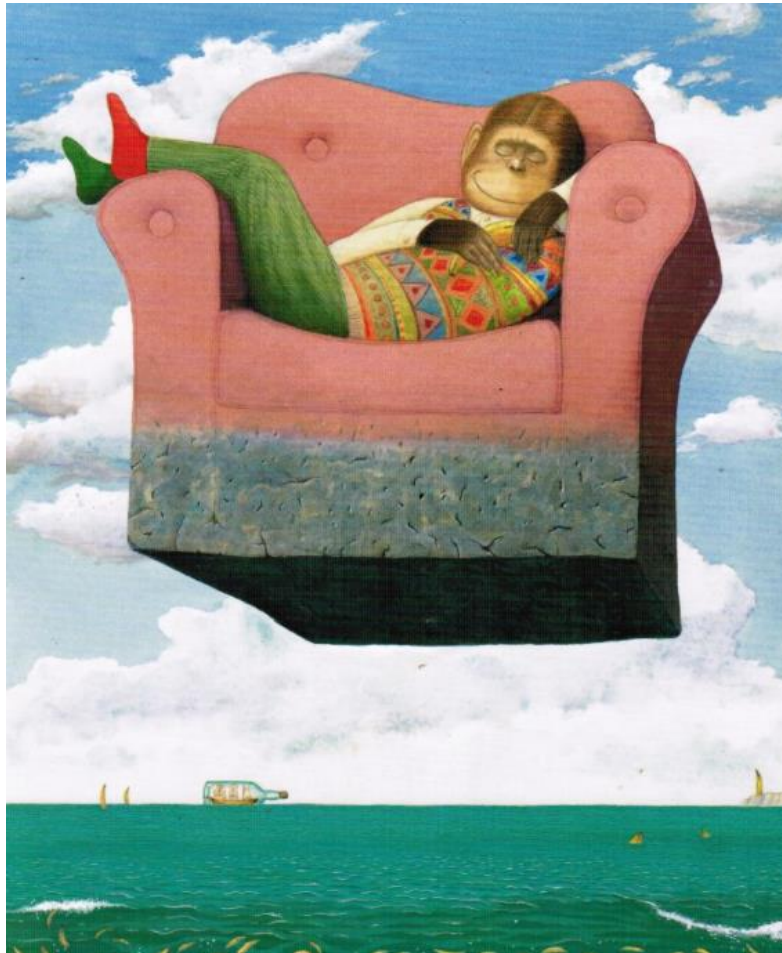


“If ever one art movement consumed the entire illustration genre, it was Surrealism”

(Heller and Chwast, 2008, p.70).



Arianne Nicholas

1802809

Illustration: Image, Book, Text

Word Count: 1494

Tutor: Delyth Lloyd-Evans

In this essay I will examine the fundamental importance and influence the Surrealist movement provided to contemporary illustration. Exploring themes from the founding practitioners reimagined in the light of today's illustrators to the visual language we use in modern communication and technology, a significant rise in awareness is evident across literature, art, society, and essentially our own psychology on behalf of the Surrealist movement.

By offering an endless array of daydreams or fantasies for those in need of comfort or escapism, no other ethos offers one a world where “the roses are blue; the wood is of glass” (Breton, 1924, p.47), or a realm in which “Total possibility and total obliteration coexist, and disorientation prevails” (Stich, 1990, p. 84)

Argued by Andre Breton discordantly to Sigmund Freud's theories regarding hidden desires and psychiatric diagnosis for treatment, it was emphasised that the subconscious existed independently as its own creative outlet, and rather than alter or unravel the abnormal desires, we are to simply make reality with them (Cramer and Grant, 2020). In the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton distinguishes the process as pure psychic automatism free of any reason and liberated from all aesthetic or moral concern (1924, p.26). It is important to note these developments as the artistic awakening that the Surrealist movement stirred would be one to have a ripple effect across all creative stimuli, unravelled from both fruitful and barren attempts to define exactly what it is that provides each individual with their unique awareness.



Fig. 1. Shaun Tan, *The New Country*, 2004-5



Fig. 2. Shaun Tan, 2007

Born in times of uncertainty, Surreal ideations have often posed as simpler or more appealing settings than our waking life.

