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

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An introduction to surrealism

Surrealism, heavily influenced by Dadaism, is an art movement that focuses on creative expression connecting the real world with fantasy. Surrealism has had a huge Impact on Illustration with its focus on creating a dream like narrative that may seem impossible to achieve in reality. The Manifesto of Surrealism was created in 1924 by the poet Andre Breton, which is when the movement officially began, starting with poetry and painting. 'Surrealism inspired related movements in painting, sculpture, drama, and film, and has had a lasting influence on the creative arts as a whole.' (Gale, 2015, P. 2) 'When Breton wrote his manifesto in 1924, he described surrealism as "pure psychic automatism." He meant that it was a way to freely express the imagination, without the thinking mind getting in the way.' (Brooks, 2019, P. 8). The main focus of surrealism is turn images of imagination and illusions into reality. 'Influenced by psychoanalytic theory, Surrealists used art to delve into the unconscious mind. This was a method of self-analysis, unlocking underlying attitudes, desires or traumas and transposing them into art with symbolism. The use of psychoanalysis resulted in highly emotional, visceral and often shocking imagery.' (Davis 2020). The following paragraphs will discuss some of the most influential surrealists to impact the illustration genre and why It is still exceedingly significant to the art world today.

The Son of man



Figure 1: Magritte, R., 1964. The Son of Man. [Oil on canvas].

'The Son of Man is a 1964 surrealist self-portrait by Belgian artist René Magritte. As one of the most recognizable paintings of the surrealist movement, the painting is both simplistic and ambiguous, with the meaning left to the interpretation of the viewer.' (Lloyd, 2010). The painting displays a man, dressed in and overcoat, with a bowler hat and red tie. He seems to be standing in front of the sea with clouds over head. The most fascinating part of the composition is the apple hiding the figures face, leaving the viewer wondering why exactly is it there? What is the message Magritte is trying to convey? 'It has been theorized that the title of the painting could be a reference to Christianity, and that the green apple is a symbol of the common man succumbing to temptation. In Christian mythology, the apple is a symbol of knowledge and of the fall of man, recalling the story of Eve accepting the apple from the serpent in the Garden of Eden.' (Lloyd 2010). Aside from the religious theory there is also the approach that the apple may symbolise anonymity. The unknown mans attire looks as though he may be a businessman. The apple does an interesting job of hiding his identity to conform to society. 'The way that the apple obscures the man's face means that he is hiding his true self from the eyes of society.' (Lloyd 2010). Both theories are very plausible, however there is no right answer, Magritte's aim was for the audience to interpret the image how they personally see it.

