



Claims Department

Surrealism -

It is a razor across

An unblinking eye.

That there haiku (sorry, John Hertz, I realise this is gimmick infringement!) establishes surrealism in my field of view quite nicely. I came to it through film, and specifically through Dali. There are other Surrealists, of course, Magritte, Kahlo (and yes, despite her protests, she was a Surrealist, or at least practicing Surrealism), Lam, Oppenheim, Miro, Breton, and lesser-known masters like Carrington, Tanning, Nash, Horna, and Bravo. It's a style that requires the precision of tradition portraiture along with the presentation of a dream-like state.

Or, at least that's how I read it.

The problem with Surrealism is that it came after Dadaism.

Dadaism was the rejection of the traditions of art and the forms. There was a stripping away of meaning, at least sensible meaning, and an increase in the automatism of creation. It was the beginning of art as concept as opposed to art as product.

And then Surrealism comes about.

Surrealism and Dadaism are too often tied together. Surrealism is not about rejecting structure, but embracing a different, hazier structure. Dada was, in many ways, about the way a whole need not consist of coherent parts, while Surrealism was about creating coherence from distantly-related parts. I love that about both, and while you could make a good argument that they both had their roots in Cubism (Dada's imagery comes from Cubism's challenge of the traditional Art of Viewing; Surrealism's concept of image runs away with Cubism's idea of differing views from that the view takes in at a regular art gallery) and both come to wonderful product as the outcome.

You honestly can not understand Surrealism. I know, I know, you can hear your art history teacher going on and on

about how it all has to do with Jungian and Freudian ideas, and psycho-sexual concepts that were bubbling up. Your art history teacher was wrong. So wrong. So very very very wrong.

Surrealism can only be felt. It is a visceral art form, full of images designed to draw out a sensation. Look at people who stand a foot away from the tiny framed image of Persistence of Memory. After a while, they'll start to scratch their elbows; their shoulders will somehow relax and tense at the same time. Dali's Crucifixion overwhelms, and the viewer will invariably move their neck as if trying to line it all up into a single image. That is Surrealism, a collection of sensations and physical effects that then we feel the need to intellectually justify.

In a way, my collages are Surrealist-style works. They are meant to make some sense, but while the Surrealist, the REAL Surrealists, delved into the psyche, I simply dip into my own weirdness and put that out there. Sometimes it's to confuse, sometimes to titillate, and sometimes, just sometimes, to annoy. The idea is not to present a pleasing image, but an affecting image, and I don't always manage.

This issue is dedicated to all the Surrealists, those that are gone, and those that remain. You've done the lord's work, and done it well so often.





For Emak Bakia Cardinal Cox

Summer 2019 I was approached by Emily Steele with the idea that for the Gateway Film Festival in Peterborough they would screen three surrealist silent movies and four poets would write work to accompany the films, much like a new score.

This appealed to me as way back when I was in a band both I and Paul the keyboard player had independently discovered the duo Into The Nursery who were creating fresh scores for old films. We thought this was something we could try, though we never did.

The three films were to be 'Ghosts Before Breakfast' (1928) by Hans Richter, 'Emak Bakia' (1926) by Man Ray and 'The Seashell and the Clergyman' (1928) by Germaine Dulac. I'd have been happy to work on any of those. My fellow poets who were also commissioned to write were Ross Sutherland (himself an award-winning film maker), Charley Genever (former Poet Laureate of the city) and Malika Speaks (who became the new Poet Laureate of Peterborough during the project). I later discovered that it was Ross (who had directed my one-man show) who had suggested the project.

Before the project was finalised and we were allocated our subjects I dug out copies of some of the pamphlets I had worked on with the Surrealist Sportsmans Club (now grown quiet) so that Emily could see examples of my work. Next, I dusted off some of the numerous books on surrealism (and

Dadaism) to stimulate my imagination and set myself some exercises.