Never before had man's submission to the world seemed so unendurable, that submission of which an intense awareness and a desire to bring it to an end are precisely what makes the artist

(Nadeau, 1989, p236)

A collection of work that demonstrates this beautifully is Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*. Through the towering threats and creatures of all sizes and demeanours, each reader can find a journey that resonates with them; be it a physical or psychological shift in their personal travel through life. One can communicate triumph or trauma through symbolism and semiosis, as explained by the illustrator himself:

It is open to the individual reader to decide whether this might be political, economic, personal or something else, depending on what ideas or feelings the picture may inspire.

(Tan, 2006)

Illustration is the easiest practice of manifesting visualisation, enabling the creator or observer to bestow or revoke emotional power. No other medium allows the imagination to speak so fluently. Surrealism has always been an emotionally gripping and powerful vehicle for emotional expression, As demonstrated gracefully by surrealist artist, celebrity, and cultural icon Frida Kahlo. An example of this organic mentality as a means of therapeutic communication to oneself and others can be observed in the piece *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932). It has been interpreted to illustrate Kahlo's anguish.

Kahlo depicted herself surrounded by "symbols of maternal failure" representing her "knowledge that she would never be able to bear a child.

(Lindauer, 1999, pg. 21)

In contemporary illustration Kahlo and herself has become a symbol (fig. 4) with the rise in female empowerment, depicted through surrealist application.



Fig. 3. Frida Kahlo *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932)

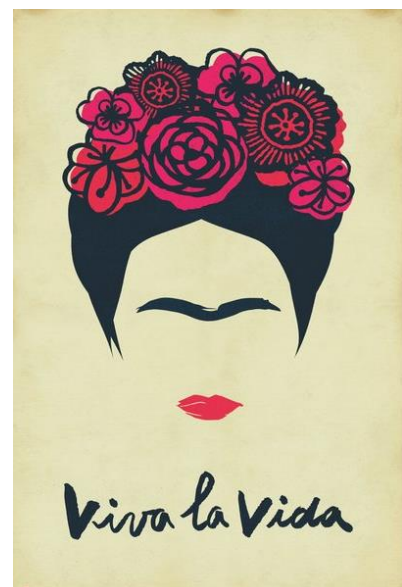


Fig. 4. Example of a popular poster, Close-up Shop (2021)

By providing the perfect environment from which to provide multiple intriguing and simultaneous cues for the younger observer, the picture book contributes another angle from which to view the impact the Surrealist movement had on literature and the wonder it continues to cast over the coming generations of readers. It is observed that “children favour styles of art that amuse, delight and challenge them” (Arizipe and Styles, 2003, pg. 50) and further study into the exciting works of Anthony Browne exemplify the success of surrealism, not only with those charmed by the classic figures, but their children too. Paying homage to the iconography and juxtapositions made



Fig. 5-8. Anthony Browne, *Willy the Dreamer* (1998)

famous by the founders through intertextuality - for example, Browne’s references to the art of Rousseau (fig. 5), Dali (fig. 6), Carroll (fig. 7), Magritte (fig. 7), and Chirico (fig. 8) - the silent tributes prove to be an additional educational stimulus.

"Another common view is that pictures are a means to an end - an aid to literacy and language development "

(Doonan, 1993, pg. 7)

Browne's artwork, particularly in *Willy the Dreamer* (1998) encapsulates the atmospheres and nostalgia that lies dormant after viewing Surreal and uncanny paradigms for the first time. Opportunity is created for those unfamiliar with the unfamiliar to query these cultural references, passing the strange and peculiar baton to the next generation of artists, introduced to the ambience of Surrealism through a vivid retrospection of childhood memories in a postmodern picture book.

