

René Magritte

SELECTED WRITINGS

Edited by Kathleen Rooney and Eric Plattner

Translated by Jo Levy

René Magritte
Selected Writings

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Translated by Jo Levy

With six pieces translated
by Adam Elgar

Edited by Kathleen Rooney
and Eric Plattner

Preface by Sandra Zalman



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You are far from being the *occasional writer* you claim to be, but you are, in my eyes and in the eyes of many others, a poet who sheds an unforgettable light on himself and his painting.

– Letter from Guy Rosey* to René Magritte,
23rd March 1965

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Key to the Abbreviations in the Annotations

FA.: *Le Fait accompli*

L.S.: *Lettres Surréalistes*

W: bibliography of *René Magritte* by Patrick Waldberg, 1965

La Destination: La Destination: Letters [from Magritte] to Marcel Mariën (1937–1962), 1977

Editors' Note on French Titles

All French titles of Magritte works mentioned in this book can be found in the Index under “Magritte, René”, with their English translations in brackets.

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The Double Agent: A Preface

by Sandra Zalman

When Magritte died, in 1967, the *New York Times* reported: “‘He used to call himself a secret agent,’ one of the artist’s friends recalled yesterday. ‘By that I suppose he meant to allude to the contrast between his appearance and his reality. He looked like a small-town banker, but under the banker’s innocent allures Magritte was a very revolutionary personality.’” This contrast between Magritte’s famously bourgeois appearance and his lifelong devotion to undermining those same bourgeois principles lies at the heart of Magritte’s visual and, as evidenced in this volume, literary enterprise. Despite his outward commitment to normalcy – not only in his appearance but in his schedule of painting in the afternoons at home in suburban Brussels – Magritte was a canny purveyor of the subversive ideas associated with Surrealism.

Magritte first encountered Surrealism by proxy – a friend showed him a reproduction of Giorgio de Chirico’s *Song of Love* (1914, now in MoMA’s collection), which inspired him to move away from his previous artistic experiments and towards Surrealism – influenced by the ideas of Marx and Freud – exploring the liberation of thought, embracing the irrational and expressing the poetic through disjunction and disruption.

As Magritte discovered Surrealism, so too did the Surrealists discover Magritte, initially through the writings of Paul Nougé,* whose journal *Correspondences* began circulating in Paris in 1924 (the same year that André Breton founded Surrealism and began publishing *The Surrealist Revolution*). The French Surrealists were so taken with these writings that Breton and Paul Éluard travelled to Brussels to ask that the Belgian writers add their signatures to their tract, *The Revolution First and Always*, denouncing the French war with Morocco. When Magritte met Nougé the following year, it was their mutual political interests that formed the basis for friendship, collaboration and the foundation of the Belgian Surrealist group around 1925, which would include Camille Goemans, E.L.T. Mesens, Louis Scutenaire and Marcel Lecomte.*

Like the French Surrealists, the Belgian group was also dominated by writers, and as such it makes sense that many of Magritte’s published texts are co-authored with his friends. The Belgian Surrealists collaborated in

other ways too – some wrote essays about Magritte, while Magritte often illustrated their tracts or did layout design for journals. The numerous journals produced by both the French and Belgian Surrealists were a key form of artistic production, as well as communication between and amongst the groups. Several of Magritte’s paintings are included in major Surrealist articles and other texts. For example, Magritte’s *The Rape* was featured on the cover of Breton’s book *What is Surrealism?* in 1934. The visual and the verbal were fluid means of communication, constantly inflecting and slipping into each other.

One tenacious thread throughout many of these writings that has not been foregrounded by critics is Magritte’s commitment to Marxism. These ideas are what drew the French Surrealists to the Belgian group. In lectures, treatises and exhibition statements, Magritte continued to affirm the absurdity of capitalism and explored Marxism as an alternative.

This was a common Surrealist attitude. As Magritte puts it bluntly in ‘Lifeline’, a public lecture he gave in 1938, translated in this volume: “We met the Surrealists, who were violently demonstrating their disgust of bourgeois society. Their revolutionary claims being ours, we joined them in the service of proletarian revolution.” In 1939, he and Scutenaire co-wrote the tract ‘Bourgeois Art’, denouncing capitalist hypocrisy for always refusing to recognize a thing for what it is. It seems likely that these ideas are at the root of the games Magritte plays in his paintings – wherein objects become weightless, shapeless, negated, depleted, freely exchanged and interchanged – to allude to a world of values turned upside down.

‘Life Line’ also provides many autobiographical details. These particulars would become tropes that informed criticism throughout his career: his youthful amusements in a cemetery, his mother’s suicide and her body’s soggy recovery from the Sambre River, his turn towards painting as a way to explore object relations and his occasional inspiration from dreams. Yet, for the most part, Magritte maintained that his works derived not from dreams but from the mystery of the everyday, disrupting assumed conventions.

Magritte had his first one-person exhibition in Brussels in 1927, in which he displayed his new turn towards Surrealism. Particularly we see him toying with sexuality and violence in almost clinical terms. Surrealist themes infiltrated his advertising work as well, which he continued alongside his avant-garde pursuits. In many ways this confluence makes sense, since the shock of Surrealism – intended to wake people from their complacency – was also readily recognized by the advertising industry as a marketable visual strategy.

Since this is a volume of Magritte in translation, it seems appropriate to think about how Magritte’s work made its way beyond his immediate

circles in Belgium and France, and on its own terms – especially in the United States. Indeed, it was via advertising that American audiences first became familiar with Magritte, as his work was readily appropriated in ads by corporations ranging from Ford Motor Company to CBS. (Perhaps this was not surprising given Magritte’s own work as a commercial designer.)

In the US, Magritte received his first solo exhibition in 1936 at Julien Levy’s gallery, an accomplishment he would not achieve in Paris (much to his chagrin) until 1948. But his work was initially considered by American critics to be rather banal – Surrealist one-liners not able to compete visually with the psychological intrigue or academic virtuosity of his fellow Surrealist Salvador Dalí. While Magritte showed consistently, if unremarkably, in New York, his fame grew in Europe, and he received his first museum retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts in Belgium in 1954. Coincidentally, 1954 also marked Magritte’s first major retrospective in the US, at Sidney Janis’s gallery in New York.

Janis’s show – *Word vs Image* – was the first time that Magritte’s now iconic *The Treachery of Images*, with its famous renunciation, “*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*”, was shown in the US – and along with it, its first reproduction in the American press (accompanying a positive review by Robert Rosenblum). The exhibition – which took its title from Magritte’s illustrated essay ‘Words and Images’, originally published in 1929 in *The Surrealist Revolution* and translated in this volume – was initially considered a failure by Janis, since he only managed to sell one work; however, it was at Janis’s gallery that a younger generation of artists, including Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, became better acquainted with Magritte’s oeuvre, later acquiring works by him. Magritte pointed the way for painting to move beyond formal concerns and (re)insert itself into everyday life.

Moreover, in disavowing the singularity of painting, Magritte also undermined one of the myths fundamental to modernist aesthetics. For Magritte, it was the thought that was most important – not necessarily its formal qualities. As he declared often, “For me, a reproduction is enough! Like in literature, you don’t need to see a writer’s manuscript to be interested in his book!” Instead of precious objects, Magritte considered his paintings philosophical: “It’s not a question of painting, but of thinking.” When the French philosopher Michel Foucault published *The Order of Things* (1966), Magritte read it eagerly. Foucault reciprocated the admiration, later publishing an extended meditation on Magritte and the nature of representation (*This Is Not a Pipe*, 1983).

In 1965, Magritte travelled to the US for the first time to attend the opening of his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, an exhibition that toured to multiple venues across the country in 1966.

Posing for photos in his bowler hat and suit, Magritte and his paintings were featured on the pages of such popular magazines as *Life* and *Esquire*, and critical reviews immediately compared his work to the new saturated reality of the pop artists.

With the rise of pop art in the 1960s, Magritte was often asked about his works' newfound status as a precedent for pop, an affiliation he repeatedly disowned. As he declared in an interview, "I notice that real avant-garde art has always been badly received, whereas fake avant-garde art is enormously successful. Pop art lacks the authenticity that would give it the power to be provocative". For Magritte, the pop artists' commercial success belied their avant-garde claims, and he was deeply ambivalent about his own belated recognition on those terms. But it was largely because of pop art that Magritte finally received the international critical attention he had so long sought.

In part, Magritte dismissed pop because he did not recognize its socio-political critique of consumption, perhaps because of its deceptively conformist packaging. Magritte's paintings are more overt in demonstrating the breakdown of object relations and the disquieting worldview that the bourgeoisie creates. In a letter to the Communist Party, Magritte asserted: "The only way that poets and painters can fight against the bourgeois economy is to give their works precisely that content which challenges the bourgeois ideological values propping up the bourgeois economy." And yet, at least outwardly, one had to play by the rules. This is why Magritte is more than a secret agent – he is a double agent. He worked in the space between visual and verbal, painting and poetry, mysterious and banal, popular and avant-garde. He fought against bourgeois culture, but offered the most beguiling images of it.

The Alphabet of Revelations: An Introduction to René Magritte's *Selected Writings*

by Kathleen Rooney

When he was young, René Magritte tried his hand at being an author, drafting detective novels as “Renghis”, a pseudonym created through the combination of his first and middle names: “René” and “Ghislain”.

And then, as everyone knows, he went on to become a world-renowned painter, not a mystery writer. Yet he remained a passionate lifelong reader, and many of his images have titles taken from various books, including *Alice au pays des merveilles* after Lewis Carroll, *L’Au-delà* after François Grégoire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *La Géante* after Charles Baudelaire, *Gaspard de la Nuit* after Aloysius Bertrand, *L’Île au trésor* after Robert Louis Stevenson, *Le Château des Pyrénées* after Ann Radcliffe and *Le Domaine d’Arnheim* after his greatest literary hero, Edgar Allan Poe, to name a few.

But as fewer people know, so too did Magritte continue writing, becoming a versatile and genre-jumping author of essays, prose poems, manifestos, polemics, lectures, reviews, film scripts, memoirs, interviews, pamphlets, aphorisms and plays on words and images.

In an interview with Michel Géoris in 1962, Magritte says that, “For me, painting is bringing my thoughts to life. I very much like poets and writers, but I am not a writer, so I think in images, not in novels and poems.” Magritte is technically correct in his self-assessment, of course. He was not a poet per se, nor was he primarily known as a writer, but even he could not deny that he was a painter who wrote, and who wrote compellingly. His written output is both significant in its own right and because his images are so carefully authored themselves. In short, the material here, available now in English for the first time, makes the case for Magritte to be understood not just as a painter but as a literary figure.

The abundant verbal skill on display in his *Selected Writings* likely won’t surprise admirers of Magritte’s paintings, works in which he is witty and ingenious in his concerns with language, semantics and “the use of the word”, as he called several images: *L’Usage de la parole*. Over the course

of his lengthy and prolific career, Magritte executed numerous works – far too many to name here – with text in them. *Le Bouchon d'épouvante* (*The Fright Stopper*), for instance, features one of his signature bowler hats bearing the label “FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY”. *Le Paysage fantôme* (*The Phantom Landscape*) presents a portrait of his wife Georgette’s friend Suzanne Dhout, with the label “*montagne*” (mountain) running diagonally across her cheeks and nose. *Le Paysage isolé* (*The Lonely Landscape*) depicts a man, seen from behind, looking at a vista and with a speech bubble containing the words “*je ne vois rien autour du paysage*” or “I see nothing around the landscape”.

In these works and others, Magritte takes delight in disrupting the purported meanings of words and images, meanings that many people take for granted as being fixed or finite. He playfully yet seriously reminds the viewer not to confuse resemblance or likeness with representation, calling attention to the ambiguities, uneasinesses and even epiphanies that can arise when familiar objects and words are placed in unexpected contexts.

His writings tend to pursue similar aims, and it is important to note that they are not needed to understand the paintings, but are instead stand-alone works, worth reading in their own right. Many of them do add insight to the way that Magritte almost perpetually interrogates linguistic and pictorial systems of representation, but they do so on their own terms and as self-contained pieces.

Throughout his career, spanning over four decades, Magritte investigated again and again not just the distance between images and language, but also between language and images and the things they purport to name or represent. He did so perhaps most famously in the near-ubiquitous *La Trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images*), with its illustration of a pipe and its statement *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (“This is not a pipe”). Magritte dedicated much of his output, both visual and literary, not simply to warning of the treachery of images, but also to warning of the danger of failing truly to look at things, or of trusting in received ideas or abstractions.

On canvas and on paper, he reminds his audiences never to resort to habit or prescribed emotions, but to do and see and feel for themselves. By questioning the everyday, he renders it extraordinary, giving both ordinary and extraordinary things back to viewers and readers.

Fittingly, given his early writings, as well as his affinity for Fantômas, Nat Pinkerton, Nick Carter and other fictional characters like them, Magritte can be understood, both visually and literarily, as a kind of detective, questioning everything commonly presented as reality and empirical truth and looking for clues to reveal what he perceived to be the all-important mysteries of life. In his essay ‘Life Line’, he concludes: “All these hitherto

unknown things that are coming to light suggest to me that our happiness too depends on an enigma associated with man and that our one duty is to try to solve it.”

In the short prose poem ‘Mystery is Not...’ he writes: “Mystery is not one of the possibilities of reality. Mystery is what is absolutely necessary in order for reality to exist.” And that is what, like the paintings, these writings offer: mystery without mystification.

His writings offer insight into the mystery of his images. But even when they appear expressly to address a particular painting – as in the prose poem ‘The Legs of the Sky’, for instance, which could refer to *Les Muscles célestes* (*The Muscles of the Sky*) and ‘A Walk in the River’, which could refer to *Les Habitants du fleuve* (*The Denizens of the River*) – they should not be considered explanations or interpretations. Magritte did not want his work to be reducible to a puzzle to be solved, writing in ‘Life Line’ that “Titles must be an additional protection to discourage all attempts to reduce poetry to a pointless game”. Even more explicitly, he writes in ‘On Titles’ that “The relationship between title and picture is poetic – that is, it only catches some of the object’s characteristics of which we are usually unconscious, but which we sometimes intuit when extraordinary events take place which logic has not yet managed to elucidate”.

In other words, just as a poem cannot be paraphrased, Magritte’s pictures cannot be – and are not here – in any way summed up. Rather, Magritte’s writings stand *equally* as marvellous writerly pieces in their own right *and* as invaluable glimpses into what goes into thinking about images and the visual world to make new artistic creations. In fact, it’s worth noting that he thought of painting as a type of poetry.

In ‘A Poetic Art’, he writes: “The art of painting, as I see it, makes possible the realization of visible poetic images.” And his definition of poetry – as effective a definition as can be found anywhere – is that it must be surprising and enchanting. In the short essay ‘L’Empire des lumières’ – jumping off from his image of the same title in which the landscape on the ground is nocturnal, but the sky is daylit – he writes: “This evocation of day and night seems to me to have the power to surprise and enchant us. I call this power ‘poetry’.” His pictures are certainly full of surprise and enchantment, and so is his writing.

Moreover, Magritte’s writing, like his painting, is neither automatic nor stream-of-consciousness, techniques popular among his fellow Surrealists, particularly early on in the movement. His words, like the objects in his images, are carefully chosen, meticulous and deliberate. In a letter to Volker Kahmen in 1967, Magritte asks the art historian to cut the word “dream” in reference to *Le Domaine d’Arnheim*, because “the dream is *sub*-reality

– that is, there is nothing poetic about it”. In the same letter, Magritte offers his notion of the function of poetry, saying, “Poetry gives a sense of passion to a reality we have found to be inadequate: it is surreality. It is a response to the feeling of universal mystery.”

In his writing, too, he urges his audience not to settle for what they are told is the so-called real world. In his essay ‘Surrealism in the Sunshine’, he argues:

Life is wasted when we make it more terrifying, precisely because it is so easy to do so. It is an easy task because people who are intellectually lazy are convinced that this miserable terror is “the truth”, that this terror is knowledge of the “extra-mental” world. This is an easy way out resulting in a banal explanation of the world as terrifying. Creating enchantment is an effective means of counteracting this depressing, banal habit.

Here and throughout his *Selected Writings*, he reminds readers that they should not resign themselves to a mediocre or terrifying reality, but should instead aspire towards the better, more satisfying and equitable worlds which might be possible.

His belief in the necessity of the creation of enchantment shows that Magritte is not merely a detective, then, but also a magician. He writes in ‘Ariadne’s Thread’:

But if we believe in the *reality* of the poetic act and try to discover its meaning, we find a new direction which instantly leads us away from that sterile region which the mind wears itself out attempting to make fertile. The aim of poetry would then be to discover the secrets of the universe, which would give us power over the elements. Magic would be possible.

This application of poetry – visual and verbal – towards the discovery of secrets is perhaps what causes him so frequently to award the descriptors “poetry” or “poetic” as marks of his highest praise. Of the Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico, an early and lifelong influence, he writes: “This triumphant poetry has replaced the stereotyped effect of traditional painting. It is a complete break with the intellectual habits peculiar to artists who are prisoners of their talent, virtuosity and all petty aesthetic frills. It is a question of a new vision where the viewer rediscovers his isolation and hears the silence of the world.” So important was poetry to Magritte that he sometimes sought help from his friends, particularly the poets Paul Nougé and Louis Scutenaire, on the titles of his images. And in the end, his own writings suggest that Magritte is himself a poet of sorts, not just figuratively or as a term of respect, but truly.

In his polemics and other political writings, Magritte reveals his belief in the power of poetry and painting to change the world, but also his sense of the potential futility in striving to do so. In 'A Letter to the Communist Party of Belgium', he writes: "No one would be bothered about a strike of painters or poets. The only way that poets and painters can fight against the bourgeois economy is to give their works precisely that content which challenges the bourgeois ideological values propping up the bourgeois economy." This critique of sham, conformist values has verbal resonance with his visual language, where, for instance, one possible way of looking at his bowler-hatted man is as a recurring character or protagonist in a bourgeois realm.

In a 1947 interview, Louis Quiévreux* asks Magritte what he is interested in, if not in money, and Magritte replies:

Creating. My only wish is to be enriched by exciting new ideas. For me, art consists in expressing charm and pleasure. Before the war my works reflected anxiety. Experience of conflict and a load of suffering has taught me that what matters above all is to celebrate joy for the eyes and the mind. It is much easier to terrorize than to charm... I live in a very unpleasant world because of its routine ugliness. That's why my painting is a battle, or rather a counter-offensive. The world is so strange. And can we ever know the world?

As critical, argumentative and even philosophical as his writings can sometimes be, Magritte is not so much a philosophical writer. In fact, he frequently voices his disappointment with philosophy, aware of its ever-present potential for failure, given its reliance on arbitrary linguistic structures which can lead to incomprehension. Rather, he is a literary one, dedicated to the literary aims of enchantment, poetry and mystery.

As a painter, Magritte gives his audiences occasions to transform their perceptions of the world. His writing seems directed in similar ways towards the same end: giving his readers the chance to see a familiar world in an unfamiliar light should they choose to do so. In a strange, short essay called 'Another Head at the Back of the Head', he writes: "What we are doing is valuable to the few people who are capable of liking what they like; the others, who like what they ought, don't count." These writings, like his images, stand to give the audience opportunities to differentiate between what they've been told they should admire and what they really do.

Many of these pieces, particularly the prose poems, aphorisms and very brief stories, resist explanation or interpretation, both of which are terms and activities Magritte finds suspect, preferring that his viewers try to see

for themselves what is there; to take the “presence of mind” he says was required to make the work and to allow it to make their own minds more present.

According to his friend Henry Torczyner, Magritte “encouraged the reproduction of his paintings in every medium, mechanical or otherwise, as posters or postcards. Magritte disliked the orthodox, conformist notion of the unique *exemplum*.” It seems appropriate that finally his writings can now, too, be reproduced and disseminated in English – and it’s especially apt that many of these writings are themselves brief enough to fit onto postcards.

It’s hard to say why exactly it has taken so long for Magritte’s extensive writings to become available in English. His *Écrits complets* were published in French by Flammarion in 1979, weighing in at a hefty 764 pages. An English edition of his *Selected Writings*, translated by Jo Levy and edited by John Calder, was originally commissioned in 1987 by Calder Publications, but the book was never released. The translation – complete and in need of some polishing – languished in typewritten manuscript format in the Calder archives in Caen, France. Almost thirty years later, edited by Eric Plattner and myself, here it is.

Thanks to our having seen the Magritte exhibit *The Mystery of the Ordinary: 1926–1938* at the Art Institute of Chicago in the summer of 2014, I became intrigued to learn more about Magritte’s output as a writer, because many of the museum wall texts consisted of quoted material from the artist’s writing. Following the show, I was able to track down the translated manuscript with the help of Alessandro Gallenzi of Alma Books, which took over Calder Publications and its backlist.

Because of the *Selected Writings*’ somewhat unusual route towards publication, I’d like to offer a word about both the means of the book’s selection and its organization, as well as what it consists of and how it can be read. Interestingly, the original contract for the project in the 1980s is for the *Collected Writings*, indicating that Calder may have intended to publish the whole thing before a series of circumstances – a loss of Arts Council funding and a serious medical issue – caused him to reassess his plan. Sadly, because Levy is dead and Calder has no clear recollection of the matter, having discussed it with the translator in person as opposed to in writing, we cannot know for certain the principles by which the two of them made their choices of what to include from the *Collected* in the *Selected*.

By going through both the Flammarion edition and the translation, though, I have been able to notice some patterns. To begin with, this move from *Collected* to *Selected* is arguably a serendipitous one, as the former

version edges close to the category of too much of a good thing, risking overwhelming its readers with its sheer bulk and repetition. Levy and Calder appear to have erred on the side of choosing the most self-contained and substantive pieces from the *Collected* – pieces that are cohesive and not merely ephemeral. Put another way, they seem to have left out pieces that are arguably too slight or redundant to merit inclusion.

In addition to this principle of including the most essential but also varied set of documents, they seem to have opted for pieces that actually were written by – or mostly by – Magritte himself. There are quite a few pieces, especially from his earliest years, where he was collaborating to such an extent with Nougé, Scutenaire and others in his circle that the pieces that Levy and Calder left out might not even have been written, but rather just signed or endorsed by Magritte as part of their collective Surrealist activity. None of this is to say that the *Collected* version is not a valuable document, but rather that the *Selected* provides more than enough material for both the casual fan and the scholar to vastly increase their depth of knowledge about the artist.

Also, Levy and Calder seem to have made a judicious selection of which of Magritte's many interviews – particularly towards the end of his life as his renown was peaking – to include. They left out quite a few, but as is often the case with interviews, Magritte gets asked the same questions in a lot of them, and the *Selected* does not suffer from its lack of this kind of redundancy.

Thus, I can conclude that everything that Levy and Calder included warrants inclusion, and that most of what they left out – though interesting, particularly to Magritte completists – is not needed to make the *Selected* a satisfying and lively document unto itself. That said, we did decide to commission a translator to translate a few of the pieces omitted by Levy and Calder that we felt should be restored, with an eye towards making the selections in the *Selected* the best ones possible.

In terms of organization, the pieces are arranged primarily chronologically, as is the original Flammarion edition, starting in 1922, when Magritte was twenty-three, and continuing until 1967, the year of his death at the age of sixty-eight. We considered reorganizing it as we were beginning to edit it, but decided to preserve the chronological order because this seemed the best means of offering readers and scholars insight as to how Magritte's writing developed alongside his biography and his artistic production. That being said, there is one deliberate exception at the very end, where we swap 'Remarks' – drawn from multiple documents from different time periods – with the essay 'Knowledge of the World' to end on the latter, a more unified and conclusive piece.

In terms of what the pieces themselves consist of, their range and variety are fairly impressive. We opted to group the selections chronologically in part because Magritte's output is so variegated – such a miscellany – that no method of grouping them by type seemed logical, or sufficiently rewarding to balance the diminished opportunity for tracking the evolution of Magritte's ideas and attitudes over time that the historical approach affords.

Anyone who spends time with this selection will see that genres and trends are observable in Magritte's output, but a chronological presentation encourages and invites readers to venture forth and make their own observations – to note, for instance, how throughout his life Magritte maintained many lively correspondences, treating casually in letters matters he treated more formally in his published writing. Or how he used such polemics as 'Pure Art: A Defence of the Aesthetic' in 1922 or his 'Surrealism in the Sunshine' series in 1946–47 to justify what he thought his own work was doing and what he thought art more generally ought to do. Or how he continually collaborated with his circle of friends on small magazines and publications, starting with *391* and *Période* in 1924 and continuing with his friend Paul Colinet's* zine (*avant la lettre*) *Vendredi* in the 1950s and his own idiosyncratic publication *La Carte d'après Nature* in the 1950s and '60s. But perhaps what is most fascinating is how each of his various types of writing interacts with and overlaps into the others, all of them unified by his unique voice – apparent both on the page and in his numerous live interviews – to create a portrait of a mind that is itself uncontained by genre: funny, serious, angry, satiric, contemplative and argumentative, both by turns and simultaneously.

Magritte was ambivalent about the notion of posterity. He says in an interview with Guy Mertens in 1966: "For me the future is the end of the world. Whether my painting is worth more or less in a hundred years, I don't mind. It might merely have a historical value. What is important is that in a hundred years' time, someone finds what I found, but *in a different way.*"

Half a century after his death in 1967, Magritte's works have, if anything, only grown even more instantly recognizable to audiences. On the one hand, this familiarity is a testament to how resonant his painting remains with contemporary viewers; on the other, it risks rendering his work dismissible as something we've already seen. Now, these writings give both Anglophone scholars and casual fans the opportunity to look again at the person behind the paintings, and at the paintings themselves.

Today, in a world which seems bent on deadening its residents with spectacle, kitsch, materialism, exhaustion and countless empty entanglements that insist on their status as the "real" concerns of life, René Magritte remains – in his painting and in his writing – as relevant as ever, reminding

RENÉ MAGRITTE

audiences that there are alternatives, there are mysteries, and that things don't just have to be what they are or have always been. As he reveals the hidden possibilities of the world to us, he reveals himself to be an inimitable detective-magician-painter-writer, offering us the invisible, showing us secrets, and more importantly encouraging us to devise our own ways of searching for these things for ourselves.

The editors would like to acknowledge the work of André Blavier (1922–2001), the editor and compiler of Magritte's *Écrits Complets* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), on which the translations in the present selection are based. This edition has greatly benefited from his knowledge and research.

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Selected Writings

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Pure Art

A Defence of the Aesthetic

To E.L.T. Mesens

"Each thing must be said according to its rhythm."

— Pierre Bourgeois*

Though the existence of gravity is proved by the laws that influence all bodies, what may trigger an aesthetic emotion seems not to exist except in man's imagination, and is created by him out of nothing; so, in order to discover what it is, you have to be a different kind of seeker than the gold-digger: you have to CREATE WHAT YOU ARE SEARCHING FOR; the artist has a natural aptitude for this activity.

The essential aim of the work of art, synonymous with the artist's "discovery-creation", is to trigger the aesthetic sensation in the viewer AUTOMATICALLY.

A work of art, like a house, a lens, a billiard ball or any other product of human activity, must be perfect in order to fulfil its essential function and continue to satisfy the spirit when it is not in use. This perfection will then be the "decorative-spiritual side", which is a result and not an aim. Like any other object, the work of art, in order to achieve the maximum (only relative perfection is possible) must have a distinct character and be uniquely concerned with completely fulfilling its essential function.

ON ARCHITECTURE

*Subtitle of On the Basis of Morality by Arthur Schopenhauer: "Submitted to the jury of the Royal Danish Society of Sciences in Copenhagen, 30th January 1840 and NO PRIZE."**

The essential *raison d'être* of a house is to be a more comfortable dwelling than natural shelters.

The house is necessary; but what is essential is the perfect solution of a problem that has been posed correctly, a pretext for action. A house should

fulfil only its essential function, the only one it can fulfil wholly. Then it will be perfect and continue to satisfy the mind and the spirit.

All objects can achieve this relative perfection. Only works of art achieve it in the realm of aesthetics, which is the essence of what they express.

It is a GREAT MISTAKE to believe that, in order to be perfect, the house must have an additional aim: to trigger aesthetic sensations automatically in the inhabitant or the passer-by. This old preconception must be removed from house-building, as it has disappeared from the building of the best ocean liners, electric and mechanical machines, tools; there was never any question of this in the manufacture of lenses: if half-aesthetic, half-scientific conceptions got in the way, then they would not have the ideal form necessary to fulfil their function; or, for example, in airplane construction, where, because of RISK OF DEATH, builders are obliged to shape the most minute part of the plane according to its function.

A window with aesthetic proportions fulfils its function little better than a false window. We do not want to suffocate in a room which is badly ventilated, because a window has been made too small in order to “look good” in the façade of the house.

There is a pressing need to divorce that ill-matched old couple, building and art, that is: architecture; for, as in the past when theology prevented philosophy from evolving freely, aesthetic taste is impeding the marvellous discoveries of the building engineer.

A wine has a pleasing colour because that is naturally the colour of a good wine; similarly we shall see, when we have tested it, that the shape of a building that is comfortable is the most pleasing – the most comfortable houses prove it; they are the most beautiful, and if there are ugly parts, they always occur when the builder has not solved a construction problem successfully, or has sacrificed this essential problem to a whim.

“Beauty is merely the anticipation of happiness.”*

That beauty cannot be denied when we look at the shape of a locomotive, a microscope, a needle, a screw, a rotary press... Avant-garde architects have intuited this, but they make a grave mistake by getting their inspiration from these shapes and applying them to the house; they impose them VISUALLY and not in the spirit that gave rise to these forms. The Style (the shape) of the locomotive is a result and not an aim in itself.

The ideal shape of a glass or a pencil is the result of chemical or mathematical experiments, and not of a desire for an aesthetic effect; when, as in architecture, an aesthetic aim is introduced, the glass is uneven, botched; it is half glass, half piece of sculpture. It is only logical to reject something slipshod when you can get the thing right.

We must SPECIALIZE to achieve more INTENSITY; each object would then have its own particular style; then we would have RICHES. When people want to make every object in the same style, the aesthetic style of a work of art, it leads to poverty.

The mechanical engineer has more pride than the architect: he finds his job interesting enough without adding aesthetic aims; he does not pass his machine off as a work of art.

ARCHITECTURE IS NOT AN ART. Greek temples? Cathedrals? Many of them would be perfect as sculptural structures if their creators had not had to conform to aims which were not aesthetic in order to inspire the religious spirit, house idols, etc. As an architectural structure (a meeting place, the height of a cathedral nave makes no sense; it is a response to a religious theory, which is somewhat different from an artistic necessity. Again considered from the structural point of view, the cathedral has solved the problem of vaulting ingeniously: the arches soar, resting on the smallest possible supports and relying on the combination of equal and opposite forces; they span a great space with, for that time, a minimum of materials. This is very ingenious, but certainly does not have the power to trigger aesthetic emotion automatically.

As for Greek temples, a particular misconception has often helped us to take the pleasure we get from the ingenious structure for aesthetic pleasure.

Up until now, architecture has juggled with the nature of aesthetics and the nature of the house; if only this compromise would disappear – let it be replaced by the building engineer, then the aesthetic problem will be rid of questions that have nothing to do with it. Then we will have perfection in architectural structures (the best possible for the present), a perfection already achieved in mechanics and which the human form conceived by man might have (doing away with accidents of birth – spare parts).

Objects made by man must be perfect: that is the only life he can give them. Forms of life can live despite their flaws, thanks to the will to live that nature has given them.

Like the study of machine manufacture, the study of house construction must only follow ingenious plans dictated by the need for order, hygiene and convenience; the elevation must be dictated by the plan and strength of the materials, offering an economic solution for the use of these materials. The problem of a window given to several architects will be successfully solved when, with all the existing building techniques, the solutions are identical; if we claim that a window can, from a structural point of view, be positioned rightly in several places, we leave out the economy of construction; it can have a mathematical precision like the unique shape of a

lens which we know has a special function. Standardization is necessary for perfection; the most recent style of house has to be the only satisfactory one. No fear of monotony: the present-day standardization of electric light bulbs is not monotonous; what is more, numerous specialized buildings (factories, banks, cinemas, schools, blocks of flats, private houses, etc.) will offer different aspects; different climates also require different solutions.

Idiots and “artistic” architects look at the telescope; contemporary man uses the telescope. The beauty of an object depends on the essence of that object. The beauty of the telescope is internal.

In architecture, a column is beautiful when its proportions, like the stem of a flower or a leg, depend on the strength of its materials. It is unnatural to add columns for aesthetic effect if they are not supporting anything, or to use solid iron columns the same thickness as stone ones to bear the same weight; or, having decided *a priori* on the thickness of the columns it is unnatural to use stone for its appearance when it would be easier to use iron.

Such tendencies prove one is a very bad architect; one may be a good sculptor; so, logically, one should stick to sculpture; there is nothing to stop us making sculptures as big as hangars for airships that we can walk into. The problems are the sculptor’s. Light and shade, volume, depth, angles spaced according to an implacable order and logic obeying the sculptor’s aesthetic needs, realizing a complete organism in which every detail is indispensable to the life of the work, a rigorously precise work; if the smallest detail is taken away, the work is mutilated.

The most powerful, ingenious man is the least compromising. FOR MORE BEAUTY the architect must be purely scientific. Style is not an end in itself: it is a result; the eternal style (that is, the style of the time) is the ESSENTIAL.

In the past, painting and sculpture were inhibited by story, history, religious spirit, etc. (cathedrals, *via dolorosa*, illuminations). They were used to emphasize a religious dogma or sentimental tale. Now, some architects claim that painting must only be an ADDITION to their buildings, whereas it has to be an integral part: painting at ease on the neutral wall and neutral decoration of that wall. A comfortable wall puts up with the presence of men, flowers, animals, functional furniture; it also puts up with a plastic work of art. Paintings are not made for walls, but walls are made to shelter man and the objects he uses.

A painting hanging on the wall may be a disturbing factor; this disturbance is only superficial; it is caused by life; it is inevitable; fated; in the deepest sense it is order: law. There is nothing more peaceful than a plain surface, but the life of a good picture is more precious than the wall’s silence. The train does not spoil the scenery.

If we want it to be neutral, the decoration of a wall must not express anything... it disturbs the peace of the wall without satisfying the spirit...
ART LOVERS BEWARE!

Michelangelo's paintings satisfy the spirit because, although he painted on the wall, he only thought of it as a material and was not interested in making his painting neutral.

Decorating a wall imposes additional difficulties on the decorator, and the resulting aesthetic effect has no more worthwhile value than the stories the ancients thought they had to introduce into their pictures; solving these difficulties results in an unsatisfactory expression of the creative idea. The decorator has to make use of the proportions and size of a wall; the free painter pictures the proportions and size of his canvas.

The role that architects demand of painting inevitably sweeps sculpture along with it (cornices, roses on the ceiling, sculpted panelling, consoles, moulding, etc.). Now, avant-garde architects already feel how ridiculous these frills are. LET US HOPE THEY WILL FOLLOW THROUGH THIS INSIGHT: LET US HOPE THAT THEY KNOW THAT THE MODERN AESTHETIC STRUCTURE OF A HOUSE IS AS RIDICULOUS AS THE DECORATIONS WHICH WERE ONCE THOUGHT TO BE INDISPENSABLE.

Must painting and sculpture be decorative, ornamental? Is the apple used to decorate the table? Must music be a digestive, a soporific? Must it be used as an alarm – so some eccentric industrialist, a patron of the arts, could have chimes in his factory instead of an electric bell?

It is not the job of painting and sculpture to reveal the beauty of materials (the hardware stores and the mason's yard do that very well) nor to decorate cups and saucers, nor to make up a woman's face, nor to decorate walls.

Primitive man slashed his face, painted his body and wore rings on his toes, in his ears and nose. We respect the primitives. They were wrong; let us not imitate them; imitation, plagiarism are signs of decadence, exhaustion, stupidity. In tattooing we merely see the first humble efforts of the creative instinct (the aesthetic impulse).

It is the same motive that, throughout the centuries, gave rise to the works of art we admire; but modern man could not live in a house conceived as a sculpture, nor under a ceiling decorated by a contemporary artist, even if he were Michelangelo.

Applied art only thrives on compromise, the petit-bourgeois mentality. The prejudice in favour of applied art is so deeply rooted in man that even civilized people prefer architecture, wall hangings, carpets, furniture and aesthetic lampshades to perfect objects. They think it is necessary to decorate objects in the name of perfection. What is more, they believe in the

logical evolution of decoration; they still think it is possible to introduce a modern style into decoration.

MODERN DECORATION DOES NOT EXIST; it is no longer relevant; it forces the good worker and the machine to prostitute their energy and results in a criminal waste of raw materials. Before it becomes defunct, the diamond industry will still count Kaffirs and Zulus among its most recent clients.

APPLIED ART KILLS PURE ART. The destruction caused by applied art is considerable; in order to live, many artists spend the better part of their lives destroying themselves by manufacturing artefacts that sell in mass production.* These mediocre works satisfy mankind's aesthetic need in a mediocre fashion; because of this, man takes no further interest in the works of pure art by these same artists, and so they are unsaleable.

The artist must be able to live off the work he produces.

In this way, art, like other human activities, would be able to fulfil its role properly and mankind would be more balanced, less anarchic and so stronger... THIS IS THE TRUE DISCIPLINE.

We are on the threshold of a classical period: THE AGE OF POLISHED STEEL. Those who feel this are the only ones who are AWARE.

We affirm that the work of art must be an autonomous work, able to be reproduced in millions of copies, thanks to the progress made in coloured photo-engraving. Do you think the man looking at a reproduction on a plane journey is interested in the decorative side of a plastic work of art?

More exhibitions, exchanges of works of art, so that people go to exhibitions like they go to the cinema. Big cosmopolitan cities, at night in the sky, illuminated signs: EXHIBITION: THE PAINTINGS OF X.

ON PAINTING

Aesthetics is not a means of finding the perfect solution to some problem, but it certainly is the essence of a particular problem: art.

The research carried out by most modern painters is the result of a grave mistake: they wish to determine the style of a painting a priori; now this style is the inevitable result of a well-made object: the union of the creative idea and its realization.

As for producing this work, a genius without means of expression is sterile; therefore a painter has to have a thorough mastery of the material resources at his disposal and use them strictly according to their own laws. He must be a skilful technician, the MASTER of his craft and not the SLAVE. Virtuosity is for idiots (in the pathological sense). The real job is in the layout, the choice of line, shape and colour, which will automatically

trigger aesthetic sensations, the picture's *raison d'être*. Consequently, the painter must be conscious, and not take on additional problems which will distract him.

A picture is a constructed object. It should be well constructed; that is a condition of life: precision, logic, economy, integrity; the mentality that is not satisfied with an approximation, that likes a circle to be drawn with a compass, that uses the most economic means to obtain the maximum effect – this is the way the work of a good workman is “finished”. The same objective in the field of physiology: the health of the organs through which life manifests itself. Even the weak feel the need for a structure; they keep their balance through contradiction (very fashionable).

Many painters use means that are not suitable for triggering aesthetic sensations, namely: anatomy, perspective, photographic images (accurate drawing), colour in *trompe l'œil*, didactic tendencies, the composition of historic, dramatic, comic “genre” scenes, etc.

We need: the anatomy of the painting and not the clinical anatomy of the sitter; drawing and colour must fit together precisely, not merely serve to give an effect of perspective; we need composition, which lies in the economy of surface, the rhythm, the life of the picture, the intellect ordering the construction of the creative idea expressed successfully.

When the creative idea needs perspective in order to be expressed satisfactorily, the painter must sacrifice the flat aspect of his canvas, for the canvas has to perform its duty, not the painter, and he does not paint merely in order to cover a canvas with colours, just as the poet does not write merely to cover the page with words.

The painter who uses a subject and takes it for his goal proves that he is not conscious of the reactions influencing him, which are therefore unconscious. An artist is moved by a passing train: this fact brings to life what was latent in the artist. A central core is then formed. An inner force develops it from the inside outwards, like a fetus. The work of art will see the light of day, like the child, when its organism is complete.

The discoveries made by the Cubist painters are significant: wishing to respect the properties of the canvas, the flat two-dimensional surface, they have rediscovered the unchanging laws of painting. But Cubist means can be useful in more than just the question of the two-dimensional: they are excellent building materials. Many Cubists take these means for ends: they make the same mistake as architects, they decide on the style of their painting a priori.

Albert Gleizes,* in his study on Cubism, has given a good definition of the work of art; unfortunately he also subordinates the creative idea to the look of the picture, even if it is accidental, since he affirms: “When a ray

of sunlight falls onto a two-dimensional picture, it is suddenly enriched logically by that ray of light.” A perfect picture cannot tolerate anything being added or taken away; a ray of sunlight, unforeseen by the painter, falling on a part of the painting, is an accident, as are reflections, flaws or the patina (dirt) of time.

“What one era thinks is bad is usually the out-of-date residue of what was once thought to be good – an atavistic attitude to an ideal that has aged.”
– Friedrich Nietzsche*

“Success comes from the streets; glory comes from the elite.”
– Remy de Gourmont*

There is evolution in art, as in everything. The contemporary public prefers the power saw to the flint saw, which was a brilliant discovery for its time, the best, perfection; but this same public does not recognize that art evolves, or they do so grudgingly.

People suppose that the image of an object is pictured in the same way in a man’s eyes, an ox’s eyes or in the open eyes of a corpse. This image is transmitted to the brain by the ocular nerves. So, our judgement of the object depends on the quality of the brain. If, compared to the average man, the ox is not considered competent to judge an object, the same comparison holds for the man in the herd and the artist. Genius, which is profoundly innovatory, is ahead of its time – or rather: it alone is of its time; the general public follows after, but is always at least a generation behind. The public does not acknowledge the value of a work of art without the sanction of time; hence the laughter and incomprehension at the efforts which the public calls mad and which will become classics, as all revolutions before them.

Our principles, which are rejected today, will be the dogmas with which people will try and demolish the young; they will be asked for the same explanations we were asked; yet, if a picture could be explained in words, words would suffice and the picture would be superfluous.

“In art, any value which can be justified is commonplace.”*

Aesthetic emotion is SUFFERED by the sensitive viewer.

THE PROBLEM OF PLASTIC ART MUST BE SOLVED TOOL IN HAND.

Unpublished manuscript by Victor Servranckx* and René Magritte in the Archives of Contemporary Art in Belgium, Brussels, 1922.

Norine* Blues

It's "Diabolical" and "Capricious", "Marquita" "Mitsou" dazzling dresses vaporous "Clouds" "Dew", divine Hydrangea "On the Wing" "Soft Night" Cocktail, "Let's Be Discreet", "Here Come the Flowers", "Pretty Roses" "Big Llama", "The Winner" was falling in love with "Geisha" to calm his "Neurosis" "Dream of India" "Blowing in the Wind" The "Golden Blues" are "Sparkling", "At the Wheel" I saw "Prince Igor" "Take Me Away" "Restless" "Flame" "Like Him" in a beautiful golden "Dream" O "Raja" I am so "Elegant!" Pretty dresses pretty names! "Colourful Fairyland" "Mad Passion" "In Full Bloom!"

Norine Blues: Pretty Dresses with Pretty Names. Created by Évelyne Brélia at the Kursaal, Ostend. Words by René Georges (i.e. René Magritte), music by Paul Magritte. Brussels, Musical Office, 1925, cover illustration by Magritte.

Texts from 391

- In a dream,
- Brothels make a great impression,
- You'd think you were walking into a Conservatory.

*

- Invalids justify Cubism.

*

The positive pole attracts the negative pole, since we live we love.

*

I like beer and hollyhocks.

*

A man in his birthday suit.

*

Cats are lucky to live under chairs.

*

The cow has feelings.

In 391, Paris, no. 19, Oct. 1924, p. 130 of reprint; Paris, Terrain vague, 1960 (W 8).

Texts from *Période*

The ambassador
of a beautiful country
has the honour
of inviting you
to a big dinner party
The rooms will be candlelit.

In the Prospectus for the magazine (being planned), *Période*, at Mesens's house, Rue de Courtrai 55, Brussels (W 3). See Christian Bussy: *L'Accent grave*. Nougé aborted the project by disseminating, in Oct. 1924, a counter-prospectus where the text by Magritte became: "The ambassador / of a sombre country / has the honour / of asking you / to dinner / you have said / Our funerals will take place in the afternoon."

Texts from *Æsophage*

THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS

1. Our policy is to practise self-destruction with all our might and to put our faith in human virtues.

2. All our collaborators must be good-looking, so we can publish their pictures.

3. We shall make a vigorous protest against all decadence: erudition, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, Dadaism and its substitutes, cocaine, itching powder, compulsory education, polyrhythmia, polytonia, polynesia, carnal vices and, above all, homosexuality in all its forms.

4. Our freshness will not tolerate rotten tips, nor the wives of our friends.

5. We refuse under any circumstance to explain precisely what people won't understand.

Our venture is as far-fetched as our hopes. We shall take the greatest care over the most trivial things, we claim nothing, the love of our staff of young girls is more important.

“Here we go, Here we go!” That's our motto.

*

WHAT EVOLUTION CAN LEAD TO

Freedom that is unhampered by derision allows, with numerous exceptions, all ways of understanding the pictorial problem to be suitably represented (Impressionism, Renaissance, Copyism, Ornamentationism, etc.) and allows others a rapid and individual evolution. When beauty in its turn becomes unbearable, mere demolition workers can evolve no further, because they have nothing left to demolish. The prudent stop, deeming it necessary to represent something, moral suicide being less risky than the other. And it will be said: “That's where anarchy gets you.”

When the Will is no longer the slave of things, all seems lost, and it then becomes possible to realize images of a marvellous universe – creation – then to abandon them immediately – critical. For people are so serious that

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nothing is taken seriously any more except negation. And so evolution does not halt – it begins. We will often come within a hair's breadth of idiocy; never mind, it is pleasant to think where that may lead.

*

MM. Victor BIENTENHOLZ, Pierre DUPUIS, René MAGRITTE, E.L.T. MESENS and Paulus PROQUET* present ŒSOPHAGE.

WHY?

*

SO MANY STARS MAY BLOW YOUR MIND BY CHANCE.

*

URBAN PLANNING:

What will make me even more
sceptical is the billboard
for Rose Amy signed
by Orsi and the looks which
demand all the strength.*

In *Œsophage*, Brussels, one issue only. March 1925, no page numbers (W 15). Signed René Magritte and E.L.T. Mesens.

Texts from *Marie*

We must saw off the rungs of the ladder again.

*

Do you still have the same shoulder?

In *Marie*, Brussels, no. 1. Jun. 1926, p. 1 (W 18).

You

*"In your text's mirror,
Your mirror's text."
– C.G.**

Painting excites your admiration by the likeness of things whose originals you do not admire. But this admiration is sometimes painful to you: it will take you far.

*

The word "painting" is ugly. It makes you think of heaviness, sometimes of pretentiousness. Pictures exist and attract you, but they are not paintings. They have two lives – or rather, none at all.

*

Scruples torment many painters but, once and for all, they are in a singular position. They are overlooked. They are always neglected. It is for reasons other than these that we are no longer moved by them.

*

The success of a work does not seem to depend much on its starting point, on the difficulties involved in realizing it. The finished picture is a surprise, and its creator is the first to be surprised. You want to achieve an even more striking, unexpected effect.

