: Victo Ngai, 2014

While looking at modern illustration and surrealist inspiration, it appears that collage has remained prominent in many artist's work, this style of working having potentially disturbing and dreamlike imagery, as the artist is able to take images and move, and adjust them as they please; using multiple images to create a new image. Quentin Jones is an illustrator, photographer and filmmaker born in London in the United Kingdom. She has done work for many celebrities and famous brands such as Chanel, Vogue and Louis Vuitton. A quote from her online portfolio says 'her aesthetic is often described as a modern take on the surrealist tradition, realised largely through photomontage, loose paintwork and dynamic video editing.' (Quentin Jones).

This artwork (figure 5) by Quentin Jones was commissioned by Sisley to promote their perfume and brand. The piece's composition consists of a woman holding the perfume with a colourful collage of paint and photographs surrounding the outer edges of the canvas. Unlike the surreal collage pieces from the 1920's, Jones' art uses bright and vivid colours, namely pink and blue in this piece.

Although this is an editorial piece, it is clear to see the fine art and surrealist inspiration, as this



Figure 5: Quentin Jones

piece, like Victo Ngai's, also experiments with scale. In this artwork, the flowers and perfume bottle are increased in scale compared to their real-life counterpart. This may just be for aesthetic purposes, but is still interesting to think about and make comparisons.

Just by looking at the wide variety of illustration produced throughout the years, it is clear to see how illustration have evolved and adapted in response to society and politics, to name a few examples. Making comparisons between different artworks allows us to point out smaller details in the piece we wouldn't have otherwise seen and make note of how, and possibly why things have changed. For instance, let's compare Max Ernst's collage work to Quentin Jones, in particular figure 2, compared to figure 5.

Firstly, Ernst uses mainly monochrome in his works, namely various shades of brown and grey, as the collage pieces he used likely came from black and white newspaper. This is almost the complete opposite to the work of Jones, who's

work features a wide variety of colours. Although both of the artists take images from newspapers and magazines, it is clear to see how technology has changed between 1920 and now, allowing Jones to use a wider variety of printed colour in her work. In contrast to Jones' colours, Ernst's pieces have a more cohesive look as they use less colours which allows his work to have a signature look and be instantly recognisable. In addition to this, the collage pieces blend together easier in his illustrations, which can create an illusion and make the viewer wonder if the piece is a black and white painting or collage. Having an art piece with such duality is an interesting twist compared to Jones' recognisable collage and scrapbooking style. It could also be noted that the duality of Ernst's pieces compares with the meanings of surrealism, believing in two realities, or having the conscious

mind verses the unconscious mind. In regards to colour in both of the artist's work, one could also see this as social commentary. The bleakness of Ernst's illustration could be compared to the happenings of the time, dealing with the mass effects of the First World War. With that in mind, modern day isn't perfect but thanks to our ancestors' efforts we now live in a more peaceful society, compared to the past.

A similarity between the two is that both of the illustrations feature a young woman within the composition, both of which are wearing a long formal dress and are seated. However, unlike Jones' piece, Ernst's illustration seems to be telling a more obvious narrative, with the people in the carriage flying over the field below. It could be argued that the people in the carriage are a couple, dressed for a formal occasion and are on their way to the event, or perhaps leaving said event. In contrast, Jones' illustration depicts a young woman sat within a composition of flowers and other adornments. Like precious, one could also take these compositional choices as political and societal comments, that nowadays people are more independent and marry less than before, in particular young women who are now freer to be themselves and have more rights. In Jones' artwork the young women look powerful and confident, a strong message to other women.

In conclusion, by looking at the variety of illustration in the world, from the beginning of the 1920's to now, it is clear how politics, society and technology have effected his artists approach their work and in what manner. During a post-war world, many artists and creative people alike looked to surrealism as a way of escaping; a way to slip into a different mindset and cope with the struggles of life. This way of working inspired many artists and illustrators to also approach creativity in this way, allowing the subconscious to create what it envisions without second guessing or analysing it. Although there is a higher contrast between the illustration work of today verses the beginning the surrealism movement, it is fair to comment that the surrealist approach and aesthetic has been maintained and practised by many and is now displayed in a wide variety of ways, whether they are obvious or not.

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