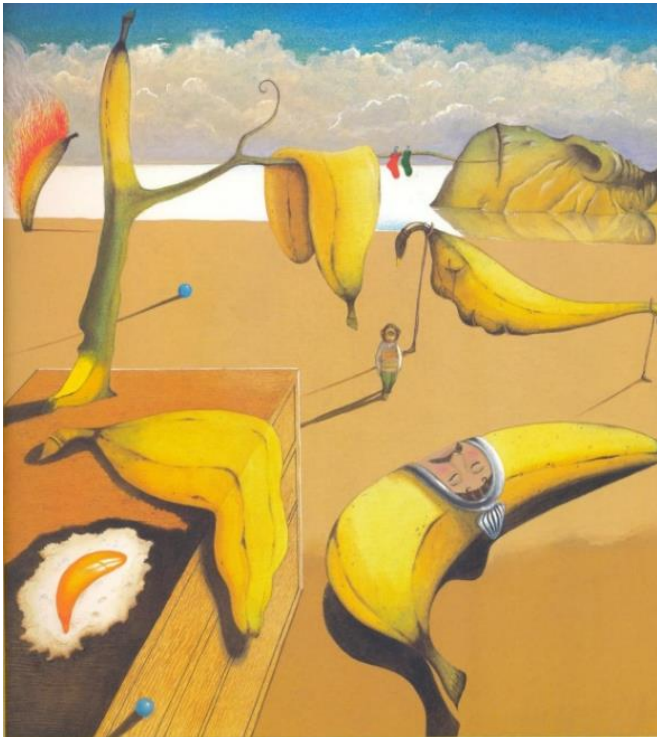


Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.

Not all is comforting and nostalgic, however as a notable factor in the successful outcome can be described as what was established by Freud to be the *Uncanny*. Labelled as “unheimlich”, the opposite of the German “Heimlich” - belonging to the home, familiar (1919, pg.2) - Freud outlines the fundamental emotional presences which contribute to how one may feel when viewing a surrealist artwork, the unease and anxiousness of an unpleasant dream.

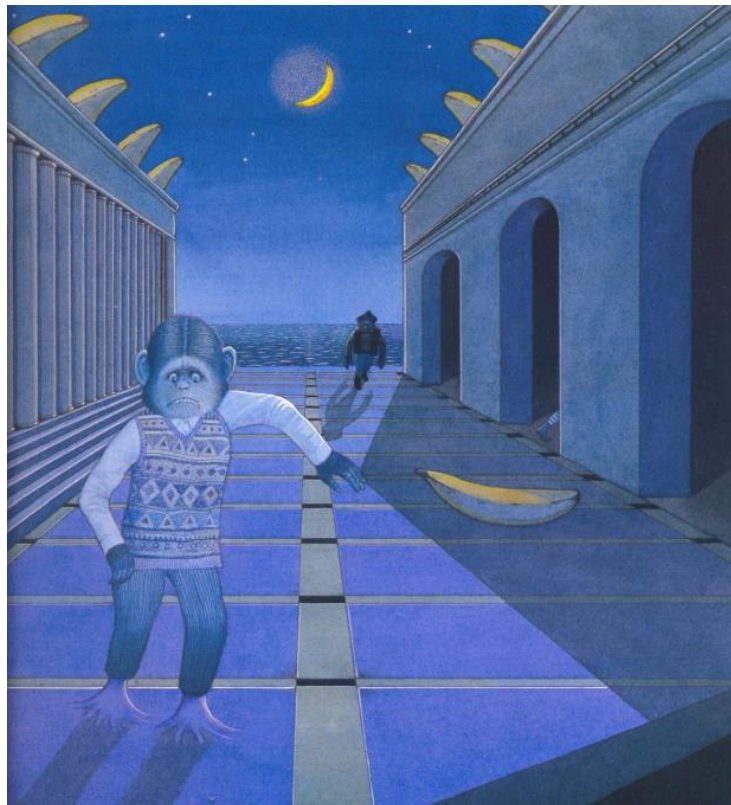


Fig. 8.

Illustration has held an effective role in commerce and advertisement, and so too would it be swept by the wave of the surrealist trend much to the dismay of those who supported the moral over the matter. “It is clear to anyone who has given surrealism serious consideration that it stands essentially opposed to capitalism and commerce” (Fijalowski, 2007, pg. 101).