The Persistence of memory

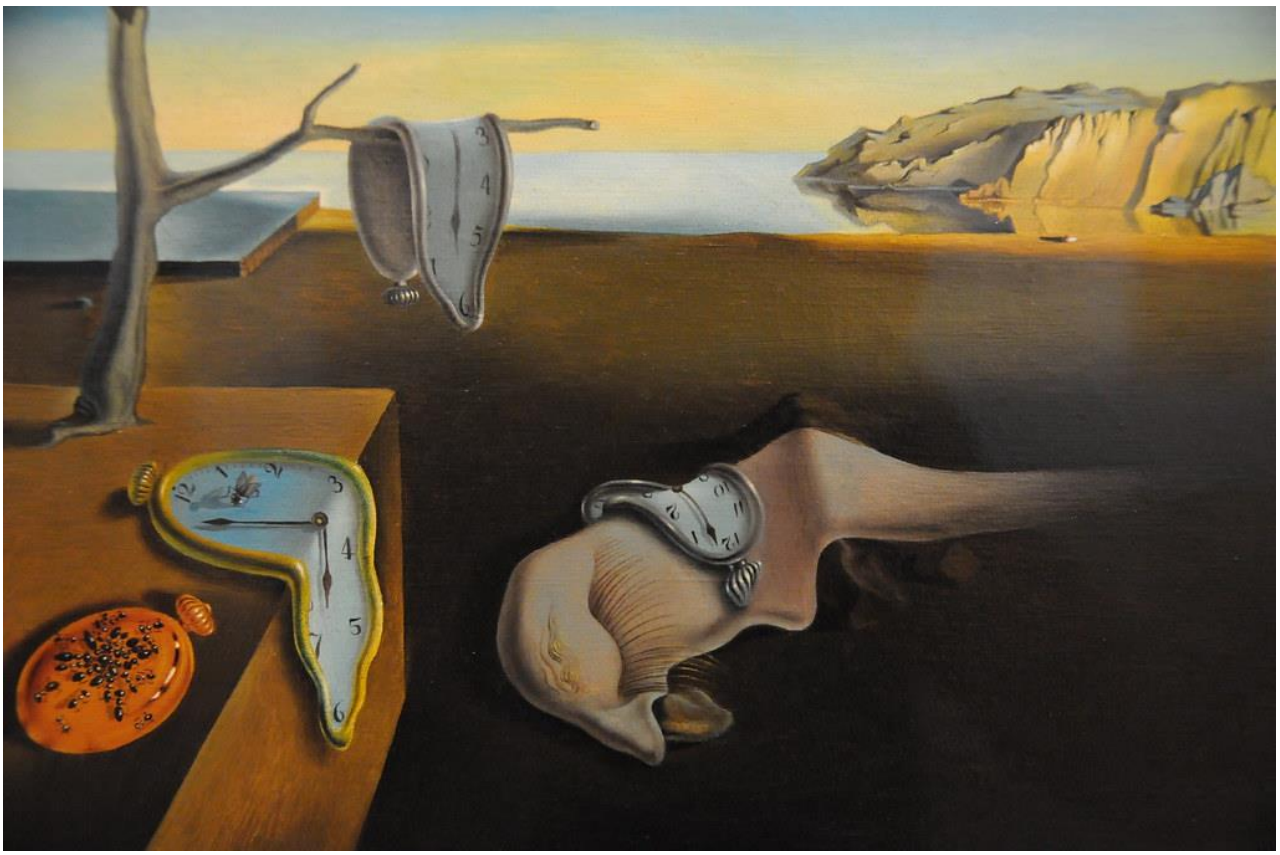


Figure 2: Dali, S. 1931. The persistence of memory [Oil on canvas]

Salvador Dali was one of the most well-known surrealists of all time. His eccentric work and personality have made him a symbolic part of the surrealism movement as a whole. '*The Persistence of Memory,* has become a well-known symbol of Surrealism. Painted during the Dada-inspired movement, the melting-clocks-masterpiece embodies the sensibilities that define the experimental and eccentric genre. To contextualize the iconic piece's place in art history, one must understand its unique influences,

examine its symbolic content, and appreciate the artist's avant-garde approach to its creation.' (Richman-Abdu, 2019). The image consists of clocks that seem as though they are melting, and a closed pocket watch smothered in ants. 'These fascinating timepieces appear to have lost their integrity, as they are limply draped over a tree branch or sliding off of an ambiguous platform.' (Richman-Abdu, 2019). The background of the image is a realistic depiction of a coastal landscape with sand, sea, and cliffs. one of the most parts of the image is the unfamiliar shape strewn across the centre of the painting. 'Perhaps the most perplexing part of the scene is an anthropomorphic mass sprawled on the ground. This face-like figure is thought to be a self-portrait of the artist.' (Richman-Abdu, 2019). Dali uses the concept of painting in a hyper realistic style despite using dreamlike, imaginary themes. The work of Dali influences many surrealist artists to this day, His work still immensely popular proving that the movement has never truly deteriorated.

Harlequin's Carnival



Figure 3: Miro, J., 1924-1925. Harlequin's Carnival [Oil on Canvas].

