

2. DREAMS AND VISIONS

Introduction

Dream imagery has been a recurring theme in the art of many cultures. From ancient times, dreams and dream-like revelations or visions were interpreted as communications between gods and humans.

Among the earliest accounts were those recorded in cuneiform, an early writing system in Mesopotamia, such as those of the Sumerian King Gudea (r. ca. 2200 BCE), who preserved his dreams on clay tablets so he might take them to a temple and ask a goddess for help in interpreting their meaning. Historical accounts of the mythic hero Gilgamesh, King of Uruk (ca. 2700), were recorded on 12 clay tablets dating from around 2000 BCE. In this epic adventure of his search for immortality, Gilgamesh is guided by recurring dreams that he conveys to his goddess mother, Ninsun. She helps decipher the prophesies that will guide him in the waking world. The serpentine forms on a clay mask (ca. 1800-1600 BCE), seen in Figure 1 on page 37, depicting the demon Humbaba, the guardian of the cedar forest who was defeated by Gilgamesh, suggest the Mesopotamian divination practice of examining the internal organs of a sacrificed animal to predict the future. Scholars believe that ancient Mesopotamians also had a practice of telling their dreams to a lump of clay, rubbing it on their bodies, and then throwing it in the water so that any evil consequences would crumble and dissolve with the clay. This practice was often used to dispel negative dreams and nightmares, or dreams considered to be of an inappropriate sexual nature.¹

Like the Mesopotamians, ancient Egyptians also believed that dreams had significance. In honor of a dream, Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1419-1386 BCE) erected a large stele, or stone slab, between the paws of the Sphinx at Giza. The inscription on the stele recounts that Thutmose had been out hunting, fell asleep near the Sphinx, and dreamed that the Sphinx opened its mouth and spoke to him, foretelling years of prosperity and happiness ahead. Ancient Egyptians built temples to their god of dreams, Serapis, where specially trained priests would interpret dream symbolism or perform rituals and recite incantations to incubate dreams.² Egyptians would fast, pray, or draw pictures before going to the temples to guarantee that their dreams would be illuminating.³



Figure 1. *Clay Mask of the Demon Humbaba*; clay; Mesopotamian (Sippar, southern Iraq); ca.1800-1600 BCE; H:3.3 in. (8.4 cm.), W:3.3 in. (8.3 cm.); British Museum, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Numerous dream references found in religious texts have also inspired works of art. The Prophet Muhammad (570-632 CE), the founder of Islam, is said to have had his first vision in a dream, when the angel Gabriel appeared to him while he was meditating in the mountains near Mecca. Ancient Hebrews, such as Solomon, Jacob, Nebuchadnezzar, and Joseph, were all guided in their decisions by visits from God or prophets in dreams. In the *Book of Genesis*, Jacob's dream of a heavenly ladder is interpreted as a portent of the future awaiting the Jewish people. Jacob's son, Joseph, is brought from prison to interpret the troubling dreams of the Egyptian pharaoh, as it was commonly accepted that the dreams of kings could influence the future of entire nations and people. In the *Talmud*, the book of Jewish laws that was compiled between 500 BCE and 200 CE, there are over 200 references to dreams, with the assertion that "dreams which are not understood are like letters which are not opened."⁴

There are numerous references to dreams in the New Testament, particularly in the *Book of Matthew*, where Joseph is visited in a dream by an angel of the Lord who tells him about Mary's divine conception, or later, when angels warn Joseph to flee Egypt and return to the land of Israel. Scenes such as these are depicted in numerous works of Christian art, including the famous cycle of frescoes painted by Giotto (1267-1337) in the Scrovegni Chapel in Italy (ca. 1305).

A dream plays a key role in the founding of Buddhism. In 544 BCE, Queen Maha-Maya dreamt she was transported to the Himalayas by angels, where the future Buddha, in the form of a glorious white elephant, enters her womb. The dream of Maya is depicted in works such as a relief sculpture at the Mahayana Buddhist Monument, *Borobudur*, in Magelang, Java, Indonesia (ca. 8th-9th century).

The *Sacred Books of Wisdom*, or *Vedas*, early Hindu writings from India (ca. 1500 -1000 BCE), address the relationship of unconscious dreams to actions in the conscious life. A later series of Indian works, the *Upanishads* (ca. 900-500 BCE), explain that dreams are expressions of inner wishes and desires.⁵ The belief that dreams could facilitate the communication of messages from the gods was as important to the ancient Greeks as it was to the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and Chinese. The first known book on dreams was written by Antiphon, an Athenian writer and statesman in the 5th century BCE, around the same time that the legendary Greek god of medicine and son of Apollo, Aesculapius, was thought to visit people in their dreams, miraculously curing them as they slept. Aesculapius, a favorite subject of classical Greek sculptors, is also portrayed in later paintings, such as Sebastiano Ricci's (1659-1734) work, *The Dream of Aesculapius* (ca. late 17th- early 18th century), where he is shown giving advice to a dreaming patient.

Theories on dreams and healing were espoused by other ancient Greek healers, including Hippocrates (469-399 BCE), the father of medicine, who believed that the images received by the soul during the day were then produced by the soul at night. Although Aristotle (384-322 BCE) did not believe that dreams were divinely inspired, he did suggest that they were indicators of physical conditions within the body, as did the Greek physician Galen (ca. 129-ca. 216), who was reputed to have carried out operations on the basis of his dream interpretations.

In the middle of the 2nd century, the philosopher and soothsayer Artemidorus published five books about dream interpretation known as *Oneirocritica*, in which he describes two classes of dreams: *somnium*, which forecasts the future, and *insomnium*, which deals with contemporary matters and is affected by the state of the body and mind.⁶ Greek mythology included

Hypnos, the god of sleep, and his son, Morpheus, the god of dreams. These mythological figures and themes were the focus of neoclassical works, such as those by French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828), who used marble to depict the youthful winged deity, *Morpheus* (1777), as he sleeps, and *Iris and Morpheus* (1811), the painting by Pierre-Narcisse Guérin (1774-1833), in which a dozing Morpheus is visited in his dream by Iris, the messenger of the gods.

