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

The ‘surrealism’ movement began to surface during the first world war, becoming an officially recognised international and political movement in Paris in 1924 with the publication of ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ by Andre Breton. Defined by Breton as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought” (Andre Breton, Manifesto of Surrealism, 1969, p26). Breton also stated that “our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable.” (Andre Breton, Manifesto of Surrealism, 1969). This relates to the surrealist movement because surrealism is the ‘unknown’, many paintings feature indecipherable objects, this

allows the viewer to interpret the images in a way that is personal to them and their own unconscious mind.

Heavily influenced by the psychological writings and findings of Sigmund Freud, surrealism fought against the constraints of the human mind and the oppression that was prevalent in society during the time.

What made Freud so influential to the artists involved in the surrealist movement were his theories and writings about the human mind, psychoanalytic and oneirological work.

Freud based his theories around sexuality and sexual desires. His writings state that “the dream is not meaningless, not absurd... it is a perfectly valid psychic phenomenon, actually a wish-fulfilment.”

(Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900).

Freud developed a model of the 'psyche', containing the ID, ego and superego. Freud believed that the ID is the brains' demand centre; containing all sexual drives and desires. The super-ego operates as a moral conscience and that the ego mediates between the both, adding the need of reality. According to Freud, significant events in one's life can disappear for a short period or forever, from a persons' consciousness. These memories become suppressed and relegated to the unconscious mind.

Freud believed that dreams represented suppressed desires and focussed much of his work around decoding his own dreams and those of his clients, in order to unlock and decipher the unconscious and to attempt to treat many different psychological disorders.

"can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?" (Andre Breton, Manifesto of Surrealism, 1969)



Figure 1 - The Robbing of the Bride,
Max Ernst, 1940

Many surrealist paintings feature sexualised and phallic imagery because of influences from Freud's research. "IN a 1932 letter to André Breton, the autocratic leader of the Surrealist movement,

Sigmund Freud made a rather surprising confession: "Although I have received

many testimonies of the interest that you and your friends show for my research," Freud wrote, "I am not able to clarify for myself what surrealism is and what it wants. Perhaps I am not destined to understand it, I who am so distant from art.'" (Alan Riding, New York Times, 2001) This shows the critique that surrealism faced and still faces today. Similarly, Illustration faces much critique of its own, for example; fine art is often valued above illustration "certain

professors that scoffed at illustration being an art form” (Matt Fussell, *The Virtual Instructor*, 2010).

The Surrealism movement; primarily started from literature, was built around of theme of love, sex and dreams. The movement not only consisted of painters. There were a whole host of talented surrealists; working in art, literature, photography and film. It is therefore easy to see how surrealism was both born from, changed and continues to influence illustration and story telling through language and Images. Illustration “is used to entertain, explain, educate and promote values through the visual interpretation of myths, legends, fables, tales and stories.” (Mark Wigan, *The visual Dictionary of Illustration*, 2009).

Surrealism not only influenced book illustration but also many other genres of illustration, such as fashion illustration. Elsa Schiaparelli, a fashion designer and a great rival of Chanel; worked with many great artists including surrealist Salvador Dali, who produced some designs



Figure 2 – The tear dress, Schiaparelli Circus Collection (silk dress with Dali designed print)

for her “Two of her most famous pieces produced with Dali were the shoe hat, which was worn as if up-turned upon the wearer's head; the Tears

dress, an evening gown

painted with trompe l'oeil

rips and tears; and the Skeleton dress, a black gown featuring padded pieces representing bones.” (Bibbay Sowray, Vogue, 2012).

Elsa Schiaparelli was “greatly influenced by surrealism, she translated mundane objects into high fashion: lollipop buttons, padlock belt-buckles, balloon shaped handbags, lamb-chop-shaped hats and suits that resembled chests of drawers.” (Cally Blackman, 100 years of fashion illustration, 2007).

Surrealist paintings depict confusing, unnatural images and scenarios that are not true to everyday life. They were mostly intended to be shocking and thought provoking. A lot of surrealist artists’ works could be described as disturbing, which was absolutely the intention of the artist when creating. Surrealist art is a talking point and can not and should not be compared with fine art paintings and hyper-realistic portraiture. Surrealist art provides hidden messages that are open to individual interpretation. It is this that hugely connects the

surrealist movement to illustration of today; modern illustrators want to create images that are able to depict emotions and stories that may not be easily put into words and provoke response from viewers, something that surrealism achieved very well.

Surrealism has therefore had a significant impact on art and film and has helped to develop new illustration techniques and styles of work, staying highly prevalent in modern day illustration.