*

An object may be ridiculous or not. The wish to develop it in space demands more from oneself than from others. You may see life all over the place. You may guess at things that are dying so fast... It is better to resist, to read the secret calmly.

In Adieu à Marie, Brussels, one issue only, at the end of 1926, or the beginning of 1927 according to Mariën (W 18).

The Legs of the Sky

The floor, moonlit, the moon behind you, is not enclosed by walls; a patch of sky is hidden by distant trees. But a patch of floor is itself hidden by the sky's legs, standing on it, and this cannot be the opportunity for useless thoughts.

A WALK IN THE RIVER

A few companions had been doing too much talking beside the purple water. The group, panic-stricken, ran away, and I found I was incapable of following them. I stepped into the water, and the depths turned luminous; faraway ferns could just be seen. The reflections of other dark plants stopped them rising to the surface. Red threads took on all sorts of shapes, caught in the invisible and doubtless powerful currents. A plaster-cast woman advancing caused me to make a gesture which was to take me far.

Texts published by Marcel Mariën in *FA*. no. 6, Jul. 1968. A letter from Magritte to Nougé, *L.S.* no. 105, Sep. 1927, confirms that these two texts are certainly “not very objective descriptions”, more like “a sort of equivalent” of two canvases, probably the first ones executed in Paris: “I’ve done two canvases up till now; here are the titles and what I can say about them...” David Sylvester has recognized ‘Legs in the Sky’ in the painting entitled *Les Muscles célestes*. On the other hand, the painting *Les Habitants du fleuve* bears only a very slight resemblance to the second text.

Nick Carter

The world resembles Nick Carter,* the detective who has recently arrived from America. But his eyes are open in the city as in the countryside. The objects around him do not seem to demand from his glance the usual movements. His movements are like those of an automaton; he follows a straight line and shifts furniture or walls that might happen to be in his way. The black cracks that cover his face turn transparent in the electric light. His room is dark, and when the light is put on to look at a document or to check his weapons, you can see the curtains in his study through his face.

A woman was taking the lift. At the same time the porter made an obscene gesture at her, she told Nick Carter.

When Nick Carter dreams of his disguises, their ingeniousness...

Published by Marcel Mariën in *F.A.* no. 28, Oct. 1969. He dates the manuscript to 1927 and says it was intended for the little magazine *Distances*, but Magritte abandoned it in favour of a similar text about the figure of Fantômas.

Personal Experience

I get up very late, I need an enormous amount of sleep. When I open my eyes, a crowd of thoughts come to me. Things I have seen the day before. And so sometimes I remember things I have dreamt in the night. I am always delighted when I remember them: it is like a victory when I manage to recapture the world of my dreams. I had thought before how strange my morning thoughts were; it apparently was a question of remembering all I possibly could, and as far as I remember I never went back more than twenty-four hours. I realized it as soon as I thought of controlling it.

This morning I found some of the characters in my sleep: a woman on a bike who brushed past me, with a man also riding a bike. It was night, and I could clearly see the woman riding away, her white stockings, and I was still thinking about her after she had disappeared round the corner. Then I was disturbed by a magic object, an apparition. I saw a person unrolling a piece of blue silk, and the silk frightened me – I didn't dare go near. And yet it wasn't at all dangerous. The man who was showing it to me and smiling was hardly taking any notice of it. At that moment I was aware of where I was. We were on a Pacific Island and there were women beside me, face downwards, not daring to look at the piece of silk they were seeing for the first time.

Remembering these things, I suddenly discovered that they weren't from a dream. I had seen the woman on the bike that evening as I was coming out of the cinema. I was with several people who didn't notice, but they remembered that a lot of cyclists had gone by. I have the same certainty about the blue silk, but it is only certainty; I cannot bring myself to take away the magic it still has, nor to rank it with objects that you only have to touch or look at once.

*

It is the end of the afternoon. A woman is moving towards the L. woods. The light of day seems still to be clinging to her light dress.

She goes into the woods. It is bathed in twilight. Trunks and branches gleam, vague and silvery.

She goes forward slowly as if she is weary. Soon she hesitates, stops, lies down on a bed of fallen leaves.

A shout is heard in the distance, a woman's name.

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With eyes wide open she stares at a broken branch hanging on by a few threads to a huge tree.

One of her hands has closed round the object she dropped when she lay down. Through her light dress you can make out her woman's body. Her pale face expresses extreme weariness.

A secret life begins to stir around the woman on the ground. You can hear the muffled sound of leaves rustling, thuds, strange gliding noises. Visible but elusive shapes move among the black tree trunks.

The woman is indifferent, she doesn't shiver, she is not worried by this strange world.

Soon it will be daylight; patches of fresh foliage begin to appear in the shadows.

The woman lies in the same position, shadows dark on her flesh as if the colours of the night still clung to her. Her half-open mouth seems to breathe in the first smells of the day and her loose hair mingles with the fallen leaves.

Thus the night went by.

Texts published by Marcel Mariën in *EA*. no. 6, Jul. 1968. Mariën dates them 1927–28.

The Man with the Aimless Face

Everyone looks like him, but he has his eyes open. He is the master of memories, he clarifies the appearance of things. His dream is infallible.

THEATRE RIGHT IN THE HEART OF LIFE

Doubtless it was a princess coming out of the wall, smiling, in the house surrounded by a magnificent sky. On the table were choice fruits, looking like birds. The lighting was comprehensible, despite a few unaccountable shadows and the lack of perspective beyond the open doors. The whole was dynamic thanks to the proportions.

Now the princess is running, an amazon without vertigo, in the boundless fields searching for mysterious proofs. She uses up the thoughts and acts of an infinite crowd of people. She gets over poetic obstacles: suitcase, sky; penknife; leaf; sponge, sponge.

In *Distances*, Paris, Rue de Tourlaque, 22, but actually run by Nougé from Brussels, no. 1. Feb. 1928, no page numbers (W 31). The text is dated 23rd Jan. 1928.

“He Had Set out Alone...”

He had set out alone so he didn't have to confide in anyone. Hidden under the trees, he could see the old castle and the snow-covered mountains. He waited for nightfall to make his move. He crept towards the castle and, with extreme caution, went through the ruined gateway. Dagger in hand, he glided over the broken flagstones of the great hall. He was advancing softly down the silent corridors, fingers brushing the walls to guide him. Suddenly a blast of hot air hit him in the face. He went nearer... In front of the entrance to the guardroom, a few yards in front of him, they had placed a door with loose planks. Having got used to the dark, he could just make it out. He crawled up to the door and slowly took off his coat and wrapped it around his left arm; then he kicked the door open. It fell to the ground with a crash, raising a cloud of dust which quickly vanished. He went in. The huge room was empty.

Text dated 14th Feb. 1928, published by M. Mariën in *E.A.* no. 6, Jul. 1968.

Notes on Fantômas

He is no longer the pretext for a story; the story does him service. The works of Fantômas cannot be destroyed nor suffer any modifications.

His staff consists of young gypsies. They obey a system, despite the sudden and somewhat brutal way they burst into the detective story.

Fantômas demands more from others than from himself.

He is never completely invisible. You can see his picture through his face.

When he is haunted by memories, he follows the arm that leads him along. He moves like an automaton and shifts furniture or walls out of his way.

His girl has been speaking for a long time. She's not interested in his body. She admires life.

Fantômas's skill is more precious than words. It cannot be divined – and its power is indisputable.

A coup de théâtre. Juve has been following Fantômas's trail for a long time. He crawls over the broken flagstones of a mysterious corridor. His fingers touch the walls to guide him. Suddenly a blast of hot air hits him in the face. He draws nearer. His eyes are used to the dark. He makes out a door with loose planks a few yards away. He takes off his coat and wraps it around his left arm and gets out his revolver. As soon as he has moved the door out of his way, Juve realizes that the precautions he has taken are useless: Fantômas is near him, sound asleep. Juve ties the sleeper up swiftly. Fantômas goes on dreaming, of his disguises perhaps, as he usually does. Juve, delighted, unfortunately, speaks and makes the prisoner start. He wakes up, and as soon as he is awake he is not Juve's prisoner any more.

Juve has failed once again. But there is still one way to reach his goal: Juve must introduce himself into one of Fantômas's dreams – to try and be one of its characters.

In *Distances*, no. 2, March 1928 (W 31).

“All Precautions...”

All precautions had been taken first thing in the morning. There was a surprise turn to the adventure; it had begun as usual and continued uninterrupted in a dream till the end of the night, the moment of waking.

A crowd of hikers whom the night had taken by surprise, fell asleep beside the river. The water stopped flowing. A few hours passed thus in a complete immobility and a deafening noise.

Texts published by Mariën in *FA*. no. 6, Jul. 1968. These texts appear in reverse order in a letter to Nougé, Feb.–Mar. 1928, published in *L.S.* no 131.

“Her Heart Is Mine...”*

Her heart is mine. She raises her eyes, they change colour. She guides me, I breathe in a scalding perfume. She feels no constraint. On the contrary, her movements are little miracles.

I believed that I would be lost if I made the gesture that would win her over, and that I couldn't possibly make it until I had made countless attempts. I chose her without hesitation. She lived in my set, I had never noticed her. Her presence was a challenge that I took up in a flash. There was nothing about her to indicate the violence of her passions.

We go deep into the countryside; it puts on its jewels as we approach. I meet no obstacles: nothing resists the power she has revealed to me, all desires are fulfilled, even our immediate longing for a surprising adventure.

In *Distances*, no. 3, April 1928 (W 31).

The Colours of the Night

An event can affect us in different ways, depending on whether we have merely responded to the details that make us happy, for example, or evoke other feelings. What use would a perception of *all* the details be? We cannot guess, since we are not granted such perception.

A unique set of circumstances can lead a man, *whoever he is*, to a revelation in his life, to a certainty that facts exist, which we cannot see, not finding within ourselves a sentiment which would render them perceptible. They will be in no way explicable; they will be beyond any meaning we could give them. The clear sight indispensable to such a revelation will ensure that it is not lost at the cost of a common error: that of thinking that such facts are the manifestation of another world that is stranger to us than the one we live in. This lucid vision sheds light on “familiar” facts and also on the facts we know nothing about. These “familiar” facts keep their usual aspect; the ideas they inspire are arbitrary and inadequate, having nothing to do with them.

The man who has experienced this lucidity most intensely lives with the existence of these facts; he is disturbed by their presence. And it becomes his lifelong duty to search for the feelings which might correspond to them. He will do all he can to try to find out what is demanded of him *next*, which he longs to know.

The story that one of our friends told us will bear out these statements. Our instinct alone and the noticeable liking he had for solitude prevented us from seeking out his company. We suspected he lived with a woman in secret. His face expressed no ordinary passion. He was a man whose age it would be difficult to guess. We had however heard vague rumours about him. He had spent quite a hectic youth in the town where he was finishing his studies. He had apparently been driven out because of some scandalous affair.

One evening, in a confiding mood, perhaps hoping that we would help him, he told us the following story:

“I was introduced to L. the sculptor... His wife looked like one of my childhood friends. The woman in front of me seemed to spring straight out of the depths of my memory.

“She looked too much like something long-forgotten; like the little girl I had known as a child, now dead. From the very first moment I felt tied

to this woman. And I took the ties that bound me for the violent desire I felt for her.

“Today I realize that I would not have been able to bear her but for her beauty, which reassured me...

“The statues she surrounded herself with were stamped with her charm. It gave me pleasure to imagine that the statues were animated by life (by death?) because of their model. I fell in love with them too. Their silence was natural and didn’t force me to be restrained, as I was with the woman.

“In her charm there was the promise of yielding her body, which was consumed by secret languor, or a violent passion. She was silent for long periods. I attributed this silence to a supreme indifference or an instinctive fear of taking the least responsibility.

“Her silence prevented me from making use of the fine words I had ready to seduce her with. It seemed to want the words to be less facile, more exact perhaps. I modelled my behaviour on hers. I felt my presence beside her would be enough to win her over.

“I thought we were both putting over a false image of ourselves: we took delight in hiding the violent passion we were beginning to feel for each other and pretending not to be aware of it. Rapt looks were the promise of total surrender to the man who wanted her.

“Seeing her a little I began to love her *charm* more than her beauty. I found a new meaning in it. I thought I was penetrating the secret: to her flesh clung the colours of night, evoking women’s bodies I had known at night. A woman to whom such colours were clinging must be like those who give themselves at night to a stranger, drawn to them by a great idea of love... Night or day would be all the same to such a woman, I thought, night’s colours were hers.

“I was shattered by desire. Yet I experienced a little pleasure in prolonging the suspense: my imagination took on shades I had never known before. My experience of women seemed insipid compared to the pleasure this one seemed to promise me. I pictured her surrender, her too violent passion which would prevent her from speaking, moving perhaps...

“When I was brought to her she was expecting me. But I saw things in a new light. From this new perspective things seemed to be talking to me. I realized that until that time nothing in my life had seemed so real, so much so that I wasn’t sure if I had been living until that moment. Everything affected me so powerfully that I couldn’t look at anything too long...

“I had an intense need of her, yet I put aside my shyness with a certain unwillingness. I felt deep down that an event was about to take place on which things greater than me depended.

“As I approached her I knocked over a small mirror on her knees. I glanced into the mirror and threw it away at once; I had trouble recognizing myself. I hardly dared look at her face. I closed my eyes to stop things going any further...

“She was wearing a light dress. I had discovered her body here and there. She put up no resistance. I trembled with a monstrous passion.

“Now I had to break that long period of suspense. I was afraid she led our thoughts in a mournful direction.

“Nothing stood between me and my desire, and I felt it would be a miracle to fulfil it – a miracle was needed.

“Her long hair fell loose, curling like a black flame. I had her at my mercy...”

My friend stopped speaking. There was a strange glint in his eyes. We felt it would be absurd to talk to him. We had been too genuinely interested for him to stop there. He continued in these words:

“Dear friends, what happened to me next is not important; for me it had no connection with what had gone before. I had to run away. My head was filled with a memory I had to listen to.

“I have tried since to recapture what happened to me with the same intensity: I have brought home such and such a girl whom I thought would do. I have tried to recreate the scene. I made her pose like the other. It wasn’t hard to reproduce each detail that struck me. But I have not been able to recapture the intensity of my feeling in this way, whether I chose a woman *alive* or *dead* to help me...”

How could you help such a man? The incident had left him with an image of too much reality for him to be able to respond to what we could make up to explain his affair, or make it appear *more miraculous still*.

Letters from Magritte to Goemans, 20th–25th Sep. 1928, published in Waldberg, pp. 282–83. While it was in the proof stage, this story, or at least Magritte’s part, was published by Mariën under the title: ‘The Colours of the Night’, Brussels, *Lèvres nues*, Sep. 1978. This is the final draft.

“Communal Action...”

Communal action could possibly have a formidable prestige. It would make more explicit what *Poetry*, for instance, may leave implicit.

In *Variétés*, Brussels, spec. no. *Le Surréalisme en 1929*, Jun. 1929. This is Magritte's response to a letter by Raymond Queneau, published in the dossier put together by Aragon and Breton under the title: *A suivre. Petite contribution au dossier de certains intellectuels à tendances révolutionnaires* (W 46).

Reply to the Questionnaire on Love

“I. What sort of hope do you put in love?”

All I know about my hope in love is that it only needs a woman to give it reality.

“II. How do you envisage the transition from the *idea of love* to the *fact of loving*? Would you willingly sacrifice your freedom to love or not? Have you done so? Would you agree to sacrifice a cause which you felt bound to defend till then, if you felt it was necessary in order not to forfeit love? Would you agree not to become the person you could have been, if that was the price you had to pay to enjoy the certainty of love to the full? How would you judge a man who would go so far as to betray his convictions to please the woman he loves? Is it right to demand or obtain such a pledge?”

The transition from the idea of love to the fact of loving occurs when a being who has appeared in reality imposes his existence in such a way that he has to be loved and followed in daylight or in the dark.

I would sacrifice any freedom that stands in the way of love. I rely on my instincts to make this gesture easy for me, as has happened in the past.

I am ready to abandon the cause I champion if it may corrupt me in the face of love.

I cannot envy a man who never has the certainty of love.

A man is privileged when his passion forces him to betray his convictions to please the woman he loves.

The woman has the right to demand such a forfeit and to obtain it, if it serves to glorify love.

“III. Would you acknowledge the right to deprive yourself for a time of the being you love, knowing how absence helps glorify love, while seeing this as a shabby motive?”

No. It would be imposing limits on love’s power for the sake of a test.

“IV. Do you believe in the victory of love over sordid life, or does sordid life triumph over glorious love?”

Love cannot be destroyed. I believe in its victory.

“Poetry...”

Poetry is a pipe.

In *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Paris, no. 12, 15th Dec. 1929, p. 53.

Words and Images

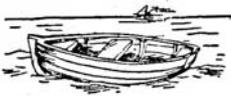
No object is so tied to its name that we cannot find another one that suits it better.



An image can take the place of a word in a statement.



Some objects do without a name.



An object hints at other objects behind it.



Sometimes a word merely serves to designate itself.



Everything tends to suggest that there is little connection between an object and what represents it.



An object encounters its image, an object encounters its name. The object's image and name happen to meet.



The words referring to two different objects do not show what can separate these objects from each other.



At times the name of an object stands in for an image.



In a picture words have the same substance as images.



A word can take the place of an object in reality.

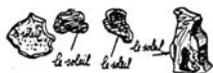


Images and words are seen differently in a picture.



SELECTED WRITINGS

Any old shape can replace the image of an object.



Indefinite shapes have a significance that is as necessary, as perfect as precise ones.



An object never does the same job as its name or image.



Sometimes written words in a picture refer to precise things, and images refer to indefinite things.



Now, the visible outlines of objects touch in reality as if they make up a mosaic.



Or else, the opposite.



In *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Paris, no. 12, 15th Dec. 1929, pp. 32–33 (W 45).

KEY TO THE FRENCH
IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

The cannon

The sun is hidden by the clouds

Sky

The real object... the represented object

Forest

Character losing memory... woman's body

Cannon

The sun

Mountain

The sun... the sun... the sun

Horse

Cannon

Fog

Space of a Thought

[Film]

1. A man, hand to his forehead, lowers his hand with a vigorous gesture (full face).
2. A woman (in profile) smiles fondly at the wall and slowly turns her head away.
3. Close to the houses, a street. Emerging from behind the camera, a man, a woman, a man, a woman are running away – we only see their back view – very quickly getting smaller and smaller. The camera turns suddenly, goes down a dark corridor.
4. Night opens out onto the man's back view; he is holding a mirror in his hand in which we see an oil painting.
5. A woman's hat, a shirt, stockings, shoes slowly whirling round.
6. Close up of mirror.
7. Close up of a hand holding a huge stone. The fingers let go slowly. The stone drops.
8. Man in the mirror as in 4. A stone breaks the mirror.
9. Close up of a woman's face screaming in terror (1.5 metres, then zoom in one metre with supplementary lens) – face disappears as the lens pans in to 20 cm from her open mouth.
10. The oil painting (close up).
11. The woman, serious expression, full face (close up).
12. The man puts his hand to his forehead.

[Another film]

1. Procession. The Blessed Sacrament.
2. A man at a table, writing. Sees a crucifix, which he brushes off with the back of his hand. A black glove drops onto the table. The man looks at the glove, putting down his pen, tears the page he is writing into little pieces. Throws the pieces at the camera. Puts the glove in an envelope.
3. The envelope on the pavement. A woman passes by, picks up the envelope.
4. Woman A in front of a mirror. She is painting her features with a paintbrush in black. The glove lies on the mirror frame, fingers hanging down beside the face.

SELECTED WRITINGS

5. The man, back view (hat, overcoat) beckons to someone invisible.

6. Woman B, sitting beside a table. She turns the torn envelope over and examines it in a frenzy. Then she sticks pins into the heart and head of a crude wax figure.

7. The man picks up an invisible object, examines it, puts it on the back of his hand and blows.

8. Women A and B are playing ball with the glove. Suddenly one of them points to the sky and screams in terror; the other one hides her face in her hands. The glove drops down between them.

9. Empty sky. A cloud. Material fluttering.

10. The man walks forward beating the grass with his stick. The camera follows him. He comes to some corpses. Kicks them. Then leans down, picks up the glove. Turns slowly to the camera and throws the glove at it.

11. Church door.

.....

Elements to be included:

1. Woman in a veil – close-up of head – whole body, sitting down. She is reading, following the lines of a big book with her finger.

2. Women chatting, sitting in a garden. The conversation cut with two or three shots of empty chairs.

L'IDÉE FIXE*

Scene 1

Country towards evening – threatening sky – deserted landscape.

1. A young man on horseback seems to be roaming around.

2. He sees an object on fire, beside the road, quite a long way off.

Close-up: a tuba on fire with the countryside in the background.

3. The horse rears up and begins to gallop.

Scene 2

In front of some park gates – a deserted chateau.

1. The young man dismounts, pushes the gate open and goes in, followed by his horse.

Shots of the park, stone on the ground, wild vegetation.

Close-up: Money, banknotes, cigarette butts on the ground.

2. Shot of a chateau and a young man going towards it. (The door is ajar.)

Scene 3

A deserted corridor with a staircase.

1. The young man climbs the staircase.
2. When he gets to a certain height the staircase is blocked by a wall.
3. The young man strikes the wall, and an irregular opening, a crevice, forms in the wall.

Scene 4

An almost empty room.

1. The young man enters. (Shots of the room: an uncurtained window, looking out on a black background.) A dark stain on the floor.
2. Long shot of a fireplace with a clock and two candlesticks. The nozzle [Belgicism for stovepipe] coming out from the fireplace is a locomotive. (We see an engine in the place of the stovepipe and the stove.)

Scene 5

A bedroom. A young girl is lying down, one arm over her head, the other hanging over the edge of the bed; hand holding a flower. (Close up of this arm.)

1. On the floor beside the bed a black sphere (c.70 cm) appears *slowly* and vanishes in the same way.
2. A door opens slowly (close up of door handle turning) *on its own*, and closes in the same way.
3. Out of a dark corner of the room comes an old figure dressed like a nineteenth-century marquis (his face is a set mask, but we must not see that it's a mask). A powdered wig. He goes up to the bed.
4. Kneels down and puts his mouth on the young girl's arm, near the shoulder.
5. *Close-up*: a little blood trickles down the arm and stains the sheet.
6. Suddenly the marquis appears to be listening – he gets up and goes back to the corner of the room which is in shadow.
7. The door opens on its own again and the young man enters, hesitates, but when he sees the young girl lying down he goes up to her quickly.
8. *Close-up*: he tries to wake her, wipes the blood off her arm.
9. He settles into an armchair near the bed.
10. The room seems to be full of smoke getting thicker.
11. *Close-up*: young man's face: he grimaces and falls asleep.
12. Then the marquis advances and carries the girl off into the shadows. (Slow fade-out.)

SELECTED WRITINGS

13. The frame very clear again. It is morning. The film is tinted orange.
14. The young man wakes up, gets up instantly, very anxious, and looks at the bloodstain on the sheet.

Scene 6

1. The young man goes into rooms, down corridors, then we see him go downstairs.

Scene 7

A cellar. (The film is back to black-and-white again.)

1. The young man searches everywhere.
2. He sees the flower the young girl was holding on the ground.
3. He picks it up, and a little farther on discovers a trapdoor, lifts it up and goes down.

Scene 8

A room where motionless figures in tights stand in various poses beside gymnastic equipment. An opening or a staircase from above comes out here.

1. The young man enters through this opening and touches a figure who immediately falls over.
2. The young man sees a gap in the wall, near the ground; he climbs through it.

Scene 9

A sort of underground passage with beams holding up the earth and plants growing on the walls (the leaves have fruit made of iron bells). The young man follows this passageway and comes to

Scene 10

1. An irregular-shaped opening in the wall through which we see a busy boulevard, as if seen from the first floor.
2. The young man pauses a moment, looks at the view, then crosses in front.

Scene 11

1. The young man comes up to another opening looking out onto a room.

2. Shot of the room. A little old man (big beard, bald, bulbous head) puts a stone on a square board on a table.
3. *Close-up*: he draws a circle round the stone.
4. Cuts out the circle with a saw.
5. Ties a plumb line to the stone.
6. Climbs up a double ladder and puts the stone on top; lets the plumb line down, then gets off the ladder.
7. He puts the board on two supports which come up to his shoulders, so that the plumb line passes through the centre of the hole he has cut out.
8. He looks at his watch and waits a few minutes.
9. Suddenly he ducks under the board, head coming out of the hole. He sticks out his tongue and thumbs his nose.
10. He pulls the thread, and the stone falls straight onto his head.
11. Frame of this scene shot through opening in passageway with the young man watching, and then crossing in front.

Scene 12

1. Another opening looking out onto a building site where a house is being built, and the young man coming up to it.
2. *Close-up*: a mason stops work and sits down by a pile of bricks, drinks from a flask, picks up a brick and eats it.
3. Opening looking onto this scene with young man crossing in front.

Scene 13

A fairly short shot of an irregular opening in the wall of the corridor, revealing part of a woman's torso.

(This part of the torso takes up *all the visible space* in the gap in the wall.)

Scene 14

Fairly short shot of the sea, birds flying across the opening.

Scene 14 b

1. We see through an opening a bull tied up, against a neutral background. Two toreadors, one with arrows, the other with a bicycle pump in his hand (the handle is a sword hilt) in the foreground.
2. They salute each other, and the first one advances towards the bull; the other is behind him.

SELECTED WRITINGS

3. The first toreador plunges the arrows into the animal's back and neck; blood runs out.
4. The second plunges the bicycle pump into the bull's backside and pumps.
5. The young man crosses in front.

Scene 15

Fairly short shot of a cemetery.

Scene 16

Fairly short shot of an orgy scene (couples rolling on the ground, couples on furniture, behind screens, etc.).

Scene 17

1. Fairly short shot of civilians and priests carrying flags; their jackets are covered with decorations. Marching. Explosions.
2. The young man crosses in front of this scene, pauses a moment, shrugs and goes on.

Scene 18

We see the young man at the end of the tunnel which slopes upwards towards a background of branches through which a few rays of sunlight are filtering. He brushes the branches aside and goes off.

Scene 19

In the country. The young man emerges from behind a bush.

Scene 20

1. Farther off in a field, the young man questions a peasant insistently; the peasant seems sorry he can't help.
2. He sees his horse farther on and goes towards it.

Scene 21

1. In another landscape, the young man leading his horse by the reins sees the black sphere (from scene 5) rolling around in the middle of a field.

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2. He follows the sphere which precedes him down paths, a slope, etc.
3. The sphere stops in front of a hovel.
4. The young man enters the house (the horse is not in the frame).
5. Suddenly the black sphere vanishes from the frame.

Scene 22

1. Poor interior, with the young woman asleep on a bed.
2. The young man, happy to see her again, goes up to her, tries to wake her.
3. *Close-up*: he holds the young girl's head and lifts up her eyelids.
4. He seems to despair and goes towards the window.
5. *Close-up*: of a window and the young man looking out. We see someone outside, quite far off; he is coming in.
6. When he is quite near, we recognize the marquis (from scene 5).
7. Interior (without young man); the marquis enters.
8. He goes up to the bed and kneels down; he already has his mouth on the young girl's arm.
9. Then the young man (hidden behind a curtain near the bed) rushes up to him and a fight starts.
10. However, the young man has the upper hand, and the marquis, who has got out a dagger, presses it against the young man's breast.
11. He, with one hand, tries to push the marquis's face away...
12. *Close-up*: ...we see the marquis's face detach itself (the wig stays in place) and instead of a head we see tubes coming out of the neck (part of the tubes of a tuba).
13. Then the marquis falls and the young man grabs the dagger which has dropped to the ground and plunges it into the marquis's heart.
14. The young girl wakes up.
15. She falls into the young man's arms. (We see the figure on the ground behind the couple.)

Scene 23

Evening. Blue light. We see the couple on horseback riding off.
Fade out slowly.

The first two scenarios were published by Mariën in *FA.*, no. 2, May 1968, under only Nougé's name. Mariën dates these scenarios to around April or May 1932. The films are now lost – “destroyed”, according to the editor of Magritte's *Écrits complets*, André Blavier.

“Detective Rodiston...”

Detective Rodiston saw several lights by combining the head of this man, on which he had worked hard on a day when he did not lack inspiration, with the movements to which the previous pages make allusion. Gestures and characters were suddenly lit up, and they attracted him, since Rodiston found sex appeal difficult to resist.

The decisive, conclusive experience required two or three days' total fasting and then, during the flight on the mechanical mosquito, the simultaneous holding of the nose and ear by the right hand and the left hand, in such a way as to leave the vulnerable parts of the body completely exposed.

But an undoubted miscalculation on the part of the detective brought him into the presence of the maid with no means of persuasion and in a state of complete decomposition.

In *Le Vocatif*, Brussels, nos. 89–90, Mar. 1975. Magritte's contribution to *La Vitrine du posticheur* [*The Wigmaker's Shop Window*], an illustrated crime novel written jointly by Paul Colinet, Marcel Lecomte and René Magritte. This text has been dated to July 1933.

Surrealist Games

1. Colinet proposes eating cream.
2. Lecomte stands beside the barbed-wire post and Colinet passes right beside a woman.
3. Lecomte talks of touching, one night spent camping.
4. We meet those ladies that smell of violets and they answer us.
5. I talk of Éluard.
6. Lecomte had a toothache during tea.
7. I talk of sexual matters at table.
8. Colinet tells me he must look at me in a particular way to see me properly.
9. While playing conundrums, L. discovers it's a question of fluids.
10. Lecomte gets Madam C. to sharpen his pencil.

*

The brush which was found in the wardrobe shortly after the astronomer's suicide seemed to us to be carried by complicitous hands to the table where our tired arms were resting. Each separate bristle was visible; they didn't merge into that uniform surface found in ordinary brushes. The astronomer had carefully tied a childhood souvenir to his brush: a scrap of pink garter which he had got from one of his young admirers one evening when the heavens were resplendent with stars, but which, however, could not attract his attention. He had seen this scrap of material on the young girl's leg and felt an irresistible urge to possess it. He had to have the ribbon or the girl. As he still held deeply rooted religious convictions, he had chosen the scrap of material and had simply grabbed it, pretending to make a clumsy gesture that made him fall and cling to the object of his desires. Since then he always has it with him.

*

Small trade.

The hat given to you by your mother is the fruit of a whole mass of workers.

It has passed from hand to hand, and a decent hatter has given it its pretty shape.

SELECTED WRITINGS

A horse has drawn the carriage filled with hats and then had its meal in the stable.

One day some wretch who didn't have a hat and was jealous of those who did set fire to the village barn, so it would spread and set fire to the hatter's shop.

Moral: Hats get burnt when they are too dear.

The first piece is from a manuscript in Magritte's writing, preserved among Paul Colinet's papers, dated 20th Aug. 1933. The following two pieces appear to be part of the same file.

Ariadne's Thread

The most genuine manifestations of the spirit seem to be vulnerable thanks to a particular weakness: they can be too easily dismissed; if the slightest objection on grounds of sentiment arises, they are rejected with contempt or indifference.

Most of the time, poetry is ineffectual, not so much because of poor technique, but because of a genuine weakness. After a little experience this weakness becomes obvious, as is the ever-renewed disappointment that goes with it. Things get worse still as the poetic approaches the domain of aesthetics. With few exceptions it is a question of *mises-en-scène*, which give the illusion of contact with the real, but merely encounter the void.

But if we believe in the *reality* of the poetic act and try to discover its *meaning*, we find a new direction which instantly leads us away from that sterile region which the mind wears itself out attempting to make fertile. The aim of poetry would then be to discover the secrets of the universe, which would give us power over the elements. Magic would be possible. This would truly satisfy the deep human longing for the marvellous, which has been cheated by miracles and to which we owe, just recently, once again the success of sordid visions.*

If we take this longing seriously, we must no longer be content with subterfuge. And the discovery of a secret, however beautiful it may be, must never be used to transform all things in a facile way into amazing objects – for the mere instant delight in producing a poetic effect which is worthless.

The reality of the element that reveals its secret to us is certainly the point from which we should not depart at any price: it is a touchstone.

In *Documents* 34, Brussels, no. 1, Jun. 1934. *Interventions surréalistes*, p. 15 (W 78).

Reply to the Questionnaire on the Crisis in Painting*

“Let us ask those who are in a better position than we are to throw light on the crossroads painting has reached, where we feel painting does not know which direction to take. Painters, critics, aestheticians, art lovers, art dealers, etc., will tell us the reasons for their doubts, faith, despair, hopes.

We ask them to tell us:

1. If they do or do not think that the *profits* of the period to be settled up – Cubism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Surrealism – make up for what have been called the *losses*, and if it is important to retain something, for the future, from what has been attained – in other words, whether we need to renew contact with a distant or recent past (the Greeks and Romans, for example, or the Renaissance, or Corot) or *carry on* with the investigations of our immediate predecessors.

2. If they accept, and to what extent, any of the watchwords current in *progressive* or *reactionary* circles.

3. Finally, as regards the aesthetic point of view or in general, how do they envisage the *present position* of painting – and its subsequent development.”

1. What painting has lost or gained is of no interest. The only things worth considering are the efforts made to free oneself from the habits of a world which has done all it is capable of, and is now disintegrating. At best painting plays the part of “instrument”, “tool”.

I am for a break with ancient or modern art.

2. I agree with the Communist point of view. My art is only valuable in so far as it is opposed to the bourgeois ideology in whose name life is extinguished.

3. Alongside countless variations on the same subjects, there is research going on, inspired by the scientific spirit and the desire for freedom. These efforts attempt to bring to the field of consciousness objects which the morality and education that has been imposed on us have left cautiously in the dark. There are glimmers that arouse suspicion and the admirable merit of having pointed them out goes to

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the Surrealists. The development of such research seems to me to have no end, but the mediocrity of the world we're given makes it singularly difficult.

In *Les Beaux-Arts*, Brussels, no. 164, 17th May 1935, p. 15 (W 92). Magritte's response was introduced by a commentary: "The Communist point of view is that of René Magritte. What he thinks of the 'official' art of the USSR, such as it was shown to us, last summer, at the Venice Biennale. If one is Communist in art, is one Surrealist in politics? With each step, new misunderstandings and new equivocations. The sharpness of statements like those by René Magritte is apparent. But 'there exist glimmers' that we are happy to capture in the mirror (the least distorting possible) of our survey."

Georges Braque

We would like to recommend the large Georges Braque exhibition at the Brussels Palais des Beaux Arts* to our readers. It is a show of undeniable historical interest, which it is important to grasp fully.

Braque is a “Cubist” painter.

In the history of art, it may be helpful to distinguish roughly two periods: that of classical art and that of modern art.

Modern art begins around 1800. Painters such as Courbet, Géricault and Delacroix paint images which no longer have the conventional character of classical compositions. Millet and Manet express life itself so forcefully that, in the eyes of their contemporaries, their painting is felt as a provocation and enrages art critics and a public tied to the sterile imitations of the past.

With Corot a search begins where specifically pictorial concerns take over from the subjects portrayed; these subjects merely being an excuse for revealing the shapes created by light and shade.

“Appearance” takes on an increasing importance for the “Impressionist” painters. These claim to capture real colours at the very moment we observe them; this direct observation of reality allows us to note nuances that escaped the classical painters, or seemed unimportant to them. And “Pointillist” painters go even further in their attempt to restore the particular vibrations of certain atmospheres by breaking down colour.

But these various efforts were necessarily limited. At best they enabled painters to put impressions inspired by “the look of things” into concrete form.

Cézanne goes beyond this stage. In Cézanne, there is a conception of the universe which is not content with mere appearances. This painter attempts to penetrate the very substance of the world and the essence of space. Besides, Cézanne’s pictures are not like more or less stylized photographic productions. They once again call into question the pictorial representation of reality.

The “Cubist” painters, among whom Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso seem to be the best known, have responded to this summons in an original way.

They have condemned out of hand any painting that claims to reflect the universe.

Cubist pictures are objects with a life of their own, not *representations*. They find their justification by emphasizing the *gap* between the painted object and the appearance of the real object. Now it is appearances that are called into question, and we note that the intention of the Cubist painter is to find a new means of knowledge, rather than to inspire new aesthetic pleasure.

Have they succeeded in this venture?

Perhaps not. But nevertheless, an exhibition such as Georges Braque's is worth considering.

Let us note in conclusion, in order not to break with critical traditions, that Braque uses a very limited range of colours; that he sticks particularly to silhouettes and lights and shades, and that the variety of his greys, whites and blacks often create surprising effects.

In *La Voix du Peuple* (Belgium's Communist party newspaper), Brussels, 1st Dec. 1936 (W 110). Signed Florent Berger, Georgette's maiden name.

Exhibitions:
Georges Rogy, W. Bartoszewicz,
Alfred Wickenburg at the
Palais des Beaux-Arts

Georges Rogy,* who trained as a painter, has not forgotten the teaching of his masters. His paintings bear witness to this knowledge; they give an impression of well-conducted operations and skillfully executed plans, whose results, however, are always predictable.

If Monsieur Rogy were a writer instead of a painter, it would be said that he writes excellent dissertations and has a thorough command of grammar. Since he paints, we will say that he is a good draughtsman and is not unaware of how to achieve charming and monotonous effects at will.

W. Bartoszewicz* is a Polish painter with a sense of the cinematic and the picturesque. But, like most people who create for the theatre or cinema, Bartoszewicz seems above all afraid to show "simple things" to the public. He therefore attenuates the dramatic effects by introducing an element of humour that is reassuring enough. A facile, "comfortable" style completes the compromise.

On the other hand, Alfred Wickenburg's* paintings are moving proof of the artist's efforts to escape from bourgeois conceptions of art.

Here, spirit has conquered habit.

The painter offers us images which plunge the spectator into an ambience similar to that of a dream; the outside world begins to take on strange dependent relations to man, which results in a kind of renewal of the physical qualities of objects.

Alfred Wickenburg belongs to the Austrian nobility. It is quite obvious that he finds the atmosphere of his class stifling. But we feel he is hesitating to commit himself irrevocably to the path that attracts him.

Let us hope he soon realizes that this art can only be, at the moment, one instrument among so many others in the service of liberating tortured man.

In *La Voix du Peuple*, Brussels, 15th Dec. 1936 (W 111). Signed Florent Berger.

London Lecture

Mesdames et Messieurs,

La démonstration que nous allons faire ensemble
tendra à montrer quelques caractères propres aux mots, aux
images et aux objets réels.

(1) Un mot peut remplacer une image:

Chapeau HAT.

(2) Une image peut remplacer un mot. Je vais le démontrer
en me servant ^{d'un} ~~de~~ texte d'André Breton où je remplace un mot
par une image:

Si seulement IF ONLY THE SUN WOULD SHINE TONIGHT.

[de Jean Senteinere] On ne peut pas ONE CANNOT GIVE BIRTH TO A FOAL
WITHOUT BEING ONE ONESELF.



de Paul Eluard:

Dans les plus sombres yeux se ferment les plus clairs.
THE DARKEST EYES ENCLOSE THE LIGHTEST.

[de Paul Colinet]

Il y a THERE IS A SPHERE PLACED ON YOUR
SHOULDERS.

de David Gascoigne

[de Tzucens]

Masque de veuve WIDOW'S MASK FOR THE WALTZ.

de Humphrey Jennings
the

THE FLYING

OF EDUCATION

- 2 -

(3) Un objet ^{reil} peut remplacer un mot:
Le pain du crime. THE BREAD OF CRIME. 8

(4) Une forme quelconque peut remplacer ~~l'image d'un~~
objet ^{un mot}
Les naissent THE ^{BOUN} ARE BORN IN WINTER. 9

(5) Un mot peut faire l'office d'un objet:
Ce bouquet THIS BOUQUET IS TRANSPARENT

(6) On peut désigner une image ou un objet par un autre
^{nom} ~~mot~~ que le sien:

L'oiseau O THE BIRD

La montagne  THE MOUNTAIN

Voici le ciel  BEHOLD THE SKY (skale)

skale is de skape

10

(7) Il existe une affinité secrète entre certaines images.
Elle vaut également pour les objets représentés par ces images.
Recherchons ensemble ce qui doit être dit. Nous connaissons
l'oiseau dans une cage. L'intérêt est éveillé davantage si
l'oiseau est remplacé par un poisson ou un soulier.

Ces images sont curieuses. Malheureusement elles
sont arbitraires et accidentelles.



- 3 -

Il est possible pourtant d'obtenir une image nouvelle qui résistera mieux à l'examen du spectateur. Un grand œuf dans la cage parait être la solution requise.

11



Occupons nous maintenant de la porte. La porte peut s'ouvrir sur un paysage vu à l'envers.

Le paysage peut être ^{représenté} sur la porte.

12

Essayons quelques chose de moins arbitraire: à côté de la porte faisons un trou dans le mur qui est un autre porte aussi.

Cette rencontre sera perfectionnée si nous réduisons ces deux objets ^à un seul. Le trou se place donc tout naturellement dans la porte et par ce trou l'on voit l'obscurité.

13

Cette image pourrait de nouveau s'enrichir ^{si l'on} en éclairant la chose invisible ^{cachée par l'obscurité} que l'obscurité nous cache. Notre regard va veut toujours aller plus loin, veut voir enfin l'objet, la raison de notre existence.

*Tout de la démonstration faite par René Magritte, à
Londres, à la London Gallery, le février 1967*

14

[Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the experiment we are about to make together I hope to demonstrate certain characteristics of words, images and real objects.

1. A word can replace an image:

Chapeau HAT

2. An image can replace a word. I shall demonstrate this using a text by André Breton, where I replace a word with an image:

Si seulement IF ONLY THE SUN WOULD SHINE TONIGHT
On ne peut pas ONE CANNOT GIVE BIRTH TO A FOAL
 WITHOUT BEING ONE ONESELF

by Paul Éluard:

Dans les plus sombres yeux se ferment les plus clairs
 THE DARKEST EYES ENCLOSE THE LIGHTEST

Il y a THERE IS A SPHERE PLACED ON YOUR
 SHOULDERS

by David Gascoyne

Masque de veuve WIDOW'S MASK FOR THE WALTZ

3. A real object can replace a word:

Le pain de crime THE BREAD OF CRIME

4. Any shape can replace a word:

Les naissent THE ARE BORN IN WINTER

5. A word can do the work of an object:

Ce bouquet THIS BOUQUET IS TRANSPARENT

6. You can designate an image or an object by a name other than its own:

L'oiseau THE BIRD

La montagne THE MOUNTAIN

Voici le ciel BEHOLD THE SKY (skaie)

7. Certain images have a secret affinity. This is also true of the objects represented by these images. Let us try and find out what we mean. We

know the bird in the cage. It is more interesting to replace the bird with a fish, or a shoe.

These are strange images. Unfortunately, they are arbitrary, gratuitous.

However, it is possible to get a new image which will stand up under examination. A large egg in the cage seems to be the right solution.

Let us think about the door now. The door may open onto an upside-down landscape.

The landscape may be on the door.

Let's try something less arbitrary: let's make a hole in the wall beside the door, which is another door.

The union would be perfect if we reduce these two objects to one single one. The whole is then quite naturally in the door, and through the hole you see darkness.

This image can be further enriched if we shed light on another invisible thing hidden in the dark. We want to see farther and farther, we want at last to see the object, the reason for our existence.]

Plan for a demonstration made by Magritte in London, (?) Feb. 1937, within the framework of the *Young Belgian Artists* exhibition, at the London Gallery (W 131). Magritte stayed, in Feb.-Mar. 1937, as a guest of his patron, Edward James.

“My Dear...”

My dear, I go to and fro among your trees, a little wan. A sheet flaps, fluttering from one of your branches. Your camisole is green, I shall remember. When I see from afar the sheet of your thigh, I set out the finest eighteenth-century tree-guard. This is how I explain it: the things we see, like your source for example, are in the street, passers-by don't get frightened (if they could see your spring they'd drink from it, that's all). But what a panic if it were a question of the fluttering sheet: those passers-by would flutter too, like birds nipped in the bud. There'd be toing and froing as I go to and fro in your trees. That's the mystery.

In *Le Vocatif*, Brussels, nos. 39–40, Dec. 1973: *Collectif pour Irène Hamoir*. Signed Magritte, with contributions by Colinet, Georgette Magritte and Scutenaire. One of Colinet's texts is dated 1937, which corresponds to the “collective” era.

“Dear Jef...”

Dear Jef,

I don't have enough light any more, nor flesh, nor blood. Death hovers around me, and in the evening the same substance weighs on my courage.

Heads set upright against black slopes, meadows in the foreground and pastures like naked shells on the seashore. The perfume of disquieting woods and bodies, the sense of things, work in safety, the black shape, the sadness of nails in the rain, the blue façades, the enigma of sidewalks, the ray of light climbing from branch to branch on the horizon, the door opening into the starry abyss.

Everything in the air is warm, everything in the heart cold. Smiling murder comes up from the source when the blood has run its winding course. Flashes of fire in the depths of the mind have turned to ice. Your hand gathers green trees. In the night the parapet is filled with withered flowers and old heads. The visit to Titine* has been put off indefinitely. Come anyway, though it'll be a smaller gathering.

Mag. (best wishes)

Postcard from Magritte to Scutenaire, postmarked 18th Dec. 1937.

Life Line

Ladies, Gentlemen, Comrades,

This old question: “Who are we?” receives a disappointing response from the world in which we have to live. Indeed, we are merely the subjects of this so-called civilized world, where intelligence, baseness, heroism, stupidity are quite at home with each other, taking it in turns to come to the fore. We are the subjects of this incoherent and absurd world, where weapons are made to prevent war, where science is devoted to destruction, construction, to killing, to prolonging the life of the dying, where the most frenzied activity is misdirected. We live in a world where people marry for money, build palaces which fall into ruins, deserted, by the seashore. This world still holds together as best it can, but we can already see signs of its approaching downfall shining in the darkness.

It will seem naive and unnecessary to repeat these obvious facts to those who calmly take advantage of this state of affairs. The people who live off this disorder hope to exacerbate it and, since the only means compatible with it are fresh disorders, by plastering over the old edifices in their so-called “realistic” way, they are contributing, unawares, to its imminent ruin.

Other men, on whose side I am proud to be, despite the utopian attitude they are taxed with, consciously crave the proletarian revolution which will change the world; and we are acting to this end, each according to his means.

However, we have to fight against the banal reality wrought through centuries of worshipping money, races, nations, gods and, I may add, worshipping art.

Nature, which bourgeois society has not quite managed to destroy, offers us the dream state, which gives our body and soul the freedom so urgently needed.

Nature appears to have been too generous in providing madness as a refuge for individuals who are too impatient or too weak; this protects them from the stifling atmosphere of the modern world.

Love is the great protective force, love which draws lovers into an enchanted world made to measure, which is admirably protected by its isolation.

Finally, Surrealism, which offers humanity a method and a direction for the spirit allowing research into fields which have been consciously neglected or despised and which nonetheless concern man directly. Surrealism claims for waking life a freedom similar to the freedom we have when we dream.

It is a potential freedom and, from the practical point of view, all we need is for new technicians to devote themselves to reducing some inhibition – possibly the fear of ridicule – and to seek a few minor alterations in our habits, so that the talent we have for only seeing what we choose to see turns into a talent for instantly discovering the object of our desires. Everyday experience, hampered as it is by religious, secular or military morality, already to a certain extent realizes these possibilities.

