



## Surrealism

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# Surrealism

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*Surrealism* is a survey of the twentieth century's longest lasting and, arguably, most influential art movement. Championed and held together by Andre Breton for over forty years, Surrealism was France's major avant-garde artistic tendency from 1924 onwards, rapidly spreading around the globe to become an international phenomenon. During World War II Surrealism's exiled artists and writers had a major impact on American art and were a primary influence for the Abstract Expressionist generation. The official surrealist movement continued to the end of Breton's life in 1966, and its legacy is still pervasive today, in contemporary art as well as in numerous quotations from surrealist imagery in cinema, advertising and the media.

The Survey essay by Mary Ann Caws - a distinguished scholar, translator and associate of the Surrealists - describes in clear, perceptive and lively prose the essential characteristics that define Surrealism, as well as tracing a concise path through the chronology of this prolific and wide-ranging movement. The text also demonstrates how surrealist art and writing are interdependent. The Works section follows the movement from its beginnings in the 1920s up to the 1940s and 1950s. Its six sections trace the themes which predominated at different stages: Chance and Freedom - the earliest work, characterized by complete automatic spontaneity; Poetics of Vision - the strategies of surrealist image-making, reflecting the mind's inner visions; Elusive Objects - the fascination with objects of all kinds from which emerged artworks such as Meret Oppenheim's celebrated fur-lined cup and saucer; Desire - the investigation of desire, eroticism and 'mad love' which is central and unique to the movement; Delirium - Surrealism's high-risk engagement with extreme mental states and disturbing, uncanny visions; and, the Infinite Terrains of later Surrealism, ranging from Joseph Cornell's magical assemblages in box frames, like 'theatres of the mind', to the infinite fields and dynamic energy of late surrealist painting at the dawn of Abstract Expressionism.

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