Surrealist art was intended to stimulate the unconscious brain, which surrealists believed contained the power of imagination and ultimate creativity. “It hinders the creative work of the mind – if the intellect examines too closely the ideas already pouring in” (Friedrich Schiller, Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900). In an attempt to unlock the unconscious mind, many surrealist artists attempted to

produce paintings and writings without using conscious thought; this can be referred to as automatism. "Every Idea has to develop in my unconscious, and sometimes it takes years... The starting point is absolutely irrational, sudden and unconscious; I start off blindly"

(Joan Miro)

Max Ernst was a self-taught German painter, sculptor, poet and printmaker. Ernst was a significant figure in both the dada and surrealist movements

Max Ernst created surrealist collages using clippings from various magazines, book illustrations and catalogues.



Figure 3 – Men shall know nothing of
this, Max Ernst, 1923

“Dada was first of all a mental attitude... Our aim was total subversion. A ghastly and senseless war had cheated us out of five years of our lives. We had seen all that has been held up to us as good, beautiful and true, topple into an

abyss of ridicule and shame, The work I produced in those days was not meant to please, but to make people scream” (Max Ernst, Schneede, Surrealism)

Dadaism was an artistic movement that started in 1916 that later influenced surrealist art. It began with the purpose to mock the meaninglessness of the modern world and how we choose to live our lives.

The definition of Dadaism by Tate art gallery reads; “Dada was an art movement formed during the First World War in Zurich in negative reaction to the horrors and folly of the war. The art, poetry and performance produced by dada artists is often satirical and nonsensical in nature” (Tate- tate.org.uk)

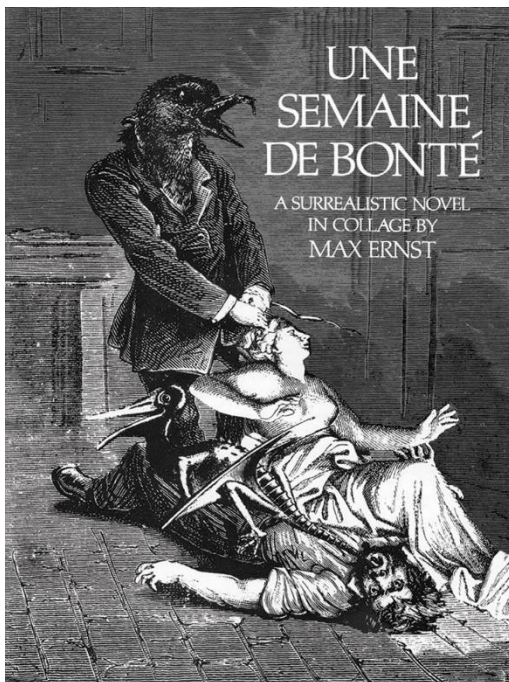


Figure 4 - Max Ernst, Une semaine de bonte (a week of kindness), 1934

Max Ernst produced a comic/ artists book;

Une Semaine de Bonte (a week of

kindness) – a surrealistic novel. First

published in 1934, it comprises of a series

of images created from a number of cut-

outs of illustrations from Victorian novels

and encyclopaedias. The book shows clear

links to narrative illustration and therefore helps to portray

extremely well, exactly how surrealism has impacted on the

narrative illustration genre of today and all illustrated books and comics that were published after it.

Collages are often used by modern day illustrators for children's picture books. Lauren Child, a well known author and illustrator, creator of popular children's book series 'Charlie and Lola' uses collage in her artwork. Although Child's bright children's illustrations show a significant parallel to Ernst's surreal and dark illustrations, it is clear to see the influence that surrealist artists like Ernst have had on modern day illustration of all types.



Figure 5 - Charlie and Lola, Lauren Child

Surrealism was not only influential to illustration but also owes some of its own origins to illustrated novels. Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' for example, originally published in 1865 and illustrated by John Tenniel; with its surreal and dream-like story line, full of strange, non-sensical characters and events went on to influence surrealist Salvador Dali, to illustrate the novel using his own style - over one hundred years after it was first published - in 1969.