Anyway, the Surrealists know how to be free. “Freedom – the colour of man,” cries André Breton.*

*

In 1910, de Chirico plays around with beauty, imagines and creates what he desires: he paints *Le Chant d’amour*, where we see a pair of boxing gloves* and the face of a classical statue brought together. He paints *Mélancholia* in a landscape of tall factory chimneys and endless walls. This triumphant poetry has replaced the stereotyped effect of traditional painting. It is a complete break with the intellectual habits peculiar to artists who are prisoners of their talent, virtuosity and all petty aesthetic frills. It is a question of a new vision in which the viewer rediscovers his isolation and hears the silence of the world.

In his illustrations of Paul Éluard’s *Répétitions*,* Max Ernst has demonstrated superbly that we can easily do without everything that gives traditional painting its prestige by using the disturbing effect created by collages from old magazine pictures. Scissors, glue, images and genius have indeed replaced brushes, paints, model, style, the artist’s sensibility and sacred inspiration.

The works of de Chirico, Max Ernst, certain works by Derain* – *L’Homme au journal*, for example, where a real newspaper is stuck into a figure’s hands; Picasso’s research, the anti-artistic activity of Duchamp, who simply suggested using a Rembrandt as an ironing board,* are the beginning of what is now called “Surrealist Painting”.

*

In my childhood, I used to enjoy playing with a little girl in the old disused cemetery in a small provincial town.* We visited the underground vaults, whose heavy iron door we could lift up, and we would come up into the light, where a painter from the capital was painting in a very picturesque avenue in the cemetery with its broken stone pillars strewn over the dead leaves. The art of painting then seemed to me to be vaguely magical, and the painter gifted with superior powers. Alas, I learnt later that painting had very little to do with real life and that every attempt at freedom has always

been ridiculed by the public: Millet's *El Angelus* provoked a scandal when it appeared; the painter was accused of insulting the peasants by his portrayal. People wanted to destroy Manet's *Olympia*, and the critics blamed the painter for painting a woman cut in two, because he only showed the top half of a woman behind a counter, the bottom hidden by the bar [*Un Bar aux Folies Bergère*]. When Courbet was alive, it was thought that he showed extreme bad taste in showing off his pseudo-talent. I also saw that there were infinite examples like these reaching into all fields of thought. As for the artists themselves, most renounced their freedom easily enough and put their art in the service of no matter whom or no matter what. Their concerns and ambitions were generally those of the most blatant arriviste. And so I had a total mistrust of art and artists, if they were officially sanctioned or aspired to be, and I felt I had nothing in common with them. I had a reference point which placed me elsewhere: that magical art that I had known in my childhood.

In 1915, I was trying to find the position which would enable me to see the world in a different way from the way people wanted me to see it. I did have some technical skill in painting and, alone, I made experiments, deliberately different from anything I knew in painting. I felt the delight of freedom as I painted the least conventional images. Then, by a curious stroke of luck, I was given, with a pitying smile – doubtless with the idiotic desire to play a trick on me – the illustrated catalogue to an exhibition of Futurist painters.* There, before my eyes, was a powerful challenge to the common sense I found so annoying. For me this was the same “light” I used to find when I came up from the underground caves in the old cemetery where I played on holiday as a child.

I painted a whole series of Futurist pictures in a veritable frenzy.

And yet, I don't think I was a very orthodox Futurist, since the lyricism I wanted to conquer had an invariable centre unrelated to the aesthetics of Futurism.

This was a pure, powerful feeling: eroticism. The little girl I had known in the cemetery was the object of my daydreams and was caught in the exciting atmosphere of train stations, fairs or towns that I created for her. Thanks to that magical painting I rediscovered the feelings I had experienced in my childhood.

I did not use harshly defined shapes and colours in my compositions, so the shapes and colours could be altered and submit to the demands of a dynamic rhythm.

For example, the elongated rectangle that stood for a tree trunk was sometimes cut off, sometimes curved, sometimes hardly visible, depending on its role. These totally free forms were not at variance with nature,

which doesn't, as regards the tree in question, stick to producing trees of one colour, size and strictly invariable shape.

This type of preoccupation gradually called into question an object's relation to its shape and the relation of its apparent shape to what is essential to its existence. I was searching for the plastic equivalents of this essence and I ceased to be concerned with the movement of the object. I then painted pictures of still objects, stripped of their details and accidental particulars. Only the essence of these objects was visible to the eye and, in contrast to the image we see in real life, where they are concrete, the painted image gave a very lively feeling of an abstract existence.

Now, this contradiction broke down: I ended up finding the same abstraction in the appearance of the real world as in the pictures; for, despite the complicated combinations of details and nuances in a real landscape, I saw it as if it were merely a curtain in front of my eyes. I became uncertain of distance in the landscape, very unsure how far away the light blue of the horizon was, my immediate experience placing it simply on a level with my eyes.

I was in the same innocent state as the child in his cradle who thinks he can grab hold of the birds in the sky. Paul Valéry seems to have felt like this in front of the sea – which, he says, rises up in front of the viewer's eyes.* The French Impressionist painters, Seurat for example, by breaking down an object into its colours saw the world exactly like this.

I now had to bring this world to life, a world which even when moving had no depth and had lost all consistency. Then I felt that the objects themselves had to reveal their vigorous existence, and I searched for the answer.

Because of this new preoccupation I lost sight of my previous experiments; once I had arrived at the abstract representations of the world, from the moment that very abstraction characterized the real world as well, they were useless. I began to create pictures from a new starting point using my old way of painting; because of this discrepancy I was not able to carry through my investigations to the full; my attempts to reveal an object's existence clearly were hindered by the abstract image I gave that object. The rose that I placed in the breast of a young naked girl [*Jeune fille*, 1924] did not produce the disturbing effect I expected.

Subsequently, I introduced into my pictures elements with all the details we see in reality, and I soon saw that these elements shown in this way instantly called into question the elements they corresponded to in the real world.

Therefore, around 1925, I decided only to paint objects with the details that were visible; that was the only way my research could develop. I was really only abandoning a certain style that had led me to a point I had to go

beyond. That decision, which forced me to break a comfortable habit, was made easier at that time by a long meditation in a Brussels café. Because of my state of mind, the door mouldings seemed to be endowed with a mysterious life, and I was in touch with their reality for a long time.

*

It is at this point that I met Paul Nougé, E.L. T. Mesens and Jean Scutenaire. We were drawn together by common concerns. We met the Surrealists who were violently demonstrating their disgust of bourgeois society. Their revolutionary claims being ours, we joined them in the service of proletarian revolution.

It was a great failure. The politicians who led workers' parties were, in fact, far too egotistical and short-sighted to take the Surrealists' contributions into account. They were the high-and-mighty men who were permitted to compromise seriously the cause of the proletariat in 1914. All kinds of baseness and treachery were allowed. In Germany, when they represented a mass of perfectly disciplined workers and could have used that power to crush that bloody nuisance, Hitler, they simply gave in to him and his handful of fanatics. Recently, in France, Monsieur [Léon] Blum is helping the Germans and Italians to kill off the young Spanish Republic and, fearing, he says, a revolutionary situation, he appears to be unaware of the rights and power of the people, as he, in his turn, gives in to the threats of a reactionary minority.* But let us note the way that a proletarian political leader must be very courageous to dare to proclaim in public his faith in the cause he is fighting for. Such men are killed. The subversive aspect of Surrealism obviously worried the traditional workers' politicians, who are at times indistinguishable from the most strenuous defenders of the bourgeois world. Surrealist thought is revolutionary on all levels and is, of necessity, opposed to the bourgeois conception of art. It so happens that left-wing politicians agree with that bourgeois conception and, when it comes to painting, they don't want to tough it out unless it toes the line.

However, the politician who calls himself a revolutionary and who must therefore look to the future, ought to be opposed to the bourgeois conception of art, because it consists of a cult uniquely devoted to the works of the past and a desire to impede the progress of art. The value of a work of art is also measured in the bourgeois world by rarity, by its worth in gold; its intrinsic value only interests a few innocent latecomers, who are equally satisfied by the sight of a flower in a field and the possession of a diamond, whether real or false. A conscious revolutionary like Lenin judges gold at its true value. He writes: "When we have conquered on a world scale, I think we will build gold urinals in the streets of some of the biggest cities in the world."* A senile

old reactionary like Clemenceau, zealous slave of every bourgeois myth, has this mind-boggling thought on art: "Certainly I have won the world war, but if I have a claim to fame in future History, it is due to my incursions into the realm of art."*

Surrealism is revolutionary because it is the restless enemy of all the bourgeois ideological values which keep the world in its present appalling condition.

From 1925 to 1926, I painted some sixty pictures, which were shown in the Le Centaure gallery in Brussels. Their impressive testimony of freedom naturally made the critics jump to the attack; I didn't expect much from them anyway. I was blamed for everything. Blamed for the absence of some things and the presence of others.

The absence of plastic qualities which the critics noted had, in fact, been an objective representation of objects, which was clearly understood by those whose taste has not been corrupted by all the literature surrounding painting. The detached way of representing objects seems to me to come from a universal style, where an individual's idiosyncrasies and petty preferences are no longer in play. For example, I used light blue for the sky, unlike the bourgeois artist who paints the sky in order to put such and such a blue with his favourite grey. As for me, I find that these poor little preferences do not concern us, and that these artists are in all seriousness making themselves ridiculous.

It was for good reason that the traditional picturesque, alone authorized by the critics, was not in my pictures: on its own the picturesque has no effect, it works against itself each time it reappears in the same old way. For what gave it its charm before it had become traditional was the unexpected, the novelty of composition, its strangeness. Through repetition, the picturesque has become disgustingly monotonous. At every *Salon du Printemps*, how can the public look yet again at that old church in sunlight or moonlight, those onions and eggs, sometimes on the right sometimes on the left of the inevitable copper pot with its statutory reflections, without being overcome with nausea? Or else that swan, which since antiquity has been getting ready to penetrate all those thousands of Ledas?

However, I do think that the picturesque can be used as any other element, provided that it is used in a new way or under particular circumstances – for example a veteran, a legless cripple would cause a sensation at a court ball. The conventional picturesque quality of that avenue in the ruined cemetery seemed magical to me in my childhood, because I discovered it after the darkness of the underground caves.

I was also blamed for the ambiguous nature of my pictures. What an admission on the part of those who complain: they admit ingenuously that,

when left to themselves, they are uncertain, they don't have the authority of some expert, the sanction of time, or some catchword to reassure them.

I was also blamed for my unusual preoccupations. Strange reproach from people for whom novelty is a mark of high value.

I was blamed for lots of other things and finally for showing objects in pictures in unfamiliar positions. And yet, here, it is a question of making a real if unconscious desire come true. Indeed, the ordinary painter is already trying, with the limits fixed for him, to upset the order in which he always sees objects. He is timidly audacious, vaguely allusive. Given my wish to make the most familiar objects jar, if possible, I obviously had to upset the order in which objects are usually placed; I found the cracks we see in our houses and on our faces more eloquent in the sky [*Le Monde poétique*]; turned wooden table legs lost their innocence if they suddenly appeared to dominate a forest [*Le Jockey perdu, Le Joueur secret*]; a woman's body floating above a city was a fair exchange for the angels which have never appeared to me [*Les Grands Voyages, La Robe de l'aventure*]; it was very useful to see the Virgin Mary's underwear – it showed her in a new light;* I preferred to believe the iron bells hanging around the necks of our admirable horses were growing like venomous plants on the edge of the abyss [*Les Fleurs de l'Abîme, Le Gouffre argenté*]...

As for mystery, as for the enigmas imposed on my pictures, I will say that this was the best proof of my break with all the absurd intellectual habits that usually take the place of a genuine feeling for life.

*

The pictures painted during the following years, from 1925 to 1936, were also the result of a systematic search for a disturbing poetic effect, which, if created by setting objects from reality out of context, would give the real world from which these objects were borrowed a disturbing poetic sense by a natural exchange.

The way I did this was analysed by Paul Nougé in a work entitled *Les Images défendues*.^{*} Firstly, removing objects from their usual surroundings, for example the Louis Philippe table on an ice bank, the flag on a dung heap. The objects which were to be removed from their usual context were very familiar objects, in order to make the sense of disorientation as disturbing as possible. A child in flames will indeed move us more than some distant planet being burnt up [*Le Maître du plaisir*]. Paul Nougé noted correctly that certain objects devoid in themselves of any exceptional affective power retained this power when removed from their normal surroundings. Thus, women's underclothes were particularly resistant to any unexpected venture.

Creating new objects; transforming ordinary objects; changing the substance of some objects: a sky made of wood, for example [*Le Prince des objets*]; using words with images; calling an image by the wrong name [*L'Usage de la parole*, *La Clef des songes*, etc.]; putting into practice ideas suggested by friends; portraying certain visions of the half-awake state [*Bel canto*, *Les Affinités électives*, *Jeune fille mangeant un oiseau*, *La Durée poignardée*] were, on the whole, ways to force objects to be sensational at last.

Paul Nougé, in *Les Images défendues*, also notes that the titles of my pictures are a talking point and are not explanations. The titles are chosen to prevent my pictures from being placed in a reassuring region in which the mechanical functioning of the mind would place them, in order to underestimate their significance. Titles must be an additional protection to discourage all attempts to reduce poetry to a pointless game.

*

One night in 1936, I woke up in a room with a bird asleep in a cage. Due to a magnificent delusion I saw not a bird but an egg inside the cage. Here was an amazing new poetic secret, for the shock I felt was caused precisely by an affinity between the two objects, cage and egg, whereas before, this shock had been caused by bringing together two unrelated objects [*Les Affinités électives*].

From then on I searched for other objects which could also, by bringing to light an element particular to them, reveal the same manifest poetry as the egg and the cage had succeeded in creating through their meeting. In the course of my search I became convinced that this element to be discovered, this one thing among all others somehow attached to every object, was always something I knew beforehand, but that this knowledge was as if buried deep down in my mind.

As these investigations could give only one correct answer for each object, my research was like an attempt to solve a problem with three “givens”: the object, the thing tied to it in the shadow of my consciousness and the light into which this thing had to emerge.

The problem of the door called for an opening that someone could go through. In *La Réponse imprévue* I showed a closed door in a flat in which an odd-shaped hole unveils the night.*

Through *La Découverte du feu*, I had the privilege of feeling the same as the first men who gave birth to flame by rubbing two stones together. In my turn I imagined a piece of paper, an egg and a key bursting into flames [*L'Échelle du feu*].

The problem of the window led to *La Condition humaine*. In front of a window seen from inside a room I placed a picture representing exactly

that part of the landscape masked by the picture. So the tree in the picture hid the tree behind it, outside the room. For the viewer, the tree was simultaneously in the room in the picture and outside in the real landscape. That existence in two different spaces at once is like the moment existing simultaneously in the past and the present as in *déjà vu*.

The tree as the subject of a problem turned into a big leaf, its stem a tree trunk with the roots going straight down into the earth. In memory of one of Baudelaire's poems* I called it *La Géante*.

For the house I showed a room with a house inside it through the open window in the façade of a house. This is *L'Éloge de la dialectique*.

L'Invention collective is the answer to the problem of the sea: lying on the beach is a mermaid: the top half is a fish, and the lower half the belly and legs of a woman. I solved the problem of light with a candle, lighting a woman's bust in a picture which was also lit by this one candle. This was called *La Lumière des coïncidences*.

Le Domaine d'Arnheim is the realization of a vision that Edgar Allan Poe would have been very pleased with: a huge mountain shaped exactly like a bird with wings spread. It is seen through an opening with a ledge on which there are two eggs.

Woman gave rise to *Le Viol*. This is a woman's face made up of her body. The breasts are the eyes, the nose is a navel and her sex replaces the mouth.

The problem of shoes demonstrates how the most appalling things go unnoticed through force of habit. Thanks to *Le Modèle rouge* we feel that the union of foot and shoe is a monstrous custom.

In *Le Printemps éternel* a girl dancer has replaced the penis of a Herculean figure reclining by the sea.

The problem of rain called forth great clouds creeping over the ground in a view of the countryside in the rain. *La Sélection naturelle*, *L'Union libre* and *Le Chant de l'orage* are three versions of this.

Finally, the last problem I tackled was the horse. Again I realized while I was searching that I knew unconsciously what had to be brought to light. In fact, my first idea is a vague anticipation of the definitive solution: the idea of a horse with three undefined shapes on its back; I did not know what they meant until I had made a series of tests. I constructed an object: a pot with a label with the image of a horse on it and the words "Horse jam". I then thought of a horse and replaced its head with a hand with the little finger pointing forwards; but I realized it was too much like a unicorn. For a long time I lingered over an attractive composition: I placed an amazon in a dark room sitting by a table, leaning her head on her hand, staring dreamily at a horse landscape. The bottom half of the body and the horse's legs were the colour of sky and clouds. What put me on the right track at

last was a rider in the position of someone riding a galloping horse: the head of a charger emerged from the arm that was thrown forward and the other hand thrown backwards like a whip. I placed an American Indian beside the rider in the same position and I suddenly guessed the meaning of those three undefined shapes I had put on the horse when I began my search. I knew they were riders and I put the finishing touches to *La Chaîne sans fin*: in a deserted landscape and dark sky, a rearing horse with a modern horseman, one from the end of the Middle Ages, and a rider from an ancient civilization on its back.

*

Nietzsche thinks that without a hyperactive sexual system, Raphael would not have painted all those madonnas*... This is certainly a different motive than those generally attributed to this venerable painter: priests, fervent Christian faith; aesthetes: desire for pure beauty, etc. But this opinion brings us back to a healthier interpretation of pictorial phenomena. Our chaotic world, full of contradictions, holds more or less together thanks to very complex, ingenious explanations which seem to justify it and render it acceptable to the majority. These explanations do take into account a particular experience. But it should be noted that it is a question of “ready-made” experience and that, if it gives rise to brilliant analyses, this experience is not itself founded in terms of an analysis of its true conditions.

Future society will develop an experience at the heart of life which will be the fruit of a far-reaching analysis, whose lines are being drawn before our very eyes.

And it is thanks to a rigorous prior analysis that the pictorial experience as I understand it can henceforth be founded. This pictorial experience confirms my faith in life’s undiscovered possibilities.

All these hitherto unknown things that are coming to light suggest to me that our happiness too depends on an enigma associated with man, and that our one duty is to try to solve it.

Unpublished text of a lecture given by Magritte, 20th Nov. 1938, at the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp.

Bourgeois Art

The bourgeois order is a disorder. Extreme confusion deprived of all contact with the world of necessity.

Those who profit from the capitalist confusion defend it by means of a bunch of sophisms and lies through which they attempt to influence all human activity.

And so they do not hesitate to affirm that the bourgeois social order has helped the development of culture to an extraordinary degree, and that art, for example, has conquered unexplored territories which, before, seemed inaccessible.

There is no longer any possible doubt. We must denounce this imposture. Our criticism does not spring from a desire to do battle, but is based solely on precise, strictly objective observation.

The very special value accorded to art by the bourgeoisie clearly shows up the futility of its aesthetic concepts, built up under the pressure of class interests totally alien to cultural concerns. The stratagem consists essentially in falsifying the natural relations between man and his world, so that it is no longer possible to use an object for itself, but always for motives which are totally unrelated to it. People do not want a diamond for its intrinsic properties – its authentic qualities alone – but because, as it costs a great deal, it gives the man who possesses it a kind of superiority over his fellow men, and is a concrete expression of social inequality. Besides, things have become so absurd that if you buy a fake diamond unawares, you will be just as satisfied, because you have paid the price of the genuine article.

It is no different with art. Capitalist hypocrisy, always refusing to take a thing for what it is, attributes to art the characteristics of a superior activity, quite different from the activities of the average man. Whereas usually man **MAKES** something, accomplishes some task of no world-shattering significance, the bourgeois artist claims to **EXPRESS** high-flown sentiments that are merely subjective. In this case bourgeois individualism is pushed to the limit, an individualism that isolates man and allows each one to feel superior to all his fellow men with whom he has no real contact.

However, it would be wrong to suppose that there have been no valid views on art formulated during the course of capitalist domination.

We need only evoke the ideals of Hegel, Nietzsche and Freud. Hegel clearly saw the art of allowing man to express his very innermost spirit through enduring actions. Nietzsche, who remarked that you can't look at the impressive number of virgins Raphael painted without realizing that he had excessive sexual potency. Finally Freud, whose psychological works are of capital importance, who tried to show that artistic activity is nothing but a substitute for sexual activity, sometimes also a preparation for it and often even a disguised form of exhibitionism.

In the light of such statements, all the critical literature clustering round the field of art has to be seen as essentially absurd – like blundering flies, buzzing round a corpse in an advanced state of decay. We only have to recall Clemenceau's delirious statement: "I won the world war, but I am confident that my incursions into the field of art will bring to my name the only lustre that will not tarnish with age!"

We have to realize that the revolutionary artist has inherited a mass of habits and confused feelings. He is an object of suspicion and to a certain extent suffers the demoralizing effect of obscure, contradictory advice which leads him astray. Thus his essential freedom is threatened. But he revolts against the execrable conditions of life and, with limited means, attacks the dubious ideas of morality, religion, country and aesthetics imposed on him by the capitalist world.

That's why he resorts to scandal (Rimbaud wrote on church walls: "Shit on God!"*) – shocking the conformist may open some minds to doubt. That is why he attempts to create certain objects (books, pictures, etc.) which will destroy the prestige of the bourgeois myths – or at least he hopes so.

The true value of art is a function of its power as a liberating revelation. And the artist is in no way superior when it comes to man's work. The artist does not have a priestly role, which the bourgeoisie alone attributes to him. But he must not lose sight of the fact that his efforts, like the workers', are necessary to the dialectical progress of the world.

In collaboration with Scutenaire, in *London Bulletin*, no. 12. 15th Mar. 1939, pp. 13–14 (W 165).

For *L'Invention collective*

Men are forced into doing all they can to accomplish a utopian task.

Their consent is obtained by using threats and words that appear to describe indispensable realities.

The world is blinded by this blackmail, and yet legitimate anxiety is manifested, though this is soon appeased by the rather vague hope that dreams will come true, somehow or other.

As long as we have the means, we Surrealists cannot refrain from action; we oppose absolutely the myths, ideas, the feelings and behaviour of this equivocal world.

Text for the first number of *L'Invention collective*, 1939.

“R.M. Has Changed...”

R.M. has changed the use of painting. Here it is no longer a question of mere vision, sensitivity or any other explanation usually used in the art world. You can more or less find these things in R.M.'s paintings. But a curious point of view deprives words of their power to explain. We long to know, but we try and satisfy this longing in a joyous atmosphere and the light in R.M.'s pictures lends an unexpected charm to our efforts.

Letter no. 62 (Nov. 1943) in *La Destination*, 1977. This text was to inspire in Mariën a preface of up to twenty lines for the exhibition at the Galerie Dietrich (W 210). Ultimately Nougé wrote the preface, under the pseudonym Paul Lecharantais.

The Paint Seller, or The Labour of Man

A painter goes to Madame X's shop and asks for a stretcher and a 50 x 60 cm canvas. Madame X asks what he is going to paint on the canvas, the artist says he doesn't know yet, that he is waiting for inspiration, to which Madame X replies: then why are you ordering this size since you don't know whether it will be suitable for what you have in mind? Come back later, Monsieur, when you know exactly what you need. Another artist comes in to buy paints, Madame asks what they're for. They're for a portrait and, questioned further, the artist says the model is red-headed with green eyes. Right, says Madame X, here are the paints you need, and she wraps up a few. The painter says: I need Veronese green for the eyes and scarlet for the dress. No you don't, says Madame X, I have given you cinnabar green (a yellowish green) – you'll have to use that for the eyes, using the right contrasting tones; and I don't think scarlet is what you want for the dress – you'd be better to paint it in a grey tone to go with the red hair...

In La Destination, 1977, no. 75.

Magic Lines

Jacques Wergifosse,* closing his eyes and thinking of an object, a feeling, draws lines on the paper. He moves towards what is here, close beside us, lying in wait for us in the night.

Wergifosse's drawings are the remnants of a state between waking and sleeping.

They can only make sense in those rare moments when our heart has found its place in the universe.

In *Le Ciel bleu*, Brussels, no. 6, 29th Mar. 1945, p. 3 (W 216).

Homage to James Ensor*

The publicity surrounding the James Ensor exhibition* is very interesting in itself: firstly, the critics were unanimous in declaring that James Ensor is an artist of the first order, with considerable spiritual influence. However, this same group of critics gave Ensor's first pictures a somewhat cool reception (*Le Chou* was termed "depraved" in 1880, *L'Après-midi d'Ostende* was turned down by the *Salon de Bruxelles* in 1881, etc.). Naturally, these competent critics played their usual role, furiously defending the worn-out values of the moment at each call to arms, and the young Ensor did not seem too concerned. Now the watchword has changed: Ensor, it seems, is "the top". Of course some degree of freedom was inevitable in his search for a new pictorial climate. The French Impressionists had the same aim: to hone the objectives of painting, to explore in depth. Like his French friends, Ensor has created pictures indulging in the subtle plays of colour. The subjects are unimportant: they are merely an excuse for asymmetrical compositions and for the colourists' decorative discourse. It is obvious that here it is not a question of a new way of understanding the world, as in Millet, Courbet or Manet. A short-sighted sense of well-being, a good-natured humour presided over the development of Ensor's work; this gives quite a good idea of the contented life of the bourgeoisie in 1900. At best a certain inconsequential nostalgia is what is left of this world in the process of vanishing – but let us not take this for a joyful feeling of life.

As a result of the Ensor exhibition another kind of interest emerges: art dealers and speculators of all kinds are on the lookout for a good bargain.

The preface to the exhibition catalogue tells us that the "questionable pictures" will soon be investigated and eliminated. Then Ensor's pictures will become gilt-edged investments. Poor brave James Ensor! You were thrust into the title Baron and now the very images in which you sang your youth have become the sad objects of a vast speculation business.

Finally, the interest now shown by the visitors to the Ensor retrospective is worth noting: the public strolls around looking grave and serious in front of vegetables, vases of flowers, drunken Christs and the other subjects Ensor amused himself painting – unaware that their serious airs

RENÉ MAGRITTE

are somewhat out of place. If it were possible to forget all the gossip and legends that distort James Ensor, a large exhibition of his works like the one now being held would perhaps help to purify the artistic atmosphere still overshadowed by the Nazi occupation. But it seems we must still be living under the blackout.

In *Le Drapeau rouge*, Brussels, 20th–21st Oct. 1945 (W 224).

Three Pamphlets

IDIOT



Good patriots are idiots;
Good patriots muck up the country.

*All the time, every day, at least one patriot
has no qualms about shitting on the sacred
soil of his native land.*

Priests are idiots; they don't know a thing
about religion.

We'll show 'em a thing or two.

The Breendonk torturers* are fools, totally
lacking in imagination.

*They could have forced their victims to look
at themselves in a mirror, for instance.*

Reader, you are an idiot, naturally.
The cops protect you (badly), but you suffer
(badly).
Screw it.



SILLY BUGGER



Politicians have bugged up the world with their wars. Now they are preparing a famine.

Never mind that, we'll soon be enjoying first-class meals and thinking about all those cretins who are dying of hunger.

In the past, economists bugged us up by encouraging consumption. Now they ask us to make sacrifices. Can you believe it?

But it seems that it all depends on the coal dispute, all is well. Our slaves, the miners, are sweating away for us.

Soldiers are there to be bugged around. But even the heroism of the trooper has a limit.

A pity – they could be forced to stand to attention to shit.

Reader, you are a perfect bugger.
You should be put down.





FUCKER



The fucker is a smart guy. He doesn't give a damn about repopulation; on the other hand he is guilty of excess timidity.

Indeed, does he dare introduce his prick into his friend's asshole?

Fuckers make good publicity.

Thus a fucker with a hobby in the perfume business has come up with the idea of displaying in his shop, amidst a rustic décor, a magnificent bunch of flowers sprouting out of a crapper.

Good Catholics are imbeciles.

Really, when they take Christ's body into themselves they're swallowing the Lord's prick and arse too.

Reader, you are a fucker too. When you shit, even your crap fucks you.



'Idiot' was published at the beginning of April 1946 according to Wergifosse (in *EA*. nos. 11-13, Apr. 1974). 'Silly Bugger' and 'Fucker' were "forthcoming" according to a letter to Achille Chavée on 5th Apr. Mariën (*Les Lèvres nues*, new series, no. 8, Mar. 1974) claims that Magritte is the author of 'Idiot', while he collaborated on the other two pamphlets.

A NEW
Cultural Initiative
FROM THE
COLLEGE^O_FART





The importance and reality of the carnal act cannot be seriously refuted by our members. After the work of Remy de Gourmont, Freud, Kierkegaard, Marcel Lecomte, D.H. Lawrence, etc., who shed the revolutionary light of the unconscious on the subject, it was evident that a bold, balanced dissemination was called for. We are convinced that our COLLEGE cannot avoid its obligation to paint in broad brush strokes a vast sexual fresco, so that our members will see, in these angst-ridden times, the necessity for organizing the sexual education as regards the libido – concrete basis if ever there was one – of the working masses as well as from the perspective of the present times.

The eminent, distinguished professor IJOWESCU* from the College of Further Sexological Studies in Sofia is at this moment engaged in a tour of the West. After brilliant performances in Vienna, London and Paris, we have no doubt that Brussels, having the professor within its walls, will be eager to give him a hero's welcome. The COLLEGE has the good fortune to announce to its members that the professor is their devoted servant, and they will have the chance to appreciate his dialectical talents, delicately impregnated with a humanism lightly tinged with a hint of the serene existentialism. While contributing to the intellectual development of its members, we must emphasize that the

professor is working with us to strengthen the bonds of Belgo-Bulgarian brotherhood.

The professor's main works are being translated into French and Flemish, and, thanks to our efforts, will soon be published to inaugurate the series: SEX and CULTURE.

— ROYAL SEXUALITY AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS ON THE PEOPLE

— THE UPROOTED SEX, OR PEDERASTY
(Sketch of the author)

— RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA AND THE PERFECT ORGASM (2 vols.)

There is no doubt that our members will all appreciate the high educational value of these works, which we strongly recommend to the untiring attention of our readers, and as usual they will be anxious not to lose this opportunity of providing for all eventualities and of profiting once again from our pedagogical activities – which every day bring further proof of fertility, thanks to our unsparing efforts not to lose sight of important intellectual currents.



In addition to our educational sessions in cinema, music (records), painting, theatre (from tragedy to farce) and philosophy, our COLLEGE is organizing three sessions on:

SEXUAL PRACTICE

Lectures by Professor IJOWESCU
College of Further Sexological Studies
Sofia (Bulgaria)

15th May, at 8.30, in the *Petite Salle des Beaux-Arts*;
SIMPLE, SUBLIMATED and ONEIRIC SEXUALITY

17th May, at 8.30, in the *Grande Salle des Beaux-Arts*;
PAGAN, CHRISTIAN and LOGICAL SEXUALITY

19th May, at 8.30 in the *Petite Salle des Beaux-Arts*;
SEX IN ART AND IN POLITICS

These conferences will be illustrated by explanatory scenes for which young intellectuals ... of both sexes will provide their assistance ...

**ADMISSION: 20 FR. Associate Members and Subscribers: 15 FR.
Artists or students: 2.50 FR.**

Magritte and Mariën were the authors of this hoax (W 248). The invitations were posted on 4th May 1946 (see *EA*. no. 111-13, April 1974).

Texts from *Le Suractuel*

The sun and the priest

Bruss. 2nd July (R.M.)

I saw a priest in the sun. Not only was he black (so are sun spots), but he was dirty. It bothered me, even if it didn't bother the sun.

News item

Bruss. 2nd July (R.M.)

An Italian cook and his wife take in rich tourists. When they go for a walk in the country, alone or with their families, the cook conjures up a violent storm, and then he has his wife rob the unsuspecting guests.

Bruss. 2nd July (R.M.)

In the sun this afternoon I saw a young woman in the company of her body waiting for a tram.

Passing by the American Consulate, I suddenly think of going in and politely asking the consul to "do the necessary" so I can be made King of America tomorrow. (R.M.)

In *Le Suractuel*, Brussels, ed. Christian Dotremont, no. 1 (one issue), Jul. 1946.

Le Jour nul des Poètes*

Open Letter to Father Morel*

My Reverend Father,

I have been guilty of rash – some would say indelicate – acts. Fortunately, the Allies' successive victories have opened my eyes and forced me to examine my artistic conscience anew. My conscience is now clear, no one is harassing me, and the winds of charity are blowing and calming me. Through the orifice of my parish confessional it was not difficult to receive absolution for my spiritual activities as a slightly compromised collaborator. Therefore, armed with a pure, humbly Christian soul, I respectfully take the liberty of conversing with you on serious matters (to me at least). My *Poet's Journal* is about to be published again, and I am anxious for it to be the progressive champion of the morality of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of that morality that inspired Paul Éluard, the great Resistance hero, with his finest verse; particularly this admirable poem to the glory of the crippled, dedicated to you (allow me to recall it for the reader):

DEAD STAR

Fresh wounds
My brow this burning balm

The cripples with their plant hearts
Open doors
To what is left of man
To weep before love
To play and suffer

Your eyes frighten shells
Your spring wheels grow

Among stones
Your little carriage is beautiful

In the dark picture
Your breast your late lamented arms
A trinity of words
On my hand on your mouth

Long live France

– Paul Éluard

...this morality that enables us to triumph over the demon of the flesh, as do, for example, the magnificent rector of Louvain University, Father Lhiétard, and countless others! I salute them in the ideal.

They represent the ORDER we need if we do not wish to succumb to our illicit appetites.

To think that there are some who think of criticizing this order, who feel the need to modify the august social machine! Can one not live holily in Catholic society as it exists today? Can one not – even if one is not a practising believer – live righteously without being troubled by vain thoughts? I reply: yes, surely! We have only to think of those artists from the College of Art and we have to admit that one can labour in the field of modern art and still protect oneself from the evil pitfalls into which so many frivolous minds fall in such a secular fashion! But good always triumphs in the end; Dalí, troubadour of human excrement, paints baby Jesus surrounded by roses, and Max Ernst was not slow to follow this fecund route: he has just painted a Temptation of St Anthony, approved by the Hollywood connoisseurs.* Has not Picasso himself acknowledged the ancient intellectual truths? His descents from the cross bear eloquent witness, and no one doubts that, thanks to this fragile glimmer of light, we were permitted to see you taking all the necessary steps to lead this lost sheep back to the bosom of our valiant mother Church (at least in public). But it would be remiss of me not to point out to you the case of Picasso (give the Devil his due): in your lectures on him you omitted to point out my influence on that period of the Spanish master. Although tenuous, my influence is indeed conclusive! I have no trouble in finding the tumescent flesh in Picasso's crucifixions in my own series of "Christic sufferings", and the blood pouring out of my Christs and chickens winds its cavalier way through the primitive compositions of the celebrated Iberian. The hands of the Galilean that I painted with bits and pieces Picasso exhumed again a few years later! In brief, he jolly well pinched my Christ! But all that aside, I fully approve your generous Picasso-ian propaganda; it can but lead the pederasts and miserable rebels of our time back to God. I shall make every

effort in the *Poet's Journal* to help you manfully in this holy crusade. The great names: Claudel, Pierre Fontaine (of *Le Phare*), Pierre Emmanuel,* Bernanos, Cocteau, Mauriac, Montherlant, Fabre-Luce* are all with me heart and soul. In this special issue of the *Poet's Journal* I already have a sumptuous unpublished text by the great pillar of future generations, namely PAUL CLAUDEL: that caryatid, what a wrestler's torso! I had the honour of meeting him at a banquet for ascetics and never will I forget the mystic influence emanating from every pore! And his dramas! Which is why I cannot believe certain rumours accusing him of bestiality and claiming that he is seriously implicated in sex scandal. It would be a good thing if you could shed some light on this subject too.

I have no doubt that all the above presupposes you to grant me your earnest attention, and that in the future I can count on your loyal collaboration. Reverend Father, I offer you my filial and sacred respect. Pray for me.

– Pierre-Louis Flouquet

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THE SACRIFICIAL PAINTING, OR NO MAN IS A PROPHET IN HIS OWN LAND

Our racial treasures, our folkloric traditions are in danger. Too much frivolous publicity on behalf of foreign ventures is infecting our country's art. Scarcely has the so-called Dutch School left our ranks, when here comes foreign-born Picasso, attempting to upset our spiritual equilibrium. Alas! Our Belgian painters are neglected; they are unknown abroad and barely tolerated here at home.

Tytgat, De Smet, Delvaux, Pieter* and countless other noble palettes work and slave surrounded by an indifferent public. There must be an end to this scandalous state of affairs. Let us close ranks! Let us protect ourselves, let us not allow our painters to be sacrificed so shamefully! For they are as necessary to us as the native air we breathe and, faced with imported painting, the swift religious currents that the *Poet's Journal* has set in motion are inspiring them with the racial vigour of our inspired thrusts. Customs control is useless when it comes to the plastic arts, and our leaders would do well to follow the example of what was, all things being considered, beneficial in the Propaganda Abteilung, by translating into our national usage the severe but just measures taken to prevent degenerate Semitic art from submerging the Germanic plastic arts. Really, all our openings must be blocked by a sordid materialism when we refuse to give Tytgat the place he deserves! Tytgat the Northern Gaul, the sleepy

shepherd, the homely cantor of a senile but virile world! And his companions: Brusselmans,* the pastry poet whose potatoes recreate the Belgian cosmos with its harsh Nordic realities – who teaches us how far we have come from Cézanne’s gaudy, multi-coloured apples, those French apples that saw at first hand the edge of the Abyss in 1940! De Smet, fairground Frenchie with his abstract black puddings! Delvaux comes back at last to the great decorative mystical fold! Pieter, the Ghent forger of cathedrals into a plastic ideal! Pasque,* the craftsman, his hands clammy with sincere fervour! Dasnoy,* the florist of the feminine altar! And so many others, living or dead, who have sung the praises of the Holy Land! Let us make our *mea culpa* and may God be with us.

– Pierre-L. Flouquet

*

LONG LIVE THE BELGO-COSMIC FILM! Pilgrim in Hell

It was with the undying enjoyment of the highest order that I was present at the screening of the film of Father Damien’s life – Father Damien, God’s sporting mouthpiece, among the innocents of the Hawaiian Isles, who knew not good from evil before Father Damien disembarked upon their shores. Father Damien! His champion’s profile stands out in startling Christian relief on a few metres of film! Praise be to the Belgian filmmaker Henri Storck,* to whom befell the honour of working straight from the life of this holy man, martyr of the flesh, whose image fills mothers and children with tender pity. Storck will know what I mean when I “explain” that his obvious genius on this occasion is not unrelated to his abandonment of Communism, his return to the breast of the Demiurge, the direct result of the startling revelations vouchsafed to him by the intellectual filmmakers of the Third Reich about Bolshevism. (Bolshevism, which disgusted me so much that, had I not been under the sacred obligation to provide for my children’s sustenance, I would have instantly joined the Walloon Legion to go and shed my blood in the flames of the anti-Bolshevik crusade!) Storck’s film would not have been complete without the masterful musical score which added to its propaganda effect. And so a double homage must be rendered to Moulaert Junior,* who undertook this difficult task. Moulaert Junior is all the more deserving from the religious point of view, since his prominent position with the liberal, anticlerical paper *The Last Hour* did not prevent him from producing the religious music accompanying Father Damien’s adventures. This proves he has an open mind and a contempt for

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subjective sectarians who adhere to the narrow limits of an absurd faith; and, to a certain extent, we can see that his intellectual freedom frees him for higher tasks than those he is at present engaged in. He can, without a qualm, look his destiny in the eye. The only disadvantage results from my inability to judge Moulaert's music from a strictly artistic point of view, sensitive as I am only to the purest forms of the spirit.

The Storck-Moulaert production, a mystic film with the aerodynamic quality adapted to the development of the modern world, raises Belgium to the same level as those countries which produce great soundtracks.

— P.-L. Flouquet

In *EA*. pp. 57–58, Jan. 1972.

Francis Picabia: Animated Painting

“The pope’s pox.”
– EP.

Yes, Picabia’s paintings move, there are hands caressing girls for a certain length of time. Picabia’s white hair gives us the feeling of eternal youth. Incredible as that may seem. But that’s what pleases us, the few of us who take pleasure *even in painting*, and who have decided to do away with the same old boring artistic refrains.

So, faced with Picabia’s pictures there’s no need to think of “revelations” in the coffee grounds or “prophecies” that require too much patience to be verified. Picabia thinks as we ought to think. In 1946, he opposes the intrusive forces of the past with movement and flashes of bright light revealing the whole of life in its magnificent isolation.

One summer evening, he carried off a pretty bride on the very day of her wedding and introduced her to the impossible. It all went very well. All transformations go well, anyway. You only have to prefer the young girl running down the street laughing to the morose charm of old photographs. You only have to prefer the open air and the song of the woods to dusty old manuscripts. You only have to want pleasure to reign supreme despite the spectacle of a world peopled with ruin and idiotic anxieties.

Picabia’s paintings move, they escape from any fixed idea. They are superficial, like the joyous life of lovers and, as it were, leave out those who miss the “profundity” of the blackout and the music of the guns. They inaugurate a new reign of pleasure which must be placed within the limits of our life.

In *EA*. no. 78, Feb. 1973. According to Mariën, this unpublished text was intended for the catalogue of a Picabia exhibition. In a letter dated 8th Oct. 1946, Magritte wrote that Picabia asked him “to write the preface for his show in Brussels”.

Surrealism in the Sunshine:

I. Quarrel of the Sun

The argument starts badly, since it's a question of saving one's skin (or so it seems). Since the scholastic disputes, when enthusiasts risked being burnt alive for their ideas and feelings, the stake is still the same: each party has to confute the enemy's argument. Eventually it's a battle between those who want to preserve an ancient or a recent tradition and those who want change. Both have the impression of fighting for their lives, or at least what makes their lives distinctive. Obstinacy and an inferiority complex aid the adversaries in sticking to their guns and not giving an inch of terrain, even if through sheer exhaustion they lose sight of the cause they are defending and want to call a halt.

In 1946, a quarrel broke out over the wish to use Impressionist techniques in "Surrealist" painting to represent without complications the light of the sun. Those against put forward the obvious difficulty of using Impressionist techniques posthumously; apparently the painters of 1900 had a secret that is now lost for ever.

They also said that by using these techniques we would lose a special pictorial atmosphere, characterized both by the ambiguity of the image (a real head looking like a wax dummy or vice versa) and by its precision (it certainly is a head and not a foot); this loss would occur because of a rough *trompe l'œil* effect (objects with no fortuitous lighting, idea objects). Those against are also defending a style of painting where the highest degree of ambiguity is achieved thanks to an obscure portrayal, an improvised, more or less distorted style of drawing objects, or by the use of lines which, like cracks in a wall, hint vaguely at an object. What is above all in question is the pleasure we derive from these paintings (*irrespective of the subject*), a pleasure peculiar to this style of painting (after all, the subjects are the same in the paintings that have sunlight in them). This style of painting is essentially ambiguous, and so is our enjoyment. We experience the vagueness of dream figures or the visual delusions of the night. We are pleasurably disturbed when faced with figures when we can't tell if they are real or dummies. A taste for undefined cruelty produces shudders, platonic threats produce an agreeable frisson – a certain fascination that we recognized and which has now had its day.

There is a wish to replace these fraudulent pictorial atmospheres (since, if the images are formally accurate, the more accurate they are, the more

successful is the illusion, THE GREATER THE FRAUD, the more successful the visual illusion) by an “Impressionist” atmosphere – that is, not the *trompe l’œil* or its opposite: the non-figurative image, but the equivalent of the colours we see (a vision that does not affect or claim to affect the “object”), a deliberately subjective, gratuitous vision with no ambiguity. The pleasure we feel is complex: it is natural, like physical pleasure, and it is subtle, since to appreciate it *we must admit that we see the gap between the object and us*, which is by no means easy, and *we must abandon* stereotyped images of objects which satisfy us because we are indifferent and intellectually lazy. We must not depict objects in terms of the intellectual level of the man on the street; the danger of *trompe l’œil* images is that they may provoke such a strong feeling of admiration for the “artist’s skill” as he has succeeded in giving the “illusion of the real” that this is the only feeling in the consciousness of the average viewer, and, at times with scepticism, if he thinks about it: he will for example think that you can only use watercolours to paint the sea and will feel “cheated” by the artist who has painted a “seascape” in oils. For the most part, it is ideas like these that “confuse” the average viewer unfamiliar with painting. For all intents and purposes, this subjective attitude considers exterior reality to be unknowable, yet wishes to act upon it. This is the frank recognition that the problem does not exist for us, and so gives the notion of the “outside” an affective content more tragic than any other conception of “exterior reality”.

This refusal to consider the relation of exterior reality to consciousness is tragic, since it gives us the measure of our limitations and alienates us by heightening our sense of the unknown.

The Impressionist style can portray a night-time or a sunlit landscape equally well, but it is always a question of physical night or light – that is, a transient impression of a night or a light, and not a fixed or abstract impression.

The nights and lights we know are transient and must not be sacrificed to a *fixed idea of night or light that is fraudulent*, since when this impression is particularly intense it is taken for a *special knowledge* of real night or light “in themselves” and creates a false sense of danger. If there is a real danger, it is, on the contrary, totally unknown.

*

When we compare the arguments of the adversaries, two attitudes emerge: on the one hand, effectively, the belief that the real world outside the mind is unknown, may be “domesticated” and can be evoked by the use of old or new formulas.

On the other: that the unknown remains unknown, since flashes of consciousness are not taken for an escape outside our mental world, but rather for a vision of our mental prison which must be transformed.

On the one hand: a world of fake ambassadors of a fake unknown world which at times influences our mental world.

On the other: through its limitations which are “known” but extensible, the mental world is in contact with the genuine unknown, which then appears all the more formidable to the harshly lit mental world from which all shadows have vanished.

*

Our mental universe (which contains all we know, feel or are afraid of in the real world we live in) may be enchanting, happy, tragic, comic, etc.

We are capable of transforming it and giving it a charm which makes life more valuable. More valuable since life becomes more joyful, thanks to the extraordinary effort needed to create this charm.

Life is wasted when we make it more terrifying, precisely because it is so easy to do so. It is an easy task, because people who are intellectually lazy are convinced that this miserable terror is “the truth”, that this terror is knowledge of the “extra-mental” world. This is an easy way out, resulting in a banal explanation of the world as terrifying.

Creating enchantment is an effective means of counteracting this depressing, banal habit. In order for the charm to work, it is essential to avoid misunderstanding (more or less crude *trompe l'œil*, the ambiguity of non-figurative painting). In painting the elements at our disposal are a feeling for the objects we portray, feeling taken as subjective truth: visual subjects (trees, skies, etc.), imaginary subjects (fairies, ghosts, mermaids, etc.), real physical lights (suns, dawns, twilights, nights), light best produced by using Impressionist techniques different from “academic” light with its abstract lighting effects. If these elements are combined in a certain way, it is possible to begin to realize the enchantment we need.

The pursuit of this effect is so much more enjoyable since one takes risks of all sorts (whereas if you take the easy way out, creating “disturbing poetry”, you approach a safe, well-defined, acceptable unknown).

We must go in search of enchantment, revealing the unknown quality in each object presented with unambiguous delight, and in 1946 we must “defend” this charm from any unsavoury contact and place it out of reach of impostors.

*

For example, the painting *Le Paysage isolé*, in 1928, shows a neutral landscape; this neutrality had to be stressed in order to emphasize the provocation implicit in this way of painting, so that what was intended, demonstrated, was safe from artistic interpretation.

