

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

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This essay will explore surrealism and will specifically focus on whether surrealism consumed the entire illustration genre. The initial response to the statement provided was to disagree that surrealism 'consumed the entire illustration genre', (Heller: p70 2008), however the more I thought in to this it opened my mind in to thinking it may be true. Once I've completed my research I'm expecting to find out that surrealism is actually a much bigger part in illustration than I thought by finding out about the in's and outs of surrealism as the more I thought about it the more I realised I don't know much about the movement of surrealism. My existing knowledge on surrealism is that it's an art movement that almost forces you to think outside the box whilst consuming it to come to some sort of understanding. I also believe that a lot of surreal artists find the beauty and creativity in that aspect of the unknown and almost confusing their audience in to thinking in a way they don't usually think. Surrealism allows the artist to create without thinking twice about what they are putting on to their canvas therefore resulting in very confusing yet wonderful outcomes.

Surrealism was an art movement that started in Paris and took place between 1924-1945 after the publication of the manifesto of '*Surrealism by Andre Breton 1924*', though it still has a massive influence on artwork today. "A twentieth century literary, philosophical and artistic movement that explored the workings of the mind, championing the irrational, the poetic and the revolutionary" (Tate, 2020) It became an international and political movement as it was all about getting a better understanding of the human mind.

The majority of the surreal artists were all influenced by the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), which is one of the most noteworthy and dominant concepts of the 20th century. Psychoanalysis is a method through which a psychiatrist unveils the unconscious disputes based on free associations, dreams and fantasies of the patient. "The primary assumption of psychoanalysis is the belief that all people possess unconscious thoughts, feelings, desires, and memories." (McLeod, 2007)

Freud published that present in the human mind lies an existence of unconscious conflicts which is able to be analysed to be able to get a deeper understanding about how to treat issues effecting the human mind. "The unconscious mind comprises mental processes that are inaccessible to consciousness but that influence judgments, feelings, or behavior" (McLeod, 2009)

Just from the research I've done so far I can now imagine how surrealism did take over the genre of illustration as it allows people to express what is going on within their mind which in that

instance never gets outdated as over the years more and more people like to open up about their thoughts and feelings. Freud's aim was to try and understand the formation of the mind to be able to find solutions or at least help with troubling psychological disorders and mental issues. Freud confirmed that certain events in people's lives that disappear for a moment of time in their life or even forever however they become refined to the unconscious.

(Freud 2014) Our life is full of confusion and complications, Freud appears to have a very negative outlook and broadcasted this on to people that looked up to him like the surreal artists at the time resulting in surrealism being the main art movement at the time as surrealism allowed you to express unsettling emotions without having to explain them in words.

Freud states that we are all drawn to the pleasure principle, which inclines us towards easy emotional and psychical awards and away from the unpleasant things like people that judge and discipline. He also states that as infants we are pushed towards the pleasure principle which can lead us to never doing work, eating too much and he even claims as far to say that it can lead to you trying to sleep with members of your own family which personally I think is not true but I do agree with the fact that if we are spoiled as children we can expect everything to be given to us resulting in you not wanting to work. Freud suggests that as humans we should adjust to the reality principle, and to be able to do this he believed that there were good and bad adaptations to follow by; 'neuroses' is what he called the 'troublesome' (Freud, 2014) ones which is when you restrain yourself from the pleasure principles which results in a conflict between 3 parts of our minds, 'ID' is driven by the pleasure principle, 'superego' which is the want to follow rules and do the right things in life in society's eyes and 'ego' which is a mix of the other two sections, it obliges between them both. (Freud, 2014)

Freud claims that to channel these thoughts and feelings we have to think back to our childhood to find out the 'neuroses' that we gathered from growing up; the first stage of our life is called the 'oral phase' which is when we learn to eat and sometimes learn bad habits from our parents if they allow us to refuse certain foods. (Freud, 2014) The second phase was known as the 'anal phase' which is known as 'potty training' which is when we are dependent on our parents to tell us when to go to toilet and the time where we are pushing the boundaries to make our own decisions. (Freud, 2014) Finally the third phase is known as the 'phallic' which is where Freud claims that children have sexual feelings towards family members as that's all they know, and because you learn to love from your parents it can result in having sexual troubles in the future with someone you love as the people you learnt love from, you didn't have sex with. (Freud, 2014) I don't agree with Freud when he states that you can have 'sexual troubles' in the future as I

believe the love you learn from your parents is extremely different to the love you have for a partner. All the life phases have resulted in many artists producing unfiltered artwork as surrealism allows you to “tap into the sexual and violent thoughts and desires that were otherwise repressed”. (WooCommerce, 2016) This is another reason why the surreal art movement could off consumed the illustration genre as illustration is all about sending a message through art and images therefore artists used illustration to address their unconscious thoughts and feelings. Freud also believed that people use jokes to suppress the trauma in our lives, (Freud, 2014) which then surreal artists would then use artwork to express their trauma through funny/disturbing artwork known as surreal illustrations. I personally do believe that Freud was a very disturbed person himself and therefore only saw the negatives in the world however I do believe that a lot of the surreal artists channelled his concept of ‘psychoanalysis’ to inspire their work. Many surrealists believed that when your mind is rational it can extinguish the ability of imagination and that the unconscious mind gives you the power to find the imagination you need, this resulted in many surrealists using their unconscious mind to create their artwork.

There are two main types of surrealism, one known as ‘Oneiric’ which is dream like imagery.



Diego Sánchez *Dazed Beauty* (Peters, n.d.)

