

GALLERY OF MODERN ART, BRISBANE

SURREALISM

THE POETRY OF DREAMS

PRIMARY TEACHER NOTES

MAX ERNST / JOAN MIRÓ



This education resource focuses on Max Ernst and Joan Miró and explores the techniques they used:

- Exquisite Corpse
- automatic drawing
- frottage

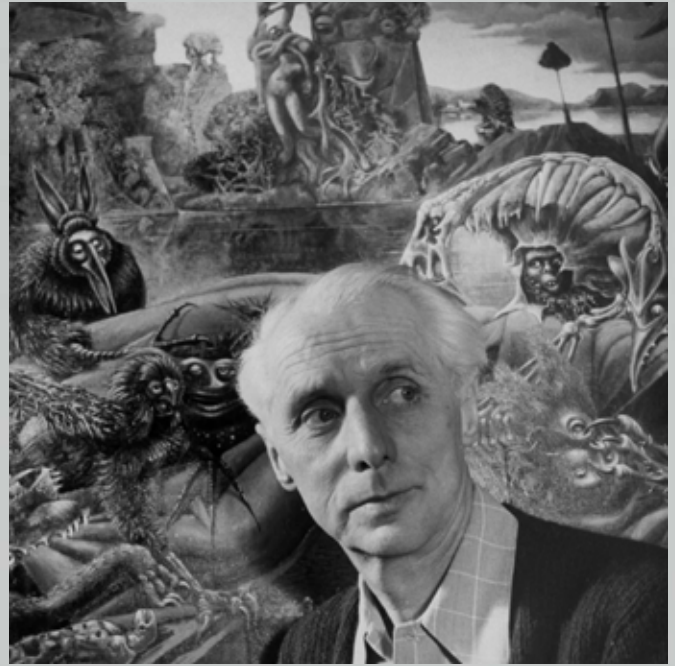
Surrealism was one of the most important art movements of the twentieth century. Surrealist artists tried to release the creative power of the subconscious mind, creating images in which the familiar meets the unexpected.

MAX ERNST

Prolific German artist Max Ernst (1891–1976) had a tendency to defy authority due to his strict upbringing. His father's interest in painting and sketching in nature influenced him to take up painting himself.

Ernst studied philosophy and art history at the University of Bonn between 1909 and 1912. After serving in World War One, Ernst formed a Dada group in Cologne with Jean Arp and Johannes Theodor Baargeld. He began to create collages around 1918, which were then presented in an exhibition organised by Surrealism's founder André Breton in Paris in 1921. This exhibition initiated the aesthetic foundations of the future surrealist group.

Ernst experimented with new techniques in the context of this young artistic movement. Increasingly, his paintings showed a preoccupation with Freudian ideas and the images of dreams. The works also began to increase in scale. His experimentation assisted in defining the focus for Surrealism — on the poetic imagination and the unconscious — signalling a break from Dada.



Created in 1923, *Ubu Emperor (Emperor Ubu)* instantly marked Ernst's entry into the sphere of Surrealism. This art work demonstrates the uncanny effects arising from chance combinations of elements, a characteristic of the artist's collages.

Ubu is a metaphor for the modern man, a ridiculous and grotesque caricature of authority invented by the writer Alfred Jarry in 1896 for his scandalous play *Ubu Roi*.

Ubu appears in Ernst's painting as a mechanical spinning top with hands arrayed in a gesture of surprise.

The power of the art work lies in the unified image, which is invested with the capacity to disturb through the observation of its individual elements: the tip of the spinning top, the red hulk with wire armature showing through, and the human hands expressing surprise.

Ernst's conscious exploration of chance, dreams and memory in his collages and paintings of the early 1920s provided an ideal point of reference for Breton to address the importance of surrealist painting in later issues of *La Révolution surréaliste*. Twelve issues were published between 1924 and 1929.

Top: **Max Ernst** with his painting *The Temptation of St Anthony*, 1946 / Photograph: Claude Huston / Collection: Time & Life Images / Image courtesy: Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

Above: **Max Ernst** / *Ubu Emperor (Emperor Ubu)* 1923 / Oil on canvas / 81 x 65cm / Gift of the Fondation pour la Recherche Médicale in memory of Hélène Anavi, 1984 / AM 1984-281 / Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris / © Collection Centre Pompidou, Dist. RMN / Philippe Migeat © Max Ernst/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011

JOAN MIRÓ

Joan Miró (1893–1983), a native of Barcelona, was very proud of his Catalan culture. As an artist, he wanted to depict the images he saw in his mind as well as those he saw with his eyes. He was able to use the power of his imagination to transform reality, and he depicted this in his art works.