In 1946, the new *Le Paysage isolé* in the sun (which would not have worked in 1928) is a superposition, and thanks to its glowing colours this startling landscape helps us to feel “night” more forcefully, night which is all around and yet invisible.

As in 1928, severity was our bodyguard.

In *FA*. nos. 51–53, Jun.–Aug. 1971. These documents encompass the period from 11th Aug. 1946 to 24th Sep. 1947.

Surrealism in the Sunshine: 2. Manifesto of Extra-Mentalism (Notes)

Life has been reduced to such a mediocre affair that we can say such things as: "We'll show them how to live." We only appreciate life when we are in distress, anxious, in pain, in terror. We find the ceaseless, frenzied efforts to turn the world into a torture chamber "quite natural". We do not rebel, since our minds have been warped: we think that if life is seen in a tragic light it is seen more clearly, and that we are then in touch with the mystery of existence. We even believe that we can reach objectivity thanks to this revelation. The greater the terror, the greater the objectivity.

This notion is the result of philosophies (materialist or idealist), that claim that the real world is knowable, that matter is of the same essence as mind, since the perfect mind would no longer be distinct from the matter it explains and would thus deny it. The man on the street is unknowingly in harmony with this idea: he thinks there is a mystery, he thinks he must live and suffer and that the very meaning of life is that it is a dream-nightmare.

Le Vierge, le Vivace et le Bel Aujourd'hui

on the contrary, sheds light exclusively on the realm of consciousness and limits our life to that realm. This harsh, optimistic lighting gives a more valuable insight into objects than when they are viewed in a tragic (pes-simistic) light.

*La Terre n'est pas une vallée de larmes**

Optimistic extra-mentalist words which contradict the philosophies that our life must be tragic in order to prepare us for more serious things to come (death, for example) and accustom us to a feeling of menace, so that at the moment of the supreme danger we are forearmed and not so painfully taken by surprise.

Reprinted in *Manifestes et autres écrits*, pp. 61–65.

Surrealism in the Sunshine: 3. Manifesto No. 1 – October 1946

The experiment goes on

A certain kind of Surrealism claims to tame the unknown. Just like in philosophy, the one concern is really knowing the world and forgetting to transform it. A system of fossilized beliefs in “beings” and mysterious “forces” has replaced the enthusiasm of the beginning. So-called Surrealists have even taken over the “love of art”, not to mention that of their “native land”,* doubtless ready to convert soon to some religion. This Surrealism is only practised now by smart alects, innocent ordinary people, and “with it” tradesmen. As for the ancestors, they cling to their comfortable reputation or else are resigned and have given up the struggle. And yet the experiment goes on in the sunshine.

Everything takes place in our mental universe. By mental universe we of course mean everything we can perceive through the senses, feelings, imagination, reason, revelation, dreams or any other means. *We are responsible for the universe.* This fact allows us to judge non-dialectical philosophies (idealist or materialist) for what they are: meaningless games, since philosophers attempt to attain perfect consciousness, which must fuse with the object and so deny it.

Our impression that we are unable to escape from the mental universe forces us, on the contrary, to affirm the existence of an extra-mental universe and the reciprocal action of each on the other is clarified.

We can perceive neither “light” nor “darkness” in the extra-mental universe. As we can know nothing about it, there is no mystery. We do not know darkness since, if we are clear-sighted, we see that all physical and spiritual darkness is enlivened with light and colour. (The unfortunate philosopher is afraid of the darkness of infinite spaces, another hears the music of the spheres.)

If they weren't so miserably limited by this wretched world, the Facteur Chevals,* the Douanier Rousseaus,* children and madmen who draw pictures, would be capable of creating a fairy land which would have meaning for us. We should bear these efforts in mind. They contradict the Christian conception of the world, which wishes to make it into a “vale of tears”, and

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counter certain Surrealist efforts at this time, the creation of fraudulent poetry – afraid as they are of any bright light.

We must not be afraid of the sunlight using the excuse that it has always served to shed light on a wretched world. Fresh and enchanting mermaids, gateways, ghosts, gods, trees – all these objects of the mind will be restored to the intense, brightly lit life inside our mental universe.

Brussels, *Le Miroir infidèle*, Oct. 1946 (W 242). Signed Joe Bousquet, René Magritte, Marcel Mariën, Jacques Michel, Paul Nougé, Louis Scutenaire, Jacques Wergifosse.

Surrealism in the Sunshine:

4. Manifesto No. 2 – November 1946

SUNRISE

M.F. – What is Surrealism?

*A.B. – An old tin tool before the fork
was invented.*

*(Dialogue in 1934)**

Surrealism must no longer be a bridge between two wars.

*

André Breton, in a lecture in 1942,* said that Surrealism would only die when a new, more liberating movement was born. This liberation has taken place within the Surrealist movement itself. After the war, the young people who looked to their elders for guidance were too passive, having taken the safe path that twenty years of Surrealism had offered them. Such a state of affairs is the result of an intolerable rigidity. That is why there are a few of us who have quit the well-trodden path of Surrealism's fixed form.

*

In the first manifesto of 'Surrealism in the Sunshine', we were accused of being anti-dialectical; doubtless because people thought they detected total contradiction between the mental and extra-mental universe. And yet, from the first moments of its life the human embryo is in contact with extra-mental factors. From then on the reciprocal interaction of extra-mental factors and the mind make up the mental universe of the embryo. And so the mental universe appears as the dialectical synthesis of the extra-mental and the mind. Man as a mental world is therefore separated from the extra-mental and from his own mind. Man is totally isolated, and one of the most striking consequences of this separation lies in the fact that man only perceives his own body and mind within his mental universe.

*

The idea of separation, which was merely used to show up objects and individuals more distinctly, has spread today to the whole universe. Objects

and individuals are now being reintegrated into the separated universe, and consequently connections only count in terms of their consequence as regards a life of more intense pleasure – some are positive, some negative. Therefore we must fight against the negative aspects (terror, boredom and any of the other fake mysteries) and search for an enchantment which will bring the reign of pleasure into being.

*

And now we come to the consequence of this intrusion of the sun into poetry, an intrusion considered by some to be superficial and which they are seriously countering with a deadening light. By shedding as harsh a light as possible on what we can see (our mental universe), we now have a precise sense of what we cannot see or know (the extra-mental). We have to use sunny colours and words.

*

In the ethics of pleasure the contradiction between rights and wrongs is re-established. It seems to be quite futile to look for the famous “mental point where high and low, real and imaginary, etc., cease to be perceived as opposites” (Breton).^{*} We must, however, point out that in the extra-mental world which we cannot know, and where therefore we cannot make comparisons, there can be no contradiction. Consequently, we can see how useless research into chance is, since this research aimed to show, at certain moments, how nature’s ends coincide with man’s. On the other hand, investigations that claim to penetrate the extra-mental actually seem today to spring from a religious impulse.

*

Automatism is another device which is no longer of value today: it is extremely useful in psychoanalysis, as is the use of the microscope in biology. But, as a poetic tool, it has become quite ineffectual, because we are used to it and its singularly indifferent results are devoid of all charm.

*

In past Surrealism, we find a great affection for a certain type of humour, so-called “black humour”. It would be better to use another term: FUN-HUMOUR, the term “black humour” evoking a particular feeling of terror which we have now outgrown. Therefore, we will keep, for example, Lewis Carroll, Raymond Roussel, Guillaume Apollinaire, Alphonse Allais,^{*} O. Henry, Francis Picabia in their positive modes, and the Poems of Isidore Ducasse.^{*}

It is very important to note that at its origins it was through a dialectical action against what was depressing in “black humour” that we longed for the sun, to light up the darkness of fake mysteries and to break with the worn-out past – rupture and lighting necessary to the conception of the mental universe. This mental universe, which has to be enchanting, counters the pessimistic post-war state of mind.

*

Investigations into the unconscious, once the shock effect has diminished, seem to us to belong to the field of psychology alone. They are of no interest to us except as a means to action, the truth being of no importance to us.

*

The blue sky isn't black any more:

We are invited into a countryside sculpted in light and covered with obelisks. On its green paths we have come across Scheherazade's smile, the white hands of elves and the glossy hair of fairies. In this wonderland, Alice is playing with a little rabbit.* Méliès has popped up out of the blue. Peter Ibbetson's* true dream is all around us, masking the nightmares of frost. Here the sky is open to the sun – the path leading us to a new sensation. The golden age, which we refuse to locate in an abstract future, from now on brings enchantment within the confines of our lives.

See the gates that kept us separate from the clearing where pleasure reigns.

In *EA*. nos. 111–13, Apr. 1974, pp. 13–16. The definitive version of this manifesto, signed by René Magritte and Jacques Wergifosse, was sent to Wergifosse by Magritte on 8th Oct. 1946.

Surrealism in the Sunshine: 5. Manifesto of Amentalism

*“The written or printed word means nothing –
unless its intention is to amuse men.”*

– Rex Stout,* The League of Frightened Men

The resources of pleasure are susceptible to vast improvement. This is possible. But it is a huge task when you think that we have learnt nothing from the unfortunate experience of over 2,000 years, living with a conception of life as the opposite of joyful. Amentalism proposes a new experience, a new activity, which could this time have less uncertain results, thanks to a simple measure of mental hygiene: this consists in getting rid of all our philosophical habits.

For philosophers and their unfortunate victims, life is dominated by a belief in the unknown, called according to preference, spirit or matter; or else by a belief in an unknowable about which there is painful uncertainty, and a wise refusal to decide whether it is spirit, matter or nothingness. That the majority of men are obsessively preoccupied with such beliefs shows how human actions are powerless to transform life into rapture. In fact these actions are useless, incapable of creating joy, because they are influenced by ideas of what life *is*, whereas they should be formulated in terms of what life *can be*.

Philosophy has caused so much harm that even men who have decided to change things, revolutionaries, feel the need of a theory – a dialectical materialism – to justify their actions. Doubtless, in the present state of the world, where “ideas” play such a large part, the dialectical-materialist method is an excellent tool: it is necessary in order to succeed in organizing the exploitation of the riches of the globe for the enjoyment of the majority and to assure impossible and inconceivable delights which are not possible at present – but this tool cannot help us benefit from these future pleasures now.

It is only when ends and means are confused that dialectical materialism is taken for an absolute truth. Without that confusion, dialectical materialism is still useful in the politico-economic struggle and does not preclude the possibility of engaging in parallel activity in different areas, where dialectical materialism is ineffectual. The desire for these parallel

“lines” to meet now is like believing that you can close a circle before you have finished drawing it.

Amentalism proposes to look after what is left of our pleasure instinct and cultivate it where necessary. The first condition is a serene indifference to philosophical concerns, which seems to be an easy one, thanks to a few practical considerations:

1. EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE IN OUR MENTAL UNIVERSE.

By mental universe we mean everything we can perceive, through the senses, feelings, reason, imagination, intuition, instincts or any other way.

2. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO HAVE ANYTHING EXCEPT THE MENTAL UNIVERSE.

Example: It is impossible for you to have any sense of this writing that is penetrating word by word into your mental universe except from your mental universe. We who are writing this text, can only have the sense of it that comes from our mental universe, etc.

3. THE NOTION THAT THE AMENTAL EXISTS IS THE ONLY NOTION WE CAN HAVE CONCERNING THE AMENTAL.

The mental world in which everything takes place leads to the existence of the amental, which we can say nothing about except that it exists. All the qualities we may attribute to it would be applicable, since these qualities would be from our mental universe: harshness, light, outer, inner, movement, etc. These qualities are only applicable to objects which are part of our mental world.

When we say the amental exists, we are not being specific. Doubtless those obsessed with philosophy will take us up on that, which proves once again how far apart are our mental worlds – in this case, that of the professional philosopher vis-à-vis ours.

Philosophical obsessions start from the conviction that the amental can be translated into the mental, thanks to patient, studious research, and the belief that messages come from the amental to certain privileged people and that we must abide by this information, however painful.

*

But here comes the sun to dissipate life’s shadows: joy and understanding to help out. Our mental world is filled with sunlight: the joy we have chosen as a sun to guide us. We have chosen pleasure as a reaction to the years of tedious terror, and consequently we stand firm in our longing for joy, a joy that will spread and grow more intense for everyone when the last noxious fumes of “knowledge” have vanished from everyone’s mental universe.

Our activity no longer springs from a mere desire to be subversive, yet the more subversive it is, the more valuable it will be. Nor are we inspired by

a desire to mystify: this is too simplistic a device, too complicated for us, too weighty for the little that may be achieved. However, we cannot prevent people from attributing to us an insistent taste for mystification, and this accusation does have a certain value: it is a criterion, a way of checking whether our experiments are working in a hostile world.

When we deliberately chose pleasure as the supreme goal in life, we had been through the experience of twenty years of Surrealism, which initially created shocking objects, sufficiently effective to get rid of the sterile confusion beloved of the Dadaists. After a reactionary development, Surrealism at present means the practice of ineffectual magic, the cult of so-called exotic or esoteric mysteries and the creation of a myth dredged up from an empty source. The areas in our lives which pleasure could illuminate have been so narrowed down that we cannot allow ourselves to be destroyed in the Surrealist manner.

The present Surrealists cannot conceive of their activity except in terms of fighting for or against the Communist party. Reactionary Surrealists choose idealism; revolutionary Surrealists prefer materialism. As for us, we think that our particular activity would be paralysed by such concerns. It seems obvious to us that the politico-economic struggle on dialectical-materialist lines on the one hand, and our activity and experiments on the other, are necessary, but that they are parallel activities, and it is absurd to confuse them and to wish to see one suppressed by the other or to impose one's own method on the other.

We have neither the time nor the inclination to play at Surrealist art;* we have an enormous task ahead of us; we have to invent enchanting objects which will awaken what is left of the pleasure instinct. We have to avoid ambiguity and distinguish ourselves from the Surrealists. For this reason we are choosing the qualifying term "Amentalist", which we think will help to remind others that the era of obsessive philosophizing is on its last legs.

The Amentalist is the man who prefers pleasure to understanding, and for whom understanding is only valuable in so far as it can add to and give birth to joy.

The Amentalist is the man for whom the distinction between mental and amental is already a source of pleasure, for that distinction is a consolation that frees him from a load of deadweight.

The Amentalist is the man for whom the idea of the separation of his mental universe is a joy shedding light on and rendering more intense all his pleasures, even the most trifling.

In *FA*. nos. 51-53, Jun.-Aug. 1972. Mariën dates this from 1946. But *FA*. nos. 111-13, p. 10, cites a letter from Magritte to Wergifosse dated, correctly, 24th Sep. 1947.

Le Savoir Vivre

Common courtesy teaches us how to get rid of bores and other superfluous people gracefully. We are given a set of rules which can be delightful, yet at times ambiguous (the banker “will give his seat” to the beggar woman in a crowded tram). For some people good manners can also turn into an easy way of withdrawing, people who think of themselves as exceptional beings, obliged to guard against any contact with the herd, the outside. On the contrary, those who are answering the following questions admit that their private life, their feelings, even their eccentricities are remarkably banal from the moment they become public property.

Splendid isolation does seem to be merely a banal illusion.

We also feel that, if the illusion were shattered, it would be possible to investigate feelings which would not be the property of a privileged few, but give the sense of a bigger life.

THE QUESTIONS:

1. What do you hate most?
2. What do you love most?
3. What do you most hope for?
4. What are you most afraid of?

THE ANSWERS:

(By René Magritte)

1. I hate my past and other people's pasts. I hate resignation, patience, professional heroism and all compulsory fine feelings. I also detest the decorative arts, folklore, advertising, radio announcers' voices, aerodynamism, boy scouts, the smell of mothballs, reality and drunks.

2. I love subversive humour, freckles, women's long hair and knees, the laughter of young children at liberty, a young girl running down the street.

3. I hope for a living love, the impossible and the chimerical.

4. I am afraid to have a precise knowledge of my own limitations.

In *Le Savoir Vivre*, Brussels, *Le Miroir infidèle*, 1946. (W 247). Magritte wrote the anonymous introduction.

Magritte and the Communist Party:

1. "Clarification..."

1. Clarification addressed confidentially to Communist intellectuals. Although Descartes and Berkeley's* arguments concerning the existence of the real physical world contradict each other, they are nonetheless equivalent. Because the realm, both active and passive, in which men have to live is indifferent to any opinion about its reality.

The Marxist materialist doctrine, which works for the undecided by freeing them from ideas that prevent them from acting, on the other hand introduces confusion into theories that motivate definite action, particularly if one wishes to use this doctrine to decree that artists must fill a post in which they are unable to show what they are capable of.

Fortunately, the present class struggle when committed to direct action is not much bothered by the idea that this struggle is taking place solely in the historical-materialist context. It is only in "spare moments" that conferences are held and a whole literature backed by the party reminds us of this, and attempts to subject artists to a somewhat oversimplified programme: "The role of the artist is to celebrate or propagate Marxist victories and ideas. This is his only consecration. In addition, it is strongly recommended that he use styles and subjects that are directly accessible." This theme, with numerous variations, fixed in advance a prescribed limit and an objective unrelated to the efforts of the artist. This theme sums up the aesthetic preached by the party, and everything which differs from it is judged unhealthy and harmful. This view of art is identical to the view held in such high honour by the Nazis. However, if the Nazis condemned at the same time Marxism, tuberculosis and so-called degenerate art, they had good reason for doing so, at least in their eyes. It was in fact logical for them to suppress the Marxists, to take the necessary measures to ensure that the SS didn't turn a blind eye; they had to succeed in their persecution of the degenerate artist whose works might well have been able to save them from their own intellectual poverty.

It is therefore astonishing to find that Marxist theoreticians share the same distrust of the art styles that give additional opportunities for the liberation of man. It is absolutely necessary to draw attention to this danger.

Magritte and the Communist Party: 2. From A Letter to the Communist Party of Belgium

At the present time the only way for an artist to survive is by allowing his work to be exploited. A painter who refuses a contract with a dealer, or refuses to sell his paintings to art lovers because he thinks he has a right to more money than the value of the transaction, has no way of getting more; he does not have the effective weapon that other jobs have: the strike. No one would be bothered about a strike of painters or poets.

The only way that poets and painters can fight against the bourgeois economy is to give their works precisely that content which challenges the bourgeois ideological values propping up the bourgeois economy. It turns out that the only writers and painters who are working along these lines (as scientists also are in their field) are, in Belgium, those who signed this letter and whose public adhesion to the Communist cause is greeted with hostility and distrust on the part of the Communist Party. In fact, when the Communist press does bother with cultural problems, it is never their efforts that are in question (not a word in *Le Drapeau rouge* about the works of Nougé, Scutenaire, Mariën and Magritte which were sent to them; on the other hand, by doing them the honour of considering them as enemies, the bourgeois press proves its perspicacity), but apparently the rule is that the representatives of bourgeois thought are alone considered worthwhile. Cf.:

The articles in *Le Drapeau rouge* devoted to the exhibition of modern painters note:

1. Firstly Ensor (who showed his paintings in Germany during the Occupation) and other “stars” sanctioned by the bourgeoisie.
2. Artists who are dead; the mere fact that they are dead inspires a show of interest “a bit late in the day”, and death appears enough to make the work exceptionally valuable.
3. An anarchic collection of the efforts of “young painters”, which we can make nothing of at this point in time.

*

SELECTED WRITINGS

The party refuses, so it says, to take a stand on these matters, but in reality, if the party has no confidence in the content of these works, it is because this content is worthless in the fight against bourgeois ideology. The party does however wish to take advantage of these artists who are *powerless to create new feelings* and asks them to engage in political agitation. However, artists cannot go on strike, and it is obvious that political agitation on the part of artists is absurd.

The only *correct* attitude for the party to adopt vis-à-vis the aesthetic question, *which it refuses to adopt*, is to demand that the artist give his work revolutionary content. This is what we believe, and consequently we will not participate in the Antwerp Conference,* whose absurd theme is the search for ways for the artist to participate in political agitation.

In *E.A.* nos. 51–53, Jun.–Jul. 1971. These documents comprise Magritte's writings from 18th Nov. 1945 to Oct. 1947.

Magritte and the Communist Party:

3. Letter to *Le Drapeau rouge*

Dear Comrade,

Your attention should be drawn to the danger of certain articles in *Le Drapeau rouge* precisely because they seem harmless enough; for example, the one entitled “The Queen’s visit...”,* published on 22nd October.

If one credits the readers of *Le Drapeau rouge* with sufficient critical judgement to see that this is merely a propaganda article, it is not to be assumed that those who need convincing will have less open minds and will be taken in.

As for the workers among your readers – alas, already worn out by soul-destroying work – the sports pages suffice to provide their ration of “opium for the people”. It is harmful to confuse them with articles like the one on the Queen’s visit, where Communist artists and passers-by are shown standing around in a semicircle, and where there is in addition an excellent free advert for a car.* Rubbish such as this will not give the workers the sense of a committed struggle, when the paper portrays an enemy of Communism as an exquisite being, slavishly worshipped by the party.

On the contrary, it would have been far more useful to use the Queen’s visit for specific propaganda purposes, provided that you stressed that it is the Queen who had the honour of coming in contact with the party, and not the party who had the conspicuous honour of greeting the old whore.

In *Les Lèvres nues*, new series, no. 3, Sep. 1970, p. 8.

Magritte Interviewed by Louis Quiévreux

MAGRITTE: Symbols are what you learn at school. To be a Surrealist is to banish from your mind what you have seen “before” and to search for what you haven’t seen “yet”.

QUIÉVREUX: New York is intrigued by some of your paintings. Would you, for instance, explain your work showing a pipe with the caption “This is not a pipe”?

MAGRITTE: It’s quite simple. Who would dare to say that the PICTURE of a pipe *is* a pipe? Who could smoke the pipe in my picture? No one. So IT IS NOT A PIPE.

QUIÉVREUX: Very ingenious. But the Americans didn’t understand *Le Sourire*...

MAGRITTE: A stone from the year 192370, dug up from the ruins after so many civilizations still to come... doesn’t that make you smile?

QUIÉVREUX: Tell us why there are often eggs, a glass of water and a rose in your pictures.

MAGRITTE: The egg, perhaps because I see the world in it. The glass of water because of its freshness and luminous quality. The rose, I don’t know yet. Perhaps I’ll find out later...

QUIÉVREUX: Are you rich?

MAGRITTE: No. I am not interested in being rich.

QUIÉVREUX: Excuse me, but if a Van Eyck can be sold for a million dollars, wouldn’t you like to have the money to buy that masterpiece?

MAGRITTE: No. I’m not interested in that painting.

QUIÉVREUX: What are you interested in?

MAGRITTE: Creating. My only wish is to be enriched by exciting new ideas. For me, art consists in expressing charm and pleasure. Before the war my works reflected anxiety. Experience of conflict and a load of suffering has taught me that what matters above all is to celebrate joy for the eyes and the mind. It is much easier to terrorize than to charm... I live in a very unpleasant world because of its routine ugliness. That’s why my painting is a battle, or rather a counter-offensive. The world is so strange. And can we ever know the world? You were talking about eggs just now. One of my clients (we do have to have clients) was

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talking to me one day when he noticed one of his hens eating an egg it had just laid. He became so enraged at the sight of this “theft”, this “sacrilege”, that for a moment his whole face distorted. He grabbed hold of the fowl by the legs and smashed its head against a wall. In a flash I saw into that man’s true consciousness and I vowed never to let him have any of my works.

Interview by Louis Quiévreux, in *La Lanterne*, Brussels, 23rd Apr. 1947 (W 276).

“Aesthetic Pleasure...”

Aesthetic pleasure is easily obtained: a craftsman's job, a few ideas with no mystery, a traditional subject, and we consider ourselves satisfied. It's just as easy most of the time to obtain pleasure in other ways, and the rhythm of life is quite impoverished thereby. Some people are not satisfied with this state of affairs: they have not given up the idea that life could be superior to what it is at present, and they also think there are ways to achieve this. One way is to change the order of things and instantly the world has a new face. If this face is to be preferable to the old one, then it is important that the new features that animate it possess a charm capable of giving life meaning. M. is already creating this charm through images, and the images are thereby justified. However, this charm is only perceptible to those who are not sorry that he has abandoned those habitual ways of thinking about the banal world, which is precisely what needs to be transformed: the habit, for instance, of only imagining two objects if they are linked by a simple, logical link; for example: the apple *on* the table. M. thinks up less obvious links, a more fruitful logic; for example: the apple *in* the table, etc. The series of gouaches where we see eyes and mouths crammed with pearls (*Shéhérazade*) enriches us with a new concept which forces logic to extend its frontiers.

You cannot say that a photograph of an object is “conventional”. The relations between object and lens are registered without the imagination. This idea of portraying an object “objectively” by means of painting arises. (Obviously, oriental art cannot pretend to this objectivity. Perspective and rules of lighting are neglected – as in primitive painting or children's drawings). M. thinks we must go further with this objective portrayal and *not ignore it* (as Negroes, for example, who do not recognize a photograph). Impressionist techniques which came after the techniques of painters like Manet, who achieved the maximum objectivity, are suitable for painting objects, going beyond a mere objective representation: indeed, our knowledge of what we see is enriched: we analyse the colour of an object and the analysis is a riot of colours. Having painted from 1926 to 1940 pictures in which harsh solid colour dominated, M. afterwards aimed to put his paintings to a decisive test, since the meaning of his painting was not to depend on its “dress” – there was too much at stake. The new face of the world M.'s painting introduced us to had, in fact, been seen in a different atmosphere

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from that of his previous pictures. This new face which formerly was harsh and disturbing had to prove its power by being able to smile and to charm. This is why Impressionist techniques were suitable for M.'s new paintings, thanks to the new possibilities they offered. M., who pays no attention to the mental habit which worries about recognizing an artist by the originality of his technique, uses a method appropriate to his goal. Originality is part of this banal world which needs to be transformed. M. uses Impressionist techniques and leaves the Impressionists surprisingly far behind.

In *Manifestes et autres écrits*, pp. 89–90. Mariën dates this piece to the occasion of an exhibition that was to take place at the Galerie Lou Cosyn in Brussels, in Jun. 1947 (W 277).

On Titles

I.

General comments apropos of titles:

The titles of pictures are not explanations, and pictures are not illustrations of titles. The relationship between title and picture is poetic – that is, it only catches some of the object's characteristics of which we are usually unaware, but which we sometimes intuit, when extraordinary events take place which logic has not yet managed to elucidate.

1. *Alice au pays des merveilles*

We imagine the tree to be living in wonderland. To this end, the landscape and the tree have human features.

2. *L'Invention du feu*

The amazing discovery of fire. Thanks to the friction of two bodies together, suggestive of the physical mechanism of pleasure.

3. *L'École buissonnière*

Here, the idea of playing truant is applied to objects.

Life is no longer represented on a stage set; the roving imagination sees life as a show.

4. *La Leçon d'esthétique*

In the forest a hunter meets an art show.

5. *Raminagrobis*

The cat still exists in the twentieth century. The legend bursts into modern life.

6. *L'Age du plaisir*

We feel more intense pleasure when the most arbitrary objects (toad, cup and ball, woman, grotto, landscape) share in the thrill.

7. *Le Civilisateur*

Nature, the source of man's finest inspirations, is here pictured as a forest in the shape of a castle and dog.

8. *La Lampe philosophique*

The meditations of the obsessive, absent-minded philosopher can suggest a mental world closed in on itself, as here a smoker is the prisoner of his pipe.

9. *Jour de fête*

Holidays are full of surprises. Here, the surprise is seeing a young girl running with a horse's head in her arms.

10. *La Grande Marée*

This was first called *Le Grand Monde*, but the title was changed because it would be interpreted as a satirical view of the great world because of the cigar box.

It is not a question of satire, but of poetic effect.

The spring tide is strange objects rising into our field of vision: the woman's torso, half flesh, half wood, and the cigar, which is already lit, coming out of the box.

11. *Les Fleurs du Mal*

A statue entirely of flesh may seem immoral because it is too carnal, also the flesh flower that the statue is holding.

12. *Le Lever du soleil*

If we can imagine blooming young girls, why not a bird blooming? The appearance of the bird is delightful, like the sunrise.

13. *La Vie privée*

Everyone has a private life that we can catch a glimpse of as through a window, the moment our consciousness is expanded.

14. *Le Mois de mai*

To crown the month of May, triumphal arches of flowers have been raised over the river, which is made all the more alluring, as in the month of May.

15. *Le Somnambule*

The owl, like the sleepwalker, doesn't know the gestures he makes. Unawares, he is smoking with his eyes open.

16. *La Reconnaissance infinie*

To get to know the countryside more fully, two walkers choose an unaccustomed path.

17. *Le Principe d'incertitude*

We cannot be sure from the shadow of an object what that object is in reality. (For example: you can make a bird's shadow with your hands and fingers.)

18. *La Belle au bois dormant*

In a magical world the beauty has taken on the appearance of a horse and the forest has turned into a house.

19. *La Perspective amoureuse*

Through love we discover the widest perspective. Here a sense of depth has been suggested by leaving out the part of a door that masked a landscape made up of known objects (trees, sky) and a mysterious object (the big metal bell on the terrace).

20. *Le Printemps*

Objects appear inside a head made of an unknown substance, as brighter colours appear in the spring. In front of the sea, plants produce mysterious buds: metal bells.

21. *La Saveur des larmes*

The sight of a felled tree is both a joy and a cause for sadness.

22. *Le Bain de cristal*

In the magical desert light a giraffe appears in a large crystal glass.

23. *L'Éducation sentimentale*

In order for objects revealed to us in our childhood to continue to have the same force of revelation, they must have a different role; and so, for example, a link is created between the house and a musical instrument, a cup and ball is transformed into a new mythical animal.

*

II.

(Same *incipit* as I)

La Terre promise is a world in which smiling objects touch our hearts. Now there's only room for a miraculous universe.

La Magie noire. Transforming a woman's flesh into sky is an act of black magic.

Les Profondeurs du Plaisir. In the apparently banal circumstances in which this woman is placed, it seems we can experience the most intense pleasure.

Le Bon Sens. It's common sense to place the bowl of fruit on a horizontal rather than a vertical surface.

Le Colloque sentimental. In front of a slanting window, two wooden objects which are no longer banal speak of love and happiness.

La Leçon de choses is a lecture on the sky, the woman, the egg, the bird and the young girl.

Les Grands Rendez-vous are meetings objects sometimes plan without us knowing.

Les Droits de l'homme. Here man is reminded of his right to act on objects and change the world.

Le Cicérone. The object we see in this picture is really doing the honours of the house.

Le Vieux Canonier. On his treasure island, the old gunner looks like the anatomical opposite of a triton; he has unfortunately lost a leg in battle and is paying amorous court to a young girl.

Le Pouvoir de la Main. The omnipotent hand makes child's play of the heaviest stone, and a wall, a castle, a glass, a rose cannot resist it. We can't tell if the glass has got bigger or if the castle has shrunk.

Le Coup de Grâce. The house managed to get into the cave, we don't know how; imagination gives the finishing touch.

The house, looking into the darkness of the cave, plunges into the night of the unconscious, and our usual habit of looking outwards is given the *coup de grâce*.

La Voix du sang. The words dictated by our blood sometimes seem mysterious to us. Here it seems we are ordered to open up magic niches in the trees.

The title *Olympia* was given in memory of Manet, in honour of the woman ennobled by an ambiguous shell with a somewhat erotic shape.

Les Grâces naturelles. Everything in this canvas possesses natural grace in the highest degree.

Le Libérateur. This painting frees us from our intellectual habits. The indefatigable traveller shows us the sky in a more poignantly moving way.

La Forêt joyeuse. The forest has become more joyful since the trees have turned into wooden pins and a huge woman's torso lives there.

L'Univers mental. The woman is looking at her hand and only sees it in her own mental universe. We only see this picture (landscape, woman, stone) in our mental universe. Their real lives elude us.

L'Accord parfait. Thanks to the painter, perfect harmony reigns between room, woman, stone and leaf.

Shéhérazade is the name given to the woman-pearl object in memory of the *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Le Prince charmant. The bird crowned with towers is the prince charming of a new fairy tale.

Le Prince charmant. The bird with the princely eye is charming the leaf-birds.

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III.

The matter of titles.

I think that the best title for a picture is a poetic one. In other words, a title consistent with the more or less lively emotion we feel when we look at the picture.

I reckon that you need inspiration to find this title.

A poetic title is not a scrap of information that tells you, for example, the name of the town in the picture, nor the name of the model in the portrait – nor, finally, the name of the symbolic role attributed to the painted figure.

A title whose main function is to supply information does not require any inspiration.

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The poetic title has nothing to teach us, but it must surprise us and enchant us.

I and II are manuscripts in Magritte's handwriting, conserved in the Archives of Contemporary Art in Belgium (AACB) in Brussels. The twenty-three titles, in order, are of works exhibited in Nov. 1946 at the Galerie Dietrich (W 253). III is undated, and it is possible that it may be from some ten years later.

Magritte Interviewed

by André Gomez

GOMEZ: My dear Magritte, how did you get into painting?

MAGRITTE: Allow me (*laughter*) to ask you a question: what do you mean by *that* question?

GOMEZ: Well, the widest possible meaning – that is, at a particular age, how did you come to give up all the other material means of expression and stick to painting proper?

MAGRITTE: Yes, but I could quite well answer: I did this and that, a series of movements in time. But that wouldn't tell you *how*.

GOMEZ: Yes it would, since you did, at a particular time in your life, decide to give up other means of expression – writing, music or poetry – in order to paint.

MAGRITTE: But I didn't *give up* anything at all.

GOMEZ: You began by painting?

MAGRITTE: Well, listen, between ourselves, if you asked me how I happen to be blond rather than dark, to have fair hair rather than black hair, I couldn't answer.

GOMEZ: I understand that, because in that case you had no choice, but all the same, you did at a particular time in your life say: I am going to paint, and you started to paint.

MAGRITTE: Ah well, don't you see that I feel I had no choice, no more than I could choose the colour of my hair? It happened... I don't know how it happened... I have always painted, I really don't remember how it came about.

GOMEZ: You never went to school, you—

MAGRITTE: Ah! Obviously, I ended up going to school, but that's a manner of speaking, I was at school, a college, but—

GOMEZ: In Belgium?

MAGRITTE: In Belgium. Only it was a college I attended... very irregularly.

GOMEZ: Right... like everyone.

MAGRITTE: Perhaps like everyone... anyway, I can't take that as—

GOMEZ: Was it the Brussels equivalent of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris?

MAGRITTE: Yes, it's the... equivalent.

SELECTED WRITINGS

GOMEZ: And you only stayed a very short time?

MAGRITTE: Yes, a very short time.

GOMEZ: And you were thrown out, like everyone else?

MAGRITTE: Probably, yes, I think so, yes, yes I was.

GOMEZ: And then, obviously you had a number of exhibitions, and there is a question I'd like to ask you, if you don't mind, giving us a few facts, a few words about your participation in the Surrealist group.

MAGRITTE: Ah, yes! Here comes the question you shouldn't have asked (*laughter*). Do you know that the word Surrealism doesn't mean anything to me now? Like the word "God" for example: it's a word used to sum up or shake off... a worry. It is simply useful to say: yes, that's Surrealist, yes, God did that, then we know where we are.

GOMEZ: Yes, but—

MAGRITTE: We're happy. The word means nothing to me, I can't use the word.

GOMEZ: Yes, but it is nonetheless true that for a certain time this... group whose name I shan't pronounce did have quite an important influence on the period and individuals from the literary as well as the pictorial point of view, and it enabled painters to break away from old, more or less mistaken formulas and give us—

MAGRITTE: Yes, I dare say, but don't you think it is the painters, poets and writers themselves who... freed themselves from the formulas you mention, who created new ways of thinking? But it isn't the *word*...

GOMEZ: Of course... they invented the word to express their ideas...

MAGRITTE: Certainly, yes...

GOMEZ: A new way of thinking, although they probably didn't invent anything in the end, since there are many others who were Surrealists before the word was invented. Now I also want to ask you for a few words on how you see contemporary painting, the direction and future of painting.

MAGRITTE: I'm sorry, I'm going to be frank...

GOMEZ: And biased, because one is always biased when one is being frank.

MAGRITTE: ...Painting *bores* me like all the rest. Painting is unfortunately one of those activities, it belongs to that series of activities that don't seem to me to change anything in life, it's always the same old habits coming back and I am... I expect painting, at least I understand painting in this way: the painter must be so demanding—

GOMEZ: Yes, but painters are always very demanding.

MAGRITTE: Yes, but these demands are so familiar, they always—

GOMEZ: Run of the mill, familiar...

MAGRITTE: ...banal demands. Even if it's to be a good draughtsman, for example, to draw well. To draw well or to polish a table well – for me it makes no difference.

GOMEZ: No more interesting than that?

MAGRITTE: It doesn't help me, does it? A painter is a good draughtsman and I see his picture... well, that can't help me, any more than the carpenter who's done a good job on his table...

GOMEZ: Yes, that's part of the job...

MAGRITTE: I want something else anyway.

GOMEZ: So have you found anything else in painting?

MAGRITTE: Listen, I think that in man's mind there is... a... possibility which is only rarely... what's the word... only rarely...

GOMEZ: Realized?... Who are the painters that satisfy you totally, if I may put it like that? Whom do you especially like?

MAGRITTE: No one, my dear sir, no one.

GOMEZ: Since the world began, and painting...

MAGRITTE: Since the world began, yes, evidently, all human efforts are finally...

GOMEZ: Worthwhile nonetheless.

MAGRITTE: Worthwhile, yes, but... not... they haven't found it.

GOMEZ: But don't you think men like Courbet, or like Ingres, or like Cézanne, or like Renoir, or, closer to our own times, Picasso have contributed something, however little, something important to painting?

MAGRITTE: Of course, relatively... as regards what is happening, it's important in the art world, obviously. Picasso, Ingres, Courbet are great figures, but... the world could get on just as well without them... anyway I don't know...

GOMEZ: Obviously the world would get on just as well; we would probably get less joy out of painting because we like it. But do you think that you could have painted as you are painting today if Courbet hadn't painted as he did, or if the Impressionists hadn't liberated painting from the studio?

MAGRITTE: Perhaps not...

GOMEZ: If the Surrealists...

MAGRITTE: ...yes!

GOMEZ: A taboo word, OK, but if Surrealism hadn't allowed the imagination to contribute something else and show something different from what we normally see in painting, or do you think without—

MAGRITTE: Listen, I think I probably wouldn't have painted in the style I use now, but I think I would still have *tried* to create new sensations as I do now.

GOMEZ: Yes, but doesn't every painter try to create new sensations...

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MAGRITTE: Oh no, I don't think so...

GOMEZ: Don't you think...

MAGRITTE: Classical painting...

GOMEZ: Yes, but here...

MAGRITTE: ...has a clearly defined objective: beauty... formal beauty...

GOMEZ: Formal beauty, perfect copying of nature...

MAGRITTE: ...clearly defined, yes.

GOMEZ: Photographic painters I'd say. But I don't think you can really call that painting.

MAGRITTE: Ah, some people do.

GOMEZ: Of course, but I don't think that it's that kind of painting that has helped today's artists and painters to come to free themselves precisely from that style and pictorial manner.

MAGRITTE: Well, yes; and so I think that what has helped to free these painters from their chains is... a certain *freedom*.

Interview conducted in Paris for the Radio Suisse Romande, during Magritte's exhibition at the Galerie du Faubourg (W 305). The broadcast date is uncertain, but Magritte mentions it in a letter to Scutenaire in June 1948, in which he also says: "I was disagreeably surprised to hear the faithful reproduction of my voice. For me it's the voice of a fat old idiot."

The Real Art of Painting

The consequences of the art of painting are numerous, as are the possible ways of understanding and practising it.

The first drawings that appeared in prehistoric times required great intellectual stamina on the part of the caveman, not only to conceive them, but to *dare* to conceive them despite the prejudices of his time.

It is very possible that the first artists were massacred as dangerous sorcerers, and afterwards, when people got used to them, other artists were thought of as gods, then as mere agents of information in the service of nascent heraldry.

These various ways of looking at the art of painting since prehistoric times still survive in the twentieth century. The painter wanting intellectual freedom is an object of general hostility, the official painter is an important figure, the industrial painter is a hireling, asked to decorate brothels, churches, shop displays, advertisements and other means of modern propaganda.

The archaeology of the past and present draws up a list of all styles of painting. This bookkeeping is not to be consulted by the painter, who wishes to find the right style which will benefit man.

The art of painting is an art of thinking, and its existence stresses the important part the human eye plays in life; the sense of sight being the only one affected by a picture.

The art of painting aims to perfect vision, thanks to a pure visual perception of the outside world through the sense of sight alone. When a picture is conceived with this aim in mind, it is a means of replacing natural scenes where the eyes function mechanically, because of habit, which masks these sights which are always the same or always what we expect. On the other hand, if nature suddenly takes on an ominous look, not only sight is needed, but our other senses: hearing, smell, touch, taste – throwing us into a state of panic unlikely to result in any worthwhile contact with the outside world.

And so we see that painting is banal unless it plans to take the eyes into account. An example of this mediocre kind of painting is the picture created to arouse patriotic feelings and titillate the licentious tastes of a rich banker: a portrait of said painter in front of an unfurled flag, brandishing a drawn sword in one hand and supporting on the other a pretty woman who is about to faint – a woman whose sensual body shows through her

dress, which has been ripped by some barbarian who has been put to flight. It is obvious that, when confronted by this picture, sight hardly plays a lofty role: if we look at this picture or at the door of the banker's safe, we are offered the same distressing spectacle. The picture is probably useful to the banker as an erotic or heroic stimulant, but these singularly banal stimulants hardly encourage a pure visual perception of the outside world.

However, a less trite painter, who recognizes that the aim of painting is to involve the sense of sight alone, would be misunderstanding this aim if he conceived the following picture: a blindfolded man walking in a forest and an assassin armed with a knife. This would be a mistake: it is certain that in this case the man's sight is absolutely necessary to save his life, but sight only takes on significance because of a fleeting sense of anxiety. The picture would imply that, if there wasn't an assassin, the man's sight wouldn't be so important.

The same subject revised could give this: a blindfolded man walking in a forest (no assassin). In this case it would naturally "be a question of" the importance of the sense of sight for the painted figure, but not to the same extent as with a picture, before which the living eyes of a viewer are given the opportunity to experience a perfect functioning.

To achieve this result, the painter has to invent and execute pictures under harsh conditions. He must start by despising fame and denying himself the material advantages which would enable him to work in peace. He must scorn fame, because in order to become famous he would only be allowed to paint banal pictures, like the one described above. Glory will come of itself or not at all. (The fame of Leonardo, of Galileo, of Mozart adds nothing to their works.)

In addition to a life exposed to ridicule, insults or still worse (he will be taken for a hoaxer, even a degenerate), the painter has professional problems to solve all the time; for the way he sees and practises the real art of painting is subject to a cruel law: the perfect picture is not a meditation; this is a banal, worthless sensation akin to patriotism, eroticism, etc. The perfect picture is only effective for a very short time, and one's first feelings are, to a greater or lesser extent, inevitably dulled by habit. This implacable law forces the painter to surpass himself in each new painting, not in the sense of adding useless things, but making an effective change. According to this law, the viewer must be prepared for a unique moment of consciousness and recognize that he is powerless to prolong that moment. For the viewer (the first viewer is the artist himself), this unique contact takes place in front of a picture, and when this happens it is important that the picture is not detached from the wall on which it is hung, from floor, ceiling, viewer and everything which exists.

The particular problems the painter faces are psychological. He must not allow himself to be carried away by the technique of the art of painting, which is made even more complicated by the succession of different styles that have come to light in the past century. The caveman's simple linear representations have been succeeded by the same representations, more perfected with the silhouette of the body fleshed out. There can be no doubt that a knowledge of perspective and the study of anatomy have given the painter a foolproof means of achieving the "*trompe l'œil*" effect.

Around 1900, when this technique was at its peak, it became evident that it was missing its mark: the numerous landscapes swelling the ranks of the no less numerous portraits did not succeed, despite their numbers, in arousing any other reaction than boredom.

The century began with discoveries which replaced old techniques with new ones, in all areas. Painters, dissatisfied with sterile painting, succumbed to the general craze for technique and attempted to rejuvenate painting. The cinema showed moving pictures on a screen, and this amazing novelty inspired them to rival it. Unfortunately, the problem was posed wrongly: since the techniques of the art of painting were at their peak, it was not a new technique that was needed to renew painting. Actually, we had a perfect technique at our disposal, but it was used unintelligently and ineffectually, whereas the clumsy techniques of the new art of the cinema were effective merely because of their novelty. And so painters, misunderstanding the problems of painting, became more and more ingenious in their search for new techniques and, thanks to their novelty, managed to give painting fleeting moments of superficial vitality. The Impressionists, Cubists, Futurists experienced moments of excitement and intense emotion thanks to their original techniques, but these techniques were futile, since means other than painting could produce – often more successfully – similar moments of excitement and heightened emotion. Since this research into technique has come to an end (cf. "abstract" or "non-figurative art", "Constructivism", "Orphism", etc.), the painter is faced with the technical problem put back into the right perspective – that is, in terms of the desired effect – if he masters it, the great importance of technique is reduced rightly to its *average* proportions.

If the true goal of the art of painting is to conceive and create pictures which will give the viewer a pure visual perception of the outside world, the painter must not counteract the normal functioning of the eyes, which see objects according to a universal visual code: for instance, the object sky is perceived as a blue surface. If the painter wishes to give a pure visual perception of the sky, he will use the blue surface, adopting all the visible characteristics of this surface (nuance, perspective, luminosity, etc.). This

does not pose any technical problem for the painter, who is master of the technique needed to paint the blue surface – which, for the sense of sight, is enough to evoke the sky. But it does pose a psychological problem: how to make the sky look in terms of the desired effect, what to do with the sky? We have certain wonderful possibilities at our disposal, we just need to know how to use them. The painter's techniques may solve certain problems; others call for cinematic techniques, which may also achieve a pure visual perception on the part of the viewer. Thus the idea of a static flash of lightning is of no help to a painter, because the image of a flash of lightning in the picture would be seen as the image of a flash associated with the idea of its lightning movement; whereas, on the screen, thanks to an elementary trick, the viewer could actually see a flash arrested in a stormy sky. In relation to this, the cinema, as it could be, like painting, ought to obey the psychological law mentioned above, and so should only show the flash of lightning for the length of time needed for the eye to recognize that it is static, because, when this time is past, the static flash loses its effect.

The painter's main job is to search for effective ways to show the sky, a pipe, a woman, a tree or any other object. This task is carried on in the dark, although in the dark he must hang on to his sense of freedom if he wishes to prevent himself from being swept up in the magnetic field of chance.

In *EA*. no. 18, Mar. 1969. Mariën dates the text 1949.

The Call of Blood

The sphere and the house suggest enigmatic measurements to the tree.
Curtains hide what is of no earthly use.

In *F.A.* Dec. 1972, under the general title: *The Railing*. Mariën noted of the set: “These commentaries on thirteen Magritte paintings were written in the spring of 1950. They were conceived for an album of photographs to be brought out by Serge Vandercam, a book which was even announced in a library catalogue, under the title *A New World*, in correlation with the exhibition: *The New World*, Charleroi, 20th Apr. 1950 (W 353). The other authors were Colinet, Mariën, Nougé and Scutenaire. But only two or three photos were executed. The texts remained unpublished, except the ones by Nougé, published in *Histoire de ne pas rire*.”