The art of numerous cultures depicts dream imagery often connected to spiritual beliefs. Other works present more personal dreams and visions. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the Austrian psychoanalyst who was the first to describe at length the subconscious life of the mind, had a profound impact on numerous 20th-century artists. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), Freud proposed that dreams are attempts by the unconscious to resolve psychic conflicts and that they are the disguised expression of an individual's deep-rooted wishes.⁷



Figure 2. Tibetan School; *Tanka of Padmasambhava*; painted cloth; ca. 749 CE; American Museum of Natural History, New York. Photograph courtesy of Boltin Picture Library / the Bridgeman Art Library. [Note: Dimensions are not available.]

Spiritual Visions

Art inspired by or designed to inspire spiritual visions has taken many forms. The tradition of ritual meditation is important to the practice of Buddhism. The *tanka* (or *thangka*) is a uniquely Tibetan form of painting or textile that provides guidance for meditation through iconography.⁸ Such works may depict eminent teachers, as seen in the *Tanka of Padmasambhava*, (749) shown in Figure 2 (pg.39). Padmasambhava (a.k.a. Padma Sambhava), with Shantirakshita and Trisong Detsen, co-founded Tantric Buddhism in Tibet⁹ and the first order of senior monks, known as lamas. He first arrived in Tibet in 747 CE, blending theories of metaphysics, mysticism, magic, and occultism with yoga. Known as Guru Rimpoche, or “the glorious teacher,” he was elevated to the status of a god in subsequent generations, and often depicted in Tibetan *tankas* surrounded by disciples, minor gods, and bodhisattvas—idealized beings in the appearance of youthful, heavenly gods.¹⁰

Figure 3 (pg.41) presents an image of a spiritual vision that reinforced a ruler’s divine status. The eighth-century Mayan *Lintel 25 of Yaxchilán Structure 23* is from the doorway of a palace. The limestone carving depicts Lady K’ab’al Xook, the wife of the Lord Shield Jaguar II (r.681-742), performing a bloodletting ritual by running a thorny rope through a hole in her tongue. A “Vision Serpent” appears with a figure of a warrior emerging from its mouth, whose identity is not clear. Along with the date inscribed on the work, which corresponds to Shield Jaguar II’s accession to the throne, the depiction of this spiritual vision was intended to confirm the couple’s royal lineage and right to rule.

The vision presented by Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Bosch (1453-1516) in his triptych entitled *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503), shown in Figure 4 on page 42, has been the subject of debate. Two half-panels flank a central larger one. On the left Bosch shows the Garden of Eden, with God the Father standing between Adam and Eve. The central panel presents the garden of the work’s title—large numbers of nude men and women, amid gigantic fruit and strange vegetation, seem to be indulging in earthly delights of the sensual kind, although there is no depiction of any engaged in sex acts. The ambiguity of this image has prompted some scholars to argue that it represents innocent pleasure, while others have asserted it portrays carnal depravity.

The meaning of the right panel is clearer. Bosch depicts the horrors of Hell that await those who lead sinful lives on earth. Terrifying, monstrous creatures use a variety of bizarre instruments for torture. This vision is a warning to viewers that eternal damnation lies ahead.



Figure 3. Mayan artist (Yaxchilán, Chiapas, Mexico); *Lintel 25 of Yaxchilán Structure 23*; limestone relief; Late Classic period, 600-900 CE; H: 51 in. (129.5 cm.), W: 33.7 in. (85.7 cm); British Museum, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 4. Hieronymus Bosch (Netherlandish, ca. 1450-1516); *Garden of Earthly Delights*; oil on wood panel; ca.1500-1505; (central panel) H: 86 5/8 in. (220 cm.), W: 79 3/4 in. (195 cm.); (side panels) H: 86 5/8 in. (220 cm.), W: 38 1/8 in. (97 cm.) (each); Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. Photograph courtesy of Art Resource, NY/Photo by Erich Lessing.

The Night Journey of Muhammad on His Steed, Buraq (1514), shown in Figure 5 on page 43, is an illustration from the *Bustan*, a collection of spiritual writings by the Persian poet Sa'di. The bottom half of the composition shows an unadorned interior with three sleeping figures. Above them the Prophet Muhammad rides into the heavens on the back of Buraq, a winged creature with a horse's body and human head.

Some Muslims believe Muhammad's journey actually took place—that the Prophet traveled to Jerusalem and from there to heaven. Others think the journey happened in a dream, or was a spiritual experience of his soul. The artist's perspective is not evident in this work. It is also not clear why the artist made a choice unusual in Islamic art—showing the Prophet's face uncovered, which perhaps was done to emphasize his human nature. Later images portray the Prophet with a veiled face or, in more recent times, his entire body is symbolized by a white cloud or rose.¹¹



Figure 5. Unknown painter; Sultan Muhammad Nur (calligrapher) (Uzbekistani, active first half of 16th century); *The Night Journey of Muhammad on His Steed, Buraq* from the *Bustan of Sa'di*; colors, ink and gold on paper; 1514; H: 7 ½ in. (19 cm.), W: 5 in. (12.7 cm.); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Louis V. Bell Fund and the Vincent Astor Foundation Gift.



Figure 6. Francisco de Zurbarán (Spanish, 1598-1644); *St. Francis of Assisi*; oil on canvas; ca.1640; H: 81 ½ in. (207 cm.), W: 42 in. (106 cm.); Museu de Arte de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1644) created several paintings depicting Saint Francis of Assisi, who was instructed by God to repair the Church, give away his property, and preach to the poor. Figure 6 (pg.44), painted in 1640, combines compositional simplicity with dramatic use of light and shadow. The isolated figure of a poor and devout Saint Francis stands against the darkness, his hands concealed beneath the dusty ends of his sleeves and his face partially obscured by the shadow of his hood. He turns



Figure 7. Francisco de Zurbarán (Spanish, 1598-1644); *Saint Francis in Meditation*; oil on canvas; 1639; H: 63.8 in. (162 cm.), W: 53.9 in. (137 cm.); National Gallery, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

his eyes upward toward heaven, deeply absorbed in a private moment of revelation. Evident on the robe near to his heart are stigmata, which correspond to Christ's wound from a soldier's lance piercing his flesh during the crucifixion. The stigmata appeared on St. Francis miraculously after many days of fasting and contemplation on the La Verna mountain in 1224, when he had a vision of Christ carried to heaven by angels.