While in Dublin for the Worldcon I attended a talk by Joao Goncalves, who composes music for films and computer games, for inspiration. I picked-up tips about tempo and contrasts.

I was given the task of writing to Man Ray's film (and was very happy about that as a fan of his photography). First, I roughly timed the individual scenes through the movie, itself about 15 minutes long. The film is made up of four unequal parts, with the second the longest. So I saw this as a work of three movements and an overture. I wrote for the third and fourth parts first. Then I wrote for the first part and included in it quotes from the other two. Then, lastly, I tackled the longest part. Breaking it down I'd found a set of contrasting themes; light and dark, men and women, countryside and town, technology and nature, etc.

The actress in the film was Man Ray's frequent model, Kiki of Montparnasse. When I looked up about her I discovered that her real name was Alice. That gave another dimension by relating it (in tone) to Lewis Carroll.

After much writing rehearsing, and re-writing we performed our pieces in a half-lit cinema as part of both the Gateway Film Festival and Syntax Poetry Festival. By this time Ross had discovered that what he'd thought of as a unique take on silent cinema was actually an artform with a long tradition in the Far East, known as Benshi in Japan, and had been revived (as Neo-Benshi) in the 1980s in America



#0.1

The hungry camera / Mechanical eye devours / All light in its path /
Clattering machine / Teeth bite the celluloid tongue / All in its belly /
On its three still legs / We go to its hungry eye / Never satisfied /

#0.2

(hiss/static sounds)

#0.3

Translucent petals / Eye of the day from dark soil / Jewel of garden /

#0.4

Jesus' nails rain down / Dervish spinning communion / With his
dancing god /

#0.5

Hands upon a clock / Earth spinning on its axis / Time repeats, re-
peats /

#0.6

Light refracts rainbows / Gravity bends photons / Light caught in
mirror /

Light ripples on waves / Mirror reflects light back out / Light attracts
brave moths /

#1.1

Let there be light, let there be light / Matter can lie within darkness
/ But energy changes matter / Liberates light – photons / Escape as

atoms break – smash / As electrons collide – if / Light is slowed
through some / Medium can it change back / To matter? Mater ro-
tates within the universe – enough / Matter creates gravity to / Bend
light – mirror / Reflects light back into / The universe – reveals /

Where light has been – / Prism reveals colours / Within white light
– / Let there be light, let there / Be light /

#1.2

We dance in puddles / Said we are mostly water / Oceans dance in
us /

The tides ebb and flow / Rise and fall beneath the moon / Surging
through our veins /

#1.3

Rivers leap from cliff / Foam and droplets catch the wind / Deep still
pool awaits /

#1.4

Light caught in mirror / Slows into a photograph / Prism traps sun
rays /

#1.5

Gravity bends light / Ripples and lenses photons / Slows it in its
path /

#1.6

Alice in her motor car / Alice is her motor car / This is now / The
car is hers / She drives her car / Goggles make the world a picture /
This is her life / Every road is hers / The whole country is her street /

Alice feels the engine vibrate / Wind is cold against her cheeks / The roughness of the road / Rocks the car that is her cradle / The throb of the engine / The jolt of the road / Shakes her whole body / The mass of common folk / Are but a flock / She is the warrior queen of Montparnasse / In her golden chariot / Alice heads to the mountains / Alice heads to the ocean / Alice heads to oblivion / Alice heads to ecstasy / When the car stops / Alice has multiplied / Everything is now possible / Alice is infinite / Alice is omnipresent /

#1.7

Gimme that old time dancing / Gimme that old time beat / Gimme that old time prancing / Move those old time feet / (rept. slower and slower) /

#1.8

Alice is alone / The house of / Emak Bakia / Alice finds her peace /

#1.9

Every man is a woman / At one time in the womb / Every woman contains man / All of us contain our opposite / The young contain the old / The old release the young within / Alice contains Jack / Jack secretly lets Alice emerge / This house has many rooms / We must find one to live in / Life is short / Live it, live it well /