Letter to *Micro-Magazine*

Dear Sir,

I see in *Micro-Magazine* that there are apéritif concerts.* I didn't know there was such a thing as apéritif music?

Digestive or purgative music would be just as good as apéritif music, don't you think? If they don't exist, you must invent these genres in the interest of the development of musical culture. This would be easy for you, since you are a creator.

Thanking you in anticipation, my dear sir, of apéritif music.

Yours purgatively,

Shitter,
director of the purgative powders manufacturing co.

In *Vendredi*, no. 19, Mar. 1950. *Vendredi* was a handwritten and illustrated private weekly, run by Paul Colinet and Marcel Piqueray, and aimed at Robert Willems, Colinet's nephew, then living in the ex-Belgian Congo. *Vendredi* consisted of 100 issues, from 11th Nov. 1949 through to 5th Oct. 1951. Magritte, Mariën, Irène Hamoir and Scutenaire collaborated on it sporadically.

Henri Heerbrant

Paul Klee saw the art of painting in terms of the strict limitation of its means. This has led to Heerbrant today, who is drawing shapes where the relations of line and colour scarcely tally with what we find in our visual observation of the physical world. And yet there is sufficient overlap to meet the modest requirements of a non-Euclidean geometry.

These figures are only meaningful for the imagination.

The art of painting practised by Heerbrant poses the following problems: a child only enjoys playing with a doll because he is using his imagination. Doesn't the enjoyment a mother has playing with her child suggest a very different yet satisfying use of her imagination? Or else, wouldn't a child playing with an electric train have more fun if he could drive a real train across the country? Does the grown man playing with a sophisticated toy train (like the toys millionaires have) think he is a train driver – and if so, what are we to think of the quality of his imagination?

In the *Invitation* to the exhibition of Henri Heerbrant (1912–82), a painter, engraver and assemblagist, at the Lou Cosyn Gallery, Brussels, 18th–30th Mar. 1950 (W 345).

Battle of Wits

Descartes's work, exciting as it was when it first appeared, is now merely used as an antiquated reference system for academic philosophers, when it is hardly more than an elegant example of the art of writing. But Descartes did have the audacity to try to rid the human mind of mistaken ideas that were preventing man from using his brains. Descartes made use of the "material" of his times – i.e. God and the existence of the real physical world – as subjects for intelligent meditations. While on the one hand exercising the intelligence was valuable, on the other, the unsatisfactory "material" at his disposal could only produce a miserable result, such as logical proof of the real existence of the physical world.

Another mind, Bishop Berkeley, in proving the opposite, ended up demonstrating in spite of himself that the world in which men are forced to live is indifferent to anything we may believe about its reality, since imaginary or real physical reality are virtually the same things.

In the twentieth century, the old material has been replaced by a considerable body of useless ideas. But this new material still plays a repressive role as regards understanding. And so, for life to go on or reach a certain level, positive life forces have to fight a ceaseless battle against the negative forces of confusion.

And if history is to be believed, the positive, life-giving forces will always triumph in the end.

*

Everything hangs together. The problem of "culture" is closely linked to all the others and calls for the same serious, rigorous scrutiny.

However, understanding any problem requires an open mind capable of distancing itself from the confusion all around.

The general problem of culture, and particularly that of "art", always produces a struggle between intelligence and the forces that want to paralyse it. Now, in the twentieth century, just as in the past, those forces working on the side of life are in a favourable and unfavourable position at the same time. Favourable because of certain victory; unfavourable because of universal resistance using all means to numb it. As we know, the means range from gentle irony to brutal oppression and murder.

An analysis of the means used by the deadly forces of the opposition reveals a misguided view of art and its precise role.

The quality of a work of art is the only thing that ensures that it is a work of art: we must achieve the best results we can with the means at our disposal. This maximum result is only achieved if we have maximum freedom in the use of those means.

For example, in the specialized field of painting, artists have the following means: composition of a plastic image, realization of this image thanks to the artist's craft and the use of the requisite materials provided by the trade. The best results depend on the calibre of the workman or artist.

In the history of art, or quite simply in history, the best results are in the precision of the artistic expression at a given point in time. This historical value is an expression of fruitful forces. The forces of obstruction attempt to fight off this bold attempt in any way they can. There are crude and insidious ways. The insidious ones, hard to pin down, appear under the guise of revolutions liable to put the misguided on the wrong track. So-called subversive painters have no trouble in causing confusion among frivolous art lovers. Impostors take people in with so much idiotic effrontery that they are generally acclaimed, "snobbism" being a synonym for high culture among the oppressors.

The fate of Douanier Rousseau is an example of the aberrations this snobbism leads to.

When Rimbaud states his affection for simple, naive painting, he is conspicuously rebelling against an official, fossilized art. But at that time he was the only one to speak up. Since everyone now has discovered a similar taste, it is no longer possible to tolerate such affectation in painting.

In contrast to the "Sunday painters" or the painters of the Salons of Paris, the Impressionists brought us an essential, fresh, intelligent style of painting, which resulted in a clash between living ideas and dead ones. And, in our times, the general public still prefers the latter, and has not yet truly understood the Impressionists' living ideas.

Picasso, who discovered a new way of understanding painting, was adopted by the champions of confusion because of his negative aspects: because he creates a totally superficial intellectual scandal.

Sometimes the partisans of confusion do not recognize "their own", and we are offered the spectacle of a massacre of individuals on the same side.

Or else, we see men fighting to be understood in their own field and espousing error in others, like Pasteur, Einstein, Valéry.

When intelligence is used to destroy, it becomes dangerous: valid ideas that have been misconstrued still stand up under analysis – an analysis which, though well-intentioned, is inadequate.

One of these forceful ideas which are abused is the idea that art has a social role to play and that this role is its only justification. This idea comes in various guises, depending on the exponent's profession. For the stupid merchant who only sees his social role in terms of defending "commerce", art must be closely linked with business, and the only aesthetic he takes seriously is the aesthetic of advertising. To the dimwitted priest whose social role is to "spread the word of God", art is exclusively religious, and so on. On the other hand, an intelligent doctor recognizes that art can be therapeutic and help cure patients, and if this doctor is sensitive to painting, he can but abhor a conception of painting that is limited to the "medical". Similarly, the historian, mathematician, politician, engineer can only comprehend art in its purity if they demand that art fulfils its proper social function – that is, independent of any other form of social activity.

Indeed, the only justification for art in social terms is to be found in the social role it plays. And so it is necessary to understand what this really means and avoid any misconceptions that would compromise this genuine social role. The artist's activity, as in all other spheres, is both social and personal.

It is social and worthwhile when the artist's work represents a positive stage in the history of art. Nowadays, as in the past, this is dependent on the great mass of inertia determining the obstacles blocking this activity. His activity is personal, unaffected by the social role, in that the artist's energies are directed to achieve the highest quality, the best artistic effects. Just like any other human activity. Like the doctor performing an operation whose success would be jeopardized if a "social factor" were added to his professional difficulties; like the politician who studies the best way to achieve an important political result, whose activities would be handicapped if his social role interfered with his political role.

And so we note that, as in the class struggle, where material needs are understood rightly when they are considered identical for each individual – whether or not he is able to recognize or satisfy them – in the conflict of ideas, spiritual or cultural needs are also identical for each individual – whether or not he is able to recognize or satisfy them.

*

The strictly social worth of an artist's work can only be estimated in terms of his personal commitment.

The education and milieu which have formed the artist's judgement on life, the working of his mind and art are factors which make possible this personal activity, irrespective of the artist's vital power.

The workings of the mind are not yet fully known, and unlike some misguided people we refuse to believe they are. But what we do know for sure, as Descartes would say – and this is all the artist needs to go on – is that *the mind is capable of imagining effects which it cannot explain*.

It is important to emphasize that *nothing is ever really “explained” in any area*. In fact, what the explanation inevitably boils down to is a misleading paraphrase of the thing “to be explained”. The “explanation” of an apple on a table only ends in a review of the notions of botany, gravity, carpentry; the “explanation” of the earth turning round the sun can only be a list of astronomical calculations, etc.

The words “therefore”, “if”, “because”, etc., which are used in the language of explanation, are not explanatory terms, but merely “ways” of saying: “You can see that this more or less tallies with that” and no more.

The functioning of the mind is perhaps knowable down to the last detail. Only when it is known will we be able to talk properly about “explaining” – that is, when we have explained “*the explanation*”.

The artist must know what he may need from all angles. As for his artistic work itself, the main information he can obtain from understanding how the brain works comes down to the fact that a man’s artistic activity depends on his understanding of art, morality, “a temperament open to refinement”, plus the vital power of the man as he is, as he has himself struggled to become in the environment in which he lives.

The understanding of art, in the sense that it has a superior end in view, is, in the twentieth century, inevitably subversive. It is opposed to an understanding that restricts art to the conquests of the past. But a genuine knowledge of art cannot be content with this illusory comfort and enables us to rediscover eternal youth, thanks to its audacious, clear-sighted efforts to give the “notion” of art its living content again: and it is precisely this living content which aesthetes and modern critics find unjustifiable.

This living content incorporates into the “notion” of art the search for less reductive sensations than those of beauty or the artist’s so-called subtle sensibilities.

It is a question of searching for sensations that elude the qualifications and vague classifications that still thrive today, such as “indescribable”, “revolutionary”, “infinite”, “fantastic”, etc.

These sensations cannot be pulled to pieces by academic psychology, for the simple reason that they are beyond its boundaries. Their real power is not proved because they were the product of some kind of illumination, which can easily be misconstrued, but because we can verify their efficacy. They prevent any complacency, they force the most entrenched minds to

justify their rigid limits – for these new sensations are the manifestation of universal intelligence in its transient form.

The “notion” of art no longer calls, thanks to its new content, upon sterile values such as “humour”, “anxiety”, “pity”, “sensitivity”, “talent”, “taste”, etc. These sterile values, when they do have some substance, simply become means which enable the artistic individual to demonstrate his understanding of life by creating vital sensations which cannot be reduced to any formula or intellectual analysis.

The man who undertakes the search for such sensations cannot be mistaken for the conventional “artist”. His “art” is a new human activity, called, for want of a better word, “artistic”, or simply, to mark its special nature, “Surrealist”, with all the confusion this word engenders.

*

If we admit that man is capable of action in all fields of human activity, the choice of an activity, imposed largely by his social destiny, is made in certain cases *despite* this social destiny. Then man’s vital power meets a set of auspicious circumstances which allow him to triumph over his fate. His choice is the fruit of a personal preference or a passion, a very precious and very dangerous feeling.

When the right choice was made, here are the names of men precious to humanity: Archimedes, Leonardo, Pasteur, Marx, etc. As for the wrong choice, names we would rather forget, but which we remember all too well: Nero, Bonaparte, Hitler and so many others. But for these tragic mistakes, due to powerful but misguided minds, Nero might have surpassed Mozart, Bonaparte might have led to victory the revolt of Spartacus, Churchill and Hitler might have been the greatest painters in history.

The struggle – like life – goes on.

In *FA*. nos. 51–53, Jun.–Aug. 1971. Mariën says in his editor’s note: “This text, which we give here in its third draft, includes, written in the margins, corrections added by Paul Colinet and Marcel Mariën. Due to lack of space, Mariën could not publish it in *La Feuille chargée* (Mar. 1950) for which Magritte had written it.”

Note to the Communist Party

The workers have been introduced to paintings in inauspicious conditions, caused by an initial confusion about the nature of artistic activity and political action.* Whereas the struggle on the political level can, under the present circumstances, only claim the minimum – the right to bread, for example – the struggle of revolutionary artists can, under the present circumstances, claim the maximum: the victory of intellectual luxury – this must not be abandoned.

When the workers met the artists, they were only given the chance to look at pictures which were strictly limited to the expression of political ideas and feelings, and the present mistake those responsible for the party's cultural line are making is to encourage the workers to believe that these are the only kinds of pictures suitable for them.

To translate political ideas into pictures is useful to illustrate party posters, but it does not follow that the only valid role for the artist is to paint pictures exclusively confined to the class struggle, nor that the workers should be denied the pleasure of seeing pictures which would enrich their consciousness in quite a different way from the way this is done through class consciousness.

Class consciousness is a basic necessity, but this does not mean that the workers have to be condemned to bread and water and that it is wrong to wish for chicken and champagne. They are Communists precisely because they aspire to a higher life, worthy of man.

The Communist painter justifies his artistic activity by creating pictures that are an intellectual luxury, a luxury for a Communist society, differing – it goes without saying – from the useless, ostentatious and bad-taste luxury of the present exploitative classes.

If we wish to exclude systematically this luxury from the Socialist world, we are consenting to an offensive, sordid mediocrity, at least in the intellectual domain.

A superior life cannot be conceived of without genuine luxury. We cannot win without the political struggle, nor without the difficult struggle that certain revolutionary artists are engaged in, those who do not limit their efforts to expressing political ideas alone, or representing familiar scenes from the life of the workers for the purpose of general edification.

In Manifestes et autres écrits, pp. 129–32, originally dating from 1950.

The Condemned Man

The condemned man, having put on his regulation shoes, has nothing to do in his cell; this is all the more painful for him as, when he was a free man, he was always very active. He set store by reality because it alone had practical repercussions.

And so there he is, in an insufferable passive state, waiting for the decisive moment when the guillotine and all the penal machinery will put an end to his life, setting him free from sterile daydreams.

In *Vendredi*, no. 69, 2nd Mar. 1951.

“A Man of the People...”

A man of the people, facing the death of his wife, would say: “She’s now between four planks of fir.” Coupled with his certainty and his grief would be the idea that fir exists to be fashioned into coffins. When a head of state becomes a widower, his power having nothing to do with the desires of the masses, his grief takes on a particular alimentary aspect: the tears of a head of state have an edible value – the more powerful the widower, the higher the value. The alimentary character of his grief is the same as that of his other luxuries (only in a democracy and in small poor countries would the sorrow of a head of state be equal, from an edible point of view, to economical bourgeois cooking). It should be noted that any idea or feeling that a head of state has is inevitably edible: so, when he calculates his salary, he calculates what the budget of each citizen can contribute and what this represents for each one in basic alimentary terms (bread, potatoes, meat), and what this would fetch on the world market transformed into choice victuals for the head of state. This is why at the funeral of a woman of the people, the family is given a frugal meal consisting of starches and substitutes, whereas at the funeral of a woman from the industrious sphere, a feast with rare crustaceans, fine meats, rich sauces and vintage wines places the mind of the head of state in the alimentary sphere to which it belongs.

In *EA* . no. 28, Oct. 1969. Mariën dates this text from 1955, by reference to ‘Variants of Sadness’. However, Blavier discovered that parts of it appeared in *Vendredi*, no. 69, 2nd Mar. 1951.

“It Is Difficult...”

It is difficult to think while thinking of nothing. Colinet walks with Lecomte towards the petals of a dream.

In *Vendredi*, no. 71, 16th Mar. 1951, under the heading ‘To Fill a Corner’, illustrated with a drawing by Magritte: *La Tendance au nœud papillon*.

Two of a Kind

Some guy is heckling a priest: “Why don’t you emphasize in your sermons that two enemy soldiers are basically the same: both forced by their countries who are at war, or rather by the same crass stupidity, away from normal life to serve as cannon fodder or worse?”

“Freak,” replies the priest.

Unpublished text from a letter to Colinet, 9th May 1951.

Magritte Interviewed by Maurice Bots

MAGRITTE: I have nothing to express! I simply search for images, and invent and invent. The idea doesn't matter to me: only the image counts, the inexplicable and mysterious image, since all is mystery in our life. I paint the beyond, alive or dead. Beyond my ideas, I work through images...

Therefore the decorative sense does not exist for me. I don't paint: I use objects which appear to be pictures because, by chance, this is the form of expression that suited my senses. I might have expressed myself just as well through writing, singing, medicine...

Poetry isn't a matter of versification. It is what is to be found in the universe, well within what we can see.

The way a scientist at his microscope sees more than the naked eye. But there comes a time when he too is stopped at a certain point. Well, it's at that point, for me, that poetry begins.

BOTS: So your use of cold tones is not a matter of chance?

MAGRITTE: No, because all this mysterious universe is cold. I don't feel any warmth in the void of the beyond. Besides, I attempt to give substance to the imperceptible, and this can only be cold.

BOTS: Painting the imperceptible... Why hasn't he been to search worlds elsewhere to find substance?

MAGRITTE: No, no, I am a Westerner before anything else. Japanese oriental beauty, for example, doesn't move me. My horizons are here in this world.

BOTS: The future for you?

MAGRITTE: Nothingness. Past, future – I ignore them. I work solely for the present, for modern man, because I am essentially in the present. Each era has its own consciousness that other eras do not know how to assimilate. Read into the past and you will only understand it in a personal sense, with your vision, not with the vision of time. For me it's the present that counts.

Maurice Bots, *Silhouette: René Magritte*, in *La Métropole*, Brussels, 2nd Jul. 1951 (W 364).

Reply to the Questionnaire: The Matter of Revolt

1. Revolt is a reflex action of the man who is alive, which it is not necessary to justify by more or less intelligent reasoning.
2. Revolt against the present world signifies a refusal to participate voluntarily in the activity of this world, which is run by hooligans and idiots. It also signifies the wish to take action against this world and to look for ways to change it.

In *La Révolte en question*, Paris, Le Soleil noir, *Positions*, no. 1, Feb.–Mar. 1952, p. 68 (W 394).

“I Am Thinking about...”

I am thinking about some new research, thanks to an idea I have about what could make valid particular paintings. Their realization depends on whether I am successful in solving certain problems posed as follows: an object, any subject taken as a question, is a matter of finding another object as answer, secretly connected to the first by links which are sufficiently complex to serve as verification of the answer. If the answer is imperative, obvious, the bringing together of the two objects is striking.

Here are three examples of problems which have led to the creation of recent pictures: *Le Séducteur* solves the “problem of water”. It represents water in the shape of a boat on the sea. *Le Coup au cœur* solves the problem of the rose: a dagger grows on the stem of a rose. The last problem I dealt with was the problem of the piano. The answer taught me that the hidden object destined to be united with the piano was an engagement ring. So in *La Main heureuse* there is a black grand piano, threaded through a big ring standing on the ground. The ring is on a grand scale, like the full glow of happiness, especially the happiness of the fingers of a hand playing the piano. Also, the shape formed by the ring, partly hidden by the piano, evokes the musical symbol of the bass clef.

I realize now that I carried on the investigations that led to these revelations in order to find out if objects have an irreducible, absolute sense. In fact, if the answers do elucidate the questions, the questions do not elucidate the answers. If the dagger is the answer to the rose, the rose is not the answer to the dagger; neither is the water an answer to the boat, nor is the piano an answer to the ring. Because of this realization, I can now envisage a search for answers which are at the same time questions, which have been answered by objects that initially played the role of the question. Is this possible? This appears to call for the capacity of the mind that Edgar Allan Poe attributes to the work of the Divinity: “Where cause and effect are reversible”. Perhaps it isn’t impossible, if we can imagine this capacity, that we could attain it through a flash of revelation.

In *La Carte d’après Nature*, Brussels, no. 1, Oct. 1952 (W 388). This little magazine – sometimes a pamphlet, often a postcard – was produced by Magritte and irregularly published in fourteen issues from 1951 through to 1964. It comprised poetry, illustrations, short stories and other miscellany.

A Great Neglected Painter: Permantier

Armand Permantier's* paintings are conceived without ambiguity, his sole concern being to evoke a strong feeling of exaltation.

In contrast to classical painters, who work with shapes and colours like those we see in the objects strewn around outside paintings, Permantier's pictorial language fits the paintings in his imagination, elated as he is by the right to view the sky as an equal.

Although Permantier has the strength to adapt to the worst and the best that society has to offer – not really seeing any great difference anyway – his exemplary life deserves, at the very least, our respect and genuine consideration. As for his works, whose value lies in their unique feeling, the public will probably admire them one of these days, significantly behind the times as usual.

Magritte's contribution in the pamphlet-collection of the same title (Brussels, Nov. 1952 (W 398)), which also included texts by Paul Colinet, Maurice Cremonesi, Edmond Kinds, Marcel Piqueray, Scutenaire and Robert Willems.

Roundelay

Act I

COUNT (*returning from a walk*): I've lost my overcoat.

COUNTESS: Oh dear! Oh dear! It's just like a dream. Are we awake? (*Calling the flunky*) Baptiste! Baptiste! (*Enter Baptiste*) Ah, there you are, Baptiste; are we awake or are we in a dream?

BAPTISTE: Well, there's something to be said on both sides, Madame la Comtesse; I couldn't prove logically that you aren't a pure creation of my mind.

Act II

COUNTESS (*to Count*): No, not today: I am indisposed.

Act III

COUNT (*to Baptiste*): Although you are not in my set, Baptiste, I feel the need to have carnal intercourse with you.

BAPTISTE: Certainly, Monsieur Lecomte, but first I'll have to go poop, so you can get in.

CURTAIN

In *Les Lèvres nues*, new series, no. 2, Dec. 1969, p. 4. Mariën dates the text to 9th Dec. 1952.

“Evidence...”

Evidence of deceit and stupidity can be seen, heard, felt, throughout our life. A few spaces where the sight can rest without shame escape from this nothingness. These spaces are ideas made with objects and resemble the paintings of

René Magritte

Stencilled invitation to Magritte's exhibition, Verviers, *Temps mêlés*, 14th–26th Mar. 1953 (W 427).

Nat Pinkerton*

The private detective arrives at his office. A visitor is shown in by the detective's assistant. When the visitor has left, the detective gives orders to his assistant. The assistant puts a gun in his holster and gets out of the office. The detective lights a cigar and writes a letter. About midday, he goes to a gourmet restaurant. After his meal, he goes for a walk and, out of habit, mentally photographs all the people he sees. He notices that his morning visitor is sitting on a bench. He buys a book in a bookshop and then returns to the office. Having taken off his overcoat and cap, he lights a cigar and reads the book he has just bought. His assistant arrives and gives his report. The assistant shows in two women, and when they have stated their case, he shows them out and comes back for his orders. The assistant makes an arrest before nightfall: one of the women who visited that afternoon; she was living with an acrobat, a fence for the stolen goods that the detective's morning visitor had asked him to investigate. The assistant reports back to the office, writes down the professional fee for the visitor, dictated by the detective, and, his working day over, goes back to his lodgings to have a meal and go to bed. The detective goes to a quiet café to play a game of piquet before going home. He gets home around 9.30. His wife and his mother-in-law are waiting for him in the dining room, and they all eat some meat garnished with vegetables. The detective does not talk about his work to his family. He is busy writing a play with his wife and mother-in-law, who are actresses. When it is time for bed, he kisses them and goes to his own room for a good night's rest.

In *La Carte d'après Nature*, no. 4, Apr. 1953 (W 414).

M.'s Useless Painting

We admit that there is a difference between a man and a cloud, and that, although science can easily reproduce the cloud phenomenon, it is powerless to reproduce the human-life phenomenon. Scientific formulae, simple for the manufacture of steam, complex for the splitting of atoms, make this particularly obvious and totally ignored point: the formulae in question are merely means as natural as, for example, the means of obtaining a living child by impregnating a woman. It is therefore a mistake to believe that if man has the means to boil water he has no way of reproducing human life.

Because of the general respect for and ignorance of science, the results of scientific research, which are in practice either extremely useful or extremely harmful, are taken for a higher form of knowledge about things. If one is equipped with this belief, it is no longer possible to have direct contact with things, a contact uncontaminated by any scientific considerations, because each thing can be understood in as many different ways as there are scientific specializations. These various points of view do not correspond to the various aspects of things, but use things according to certain subjective priorities: for example, water for a chemist has nothing to do with water as it is seen by an admiral versed in naval warfare. Does this mean that water has no existence apart from the way we use or see it for our own ends?

The research and preoccupations of M. prove the contrary: things exist outside of what we know about them and apart from the uses that they can be put to. In M.'s pictures things are revealed, stripped of all the practical connotations that hide them from us.

Things are usually so well hidden by their uses that if we do catch a glimpse of them we feel we possess the secret of the Universe. In short, to see things would be tantamount to proving the existence of the Universe, having knowledge of a supreme secret.

M. reveals things by ruthlessly shaking off their utilitarian aspect; things then appear absolutely useless, unusable: they are enigmas defying scientific investigation. In M.'s painting *Le Séducteur* we really see water for the first time in our lives. The water is a boat and simultaneously the boat is the water. In other paintings, stones reveal the perfection of their existence, they are called: *La Parole donnée*, *Souvenir de voyage* and *Le Chant de la violette*.

SELECTED WRITINGS

In *Le Chant de la violette*, two people made of stone live in a land of stone, provoking at the base of the skull a distinct sensation of the song and the mental weight of the modesty of stones and violets.

The singular Knowledge we get from M.'s painting is as genuine as it is absolutely useless for solving the tedious problems of everyday life.

Unpublished manuscript, probably a draft for a preface to an exhibition, such as the *Œuvres récentes* exhibition, Brussels, Siren Gallery, 17th Oct. 1953 (W 436), or a planned exhibition the Seine Gallery, Paris, which did not take place.

On Jane Graverol

Everything that Madame Jane Graverol* wants to paint seems to me to be charged with the symbolic resonance that comes from a variety of romantic and dramatic feelings. Instead of “using art as an escape”, it is indeed possible, from the moment one decides to paint, not to give up one’s usual preoccupations and to create images of conflicting emotions which will be of real interest to someone interested in human documents, who can then, in his turn, arouse the curiosity of a new observer and so on, ad infinitum.

Jane Graverol’s paintings are somewhere in this world of feeling where connections between things are contained within precise limits. But it turns out that the power of the unexpected makes it harder to grasp their meaning. Jane Graverol does not wish to counter the power of the unexpected, consequently she participates in the only necessary spiritual activity.

In *Jane Graverol* by Paul Colinet, De Angelis, Irine, Marcel Lecomte, *René Magritte*, Marcel Mariën, Louis Scutenaire and Geert Van Bruaene, Verviers, *Temps mêlés*, 13th Dec. 1953 (W 419).

The Reconciliation

We had just calmed the table down when Eusébie had the idea of putting up a poster, promising that she would take two centimes off every purchase of a hundred francs, thereby hoping to stimulate purchases from the few neighbours who passed in front of her shop.

Hectolassin let the dust accumulate on his clothes in order to make the cold more bearable. As time went by, the street became unaffordable, in spite of the fifteen centimes given by Eusébie to the collection made by the bearded boy scouts to support the city's Heating System.

Monsieur Planeur, inventor of staircases, came to buy some materials from Eusébie, and he was the first beneficiary of the promised refund of two centimes. He placed these in his account at the Bank of Provisional Properties, in order not to display his cash in hand carelessly at home.

The cracks on Eusébie's wall were becoming ever larger and could be used instead of a staircase, which enabled the arrival of a tree which had come out of the soil, on the floor where her shop stood. As for Hectolassin, he felt no need to shift any higher, having already given up the desire to shift horizontally, which he found incomprehensible. With the dust still accumulating on him, he now resembled a colourless and shapeless heap in front of a wall on the way to disappearing.

In La Carte d'après Nature, special issue, Jan. 1954 (W 440).

“Mallarmé’s Death...”

Mallarmé’s death is the end of a humanity where poets could use the word poetry to mean inspired expression. Mallarmé, who was also concerned with *what is expressed*, gave the word a force which has not been surpassed: his book was to be the supreme expression of the Universe.

The word poetry enjoys sufficient prestige among those authors who are hard to discourage for them to be content with quite indifferent writings called poems. At present it merely leads to confusion when we try and understand the results of research into certain quite ordinary feelings and ideas.* We must not attempt to reduce these effects to some meaning or other, even a poetic one. They have no meaning; they *are* the meaning.

In *La Carte d’après Nature*, spec. iss. Jan. 1954: “What meaning do you give to the word Poetry?” The questionnaire was sent out by *La Carte d’après Nature* on 5th Sep. 1953.

Reply to the Questionnaire on Sexuality

Here's what I have to say in answer to your questionnaire.

Whenever they're used to scandalize or to educate, sexual acts don't amount to much. There is a sort of comforting misunderstanding in taking an understanding of sexuality for self-knowledge. Sexuality is only compatible with disinterested reflection.

Magritte's response, sent on 22nd Feb. 1954, to a questionnaire by Gaston Puel, following the publication in 1947 of *Proximités*, no. 3, ed. Robert Massin.

Autobiographical Sketch

René-Francois-Ghislain MAGRITTE was born on 21st November 1898 in Lessines, in the province of Hainaut. His father, Léopold Magritte, and his mother, Régina Bertinchamps, were then living in a house which no longer exists.

From his cradle, René Magritte saw helmeted men carrying the remains of a balloon which had crashed onto the roof of his family home.

In 1910, in Châtelet, where his parents have settled, René Magritte, who is twelve, colours in pictures and takes painting lessons. A teacher from a school in Dampremy, near Charleroi, comes once a week to give lessons to the young ladies of Châtelet. René Magritte is the sole representative (with the teacher) of the male sex in the improvised class, consisting of two rooms on the first floor of a sweet shop.

At this time, René Magritte spends his holidays in Soignies, with his aunt Flora, his grandma, his godmother Maria, and his godfather Firmin. He frequents an old cemetery, where, for the first time, he meets an artist who is working on the pictorial aspects of the old tombs in the sun for a local landowner.

René Magritte is then a pupil at the Athénée in Charleroi, where he astonishes his French teacher with his somewhat strange compositions. In 1912, his mother Régina is tired of life. She throws herself into the Sambre. In 1913, the family, consisting of the father, René and his brothers Raymond and Paul, move to Charleroi. There, in a *carousel-salon*, René Magritte meets Georgette Berger, his future wife.

He wishes to study at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. He attends irregularly until 1918, the year the family took up permanent residence in the capital.

In 1919, René Magritte meets Pierre Bourgeois, the first person to write poems inspired by the young painter's efforts. He works for a while in the studio that Pierre Flouquet had decorated with avant-garde frescoes. With his friends Bourgeois and Flouquet he meets E.L.T. Mesens in 1920. The latter has a beard and gives piano lessons to Paul, one of the painter's two brothers. Mesens, at this time, takes things very seriously and Magritte senior reveals the existence of humour to him by playing innocent tricks on him, which annoy the young musician.

The same year, René Magritte meets Georgette again, while walking in the Botanical Gardens, and from then on he never leaves her side, unless forced to. He is miserable for a few months in a foul barracks in Antwerp, where he has to put up with military instruction and shameful promiscuity.

In 1922 Georgette becomes his wife. To keep the pot boiling, René Magritte works as a designer in a wallpaper factory. Victor Servranckx, whom he had known at the Académie, has been hard at work there for several years. Magritte and Servranckx carry out research which has nothing to do with what they are being paid to do. They work on paintings which are now termed “abstract” or “non-figurative”. René Magritte finds the factory as trying as the barracks. After a year he quits and earns his living doing idiotic jobs: posters and drawings for advertising. He sells his first painting for a hundred francs to the avant-garde singer Évelyne Brélia* (her *Portrait*).

In 1922 René Magritte meets Marcel Lecomte. The painter’s investigations begin to show some results. Lecomte shows Magritte a photograph of one of de Chirico’s paintings, *Le Chant d’amour*, and the painter cannot hold back his tears. Marcel Lecomte gives the poet renewed hope when he is discouraged. He reads him a line from Paul Éluard: “The darkest eyes enclose the lightest.”*

At the end of 1924 he meets Camille Goemans,* and at the beginning of 1925 Paul Nougé. Camille Goemans was valuable to the painter as a model of spiritual integrity. Paul Nougé continually pointed out the importance of feelings and a respect for them which calls for rigorous intellectual discipline.

At that time there is exciting activity going on. Magritte, Goemans, Lecomte and Mesens publish a prospectus announcing the publication of a new magazine (*Période*). Nougé publishes a reply. A rather odd thing occurs: the group splits in two. Magritte and Mesens publish *Œsophage* then *Marie*; Goemans, Lecomte and Nougé publish *Correspondance*. After these publications a new group is formed in Belgium whose activities parallel those of the French Surrealists.

In 1924, René Magritte discovers his first painting. It shows a window seen from inside. In front of the window a hand seems to be trying to catch hold of a bird flying past (*La fenêtre*). There are still traces of past research in the picture, certain parts treated “in a plastic manner”, according to the jargon which had already been abandoned.

In 1925, René Magritte, still hard-pressed by financial worries, only has his spare time in which to paint, think, visit his friends. He creates the picture *Le Jockey perdu*, not conceived with any aesthetic aim, but with the sole purpose of RESPONDING TO a mysterious feeling, an “irrational” anguish, a sort of “call to order” which surfaces in

non-historical moments of his consciousness and which, since birth, guides his life.

During this period “business” goes well. Through a combination of events the painter suddenly benefits from a “contract” from P.G. van Hecke* and the new gallery, Le Centaure, Avenue Louis, Brussels. The painter is twenty-seven. He is able to paint sixty pictures in a year, including some, like *L'Assassin menacé*, in very large format.

René Magritte has an exhibition at Le Centaure in 1927. Art critics show nothing but contempt for his work. He is obliged to write unpleasant things to certain journalists who exceed the bounds of stupidity.

In August 1927, René Magritte settles in Le Perreux-sur-Marne, near Paris. During his stay in France he frequents the Surrealists and takes part in the activities organized by André Breton.

In 1930, René Magritte returns to Brussels. He makes new friends: Louis Scutenaire, Paul Colinet, Marcel Mariën, Jean Pfeiffer, Robert Mathy, Achille Chavée,* Albert Ludé,* etc., who share his preoccupations. Above all he associates with Scutenaire, Lecomte, Mariën, Goemans, Nougé and Colinet. Other people were approached too, notably the solitary painter Armand Permantier. From 1926 to the present, René Magritte has had exhibitions in numerous cities. His works are now known to a select few all over the world.

In 1953, René Magritte was commissioned by the Casino in Knokke to execute an important work. He had to create images to decorate the walls of a large banquet hall. These images form a panorama in eight pictures called *Le Domaine enchanté*. Paul Colinet has written a poetic description of them which was published at the inauguration.

In 1954, an old friend of Magritte, Robert Giron,* who went to the Académie at the same time as the painter, and who endeavours to reconcile his love of Art with the “realities” that condition his work as director of exhibitions at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, organized the present exhibition of René Magritte’s works with the intention of showing, through a selection, a comprehensive view of the pictures painted between 1926 and today.

In *Catalogue de l'exposition Magritte*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 8th May 1954 (W 468).

Thought and Images

One may be “struck” by the word Thought.

Our thoughts are “concerned” with sensations, feelings, reflexes, preferences, activities, ideas, beliefs and various preoccupations, as if the thought that “coincides” with these “things” was the only thought possible, as if the thought that “coincides” still deserved to be called thought.

“It doesn’t matter!” some will say. “It’s the pleasure of a pleasant and powerful sensation that counts!” Or: “It’s the fulfilment of my duty!” But, without a doubt, for something to “count”, thought is necessary to “appraise” pleasure or duty.

The hand that goes too near the fire and the reflex that makes us cry out in pain and draw back the hand from the flames “counts”, at the same time, to thought, which is obliged to be “concerned” about a painful sensation and a reflex action. It *coincides* exactly, at that moment, with these two things. The *coincidence* is no less exact when, at other moments, thought “takes into account” the worries and doubts it envisages. It is the same *coincidence* when it is a more complex question of turning one’s thoughts to even more things simultaneously. For instance: the subtle taste of a soup, your hostess’s beauty, a notion of the origin of thought or a professional problem.

*

To think of an image means Seeing an image.

The painting gives the sense of sight a visible image. The sense of sight registers the image in the picture in reverse, without Seeing, according to the laws of optics, like a camera. This image becomes a mental image, that is an image with a psychic value. It is thought that gives this value.

*

Images may be endowed with false values: commercial “value” for instance; or again the value of size prized by those who are obsessed with the metric dimensions of a canvas, by resolute partisans of large or small portions of space, by champions of fresco cementing, of mounting, of genuine craquelure and the composition of paint and remounting paste, by experts in anatomy, perspective or shadows cast.

The values that truly concern the image depend, according to personal preference, on one or two aesthetic theories which determine the creation of the resulting pictures.

Fear of being mystified assuredly affects the painted image that has the power to induce such a fear.

We are quite “safe” when we are choosing between the glory of the Impressionists, the dynamism of the Futurists, the Cubism of Picasso, the abstract art of Mondrian or Archipenko* and the genius of de Chirico. We may also value the last conventional “Prix de Rome” or else “get a buzz” from the “young” (and the old) who bewilder art critics by “discovering” abstract and non-figurative art in 1954.

*

Women, children and men who never think about art history have personal preferences just as much as aesthetes. Disagreement among these preferences cannot be explained by the influence of different “environments”. In fact, “Siamese twins” generally have dissimilar tastes and opposing beliefs, just as an individual who is torn, notably by his conflicting desires. If differences of feeling are “explained” by the structure of the “grey matter”, this is obviously not a particularly helpful “explanation”, and it resembles very much the answers given by Molière’s doctors.

Thought enables us to offer an “explanation”. Thought gives it its value. Whether the explanation is theological, metaphysical, psychological or biological, it is “uttered” by thought, which explains, *though itself inexplicable*, whatever may be said about it.

We could no doubt go on living without thinking, like plants – we don’t know if they “think”. Thought gives life its value. All values are the gift of thought. What gives is free. Thought is essentially free. It is Light. However, in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of life, our thought does not manifest its freedom to the full. It is constantly threatened, affected by everything that happens to us. It *coincides* with a hundred and one things which restrict it. This *coincidence* is *almost* permanent.

Thought has some degree of freedom when, for instance, it gives value to our feeling for a stone or when it bestows the highest value on life and the Universe on which life depends. For the sake of freedom of thought we must admire Ruskin, the art lover who wrote: “Let all works of art perish rather than the birds that sing in the trees.”

*

Life, the Universe, the Void have no value for thought when it is completely free. The only thing that has value is Meaning – that is, the moral concept

of the Impossible. To think of Meaning the mind has to free itself from ordinary, nearly ordinary and extraordinary ideas.

In the field of art, thought is generally deprived of all freedom through respect for dead traditions or subservience to ridiculous fashions.

The absurdity and cruelty of the world cries out for the generous heart to rebel and thoughts turn to justice.

My paintings are images. You cannot give a valid description of an image unless thought is guided towards its freedom. You must also pay attention to both the image and the words which have been chosen to describe it. ** The description of the painted image, which has become a mental image, must be *endlessly perfectible*. Moreover, it is important to be wary of using certain inappropriate words (abstract, concrete, consciousness, unconsciousness, temperament, ideal, etc.)

I consider any verbal attempt valid which says that my paintings have been conceived as material signs of the freedom of thought... They aim “as far as possible” not to devalue Meaning – that is, the Impossible.

If the question “What is the meaning of these images?” could be answered, it would be tantamount to making Meaning, the Impossible, resemble a possibility. To attempt to answer would be to recognize there was a “meaning”. The viewer can, with the greatest possible freedom, see my images *as they are*, while trying, as their creator does, to think of Meaning, which means thinking of the Impossible.

In *Catalogue de l'exposition Magritte*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, May 1954 (W 468), pp. 5–8.

Magritte Interviewed

by Jean Stévo* (I)

STÉVO: My dear friends, there is an important exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels: René Magritte's Surrealist work is indeed attracting the attention of numerous art critics and countless other people. I had the privilege of meeting René Magritte this morning at the Palais, and I said to him, "Come to the microphone." Here he is. My dear Magritte, I would like to ask you a question.

MAGRITTE: That's very kind. But you know my friend Colinet and I usually need forty-eight hours to answer questions. So I'm afraid we'll have to improvise if that's all right...

STÉVO: But of course.

MAGRITTE: We are at your service.

STÉVO: That's too kind of you, my dear Magritte. Tell me, are you satisfied with the selection of your works in the exhibition? I believe there are works from 1926 to the present.

MAGRITTE: Robert Giron, the organizer of the exhibition, has certainly made a sensitive, intelligent choice. Besides, he was helped by Édouard Mesens, who has always loyally supported my work. Having said this, I feel it is very important to make a clear distinction between a thing and the ideas we have of it, since the significance of my paintings depends on this distinction. In the case of an exhibition, one must differentiate the painting or the ideas one has about what the paintings and the ideas show, which, for the time being, belong to the realm of the unknown. Indeed, we don't know anything about what my paintings show. My paintings or ideas are significant if they compel us to see them as approximations. In short, I'd say that to be satisfied with something shows a lack of imagination.

STÉVO: But tell me, René Magritte, what in fact do you hope for?

MAGRITTE: I hope that good exists. If there is hope we obviously cannot hope for evil. My paintings are not the good. We must always distinguish between what a thing refers to and the idea we have of that thing. For instance, I would like people to think about what my paintings reveal without needing the pictures to inspire them to do so. Besides, the human being who does not see the world as a mystery won't discover what my paintings are trying to show.

STÉVO: Yes, yes... I think perhaps that's a bit complicated for our listeners, and I believe we need a few words of explanation – don't you agree? We know very well, for instance, that Magritte paints a woman and writes "tree" [*Le Vertige*]. That is basically what he's just been telling us, and perhaps we have lost our capacity to dream – we no longer have a sense of the marvellous. Magritte gives us back this sense intact. But I shall ask one of his most experienced commentators, the poet Paul Colinet, to give us his definition of Magritte.

COLINET: That won't be easy. What my friend Magritte has just said, off the cuff, leaves no stone unturned as they say, and I, who am familiar with his thoughts, see that he has formulated them accurately and that they are extremely significant. But will he be understood? We must admit that the framework of an interview is extremely narrow and restricting. As Magritte said, we both need a full two days to respond in depth to the simplest questions. So all I can do here is take a short cut and tell you one of the most exciting ideas that has come to me in front of Magritte's paintings. I had the thought that no one had ever seen these unique, fascinating pictures until today. It would be too facile to say that they had been seen merely because they have been registered by the eye...

STÉVO: Yes, exactly...

COLINET: Or that we have had a few odd ideas or fantasies about them. Nevertheless, extravagant as this idea may sound, I feel it is worthwhile, since it makes me realize how demanding these pictures are; how, because of their content, we can never see them enough. Even Magritte himself is in the same position, which is what inspired the remarks he has just made. But these marvellous paintings are there, with their strange summons and their mystery, and it is up to us to see them absolutely for the first time.

Interview broadcast on Belgian radio, 12th May 1954 at 10.25 am, on the occasion of the exhibition cited above (W 468).

Reply to the Questionnaire: “Does Thought...”

“...And so it is a sort of courage, whose external cause is example. I say external cause, although there must also always be an inner one, which is that we are made in such a way that desire and hope have more power to keep the blood flowing to our hearts than fear or despair to prevent it.”
– René Descartes*

The question: DOES THOUGHT SHED LIGHT ON US, AND OUR ACTIONS, WITH THE SAME INDIFFERENCE AS THE SUN? OR WHAT DO WE HOPE FOR AND WHAT IS ITS VALUE? implies that the sun’s indifference is not a moral indifference. So far, the *idea* that the sun burns without thought or hope, far from barracks and meadows, is no more appealing to us than the impression that the sun is endowed with some kind of consciousness. We are not totally indifferent to this question: we judge that it *must* be left unsettled, that we *must* forget it or that we *had better* pay as much attention to it as possible.

Anyway – unless we “lose consciousness” – our mind forces us to judge “what is happening”. This inescapable obligation compels us to be aware of our responsibility. We judge that we have a “limited responsibility” when we are satisfied with the *ideas* we use to define it. The most cheerful pessimists along with the gloomiest optimists have reached this point. They differ from each other because of their different *ideas*, but all the same, they don’t take their *ideas* as seriously as some lunatics do. “They stand on their own two feet” – and wait for something better.

Dream of it as we may, a human being can certainly not be a machine or a puff of smoke, which “behaves” strictly according to the dictates of science. You can even train someone to be an automaton that will obey the silliest orders. But you cannot kill what is. Any human activity is ruled by a moral code: the *moral* desire for objectivity *without morality* is needed when we undertake any work, however disinterested, however scientific we would like it to be. It is true that this desire reduces hope to uncertainty, since the scientific conquest of the unknown will probably turn out to be a disappointment, and in that case this desire will be stricken by moral futility.

We are not concerned with a disappointing object: we refuse it the right to exist.

Our responsibility is unknown to us. We assume responsibility in a hit-and-miss fashion, with thoughts and feelings that cannot be separated from deep or superficial chaos.

Those who define our responsibility are suffering from a case of “mistaken identity”, since they are confusing our responsibility, which we do not know, with obligations to such and such an idea or circumstance. But they talk of responsibility (or imply it), and therefore consider that we *must* think in terms of responsibility.

The experts in “limited responsibility” are believers lacking in imagination and gumption. Intellectual myopics and mental presbyopics, no doubt.

Hope assures us that our unknown responsibility is the only thing that truly concerns us.

The *idea* that we should do evil is nonsense, since it would give the term Evil the sense of something which cannot disappoint us.

The word Good refers unambiguously to what we always want. Sometimes *we prefer* to call it Evil, Necessity, Chance, Revolt, God, etc., and this preference is merely a habit like any other.

The word Good designates the object of our responsibility.

The hope that our responsibility towards what is Good is always with us is only an *idea* or a feeling in the ordinary and extraordinary times in our lives. It is quite a different matter when in the *almost* ordinary moments Good makes us *better*.

The unknown value of hope gives value to the things we love.

“The black sun of melancholy”^{*} sheds light on the wounded parts of the Universe. We love them, they compel us to believe in the Good.

[...]

In *La Carte d'après Nature*, spec. iss. Jun. 1954, pp. 1-2 (W 441). The questionnaire was sent out by *La Carte d'après Nature* on 6th Apr. 1954.

A Poetic Art

The art of painting, as I see it, makes possible the creation of visible poetic images. They reveal the riches and details that our eyes can readily recognize: trees, skies, stones, objects, people, etc. They are meaningful when the intelligence is freed from the obsessive will to give things a meaning in order to use or master them.

The searching intelligence sharpens when it Sees the meaning in poetic images. This meaning goes with the moral certainty that we belong to the World. And so, this actual belonging becomes a right to belong. The changing content of these poetic images tallies with the richness of our moral certainty. It does not happen at will, it does not obey any system, whether logical or illogical, rigid or fanciful.

The unexpected appearance of a poetic image is celebrated by the intelligence, ally of the enigmatic and marvellous Light that comes from the World.

In *La Carte d'après Nature*, no. 8, Jan. 1955 (p. 6) (W 480).

The End of the Octroi

On Gallieni's* orders a company singing 'La Madelon' arrived one morning in 1914 at the Porte de Vincennes, with the purpose of occupying a position inside the walls of Paris. The officials of the octroi, probably touchy because of the somewhat pointed words of the soldiers' marching song, advanced to the head of the troops to get them to pay the entry fee for the provisions they were thought to have in their haversacks. The company commander, who feared the slightest delay in carrying out his mission, took umbrage at the officials' meddlesome initiative. The affair took a nasty turn. The officials made a blunder by using their revolvers, and the company replied instantly with ferocious energy, using their own weapons. The rifles, given their calibre, soon had the advantage over the repeating pistols. When the engagement ended, not one single official was left alive. A few dead or wounded soldiers were, for the sake of order, killed on the spot, and the company, nearly at full strength, went post-haste to take up its strategic position. It is as a result of this incident that the authorities, understandably, adopted the resolution to abolish the octroi. The traveller who enters Paris to this day does not have to have his luggage searched any more. This gives him an undeniable satisfaction. However, the feeling is tinged with a certain melancholy: the ancient institution of the octroi is no more, and the traveller cannot help but think of an absolute, now imperfectible, that is no longer with us.

