

Surrealism

The term *surrealism*, coined in the theatrical program of *Parade*, came to represent a major artistic and literary movement of the early 1900s. Surrealist artists attempted to represent the world as perceived by the conscious and subconscious mind, rather than the natural world, by presenting images that were fantastic and often juxtaposed in extraordinary ways.

The poet and critic André Breton laid much of the groundwork for surrealism in *The Surrealist Manifesto*, which he published in 1924. He held that surrealists strive to join the subconscious world of dreams and imagination with the conscious world of fact and reason to create “an absolute reality, a surreality.” Rather than writing in a deliberate and logical way, Breton adhered to the Dadaist notion of allowing his poetry to appear accidental, unorganized, or unintentional, sometimes incorporating dreamscapes and word-association exercises.

Surrealist painters adapted these approaches to visual art. Starting in 1925, surrealist painters — Jean Arp, Salvador Dali, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Paul Klee, René Magritte, Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso, and Yves Tanguy — presented their works in group exhibitions in Paris, often to confused and disapproving audiences. Early works featured techniques such as using paper to squash paint onto canvas in random shapes and rubbing a pencil over a paper on rough wood to capture the patterns of the natural grain.

Like the Rorschach psychological inkblot tests that began to be used in the 1920s, these art works invited viewers to interpret visual data as expressions or catalysts of subconscious thought. As surrealism evolved, techniques grew more sophisticated. Subjects and images became more recognizable and logical, though they still were linked in novel and often unsettling ways. Some artists incorporated images that were symbolic to them personally but were left unexplained. Dali, for example, showed green giraffes blazing and timepieces spilling off a tabletop — and left the viewer to guess at the meaning.

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