In Figure 7 (pg.45), *Saint Francis in Meditation* (1639), the diagonal figure of the kneeling saint in his tattered robe dominates the canvas. In this version, however, Saint Francis's hood falls back on his neck, revealing more of his head, as one hand gestures toward heaven and the other clutches a skull—a symbol of mortality. In the distance is a dimly lit landscape, from which the meditating saint is removed.

Both works reflect the influence of Counter-Reformation initiatives. In 1563, the Council of Trent issued guidelines for the creation of religious art that would be suitable for church and would inspire devotion. According to the decree, an image of a saint should serve as a model, inspiring viewers to lead a spiritually oriented life. Zurbarán's works were exemplary in this regard.

Another Spanish artist of the same period, Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) shows restraint in his depiction of a religious story. *Jacob's Dream* (1639), shown in Figure 8 on page 47, refers to an episode from the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, frequently referred to as the "stairway to heaven" or "Jacob's ladder." Jacob was fleeing the wrath of his elder brother Esau, who had traded away his birthright. Stopping to spend the night, he placed his head on a rock and dreamt of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven on which angels were ascending and descending. At the top of the stairway was the Lord, who told Jacob that he and his descendants would have the land on which he slept and, although they would spread out in all directions, the Lord would bless them, protect them, and return them to this place. Ribera's composition presents a tenderly human view of the sleeping man, contrasting the dark, earthy tones of Jacob's clothing, the rocks, and the tree in the lower portion of the painting with the expanse of hazy blue sky in the upper half. The diagonal formed by the tree is balanced with the white, sun-filled column of light—a symbol of the heavenly ladder—seen through the clouds. One leafy tree branch appears to form a small protective canopy over the resting figure, suggesting that Jacob will be blessed and protected by the Lord.



Figure 8. Jusepe de Ribera (a.k.a. Lo Spagnoletto) (Spanish, ca.1590-1652); *Jacob's Dream*; oil on canvas; 1639; H: 70.5 in. (179 cm.), W: 91.7 in. (233 cm.); Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

In the Cornaro Chapel in Rome's Santa Maria della Vittoria, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, the sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1647-52), shown in Figure 9 on page 48, is based on Saint Teresa's account of a mystical trance-like episode—one of her many religious visions—during which an angel of God appeared to her in physical form, piercing her with the point of an arrow. In her autobiography, she describes the experience as one of spiritual and physical pain, but with a “sweetness” that she wished would happen again.¹² With her eyes closed and head thrown back, her body subsumed by rippling fabric, Bernini depicts the sensation Teresa likened to a “detachable death,”¹³ whereby her soul became awakened to God. Bronze rays provide a backdrop suggesting divine light. Although constructed of heavy marble, the angel and saint seem to be literally floating on a heavenly cloud.



Figure 9. Gian Lorenzo Bernini (Italian, 1598-1680); *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*; marble, stucco, and gilt bronze; 1647-52; H:11 ft. 6 in. (3.5 m.); Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, Italy. Photograph courtesy of SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

Another religious vision that has inspired numerous works of art in Mexico is connected to the Virgin Mary. Juan Diego (1474-1548) was an indigenous neophyte who, in 1531, reported seeing a vision of the Mother of Jesus. The Virgin of Guadalupe revealed herself to Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac near the town square, transmitting her wish that a Catholic Church be built upon the site. The unbelieving bishop to whom Juan Diego told his story gave the poor man a *tilma*, or cloak, filled with roses to present to the Virgin. When he bestowed the flowers upon her, the *tilma* was miraculously imprinted with the Virgin's image.¹⁴ Previously on the Tepeyac site stood a temple to the pagan goddess Teotonantzin (or Tonantzin), known to the Aztecs as "Our Mother." After Juan Diego's reported vision, a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe wearing the garb described in Juan Diego's vision—a costume similar to the goddess Tonantzin, with the blue mantle of heaven dotted with gold stars—was placed there, contributing greatly to the conversion of Mexican Indians to Catholicism.¹⁵ The popular and famous image has appeared in numerous art forms for several centuries.¹⁶

In Figure 10 (pg.50), *Angel of the Revelation* (ca.1803-1805), William Blake (1757–1827) depicts a biblical passage, Revelation 10:1-7, in which Saint John describes the visions he experienced on the island of Patmos. The radiant angel appears heroic in stature and musculature. Saint John is a small figure seen from the back at the bottom center of the composition. Blake represents the "seven thunders" from the biblical passage as seven horsemen. Through his exploration of apocalyptic subject matter, Blake sought to convey his religious conviction at a time when Enlightenment scientists and philosophers were promoting pure reason as a way of freeing humankind from superstition and religious authoritarianism.¹⁷ Alienated Romantics such as Blake feared the loss of individual freedoms, emotions, creativity, and moral discipline.¹⁸



Figure 10. William Blake (English, 1757-1827); *Angel of the Revelation*; watercolor, pen and black ink over traces of graphite; ca. 1803-05; H:15 7/16 in. (39.2 cm.), W: 10 1/4 in. (26 cm.); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund.



Figure 11. Margaret Anjullu (Anjule Bumblebee) (Aboriginal, n.d.); *Women's Dreamings of the Tanami Desert 2*; acrylic on canvas; 1996; H: 35 ½ in. (90 cm.), W: 23 5/8 in. (60 cm.); The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. Photograph courtesy of the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia/© 2009 ARS, NY/ VISCOPY, Australia.

Figure 11 (pg.51), *Women's Dreamings of the Tanami Desert 2* (1996), is a work by Margaret Anjullu, a contemporary Aboriginal artist from Australia's southeastern Kimberly region. In Aboriginal culture, the term "Dreaming" refers to the realm of ancestors and their activities related to the creation of the natural landscape. The symbols and techniques used to create paintings that tell stories of the Dreaming are connected to more ephemeral art from rituals that provide access to ancestor realm.

