

The beginning of dada and surrealism in the world of art.

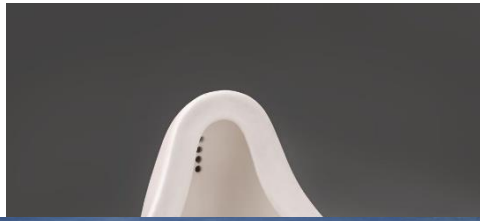
The question that I have chosen to analyse in this essay is identify and discuss two art movements and evaluate through their differences and similarities the worldview and principles they propose. Chosen these two art movements because they approaches interested me, and wanted to know them in more depth so that it can be used throughout my projects. The two art movements this essay will look at is Dada and Surrealism. This essay will give a brief overview of what these movements stood for and how they come to the surface within art history, comparing two artworks from each movement and highlighting their similarities and differences.

The Dada movement was born in Zurich in the early 20th century and was a modern style previously unheard of; "it went against accepted ideas of what is beautiful or good art and used humour and the absurd (= things considered silly or that make no sense) as a way to protest against society" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). The movement came about as a direct response to the horrors during the First World War (Dachy, 1990, p7). "Rising unwanted, unneeded, out of the postwar confusion, fomenting scandals and provocations under cover of the collapse of civilizing values" (Dachy, 1990, p.7) As a result of the first world war people were losing hope and the values, they had held onto were diminishing. It can be argued that people needed an escape, something creative to grasp onto and a way of expressing themselves and the way they were feeling postwar; Dada was "intensely and abundantly creative, bringing about a violent renewal of meaning" (Dachy, 1990, p.7). A movement shaped by the essence of controversy; Dada was initially named after a child's hobbyhorse (Curtis C, 1998, p3). The movement is characterised by the iconic playful use of objects, colours, geometric shapes, poetry, photography, film, and performances which will potentially interlink when talking about surrealism.

Surrealism has become an extension or more so a relative to Dada, working alongside each other with some similarities and differences which will be discussed later in this essay. According to the English Oxford Dictionary, Surrealism is a "20th-century movement in art and literature in which unrelated images are combined in a strange or irrational way" (OED,2023 p.764). In Surrealism merging unreasonable text and imagery was part of both art and literature when it came to creating art. At the start of the Surrealism movement, they have "perceive themselves as mythical beings whose least action, whether physical or mental was already the stuff of legend" (Melly,1991, p.85). Surrealists thought of themselves as creatures of imagination and explored the mind and its reaction to the body as a whole. Surrealism also "transforms an elaborate piece of prose into something infinitely more mysterious" (Melly, 1991, p.142); basic writing is turned into something more interesting. Surrealism "was a revolt against aesthetics in the name of total freedom of inspiration" (Alexandrian, 1975, p.27). Surrealism grows up to challenge another's ideas, attack on beauty, for the purpose for others to find their own inspiration. "Surrealism cannot be described as fantasy but as a superior reality in which all the contractions which afflict humanity are resolved as in a dream" (Alexandrian, 1975, p.49). Surrealism is therefore not just the creation of fantasies but more so where all the negative things are removed from reality as if living a perfect dream world.

Dada and Surrealism both used art as a way to reflect modern experience, showing a direct link between art and experience. "Dada and Surrealism were pledged to contesting any separation between art and the contingent experience of the modern world" (Hopkins, 2004, p2). Both movements were understood as 'avant-garde' due to their experimental and innovative approaches (OED, 2023 p.764). "The term 'avant-garde' which was first employed by the French utopian socialist Henry de Saint-Simon in the 1820s initially had military connotations but came to signify the advanced social-political as well as aesthetic position to which the modern artist should aspire" (Hopkins, 2004, p.2). The devastating impact of the first world war created the need for expression and woke people up to the horrors of humankind; many showed this through a range of art forms, bringing reality and fantasy together. The basic aim of both movements was to subject the world to a better realistic reality than the one going on in real life during that period; the art movement was evolving to suit a modern world. "Share the belief that modern art needed to forge a new relationship with its audience, producing uncompromising new forms to parallel shifts in social experience" (Hopkins, 2004. p.2). Both art movements have provided a version or insight into how the modern art movement helped to create a new way of connecting with people, creating new publicly correct ideas in society. Surrealism "would replace anarchic Dada gestures by constructive, collective action" (Rubin, 1977, p15). Surrealists replaced the chaotic actions of the Dada movement by doing things precisely to a planned event whereas Dada "concentrated on subverting middle-class culture" (Rubin, 1977, p13), undermining and breaking the rules. Surrealists rather "accepted the end of the bourgeois world as given and were more concerned with what would come afterward" (Rubin, 1977, p.10) This signalled a change in society and the opportunity for a change within art also, whereby anything could become a piece of art. "Any form, from a text to a 'ready-made' object to a photograph might be used to give Dada or Surrealism ideas of embodiment" (Hopkins, 2004, p.4). Both the Dada and Surrealism movement ideas were proven by modern day ideas of writing works and art paintings, even everyday objects gave the movement's meaning.

Fig. 1: *Fountain*.



The work of Marcel (figure 1) and Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* (figure 2) will visually differ from one another, but they both use some of the same principles. In figure 1, Duchamp's ready-made this urinal and called it up a lot of challenges other famous artists work has the audience was presented due to



Duchamp's *Fountain* Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* be compared to show similarities between them. Even though they are different, they both use the same principles. In figure 1, he presented art, which has brought questions and challenges to the public. This work left the audience offended when it was presented due to its lack of emotion,

which has in turn raised questions about whether this is considered as art, also questioning the artist himself. Duchamp has arguably manipulated his work by turning it upside down, which reflects the 'silly' and 'non-sensical' nature of Dada (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023).

Fig. 2: *The Persistence of Memory*

Dali's surrealist painting in figure two explores the subconscious mind and its unrealistic effect is representative of being in a dream. Dali invented the 'paranoiac-critical method' and showed that artists could obtain spectacular results by the controlled and lucid simulation of mental disease" (Alexandrian, 1975, p.97). Dali used this as a technique to produce his paintings, for example when using optical illusions and other multiple images to evoke the paranoid state. These are related due to both questioning the meaning of art through their range of artistic methods, bringing new ideas and new ways of creating art. Both artworks (figure 1 and 2) are aimed to confuse and challenge what the audience see to create a different view on their perspective within art. They were both experimented with their artwork and created approaches which then later become an important use of artistic language, and this had made them popular in the 20th century.

In conclusion, Dada was a movement where Dadaists used a range of art processes which explored the creating of unusual and absurd imagery to explore the means of art, escaping from the tragic war. Surrealism combined images in a strange way and used literature to explore the human mind in response to the body. Their aim was the study of the unconscious without the control of the unconscious mind. Their principles and the worldview they propose differ as Dadaists were breaking the rules using not traditional forms of art and surrealism was more so and opposite of this and

followed the rules. The similarities between these movements were that they both used bizarre and irrational thinking and based their trust on chance and accidental arts. Wonder if these movements will still be relevant in years to come or it become a historical myth, just like the movements began?

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Figure 1: Duchamp, M. (1917) *Fountain* [sculpture]. Available at: https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704641 (Accessed: 30 November 2023).

Figure 2: Dalí, S. (1931) *The Persistence of Memory* [painting]. Available at: https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/asset/AMOMA_10312310520 (Accessed: 5 December 2023).