#1.10

Waves assault the beach / Waves caress the dunes / White spume of the surf / Cloud foam splash rock pool / Ripples dance over wet sand / Lace about cliff ankles /

We dance in puddles / Oceans dance in us /

Fish deep in ocean / Swim through weed tresses / Mystery wreck on the reef / Silver fish glint in sun / Light ripples on waves / Flashes

blinding eye /

The tides ebb and flow / Surging through our veins /

Waves assault cliff ankles / Waves caress rock pool / White spume
over wet sand / Cloud foam the beach / Ripples dance of the surf /
Lace about the beach /

Said we are mostly water /

Fish deep on the reef / Swim through blinding eye / Mystery wreck
in sun / Silver fish weed tresses / Light ripples in ocean / Flashes
glint on the reef /

Rise and fall beneath the moon /

#1.11

Axis mundy / Maxis undy / Tottem / Temtoe / Tomtee / World tree
/ we trol / Daxis Muny / Yaxis Dunmy / Metot / Metot / Metot /
Yggdrasil /

#1.12

Bba – Bba – Bba – Bba / T t t t t t / Ge ge tuooooo / Na nan a na / G
g g g g g / Ethalu ethalu /

Bi (slap) bi (slap) bi (slap) / Ge wa wa wa / Ooooooooooth /

#1.13

As constellations / Filled with rarest elements / We are universe /

#1.14

Alice is cello / Tunes are waiting to be played / Music is her blood /

#2.1

Running limbs of a metal beast / The engineer is unconcerned / To inflict revenge upon captors / Pistons pump into darkness / Crossing a limitless plain / Cog teeth chomp time into fractions / Darkness grease upon chrome / Machine clangs unexpectedly / Light refraction rainbow it rages / Of coal burns flames dancing / Beneath the city yearns to escape / It still runs somewhere a belly /

Light refraction rainbows yearn to escape / The engineer is unconcerned / To inflict revenge upon captors / Machine clangs unexpectedly / Darkness grease flames dancing / It still runs somewhere into darkness / Pistons pump a belly / Cog teeth chomp time into fractions / Crossing a limitless plain / Beneath the city it rages / Running limbs of a metal beast / Of coal burns upon chrome /

#2.2 & 2.3

Wake Alice wake to the world / You are the jewel of Paris / Queen of Montparnasse / Artists are waiting for you / Their paint is drying on the palette /

Edges catching light facets refracting / Brought forth from deep mines / Jewel of the earth / Cold crystal born of molten rock / Frozen sunbeam caught in mineral trap /

Wake Alice wake to the world / Brushes are losing their hair / Turps fumes makes us drowsy / Fleeting light grows dull / Drapes are hung to stop draughts /

Edges glow translucent petals refracting / Brought forth from dark soil / Jewel of the garden / Cool array born of hard seed / Rainbow

bloom caught in vegetation /

Wake Alice wake to the world / Wine bottles yearn to be opened
/ Cigarettes struggle to be lit / There is bread, onions and cheese /
Wake Alice wake to the world /

#2.4

Millstone grinding aeroplanes / Spoon stirring music / Propeller
powering clock / Record player falling from tree / Earth spinning
with his god / Wheels upon mean gruel / Winged seeds grinding
corn / Millstone powering aeroplane / Spoon upon the road / Hands
upon his god / Winged seeds liberating music / Earth falling from
a tree / Dervish spinning from a tree / Millstone grinding a clock
/ Spoon stirring on its axis / Propeller powering the road / Record
player with his god / Earth rotating music / Wheels falling from
a tree / Hands in communion with his god / Winged seeds power-
ing aeroplane / Dervish liberating music / Millstone upon the road
/ Spoon stirring with his god / Propeller falling from tree / Record
players powering aeroplane / Earth rotating a clock / Wheels upon
his god / Hands falling from a tree / Winged seeds upon a clock /