In *La Carte d'après Nature*, no. 8, Jan. 1955, p. 8 (W 480), signed Paul Colinet and René Magritte.

Variants of Sadness

I

On Sundays, foreigners crowd into towns to see museums full of curious objects, historic buildings, etc. Everything has been arranged to cater to the pressing needs of the visiting crowds. Those not demanding immediate attention wait calmly: advertisements testify that they have not been overlooked and that they are catered to during the week.

This preamble is justified because, noticing this ceaseless concern for physical needs, we also note that less attention has been paid to the other needs of the human being.

It will be said that cinemas, churches, bookshops, barracks, mental asylums, cemeteries and a large number of ordinary institutions meet these needs. However, a vague feeling of repulsion prevents us from overestimating these dubious expressions of the mystery of human life. Also, perhaps there are seekers waiting in the wings, preparing surprises for us that are not devoid of significance?

Trained in business, having to his credit played an active part in the 1914–18 campaign and formed in the harsh school of facts (though still broad-minded enough to be staunchly concerned with the phenomenon of the soul, in his spare time), the mayor of a tourist spot seems to have taken a heartfelt interest in the study of a delicate problem. Having cleared the decks and uttered Marshal Foch's* famous riposte: "What is it about?", the mayor chose as a working hypothesis the emotional state of a visitor, worker or intellectual, on the point of leaving the town. Analysis reveals that the visitor is satiated, but weary; that he is therefore liable to make the mistake of imagining that his need for a rest signifies a desire for something else. This hazy feeling will disappear after a good night's sleep. Meanwhile, there is a melancholy expression on the visitor's face, his judgement is unsure, his memories of the spot are in danger of being tinged with gloom. To remedy this unfortunate tendency, the mayor has concluded that he and the members of his council must stand on a flower-decked platform and bow amiably to the visitors who have *had enough* of the place. This token of consideration emanating from an official body, ought logically to distract the visitor from his futile melancholy. He will then perceive that the *brain* of the place throbs with him and for him.

II

*“Oimos: But does not the Most-High know all?
Agathos: That (since he is the Most-Happy) must
be still the one thing unknown even to HIM.”*

– Edgar Allan Poe*

Freedom is the possibility of being, not the obligation to be.

The melancholy heart can beat. It can stop beating: it gets to know freedom. Melancholy knows freedom, it imposes nothing.

Freedom is an “old acquaintance” which we seem to find as hard to bear as melancholy and being. The will intervenes to regulate or stop the heart beating. All the sensations that wish to judge, serve, represent, deny or use freedom do not allow themselves *to be distracted by melancholy*, are not “taken in”, in that they are unaware of freedom.

Certainly, there is no total ignorance except in absolute nothingness.

In a world busy calculating the exact price of usefulness, freedom, melancholy and being are tolerated as long as they are duly motivated by the laws of chance, necessity or experience. We respect melancholy, but we like to take people’s minds off it: “Travel is an effective means of diverting low spirits,” says Larousse, whose gigantic labours imply a natural frenzy, a tenacious will to “chase away the blues”. To take people’s minds off their melancholy there are diversions to suit all tastes: learned discoveries that teach, notably, that love is hate, that sadness comes from a childhood complex, etc. Whatever energy goes into the search for error or truth, the distracting effect balances the other sides of the business.

Caricatures of melancholy command respect or laughter. Knowledge of freedom imposes nothing useful, it would be rather difficult to differentiate usefulness from uselessness.

Respect turns into a pain when some faces express arrogance, brutality, cruelty or other feelings that like to impose their will at the price of no matter what degradation. Sudden or well thought out, this will is absurd in that it is unaware of freedom, lacking in a sense of melancholy.

Ingenuous feelings, like love, let themselves be distracted by sadness. They do not counter knowledge of freedom with any neutral or passionate reasoning. They are happy, they can feel the most acute pain.

Unmotivated feelings “of little consequence” such as nostalgia, sympathy, pity, boredom, charm and humour, etc., are variations on the theme of melancholy incapable of providing instruction.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote ‘The Philosophy of Composition’. He says that a kind of logical method dictates the treatment of the “theme” chosen for its *effect*, viz. NEVERMORE! The effect of NEVERMORE!

RENÉ MAGRITTE

is obviously not a single effect. NEVERMORE! is just about right to help something along, the conception of a poem for instance. It is with humour that Poe brings his discourse into line with the truth of public opinion, which attributes to melancholy the power to take the mind off serious or cheerful ideas. Truth does not contradict the truth of the heart and the mind.

‘The Raven’ and ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ express the melancholy that has never abandoned the poets of freedom.

In *La Carte d'après Nature*, no. 9, Aug. 1955, pp. 1-5 (W 480).

The Ignorant Fairy

When we have our eyes open a little, we recognize that none of our actions, feelings, sensations and ideas ever escape banality.

In becoming familiar, unfamiliar things become commonplace, even when this “commonplace” takes the shape of a person. Everything we know – intelligent or stupid, little- or well-known, benevolent or malevolent, sensational or familiar, big or little, etc. – always has one thing in common: banality.

Love of the unknown equals love of the commonplace: to know is to have common knowledge; to act is to look for common feelings and sensations.

No society consisting of things ever discloses what can bring these disparate things together. No thing ever discloses what can reveal it to the mind.

The banality common to all things, that’s the mystery.

*

The responsibility of a machine comes to mind, if the world is understood as the language of mystery. It does not follow any code, moral or physical, which could be based on what it is. This responsibility being mysterious, like all things, cannot be defined by a convention, mysterious in reality. Human responsibility is no less mysterious than that of a machine, a stone or anything else. If we claimed to know what we must do or think of the mystery of the past, present or future, we would be sticking to a convention. The responsibility we assume is mysterious by right, if we think that knowledge elucidates ignorance, without ever elucidating a mystery.

It is mystery that elucidates knowledge.

In *Bizarre, bizarre*, Paris, no. 3, Dec. 1955, p. 44 (W 478).

L'Empire des Lumières

For me, the conception of a picture is an idea about one thing or several things which can be realized visually in my painting.

Obviously, all ideas are not ideas for paintings. Naturally an idea must be sufficiently stimulating for me to get down to painting the thing or things that inspired the idea.

The conception of a painting – that is, the idea – is not visible in the painting: an idea cannot be seen by the eyes.

What is depicted in the painting is what is visible to the eye, the thing or things that had to inspire the idea.

So, in the painting *L'Empire des Lumières* are things I had an idea about – to be precise, a nocturnal landscape and a sky above in broad daylight. The landscape evokes night and the sky evokes day.

This evocation of day and night seems to me to have the power to surprise and enchant us. I call this power “poetry”.

I believe this evocation has such a “poetic” power because, among other reasons, I have always been keenly interested in night and day, although I’ve never had a preference for one of the other.

This intense personal interest in night and day is a feeling of admiration and amazement.

This handwritten manuscript, with corrections, is preserved in the Archives of Contemporary Art in Belgium, Brussels. It was published in facsimile in the exhibition catalogue for *Peintres belges de l'imaginaire*, Paris, 1972, p. 118. A letter from Magritte to Rapin on 2nd May 1956 allows this manuscript to be dated to the last days of April.

Aphorisms (Dated)

There are no idiots, there is only idiocy. Idiocy consists in believing you understand what you do not understand; it is demonstrated, among other things, by the impossibly pompous, boring twaddle written about painting.

9th Nov. 1956

We need this inactivity so that we do not forget that life is an undefined problem. The only activity that seems to be valid and to which I am not thoroughly indifferent is a demonstration of this problem.

22nd Aug. 1956

The “Surrealist woman” was as stupid an invention as the “pin-up girl” who replaces her at present.

22nd Aug. 1956

You may say you are now at the “metaphysical stage”, “I hope you “stay there”, since for me that means: life in its mystery.

6th Aug. 1956

Mountains fairly quickly give you indigestion.

23rd July 1956

I recommend B,* who is very amusing to read; he is almost always angry and is continually attacking scholars who dispense with reason. Speaking of reason, I note that when we accuse X of being unreasonable we might just as well accuse the universe, which is not reasonable, which refuses to be intelligible.

23rd July 1956

What is the criterion for this title? [The title of the Charleroi frieze.] Nothing but my moral certainty, and I think a lot about the question of how impossible it is to grasp anything but ideas, feelings or sensations. What people imagine to be “links” between things only turn out to be an idea or feeling, and to my knowledge nothing can be taken seriously as a “link, relationship, cause or effect”. Rereading Nietzsche, I find exactly

the same idea, although expressed by a word which repels me: atomism. “Our consciousness (as we call it) is made up of atomic phenomena”,* in the sense of separate, autonomous, isolated, indivisible things. He also emphasizes what I have already been thinking about: we cannot predict anything; everything that happens to us is an “effect” whose “cause” is beyond us. He was “very interested in” our civilization, its decadence – I consider that in this he was hardly appealing.

19th June 1956

A title “justifies” the image by completing it; Nietzsche also says “there is no thought outside language”. Perhaps the painting that we find moving is a language without thought? Since it is certain that pictures portray ideas: justice, for example, does not move us.

19th June 1956

Another example of false poetry is for me: “Sunlight in the Head”* – “Head in the Sunlight” is not brilliant, but more just.

15th June 1956

Fine idea: presence of mind.

4th June 1956

I am not “wise”, if wisdom consists of living in peace.

9th May 1956

What one sees on an object is another hidden object.

20th April 1956

Here the question of sensitivity comes in – we are and are not sensitive: I am “very” sensitive in certain circumstances, I take an unconcerned display of stupidity as a personal insult. On the other hand, I am delighted if someone corrects a mistake I have made. It is not easy to correct mistakes and to say anything good about something bad; you need a spark of genius, that’s all.

30th March 1956

If we had to worry about results, we’d also have to worry about a lot of other things before painting a picture, and the picture would not get painted.

30th March 1956

The word “Médium”,* for instance, is still a mistake: the mistake is defining an artist, a man, as an intermediary thing that “expresses itself”. It

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really would be too easy if all we had to do was to counter the Tachist point of view with its opposite – we'd win. But in “fact”, without wanting to, what we come up with clashes with a tradition that is more or less recognized. And so Tachist vocabulary can be used, just like “de-facto” non-conformism to a tradition, to verify what we come up with; it's a good criterion of error.

26th March 1956

Whatever the pleasures and pains that come my way, I don't find it easy to get used to life.

20th March 1956

I replied to C,* asking him to reflect on the facile Bosch-Surrealism comparison, at least in my case; on the one hand Bosch, who “expresses” folkloric ideas, and on the other I, who take pains to create descriptions “without ideas”.

20th March 1956

The man who wishes for or looks for what he desires in painting will never find anything which exceeds his preferences.

20th March 1956

I can write texts that interest people who don't play by the rules; when it comes to moving the others, you have to appear to be playing their game, at the same time being very careful not to be conventional for an instant. In brief, I take pains never to be conventional when I paint and, as far as I can, when I am not painting; I “appear” to be playing the game: painting, for example, or living in a house, eating regular meals, etc.

15th March 1956

My paintings “resemble” paintings without meeting, I believe, the requirements that aesthetic treatises designate as such.

15th March 1956

It is not a question of surprising people with something, but of being surprised that one is surprised.

15th March 1956

There is a familiar feeling of mystery evoked by things that are officially called mysterious, but the supreme feeling is the “unfamiliar” feeling of

mystery, evoked by things that are officially “quite natural”, familiar (our thought, among others).

15th March 1956

The connections between things are abstract (forms?) of (thought?). The words: in, between, for, as, etc., really make too easy the exercise of thought according to rules. If it is easy to say: a rose in the garden, it is not easy (but is it a difficulty?) to say: a rose in the universe; because the word “in” is no longer an abstract piece of information, which puts our thinking “outside of itself”, but an (idea?) in our minds. Such points should, I believe, be worked on so that they are “understood” by the “beautiful minds”: to achieve that would be magic. Provided that it be real, direct, immediate and not perfunctory, nor requiring any “background knowledge” of a magical kind, nor through indirect means.

15th March 1956

I had an idea, I don't know what it's “worth”: people passionately defend what is called “the work of art”. Painters are born, live and die “for painting” (preferably abstract), like “for France”. My idea is that “what is to be defended” is not as easily defined as, for example, “classical or fashionable pictorial values”; it seems to me that what we should defend is the vision of the world, “since it cannot be separated from the person who sees it”. A work of art that needs defending in this sense is one which is “in the service of” the person who is seeing – and can it be, if he who is seeing needs it? I mean: he who sees does not need the (valid) works of art that are at his service. If he does need them (in order to see), he himself is in a way at the service of the work of art.

25th Jan. 1956

C's article* would be useful, if we needed a “preview” – that knowledge of what is not absurd is not imperative to the public.

11th Jan. 1956

I understand that having come to Brussels, “you gave up ringing at my door”; who, in the world, would not smile at that? I do not find there any reason to smile, unless it's a certain smile that one has “when presence of mind manifests itself”.

30th Dec. 1955

According to my doctrine it is forbidden (under pain of idiocy) to predict anything: what I shall do “in all spheres” is unpredictable, just as the

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appearance of a real poetic image is unpredictable... for the very good reason that “there is only one sphere”, that of the mysterious in which we live all the time, however unaware of it we may be.

30th Dec. 1955

Sometimes we cannot resist denouncing imposture and stupidity; then it's like an automatic reflex action that is justified “without reasons”.

2nd May 1955

Les Brouillons sacrés, Paris, no. 1 (unique), *Paroles datées*, ed. Mirabelle Dors and Maurice Rapin, 21st Nov. 1956 (W 519).

Magritte's Speech on Being Elected as a Member of the Académie Picard

Dear Colleagues,

I am grateful for the honour of being given the title of academician, which my friend Pierre Bourgeois has just relinquished. Despite ideas of progress and modernity in the arts – which I am unable to share – but which were resolutely championed by Pierre Bourgeois, it gives me pleasure to acknowledge his poetic power and reality.

In making me Pierre Bourgeois's successor, you are bestowing on me a mark of your esteem which I very much appreciate, and you are sanctioning, to a certain extent, a conception of the art of painting which I uphold.

I hope you will enjoy hearing what I can say about it.

Whether my eyes are open or shut, unforeseen images appear to me sometimes, which are the models for the pictures I like to paint.

It was while I was rendering the image that came to me one day that I painted the picture *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It was the unexpected image of a flesh statue, a woman entirely of flesh, holding a rose made of flesh in her hand in front of the sea, which I could see between two red curtains.

The title *Les Fleurs du Mal* accompanies the picture as a name corresponds to an object, without illustrating or explaining it.

It would not be difficult to hit upon some ignored activity in my brain and charge it with having been responsible for determining the content of what I call an unforeseen image. Nor would it be difficult to add latent memories of Baudelaire's poems, for instance, which, unbeknown to me, were the source of the painting *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Reference to the workings of the unconscious satisfy, if you like, our tenacious habit of explaining. But we do not gain any insight into the thing explained. Indeed, we lose sight of the thing explained in favour of a more or less intelligent explanation or practical hypothesis.

I manage very well without believing in the necessity of an unconscious activity. The seriousness of specialists in the unconscious seems comic to me. How ridiculous is the illustrious writer (whose name escapes me)* who saw fit to advise those interested when he went to bed by writing on his bedroom door, in all good faith, "Poet at Work".

*

Certain clear and precise images are the models for the pictures I like to paint. In my opinion, nothing other than images should be represented by means of pictorial technique. I do not wish, therefore, to express ideas or feelings through painting, even if I find them extraordinary. Nor do I wish to express what comes from the so-called unconscious.

The art of painting, like many things, can give rise to simple or complex confusions. Notably so-called “fantastic art”, which is sometimes charming, but more often deliberately puerile and sordid. Its false reputation describes it as being capable of revealing or imagining a privileged world which – if we listen to the adepts of the “fantastic” – purports to be truer than the world itself.

The art of painting, as I conceive of it, is neither simple nor complex. I know that at certain moments unforeseen images appear to me and that they are the models for the pictures I like to paint.

These images seem to me to dominate my ideas and my feelings, good or bad. They truly dominate them if they reveal the present as an absolute mystery.

Unpublished text: Magritte's reply to Maurice Cornil, who received it at La Libre Académie de Belgique, called Académie Picard, after the name of its founder, Edmond Picard, on 5th Apr. 1957.

“A Judgement on Art...”

I. A judgement on art and magic that takes into consideration civilization and fiction testifies to a credulity that overestimates its own importance and a complacency which I am far from sharing.

When the investigations of the magician and the artist render the universe *enchanting*, they seem to me to be guided by a feeling of new-found freedom.

II. The arbitrary or necessary empirical needs of the human being are assuaged, one way or another, by religion and science. So-called non-imitative art forms also deal with this in their way, which in fact consists in imitating some of life’s “givens”. A true rehabilitation or, more accurately, close attention to magic or the art of enchanting is above all desirable when the heart and mind have but one desire: the revelation of the absence and the possibility of enchantment. *Magical art* imitates the enchanted world – that is, the universe itself.

III. Figure 10. *The Revenant* by de Chirico instantly renders the universe enchanting. Figure 9. Munch’s *The Scream* weakens its repercussions for us: it’s a “natural precipice”, which in the image receives its echoes. Figure 8. Does *The Sleeping Groom* by Baldung Grien* have any enchanting connection with the gesticulations of the old woman whom it is hard to ignore in the scene? Only those with an insatiable curiosity would be tempted to find out. Figure 11. Kandinsky seems to have given up his search for enchantment.

Other figures invite us to devote ourselves to the study of a system of symbols for “public use”. They have too much magic from “hearsay” for their reputation – deserved or not – to be forgotten and for them not to be endowed with an edifying character.

Heraclitus and Gérard de Nerval’s melancholy, Marcel Duchamp and Gaston Leroux’s humour, the charm of Madame d’Aulnoy* and Maurice Ravel, love instantly renders the universe enchanting. (It is noteworthy that these feelings do not leave melancholy or freedom out.)

IV. An object manifests a magical power when it enchants us without the intermediary of a methodical analysis. Such an analysis, answering the demands of the intellect, places that object out of range of its power. A magical conception of the world makes language *speak*, it does not analyse it.

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V. Nothing is deconsecrated in the *temporal world* – where no fame is to be won or lost – where everything poses and solves the problem of “magical art” in the universal mystery.

In André Breton (with the collaboration of Gérard Legrand), *L'Art magique*, Paris, Club Français du Livre, Formes et Reflets, 1957, *Formes de l'art*, series, no. 1, p. 67 (W 543). Magritte was responding to a five-question survey on “magical art”.

“Surrealism...”

“Surrealism”, like “fantastic art”, means something very vague and phoney if it is given any other sense than the very limited one to which it exactly corresponds.

Epigraph for a pamphlet of the Tendence Populaire Surréaliste: *Allez-vous-en sans payer*, 22nd Nov. 1977 (W 560).

“The Charm of the Strange...”

We can feel the charm of the strange just as well when looking into thin air as when we see a landscape appear in the sky. We may well be suspicious of being forced to have a specific feeling which is “determined” by what we are looking at. Sometimes we look at a very familiar thing and have a strange feeling, and we may have a feeling of familiarity when looking at things that are called mysterious. In both cases, a feeling of strangeness, the familiar thing and we ourselves are united. This hardly implies that our feelings are “determined”, nor that the painter can decide what feeling a painting should provoke. On this subject, it is to be noted that everything that is “determined”, or rather thought to be, is singularly lacking in charm and interest: we really do not like a picture on learning what allegedly “determined” it – we instantly “lose sight” of it in favour of a tedious and irrelevant commentary.

What we feel when looking at a picture is not to be separated from the picture, nor from ourselves. The feeling, the picture and we ourselves are united in our mystery.

Text from a letter by Magritte to Colinet. No date. But probably from between Dec. 1957 and Jan. 1958.

René Magritte Puts the Image in Focus

Here's a novel idea for everyone: sometimes people ask: "What does this painting represent?" An "intellectual" would be wary of asking this "naive" "uncultured" question, in case he wasn't "in the know". This question signifies that the image has been registered correctly but interpreted incorrectly, since it is asking *what we feel*. What we feel or what we really think when looking at a picture would correspond to the question posed in this way: "Who represents this picture?" And the answer is: the man who is looking represents the picture, his feelings and ideas represent the picture. Even if our ideas and feelings are extraordinary, they cannot be expressed or represented through painting, unless a convention legitimizes a vague expression of ideas or feelings: it is *from* a painted image that ideas or feelings may appear and encounter the image. A painted image does not represent ideas or feelings, but feelings and ideas can *represent* a painted image.

In *Propos de René Magritte recueillis par Maurice Rapin*, a pamphlet for the Tendence Populaire Surréaliste, 14th Jan. 1958 (W 602), illustrated by Magritte's painting, *La Leçon de politesse* (1957).

In René Magritte's Night the Sky Floats over Us All

Magic must not say anything: it must act. This magic concerns us in that it may show us the stupidity of the idea that there is on the one hand “the Magical” and, on the other hand “the Non-Magical”. Theologians do indeed distinguish between their “Supernatural” and “Natural”, and in order to come to terms with this distinction, they have to bring in one more mystery – which isn’t hard to do. If I were a practising Catholic, it seems I ought to be certain of living in a *single* supernatural world. Similarly, I do not like to think of the activity going on unknown to me in the “unconscious”, as I do not like to think of “the will” (I don’t like believing, or saying “I want”); instead of the various explanations of the “unconscious”, I prefer my *belief*, to which I cling and according to which all our ideas and sensations are unpredictable: each moment is an unforeseeable appearance, each moment demonstrates the absolute mystery of the present.

In *Propos de René Magritte recueillis par Maurice Rapin*, a pamphlet for the Tendence Populaire Surréaliste, 14th Jan. 1958 (W 602), illustrated by Magritte’s painting, *Le Seize Septembre* (1957).

Nature and Mystery

There is a familiar feeling of mystery, experienced in relation to things that are customarily labelled “mysterious”, but the supreme feeling is the “unfamiliar” feeling of mystery, experienced in relation to things that it is customary to “consider natural”, familiar (our own thoughts among other things). We must reconsider the idea that a “marvellous” world manifests itself in the “usual” world whenever we are struck by coincidences. It is in fact the “usual” world which asserts itself by means of coincidences: they make sure we recognize it more distinctly. Instead of being astonished by the superfluous existence of another world, it is *our one world*, where coincidences surprise us, that we must not lose sight of.

Propos de René Magritte recueillis par Maurice Rapin, leaflet of the Tendence Populaire Surréaliste, 22nd Jan. 1958 (W 602), illustration. *Fortune Made*. The source for this leaflet is the letter to Rapin of 15th Mar. 1956.

Magritte Interviewed

by Georges d'Amphoux*

D'AMPHOUX: What reasons did you have, in 1926, for abandoning all other styles of painting and conceptions of art and, from then on only paint so-called "Surrealist" compositions?

MAGRITTE: The reason seems to me to be implied in the question. My research led to a conception of the art of painting to which I have remained faithful... Besides, the word "composition" suggests something that can be "de-composed". Now, I doubt my pictures can be "de-composed" in order to be analysed... my pictures are valid in so far as people don't feel the need to "analyse" them, interest in them being sufficient. People only analyse what leaves them cold: a love that you reason out and analyse is only a caricature of love.

D'AMPHOUX: As you sometimes have a certain aversion to the use of the term "Surrealist" when applied to your painting, how would you like them to be qualified? Also, isn't it easier for the critic, the public, the art historian to use the word that everyone agrees on to designate an artistic and intellectual tendency, a group, what is termed "a school", even when it has ceased to be one?

MAGRITTE: Certainly, it's easier to use a "label" to refer to a school or so-called school... However, I don't want what I paint to be called anything. I hope that the critic or historian will elucidate, by the written word, the unforeseen possibilities that my pictures call forth.

D'AMPHOUX: Why, in 1931, did you leave Paris, breaking your former ties with the Surrealist group there?

MAGRITTE: Finding Paris tiresome "at close range", my wife and I preferred a "long-range" view... My relations with the Surrealists were not affected by my return to Belgium: nothing was changed, for good or ill.

D'AMPHOUX: In the portrait of Madame Magritte entitled *Georgette*, why did you write "Vague" on a piece of paper floating in the blue sky?

MAGRITTE: There is no mystery to be "explained" in my picture: the word "Vague", inscribed in this portrait, reveals inexplicable mystery.

D'AMPHOUX: Why did you surround such a lifelike portrait with six objects: a dove, a laurel branch, a lit candle, a glove, a scrap of paper with the word "Vague" on it and a key? Do these objects symbolize the

activities, feelings, tastes of your wife? Or those that sum up marriage in our time? Or what, in your view?

MAGRITTE: The objects that accompany the face are no more symbolic than the face itself. My pictures are effective, in my eyes, if the objects they represent resist symbolic or any other interpretation.

D'AMPHOUX: Speaking of this portrait, I'd like to point out a parallel – at least so it seems to me – with the eighteenth-century Bruges painter Garemyn* painted a delightful portrait of a monk, Father Rapsaet, and surrounded him with little religious compositions. The picture is in the Bruges museum. Similarly, would you like to paint the portrait of a priest, bishop, banker, writer, director, even a restaurant owner or a confectioner, framing each of these people with objects that you think express their being, their interests, their activities? I think you'd get a great deal of pleasure from these comprehensive evocations of defined human beings... Does this sort of “comprehensive portrait” agree or disagree with your thinking, with your art?

MAGRITTE: As I see it, the art of painting represents objects so that they resist habitual interpretations. Consequently this art has nothing to do with a conception which leads to the “comprehensive portraits” you mention; because in these “comprehensive portraits” you'd bring together the most information about a model: these portraits may be “documents”, but they merely satisfy a curiosity that I do not have. I am not interested in knowing that such and such a person does such and such a job, has black hair or blond, etc.

D'AMPHOUX: You have said: “If we had to worry about results, we'd also have to worry about a lot of other things before painting a picture, and the picture would not get painted.” If I understand you correctly, you are against what has been called in recent years “committed art”, which was in fact an art committed to the conflict of ideas and political principles, which I think in your opinion, and in mine too by the way, seem to have nothing to do with art?

MAGRITTE: I try, as far as I can, to paint images which only “commit” me to mystery. Now, political ideas on art, and “common-sense” ideas, on the contrary, give the man who pursues them the feeling that he is “committed” to a certain direction and that he will certainly reach the intended goal if he sticks to the rules and guidelines laid out for him... Such rules would not help me find the images I like to paint.

D'AMPHOUX: One of your friends, Paul Nougé, in a collection entitled *Histoire de ne pas rire*, writes you a letter in which he evokes “that excitement of the mind which must come from the sense of the hidden

thing”. Do you create pictures that seem to pose a riddle for the viewer because you wish to provoke this excitement of the mind?

MAGRITTE: We need “that excitement of the mind which must come from the sense of the hidden thing”, as Paul Nougé so aptly expresses it, in order to consider an image worth painting. All I wish to do in painting is to represent faithfully the image that has appeared to me and that I consider has to be painted.

D’AMPHOUX: Do you feel that, through your paintings, compositions, images – described as strange, bizarre, even delirious by the champions of traditions of the past – that you are in the act of introducing, if not to the world in general, at least to a certain number of people and sensibilities, new feelings, new thoughts, possibly new vices, and what could be termed new spiritual forms, intellectual habits and even possibly a moral, an ethic?

MAGRITTE: It would be more accurate to say I have the feeling of “discovering” the world, rather than introducing anything into it. Anyway, where would I find what would be added to the world?

D’AMPHOUX: Have you thought about the possible consequences of this injection of a new way of seeing things and conceiving the relations between human beings?

MAGRITTE: I’ve thought of no such thing, and I don’t have to, since I have introduced nothing that comes from me alone. The universe has the powers, not I.

D’AMPHOUX: To take an unpleasant, but probably topical, example: do you consider that in the literary and moral sphere the notion of the “gratuitous crime” created by André Gide has had an influence on the minds of the young, and has encouraged them to conceive first, and then translate into action, thoughts that were doubtless not directly Gide’s, and acts that did not enter into his scheme of things as a rich bourgeois, but which might have led certain “young people” to the correctional court?

MAGRITTE: Perhaps André Gide has helped to enlarge the clientele of the courts, but I doubt it, as this clientele is hardly literate. Anyway, a writer has no more power than anyone else to change the world order.

D’AMPHOUX: Does not a painting which we won’t call Surrealist, but which is in accordance with the incoherence and absurdity of the universe, automatically reinforce this absurdity in some people’s minds; whereas the conception of an ordered, logical “French garden”, for example, counteracts this notion of absurdity, and so may lead to order and stability in the minds of the young, who will assimilate the principles of the “French garden”?

RENÉ MAGRITTE

MAGRITTE: I do not admit that the World or the Universe is incoherent and absurd. What is absurd and incoherent is the belief that the so-called logic of reason can influence the logic of the World as it thinks fit. It seems to me that a picture is effective if it is neither absurd, nor incoherent and if it has the logic of mystery, as the World does.

D'AMPHOUX: We must choose: either art is from life, or else it is pure fantasy? Which would you choose?

MAGRITTE: There is no choice, no art without life.

D'AMPHOUX: Finally, is the main aim of your work to disorient? Do you seek above all to disturb the well-intentioned viewer who contemplates your works in a spirit of good will?

MAGRITTE: Indeed, the sight of my paintings is often accompanied by a feeling of strangeness. This fact is not a goal I am pursuing; any "goal" that I could imagine would seem ridiculous to me.

Georges d'Amphoux, 'Conversation with a Surrealist: The Ideas of René Magritte' in *Les Cahiers d'art*, Brussels, 1st Feb. 1958, pp. 712-14 (W 570). In fact, the "conversation" consisted of a written exchange of questions and answers.

Another Head at the Back of the Head

The question of “art as the cause of additional conflict between men” cannot leave us indifferent, if by “Art” we mean a language that is worth listening to. It is easy enough to “disagree”, but as for knowing whether there is real agreement that does not merely rest on amiable misunderstanding, that’s another story! For instance, Valéry’s admiration for Mallarmé seems to me to be suspect: an expert poet is quite a different thing from a poet who combines both modesty and arrogance. Of course this isn’t a satisfactory example! Psychologists would be only too delighted with it. “Our single world” contains quite a few separate worlds, and communications between them are not to be desired. There’s nothing to be done with some people, they take an idea that we deem correct as the height of “absurdity”, of “evasion”, etc. What we are doing is valuable to the few people who are capable of liking what they like; the others, who like what they ought, don’t count.

This text, dated 24th Feb. 1958, and which Rapin proposed to publish at the same time as *Méthodes*, remained unpublished until the publication of *82 Lettres*.

“Max Ernst’s Painting...”

Max Ernst’s painting represents the world that exists outside madness or reason. It has nothing to teach us, but it implicates us exactly, and that is why it can astonish and enchant us.

Max Ernst does not resemble, obviously, the traditional artist for whom to see “larger than life” – or smaller – seems indispensable to his happiness or unhappiness. People are interested in traditional painting for all kinds of reasons: historical, documentary, political, etc.

If we distinguish between Max Ernst’s pictures in which his virtuosity is admired by technicians and his pictures in which the style depends on the painstaking imitation of an idea, there is still only one thing that makes them interesting: our surprise and admiration. The odd sensation that Max Ernst’s pictures are “well painted” means that we are under their spell, rather than in the presence of a proof of respect for some definition or other of “good painting”.

Max Ernst has that “reality” that can awaken our slumbering trust in the marvellous, and that cannot be separated from this life in which it makes its appearance.

Letter from Magritte to Patrick Waldberg, published in Waldberg: *Max Ernst*, Paris, Pauvert, 1958, p. 266, 268. (W 603).

Magritte Interviewed by Jean Stévo (II)

STÉVO: Dear Magritte, an exhibition of your paintings can be visited at the moment at the Musée d'Ixelles. It's a retrospective, I believe?

MAGRITTE: Indeed: the museum is showing about a hundred of my pictures painted between 1926 and the present.

STÉVO: What do you feel when you see your works some time after painting them?

MAGRITTE: I feel that I haven't done too badly painting pictures that can surprise me as if I wasn't their creator.

STÉVO: Do you feel any sort of paternal feeling when you see such an important exhibition of your works?

MAGRITTE: Yes, of course, but with the embarrassment of a father of a family who really doesn't know why his children are so beautiful or so ugly.

STÉVO: If you, the painter, are embarrassed when you look at your paintings, one can understand that the people who visit your exhibition are disoriented... especially if they have aesthetic preferences for paintings they believe they can approve of without much difficulty.

MAGRITTE: It is not only understandable, but it demonstrates, it seems to me, that if certain things seem familiar or unembarrassing to us, it's thanks to the ideas we have of them. Now, I have been at pains to paint the kind of pictures that do not look familiar and do not correspond to ideas, whether naive or scholarly.

STÉVO: You avoid like the plague, as they say, expressing ideas with your painting?

MAGRITTE: I avoid it as much as possible. I consider that words express ideas well enough, sometimes very beautiful ones, too often tedious ones – and painting doesn't have to add to them. Painting, as I see it, does not have to express ideas, even brilliant ones. If the painter has genius, he has a genius for images, not ideas.

STÉVO: But don't the titles of your pictures evoke ideas?

MAGRITTE: Possibly, since even a word that's been misunderstood can evoke the idea that it has a meaning for the man who says it. But the words that one understands do not always necessarily evoke ideas. The title

of a picture is an image made of words. It joins with a painted image without wishing to satisfy a need to know the ideas. Title and painting enrich and clarify the mind that likes images whose meaning is unknown. STÉVO: I am tempted to ask you why the mind likes images whose meaning is unknown.

MAGRITTE: It seems obvious that riddles and puzzles have a charm for the mind. The game is to find what is hidden. But the game does not affect the images whose meaning remains unknown. I believe the mind likes the unknown – that is, what is not within the bounds of knowledge, since the meaning of the mind itself is unknown.

STÉVO: Thank you, dear René Magritte, for responding so kindly to my questions. I hope that your exhibition is welcomed with the attention it so greatly deserves.

Unpublished text of an interview conducted by Jean Stévo on the occasion of the Magritte exhibition at the Musée d'Ixelles, 19th Apr. 1959 (W 656).

Scenes from Luc de Heusch's* Film, with Dialogue

MAGRITTE (*showing Lecomte a shattered pane of glass on which the fragmented landscape is still clinging**): There now, look what's happened!

LECOMTE (*examining the bits*): How strange... How odd.

MAGRITTE (*evasively*): It's an image...

LECOMTE (*positive*): It's a work of art!

*

In search of a title. A few friends, including Goemans, Scutenaire, Irène Hamoir,* are gathered together around a picture that Magritte has finished; they are collaborating on a title: *Le Mois des vendanges* [*The Month of the Grape Harvest*].

MAGRITTE: Well, let's describe the picture!...

MAGRITTE (*a little later*): I'd thought of adding a musical instrument in the corner of the room.

GOEMANS: There's no reason to suggest the presence of musicians in the room.

Dialogue by Magritte in Luc de Heusch's film *Magritte ou La Leçon de choses* (W 684). Shooting was to begin on 26th Jun. 1959, and actually began on 1st Jul.

About “the Universe of Sound”

Reality identifies itself with its possibilities. “The Universe of Sound” is one possibility that raises naive or scholarly questions for the good people who are very anxious to find a solution.

I am not in the least curious about the enigmas of acoustics: my “Universe of Sound” scarcely exists, it could hardly entertain or disturb anyone. I listen and I hear indeed, without the intervention of any other universe. I listen preferably to delightful and benign things, and I wish to listen to and to see what can evoke their mystery.

Depending on what we love and desire, the possibilities of the real are pleasant, atrocious, fantastic, banal, known, unknown, etc.

Mystery is not a possibility of reality; reality would not exist without mystery.

Certain images evoke mystery: “The Universe of Sound” is a conventional image referring to specialized scientific research, which consists in penetrating mysteries that raise questions.

An image that evokes mystery evokes something that does not raise questions, nor does it satisfy any curiosity.

In *Phantômas*, Brussels, nos. 15–16, Jan. 1960, p. 26 (W 693).

Magritte Interviewed by Lucienne Plisnier

I am very happy. Only, the name of the prize* makes me hesitate. There's never a conclusion in a painter's career. Nor highlight. Nor final chord.

...In the past, I believed that painting could exist for itself. Today I consider that it's only a way of saying something...

We are too often in the habit of intellectualizing and therefore reducing the strange to the familiar. I make efforts to make what is familiar strange again...

One day I choose a bike as a subject. I paint it in the middle of the canvas. But obviously it's not enough just to paint the bike. It has to be associated with an object that completes the description of the bike. (A picture is the most accurate description possible of a thought.) I don't find the other object straight away and I leave the work for a while. I start on another picture: against a background of blue mountains, a bike and its rider, half-hidden by a very large owl in the foreground [*Melmoth*]. I then resume the first canvas and I notice that associating the bike with the cigar works [*L'État de grâce*]. But as I don't have a cigar, I go to the shop and ask for a band. They find me an old one. Amazing! On the medallion, on the band, is a drawing of an owl...

I go to see, in Paris, in Saint-Sulpice Church, a painting by Delacroix. After my visit, I stop in front of the ultra-academic canvases, particularly God the Father, ritually seated in an armchair of clouds. During my return trip, my train stops in a marshalling yard. Association of ideas: I think of a canvas that shows a station, surmounted by God the Father in all his glory. When the work is finished, I discuss the title with a friend. We decide to call it *Le Rossignol* [*The Nightingale*] for the wordplay. Then it occurs to me to find out the author of the Saint-Sulpice picture that had inspired mine. It was "Rossignol".

In *Elle*, Brussels, no. 736, 14th Jan. 1960, p. 12 (W 774).

Likeness (Liège version)

Likeness – as referred to in everyday language – is attributed to things whether or not they have a common nature. We say “as like as two peas in a pod”, and we say, just as readily, that the fake looks like the genuine article. This so-called likeness consists merely in similarities plucked out by the mind that examines, evaluates and compares. Such mental activity is carried out with no other consciousness than that of possible similarities: to this consciousness, things reveal only their similarity.

Likeness is identified with the essential activity of the mind: that of likening something to something else. The mind picks up likenesses by coinciding with what the world offers and restoring what is offered to the mystery without which there would be no possibility of a world, nor of thought. Inspiration is the circumstance in which likeness arises.

*

The art of painting – when seen as something other than a more or less innocent mystification – cannot articulate ideas, nor express feelings: the image of a face weeping does not express grief, nor does it articulate an idea of grief, because ideas and feelings have no visible form.

The art of painting – which should really be called the art of likeness – allows the description, through painting, of a thought capable of becoming visible. These thoughts consist exclusively of shapes offered to us by the world: people, curtains, arms, stars, solids, inscriptions, etc. Likeness brings these shapes together spontaneously and creates an order that directly evokes mystery.

The description of such a thought does not suffer originality. Originality or fancy would weaken and impoverish it. The accuracy and charm of the likeness depend on the likeness, not on a fanciful way of describing it.

The question of “how to paint” likeness must be strictly confined to spreading colours on a surface, so that its real aspect fades into the background and an image of a likeness appears.

An image of likeness shows all there is – that is, *a coming-together of forms with no implications*. The wish to interpret – in order to exercise some sort of freedom – means misunderstanding an inspired image by replacing it with a gratuitous interpretation which can, in its turn, give rise to an endless series of superfluous interpretations.

An image is not to be confused with something tangible. The image of a slice of bread and jam is assuredly not edible, and vice versa; to take a slice of bread and jam and exhibit it in an art gallery does not affect its actual appearance, and it would be ridiculous to believe it was capable of revealing some thought or other. It is the same, by the way, with colours deposited, even flung on a canvas for pleasure or to some particular end.

An image of a likeness never results from the illustration of a “subject”, whether banal or extraordinary, nor from the expression of an idea or feeling. *Inspiration gives the painter what he must paint*: a likeness which is a thought capable of becoming visible through painting – for instance, the thought of a slice of bread and jam with the caption: “This is not a slice of bread and jam”; or a thought made out of a nocturnal landscape and a sunny sky. Such images evoke mystery *de jure*, whereas *de facto* mystery is evoked by the image of a solitary slice of bread and jam, or by the image of a nocturnal landscape under a starry sky.

However, all images that defy “common sense” do not necessarily evoke mystery *de jure*. The contradiction may only be the result of a way of thinking whose vitality depends on the possibility of contradiction. Inspiration does not depend on good or ill will. Likeness is an inspired thought which is not concerned with fitting into a way of thinking – whether ingenuous or sophisticated. It is of necessity opposed to reason, as well as to the absurd.

*

It is with words that titles are given to images. But these words cease to remain familiar or strange when they name the images or likeness aptly. Inspiration is needed to say them and hear them.

In the catalogue for the Magritte exhibition organized by *Temps mêlés*, Liège, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 14th Oct. 1960 (W 820).

“Mystery Is Not...”

Mystery is not one of the possibilities of reality. Mystery is what is absolutely necessary for reality to exist.

In *Rhétorique* no. 1 (prospectus), published in May 1961, illustrated with a reproduction of Magritte's painting *Le Prêtre marié* (1951). *Rhétorique* was a little magazine founded in 1961 by André Bosmans, a poet from Liège and an admirer of and – starting in 1958 – a correspondent with Magritte. *Rhétorique* published thirteen issues, most of which included contributions by Magritte.

The Question of Words*

This question of which words to say is indeed of the greatest importance, not only for writers, but for those who use language to ordinary and extraordinary purposes.

Familiar language is often stupid in its indifference towards what it says; a word stands for an idea. You could say it is not a matter of speaking but of doing vocal exercise in public.

In *Rhétorique*, no. 1, May 1961, inside back cover (W 758).

Magritte Interviewed by Israel Shenker*

For me, art is the means of evoking mystery... How can I paint a stone in such a way as to make it worth being shown? [*Le Château des Pyrénées*]... When there is a rose, and one is sensitive to it, one makes it as big as I did so that the rose appears to fill the room... [*Le Tombeau des lutteurs*] [Here, the interviewer introduces a detail furnished, no doubt, by Magritte: “The title, which Magritte took from a book”*.]

...I am getting older; I get toothaches and headaches, and there’s nothing I can do about it... I find many things beautiful, such as old walls with spots on them. But if you tell me a wall with a spot is a painting, I say you’re wrong... It’s action, non painting.* The mystery is the supreme thing. It’s reassuring to know there’s a mystery – to know there is more than what one knows.

In *Time*, 3rd Nov. 1961, pp. 42, 44. The interview was conducted between 16th–19th Oct., in relation with a Magritte exhibition in New York at the Albert Landry Gallery, 17th Oct. 1961 (W 793).

Jan Walravens: Meeting with Magritte

WALRAVENS: What was your first contact with the world of art?

MAGRITTE: When I was very young, I already had fun colouring images. But the world of art was revealed to me during holidays spent in a small provincial town. In the old disused cemetery of this town, I saw a painter practising his art, and then I got my first idea of what could be the world of art.

WALRAVENS: How, in 1921, did you react to Expressionism?

MAGRITTE: In 1921, I was torn between the wish to paint like the Cubists, Futurists, traditional and abstract painters. Their theories – which, naturally, contradicted each other – attracted me strongly, despite their dryness. I found in them elements that corresponded with my intellectual preoccupations of that era. But in 1921, Expressionism left me indifferent. Its theoreticians did not capture my interest. Besides, I don't believe that a theory of Expressionism valid for everyone is possible. Expressionism is in fact only an answer to a certain sense of distortion and simplification which I cannot share.

WALRAVENS: Am I right in saying that during these years you painted abstract pictures?

MAGRITTE: Given that during those years I tried to paint in different styles, I did also paint pictures that could be called “abstract”. But it was merely a question of research that could satisfy my desire to paint in a way that related less to painting and more to the world itself.

WALRAVENS: How did you come into contact with the French Surrealists when you lived in Belgium?

MAGRITTE: My meeting with the French Surrealists occurred around 1926, after an exchange of correspondence between the group and a few friends in Brussels who thought in the same way as I did. Also, I lived in Paris from 1927 to 1930, and that enabled me to go to the meetings where André Breton was the “*deus ex machina*”.

WALRAVENS: What was Surrealism in those years?

MAGRITTE: From the beginning Surrealism was essentially what it is today: the idea that a man's life must absolutely be worth living. This idea is inconsistent with resignation (conscious or unconscious) to triviality

and to the reduced possibilities of a conception that submits to so-called necessities.

WALRAVENS: Did you know Freud's works at the time?

MAGRITTE: I had read Freud's work closely in the era when it was freely available. But I cannot get interested in the analysis of a given reality, even if the analysis is brilliantly worked out according to Freud's predilections.

WALRAVENS: Would you like to tell us an anecdote on the subject of André Breton?

MAGRITTE: While the curiosity of scientific minds turns to something unknown that corresponds to a theory, André Breton loved the unknown for the sake of the unknown, not an unknown envisaged as an object of knowledge, which would reduce it to something known. Breton does not write to create a literary work, but to reinforce the idea that life must absolutely be worth living.

WALRAVENS: And Paul Éluard?

MAGRITTE: Éluard wrote: "The darkest eyes enclose the lightest." He was able to evoke a reality inseparable from its mystery – this mystery that is not derived from any doctrine. This mystery to which nothing can be compared, and without which no thought or world would be possible.

WALRAVENS: Which French Surrealists – apart from the two you have mentioned – have had the strongest influence on you?

MAGRITTE: I think Marcel Duchamp is a very important French Surrealist: he has shown that extremely banal objects can take on a precious charm, thanks to very slight modifications: for instance, in Paris he seals up a bottle that contains nothing but air, and on this bottle he sticks a label with the inscription: PARIS AIR.

But I must say de Chirico, who's Italian, and Max Ernst, of German origin, are particularly engaging painters. Alas, all one can say about Dalí is that in Surrealism he has found the means to deploy an activity that only dimwits could possibly be interested in.

WALRAVENS: Why did you return to Brussels?

MAGRITTE: For simple, practical reasons, as uninteresting as any reasons for moving from one city to another.

WALRAVENS: What do you think of the Belgian Surrealists?

MAGRITTE: We must mention the Belgian Surrealists Camille Goemans and Paul Colinet, who have both recently died. They didn't want to be called "literary figures"; they weren't interested in literature – nor were the Surrealists. Goemans has written poems and essays which testify to an extraordinary presence of mind. Colinet knew the secret of a warm, disquieting humour. E.L.T. Mesens has written poems which emanate an enigmatic charm. Scutenaire writes aphorisms which place the reader

in front of strange responsibilities. Marcel Lecomte knows how it is advisable to speak an inexpressible language. André Bosmans showed he was a genuine poet: he has the curious strength that enables him to call himself a “man of letters” without embarrassing us. He thinks that “Nothingness is the one miracle in the world.” Finally I’d like to mention Nougé, the writer whose presence on this earth reminds us that “everything is still possible” and that “we are responsible for the universe.” As for the Belgian painters who call themselves Surrealists, they are more interested in painting than Surrealism. Their works merely give evidence of a submission to the artistic habits that the Surrealists have rightly abandoned. These habits go hand in hand with an obvious intellectual confusion – confusion, for example, between make-believe and poetry.