Anjullu belongs to the Balgo (Wirrimanu) community in the Kutjunga region of western Australia, where traditional ceremonies have involved sand drawing and body painting. One of the techniques Anjullu uses is applying dots of paint on the canvas with a thin stick, which corresponds to the creation of sand drawings by piercing the ground. The shimmering effect that results is similar to the appearance of pigments and oils on the skin. Although Anjullu's work may appear abstract, it uses traditional symbols worn by ancestral beings to tell their story.

Sleep and Dreams

Nearly every society has developed rituals surrounding sleep and dreams. Consequently, many cultures have produced artworks that concern sleep and its comforts or discomforts, as well as dreams and nightmares.

Striking sleep- and dream-related objects come from Africa, where artfully-carved wooden headrests have long been a part of the culture. Some of the oldest examples date back to ancient Egypt, but the form has flourished to the present.¹⁹ Most are made of wood, with a small base that rests on the ground and a two- or three-legged support extending upward to a cupped resting post, meant to settle on the neck and support the whole weight of the head. Many pieces were used to preserve elaborate hairstyles, but headrests were more than simply practical. Some of those from the Islamic East African Boni tribe, in present-day Somalia and Kenya, incorporate prayers to Allah asking for "protection of the sleeper."

Especially well-known for their headrests are the Shona people from present-day Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique. Since the Shona believe that a person walks with ancestors when dreaming, the headrest serves as a way to connect to the spirit world. An example of a Shona headrest from the 19th or 20th century is shown in Figure 12 (pg.53).



Figure 12. Shona artist (Zimbabwe); *Headrest*, wood; 19th-20th century; H: 5 in. (12.7 cm); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. James J. Strain.

Various Asian societies developed their own use of headrests, though Asian designers favored a three- or four-leg support, like a miniature bench, over the single broad base of the typical African headrest. Occasionally these headrests were also made of wood, but more often, glazed porcelain was the favored medium.²⁰ Chinese porcelain pillows, common in the late 11th to early 13th centuries, were made of a sturdy stoneware called *Cizhou* ware at kilns throughout the northern provinces of Hebei, Henan, and Shaanxi. Known as popular ceramics (as opposed to ceramics used at the Imperial Court), the pillows were used to support the necks of men, women, and children, and were often vividly decorated with good luck symbols or pleasant scenes from nature, thought to promote a restful night's sleep and pleasant dreams.²¹ Like those from Africa, Chinese and Japanese headrests were designed to preserve elaborate hairstyles. They also were considered objects that could provide protection for the sleeper's temporary journey into another realm of consciousness. A high-ranked member of society might even choose to take a certain pillow to the tomb, where it might offer protection.²²

In Native American culture “dream catchers” have long been a part of sleeping rituals, particularly among the Ojibwe (a.k.a. Ojibway or Chippewa)

tribe. The dream catcher is most often hung above the bed of an infant, and is intended to filter dreams. A traditional dream catcher has woven netting attached to a circular frame, to which suspended feathers are attached. A small hole at the center of the netting allows good dreams to make their way through, sliding down the feathers into the thoughts of the sleeping child.

The dream catcher serves a similar function to the Japanese *baku*, a supernatural creature from folklore. The *baku*, a mixture of different animals—tiger, elephant, horse, ox, cock, tapir—is meant to devour bad dreams as they approach the sleeper. These figurines or amulets, used by peasants since the 18th century, are worn or sit by bedsides in Japan. Until the 19th century, the Chinese ideogram for “*baku*” was still inscribed on headrests to ensure sound, restful sleep.²³ These dream-related creatures have also appeared as *netsuke*, small carved objects. A naturalistic-looking *baku* was the subject of a woodblock print by the celebrated artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and, more recently, the creature has been appropriated in Japanese popular cultural forms such as *anime* and *manga*—cartoons and comics.

A Japanese work that depicts blissful slumber is *The Four Sleepers* (14th century), shown in Figure 13 on page 55, by Mokuan Reien, a monk and a painter who studied at a Chan monastery in China. The work shows the intertwined figures of Chan lore—the poet Hanshan, the monks Shide and Fengken, and the tiger Fengken rides. Chan and Zen Buddhism encourage each individual to achieve Enlightenment by transcending earthly concerns. The work suggests that this state of peace and happiness is connected to dreaming or meditation. The ink-wash technique used, known as “apparition painting” or “shadow painting” (*wangliang hua* in Chinese or *moryo-ga* in Japanese) is distinguished by its stylized sketchiness.²⁴

Another Japanese work, *Utatane soshi emaki (A Wakeful Sleep)*, shown in Figure 14 (pg.56), was created by court painter Tosa Mitsunobu (1434-1525) in collaboration with the courtier-scholar Sanjonishi Sanetaka (1455-1537). This late 15th-century work depicts fulfillment of a woman’s romantic fantasy in her dreams. Presented in the form of a short story scroll called *ko-e*, the illustrated tale was meant to be slowly unrolled in stages and “read” in sequence. In this story, a woman falls deeply in love with a man she has only encountered in her dreams, before magically meeting him in person at a temple. At the time, *ko-e* scrolls were exceedingly popular and produced for different audiences, including children. Yet the messages in the stories reflect Buddhist principles by addressing the illusory nature of earthly desires. The narratives typically follow a pattern in which the main character undergoes a personal transformation, coming to a self-realization at the end.²⁵



Figure 13. Mokuan Reien (Japanese, d. 1345); *The Four Sleepers*; ink on paper; 14th century; H: 27 ½ in. (70 cm.), W: 14 in. (36 cm.)