#3.1

The factory makes the fiction that is money – escape is impossible
they carry the city with them – car carries the prisoner to his place of
daily torture – the buildings of the city weigh down the land – beg-
gars are the victims of the city – we'd all be beggars if the city willed
it – cracks in the pavement offer brief homes to brave weeds – the
dream of the city is for houses everywhere but no homes anywhere –
within his suit Jack's soul has died – he carries a burden – a secret of
his pain – of his struggle – heavy walls hang onto night even though
the sun is overhead – these roads never lead to the countryside –
Jack is trapped while Alice is free

#3.2

Kill the collars but / They rise – starch broken – they rise / To dance
upon winds /

Fed fat upon hopes / Liberated from pupae / White wings in the dark
/

They dance upon winds / White bone corpse fed butterflies / White
wings in the dark /

#3.3

Beams of light escape / Shutter chinks throwing thin path / In garden
at night /

Light attracts brave moths / Immolate upon candle / Suttee sacrifice
/

We no more can know / Heaven than moth battering / Against win-
dow glass /

Thump, thump, thump, flicker / Wings whirl behind thin curtains /
We ignore the sound /

#3.4

Crystal ball dark room / The gypsy peers to find clues / Of truth she
can sell /

The room though is dark / All she sees her own dark eyes / Her
dreams their future /

Crystal ball dark room / The gypsy peers to find clues / Of truth she
can sell /

#3.5

Wake Alice, though / You are more awake / When you dream / Wake
Alice / Wake Alice / Wake Alice / Alice wake / Wake Alice / Alice
wake / WAKE ALICE WAKE /



The Surrealist Mecca for Me – MoMA

by Chris Garcia

I love MoMA. Whenever I go to New York, I visit MoMA, and I pay my respects to the POP and AbEx artists and their leavings hanging on the gallery walls. Though I am much more into those later decades of the 20th Century, I can say that it is the Surrealist works that drew me in to MoMA at first.

I visited MoMA the first time in the early 1990s. It was on a trip in the summer which I had a very good time on. We took the train from Philly to New York and Washington and Baltimore, and at MoMA, I wandered around known next-to-nothing about the place. I don't remember how I got there, but I rounded a corner and there it was – *Persistence of Memory*.

It was tiny. So small.

That's what grabbed me first, and has always stuck with me. When I think of it, I think of it as massive, as dominating a wall, a gallery, a square, a city. It's got to be massive, but as the best of all Surrealist works, it defies what you expect to give you what you need. It was there, on that first visit where I stood less than a foot away staring at the thing, that I noticed the itching. Right at my elbow. An invisible, and incorporeal, ant wandering up my arm. It was a masterpiece, and every stroke measured to bring about the sensation of creamy tactile itchiness.

It was what I walked away with, and what I will always love, but then I turned and saw another work, one that I had not known about, but it truly represents Surrealism to me these days – *Object* by Meret Oppenheim. It is a teacup, a saucer, and a spoon, only they are all covered in fur. Specifically, and I only learned this recently, by hair from the pelt of a Chinese gazelle, a goa. It is a beautiful work, and it was the first Surrealist work specifically purchased for



the MoMA. Meret Oppenheim, called the First Lady of Surrealism, has a massive body of work, but this one is so simple, so thoroughly thought-through that if it were made today it would be a sensation still. It's got a perverse sense of incongruity, that this object, still recognisable as a teacup, would be rendered useless by the addition of the fur, which removes it from the world of use into the world of art object. It's a masterful turn, I think, and one that deserves a lot of contemplation. There's supposedly sexual imagery to it, the idea of the vessel and the fur/hair lining it, though really, it strikes me differently, less as a sexualized object of every day use (and perhaps it's just that I simply don't associate tea-drinking as a primarily-feminine activity) but as a representation that it takes a rejection of everyday use to become an art object, which would stand in stark opposition to the POP art and design items in the collection.