Miró used automatic drawing as a way to challenge traditional approaches to painting. He used a diverse range of media, including painting, sculpture, printmaking and theatre design.

The childlike nature of Miró's works reflects his exploration of the subconscious mind. His works are a manifestation of Catalan pride; he was attracted to the two-dimensional shapes in Catalan folk art and used the same flat shapes in his own works.



Between 1925 and 1927, Joan Miró produced an extraordinary group of canvases, often referred to as 'magnetic fields'. Included in this group is *Peinture (Painting)*, which displays a spare monochromatic ground and simple, often whimsical, biomorphic shapes, characteristic of the series. The hallucinatory quality of these canvases (which was perhaps also due to mental strain, lack of food, and an almost fantastical preoccupation with his art) makes them some of the most surreal works ever produced by Miró.



Top: Portrait of **Joan Miró**, New York, 27 August 1947; the mural in the background was painted for a Gordon Bunschaft-designed hotel in Cincinnati / Photograph: Arnold Newman / Getty Images

Above: **Joan Miró** / *Peinture (Painting)* 1927 / Oil on canvas / 116 x 89cm / Dation 1994 / AM 1994-136 / Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris / © Succession Miró/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011

Right: **Joan Miró** / *Peinture (Painting)* 1927 / Oil on canvas / 89 x 116cm / Bequest of Mr Maurice Meunier 1955 / AM 3294 P / Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris / © Succession Miró/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2011

CURRICULUM CHECKLIST

SUBJECT AREAS

- Visual arts
- English

CURRICULUM CHECKLIST (Essential Learnings by the end of Year 7)

Invite primary school students to identify the ways the surrealists used their imagination to comment on the subconscious.

1. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- explore the techniques the surrealists invented to make art: (a) Exquisite Corpse (b) automatic drawing and (c) frottage

2. INVESTIGATING

- the use of metaphors and symbols employed in the surrealists' art

3. APPRAISING AND RESPONDING

- evaluate the social, cultural and historical conditions, as well as the spiritual philosophies, which stimulated the surrealists to create their art, art elements and language

4. MAKING AND PRESENTING

- reinterpret the surrealists' ideas to invent new images and objects relating to their personal perspective

5. REFLECTING

- reflect on the surrealists' techniques for making art and apply these new understandings to future art-making activities.

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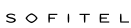
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All art works are from the Collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

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

The surrealists created art works that explored the human subconscious. They used games and activities in order to let go of their rational conscious mind and access their unconscious mind.

1. Ask your students to write down everything that comes into their minds as quickly as possible without lifting the pen from the paper for any length of time. The surrealists called this technique automatic drawing.
 - *What strange ideas have emerged from your inner mind?*
2. A student calls out the name of an object and another student responds by saying the first item that comes into their mind when they think of this object. Some examples: car, grass, shoe, strawberry, etc.
 - *What strange combinations have emerged?*

POST-VISIT: THINKING LIKE THE SURREALISTS

As a class, compose an email to send to the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) about your visit to the Surrealism exhibition.

Ask your students to draft an email which considers the following questions:

- *Why is it important to learn about Surrealism?*
- *Why was it worthwhile to visit GoMA to see the exhibition?*
- *What did you enjoy most about your visit?*
- *What new things did you learn about Surrealism?*

Please send your email to this address
edmail@qag.qld.gov.au

Create a class publication based on *La Révolution surréaliste*

Ask your students to create a class publication using the strange combinations created in the pre-visit section.

- Cut out images from magazines and combine these with drawings using the frottage technique as well as other drawings.
- Combine comics, text and the images in the style of artists Max Ernst and Joan Miró.
- Include some crazy jokes and class poems.
- Brainstorm a surrealist title for the magazine.



La Révolution surréaliste / December, 1924 / James C Sourris Collection / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery Research Library / Photograph: Natasha Harth