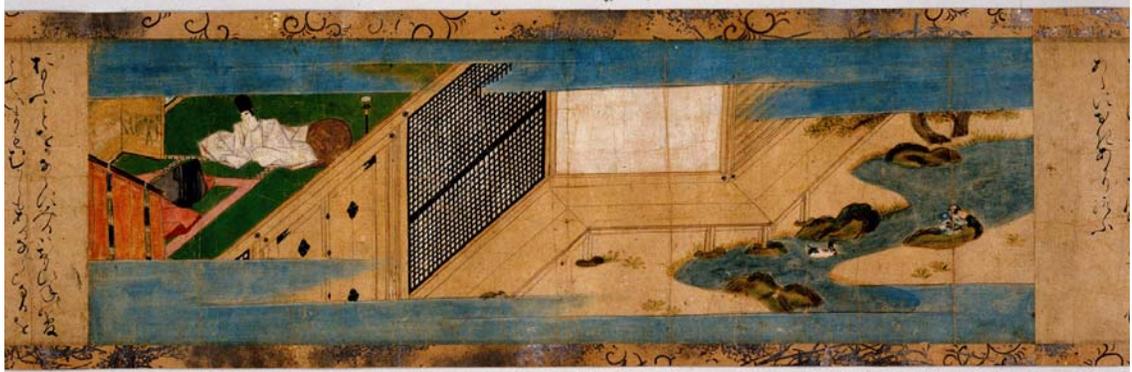


Figure 14. Tosa Mitsunobu (Japanese, 1434-1525); *Utatane soshi emaki (A Wakeful Sleep)*; ink, color, and gold on paper; late 15th-early 16th century; National Museum of Japanese History, Chiba Prefecture, Japan. Photograph courtesy of National Museum of Japanese History, Chiba Prefecture, Japan.

Dreams experienced by artists and/or artisans sometimes inspire their creations. On the island of Flores in Indonesia, Sisilia Sii, pictured in Figure 15, learned from her mother the traditional method of weaving textiles with intricate patterns, known as *ikat*. One night, her deceased mother appeared to her in a dream, encouraging her to weave two advanced patterns called *nggaja* or *sémba*, neither of which Sisilia had learned, because it was customary that only women with senior status could use them. The following night, her mother came again in a dream, explaining how to dye and weave the patterns. The dream world encounter enabled Sisilia to carry on indigenous weaving traditions.



Figure 15. *Sisilia Sii weaving*; video still; Flores Island, Indonesia; 20th century. Image courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

Two of the most famous works by Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) focus on sleep and dreaming. Rousseau was a self-taught artist who often painted exotic locales that he envisioned, but had never visited. In *The Sleeping Gypsy* (1897), shown in Figure 16, he depicts a dark-skinned woman in an ethnic costume who lies sleeping with her mandolin and water jug beside her. A lion comes near, a protector rather than a predator. In a barren desert, a full moon provides soft illumination in the tranquil scene.²⁶ Rousseau's last work, painted in 1910, is called *The Dream*.²⁷ The setting is a lush tropical jungle forest, where a light-skinned nude woman is fully awake in her dream, reclining on a sofa. Peeking out between the tall leaves and grasses are several birds, a small elephant, and a pair of lionesses. Enveloped by the foliage is a black snake charmer, who stands nearby playing the flute.



Figure 16. Henri Rousseau (French, 1844-1910); *The Sleeping Gypsy*; oil on canvas; 1897; H: 51 in. (129.5 cm.), W: 79 in. (200.7 cm.); the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

Dreams and dreamers appear repeatedly in the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), a British artist who paired his paintings with his own poetry. A series of his works focuses on fair-haired women in reverie. *A Sea-Spell*,²⁸ for example, painted in 1877, shows a woman with a halo of flowers in her hair playing a lute in a bucolic setting, her head bent forward and eyes gazing into the far distance. Rossetti is depicting the moment she slips from consciousness, as the accompanying poem makes clear: "What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear, / In answering echoes from what planisphere, / Along the wind, along the estuary? / She sinks into her spell ..." ²⁹

Nightmares and Disconcerting Visions

Through his series of paintings entitled *The Nightmare*, Swiss artist Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) has been credited with inventing horror as a visual genre. The version in Figure 17 (ca. 1781) depicts a voluptuous woman in white silk, supine on her bed with her head and arms draped off one end. Sitting on her chest is an incubus, and the head of a white horse with bulging eyes emerges



Figure 17. Henry Fuseli (Swiss, 1741-1825); *The Nightmare*; oil on canvas; ca. 1781; Goethe House and Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Photograph courtesy of Snark / Art Resource, NY.

from behind a curtain. Set in a dark bedroom, the painting conveys sexual terror, but the precise meaning of the painting has been debated for decades. There has been speculation that the work depicts a revenge fantasy for the unrequited love Fuseli had for a woman named Anna Landolt. The demon may represent a *mara*, a term from Scandinavian mythology for a spirit that torments sleepers.³⁰

In his etchings, the French artist Charles Meryon (1821-1868) presented exquisitely detailed images of Paris, focusing on parts of the city that had remained unchanged for centuries. But when the government was transforming Paris to make it more modern and, simultaneously, he was suffering from mental illness that produced hallucinations, he infused his cityscapes with disturbing imagery. Figure 18, *Le Pont-au-Change* (1854), is one of a series of etchings Meryon produced of a bridge in the heart of Paris. In successive states, he made alterations that culminated in this version, in which a flock of menacing birds has replaced a floating balloon and a drowning man has been added. Although his anxieties may have been heightened by his mental illness, those given form here were shared by others, especially as old architecture and neighborhoods were demolished to make way for broad boulevards.



Figure 18. Charles Meryon (French, 1821-1868); *Le Pont-au-Change* (*The Exchange Bridge, Paris*); etching; 1854; H: 6 1/8 in. (15.5 cm.), W: 13 3/16 in. (33.5 cm.); Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Photograph courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Gift of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts.