Fig. 9. Schlegel (1938) *These Men Use Shell*

It is believed that the age of illustration in advertisement media has passed by, with photography replacing figurative realism and dominating the pages of magazines and roadside billboards (Male, 2007, p.54) Which provides us with an overlapping of mediums. Photography can only go so far by using existing creations, whilst illustration can move mountains before they are even formed.

Observing semiotics at work, the surrealist example of an editorial illustration by Paul Weber (Fig. 10) communicates a sly, tactical battle of mental will through the notoriously sly fox, synonymous with the human capabilities of wickedness we associate from Aesop's' Fables. (Kraust, 2007, pg. 86)



Fig. 10. Paul Weber, n.d.

The works of the originals escape into everyday life and language. Clocks and apples of Dali and Magritte occur when one wants to create an eerie and unearthly atmosphere in popular culture. In practice, Surrealism induces physical and mental vertigo that distorts viewer perception. No psychology behind any topic is off limits for exploration through surreal juxtapositions (Heller and Chwast, 2008, pg. 148)

As the revolution of technological advancement and Neo-surrealism unfolded, art and illustration were arguably amongst the main areas to benefit and thrive. Due to the graceful freedom of interpretation when executed through suggestions and gentle nudges of symbolism - and the scathing exposure when an artist captures complete and literal accuracy - metaphor can be unrepentantly expressed as diffusely or explicitly as the producer wishes, the final creative decision becoming a message.



Fig. 11. Pawel Kuczynski (2013)

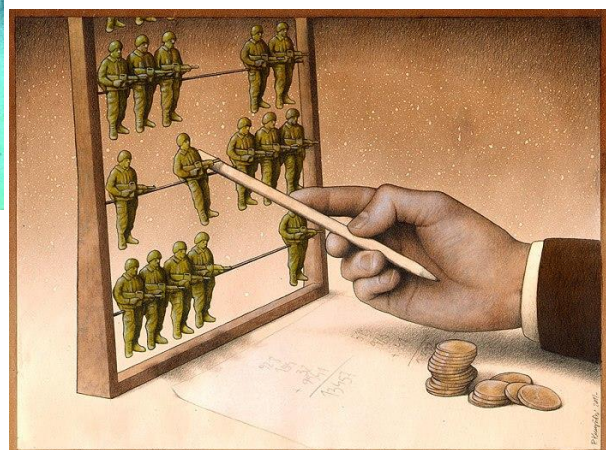


Fig. 12. Pawel Kuczynski (2013)

An illustration can also shock a newspaper reader into taking notice of a contentious argument, it can give a bland, faceless company a new identity and it can send any product into a fantasy world that might appeal to a potential buyer

(Male, 2007, pg. 10)

In its true lawless nature, the movement shook all outlets of media from editorial to cinema, unruly imagination materialised in spectacular, controversial, satirical, and influential artifacts.

