

# CURRICULUM CHECKLIST

## SUBJECT AREAS

- Visual arts
- Modern History

### 1. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- evaluate how the surrealist artists challenged, reinforced or manipulated ideas, beliefs and meaning through making and displaying art.

### 2. INVESTIGATING

- analyse, interpret and reflect on the surrealists' visual arts practices and techniques (e.g. automatic drawing, stream of consciousness).

### 3. APPRAISING AND RESPONDING

- undertake a critical analysis of surrealist art works, investigating artistic language and expression in direct relation to selected concepts, focuses and media areas
- make informed judgments and justify a position when evaluating a surrealist artist's body of work.

### 4. MAKING AND PRESENTING

- refer to the work of surrealist artists in the development of their ideas and studio projects (e.g. selection of, and approach to, subject matter, technique, use of media, or particular compositional elements in their work)
- interpret and evaluate the meaning of surrealist art works, and deconstruct and reconstruct their intent for a different context and purpose.

### 5. REFLECTING

- critically reflect on meanings, purposes and approaches of the surrealists
- apply new understandings and justify future applications of surrealist techniques (e.g. style, function, audience and purpose).

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All art works are from the Collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

# FOR THE CLASSROOM

## PRE-VISIT: INTRODUCING THE SURREALISTS

The surrealists challenged orthodox views on nature, reality, morality and beauty. They were dedicated to social and artistic freedom, an art of the instincts, and the power of the unconscious.

The surrealists used dream journals to make sense of their ideas. Sketching in a barely awakened state, they communicated what their subconscious yearned to say.

- Ask your students to record their dreams for a week in a journal.
- After a week, ask them to read the journal to understand why they are dreaming about certain things. *Is there a meaning behind their dreams? Is their subconscious mind trying to tell them something?*

The surrealists used the Minotaur as a metaphor in many of their art works. Research:

- Greek mythology and the meaning of the Minotaur
- André Mason's experience of the World War One and reasons why the Minotaur was a fitting metaphor in his work *Le labyrinthe* 1938.

## POST-VISIT: THINKING LIKE THE SURREALISTS

Discuss with your class:

- *What ethical, aesthetic and political aspects of Surrealism are relevant to art in the twenty-first century? What is the nature of the surrealist impulse in contemporary art and design?*
- *Does this influence your own art research and practice? Explain your reasons.*

## Analysing art works

Ask your students to think back to their visit to the exhibition. *Who was their favourite artist? What was memorable about their favourite art work created by this artist?*

Ask your students to write a paragraph using these prompts.

- *What does it look like?* (i.e. describe the kind of scene and what objects are included)
- *What is the artist trying to say with this art work?*
- *What symbols are included?*
- *Is there a specific mood or feeling embodied by the art work?*
- *How does the art work make you feel? Do you think this is intentional by the artist?*

## Art making: Creating an automatic sand drawing

André Masson used sand to produce images that merged organic forms with symbolic content. The technique, in which glue and sand were freely applied to a canvas and then reworked, was a painterly equivalent to the graphic automatism of his drawings.

Ask your students to research Masson's sand drawing technique and create their own image.

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

GALLERY OF MODERN ART, BRISBANE

# SURREALISM

THE POETRY OF DREAMS

SENIOR TEACHER NOTES

ANDRÉ MASSON / DOROTHEA TANNING



This education resource focuses on two of the Surrealist artists in the exhibition and aims to guide students in the following areas:

- illustrating and unlocking the unconscious mind
- symbolism and mythology
- metaphors used in text and art

Heavily influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, the surrealists aimed to merge the dream world of the unconscious mind with the rational everyday nature of the conscious mind.

'Artists need to allow an element of automatism — that is to say totally free inspiration — without which there can be no art, no progress in art, nor progress of the mind. The mind, moving by itself and for itself, progressively recording its encounters, that is where the secret of modern art lies.'

The surrealists, Paris, c.1930. From left: Tristan Tzara, Paul Éluard, André Breton, Jean Arp, Salvador Dalí, Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, René Crevel, Man Ray / Photograph: Man Ray / © Man Ray Trust/ ADAGP, Paris

Charles Estienne, 'Surrealism and painting at the Venice Biennale', *Combat-Art*, no.8, 1954

# ANDRÉ MASSON

French artist André Masson (1896–87) started studying at the age of 11 at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts et l'École des Arts Décoratifs in Brussels. He then went on to study at the École des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, from 1912 to 1913. Masson served in the French infantry and was badly wounded in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The experience of war had a profound effect on him and his art.

Recurrent themes of mythology, sexual energy, death and transformation underpinned Masson's practice. He developed a method of making drawings free of conscious control, which provided a graphic equivalent to André Breton's and Philippe Soupault's experiments in automatic writing. Masson's drawings were made rapidly, while in a trance-like state. Automatism was his continuing methodology, but colour and design were also important elements in his work.



