

CURRICULUM CHECKLIST

SUBJECT AREAS

- Visual arts
- Media

By the end of Year 10, students will:

1. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- consider the ideas that informed the sculpture and photography of the surrealist artists
- explore the ways that ideas about the subconscious mind are represented in surrealist art.

2. INVESTIGATING

- analyse the ways surrealist artists used specific techniques to create their art.

3. APPRAISING AND RESPONDING

- analyse the relationship between audience, subject matter, purpose and text
- synthesise information to provide an understanding of the role of artists and their function within a socio-cultural context
- consider the relevance of the issues presented in an art historical context.

4. MAKING AND PRESENTING

- research by observing, collecting, compiling and recording visual, verbal and sensory information and ideas from a variety of sources and contexts
- use of visual documentation to develop images and objects from visual, verbal and tactile stimuli.

5. REFLECTING

- use visual language and expression to justify responses, reflect on their own learning, apply new understandings and make connections to inform future visual art experiences (for example, demonstrating a progression of ideas in visual arts diaries).

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This educational resource was developed by Melina Mallos and Caitlin Pijpers (Access, Education and Regional Services, 2011)

FOR THE CLASSROOM

PRE-VISIT: INTRODUCING THE SURREALISTS

1. Undertake a general discussion about the Surrealism movement and the key elements found in surrealist art work.
 - *How do the surrealists juxtapose reality and fantasy?*
2. Consider the hyper-reality associated with Surrealism – i.e. the interior world is more real than the real world. Using examples of TV reality shows, such as *Jersey Shore* and *MasterChef*, convey how these programs are not 'real life', but a scripted version of reality.

Introduce photography in the exhibition:

- *How can a photograph tell a story?*
- *How can the medium of photography depict reality as well as creating fiction? Where is the line drawn between reality and fiction?*

POST-VISIT: THINKING LIKE THE SURREALISTS

Surrealist inspired black-and-white photography

- Students take two or three photographs (of a bland landscape scene, a portrait of a friend, and an obscured image of a toy or an animal).
- Download the images to a computer. Using Photoshop:
 - Remove any colour from the images.
 - Use the landscape image as a background – the students may wish to flip the image or slightly skew the image (NB: The image still needs to look real to a degree).
 - Cut out the portrait of the friend and add it to the background – the size of this image may need to be altered slightly.
 - An effect could be added to the portrait (e.g. their mouth removed, hair changed, ears enlarged).
 - Lastly, combine the obscure object into the composition.
 - Your students may wish to add a sepia tone or manipulate the dark/light contrast tones of the image.

Create your own surrealist sculpture!

- Students are to find a glass jar with a lid.
- Collect five small everyday objects that will fit in the jar (these objects need to relate to your life – these objects need to be important in your life, but ones that are often overlooked – for example, plastic bread tie, bus ticket, lucky charm, shoelace, belt buckle).
- *How could you change these items, so that they look different, but remain recognisable?* For example, you could cover them with fabric, paint them a different colour.
- Arrange the items in the jar – *the items could be glued into place on the lid to make a surreal scene, or you could fill the jar with water so they float around, like the unconscious thoughts in our minds.*

GALLERY OF MODERN ART, BRISBANE

SURREALISM

THE POETRY OF DREAMS

SECONDARY TEACHER NOTES

DORA MAAR / VICTOR BRAUNER



This education resource focuses on artists Dora Maar and Victor Brauner and invites secondary students to consider how the surrealists imagined the human condition through:

- photography (including collage, montage, solarisation and 'rayographs')
- sculpture

Surrealism was one of the most important art movements of the twentieth century. Surrealist artists tried to release the creative power of the subconscious mind, creating images in which the familiar meets the unexpected.

At the 'International Surrealist Exhibition', New Burlington Gallery, London, 1936: back row, from left, Rupert Lee, Ruthven Todd, Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, ELT Mesens, George Reavey and Hugh Sykes-Davies; front row, from left, Diana Lee, Nusch Éluard, Eileen Agar, Sheila Legge and unknown / Photograph: unknown / © Evening Standard/Getty Images

DORA MAAR

In the 1930s, French artist Dora Maar (1907–97) became closely affiliated with the surrealists through her involvement with activist groups such as Appel à la lutte, Masses and Contre-attaque. She quickly became the unofficial photographer of the city's avant-garde, capturing iconic images of contemporary literary and artistic figures, including Jacques Prévert, Yves Tanguy, André Breton, Paul Éluard, and his wife, Nusch. Maar was experimenting with photomontage and her major pieces of the period reveal some of the defining elements of Surrealism, including distorted perspective, anthropomorphic figures and obscure juxtapositions of the contemporary and the mythic.