Taking surrealism down a more abstract route is Harlequin's Carnival by Joan Miro. 'Harlequin's Carnival painted between 1924 – 1925, is perhaps Miró's most recognizable artwork, a raucous celebration of life, with all sorts of shapes floating and bouncing around. The carnival we're witnessing is supposed to be Mardi Gras ("Fat Tuesday", in French), the Christian celebration before the Lent, when people eat rich, fatty food, before giving up animal products until Easter.'(Ashcraft, 2018). The closer you look at this piece

the more you seem to notice, for example a small mermaid like creature in the top left corner, some things you do not see at first glance. ‘in spite of all this randomness and chaos, there is some symbolism to what we’re looking at. Let’s start with the Harlequin himself. You may have missed him initially because he doesn’t truly look the part. Now, look to the left from the centre of the painting, where you see the elongated white shape with a blue-red ball as a head. The Harlequin, represented as a guitar with a very long neck, unveils his identity with the presence of the checked pattern on his chest. His eyes look very sad, and that might have something to do with the hole in his stomach. It’s known that, at the time, Miró was a struggling artist in Paris, barely managing to get money for food. The more you look at the Harlequin, the more humane he seems, with his long moustache, smoking pipe, collar and tie, arms and feet.’ (Ashcraft 2018) Other aspects of the painting include a ladder on the left of the Harlequin character, possibly symbolising an escape from the chaos. On the right side of the image we see a window with some interesting shapes behind it. ‘that black triangle is likely to show us the Eiffel Tower, a view that Miró admired in his city of dreams.’ (Ashcraft 2018). Just like Dali and Magritte, Symbolism is an extensive part of Miro’s work.