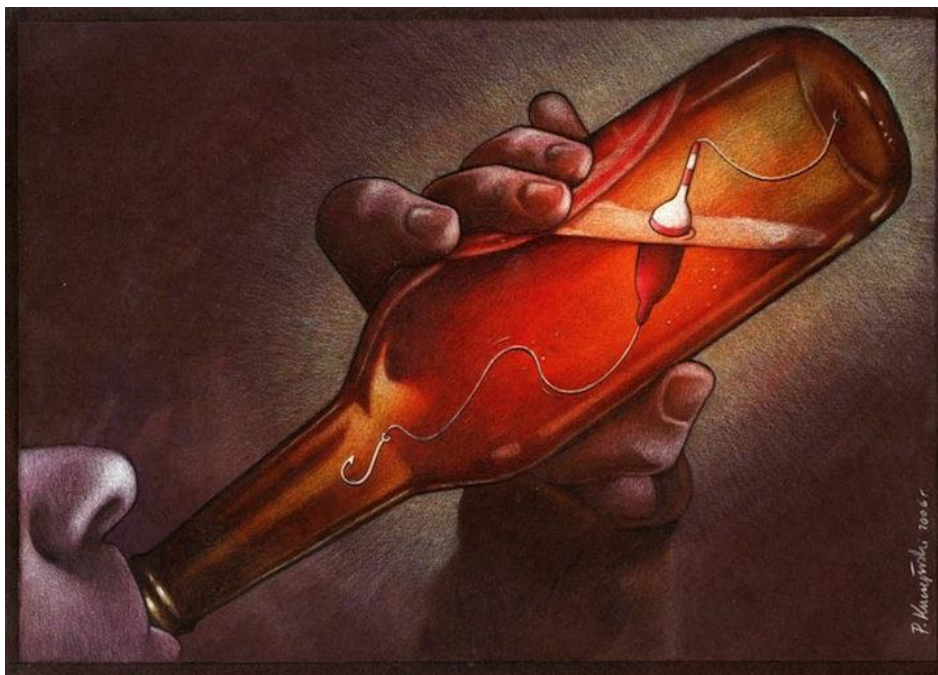


Fig. 13. Pawel Kuczynski (2013)

It could be used to sell any product and depict any idea... it was an effective way to confuse censors, so they used it to make controversial and graphic statements

(Heller and Schwast, 2008, pg. 148)

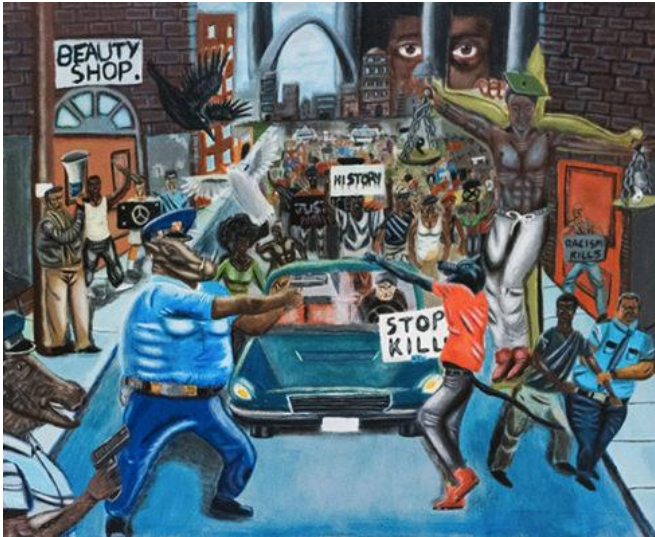


Fig. 14. David Pulphus (2017)



Fig. 15. Tiago Hoisel, *Surreal* (2016)

The specifications that personified the movement started the perfect storm for creatives and activists, the value of shock and controversy proving itself a powerful move when paired with the rights and freedom for self-expression.

Artists could employ a surrealist approach to frequently exaggerate or understate the relative sizes of objects in the composition, thus symbolising power or weakness, importance or insignificance, and threat or helplessness of some person, group, or social force.

(Fetsko, 2001, pg. 10)

The illustrated world we appreciate and adore today would undoubtedly be a lot less colourful had it not been painted by Surrealism. Art now thrives with our

chaos, reflecting black-and-white waking life like a funhouse mirror while offering comprehension, accessibility, and healthy escapism to all who observe our wins and losses.

(Artists) have asserted most loudly in our century man's ability to change himself, and the extra- ordinary, almost magical, role that literature can play in effecting that change.

(Peyre, 1948, pg. 49)

Establishing itself in the ongoing evolution of the most accessible and universal language illustration provides, it was inevitable that the conscious and subconscious, homely and unhomely would intertwine and flourish alongside artistic creation to the present world where it is sometimes uncertain where the boundary lies between waking and dreaming.