Right: Dora Maar c.1955 / Photograph: Michel Sima / Courtesy: Getty Images

Below: Dora Maar / *Le simulateur (The pretender)* c.1936 / Gelatin silver print from celluloid negative, heightened with crayon / 29.5 x 23.5cm / Purchased 2004 / TEX 2004-164 (26N) / © Collection Centre Pompidou, Dist. RMN / Guy Carrard / © Dora Maar/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011



Dora Maar's *Le simulateur* 1936 is one of her most complex and fantastic compositions, touching on some of the major themes of her career. She created the image by combining a photograph of a vaulted corridor, deliberately turned upside down, with a photograph of a boy; Maar then rephotographed the collage. The resulting image portrays a surreal, dungeon-like netherworld suggesting the unconscious — the realm of desire and torment that so fascinated the surrealists.

The beastly and unnatural arch of the boy's back, which simulates the curve of the 'floor' below, defies the laws of both gravity and decent behaviour. Maar has also scratched out the boy's eyes, leaving him blind and bereft of the usual gateway between perception and consciousness. His loss of sight could be interpreted as a disability or punishment for the horrors he has witnessed, but in this topsy-turvy underworld, we imagine that eyesight might be more hindrance than help in navigating the deeper reaches of consciousness. It might also signify liberation from repressive external forces and a return to primal reverie.

SCULPTURE

From the mid 1930s, with the encouragement of Salvador Dalí, several surrealists began to create sculptural objects. The shift towards the constructed object was driven by the need to engage directly with the material world — the world of objects and commerce. It was felt the surrealist object could represent the complexities and contradictions of modern life. A basic opposition was proposed by these works — new meanings were forced through bizarre juxtapositions alluding to subjective dreams or desires. The surrealists recognised the necessity of using everyday materials in unprecedented and provocative ways to explore the uncanny and the uncontrollable.

VICTOR BRAUNER

Victor Brauner (1903–66) was born in Romania. He studied at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, from which he was expelled since his works were deemed scandalous. From 1924 until the end of the decade, he was an active participant in the Romanian capital's avant-garde, which was aligned to Dada. After discovering Giorgio De Chirico's work on his first trip to Paris, he took up figurative painting, staging scenes with figures of fantastic animals. In 1930, he settled in France, joining his compatriot Constantin Brancusi; it was through Brancusi that he met the surrealists.

Loup-table 1939/1947 is a quintessentially surrealist object; it suggests images that are paradoxical and conjures a number of prevailing fears and desires. The object conflates ideas of domesticity with the savagery of a wild animal — the table that makes up the body of the beast also serves as its trap. The animal is frozen in a howl, 'screaming over its shoulder at death and displaying proudly a bulging scrotum', as André Breton wrote in his 1946 essay 'Entre chien et loup'. Seemingly devouring itself, the animal is biting at its own tail in an act of frenzied self-destruction.

The dual forces of eros and thanatos — of sexual desire and the death drive — are embodied in Brauner's fetishistic sculpture-object. In reality, a fox rather than a wolf (which would undoubtedly have been much harder to procure), the work's title carries overtones of Freud's Wolf-Man (another figure caught in a state of transformation).



According to Breton, Brauner's work in the 1930s, and particularly the motif of the wolf-table, was the 'most lucid testimony' of the anxiety consuming a Europe on the brink of war.



DID YOU KNOW?

'Entre chien et loup', the title of André Breton's essay, translates as 'between dog and wolf', and is a French expression for twilight. Connoting the hazy borderline between the familiar and strange, it literally suggests the difficulty of distinguishing, in the twilight, a dog from a wolf.

Top: Victor Brauner c.1930 / © Man Ray Trust / ADAGP / Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011

Left: Victor Brauner / *Loup-table* (Wolf-table) [1939]/1947 / Wood and taxidermied fox / 54 x 57 x 28.5cm / Gift of Jacqueline Victor-Brauner 1974 / AM 1974-27 / Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris / © Collection Centre Pompidou, Dist. RMN / Philippe Migeat / © Victor Brauner/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011