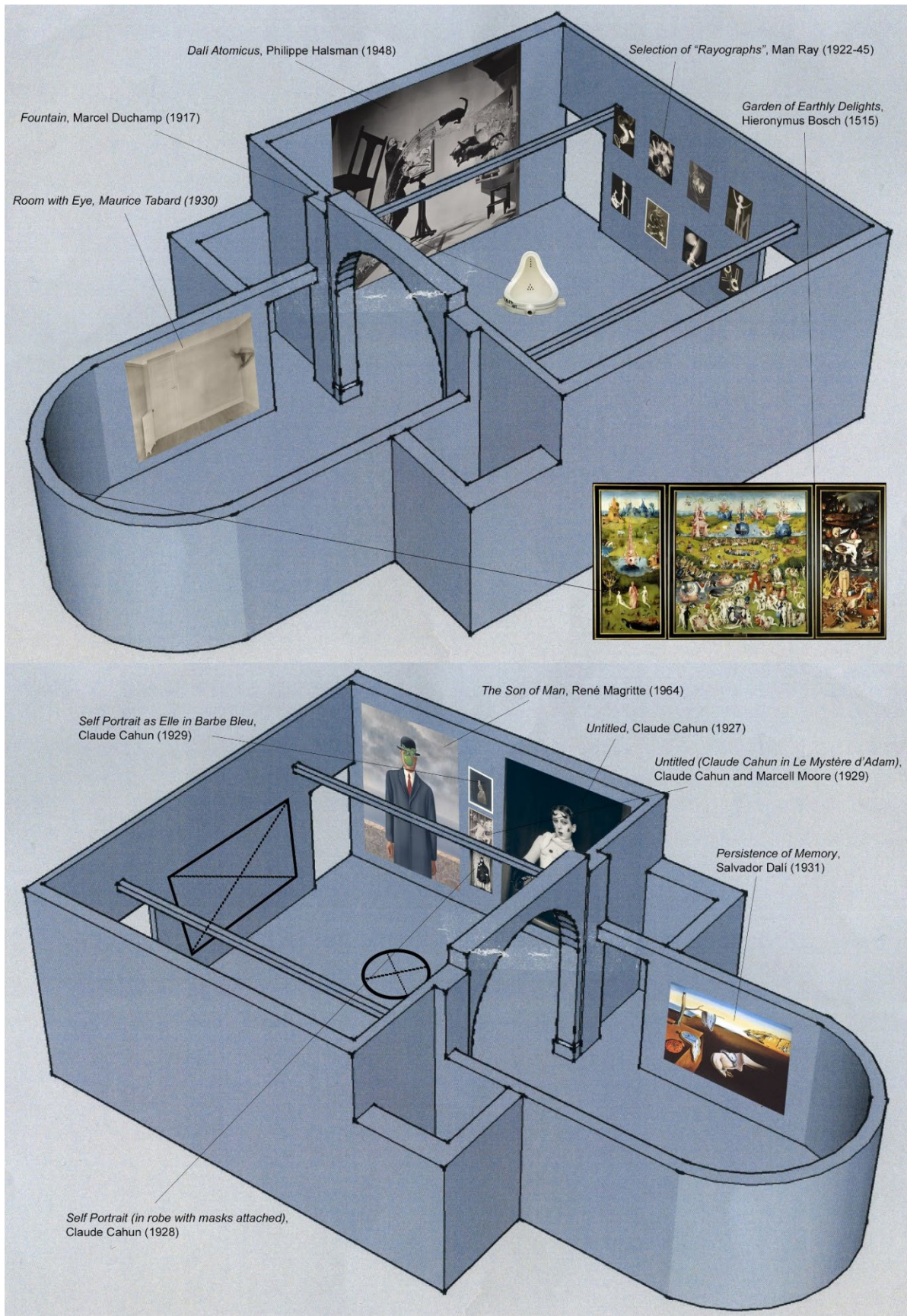




HOW SURREAL

The Mission Gallery, once a location of religious congruous, will display an expression of utopia and the unconscious. Considering the idea of the “dream”, the hope of a perfectly radiant society captures the minds of fine artists and photographers who transcended the uncanny to reveal the beauty of the unexpected. *HOW SURREAL* revives works from Man Ray, Dalí, Magritte and many more, to present a fantasized perspective of the modern world. The serenity of the Mission Gallery’s space creates an indulgent environment for visitors to encapsulate themselves into. Artists of the Surrealist era applied the movement as a way to escape the norm, breaking the conventions of traditional fine art. In its relation to the dream, the artist, in a sense, constructs an imaginary world of their desire, a world that only they feel present in. The religious ties of the exhibition’s space bring hope to its surface, which is an idea this exhibition aims to project to its visitors.

Sigmund Freud’s theories on dreams and the unconscious sparked the absurd notion that was the Surrealist era. Freud proclaimed that the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind (Freud S., *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 42), suggesting that dreams present a close to direct insight of the unconscious psyche. Artists and photographers of the Surrealist art movement felt inclined to explore this idea, considering the dream as a conduit for unspoken desires; consider Dalí’s *Persistence of Memory* (1931). The dream-like plane that the Spaniard displays on canvas examines the subconscious that is present within us in our everyday lives. Key figure of the movement, André Breton, defines Surrealism;

“Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic or moral concern.”