Salvador Dali is a famous and controversial figure of surrealism and stated in 1960:

“Compared to Velázquez, I am nothing, but compared to contemporary painters, I am the most big genius of modern time” (Dali,

1960) however his work has since been

criticised as a “Kitschy repetition of old

motifs or vulgarly pompous piety on a cinemascope scale” (Robert

Hughes, The Guardian, 2004)

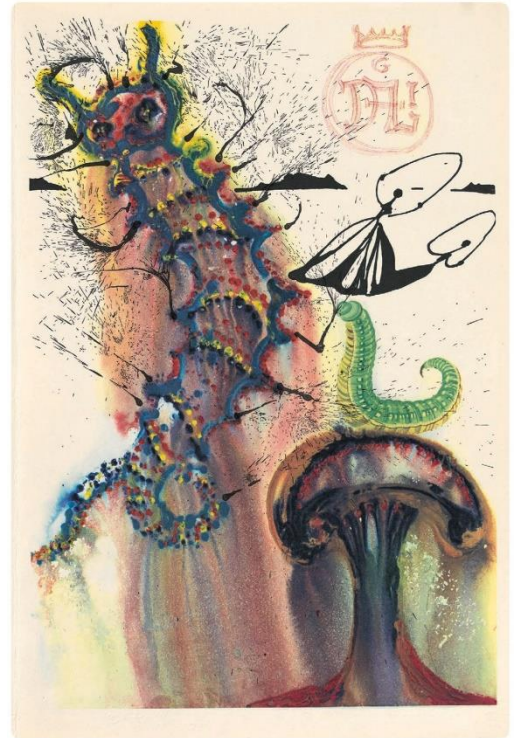


Figure 6 – Salvador Dali's Illustration for Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, 1969

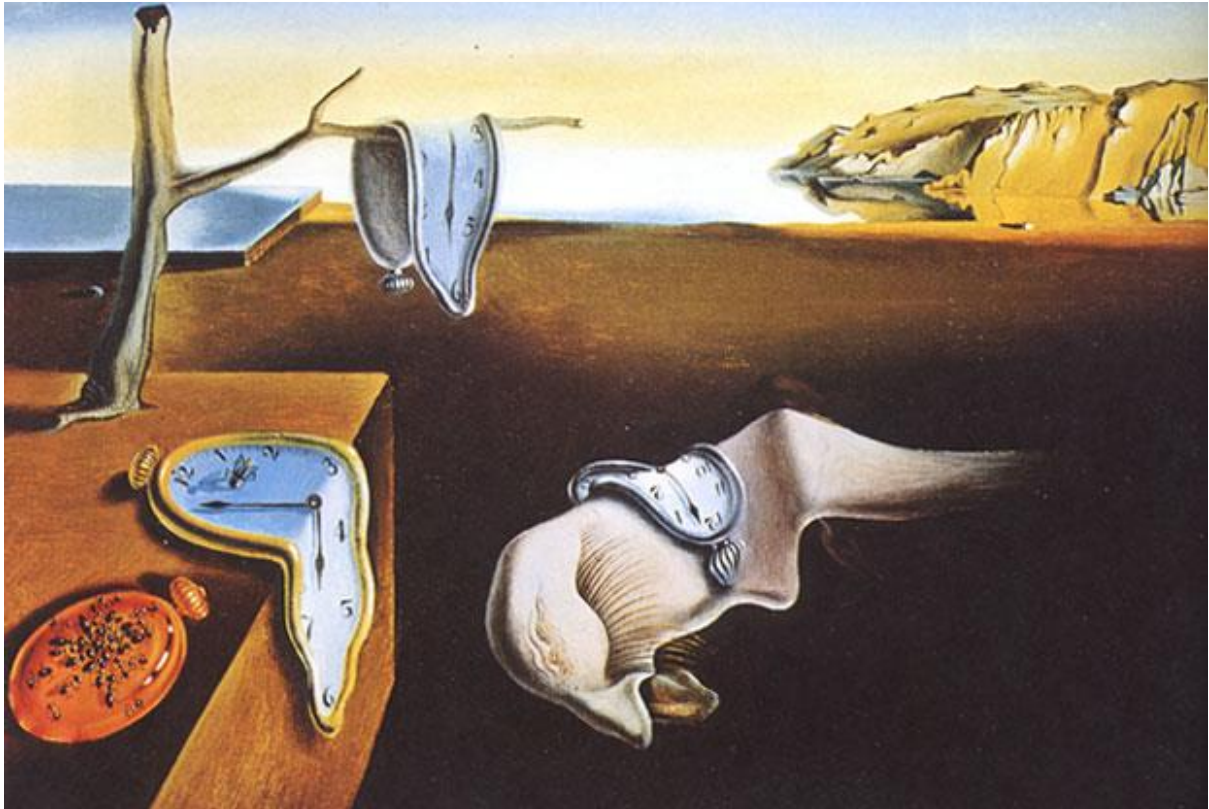


Figure 7- Salvador Dali, The persistence of Memory, 1931

Dali also illustrated books using his surreal style of drawing. Some were colourful watercolours; others were black ink line drawings. Both media are popular with illustrators of today.