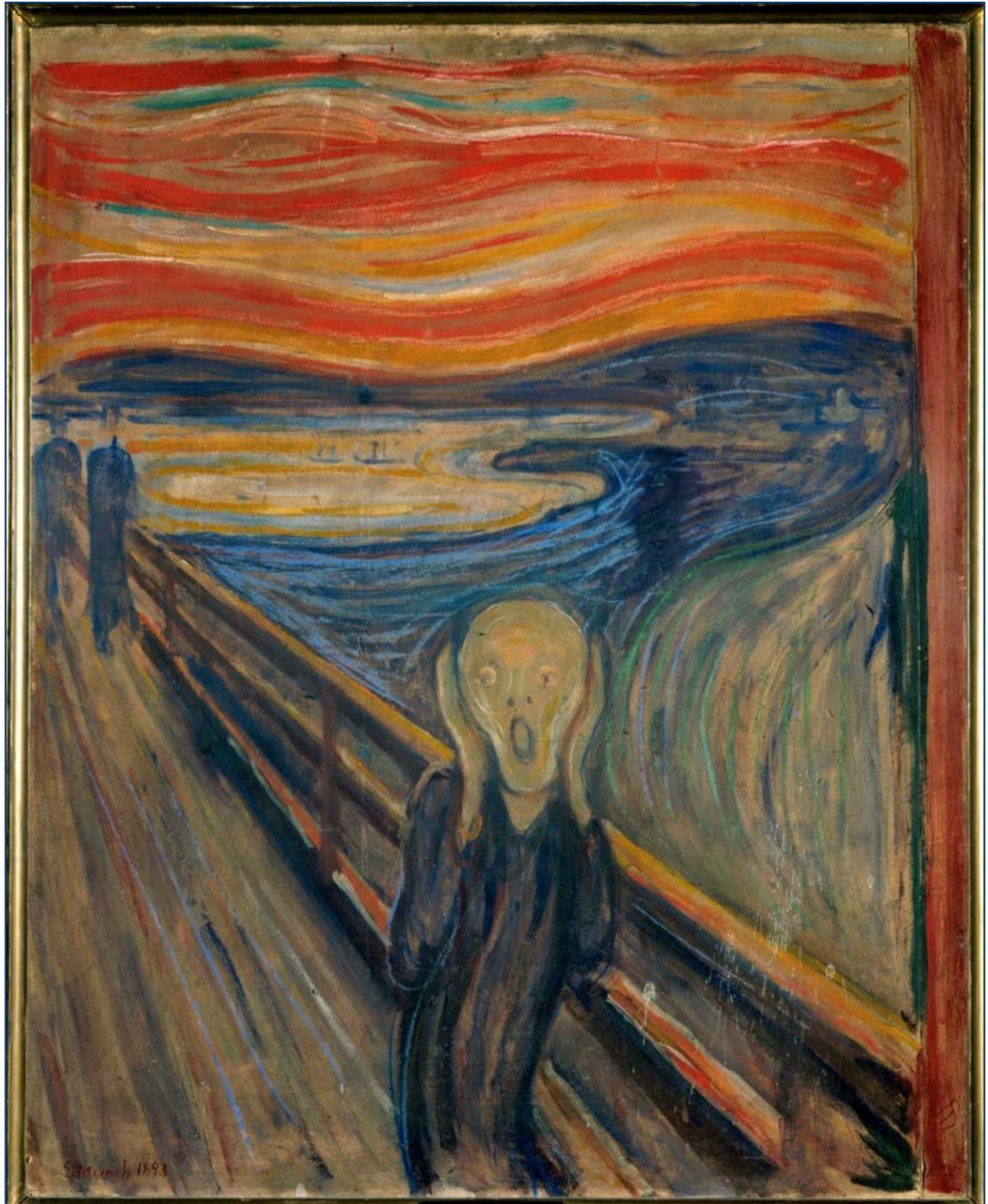


Figure 19. Edvard Munch (Norwegian, 1863-1944); *The Scream*; tempera and pastels on cardboard; 1910; H: 35 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (91 cm.), W: 29 in. (73.5 cm.); The Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway. © The Munch Museum/The Munch-Ellingsen Group/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photograph courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) conveyed the terror of his nightmarish visions through his use of color and expressive style. According to Oslo's Munch Museum, *The Scream* (1910), shown in Figure 19 on page 60, depicts “the actual mental image of the existential angst of civilized man.” The painting is one of a series known as “The Frieze of Life,” which explores life, love, mysticism, and death.

Munch wrote the following about the painting:

I was out walking with two friends—the sun began to set—suddenly the sky turned blood red—I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence—there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city—my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety—and I sensed an endless scream passing through nature.

The torment felt by the abstracted central figure in the painting is emphasized by the undulating curves and intense colors surrounding him. The artist painted several versions from 1893 to 1919. Munch's unconventional style, which in 1892 had generated controversy and prematurely closed one of his exhibitions, had a profound influence on later German Expressionists.

Anguished visions from chronic medical problems haunt a series of self-portraits by Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). When Kahlo was 18 years old she was severely injured in a bus accident, necessitating a hospital stay of a year to recover from a broken back, ribs, and pelvis. Although she underwent thirty or so operations, she continued to endure severe physical and emotional hardships throughout her life.

In *The Broken Column* (1944), shown in Figure 20 on page 62, painted shortly after spinal surgery, a tearful Kahlo stands partially nude and isolated in a barren landscape, perhaps a metaphor for her lost ability to bear children. Corseted by the metal brace holding her fractured torso together, a broken Greek column representing her spine seems about to fall apart. Her face and body are pierced by nails, the largest of which punctures the top of her left breast above her heart. Although Kahlo was labeled a Surrealist, she asserted that the visions she depicted reflected the reality she experienced, rather than dream worlds.