Reference List

- Arizpe, E and Styles, M (2003) *Children Reading Pictures: Interpreting Visual Texts*, London, Routledge Falmer
- Breton, A. (1929) *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Simon Kra, Paris
- Cramer, C. and Grant, K (2020) *Surrealism and Psychoanalysis* Available at: <https://smarthistory.org/surrealism-and-psychoanalysis> (Accessed: 1 December 2021)
- Doonan, J (1993) *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books*, Exeter, Short Run Press
- Fetsko, W (2001) *Using and Analysing Political Cartoons* Available at: <http://www.enetlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Analyzing-Political-cartoons-and-artwork.pdf> (Accessed: 2 December 2021)
- Fijalowski, K (2007) '*Black Materialism*' in Victoria and Albert Museum, *Surreal Things*. London, V&A Publications
- Freud, S (1919) *The Uncanny* Available at: <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)
- Heller, S and Chwast, S (2008) *Illustration: A Visual History*, Abrams
- Kraus, J (2009) *All the Art That's Fit to Print (And Some That Wasn't)*, Columbia University Press
- Lindauer, M (1999) *Devouring Frida: The Art History & Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*, Wesleyan University Press
- Male, A (2007) *Illustration: A Theoretical and Contextual Perspective*, London, AVA Publishing
- Nadeau, M (1989) *The History of Surrealism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press
- Peyre, H (1948) *The Significance of Surrealism*, Yale University Press
- Stich, S. (1990) *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art*, University of California, Berkely
- Tan, S (2006) *The Arrival* [interview] Available at: <https://www.shauntan.net/arrival-book> (Accessed: 1 December 2021)

Bibliography

- Arnheim, R (1997) *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, University of California Press
- Berger J, (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books Ltd
- Freud, S (1913) *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 3rd edn. New York, The Macmillan Company
- Gibson, J (1987) *Surrealism before Freud: Dynamic Psychiatry's "Simple Recording Instrument", Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art*, Vol. 46(1) pp. 56-60
- Harrison, C and Wood, P (1992) *Art in Theory 1900-1999 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd
- Heller, S and Arisman, M (2000) *The Education of an Illustrator*, New York, Allworth Press
- Lewis, D (2001) *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks*, Oxon, Routledge
- Meggs, P and Purvis, A (2012) *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, 5th edn. John Wiley & Sons, inc
- Shneede, U (1975) *Surrealism*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- Tate (2021) *Surrealism*, Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/surrealism> (Accessed: 1 December 2021)
- Tate (2021) *The Uncanny*, Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/t/uncanny> (Accessed: 1 December 2021)
- Victoria and Albert Museum (2021) *Surrealism and Design*. Available at: https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/surrealism-and-design#vam_body (Accessed: 1 December 2021)

List of Figures

Fig 1. Tan (2004-5) *The New Country* [Graphite pencil] Available at: www.shauntan.net/arrival-book (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 2. Tan (2007) *The Arrival*, Lothian Books, pp. 72, illus.

Fig 3. Kahlo (1932) *Henry Ford Hospital* [oil on metal] Available at: <https://www.fridakahlo.org/henry-ford-hospital.jsp> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 4. Close-up Shop (2021) *Frida Kahlo Poster Viva La Frida* [Poster] Available at: <https://www.closeup-shop.com/buy/frida-kahlo-poster-viva-la-vida-89926> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 5. Browne (1998) *Willy the Dreamer*, Walker Books pp.8, illus.

Fig 6. Browne (1998) *Willy the Dreamer*, Walker Books pp. 17, illus.

Fig 7. Browne (1998) *Willy the Dreamer*, Walker Books pp. 9, illus.

Fig 8. Browne (1998) *Willy the Dreamer*, Walker Books pp. 11, illus.

Fig 9. Schleger (1938) *These Men Use Shell* [Poster] London, Victoria and Albert Museum (1998)

Fig 10. Weber (2009) *All the Art That's Fit to Print (And Some That Wasn't)*, Columbia University Press, pp. 86 illus.

Fig 11. Kuczynski (2013) *Untitled* [Illustration] Available at: <https://mymodernmet.com/pawel-kuczynski-illustrations/> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 12. Kuczynski (2013) [Illustration] Available at: <https://mymodernmet.com/pawel-kuczynski-illustrations/> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 13. Kuczynski (2013) [Illustration] Available at: <https://mymodernmet.com/pawel-kuczynski-illustrations/> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 14. Pulphus (2017) *Untitled #1* [Painting] Available at: <https://ncac.org/news/blog/ncac-condemns-decision-to-remove-student-painting-from-u-s-capitol-building> (Accessed: 29 November 2021)

Fig 15. Hoisel (2016) *Surreal* [Digital Illustration] Available at: <https://www.artstation.com/artwork/xmBq1> (Accessed: 1 December 2021)