“There is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us. This interest can take the form of a quite intense feeling, a sort of conflict, one might say, between the visible that is hidden and the visible that is present” (Rene

Figure 8- The Son of Man, Rene Magritte, 1964

Magritte).

Rene Magritte was an artist involved in the surrealism movement, he became well known for producing a number of thought-provoking and witty pieces. Magritte’s artwork would frequently depict a collection of ordinary, every-day objects in an unusual context, giving new meanings to familiar things and images. His work was intended to challenge the observers' preconditioned perception of reality.



'The Treachery of Images',

A painting of a pipe that

Magritte created in 1929,

contains the sentence;

"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"

Figure 9- The Treachery of Images, Rene Magritte, 1929

("This is not a pipe")

painted below the pipe. This serves as a contradiction. The reasoning behind it is that the painting is not actually a pipe, it is instead just an image of a pipe. When Magritte was questioned about his painting, he replied that "of course it was not a pipe, just try to fill it with tobacco." (Rene Magritte).

"If a dream is a translation of waking life, waking life is also a translation of the dream" (Rene Magritte).

Leonora Carrington was a British born Mexican painter and novelist.

One of the last surviving surrealists from the movement of the

1930's. She began a relationship with Max Ernst around 1939, she

had been hugely inspired by his work and the two often collaborated

and produced surreal art works together. Carrington produced a

surrealistic portrait of Ernst.



Figure 10 – Portrait of Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington, 1939

Carrington stated that "I painted for myself...I never believed anyone would exhibit or buy my work." (Leonora Carrington). Carrington was not however interested in the writings and studies of Sigmund Freud and did not take any inspiration from him, unlike

some other surrealists at the time who

idolised Freud. Carrington chose to focus instead on ‘magical realism’, a style of fiction that combines the realistic image of the world whilst also adding magical and surreal elements. Carrington also used autobiographical details and a vast amount of symbolism as the main subjects of her paintings. Carrington intended to present female sexuality as she experienced it herself, in contrast to the male surrealists’ erotic portrayal of female sexuality.



Figure 11 – Heartbeat, Hallie Elizabeth, 2013

Hallie Elizabeth is an illustrator. In many of her illustrations, she uses objects such as feathers and constellations placed over the top of her artwork, this is similar to Rene Magritte’s surrealist work.

Even though Hallie Elizabeth is not

a surrealist, you are able to see that much of the inspiration and ideas used in modern day illustrations can be linked back to the surrealist movement.

Christian Schloe is a digital illustrator from Austria. “Each beautifully designed composition is a whimsical fantasy concocted by the talented artist. Schloe playfully blends realistic elements with perplexing, conceptual ideas. In doing so, he creates the illusion of serenity within a strange and confusing composition. Though he may have significant meaning behind his work, the artist leaves no clues



Figure 12 – Artwork by Christian Schloe

to an explanation. Viewers are left to venture out on our own journey, interpreting the intriguing illustrations with endless possibilities to the narratives that we might dream up.” (The Inspiration Grid,

2013) Schloe's work is surrealist and his reasons for creating the artwork are also extremely similar to the reasons that the surrealist movement started, although Christian Schloe does not describe himself as a surrealist. However, It is clear from the example of his artwork (figure 12) that his illustrations are very similar to the likes of Rene Magritte and Max Ernst.

Konan Lim is a surrealist artist and illustrator. "Lim whimsically portrays childhood nostalgia through his representational paintings.

The works play on the boundaries of playfulness and cuteness-overload but with something strange ominous permeating the atmosphere." (Surrealism Today, 2019) His artwork seems to be based around the children's novel 'Alice's adventures in wonderland' as seen in figure 13. His work displays dream-like nonsensical

imagery and the colour palette used, predominantly the ochre colours are similar to those used by Salvador Dali



Figure 13 – Artwork by Konan Lin

In conclusion, Many Illustrators of today take inspiration from surrealists. This is true whether they have taken inspiration first-hand from the artists involved in the movement such as Salvador Dali and Max Ernst or whether they take it from successful illustrators

and designers who have, such as Elsa Schiaparelli. If you look at many modern-day illustrators, you can see the hidden influences, through media; such as collage and photomontage, symbolism and also more visually obvious surreal influences such as dream-like and fantasy imagery. Surrealism has had an undeniable impact on the art world as a whole and whether artists and critics enjoy surrealism as an art form or not, the surrealist movement will always have importance in the illustrative genre.

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