The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur provided the theme for numerous paintings and drawings created by Masson. It also led the artist back to a form of automatism, in which the unity of the human and natural worlds is achieved through the process of drawing itself. In the Greek myth, the Minotaur was a symbol of darkness and the loss of reason. The half-man, half-bull was kept in a labyrinth on the island of Crete by King Minos, with seven Athenian youths and seven maidens regularly sacrificed to the ferocious creature.

In Masson's 1938 painting *Le labyrinthe*, an inversion has taken place. The labyrinth has been absorbed by the Minotaur, becoming an internal structure of architectural complexity occupying the place where skeleton and organs would normally be. The hybrid and monstrous Minotaur literally embodies a maze of passages and diversions, uniting the cerebral and the instinctual, or the physical self and unconscious, libidinal drives. Masson foregrounds sexuality and death as inseparable and constitutive aspects of human behaviour. Parts of the Minotaur's anatomy have taken on the form of fish, feathers, leaves and webs, suggesting Masson's abiding interest in the natural world, which became more pronounced following his travel to the United States in 1941.

Top: **André Masson** at his retrospective exhibition at the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, 1965 / Photograph: Keystone-France / Collection: Gamma-Keystone / Image courtesy: Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

Left: **André Masson** / *Le labyrinthe* 1938 / Oil on canvas / 120 x 61cm / Gift of Basil and Elisa Goulandris 1982 / AM 1982-46 / Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris / © André Masson/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011

# DOROTHEA TANNING

One of only three living artists to be included in 'Surrealism: The Poetry of Dreams', Dorothea Tanning (Galesburg, Illinois, b.1910) became famous in the early 1940s for her sexually charged, dreamlike paintings of children and adolescent girls in claustrophobic domestic settings. These works, influenced by other surrealist painters including René Magritte, Max Ernst and Pierre Roy, have since become some of Surrealism's most iconic images.

Tanning studied at the school of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1932, but joined the surrealist cause after moving to New York and seeing the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism' in 1936-37. She later wrote: 'Here is the infinitely faceted world I must have been waiting for'.<sup>1</sup>

In late 1942, she met fellow surrealist Max Ernst (then married to art collector Peggy Guggenheim); Ernst and Tanning would be together for 34 years. By 1956, the couple had chosen to live and work in France. She had explored psychic dramas in paintings set in wide empty deserts, as well as large, more simplified, semi-abstract paintings. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Tanning made a number of three-dimensional stuffed fabric works that expanded on the earlier forms of surrealist objects, disquieting and charged with sexual energy. Ernst passed away in 1976 and Tanning soon after returned to the United States, giving in to her longstanding desire to become a writer. Tanning is still a writer living in New York City.

Dorothea Tanning's move from painting to the creation of soft sculptures came from an artistic urge to see the nameless characters and ideas of her imagination expressed in sculptural form: 'I thought of woven material as a means; naturally, because I have always felt its innate beauty and magnetism and above all its possibilities'.<sup>2</sup>



*Chambre 202, Hôtel du Pavot 1970* has been exhibited in various locations over many years, but, generally, the work contains the same elements, albeit installed in slightly different variations. With considerable force, the work reveals the 'surrealist universe' Tanning continued to imagine in the late 1960s. The 'domestic' language of the work, with its use of wallpaper and fabric, perhaps recalls the artist's childhood in Galesburg, Illinois: Tanning once remarked that this was a place 'where nothing happens but the wallpaper'.<sup>3</sup> Employing two recurring themes of Surrealism, mannequins and *poupées* (dolls), *Chambre 202, Hôtel du Pavot* creates a new morphology of desire and anxiety, inspired by Pop art, the 'soft sculptures' of Claes Oldenburg and the claustrophobic constructed interiors of Ed and Nancy Kienholz.

1. From interview with Monique Levi-Strauss, 'Dorothea Tanning: Soft Sculptures', *American Fabrics and Fashions* 108 (Fall 1976), p. 69.
2. *ibid.*
3. Jennifer Mundy, 'Quiet mystery', *Tate Magazine*, no.6, July-August 2003.



Top: Dorothea Tanning and Max Ernst / Photograph: Claude Huston / Collection: Time & Life Images / Image courtesy: Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

Left: Dorothea Tanning / *Chambre 202, Hôtel du Pavot* (Room 202, Hôtel du Pavot) 1970 | Wood, fabric, wool, paper, paint, carpet, light bulbs, wallpaper, imitation wood panel | Installed dimensions variable | Purchased 1977 | Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris © Dorothea Tanning/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011