WALRAVENS: What, in your opinion, is the surreal, and why should painting, the art of colour and form, bother with it?

MAGRITTE: The surreal is not to be confused with the desire for an imaginary world. The imaginary is a caricature of poetry. When something marvellous takes place, when poetry makes its appearance, it’s not a question of imagination or lack of imagination. For example, it takes the barrack-room mentality to use the word imagination when talking about a story like ‘Sleeping Beauty’. Our delight in reading the tale is not imaginary – and this real delight must not be separated from the story of the sleeping beauty. The surreal, or surreality, is reality stripped of the banal or extraordinary meaning attached to it. The surreal is reality which has not been separated from its mystery. The surrealist painter describes thought which can be made visible through painting. This thought evokes mystery, the mystery without which no thought nor world would be possible.

WALRAVENS: What are the main characteristics of the psychic content of your work?

MAGRITTE: My paintings are visible thoughts. These thoughts are formed exclusively by figures that the world offers me. These thoughts are brought together to evoke mystery. My conception of the art of painting does not consist of treating a theme in an original or fanciful way. It’s a question of discovering something one can describe with as much precision as possible.

WALRAVENS: Why do you paint *trompe l’œil*?

MAGRITTE: Because the *trompe l’œil* allows me to give the painted image the expression of depth of the visible world, and because my painting has to resemble the world in order to evoke its mystery.

WALRAVENS: Does colour, in your work, have its own expressive power?

MAGRITTE: In some of my paintings, colour appears as an element of thought. For example, a thought made up of a woman's body which is the same colour as the blue sky [*La Magie noire*]. In other pictures, colour has to make the painted shapes look more like shapes in the visible world. It goes without saying that colour – even if it's a question of blue sky – comes into the picture to heighten its likeness to the world, but anyway, you can also like the colour of the sky for itself.

WALRAVENS: How are the titles and subjects of your pictures related?

MAGRITTE: The title is related to the painted figures in the same way that the figures are related to each other. The figures are brought together in an order that invokes mystery. The title is joined to the painted image according to the same order. For instance, the picture *La Mémoire* shows a plaster face with a bloodstain on it. When I gave the picture the title, I felt they went well together. One can talk about a picture and its title. I'll try and talk about it without rambling.

But first I must say that when I painted the picture *La Mémoire* I wasn't thinking about what I'm going to say now. I only thought about harmonizing the image and the title that names the image. Consequently, the picture is not the illustration of the following ideas: when we say the word "memory", we see that it corresponds to the image of a human head. If memory can take up space, it can only be inside the head. Then, the bloodstain may suggest to us that the person whose face we can see is the victim of a fatal accident. Lastly, it's a question of an event in the past that remains present in our mind thanks to memory.

WALRAVENS: The Surrealists claim that Surrealism is a revolutionary art. Why?

MAGRITTE: Without a revolutionary thought opposed to the more or less arbitrary rules that are imposed on us, Surrealism would not be able to grant supreme value to the idea that a man's life must absolutely be worth living.

WALRAVENS: What do you answer when you are accused of being a literary painter?

MAGRITTE: That such an assertion is a vulgar mistake. If there is such a thing as a non-literary or even anti-literary painting, then that is indeed what I am attempting to do. Indeed, my painting does not express any ideas or feelings. I leave that to the writers, who have a language at their disposal, capable of communicating ideas and feelings. Ideas and feelings do not have a visible shape that can be represented in painting. My painting is merely the description (with no originality or fantasy) of a thought whose only terms of reference are figures in the visible world. These figures are united in an order that can leave no one indifferent.

But they are not responsible for the ideas and feelings that arise when we look at them.

WALRAVENS: What do you think Surrealism has brought to modern culture that is essential?

MAGRITTE: On the one hand, Surrealism denounced certain false values that implied that an astonishing number of sillinesses were claimed to be necessary to the life of the mind, to life itself. Progress in art satisfies a few simple souls who make it their aim in life. They give themselves up body and soul to a world that is absurd and deprived of effectiveness. On the other hand, Surrealism eliminated symbols in favour of what the symbols symbolize. Surrealism has brought to culture the idea that life must not be in the service of art, nor of anything, but that nothing has any spiritual value if it leaves us indifferent.

WALRAVENS: What do you think of contemporary art?

MAGRITTE: Apart from de Chirico and Ernst, I do not know any contemporary painter who has even the remotest idea of a painting that is not influenced by intellectual habits that leave me indifferent.

WALRAVENS: Do you ever dream your paintings?

MAGRITTE: I have never dreamt of pictures to be painted. The world doesn't come into my sleep as a dream. I cannot "see" a picture unless I am fully awake, and have, moreover, perfect presence of mind. I do not have that presence of mind when I am asleep.

WALRAVENS: Do you have a favourite picture among your works, and why?

MAGRITTE: I don't have any favourites. There can only be a distinction if you can make a comparison. Now, to compare my pictures would mean being unaware of their *raison d'être*. Any one of my pictures evokes something that cannot be compared with anything else: mystery that does not correspond to any doctrine, mystery without which no world or thought are possible.

Jan Walravens, 'Ontmoeting met René Magritte', in *De Vlaamse Gids*, Antwerp, Nov. 1962, pp. 736-43 (W 840).

“It Is a Fallacy...”

It is a fallacy that works of art have the power to express feelings more or less accurately, and even to articulate ideas. This mistake is related to the “interpretation” of what happens when we look at a picture: we may be moved, “have an idea” and therefore deduce that the picture expresses a feeling or articulates an idea. We may as well believe, for example, that the cake we are enjoying expresses our enjoyment of the feeling the baker wanted to express. Similarly, that an onion articulates the idea “that people cry when they are peeling it”.

The connections onion-tears and cake-enjoyment are possible, and so is the connection picture-emotion-idea. But onion, cake and picture are obviously incapable of expressing feelings and articulating ideas.

It is also certain that the indispensable “materials” of painting (oil, glue, paste, etc.) do not offer anything new when used by a painter. We should not pay any attention to these materials if we really want to know what they have been used for.

The various ways of conceiving or looking at works of art are almost always obscenely trivial or futile. Also, conceptions and ways of looking whose *raison d'être* is the same as the *raison d'être* of the world and of thought are rare.

In *Rhétorique*, No. 5, Apr. 1962, p. 3 (W 833).

“Psychoanalysis...”

Psychoanalysis only allows us to interpret that which is open to interpretation. Fantastic art and symbolic art offer numerous opportunities to psychoanalysts: here, it's a question of more or less obvious delirium.

Art, as I see it, resists psychoanalysis: it evokes the mystery without which the world would not exist – that is, mystery which is not to be confused with a sort of problem, however hard to solve.

I am careful only to paint images which evoke the world's mystery. To do this I have to be wide awake, which means I must stop wholly identifying with ideas, feelings, sensations. (Dreams and madness, on the contrary, lend themselves to absolute identification.)

No one in his right mind believes that psychoanalysis could elucidate the world's mystery. It is precisely the nature of mystery to annihilate curiosity. Psychoanalysis has nothing to tell us about works of art that evoke the mystery of the world. Perhaps psychoanalysis is itself the best subject to be treated by psychoanalysis.

In the catalogue of the exhibition *The Vision of René Magritte*, Minneapolis, Walker Center, 16th Sep. 1962 (W 856). Harry Torczyner translated the text into English for the publication.

Magritte Interviewed

by Michel Géoris

René Magritte said to me on the phone: “I don’t think I have anything interesting to tell you...”

He held out his hand and, calming a little black dog, a dear little Pomeranian who responds to the name of Loulou: “He thinks you’re the vet... he’s by no means vicious...”

GÉORIS: What is your social background?

MAGRITTE: My father was a businessman; he wasn’t very interested in books, in the arts.

GÉORIS: When did you start drawing and painting?

MAGRITTE: When I was very young, about six or seven. Later, I went to the Athénée in Charleroi and I loved painting and drawing. My mother died when I was very young. My father liked my drawings and paintings... He was kind and encouraged my vocation.

GÉORIS: When did you decide to become a professional painter?

MAGRITTE: I didn’t decide. It came naturally. During the 1914–18 war I was registered at the Académie de Bruxelles. I stayed two years. I was living alone in very free lodgings and I didn’t go to classes very often. I led a very joyful life, centred, of course, around my painting, but also around beer and endless discussions with friends – in a word, the life of a not very studious student!

I married in 1920, before I had ever sold a canvas. I had never been bothered about selling my canvases. I painted, that’s all. However, I did have to earn a living, so I worked as a designer in a wallpaper factory.

GÉORIS: When did you sell your first canvas?

MAGRITTE: Around 1923, I sold a canvas to Évelyne Brélia [her *Portrait*], a singer who later married Fernand Quinet, and who was murdered... But that’s another story. I sold that canvas for 100 francs. Évelyne Brélia liked my painting very much. She also adored music: Debussy, Ravel.

At that time, my painting was quite different from now. In fact, up until 1925 I was searching. My painting was a continual search. I was strongly influenced by Cubism, Futurism, abstract art – all the avant-garde trends.

GÉORIS: When did you start to live off your painting?

MAGRITTE: Well, one day I had an argument with the director of the wall-paper factory. He was very condescending with me and I could never stand that. So I left his factory, where I was getting bored anyway, and took the plunge.

I did small jobs in the decorative arts, and went on searching. In 1925, I found what I thought I had to paint. I've been doing it ever since!

It was around that time that I began to sell. I participated in a group show at the Giroud Gallery.

Then a few friends, Pierre Bourgeois and Aimé Declercq,* who is now the director of the Galeries theatre, set up a small art gallery at Mont des Arts, but they sold almost nothing.

Then the Le Centaure gallery, which P.G. van Hecke ran, offered me a very modest contract, which did give me enough to live on. So, I've been living off my painting since 1925.

In 1926 I organized a big exhibition at the Le Centaure gallery. A canvas which was priced at 1,000 francs and didn't sell in the exhibition has just been sold in London for 250,000 francs.

In 1927, I left for Paris with my friends Paul Nougé, Marcel Lecomte, Camille Goemans and E.L.T. Mesens.

I stayed for three years, taking part in the activities of the Surrealist group. I got to know André Breton, Paul Éluard, Aragon as well. Breton has always remained a friend.

But in 1930, the Le Centaure gallery went broke. My contract was underwater.

Then I went back to Brussels and for some time had to begin working all over again in the decorative arts.

At that time, an Englishman* gave me a very important commission, and since then I've sold a bit more every year.

But it was not until after the war, in 1945, that my real success came. Since then, I have not had to worry about material considerations. I don't do anything to sell. I wait for people to come to me.

GÉORIS: Have you ever been subsidized by public funds?

MAGRITTE: In 1924, I got a subsidy of 500 francs. I believe that any fine-arts policy is irreconcilable with art. Art cannot be dictated to in any official manner. It's nonsense.

GÉORIS: To what do you attribute your success?

MAGRITTE: It is not thanks to the value of what I do that people buy me.

It's a question of luck. Great painters have not always been given their due. Talent does not imply automatic recognition.

GÉORIS: What do you think of people who buy your work?

MAGRITTE: There are many art lovers who genuinely love what they buy.

There are also speculators... gamblers of a sort. That's regrettable, because many painters are influenced by fashion.

GÉORIS: And you? Does fashion influence you?

MAGRITTE: Not at all. Material concerns bore me. I am incapable of selling. I'd rather give up selling and live in poverty than be a businessman.

I'm not responsible enough. I'm too casual and prefer to be bored by material concerns rather than be bothered with them.

GÉORIS: Do you sell a lot in the USA at the moment?

MAGRITTE: Yes, a lot, but I only know a few big art dealers, though sometimes a private buyer does come to see me.

GÉORIS: What do you think of the abstract-versus-figurative quarrel?

MAGRITTE: This quarrel is senseless. The people who present it as a product of the generation gap are just jokers.

I was doing so-called abstract painting forty years ago!

GÉORIS: To what do you attribute the success of famous painters?

MAGRITTE: Luck. As I already said in talking about my success. There is no mandatory recognition of what is valuable. Some very great painters are still neglected.

GÉORIS: Do you have any friends who are painters? Do you discuss painting with them?

MAGRITTE: The painters I know are concerned with questions that do not interest me.

For me, it's not a question of painting but of thinking!...

I don't expect any enlightenment from contemporary painters! I don't go to exhibitions. It's too boring!

Anyway, the exhibited canvases are merely caricatures. Abstract caricatures! Surrealist caricatures! Still caricatures.

GÉORIS: You are harsh!

MAGRITTE: There are only two painters I think highly of: de Chirico and Max Ernst. For me, painting is visible poetry!

GÉORIS: Do you believe worthwhile painters are giving up?

MAGRITTE: I can conceive of a worthwhile painter giving up for all sorts of reasons, because he isn't interested in painting any more, because his mind no longer needs that artistic activity.

GÉORIS: Without success, would you have gone on painting?

MAGRITTE: Of course! It's the only thing I know how to do!

For me, painting is bringing my thoughts to life. I very much like poets and writers, but I am not a writer, so I think in images, not in novels or in poems.

GÉORIS: Do you think the general public is interested in painting?

SELECTED WRITINGS

MAGRITTE: The masses – probably not!

The general public – well!

Anyway, it's not necessary to see a painting! There are loads of reproductions, art books. For me, a reproduction is enough! Like in literature, you don't need to see a writer's manuscript to be interested in his book!

Interest in art must come naturally, spontaneously.

We don't need propaganda!

Before leaving Magritte, I could not help but let him know I was surprised to see him so casual, unpretentious, carefree, not pontificating.

“You know, I'm not an exhibitionist,” he answered, with his kind smile. He answered my question, “You don't have any children, Monsieur Magritte?” a little bitterly.

“No, I don't have enough trust in life for that...”

Michel Géoris, *Ces étrangers qui vivent parmi nous: les peintres*. 4. *Un peintre célèbre: René Magritte*, in *Le Peuple*, Brussels, 5th Jun. 1962 (W 816).

Magritte Interviewed by Marcel Fryns (I)

FRYNS: Your name has been so closely linked with Surrealism that in the eyes of a lot of people you are identified with the movement and its doctrine. Do you mind this?

MAGRITTE: My insertion into the group was inevitable, since my concerns then, which are moreover still the same today, were similar to those of the Surrealists. I collaborated in the Surrealist Revolution in 1927 and took part in the development of Surrealism.

FRYNS: What, in your eyes, is Surrealism? Can it be defined?

MAGRITTE: I'd say that for an artist Surrealism is the fact of his consciousness as an artist. The case of the artist must be distinguished from that of the philosopher. I believe that the former becomes aware of life and not of a way of thinking. The artist is spontaneously aware of a way of life, and if he is fully conscious, the meaning of life may be revealed to him. The artist in general is only conscious of his art, which is very different from the Surrealist who uses art. Art is not the Surrealist's *raison d'être*; if he uses it, it's as a means of thinking.

FRYNS: You are often accused of despising pictorial technique? What does it mean to you?

MAGRITTE: Technique is indispensable to make the work visible; therefore it's important, like the ink a writer uses. But technique has no more importance than that; obviously, it is a means, not an end. I'd say that at the present time, young artists are too concerned with the problems of pictorial technique. It's an extremely foolish preoccupation; using new techniques can't achieve anything.

FRYNS: Are you the first person to materialize poetry?

MAGRITTE: There are precedents, for example Giorgio de Chirico and Max Ernst, who, like me, made poetry visible, but I believe that I was the one to clarify poetry. When someone asks you to define poetry, what do you say? There's nothing vaguer. I felt it was important to be precise about poetry. I identified it as the description of inspired thought.

FRYNS: Why did you choose painting as the instrument of this poetic appearance?

SELECTED WRITINGS

MAGRITTE: Simply because I prefer painting to writing. It's both painting and awareness, which are not without reflection, which led me to clarify poetry.

FRYNS: The Knokke exhibition is called "The Work of René Magritte". Is it a retrospective or a selection?

MAGRITTE: It's not a retrospective, but it is an important selection which does enable you to follow my development. In fact, this development comes to very little. My concerns remain unchanged: there is no spiritual development. But there is an experience – the contents of the mind are rich and diverse.

FRYNS: As your works are translations of poetic realities, can they have a psychological significance?

MAGRITTE: No, I do not express any feeling, idea or sensation. I show poetry, but I do not express poetry. If you like, my canvases are never the translation of a state – that is, psychoanalysis is not qualified to analyse my painting.

FRYNS: It is generally supposed that Surrealist paintings are symbolic. What do you say to that assertion?

MAGRITTE: It's radically false, since Surrealism is precisely the total suppression of symbols, the negation of any universe with a key to unlock its secrets. Breton's poems are not symbolic; when he writes "It's me... open up!" it would be absurd to look for a symbol. When Éluard says "The darkest eyes enclose the lightest" you must be insensitive to poetry to search for a symbol there. The symbol is always the negation of poetry.

FRYNS: What advice would you give a visitor asking you about the significance of your work and how to understand it?

MAGRITTE: I'd say that through my work, it's poetry that speaks.

Marcel Fryns, 'René Magritte: « J'identifie la peinture à la description de la pensée inspirée »', in *Arts*, Paris, 11th July 1962 (W 855 d).

Object Lesson

1. It is possible to see someone tipping his hat without seeing politeness.
2. It is scarcely possible to choose between two equal images unless a misplaced preference tips the balance.
3. Sometimes an image can seriously accuse the viewer.
4. Any object, taken as a question of a problem... and the right answer discovered by searching for the object that is secretly connected to the first... give, when brought together, a new knowledge.
5. Comprehension of accuracy does not preclude enjoyment of inaccuracy.
6. However distant we may be from an object, we are never completely separate from it.
7. An image unknown in the dark is called forth by an image known in the light.
8. Whatever lines, words, colours are scattered on the page, the composition is always meaningful.

In *Rhétorique*, Tilleur-lez-Liège, no. 7, Oct. 1962: *Leçon de choses. Écrits et Dessins de René Magritte* (W 833).

“Inspired Thought...”

Inspired thought – of which the pictorial description is possible – resembles only those forms presented by the world *through that which is visible*. My painting *The Waterfall* [*La Cascade*] is the description of an inspired thought which can be found simultaneously in the forest and away from the forest. In fact, this thought unites the foliage that is inside the forest with a painting which allows a distant forest to appear.

I identify the description of such a thought with poetry.

The title *The Waterfall* suggests that this inspired thought gushed forth like a waterfall.

In the catalogue for the exhibition *Guggenheim International Award 1964*, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Jan. 1964, p. 104 (W 930).

“People Cannot Know...”

People cannot know my painting if they associate it with any kind of symbolism, whether naive or sophisticated. Then again, what I paint does not imply that the invisible is superior to the visible: the visible is rich enough to create a poetic language, evoking the mystery of the invisible and the visible.

In the catalogue for the exhibition *Le Sens propre*, Paris, Iolas Gallery, 12th Nov. 1964 (W 954), with English translation.

Magritte Interviewed by Pierre Mazars

MAZARS: Does *Le Balcon* mean that you're seeking to destroy classical paintings?

MAGRITTE: Not at all! I merely seek to show something different from those pictures, to use them. And I do not feel the need to ridicule death, since ridicule is a feeling and, consequently, invisible. How could painting, which is visible, portray the invisible?

MAZARS: Can't your picture be taken as symbols?

MAGRITTE: I certainly hope to rid the things I show of all symbolism. For example, take this canvas entitled *La Grande Guerre*, where we see a person in a bowler hat whose face is hidden by a large apple. Pointless to tell you that I was not thinking of war when I painted it. The apple is the apparent-visible that conceals the hidden-visible (the fellow's face). In the world, everything always happens like this. So, there's a sort of tension, war: our minds seek to see what we cannot see. I also want the viewer looking at my picture to be in a poetic state; disturbed as by poetry.

MAZARS: We see a lot of curtains in your canvases. Why?

MAGRITTE: Yes, here for example, the sky is in the shape of a curtain because it is hiding something from us. We are surrounded by curtains. And you notice that I have a very limited vocabulary: nothing but ordinary, familiar things. What is "extraordinary" is the connection between them. My fish [*La Présence d'esprit*] doesn't raise any question like a monster from the deep would; it raises a question because it is united with other objects. These strange unions, it's inspiration that provokes them. Suddenly, an image arises in me. My role is to describe it, without being fanciful, on my canvas.

The painters who interest me are the ones who are worried about what should be painted. Max Ernst, early de Chirico. Peculiarities of style don't interest me. It is not the style of painting that gives beauty, but the subject itself. I prefer people to think about what the image represents, rather than about the artist's dexterity. Obviously if I put this blue on this grey I'm hoping it holds together. But that's just part of the job...

Pierre Mazars: *Magritte et l'objet*, in *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 19th Nov. 1964, on the occasion of the exhibition *Le Sens propre* (W 954).

Magritte Interviewed by Marcel Fryns (II)

MAGRITTE: I didn't have a favourable preconception, especially at the thought of a long journey, but from the moment I arrived, the view of New York seemed to me extraordinary. It truly was a new world that offered itself to me. I felt New York's grandeur, an incomparable grandeur. I thought of Rome, but in Rome it's historical memories that appeal to us; in New York it's something else.

FRYNS: Do you have a particularly cherished memory of this transatlantic trip?

MAGRITTE: Yes, my visit to Edgar Allan Poe's home, a little wooden house surrounded by grasslands; I was very moved by it, and in that house where he lived, I was greeted by a raven perched on a piece of furniture. I love Edgar Allan Poe: he has always been very important to me, given his singular preoccupations as a poet. I sensed at his house a kindred spirit with whom I am wholly in harmony.

FRYNS: New York is the homeland of pop art; pop artists have claimed you. Is it a filiation you have disowned?

MAGRITTE: Pop art is rather the descendent of Dadaism, but without Dada's freedom at that era. I notice that real avant-garde art has always been badly received, whereas fake avant-garde art is enormously successful. Pop art lacks the authenticity that would give it the power to be provocative.

FRYNS: What represents for you the true avant-garde?

MAGRITTE: The term is questionable. Socrates was avant-garde, and we all know what happened to him. Thought is eternal, it will always exist, but the avant-garde is a thought that is in itself revolutionary and non-imitative. Nowadays, nothing seems to me to be avant-garde in that sense; everything is imitation.

FRYNS: Are you pessimistic about the future of art?

MAGRITTE: No, I think that thought is not going to stop. In the future it will be manifested anew.

FRYNS: René Magritte, New York has been enthusiastic about your work. How do you explain the present-day craze for Surrealism?

SELECTED WRITINGS

MAGRITTE: I am not a sociologist, but perhaps the public is vaguely interested in my experiments. It's a common phenomenon: discoveries are rediscovered with a quarter-century delay.

FRYNS: Is Surrealism a doctrine or a permanent attitude?

MAGRITTE: An attitude that exists today, and that has existed for ever, but which has taken shape as Surrealism for several years. In brief, Surrealism is the appearance of a possibility as yet unknown to the mind. I don't see why the mind couldn't manifest again this possibility, which is the opposite of a habitual way of thinking.

FRYNS: Is the unknown within reach of the young?

MAGRITTE: Yes, they have the opportunity to discover the unknown, but at present nothing of the sort occurs.

FRYNS: What did the pop artists claim to find in your work?

MAGRITTE: Perhaps they realized that my works are not artistic productions, and were struck by this character, the poetic side of my approach. They concluded, and to my mind wrongly, that they had to show the poetry in the current world.

Here's where their mistake lies. They wish to express the present-day world; now it's a question of a transitory state, a fashion, and poetry is not concerned with the transitory. Poetry is the feeling of reality in its permanence.

Marcel Fryns, 'Pop art et poésie avec René Magritte' in *Beaux-Arts*, Brussels, no. 1114, 20th Jan. 1966, p. 6.

Magritte Interviewed

by Jacques Goossens

GOOSSENS: Are you Fantômas?

MAGRITTE: That's a lovely question, because you seem to believe that I may be Fantômas. If I'm thinking about Fantômas, I could say that I am Fantômas in a way, but you can be another person in two ways: really believing you are, like a madman for instance, who believes that he himself is Fantômas; or else, as I believe a poet can say when he thinks of Fantômas and this thought is not make-believe, it's a real thought. So, how shall I answer? I *know* that I'm not Fantômas, but when my mind thinks Fantômas, it *is* Fantômas. [...]

GOOSSENS: ...you liked Fantômas; you also liked a certain American detective, a certain Nick Carter?

MAGRITTE: Ah yes, Nick Carter and Nat Pinkerton, of course.

GOOSSENS: Have they influenced your work?

MAGRITTE: I don't believe so, because the... the mystery in these books is a mystery with a key, finally, a mystery that may have a solution. Now, in my work, it's a question of an *unknowable* mystery.

GOOSSENS: It's curious that literary figures and not painters have influenced you.

MAGRITTE: Ah! I don't know if there's a literary influence. I may like ... the written word if it moves me, and I also like some painted images, I also like music, I like a lot of things, but I don't think of them as influences... at least not directly.

GOOSSENS: Did your parents accept your enrolment at the Académie willingly?

MAGRITTE: Yes, there was no opposition.

[...]

GOOSSENS: Was the teaching good?

MAGRITTE: Yes, it was a very serious education, where it was exclusively a matter of learning to draw. Then, with those classes were literature courses given by [Georges] Eekhoud, and then courses on anatomy, on perspective... a little of everything a painter should know.

[...]

Ah yes, well I must say that joining the army was not... much to my taste; still, I used my talents as a painter as much as possible to please the officers, which got me out of lots of... duties and exercises.

GOOSSENS: Didn't you paint the portrait of one of your superior officers at the time?

MAGRITTE: Indeed yes... indeed, the portrait of a commander or captain... I don't remember any more.*

GOOSSENS: I believe that one day Pierre Bourgeois showed you some Futurist works which made a great impression on you?

MAGRITTE: Yes indeed, I met Pierre Bourgeois after I left the Académie and he showed me... some pictures, reproductions by Futurist painters who I didn't know at all, and they impressed me enormously.

GOOSSENS: One day Marcel Lecomte showed you one of de Chirico's works?

MAGRITTE: Ah yes, here the encounter really was more significant than with the Futurists, because the Futurists were working on a new way of painting, whereas de Chirico was not concerned with a way of painting but with *what must be painted*, which is quite a different thing... It was *Le Chant d'amour*, actually, a very beautiful picture.

GOOSSENS: Really? You were inspired by de Chirico at that time, turned a sort of switch and set something off?

MAGRITTE: Yes, it was an exceptional meeting.

GOOSSENS: And then I believe you set about painting with all your might at that point?

MAGRITTE: Ah, I painted...yes... but... I couldn't paint like de Chirico – or rather Kirico – I was searching for something to paint, you see, like de Chirico, and I couldn't paint what de Chirico painted.

...Yes, it was my first exhibition [at Le Centaure] which really represented what I consider to be worthwhile in my... in my work.

...Yes, [*Le Jockey perdu*] was the first canvas I truly painted, feeling I had found my way, if I can use this term.

GOOSSENS: Is *Le Jockey perdu* a sort of manifesto?

MAGRITTE: No, it's not a manifesto; it's a *manifestation*, a manifestation which is worth a great deal to me.

GOOSSENS: I'd like to ask you, Magritte, what your primary concern was at that time?... I'm thinking of *La Trahison des images*. What was the concern?

MAGRITTE: *La Trahison des images* is the title of a picture showing a pipe, underneath which is written: "This is not a pipe." I don't see anything paradoxical in this image, because the image of a pipe is not a pipe, there is a difference.

GOOSSENS: Wouldn't you say that was stating the obvious?

MAGRITTE: Ah! It's obvious, obvious that the image of a pipe is not a pipe. Perhaps it seems simplistic but still... it does shock people who don't think about the obvious.

...Yes, in that one [*Les Clefs des songes*] I call images of objects names other than the ones they are usually given, and it seems to me an effective experiment. Indeed, if I depict in an image... yes, if I called this shoe: shoe, I don't believe I've done something very interesting.

GOOSSENS: What was the public's reaction?

MAGRITTE: Well, as usual, the public's reactions were mockery, or misunderstanding or rage...

GOOSSENS: People don't like what can't be explained?

MAGRITTE: No, people like their habits, and perhaps they're right, I don't know ...

Indeed, from then on *Le Jockey perdu* was the first picture I considered worthwhile ...

GOOSSENS: ...Is it because you saw it as a kind of violation of the public?

MAGRITTE: Yes, and please note that the public were indeed provoked, but my intention was not to be provocative.

...Yes, there was a forced sale at Le Centaure, and among the paintings sold there were quite a few of my paintings which were bought by Mesens.

GOOSSENS: What was that rather amazing group, the Mystery Society?

MAGRITTE: Just a few friends... there was Mesens, Paul Nougé, Lecomte, Souris, Scutenaire, and we all thought alike. In relation to society, we might have seemed a little secretive and you could call us the friends of mystery.

GOOSSENS: You were sort of backing each other up in the face of the enemy...

MAGRITTE: Not backing each other up but understanding each other. We understood each other, and we were all of us searching for what could be said that was still unknown.

GOOSSENS: Did you get on well with the Surrealists in Paris? What were your relations with them?

MAGRITTE: Obviously we got on very well because we were concerned about the same things. Only, given their number, they could do other events than us; they had other means of implanting the idea of Surrealism.

GOOSSENS: Were your ideas similar?

MAGRITTE: On the whole, yes.

GOOSSENS: The characters were probably different?

MAGRITTE: Only in that they quite enjoyed provocation for its own sake.

This is where there may be a... there would be a difference.

...Ah! I don't like the word "theme".

SELECTED WRITINGS

GOOSSENS: What word should be used then?

MAGRITTE: Well, figures, they are figures...

GOOSSENS: We often find the same figures...

MAGRITTE: Yes.

GOOSSENS: Take curtains, for instance...

MAGRITTE: Yes, curtains, or for example...

GOOSSENS: What's behind the curtains, why do we see them over and over again?

MAGRITTE: Ah! Because they exist... I can only really show things that exist.

GOOSSENS: Yes, but other things exist equally, and you don't return to them with the same frequency.

MAGRITTE: My repertoire is rather limited, like everyone else's. I only know, I only see curtains, trees, the sky...

GOOSSENS: Your bells, your famous bells, where do they come from?

MAGRITTE: Well, these are the bells, the kind of bells which are hung around horses' necks.

GOOSSENS: Is that a childhood memory too?

MAGRITTE: Not necessarily, no, I don't believe so; nor are the curtains; these are just things that I see in the world and that I bring together, so that the image that I get is not indifferent, so that it's as strange as possible.

GOOSSENS: The sky also has great importance to you – the sky, clouds...

MAGRITTE: Oh yes, we see the sky all the time. You can't imagine living without ever seeing the sky – or perhaps you can and it's better not to think about it.

GOOSSENS: Rocks?

MAGRITTE: Yes, stone is also a being, a being that is of importance to me. Perhaps ...

GOOSSENS: A particular importance?

MAGRITTE: Perhaps because I would say stone does not think, whereas other things, a piece of furniture or a house, given that they are made by man, do think a little ...

GOOSSENS: Does it trouble you?

MAGRITTE: It doesn't trouble me necessarily, only I wouldn't like those thoughts tied [gap in the recording].

GOOSSENS: What about balusters?

MAGRITTE: Well, we see them under tables, you know, those turned-wood table legs that appear in my pictures and don't play their part as table legs.

GOOSSENS: But nevertheless, there are human beings in your works.

MAGRITTE: Ah! Naturally.

GOOSSENS: Men, women, but what is surprising is that we rarely see them together; rather, they are almost always alone. Man is very often alone in your canvases.

MAGRITTE: Yes, but I don't believe that has any... moral significance, no more than when I show a tree alone on a plain; I don't think you have to give it a sense of... loneliness, because if it were a matter of loneliness it wouldn't be very interesting to communicate.

GOOSSENS: Don't you personally feel lonely?

MAGRITTE: Not particularly, because I am surrounded by so many things that I can't think of myself as solitary.

GOOSSENS: René Magritte, do you think Surrealism is an aesthetic?

MAGRITTE: Oh, no! Besides, the Surrealists defend themselves against being understood in that way. Surrealism is neither a literary school, nor a school of art. Surrealists *use* literary and artistic means in order to show that which the mind can say and which is not yet known.

GOOSSENS: Does Surrealism take a political stance?

MAGRITTE: Given the difference between bourgeois thought and Surrealist thought, the latter is, of necessity, biased towards ideas of freedom, and in politics what represents freedom is of necessity on the left.

GOOSSENS: Is that why you joined the Communist Party in 1945?

MAGRITTE: I joined the Communist Party in 1945, and I believed, having made contact, that I could make people see that art was not to be as the Communists understood it, i.e., an art of propaganda, but I failed, just as the Surrealists in France failed.

GOOSSENS: It was a disappointment?

MAGRITTE: Yes, if you like, but it wasn't a great disappointment, because that's the way things are.

GOOSSENS: What part does metaphysics play in your work?

MAGRITTE: Ah... metaphysics... What do you mean by metaphysics?

GOOSSENS: Well, let's start again: is there a kind of anguish?

MAGRITTE: Yes, an anguish which can at the same time be a joy, not necessarily anguish, it's...

GOOSSENS: Are you worried by the passing of time?

MAGRITTE: No, not at all, I'm not in the least worried, but I think the world is a mystery and that nothing can be said about mystery, and therefore it can't be the grounds for anguish or hope.

GOOSSENS: Isn't Magritte basically a mystery?

MAGRITTE: Yes! We are all a mystery, we are part of the world, which is a mystery itself.

GOOSSENS: So, you and your work are a bit like a key with no lock, as I believe Patrick Waldberg says in his book?

SELECTED WRITINGS

MAGRITTE: Yes, a lock without a key... or a key with no lock.

GOOSSENS: At the Le Centaure Gallery, I believe Mesens bought back your pictures for fifty francs.

MAGRITTE: Yes.

GOOSSENS: How much do your canvases fetch today?

MAGRITTE: I don't know, apparently they're very dear... it seems that certain paintings sell for a million, it seems.

GOOSSENS: Are you happy about that?

MAGRITTE: No, I am completely indifferent. [...]

This interview was broadcast on Belgian television on 28th Jan. 1966, on the occasion of the publication of Patrick Waldberg's book, *René Magritte*.

Magritte Interviewed

by Guy Mertens

MERTENS: Why did you go to Israel?

MAGRITTE: Because I was invited; I didn't go to present a load of pompous and boring bits and pieces about painting at some congress. A pleasure trip – quite charming and entertaining.

MERTENS: Do you sometimes go on holiday?

MAGRITTE: We're always on holiday when we're free. I ate a fish called St Peter, served by a man from Lyon, on Lake Tiberias, and I came under artillery fire near Nazareth. Not quite what you expect in a little place called Nazareth.

MERTENS: What's Lake Tiberias like?

MAGRITTE: Blue. The Jerusalem museum is very interesting. I saw the famous Dead Sea Scrolls.

MERTENS: Are you moved by these "priceless" documents?

MAGRITTE: Thanks to reasoning, yes. Indirectly, their meaning for me is dead letter and dead sea, but I can accept that a lot of things are interesting, in good faith. X-rays, for instance. I mean that I don't scorn what doesn't interest me. What touches me most is that this treasure is on display in a place which can vanish totally underground if there's a war. That's beautiful. Israel, where everyone comes from "somewhere else", where war is latent, lives the life of a normal country and has all it needs. There's a big exhibition of modern painting with Picasso [March–May 1966], which the Americans and the French haven't refused to lend "because it's dangerous and you never know". At the same time, they don't behave as if war did not exist.

MERTENS: Are there any Magrittés in Jerusalem?

MAGRITTE: Two: *Le Beau Ténébreux* and... I don't remember, one from 1927 [*Les Embarras de la peinture*]. They know all about Surrealism and they themselves deploy "sur-activity" in a sort of cosmopolitan patriotism. There, the past, the present are both fantastic: The Holy Scriptures and the Kibbutz, Acre and irrigation. Here you go to a museum, a concert, a lecture and you're standing on the edge of a volcano.

MERTENS: Does Israel have the luxury of having painters?

MAGRITTE: Yes, they think about a lot of things other than me, but they give me importance as a *current* painter. Why? I am not of my time, nor

am I from Lessines or any other place. I am not affected by the ephemeral history and geography of my time, but by the fact of existing. That's what I find difficult to get used to.

MERTENS: What's it like to you to exist and for the world to exist?

MAGRITTE: This amazes me.

MERTENS: The painter Magritte seems as indifferent to the passage of time as to the weather – indifferent to past and future?

MAGRITTE: For me the future is the end of the world. Whether my painting is worth more or less in a hundred years, I don't mind. It might merely have a historical value. What is important is that in a hundred years' time, someone finds what I found, but *in a different way*.

MERTENS: Valéry says that too: "True tradition in important things is not to recreate what others have done, but to rediscover the spirit that created these things and which could create quite different things in another time."* Look, you who are an inner landscape, did you look at the Israeli countryside?

MAGRITTE: Of course, that's everyday. You must be careful, polite – which is automatic. The landscape is very beautiful, but I enjoyed it with no sense of the exotic, no feeling of disorientation. A small cloud, a sunset, a star – here or down there the tones are the same. I do not travel in kilometres. I am not an itinerant traveller. Everywhere I go it's easy for me to tell myself: "That's just what I thought. I thought so."

MERTENS: Even on the moon?

MAGRITTE: I've been there already. We have our being, we travel in the sky. The Church, in Galileo's time, was frightened when it thought that the Earth was no longer the navel of the world. But the monk [Giordano] Bruno thought: "On the contrary, the Earth moving in the sky expands man's position in the universe." My wife, on the other hand, is enchanted with the Israeli landscape, and not for the usual "tourist" reasons. In the Gobi Desert she said something remarkable to me. It was nightfall, which is not usually a very comforting time. She said: "Here the thought of death doesn't frighten me."

MERTENS: The Americans are crazy about your painting. Why?

MAGRITTE: Perhaps for unconscious reasons. They are crushed by the "real", by the material. Perhaps it's a sort of compensation.

MERTENS: Because they are dying of exhaustion?

MAGRITTE: Perhaps, yes. The man who takes medicine may feel better without knowing how it works.

MERTENS: What's the strangest thing you saw in Israel?

MAGRITTE: A meal with a hundred-year-old rabbi who had just remarried. My wife had sat down next to him. They had to put a man in between

- to save him from being contaminated by his “impure” neighbour. A museum piece in real life. This country is ultra-modern; with the most up-to-date techniques, teams, machinery they hope to be able to survive, but in the restaurants you can’t get butter with meat, only with fish, etc.
- MERTENS: Are you what is called a painter?
- MAGRITTE: My paintings *resemble* paintings. My painting is a mind *seeing* without naming what it sees. What it sees on an object is another hidden object.
- MERTENS: People always say of you: a master of mystery?
- MAGRITTE: People will say anything. I do not make puns with objects as people pun with words. There is a familiar mystery – open secrets. Well, I believe I experience an unfamiliar mystery in front of everything that is deemed “quite natural”. That’s the surprise. I am always surprised. Listen, people are apt to say “The invisible is hidden”. That’s wrong: it’s unknown. The painter doesn’t show it, doesn’t explain it: he evokes it. I don’t need explanations.
- MERTENS: Coffins sitting up, women in casts, tree-cupboards, the man in the black bowler hat, imaginary doors and windows, aren’t they symbols? The world seen through a hole in the canvas [*Le Droit Chemin*]?
- MAGRITTE: Certainly not: figures cleared from any symbolism or “feeling”.
- MERTENS: Isn’t your painting metaphysical?
- MAGRITTE: The word God has no meaning for me, but I give it back to mystery, not to the void.
- MERTENS: The titles of your paintings with their “literary” air?
- MAGRITTE: They accompany the pictures as best they can. They are not keys. Only skeleton keys.
- MERTENS: Didn’t the erstwhile “bourgeois”, now on the way to extinction, hate you even more than Picasso?
- MAGRITTE: No, really?
- MERTENS: Yes, because at least he believed he could claim that “Picasso couldn’t even draw”. This accusation became “Magritte is making fools of us, but he certainly can draw”.
- MAGRITTE: That’s no more extraordinary than the writer who makes subject and verb agree!
- MERTENS: About Israel...
- MAGRITTE: But I talked about all this in Israel! They agree!

Guy Mertens, ‘René Magritte, peintre de l’invisible, retour d’Israël’, in *Pourquoi pas?*, Brussels, 26th May 1966, pp. 91–94.

On the Death of André Breton

In 1927, André Breton and I were looking in turn at an apéritif advertisement hanging on the wall of a bistro. We exchanged glances that neither reason nor madness could explain.

We had the same looks of complicity another time, when I suggested he have his photo taken with his eyes closed.

Alas, his eyes are closed, but eyes are open or shut, we cannot forget that his mind searched for truth through poetry, love and liberty.

In Les Lettres Françaises, Paris, no. 1151, Oct. 1966, p. 17.

Message to the Sea

What can you do for the sea?

No one can tell.

Brussels, 17th Oct. 1966. In the visitors' book of the "Message à la mer" campaign, which also contained testimonials by Maurice Chevalier, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco, Haile Selassie and others. See Marcel Clébant, *Croisade pour la mer*, Brussels, Rossel, 1973.

“Nausea Takes Me...”

Nausea takes me when I look at my paints and my palette and think I'll have to mess around with them. In my paintings I show objects in places where we never encounter them... I find the cracks we see in our houses and the lines on our faces more eloquent in the sky. Table legs lose their innocence when they suddenly appear overlooking a forest... It's a complete break with the mental habits of those artists who are prisoners of their talent, their virtuosity. The point is a new vision, where the viewer rediscovers his isolation and hears the silence of the world... Neither modest nor proud, I've done what I thought I had to do.

Otto Hahn, 'Magritte ni modeste ni fier', in *L'Express*, Paris, 16th Jan. 1967, on the occasion of the exhibition *Les Images en soi*, Paris, Iolas Gallery.

Magritte Interviewed by Carl Wai

In a careful writing, which goes its slowly penetrating way, René Magritte has responded to our questions:

[...]

WAI: What is the relationship between your life and work and the mystery of the world?

MAGRITTE: As with everything, I live in the mystery. In writing this I am not “*de jure*” but merely “*de facto*”. There has to come a moment when suddenly mystery is no longer an object that can be talked about, so that I can really be in the truth of the mystery. My painting – like everything – evokes mystery, but it is conceived in order to evoke it. Consequently, it has an immediate relationship with it.

WAI: Has painting increased or lessened your anxiety?

MAGRITTE: Neither anxiety nor tranquillity intervene in my painting. When a feeling fits, we are seeing what we are looking at. Seeing what we are looking at occurs when the mystery is revealed.

WAI: What is the respective importance of intuition and conscious reflection when you are creating?

MAGRITTE: Reflection does not necessarily precede intuition or, more precisely, inspiration. The latter is the “Eureka” that emerges after a long search, but which can also come without one having looked for it.

WAI: Rimbaud writes: “The hand that holds the pen is as valuable as the hand that guides the plough.”* Michaux says in an interview: “The beings with whom I have felt at ease did not think of me as a writer, but simply as a man searching for what life is.”* Do you ever feel that painting seems futile and therefore opposes the “immediacy of life” that Éluard and all the Surrealists talk about?

MAGRITTE: Painting considered as an artistic hobby can have its charm. The work demanded is itself a pleasure. Perhaps the ploughman also takes pleasure in ploughing the land. These occupations are futile if you think pleasure is futile. The painting I “work at” is futile if you think life is futile too.

WAI: What value do you attach to André Breton’s words: liberty, love, poetry?

MAGRITTE: A supreme value when liberty, love and poetry mean that we are drawn to the impossible.

SELECTED WRITINGS

WAÏ: Would you describe the shock you felt one day in 1922, when Marcel Lecomte brought you a print of de Chirico's picture?

MAGRITTE: When I saw the print of de Chirico's *Le Chant d'amour* for the first time, it was one of the most moving moments of my life: my eyes *saw* thought for the first time.

WAÏ: How do you respond to the incapacity of man to understand and dominate his condition?

MAGRITTE: These are problems that various disciplines take upon themselves to solve with great difficulty. Man, as a being in mystery, is lacking in curiosity in respect to these problems.

WAÏ: What remedy do you have for the defeatism you admit to?

MAGRITTE: I live without hope or despair – if that's a remedy. My defeatism would end if evil could be conquered by good.

WAÏ: Would you accept that your life could be envisaged as an initiatory quest?

MAGRITTE: I don't think there is anything essential to learn.

WAÏ: What do you get out of humour?

MAGRITTE: A bit of mental health when the humour is not "coarse", and when it is "magical", as my friend, the poet Guy Rosey, says.

WAÏ: Marcel Lecomte has just died [19th Nov. 1966]. What do you remember about his soft, enchanting presence?

MAGRITTE: I shall always remember Marcel Lecomte as he was, on this earth, attention personified.

*

WAÏ: Do you often think of death?

MAGRITTE: No more often than I think of life.

WAÏ: Do you consider that your life has a meaning?

MAGRITTE: I don't know if my life has a meaning.

WAÏ: How important do you think love is?

MAGRITTE: More important than reason – as feelings are.

WAÏ: And art?

MAGRITTE: Not very – when it is a goal to be reached or a goal that has already been reached.

WAÏ: Tell us your life story in ten lines at most.

MAGRITTE: Ten lines is far too much for me.

WAÏ: How important do you think imagination is?

MAGRITTE: As important as the mind that is not subject to make-believe.

WAÏ: Do you prefer thought?

MAGRITTE: Thought has no real content unless it invents what is not imaginary. The mind and its power are not terms that allow a preference.

RENÉ MAGRITTE

WAÏ: What do you think of the society in which you live?

MAGRITTE: I suspect it is not master of its destiny.

WAÏ: Do you feel an inner freedom?

MAGRITTE: Those are just words to me.

WAÏ: How important are your dreams?

MAGRITTE: Dreams are a disease of thought – easy to forget.

WAÏ: How do you feel about growing old?

MAGRITTE: Old age is neither more nor less interesting than youth.

WAÏ: What do you think about chance?

MAGRITTE: Everything happens “by chance” whether it is foreseen or not.

In reality, nothing escapes from universal fortuitousness.

WAÏ: What do you think about desire?

MAGRITTE: It proves man’s madness and his wisdom.

René Magritte

20th Jan. 1967

Carl Waï (aka Charles Flamand and Frédéric Baal), ‘Ceci n’est pas René Magritte’,
in *Le Patriote illustré*, Brussels, 2nd Apr. 1967, pp. 793–97.

The Test of the Title

The friend of Tétanos

*

Return of personal effects

*

Legal extraction

*

The pieces of the Doctor

*

The connoisseur's box

*

Jam project

In Pierre Alechinsky, *The Test of the Title: 6 Plates and 61 Sharp-shooting Headline-writers*, Paris, Losfeld, 25th Mar. 1967. This refers to the sixty-one artists, including Magritte, who were invited to suggest titles for six compositions by Alechinsky.

Letter to Serge Creuz*

18th April 1967

Dear Serge Creuz,

I have received your letter about set designs for the theatre. I have been asked to devise some before, but I consider that imagination shouldn't intervene in set painting: it is the playwright who has to excite us.

The sets merely need to appear like landscapes or interiors as they are presented to us in reality. They don't have to "express" the spirit of the play, since the author has done this himself by writing the play.

In my opinion, a set must appear and only appear – just as the actors must only appear to be the characters they are portraying. (That's why a doctor, for example, would play the role of a doctor badly.)