The Lovers by Rene Magritte is really an underappreciated masterpiece at the MoMA. It's a work that does what surrealism was attempting to do the whole time. And when it managed, it blows the mind. *Persistence of Memory* is a great example. But here, what Magritte is doing is combining multiple concepts into a very simple process. The picture's of a man and a woman moments away from a kiss, exactly what you would see on a movie poster in the late 1920s, but their faces are covered in what appears to be canvas.



This has a massive impact on a number of different levels. The first being, it is an obscuring of the face. And in the traditional movie poster thing, the face is what is selling the actor. It's what's selling the movie. It's the beautiful people. But it's been covered from you. So you're being denied what would normally draw you in, except for it's exactly what's drawing you in. It is the subversion of the traditional ideal of the lovers kissing. But there's an aspect to it of violence that came to me the first time I saw it.

Because literally, it looks as if their heads are in hoods, the likes of which you would see on condemned criminals about to be hanged. And this definitely would've been a much more prevalent image in the 1920s than it is today, of course. This idea that when you kill someone knowingly, you obscure their face, so you can't see. And this idea of tying the kiss before dying, for example, of tying death and the markers of sexuality, the kiss, that adds a whole another layer. It's this idea that when you are presenting something obscured, normally you are trying to hide the object while leaving the idea of the object present.

The greatest example of this is Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude. Christo's wrapping of buildings and so forth, that was done specifically to obscure it, but not to hide it. You still knew that it was the Pont Neuf that was wrapped. You still know that it's Snoopy's

Doghouse that's wrapped. You still know that these are two lovers who are about to kiss and have a meaningless kiss. It's a fascinating and beautifully created work, and one of the reasons why Rene Magritte is one of my all-time favorite artists.

Man Ray's films get a lot of attention, as does his photography, but it is one piece that really hits me hard and fast and often and strangely. *Indestructible Object* or *Object to be Destroyed* is one of those works that unnerves and rebuilds your assumptions.



The one at MoMA is a replica, as the 1923 original was, not shockingly destroyed. This is true of many ready-mades, like Fountain by Duchamp, but here the question being posed by the object is not one of whether or not this object is or isn't art, but why the hell would anyone creep us the fuck out like this?

The piece is a metronome, and on the end of the arm is a cut-out image of an eye. Now, it doesn't take a genius to tie this to the image of the eye being sliced in Un Chien Andalou but it also is just creepy. While I've never seen it operate, I'd imagine that the eye, moving unwavering back and forth, would be the single most unnerving thing. I mean, it would never blink, like all paintings, but unlike other paintings, it wouldn't rest. The eye would be constantly moving, challenging the viewer to meet it. and thus, whoa Creepy!

It is slightly less creepy than Marcel Jean's *Specter of the Garden*. That statue of a head with zippers for its eyes is terrifying, and even though you can make a thousand intellectual points using it, about how it could speak towards art viewers zipping their eyes shut to works that challenge them, or people to the ill of the world, or that were all going through lives with our eyes zippered shut because we refuse to see that which scares us. No matter what it's still a punch on a nightmare ticket, first-class.

Joseph Cornell's untitled box, usually called *Bébé Marie* falls in that line as well. It's a baby doll. In a box. With a bunch of branches. Peering out. Looking at you. Unblinking, but feeling like at any second it could, should blink. Shudder.

There are some lovely Frida Kahlo pieces in MoMA, and the *Self-Portrait with Short Cropped Hair* seems to harken back to many of the ideas of Oppenheims cup. There is hair all across the floor, and it gives that itchy feeling again. It's her stare, though, that makes the work that much more powerful. She doesn't care that the hair is everywhere; it's off of her, and thus it is no longer of her. It is a painting that feels like a letting go, a freedom, but also, she's trapped in that chair, nowhere to step. A fascinating piece.

MoMA is almost certainly the greatest place in the world, and almost certainly the greatest collection of Surrealism anywhere. I love it so, and can't wait to get back there... someday.