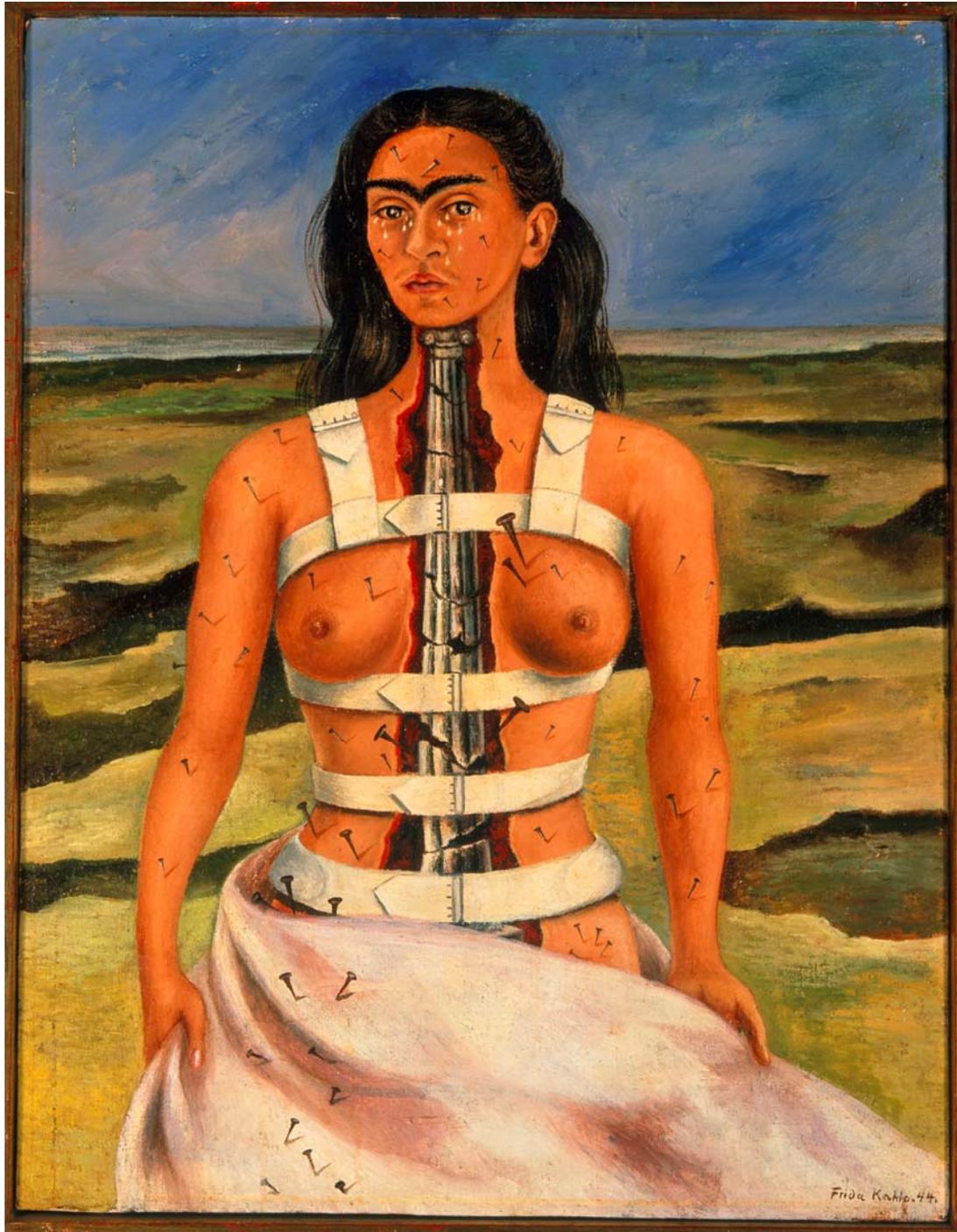


Figure 20. Frida Kahlo (Mexican, 1907-1954); *The Broken Column*; oil on masonite; 1944; H: 15 11/16 in. (39.8 cm), W: 12 1/16 in. (30.6 cm); Collection Museo Dolores Olmedo, Xochimilco, Mexico City, Mexico. © 2009 Banco de México Diego Rivera-Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph courtesy of Schalkwijk/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 21. Wifredo Lam (Cuban, 1902-1982); *The Jungle*; gouache on paper mounted on canvas; 1943; H:8 ft. (2.4 m.), W:7 ½ ft. (2.3 m.); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Photograph © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris/Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Cuban Surrealist Wifredo Lam (1902-1982) had an interest in mysticism and mythology that is evident in *The Jungle* (1943), shown in Figure 21. The influence of Pablo Picasso, with whom Lam worked in Europe, is also clear. Like Picasso, Lam incorporated the stylized representations of the human faces from African masks. When he returned to Cuba in the 1940s, Lam used this approach in *The Jungle* to convey his concerns about the Afro-Cuban community on the island.

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The jungle depicted is filled with sugarcane and tobacco, rather than wild plants. Cuba's wealth from these crops resulted from the exploitation of the Afro-Cuban population. The figure on the right—a woman-horse hybrid—reflects Lam's interest in Santeria and Vodun, traditional African religious practices from Cuba and Haiti, respectively. Lam combines these elements in a complex way and uses an unnatural palette to create this Surrealist vision.

When the Surrealists began to incorporate ideas from Freud's book *The Interpretation of Dreams* into their art, the body of work they produced was persistently bizarre, featuring the juxtaposition of normally unrelated objects. They believed that the impulse to do this came from their unconscious minds, and that their works might also stimulate the unconscious minds of viewers.

The eye is a motif that occurs frequently in Surrealist works. In *The False Mirror* (1928), shown in Figure 22, by Belgian artist René Magritte (1898-1967), a human eye—disassociated from a face and containing a cloud-filled sky—covers the canvas. *The False Mirror* challenges basic assumptions about perception, both in art and life.³¹



Figure 22. René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967); *The False Mirror*, oil on canvas; 1928; H: 21 ¼ in. (54 cm.), W: 31 7/8 in. (80.5 cm.); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. © 2009 Herscovici, London/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In his 1926 collotype print, *La Roue de la lumière* (*Wheel of Light*), shown in Figure 23, German-born French artist Max Ernst (1891-1976) also disassociates the human eye from the rest of the body. The pupil is constricted as if it were exposed to light. Ernst's print was developed using a method called frottage, which he developed in 1925. Frottage involves making a rubbing over a textured surface. The resultant image may be left as is or, if it suggests something else to the artist, further developed. In Ernst's eye, the frottage is most visible in the striated patterns of the iris and in the leaf-like veins on the sclera, the white portion of the eyeball.