Celebes

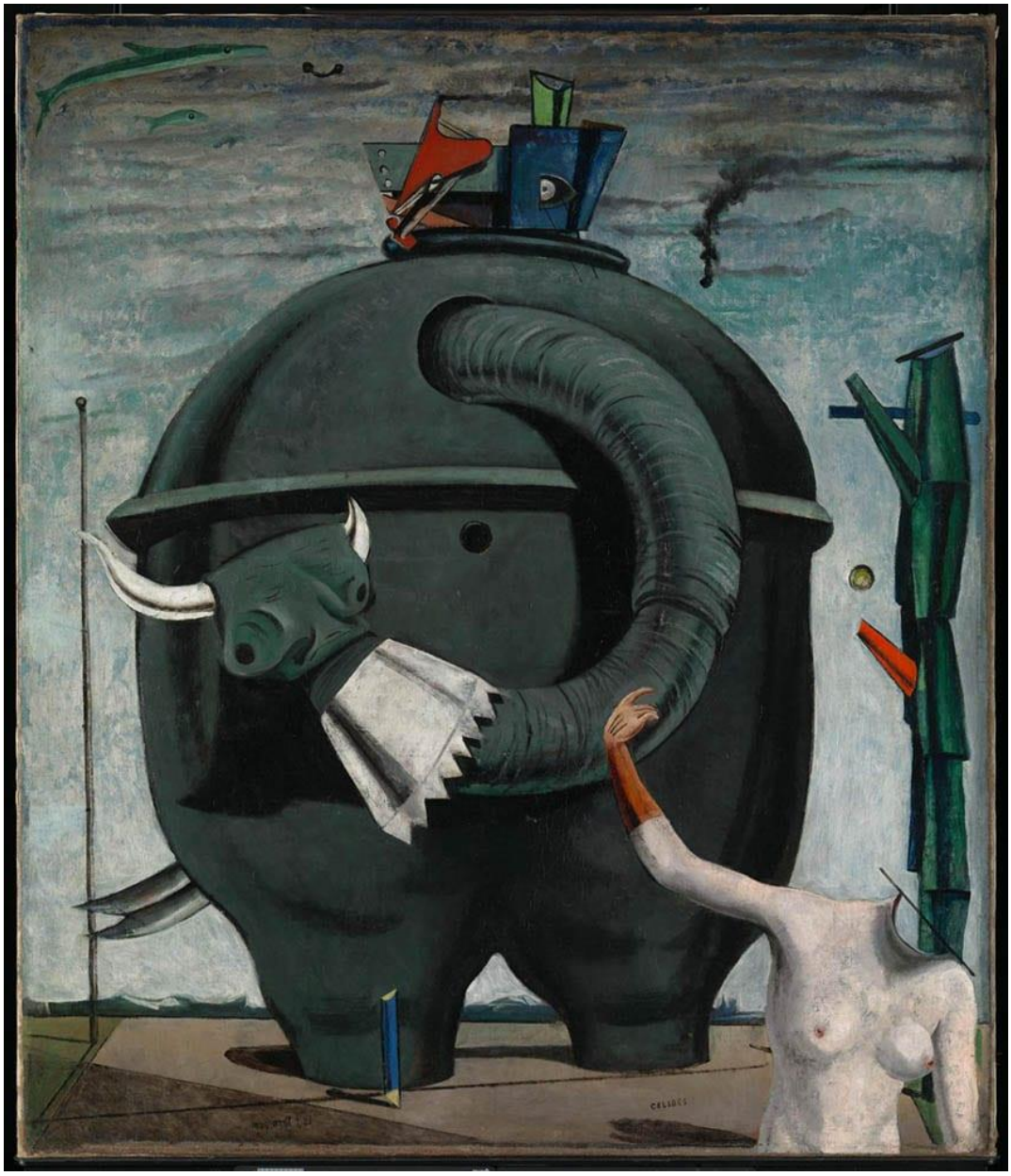


Figure 4: Ernst, M., 1921, Celebes [Oil on Canvas].

At first glance, the image may seem to depict an elephant however with closer inspection the painting actually consists of a mechanical object of some sort. *'Celebes* depicts a Sudanese corn bin that has been transformed into a mechanical elephant-like monster. Like many surrealist paintings, the piece is

set in a vast, desolate landscape. At the forefront of the piece is a headless female figure. There are numerous elements of disjointed iconography including flying fish, oil cans, and a pole as if images from within a dream. These apparently random elements are products of surrealist automatism and the free association of the unconscious mind.' (Davis, 2020). The unusual image is almost quite disturbing, with the dark shadows and headless figure appearing in the right corner.

Surrealism Today

Although It is argued that the movement ended in 1966 with the death of the founder Andre Breton, Surrealism is still a huge part of the art world to this day. The Genre Allows the artist to venture into a world of weird and wonderful with little to no rules. Surrealism does not need to make sense to be powerful. There are many contemporary artists keeping surrealism alive, some inspired by the influential artists of the past, and some taking it down a completely different route. The versatility of surrealism keeps the genre progressing further as the years go on. 'Although the surrealist movement began in the early 1920's, there has not been an era more suited for surrealism than that in which we are presently living. Lo and behold, the same limitless depths of the internet which have enabled remix culture to thrive are also well suited for inspiring surrealist works of art.' (Cahill, N.D). The idea of delving into your unconsciousness and creating a different world, whether it be beautiful or a nightmare, is something that arouses a curiosity that no other movement can reach.

Kitchen 2623 C.E



Figure 5: Essenhigh, I., 2019. Kitchen 2623 C.E [Enamel on Canvas].

Painter Inka Essenhigh composes dream like images that are comparative to some of the most influential artists from the height of the surrealist movement. 'Inka Essenhigh's painting *Kitchen 2623 C.E.* (2019) envisions a futuristic domestic space. A smoky, angelic female figure floats in a purple kitchen, above a floor that looks like AstroTurf. An anthropomorphized pan in

front of her appears to grab fruit, a whisk, and various kitchen utensils in the process of making food. Such fantastical situations, rendered with fairy tale hues and softness, are a hallmark for the painter.' (Cohen, 2019) There is something very intriguing about the way surrealism can make a composition of a kitchen look so unique and whimsical. 'The Surrealist idea of "automatic drawing," or unplanned sketching that supposedly brings out an artist's subconscious, is particularly helpful for her practice.' (Cohen, 2019). Similar to Harlequins Carnival, there is a slight disarray to the image which almost comes alive in your head. It is easy to picture the objects moving around creating chaos.