(Breton, A., *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 26)

Breton's interpretation of the Surrealist movement entails that the unconscious mind takes over, disregarding the traditional aesthetics associated with fine art and photography. The unconscious mind becomes the creator, exploring the broader capabilities of the human intellect through the means of visual expression.

This exhibition rebirths the works of prominent figures of the Surrealist era of fine art and photography. Photographers including Ray, Cahun, Tabard, Halsman, as well as works from Bosch, Duchamp, Magritte and Dalí, form a space that recognises the ideas that brought the Surrealist art movement to life.

Upon entry, the viewer's gaze is drawn towards Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917). Duchamp's contribution to *HOW SURREAL* may be considered an anomaly due to its recognition as a staple of the Dada movement. Arranged post First World War, Duchamp recycles a porcelain urinal he purchased from a sanitary ware supplier (Mundy, 2015) and reassigns its purpose into an artwork. Duchamp's appropriation juxtaposes a concept associated with distain into an object of grace and tranquillity, like a forced metamorphosis. Considering the removal of a urinal from its original state can be seen as a call-back to the destruction of the First World War. This still bears the question; what relation does *Fountain* have to the Surrealist era? You can draw the point that the birth of the art movement was the result of the reaction towards the aftermath of the First World War. It is also notable that this piece by Duchamp sparked the inspiration of sculpture production during the Surrealist era.

Dalí Atomicus (Halsman, 1948) is enlarged from floor to ceiling, allowing the viewer to feel immersed in the revolution-esque composition achieved by Philippe Halsman. Featuring Surrealist pioneer, Salvador Dalí, *Dalí Atomicus* is chaotic in its nature. The trial and error to accomplish the perfect shot creates an added essence of character to Halsman's piece; water

splashing, cats flying, muse leaping. Dalí's *Leda Atomica* (1949) can be seen on the right-hand side of Halsman's photograph. It is key to note the one-year difference between the unveiling of both artworks; the blend of past and future is established. The nonsense characteristics of Halsman's composition ties in with the idea of the unconscious mind.

Claude Cahun's *Untitled* (1927) can be seen in the far left-hand corner upon entrance, accompanied with *Self Portrait as Elle in Barbe Bleu* (1929), *Untitled (Claude Cahun in Le Mystère d'Adam)* (1929) and *Self Portrait (in robe with masks attached)* (1928), arranged in a sequence. Best known for their self-portraiture work, Cahun adopts juxtaposing personas, giving the viewer an insight into the unconscious mind of Claude Cahun. We are also invited to investigate Cahun's desires, playing on the idea of dreams being a signifier of our abstract interpretations of the perfect world.

Left-hand, opposite, introduces the first painted piece of *HOW SURREAL*, René Magritte's *The Son of Man* (1946). Amongst being one of the most prominent painters of the Surrealist movement, Magritte is best acknowledged for his approach on the familiar in unfamiliar contexts (MoMA, 2017), which is present in this portraiture work that depicts a suited man, defaced with the iconography of an apple. We question the location in which the painting is set; why is the subject sophisticated in such miserable weather? Magritte reinstates the purpose of the fruit, transposing its association with health and nourishment into a form of disguise. The concept of the dream plays a factor in wanting to hide away, wanting to escape norms.

When the term "Surrealist photography" is brought to the table, the work of Man Ray is immediately acknowledged. Considered a pioneer of the photographic movement in the Surrealist era, Ray revolutionised the use of darkroom techniques, proposing the "Rayograph" in which he exposed a selection of inanimate objects onto light-sensitive paper to develop camera-less compositions. Known as photograms in present time, the assortment of prints

displayed within the exhibition space present silhouettes of everyday objects; once mundane, now a visual aid of Ray's cognitive behaviour. Considering his workspace, the darkroom is a place of nothingness, an absence of light and uncertainty. The darkroom acts as a chamber for Ray's creations, in other words, his dreams.

Entering the domed section of the Mission Gallery's space, Tabard's *Room with Eye* (1930) is visible. The French photographer creates juxtaposing compositions by superimposing multiple imagery together, often resulting in the other-worldly depictions of face and figure. *Room with Eye* uses this technique, composing a barren room with a singular eye lurking from the wall. The optic's presence is almost super-natural, we question what it's looking for, considering the vacant condition of the room. The fogging, likely caused by the location of the print's storage, creates a ghostly atmosphere. Tabard creates a juxtaposition between the conscious and unconscious in this photograph. The room itself, with its well-ordered appearance, acts as depiction of the conscious mind, whereas the unpredictable notion of the eye's presence, acts to display the unconscious behaviour of the psyche.

Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) is regarded by many as a staple of the Surrealist movement. The content of this painting by Dalí presents a vast shoreline with the representation of warped clocks in the foreground. These clocks, which appear to be melted into a malleable material, lose all meaning (MoMA, 2019), eradicating the concept of time from Dalí's scene. The unreal aura that Dalí constructs in *The Persistence of Memory* formulates a dream-like space, acting as a plane of the human imagination. A theme of decay can be noted with the depiction of a draped creature in the centre of the composition, accompanied by the emerging ants in the bottom-left.

Concluding the collection of artworks is Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1515), a large-scale triptych visualising a fantasized, utopian world paralleled with a demoralising scene of

the inevitable future. Given the religious ties of the Mission Gallery, Bosch's fourteenth century work appropriately situates itself at the gallery's peak, sharing the embedded spiritual representation of *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Spanning between three segmented paintings, Bosch invites viewers to investigate the consequences of humans who indulge in what Earth bestows. Starting in the Garden of Eden and ending in Hell, Bosch references and resurfaces biblical themes through vivid expression to conceptualise the repercussions of humanity's toll on the world.

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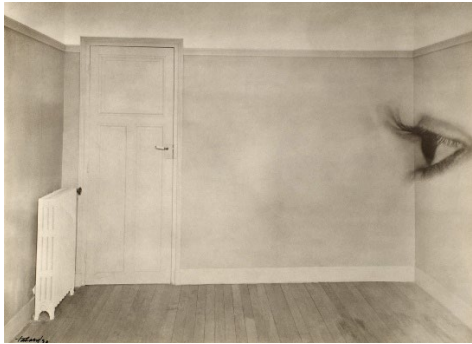
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Dali Atomicus, Halsman P. (1948)



Garden of Earthly Delights, Bosch H. (1515)



Room with Eye, Tabard M. (1930)



Fountain, Duchamp M. (1917)



The Son of Man, Magritte R. (1946)



Untitled, Cahun C. (1927)



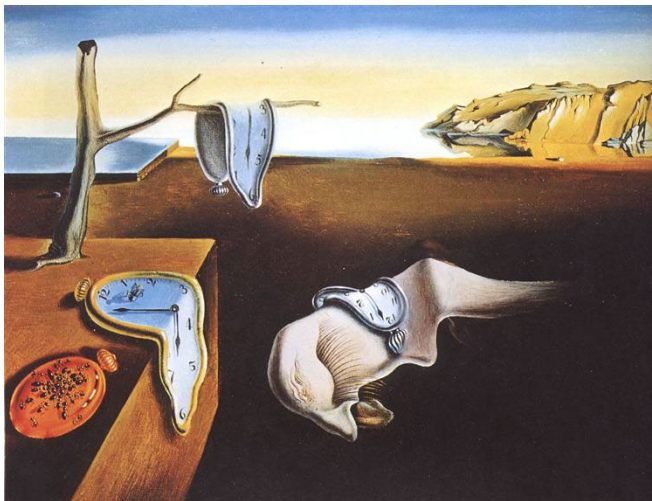
Self Portrait as Elle in Barbe Bleu, Cahun C. (1929)



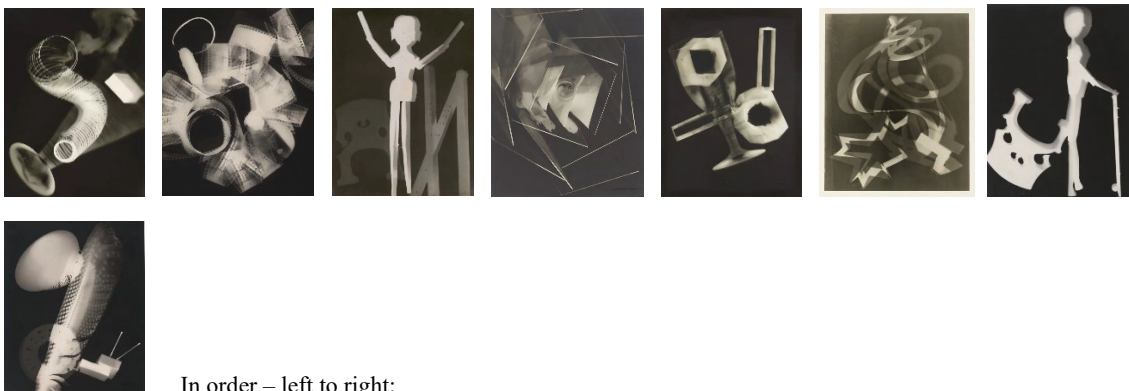
Untitled (Claude Cahun in Le Mystère d'Adam), Cahun C., Moore M. (1929)



Self Portrait (in robe with masks attached), Cahun C. (1928)



Persistence of Memory, Dalí S. (1931)



In order – left to right:

1. *Untitled with a Spring*, Ray M. (1922)
2. *Untitled with Roll of Film*, Ray M. (1923)
3. *Untitled with a Figure*, Ray M. (1923)
4. *Planes*, Ray M. (1922)
5. *Untitled with Glass*, Ray M. (1922)
6. *Paper Ribbons*, Ray M. (1924)
7. *The Manekin*, Ray M. (1923)
8. *Feather and Matchboxes*, Ray M. (1923)



Leda Atomica, Dalí S. (1949)