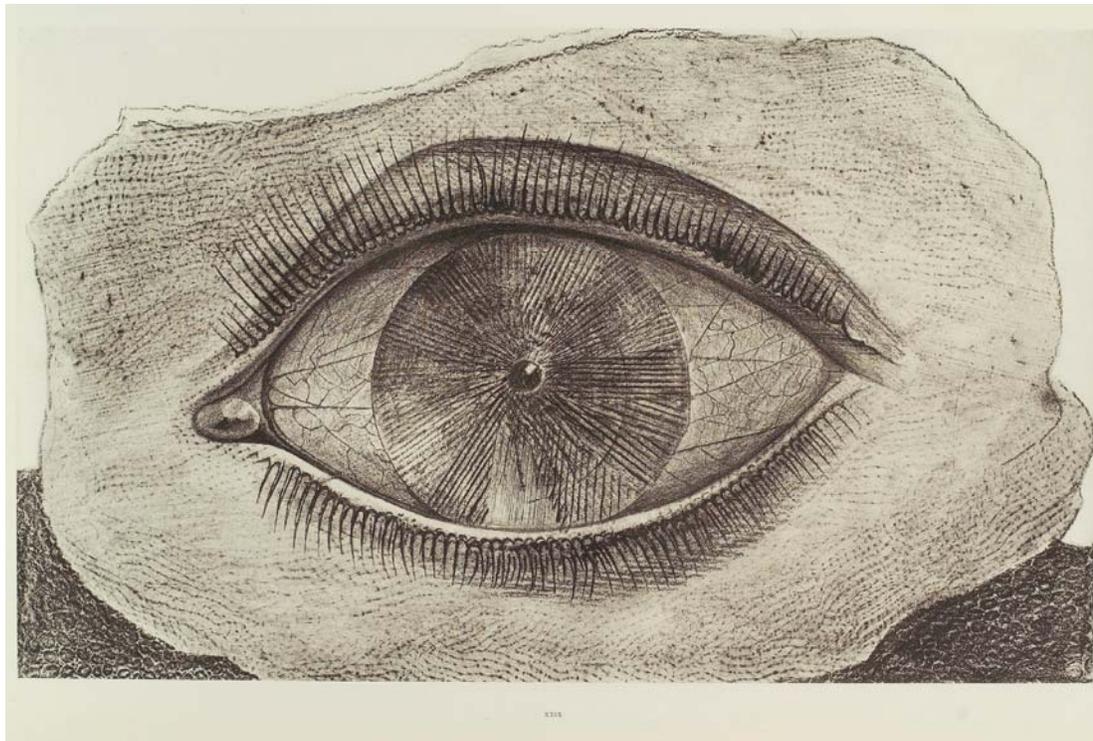


Figure 23. Max Ernst (German, 1891-1976); *Wheel of Life*; collotype, after frottage, printed in black; 1926; H:10.5 in. (26.7 cm.), W:17 in. (43.2 cm.); Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division, the New York Public Library, New York, NY. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photograph courtesy of the New York Public Library / Art Resource, NY.

A cutout photograph of an eye attached to a metronome's pendulum is a feature of *Indestructible Object* (*Object to be Destroyed*), shown in Figure 24 on page 66. American Surrealist Man Ray (1890-1977) originally created the three-dimensional work in 1923. During a 1957 Dada retrospective exhibition in Paris, protesting students took the artist literally and destroyed the object by shooting it.³² Ray subsequently reconstructed and renamed it *Indestructible Object*.³³



Figure 24. Man Ray (American); *Indestructible Object (or Object to be Destroyed)*; metronome with cutout photograph of eye on pendulum; 1964 replica of 1923 original; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 25. Salvador Dalí (Spanish, 1904-1989); *Dream, Caused by the Flight of a Bee (Around a Pomegranate, a Second Before Waking Up)*; oil on wood; 1944; H: 20 1/8 in. (51 cm.), W: 16 1/8 in. (41 cm.); Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain. © 2009 Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph courtesy of Art Resource, NY/Photo by Erich Lessing.

The Spanish Surrealist Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) was also influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, whom he met in the 1930s. Dalí was intrigued by the idea that dreams spring from the subconscious mind during sleep. The imagery for the 1944 work *Dream, Caused by the Flight of a Bee (Around a Pomegranate, a Second Before Waking Up)*, shown in Figure 25 on page 67, came from a dream recounted to the artist by his wife, Gala. Below Gala's body there are the bee and pomegranate; threatening her from above her are a fish, tigers, and rifle. In the background an elephant walks on thin, stilt-like legs. All these incongruous elements are depicted with meticulously detailed naturalism. Like dreams, the work is open to multiple interpretations. Sexuality is a theme that pervades many Surrealist works, including this one.³⁴



Figure 26. Sandy Skoglund (American, b. 1946); *Revenge of the Goldfish*; cibachrome color photograph; 1981; H: approx. 27 ½ in. (70 cm.), W: approx. 35 in. (89 cm.). Photograph © 1981 Sandy Skoglund all rights reserved.

Many images created by contemporary American artist Sandy Skoglund (b. 1946) depict dream-like visions, as in *Revenge of the Goldfish* (1981), shown in Figure 26 on page 68. A child sits on the edge of the bed where an adult sleeps. The room, in which the walls and all objects are blue like an aquarium, is filled with 120 oversized orange and red fish. To create this work and others, Skoglund constructed sets and props, which she arranges into compositions she photographs. For this particular work, she carved each fish out of terracotta. The result, as is the case with many of her distinctive works including this one, is both amusing and disturbing.

Art is about seeing more than what is in the world around us. For artists like Skoglund and her Surrealist predecessors, the unconscious mind has been a source of inspiration. Personal fantasies and inner visions--both secular and religious--have mystified, terrified, and stimulated artists throughout history and around the world. In turn, much of their work has served to prompt and guide the dreams and visions of others. Although it is impossible to truly understand the meaning of dreams and visions, it is human nature to try. Their ephemeral nature makes the process particularly challenging. Works of art serve as a concrete means of recording, analyzing, and sharing these experiences, which are mysterious and fleeting.

Endnotes

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³ Gail Bixler-Thomas. "Understanding Dreams: Perspectives From the Ancients Through Modern Times," in *Dreams: Artwork of the Collective Unconscious*: <http://www.ondreaming.com/theories/index.htm> (November 1998).

⁴ Coolidge, *Dream Interpretation*, 22, and Bixler-Thomas, "Understanding Dreams."

⁵ Ibid., 22-30.

⁶ Coolidge, *Dream Interpretation*, 23-24, and Bixler-Thomas, "Understanding Dreams."

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²² “Cizhou Ware Ceramic Pillow,” in *Highlights*. British Museum Web site: http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/asia/c/cizhou_ware_ceramic_pillow.aspx; “Pillow [China] (1985.214.132),” in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Web site: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nsong/ho_1985.214.132.htm (October 2006); and L. Smith, V. Harris, and T. Clark. *Japanese Art: Masterpieces in the British Museum* (London, The British Museum Press, 1990).

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