Green



Figure 6: Jin, X., 2016, Green [Photoshop].

'The Chinese illustrator Jin Xingye creates cartoonish compositions that leave a lot to the imagination. With a visual style that looks like it's from a children's picture book, he shares both surreal moments, as well as moments of solitude and mystery in his digital drawings' (Sayej, 2018). As technology has advanced, digital art has become increasingly popular, especially with illustrators. As Xingye demonstrates, the use of digital media to produce surrealism, is a fresh,

contemporary way to keep the movement relevant and popular. ‘Green’ by Jin Xingye depicts a natural, forest like landscape with a pair of arms and legs emerging from the bushes, the rest of the body invisible to the viewer. The arms are reaching towards a butterfly with a luminous glow creating an enchanting image, setting the imagination free. The composition has a more realistic look than other more eccentric surrealist art however the glow of the butterfly and the arms and legs that seem to appear from nowhere gives the piece a dreamlike effect. Surrealist techniques are often used in fantasy book illustrations to suggest a magical and imaginative atmosphere.

The Enemy Within



Figure 7: De Angelo, A., 2013. The Enemy Within [Oil on Canvas].

Sticking to more traditional media, Alfred De Angelo has constructed an eerie and rather fascinating piece of surrealism. A fragile body is dominated by a demon like creature trying to escape. It is conceivable that the painting depicts a tormented soul, a person battling their own demons and losing. A curious part of this image is the fact the figure itself has four arms. Significant with the surrealist movement, the use of four arms makes the image compelling and leaving the mind of the audience wander.

The Minotaur



Figure 8: Sheeky, M., 2018, The Minotaur, [Oil on MDF].

The Minotaur by Mark Sheeky is another eerie piece of surrealism. The dark colours and shadows give the painting a mysterious and moderately creepy feel. The painting shows an unusual figure resembling a creature of some sort,

on that does not exist in reality. To the left of the painting is a woman, dressed in red. The female figure does not seem to be scared of the creature towering above her, in fact she seems to have a small grin on her face. The strange smile that appears on the girl's face gives the image an unusual aura. The creature that leans over her, its eyes also facing her has all the characteristics of something that would put fear upon us as humans, yet the painting depicts a different story.

To Conclude

Reflecting on the influential surrealists from past and present, it is clear that surrealism is still undoubtedly thriving and continues to progress as a genre alongside the advancement of technologies and ways of producing artwork. 'Its worldwide impact has taken force in multiple spheres of life, ranging from art and literature, to philosophy, politics and social theory. Surrealism has also played an integral role in the growth of the feminist art movement. Female artists such as, Claude Cahun, Louise Bourgeois and Meret Oppenheim employed Surrealist strategies in their work to explore the subordinate position of women as well as gender roles within society.' (The Artling Team, 2020). The fact that surrealism is still broadly explored by practitioners proves that the movement has had a lasting effect on the creative industry. 'Artists today still employ key surrealist concepts in their works, exploring psychoanalytic theory, the uncanny, the unconscious, symbolic language and much more within their contemporary contexts.' (The Artling Team, 2020). Surrealist art is innovative and transformative, and can showcase fantastical, imagined worlds that provide the viewer with an escape from reality. What is special about Surrealist art is that it is a highly versatile genre that can be expressed through various mediums, such as: sculpture, film, painting,

lithography, etching, photography, and much more. The wide-ranging explorations of this genre demonstrates why Surrealism continues to influence contemporary artists today. Surrealism evokes emotion through obscure, mesmerising and metaphorical ways - it presents a whole new perspective and innovative way of thinking, which is what has made the genre so widely collected.' (The Artling Team, 2020). Although Surrealism is used in so many different artforms, it has made an immense impact on Illustration as it puts across a narrative in an engaging out of the ordinary perspective.

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