This is an example by of an ‘Oneiric’ painting by the artist Diego Sanchez. “I like to experiment with concepts of beauty and ugliness and play with the boundaries of funny and creepy,” (Peters, n.d.) “I believe in the personality of inanimate objects,” he says, “so it allows me to put a face on almost anything.” (Peters, n.d.). An ‘oneiric’ painting allows you to illustrate whatever you want, there is

no boundaries as to what is right and wrong which is why surrealism consumed such a big part of the illustration genre as artists felt free and judgment free which is them reaching towards the pleasure principle.

The second type of surrealism is known as 'Automatism' which is the process of unleashing the unconscious mind by creating art without conscious thought, to reveal the unconscious mind. The term 'Automatism' was taken from physiology "where it describes bodily movements that are not consciously controlled like breathing or sleepwalking" (Ernst, 2020) Surrealist collage was the first type of 'Automatism' where the artist would take parts of magazines and tear them up to create some sort of art piece that doesn't even need to make sense.



MIRO (1893-1983)

The Birth of the World, 1925

This is an example of an 'Automatism' painting by the artist Joan Miro. This painting is all created by Miro accessing his unconscious mind and portraying what it feels like when he gets "hallucinations through extreme hunger" (Surrealism, 2020) He would sit and stare at the cracks in the paint on his walls until he would make a mark on the canvas. Miro's painting is a very accurate example of 'Automatism' because "He began the work by brushing and splashing the freely painted background, which in itself is an example of 'pure psychic automatism'". (Surrealism, 2020) He compiled sketches from his sketchbook and used his unconscious thoughts to portray 'The Birth of the World'. "As Miro said, "The painting rises from the brushstrokes as a poem rises from the words. The meaning comes later"" (Surrealism, 2020) Yet again surrealism was taking over the illustration genre as it was allowing artists to express parts of their minds they've never touched before.

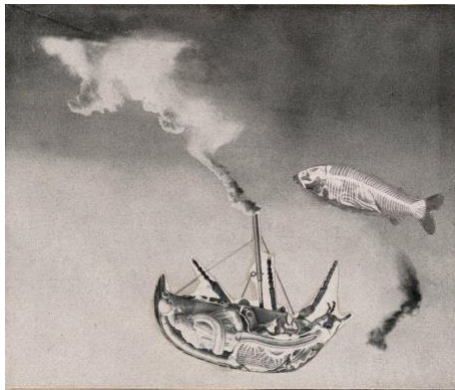
Peter Capaldi states that in order to represent the unconscious mind all you need is art and literature which is what was used to create Surrealism. (Capaldi, 2014) A lot of surreal art has the topic of sex because Freud believed the primary motivation for all things in life was sex as it was the “key to understanding the human being”. (Capaldi, 2014) That's another reason why surrealism ‘consumed the illustration genre’ (Heller: p70 2008) as ‘sex’ is something that is relatable to every human being of a certain age resulting in, Surrealism being a place they could express their thoughts about this topic which in other places wasn't appropriate. A lot of the surrealism at the time was about sexualising the female body.



J.H. Moesman, Self Portrait, 1935. Credit: Centraal Museum Utrecht. (Nicholls-Lee, 2020)

‘Actually, it was a very political movement. The focus on sex and erotics, she explains, ‘was a liberating force for them’. (Nicholls-Lee, 2020) This painting is an example of the movement being mainly about the topic of sex and sexualising the female body as quoted above the surrealists found it ‘liberating’ for them to express such emotion in to their paintings.

A very famous surrealist known as Max Ernst was a self taught Surreal artist who was heavily influenced by Van Gogh, that founded the Dada group in 1919 which was a group who formed during world war 1 in reaction to the horrors of the war. Ernst was a German soldier who suffered with PTSD from serving his country, he would then express his fears in to his paintings after connecting with his unconscious mind through surrealism. (Friedman, 2016) Dada’s aim was to destroy traditional values in art and replace it with a new type of art which turned out to be surrealism where you don't have to think twice about what you're creating, in other words there are no rules to creating surrealism.



Max Ernst Here Everything Is Still Floating 1920 (Ernst, 1920)

Eventually Ernst left the Dada group and joined the surrealist group. Ernst brought a lot to the movement as he constantly experimented with collage by using existing works of art and mixing them all in to create one piece of art work, this was a huge turn around for people to realise they can recycle and take advantage of existing artwork already out there.

Along with Max Ernst, another artist that was very impactful on this movement was Joan Miro who signed the manifesto of the surrealist movement in 1924. Joan Miro once said “A simple line painted with the brush can lead to freedom and happiness” (Miro, n.d.) Which is what surrealism was all about; feeling free whilst creating art. Miro’s sketchbooks are full of visions of her nightmares and weirdly erotic subhuman bodies; this links back to the fact that a lot of surrealism was about sex.

Lastly Rene Magritte was claimed the ‘surrealist artist of all time’ however was not recognised until he was in his 50s. “My painting is visible images which when cancel nothing; they evoke mystery and indeed when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question “what does that mean?” it does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing, it is unknowable”. (Affatigato and Affatigato, 2018) Rene Magritte loved talking about his artwork which opened up a pathway for other artists to do the same and not be ashamed of what their motives are. Magritte brought the metaphorical side to illustration of your work not having to mean anything, you can take what you want from it, this allowed every single person that saw his work feel a completely different way to anyone else which personally I think is extremely clever.

From doing all my research I have managed to find out that as a whole illustration did in fact consume the illustration genre as I believe surrealism is a lot more broad than people think and a high amount of illustrators use surrealism to portray what they want. As Peter Capaldi said "Surrealism isn't just an art movement, it's a way of thinking which is why it is still very influential in this day and age" (Capaldi 2014) I completely agree with this statement as surrealism is just about you reaching into your unconscious mind to bring it forward to the conscious mind to access all your hidden thoughts and feelings. I also believe the best illustrations are the ones that haven't had so much second thought put in to them rather just the artist putting down exactly what comes to their mind; it encourages freedom within the illustration world.

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