I know I'm going against an "avant-garde" conception of the theatre, and that I may seem "old-fashioned". I am certain that the preoccupation with new means is proof of a confusion and a puerile imagination in all spheres. The value of the imagination lies in discovering what must be thought, what doesn't leave us indifferent.

I am pleased that you are interested in my thoughts on the subject and best wishes to you and your wife.

In Serge Creuz, 'Journal d'un article pour journal', in *Beaux-Arts*, Brussels, no. 1166, 6th May 1967, pp. 14–19.

Undated Texts

I

Pushing up from the earth towards the sun. A tree is an image of a certain happiness. To perceive this image, we must be still, like the tree. When we are in motion, it's the tree that becomes the spectator. It is witness, equally, in the shape of a chair, a table, a door, to the more or less restless spectacle of our life. The tree, having become a coffin, disappears into the earth. And when it has transformed into flames, it vanishes into the air.*

Undated Texts

II

In Europe, on the vast plains where the ripe wheat makes the Sun shine,
we are a handful of men and women living beside our food.

Undated Texts

III. Prey for the Shade*

Jure, old manageress of a London gambling den, still in bed, receives a visitor whom she hardly recognizes: Fred has changed since he's been in prison. He has just escaped and is demanding back the money that he stashed with Jure. Josephin, Jure's young gigolo, arrives. Fred asks Jure for news of Irma, the girl he used to live with, and of Paulon, who used to come to Jure's dive. She has not seen them. Jure is about to give Fred his money. Josephin objects. There's a fight. Josephin is knocked out, Fred gets his money and kicks Josephin in the face before going off. Josephin, whom Jure has brought round by slapping him, breaks a bottle over her head.

The police are keeping an eye on the places Fred frequented before his incarceration. Fred avoids two officers when he leaves Jure's. He returns to his old apartment, feeling hunted, bashes the occupant on the head and extracts an envelope from underneath the mantelshelf.

Irma is a wealthy kept woman. Fred has it out with her. Violence. Irma had denounced Fred to the police and, thanks to the stashed money and Fred's denial, the latter was given the benefit of the doubt and escaped the death penalty.

In a mediocre restaurant, Fred meets Marcel, who's the same age and build. Marcel gets a private income from a solicitor from abroad; depraved, with no family, he often changes hotels because of his affairs with young women who complicate his existence.

Fred makes enquiries about Paulon, who has become a respected industrialist. Paulon's wife is dead, and their daughter Edmonde goes out with young millionaires to have a good time.

Josephin is searching for Fred to take his revenge; he finds Paulon and Irma's addresses. He goes to see Irma, and together they plot their vengeance on Fred. Irma tells Josephin that Fred was connected with Paulon. Paulon was a cashier at a bank whose debt collector was killed by Fred.

Jean, Edmonde's friend, makes a jealous scene when they are out together. They calm him down and get him drunk. His father, Cesky, a foreign businessman, a pervert, takes a sadistic pleasure in torturing him mentally, exaggerating the cause of Jean's despair.

Edmonde is found shot dead by a revolver. Her jewels are missing. Paulon tells the press and police that he is depositing a cheque with the bank as a reward for information leading to the arrest of the murderer and, feeling threatened (he believes Fred, the escaped convict, is the murderer), he hires the detective Bokin to protect him. Paulon brings Bokin up to speed (holding back a few crucial details): he says that, having known Fred in the past, the latter might have a grudge against him for not helping him at the time of his trial, and perhaps is taking his revenge by murdering his daughter.

Jure makes a visit out of curiosity and vague sympathy to Paulon, her former client, whom the newspapers have just pushed into the limelight. Paulon is bothered by this reminder of his past. One of Bokin's assistants follows Jure home and gives Bokin her address. Bokin goes to interrogate her, and Josephin accuses Fred so forcefully of the murder of Edmonde that he becomes a suspect himself. (He could have killed her to frame Fred and steal her jewels at the same time.)

Jean was beaten up by the police and is held in custody while they check his alibi. Bokin goes to see Jean's father, Cesky, who, while pretending not to, accuses his son. He doesn't put up bail for Jean. Cesky has such hatred towards him that he becomes a suspect, like Josephin.

Fred, whom the police are after (because of an anonymous letter from Josephin), feels doubly hunted. Marcel visits him in his room. (Fred is living under an assumed name, for the hotel-keeper and for Marcel.) Marcel, who has driven the owner of his hotel mad with jealousy, is kicked out. He goes looking for a new hotel, leaving his luggage at Fred's during the day. He needs a hotel with pretty chambermaids, and Fred's, which is full anyway, only has an old couple as domestic staff.

Fred has a plan. He suggests that he and Marcel go that evening to visit a couple of floozies he knows. They make a date. Fred will have a car, because the women live in the suburbs. When Marcel has left, Fred goes out, buys a second-hand car which he'll pick up at 8 p.m. He buys a map of London and its environs, a train schedule and two photos of naked women in equivocal poses. Returning home, he looks at the map and the schedule, taking a few notes. Writing with his left hand to disguise his handwriting, he puts a lewd dedication, supposedly to himself, on one of the photos: "To Fred...." He puts his fingerprints on the photo (which does not have the character of a mass-produced erotic photograph done in series: it seems to have been taken by a rather clumsy amateur). He soils the photo and wears it down against a cement wall to make it look used and old.

In the evening, Fred and Marcel stop in a deserted spot outside London near a railway. They have another drink. Marcel is quite drunk. Fred shows him the second photo, which he says is of one of the women they're on

their way to meet, and when Marcel is looking at it he bashes him over the head and drags him onto the tracks. He cleans out his pockets: identity papers, etc., puts the photo dedicated to Fred back in Marcel's pocket with other small objects, change, etc. Fred consults his watch: still ten minutes to wait. He crushes Marcel's fingers and face with stones, then lays him on the rails at the moment an express appears in the distance. The train runs over Marcel.

Bokin, liaising with the police, learns that the body found on the London-to-Birmingham line has been identified as Fred, thanks to fingerprints on the photo dedicated to him; he also learns that Fred was drunk (from the autopsy), which in part explains the accident.

Paulon is relieved on hearing of Fred's death, but asks Bokin to continue his search. Jean has been released. Bokin still has two suspects: Josephin and Cesky. He has them watched.

Now in possession of Marcel's identity papers, Fred calls himself *Marcel*. He moves his and his victim's things to a house surrounded by a beautiful garden near London. He lies low and doesn't attract the attention of the police as Marcel. He acts as his victim would and informs the solicitor of his change of address (as his victim frequently did). However, he blackmails Paulon with a typewritten letter. He says he is a friend of Fred who knows the real part Paulon played at the time when Fred was condemned, and that he has proof. In an envelope that Fred kept and retrieved from his old lodgings, there is a hastily scrawled note by Paulon. Paulon, the cashier, learnt when he arrived at his bank that a certain debt collector was to transport a large sum.

To warn Fred, he had no other, faster way than to pass him the information written on a banknote, which he handed over the counter as if Fred were an ordinary customer. Fred killed the debt collector and split the money with Paulon. If Paulon wants this kept quiet, he'll have to pay out a large sum. A meeting is arranged for a particular evening.

Paulon, frightened and hoping to get back the compromising piece of evidence, goes to the meeting. He gives a large sum of money to Fred, who remains invisible in the shadows of his car. Fred doesn't want to part with the evidence yet, and tells Paulon to expect another letter. Fred goes back to the music hall; he'd seen the beginning of the show and now watches the end, after his return from the meeting.

Paulon doesn't know what to do and finally confesses to Bokin and asks him to try and get the compromising note back.

Bokin goes back to Jure, who doesn't know of any old friends of Fred. She only knew Irma. Bokin learns from Irma that Fred was very friendly with Georges. Bokin finds Georges pushing drugs. Georges thinks Bokin is after

him because of his illegal business and beats him up with the help of two killers. Bokin, because of the pain, tells Georges that Irma told him where Georges was and that he is only trying to solve a case that has nothing to do with Georges. Bokin is left in a cellar, from which he manages to escape.

Josephin goes up to see Irma. She has been murdered by Georges's two killers as a punishment for talking. The two killers bring Josephin to Jure's and kill them both because they talk too much too.

Irma's concierge saw Josephin go up to Irma's, but didn't see anyone come down until the crime was discovered. (The killers went up with Josephin and went down by the fire escape.) The police believe Josephin is guilty and go to Jure's, where they know he lives. Downstairs, the police are welcomed with sneers: Josephin and Jure are having a ball in their room. The police find them lying in a pool of blood.

Bokin knows that someone has taken the law into their own hands and doesn't concern himself with these murders. Paulon has arranged another meeting with his blackmailer (to add to the insufficient sum of the first time). Bokin goes to the meeting.

The false Marcel arrives (leaving the theatre as before; if necessary, he'll explain that his presence in that spot was due to a violent stomach cramp which forced him to leave the theatre and stop for a moment outside a doctor's house). Bokin and his assistant force Marcel to take them to his residence. They cannot see the dark garden very well: they can just make out a sickly tree with dead leaves among the healthy ones. In the house, they search for the typewriter, Edmonde's jewels and Paulon's note. They ransack the place. No luck. In the morning, Bokin has his doubts and lets the false Marcel go, promising to keep a watch on him. Bokin and his assistant leave the house. Bokin approaches the sickly tree and discovers a hiding place. He scrapes off a piece of bark fixed to an iron plaque carefully blocking a hollow in the tree. At that moment, Marcel bashes Bokin's assistant on the head, grabs his revolver and shoots Bokin. Bokin is hit in the leg, shoots the false Marcel, who has run out of bullets and who manages to escape in his car.

In the hiding place, Bokin finds the typewriter, jewels and Paulon's note, which he puts in his wallet. He phones the police and hands over the jewels, proof that the false Marcel murdered Edmonde.

An alert is put out over the police radios for the false Marcel.

Bokin finds Paulon terrorized. Bokin learns that Fred has taken refuge in Paulon's house. There's a battle in which Paulon is killed by Fred. Fred, overpowered, is handed over to the police. He's sent back behind bars for good.

Undated Texts

IV

The criterion for what must be painted is a negative one, but it is certain: what must be painted must not be reducible to any justification that reason or un-reason may furnish. What must be painted escapes in this way – like the Universe – from an absolute justification (for the Universe, being the All, is the Absolute). *

Undated Texts

V

I saw some photographs of a woman and a child and I had an inkling that the woman was the mother of the child.*

Remarks

The remarks which follow are gathered here not in the order of their being stated – which cannot always be ascertained – but in the order of their date of first publication.

1943

1.

Sometimes a portrait tries to look like its model. But, said Magritte, one might wish that the model tried to look like his portrait.

In Paul Nougé, *René Magritte ou Les images défendues*, Brussels, Auteurs Associés, 1943, p. 42 (W 202).

2.

“And Magritte, who willingly handles the juicy irony of Hegelian jargon, confided in me that he now considers he has got over anything that he saw as ‘metaphysical’ in his previous painting; he added, half-serious, half-joking: ‘Doubtless this is the first step towards a new synthesis.’ Then he roared with laughter.”

In Marcel Mariën, *Magritte*, Brussels, Auteurs Associés, 1943, p. 14 (W 199).

1945

I challenge this folkloric art that the fascists are always defending. Art-for-the-people is false, because it rests on a superficial view. I too am of the people. What a painter must do is to see the man under his worker’s clothes. This is what Courbet did when he painted *Les Casseurs de pierres*, a work that caused a scandal among the habitués of painting, because the subject was new. Besides, I myself have often met with more understanding from workers than from the most refined aesthetes. As for the snobs, they instantly applauded the activities of the Surrealists, because they had to be “with it”. Today they are lulled by the pitiful chants of Existentialism, and tomorrow...

In Christian Dotremont, ‘Nos peintres: René Magritte’, in *Clarté*, Brussels, No. 50, 16th Dec. 1945, p. 4.

1947

“An avid, though not excessive, lover of ruins, Magritte, having heard of a bomber that had crashed in a field near his home, made this the goal of his walk. Arriving at the scene of the disaster, after a cursory inspection of the shattered vehicle, he decides to go into the cockpit. He finds two young people there, curious like him, and as he hears them talking he realizes that they are both students at the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Then, interrupting their discussion: ‘Goodness, I dabble in art too!’ Then, without pausing – the war near yet far, the enormous plane smashed to bits, the jagged roof of the cockpit breaking the sky and light above his head into fragments, the recklessness and responsibility of all of it – in order to rid himself of the sumptuous absurdity of his situation and carry it to its supreme perfection, he gives the coup de grâce to the Universe: ‘I am the *famous* painter Magritte,’ he said.”

In Marcel Mariën, *Les Corrections naturelles*, Brussels, Sélection, 1947, p. 94 (W 263).

1956

What moves me in the harmonious colonnades of Ancient Greece is not their beauty but their poetry.

Quoted by Jacques Guyaux in his review in *Journal de Charleroi*, 7th March 1956 (W 533a).

1959

“Magritte makes light of the quarrels surrounding his work. To a critic who was revelling in them, he objected: ‘So, you prefer what I clothe my painting with to any meaning it might have?’”

Jean Vanparys, *Magritte ou Le Prestige des images* – see ‘Jan Walravens: Meeting with Magritte’.

1960

I.

“Our opening conversation was stilted – even more so because the artist spoke no English. I asked him where he painted. He pointed to the spotless easel and said he worked there. I asked him if he didn’t get paint on the carpet. He looked puzzled; no, the paint he applied to canvas. And he never just slapped any of it around? More confusion: no, for he had thought out in advance what he would do with it...”

“I see you like chairs too. I like them very much, but sometimes I worry that they do not seem completely happy. Then I think of giving them tails. Now we are more content. [*Une Simple Histoire d’amour*]

“[Two days later]: Upholstered chairs. Have not the need, they are self-sufficient. But wooden chairs – ah, how much happier is their lot with the comfort, the balance of a tail!...

“That window! How it bores me! So – so rectangular! One would think that the builder, as he came to the very last one, might have been moved to put it in another way – on the bias, for example. Some day I may have to do it for myself [*Les Rencontres naturelles*].”

Marguerite Cullman, *Ninety Dozen Glasses*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1960, pp. 208–13 (W 676). These visits with Magritte took place in 1958.

2.

I don’t know how to talk, I can only paint a bit.

In André Marc, review of a preview of an exhibition in Liège (W 720) in *La Meuse-La Lanterne*, 17th Oct. 1960.

1962

1.

“The mystery is still intact,” said Magritte, “even if death is only death.” He also said, “God is going to die.”

In Louis Scutenaire: ‘À la santé du bûcheron’, in *Rhétorique*, No. 4, Jan. 1962, p. 10 (W 833).

2.

“As reported by Albert Landry,* who visited Magritte in Europe last month, Magritte says that his images are ‘discovered and imperative; they correspond to a portion of truth in so far as it is given to him to perceive the truth. If there is a lack of logic in terms of normal relationships, then this only points up the lack of reality of what we call the appearance of things.’ According to Magritte, ‘The image can only express the reality of mystery – it cannot explain’, and the term *fantasy* is appropriate for what we call the normal appearance of things, but cannot apply to the reality expressed by the image perceived poetically and recorded in all fidelity.”

John Canaday, ‘When You Call Me Good, Smile’ in the *New York Times*, 25th March 1962.

[...]

RENÉ MAGRITTE

1965

1.

If I must “interpret” this image [*L’Imprudent*], I would say (for example) that the appearance of the person rediscovers its mysterious virtue when it is accompanied by its reflection. In effect: a person appearing does not evoke its own mystery except at the appearance of its appearance.

Suzi Gablik, ‘Meta-trompe-l’œil’, in *Art News*, March 1965, p. 47 (W 962).

2.

At Geert Van Bruaene’s* funeral there were three of us: Léonce Rigot,* Jean Vanparys and me. All of Brussels, eh?

In Patrick Waldberg, *René Magritte*, Brussels, de Rache, 1965, p. 218.

3.

“It’s magnificent, isn’t it?” or “I think this one is very beautiful,” Magritte used to say, a bit like a child, dazzled by his first page of writing. Sometimes, on the other hand, faced with an old work he hadn’t seen for a while, he would grimace: “That’s not to be shown.” But if the person he was talking to insisted, rebelled, he would nod in his turn.

Ibid., p. 257.

4.

The thought expressed in my work is absolute... It can’t be interpreted. In my painting, a bird is a bird. And a bottle is a bottle, not a symbol of a womb.

‘Illogical Logic’ in *Time*, 31st Dec. 1965, p. 74 (a review of the Magritte exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York).

1967

1.

I believe Victor Hugo said: “We only ever see one side of things.”* Now it is precisely “the other side” that I try to express.

Pierre Cabanne, ‘Magritte, un bourgeois surréaliste dont l’imagination fantastique se nourrissait du quotidien le plus banal’, in *Lectures pour tous*, Paris, no. 167, Nov. 1967, pp. 45–52.

2.

“Magritte was courageous to the end. Monday afternoon, one of his last words were: ‘I wonder if I’ll come through.’”

‘*Magritte parle de sa peinture*’, montage from ‘*Life Line*’ of 1940, Jacques Wergifosse, in *La Meuse-La Lanterne*, 17th Aug. 1967.

3.

He sometimes gave a brilliant answer to a mediocre question: to someone who asked him if people commissioned pictures from him, he said that he'd like that, but no one ever suggested the kind of images he paints. "Every time I have to commission myself," he concluded.

One afternoon, Magritte invites us to describe *Le Domaine d'Arnheim* to him. As we hesitate, Magritte helps us: "You see in the foreground a little wall with a nest containing eggs... Will you describe this work [the first state of *La Page blanche*]?"

In the distance you can make out the lit windows of a house ...

"Yes, very good," Magritte declares with a (mocking?) smile, in the voice of an old-fashioned school teacher pleased with his pupil... "Go on..."

In the middle of the starry sky, the quarter-moon is shining. There are leaves hanging at the same height as the moon: one of them seems to be partly cut out. (A pause. Magritte looks at us in silence.) I don't know why the leaf in front of the moon is cut out.

"In front of the moon?" says Magritte in an almost inaudible voice...

"We'll ask Mademoiselle to describe the picture for us."

The young girl talks of big leaves laid out in the sky, in front of the moon.

"In front of the moon? You did say in front of the moon?"

Yes, in front of the moon.

"Ah! Ah!" says Magritte with feigned naivety. "In front of the moon. So the leaves are in front of the moon?"

Of course, the moon is behind the leaves.

"Well – it's a failure then," Magritte declares abruptly. "Because I wanted to show leaves behind the moon."

In fact, the quarter-moon hid part of a leaf, which we mistakenly thought was cut out and which obviously was behind the moon. Soon afterwards, Magritte painted a full moon in order to remove all ambiguity. Back to the living room. The young girl is astounded by the image:

"I like to see leaves hiding the moon."

"I too like to see leaves hiding the moon," Magritte concedes, "but if we saw some behind the moon, that would be unheard of: life would finally have a meaning!"

...The last time we met Magritte, we searched through his whole library with him. We were looking for de Chirico's *Hebdomeros*. We

RENÉ MAGRITTE

couldn't find it. "I must have lost it. I am not very orderly," repeated the painter.

Carl Waï (Charles Flamand), 'Magritte' in *Le Patriote illustré*, Brussels, 27th Aug. 1967, p. 2034.

1968

I.

"The custom-tailored man is... the perfectionist epitomized by René Magritte's painting (above) entitled *The Pilgrim*. When asked, 'What does it mean?', Magritte – who died in his native Brussels last summer – answered: 'Man and his clothes are indivisible. The problem? Making one *fit* the other... and both swing together.'"

Patrick O'Higgins, 'The Custom-Tailored Man', in *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1968.

2.

Furthermore, when Breton returned from America with the cover of the second edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* [W 215], which had a reproduction of Magritte's famous shoes in it, this painting suddenly took on considerable importance in the art market. A lady came to Magritte's house to ask him if the picture was for sale. He answered calmly: "It has already been sold, but I can make you a copy." That's Magritte for you.

André Souris, 'Paul Nougé et ses complices', in Ferdinand Alquié, *Entretiens sur le surréalisme*, Paris and The Hague, Mouton, 1968, pp. 452–53.

1969

I.

Haven't you ever seen a man leaning over a parapet of a bridge, gazing at the water, and behind him a lion? No? Well, thanks to this picture, now you have.

A.V. in *Telémagazine*, Brussels, April 1969, p. 52.

2.

I went to the Uffizi in Florence – it's not bad, but it's better on postcards. Apart from that, there are a few good bits of painting, but mostly a lot of rubbish.

Anecdote reprinted and "interpreted" by Jean Dypréau, in the catalogue for the exhibition *D'après*, Lugano, 1971, pp. 30–31.

*

SELECTED WRITINGS

(Prevented from entering an exhibition at the Charpentier Gallery in 1964 [W 943], because he had his dog with him): But it's such a shame for little Loulou. Now he'll miss the Surrealists!

*

(Not charmed by the idea of a trip to New York, Magritte is tempted by the evocation of Edgar Allan Poe's house and squirrels in Central Park): That's at least worth a trip! They offered to show me around the United Nations Building. Can you believe it! They want to show me around offices!

*

(Magritte declines a dinner invitation from a "prince who professes to love Magritte's painting" [Charles of Belgium]): I'm sorry, but I can't come. My wife is expecting me. She's made rabbit in plum sauce.

That's no problem, responds his interlocutor, telephone Madame and ask her to join us.

Vexed, because he'd just made up the story of the rabbit, Magritte goes to the phone, dials a random number, shouts "Hello! Hello!" then, after a moment, hangs up:

No one's responding at my house; perhaps something's happened to Georgette; I'll have to go and see at once.

*

(He refuses an invitation to a royal garden party. He telephones the Grand Marshal of the Court): He can't accept the invitation because he's just burnt a hole in his dinner jacket with a cigarette...

*

(To one of the daughters of the former King of Italy [Princess Maria Beatrice], at the preview of his exhibition at Iolas's in Paris, Nov. 1964 [W 954], who had just driven him back to this hotel and wanted to help him out of the car): No, no, m'dear, that'll do. Well, bye and thanks.

*

Works of art, daubs, are made on canvas. Bottles are made for holding liquids and to be flung in the dustbin when they're empty, not to be painted. That's enough of bottles!

(Magritte hadn't reckoned with one of those staunch art lovers, a Chicago lawyer,* who cabled him to ask the price of a bottle): Let's have a laugh, said Magritte. I'll say 100,000 francs.

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(That was a huge figure at that time, and he assumed it would put the art enthusiast off. In reply to the letter, a second telegram arrived which said: “I’ll take two.”)

*

(Asked to paint the portrait of a retired bank president): I’d like to, but it’ll cost 400,000 francs.

*

(To a woman who insisted on acquiring one of his works): Well, Madame, how good of you, how nice, but I’ve promised it to Mr X.

Louis Scutenaire, ‘Pour illustrer Magritte’ in *FA.*, nos. 24–25, Aug. 1969.

3.

“So, his initial words, when we met for the first time, were:

“‘Do you play?’ (Referring to chess.)

“And I was, alas, obliged to respond:

“‘Non!’”

Maurice Rapin, *Bulletin of the Tendence Populaire Surréaliste*, 10th Oct. 1969. See *La Destination*, letter no. 93.

1970

[...]

When I go off on a journey the best moment is when I come back.* In music, I don’t go further than Debussy and Ravel. (But he sometimes asks Georgette: “Play me Satie’s *Gymnopédies*.”)

There’s a mystery in the universe – but what?

Let’s not talk about it... (he would say of death).

‘En écoutant Georgette Magritte’, in René Passeron, *René Magritte*, Paris, Filipacchi-Odège, 1970.

1971

Anecdote about a crime novel:

“You would do well to read *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*,”* René Magritte advised Jean Paulhan when asked for his answer to the *Savoir vivre* questionnaire.

Two days later, Paulhan’s reply: “I’ve read *No Orchids*... It’s damn boring.”

SELECTED WRITINGS

*

Anecdote about the cinema:

About a film by Clouzot, which introduced the actress Suzy Delair playing opposite Jouvét,* Magritte only remembered the former, because she gave him the impression of one of those Parisian women who live exclusively on charcuterie.

*

Anecdote about the circus:

Magritte observed one day, about the circular layout adopted by the circus since its origins, that the spectacle of the circus invariably takes place for the spectator in front of a décor of spectators.

Marcel Mariën, in *Les Lèvres nues*, new series, no. 4 (FA . no. 55), Dec. 1971. p. 1.

1972

I.

The painting of Rachel Baes* is the world of Marcel Proust.

In the catalogue for the Rachel Baes exhibition, Brussels, Robert Finck Gallery, 12–30th Apr. 1972.

2.

A sea bursting into flames – now that interests me, he laughed derisively.

Claude Spaak, in the catalogue to the *Magritte-Delvaux-Gnoli* exhibition, Bourges, 17th June 1972. (About a picture showing a beach accidentally set on fire at Spaak's house when Magritte was there.)

1973

I.

“René imagines that the use of metaphor in language probably corresponds to a profound desire to change the habitual order of things. To say ‘a sky of gold’ or ‘a sky of blood’ implies the wish that it really was that, and even the belief that it is for an instant. But this wish is immediately countered by a contrary feeling: fear. ‘The conflict is soon resolved by the notion of metaphor itself as a “linguistic device”, a safety valve and pastime for exegetes. ‘An explanation of my painting,’ continues René, ‘could be deduced from this process; all you need to do is omit the last sentence. If I paint a sky of blood it really is that. It is not a metaphor.’”

Letter from André Souris to Paul Nougé, 25th Apr. 1932, published in *L.S.*, letter no. 198.

2.

It remains a total mystery, he affirmed, even if death is only death.

Again on the subject of death, I told him, towards the end of the '39-'45 war, that, according to some people, Benjamin Péret* had died in Mexico. "That damned Péret," he said, laughing. "Trust him to play a joke like that."*

If I told him of my reservations about the moral integrity of some party leader or other, he answered that this was unimportant, the personal leanings of the leaders having no bearing on the party's actions. And in order to convince me, he added that if I had to have my balls cut off, I wouldn't give a damn whether my doctor was a villain or not.*

Magritte, who has always complained of being tired and bored, used to like saying: "The man who works hardest is not necessarily the most tired, nor is the man whose days are full necessarily the one who's least bored..."

Original text by Scutenaire: '*Au fil des années, avec René Magritte*', published in English translation by Barbara Wright, in the catalogue to the Magritte exhibition, London, Marlborough Gallery, Oct.–Nov. 1973, pp. 11–14.

3.

Two dead painters; a recollection:

One day in 1942, Magritte tells me that he had just seen Delvaux, who was excited because he was getting ready to paint a dream his wife had had the night before. It was *Le Village des sirènes*: a street by the sea full of women in closely buttoned long dresses, all sitting on chairs outside their houses.

And Magritte added triumphantly: "Now you see, he is not even able to dream for himself!"

Marcel Mariën in *Les Lèvres nues*, new series, no. 7 (F.A. no. 100), Nov. 1973.

1974

1.

It's a role [that of a family man] that doesn't suit me, and the garden is quite big enough for the children we don't have.

Stan Laurysens, '*Le Modèle du maître*', interview with Georgette Magritte, in *Panorama*, Antwerp, no. 32, 6th Aug. 1974, p. 29.

SELECTED WRITINGS

But one must think a little too.

Sentence written in the visitors' book of the Galerie Les Contemporains, Mont-des-Arts, on the occasion of the exhibition of Fernand Poncelet, Oct.–Nov. 1955, and published in *+*—*o*, Brussels, no. 6, Dec. 1974, under the title 'Phrase inédite de René Magritte'.

1978

Lights are blazing in the author's* room in the Hotel Ruhl.

I'll turn them off, says Magritte, I can't stand waste!

He tells the story of the little bearded priest he met at the Post Office and invited home; he sees *La Magie noire*: "I didn't know men and women were made differently, but recently, while administering the last rites, when I was anointing the dying woman's feet, the sheet slipped."

In Torczyner's *Magritte*, 2nd July 1964, p. 173.

Knowledge of the World

(Some Notes on Magritte's Painting)

The description of inspired thought makes possible the attainment of visible poetry.

– Magritte

We are responsible for the universe.

– Noug 

In art, as in all human works, it's the content that plays the decisive role.

– Hegel

A work of art should always teach us that we have not seen what we've been looking at.

– Val ry

We hope that those who look at the paintings of Magritte are above all attentive to what they are thinking of while they are looking; we also hope that such thoughts be necessary thoughts for them.

– Scutenaire

Painting has continued to “evolve” since Courbet’s realism: Impressionism, Expressionism, Fauvism and Cubism have been followed by Mondrian’s abstract art. And yet, this evolution was, in reality, a succession of different manners of seeing the art of painting as regards its strictly formal aspect: the only minimal freedom allowed was in *how to paint*; what was painted had little importance, if any. Reality itself was not called into question; now, for this reality to be called into question, we need the poet’s freedom. The various ways of exploring how to paint were exhausted around 1910, with Mondrian’s painting. Indeed, abstract paintings today are merely facile imitations, mere academic exercises.

Consequently, if we were to go on painting, the importance attached to *how to paint* had to be shifted to the importance of a presence which is not incidental: the importance of the world and of thought. De Chirico was the first to conceive a painting that is a direct revelation of this presence.

Ignorance of this kind of painting is such that de Chirico is doubtless thought of as an “interesting” painter, among others, but who has now been “left behind” by pseudo-research, seen as progress, and which in truth merely turns out to be poor imitations of what he was doing in 1910.

No progress is to be envisaged in the directions opened out by de Chirico; better than progress, it gives access to the fertility of the world and of thought. Magritte’s painting has not failed to participate; that’s the least we can say, and this in itself invites us to acknowledge his inestimable value.

*

“From the most accurate figuration he arouses the strange,” write the journalists. If Magritte has only given us the “strange” – some say the “fantastic” – then his paintings join the lineage of Hieronymus Bosch and James Ensor, who attempted to entertain, perhaps to enchant, without however claiming to give us *knowledge of the world*... For the “strange” merely allows “evasion”, is only a “means of escaping from reality”. Magritte’s images, on the contrary, demonstrate the power of figures in the world at the heart of the real, and define poetry that cannot, like an arithmetical problem or like the “fantastic”, begin with certain given data and end in a solution to the problem. The “goal” of poetry does not exist; such a goal’s partial or complete achievement would be a foreign feat to poetry, which is carried on indefinitely in the fortunate form of a succession of images whose order eludes the poet.

If the adjective “strange” distorts and reduces Magritte’s thought, the same goes for a certain “originality” that some people claim to find, and that others propose to make use of. Indeed, this “originality” is incapable of making the figures of the world any more appealing; it is more likely to prevent them from remaining admirable; we are, unfortunately, acquainted with furniture and other everyday objects that have been rendered monstrous by the lovers of “originality”. Magritte only bears in mind the existence of the figures offered by the world, and not their various fashionable or trendy aspects, which he can’t stand.

It is not only these figures offered by the world that hold the painter’s attention, but also the choice that has to be made. Nougé writes: “What then are the objects that are most important to man? Without fail, the most common ones. The importance of an object for a human being is in direct relation to its banality.” A picture is a new light depending on what it evokes. The author of a poem avoids such words as slalom, laundry, gas, etc. – by the same token, the painter does not show what has topical or scientific value. And this choice will not be subjective: if the poet’s inspiration is genuine, it reveals to him what must be painted.

*

“It is with words that titles are given to images. But these words cease to remain familiar or strange when they name the image aptly. Inspiration is needed to say and to hear them.”

*

In the image of a person standing up, with the caption “person seated”, the word “seated” means “placed on a chair”; so the word “seated” is not to be understood in a “figurative” sense which would imply “prosperity”. The *literal* sense, which excludes allegory, is the only one to be considered; it belongs to a *personal* language and demands the presence of mind that distinguishes common speech from the secret language of authenticity. Common speech is the dead language that deprives words of their necessary life. The language of authenticity “gives voice” to words by making them say what they have never said before and which must be said. (The word always has the same literal sense, but here it’s a question of what it says in the literal sense in certain conditions.)

*

If figures meet in paintings in order to be brought to life, it happens that images – painted or drawn – meet with poetry. It is the meeting of two powers responding to each other, but there’s no intention to translate like the Épinal print* explains and comments. It’s not a question here of illustrations “supporting” a text; regarding poetry, explanation and interpretation are always silliness, whatever their more or less bright appearance. Magritte’s paintings are neither signs nor rebuses.

“Abstract” painters often hear the question: “What does it represent?” and one can get lost in a maze of literary explanations which we have nothing to say about, anyway; this question, asked of one of Magritte’s paintings, merely means “How should I understand it?”, because it is quite obvious if we look, for example, at *La Colère des Dieux*, that we are seeing a car and a horse which do not leave us indifferent. And this question of “understanding” would not be asked if people knew that it was a matter of seeing the image, and not a case of sterile intellectualizing through coarse symbols that the poet can do nothing with. Therefore, there is only one way to answer the question “What does it represent?”, at the risk of not satisfying; people must know that a painting by Magritte “represents” or “means” exactly the faithful description that can be made of it. At most, we can define Magritte’s thought: speech can describe in words what the eyes are looking at, even if silence would be better suited to accuracy.

And yet, although we think that “explanations” which detract from the image and from the only possible meaning – which is the image itself – are “naive” or “stupid”, some people think that psychoanalysis, thanks to its scientific discipline, can take the liberty of “explaining”. The psychoanalyst’s interpretation looks for a kind of diagnosis, and Magritte can get on very well without the imaginary biographies given by the scholars who analyse his pictures. And it’s not a question of taking into account “competence” or the “seriousness” of these scholars. “The nature of mystery annihilates curiosity. Psychoanalysis has nothing to say about works of art that evoke the mystery of the world. Perhaps psychoanalysis is the best subject to be treated by psychoanalysis.” Besides, poets, who have nothing to say about psychoanalysis, aren’t very concerned with what psychoanalysts have to say about poetry.

We are not looking for “arguments” in favour of poetry; to find these arguments – if that were possible – would testify to a concern for superfluous justification. Poetry is not explainable, it is thought, written, painted. As for the interpretations that sully thought, they cannot be accurate or inaccurate, they are necessarily extraneous to images that do not symbolize anything, that do not express any idea. “If you believe that a painting expresses a feeling or states an idea, you might just as well believe, for instance, that the cake eaten with pleasure expresses this pleasure.” Images do not invite us to “look for ideas”. The poet can only be sensitive to ideas when ideas alone are in question (with Hegel, for example). If an image has an underlying “idea”, it is useless, and it’s a shame to recognize this image, for then it is merely the illustration of an idea and loses its right as an image. You can only write that the inspired poet “has an idea” if he thinks of an image about which we would have absolutely nothing to say, except about the image itself. Colinet writes of the picture *La Parabole*: “The white house is all black. The black house is all white. They have the genius to look alike. Each one lives inside the other. They hold bright stars. They never move.” Lecomte writes about another painting, *La Cascade*: “Even the absence of a step in the shadow of his landscape materializes”; thus, better than an analysis or an explanation, language cannot disappoint us.

*

Painted images are invisible, cannot be known, if we look at the colouring products with which they have been painted. These products, the “materials”, don’t acquire any new characteristics when they have been handled by a painter; they are, however, no longer interesting in themselves, they lose their actual appearance to let the image of thought appear. Consequently,

no attention should be paid to the “materials” if we really want to know what they have been used for.

*

If images pose “problems”, whether it’s a matter of knowing how to show a cloud, a chair... how to arrange a house, etc., these problems have to be solved the moment the painter clashes with “materials”. His work is accomplished with knowledge of the image. As for working with canvas, glue, brushes and other tools, that’s just the birth of a contact, it is only layout.

Magritte has nothing in common with the aesthete except the use of the same techniques, which can only give him what spelling gives the writer, what metal gives the blacksmith. Scutenaire writes very aptly: “Magritte is a great painter. Magritte is not a painter.” And elsewhere: “He did not wish to serve painting, but to use it as an instrument of knowledge.” So, for Magritte, painting is a trial in the sense where it only corresponds with the use of materials which are indifferent; and painting is a perfect enchantment in the sense where it allows communication of *the* poetry which is neither lyrical, nor burlesque, nor esoteric, but which is lucid and necessary. Thought made manifest offers infinite possibilities that Magritte has been seeking since his first picture. What he so perfectly names “mystery” is thus evoked. Without images it would remain unknown and lost. “Mystery is not one of the possibilities of reality; mystery is necessary in order for reality to exist.”

Mystery seizes us. It is not to be “seized” like something we can study more or less calmly.

Painted images that evoke mystery are like the world when it is not understood as “spectacle”. “A viewer” believes himself “outside the world”, like the dreamer who knows he is dreaming, yet believes he is outside his dreams.

It is not possible to be seized by the feeling of mystery if you dream or if you know you’re dreaming. The evocation of mystery cuts through habitual thought patterns that imagine questions and answers, mostly of little interest.

Mystery does not imply any corresponding sense of optimism, nor any non-sense tied to pessimism. (Mystery doesn’t have a sense or a non-sense, since sense and non-sense can be defined.)

The painted images that invoke mystery affirm the beauty of what is neither sense nor non-sense; this beauty is distinct from the beauty of wisdom or reason. It comprehends the mixed diversity of good and evil, without denying this diversity in favour of total harmony; on the contrary,

this beauty accentuates contrasts. Light and shadow no longer belong to a systematized world ruled by abstract laws; they are united in an order that evokes the mystery of light and shadow.

The evocation of mystery is not to be confused with a “means” to an end, such as, for example, “the point where contradictions cease”, given by Breton as the supreme goal to reach. The evocation of mystery does not renounce anything contradictory and must be distinguished from a form of aesthetic appeasement. Mystery’s beauty is incompatible with intellectual hesitation. This beauty restores to light and shadow their violent contradictions (which vanish from the mind that is dreaming or knows it’s dreaming).

Systems live in the world of dream and in the unreal. Mystery, resistant to the demands of any system, can only be evoked by accomplishing the essential activity of thought: that of being like the world and its mystery.

The painter can forget the finished picture, which belongs already to a past, whose future can have no further expectations. Other images, still unknown, will come to assert their power.

A means to knowledge, poetry helps us to live in the mystery where we exist; it would only have a very relative value if it were merely a delight to the senses or the spirit.

*

“Art critics”, writing of Raphael’s and Gauguin’s “genius”, try to prove that these artists are technically superior to others whom they consider to be less skilful, less fertile. The *genius* of Magritte’s painting is of another kind: it is like a fact, like a state without comparative value; it describes the accuracy of thought, and does not describe a style of painting or powers of invention. “How to show a glass of water in a picture so that it is not indifferent, fanciful or arbitrary?” The *genius* of Magritte’s painting is perfectly obvious, as it allows the poet to paint only what he must, without fantasy, so that image and thought coincide.

How can an image be “better” or “less good” than another image, if both images evoke mystery? And how can a “famous” image sharpen someone’s awareness better than a lesser-known image? To allow oneself to admire in so nuanced a fashion two pictures which, although different, convey a sense of mystery, is to prefer one’s personal tastes to the power of having preferences.

Sometimes, the obviousness of images results in “shock” suffered by the person looking at them; perhaps this facile word would be less troubling if we qualified it as *permanent*. As for the birth of the image, by the painter’s inspiration, it does not depend on a systematic method; the

image is spontaneously known, arising involuntarily even if its appearance has been preceded by a patient search. Magritte has a sketch in which *La Folie Almayer* is at the research stage; the roots of the tower are still vague. Let's also give the example of *Les Vacances de Hegel*: "I began by sketching lots of glasses of water, every time with a line on the glass; this line, after the 100th or 150th sketch, opened out and took on the form of an open umbrella which had subsequently been put into the glass and, in the end, underneath the glass. Then I thought that Hegel would have been very sensitive to that object with two opposing functions: to repel water and to contain it simultaneously. Perhaps he would have been delighted or amused; so I call the picture *Les Vacances de Hegel*."

*

If a simple image is complicated for pleasure, it responds more to a concern for fantasy than for attentive freedom, which is a necessity for the mind. So, a door dug out of an opening that lets people enter and exit is both simple and complex. It's not a question of complicating this image by overloading it with uninteresting details, merely to gratify a taste for pomposity; nor is it a question of hanging the image from an airplane or the ceiling of a room...

*

To the detriment of "style", which is simply perfect in Magritte's pictures, it is exclusively a matter of revealing the world, of presenting it for itself and not for the "qualities" which make it usual and therefore prevent it from being seen, from being known. Until being used, the chair, the streetlamp, the cloud are ignored by the crowds and by the man. Before they help man to rest, light public streets, produce rain, these shapes from the world are first and foremost chair, lamp, cloud. Magritte's paintings disclose this simple and neglected obviousness. "Art," Hegel rightly thought, "is cheapened if it imitates the natural and the psychological; it must not imitate the world but reveal it."

This unpublished manuscript is a sort of "testament" that Magritte himself sanctioned. The correspondence between Magritte and Bosmans from 9th Dec. 1963–22nd Oct. 1965 shows that they were working on the text together. The first draft was by Bosmans, but he rewrote it on ten occasions to take into account remarks and suggestions by Magritte. Bosmans writes to Blavier, on 20th Oct. 1973: "If it is published one day, my name must not be mentioned, because ultimately even my collaboration is stamped with Magritte's 'thought'; it is well and truly his text."

Notes

- p. vii, *Guy Rosey*: Guy Rosey (1896–1981) was a French Surrealist poet who fled Nazi persecution in 1942. After the war, he resumed his career as a poet. His correspondence with Magritte was collected in the volume *Letters to Guy Rosey, 1963–1966*.
- p. xi, *Paul Nougé*: Paul Nougé (1895–1967) was a Belgian poet, and the founder and theoretician of Surrealism in Belgium, sometimes known as the “Belgian Breton”.
- p. xi, *Camille Goemans, E.L.T. Mesens, Louis Scutenaire and Marcel Lecomte*: Camille Goemans (1900–60) was a poet and friend of Magritte’s from 1923 onwards. In 1928, with Paul Nougé, he founded the magazine *Distances*, to which Magritte was a contributor, and in 1929 he and Magritte published *Le Sens propre*, a series of tracts exploring the relationship between image and text. Through the Lou Cosyn Gallery, founded in Brussels in 1942, Goemans was Magritte’s main art dealer before the latter began to work with the Greek-American dealer Alexander Iolas in 1946. E.L.T. Mesens (1903–71) was a Belgian Surrealist artist, musician, writer, publisher and gallery owner, who organized the first Surrealist exhibition in Belgium in 1934. He was a lifelong friend of Magritte. Louis Scutenaire (1905–87) was a Belgian poet, anarchist and civil servant. A central figure in Belgian Surrealism, he was a close friend, collaborator and correspondent of Magritte. He was often invited to give titles to new works by Magritte (170 of which still bear Scutenaire’s titles). He was also the model for the figure in Magritte’s *Universal Gravitation*. Marcel Lecomte (1900–66) was a Belgian writer and member of the Belgian Surrealist movement. Credited by Magritte as an early and enduring artistic inspiration.
- p. xix, *Louis Quiévreux*: Louis Quiévreux (1902–69) was a Belgian writer and journalist. During the Second World War he became a correspondent for several British newspapers. In 1946, he began writing for the Brussels daily *La Lanterne*, during which time he interviewed Magritte. Later, he wrote books on Belgian folklore, dialects, art and culture.
- p. xxii, *Paul Colinet’s*: Paul Colinet (1898–1957) was a Belgian poet and writer and episodic collaborator with the Surrealists, who kept his distance politically. He was a close friend to the Magrittés, and contributed to Magritte’s Vache Period.
- p. 3, *Each thing must be said... Pierre Bourgeois*: The correct quotation is: “Each thing, according to its rhythm, must be said”, from *La Foi du doute*, Trèfle, p. 110. Pierre Bourgeois (1898–1976) was a Belgian poet and the creator of the weekly review *7 Arts*, whom Magritte met and became friends with in 1919.

- p. 3, *Subtitle of On the Basis of Morality... and NO PRIZE: Über die Grundlage der Moral [On the Basis of Morality]* (Frankfurt, 1841). Magritte cites the translation by Auguste Burdeau: *Le Fondement de la morale* (Paris: Alcan, 4th edn., 1907).
- p. 4, *Beauty is merely the anticipation of happiness: Stendhal, De l'Amour*, Book 1, Ch. 17.
- p. 8, *in order... mass production*: In 1922 Magritte was working at the Peters-Lacroix wallpaper factory in Haren, where Servranckx (see fourth note to p. 10) was the artistic director. On the subject of wallpaper, Maurice Casteels wrote in 7 *Arts* (11th Jan. 1923) of “the imminent disappearance of an industry that doesn’t correspond to any architectural, aesthetic or hygienic need”.
- p. 9, *Albert Gleizes*: Albert Gleizes (1881–1953) was a French artist, theoretician and philosopher. With Jean Metzinger, he wrote the first major treatise on Cubism, *Du Cubisme et des moyens de le comprendre* (Paris: Éditions La Cible, 1920).
- p. 10, *What one era thinks... Nietzsche: Beyond Good and Evil*, Ch. V.
- p. 10, *Success comes from the streets... Remy de Gourmont: Le Succès et l'idée de la beauté* (1901), reprinted in *Le Chemin de velours* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902), p. 157. Remy de Gourmont (1858–1915) was a French Symbolist poet, novelist and influential critic.
- p. 10, *In art... commonplace*: Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (Paris: La Sirène, 1918), reprinted in *Le Rappel à l'ordre* (Paris: Stock, 1926), p. 19.
- p. 10, *Victor Servranckx*: Victor Servranckx (1897–1965) was a Belgian abstract painter and designer. He met Magritte at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1916, and in 1922 they co-wrote ‘Pure Art: A Defence of the Aesthetic’.
- p. 11, *Norine*: Norine, née Honorine Deschrijver, wife of P.G. van Hecke, was the owner and director of a fashion house in Brussels; Magritte designed adverts for her, which appeared in *Variétés*, among other publications.
- p. 15, *MM. Victor BIENTENHOLZ, Pierre DUPUIS... and Paulus PROQUET*: According to Georgette Magritte, Bientenholz was an acquaintance of Magritte’s, an amateur painter of whom the latter would make fun. It is not clear whether Pierre Dupuis and Paulus Proquet were real or imaginary. Pierre Dupuis is possibly a reference to a French painter (1610–82), specializing in still lifes, and Proquet’s name appears in the contents of *Œsophage*. Michel Sanouillet, in *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), p. 46, claims that they are members of a Brussels group.
- p. 15, *URBAN PLANNING... demand all the strength*: A response to a poem by Mesens. Rose Amy was a cabaret singer of the time. Orsi (1889–1947) was a famous poster designer.

- p. 17, C.G.: The initials of the poet Camille Goemans (see second note to p. xi).
- p. 19, *Nick Carter*: Nick Carter (created in 1884 in New York by John Russell Coryell and Eugene T. Sawyer) is, like Nat Pinkerton, the hero of a dime novel.
- p. 26, “*Her Heart Is Mine...*”: In a letter to Nougé (*L.S.* no. 137) Magritte writes that this is “a more brutal attempt than before”, but thinks that “here, the brutality is not merely exterior.” In the catalogue of the exhibition *Six peintres Surréalistes*, Humlebaek, then Brussels, 1967, Jean Dyrpréau quotes a letter from Magritte (to Marcel Lecomte):

I have just sent a piece of prose and a drawing to Nougé for the third issue of *Distances*. You’ll see the drawing shows an attempted rape, the woman is visibly terrified. I have treated the subject, the terror that grips a woman, by resorting to subterfuge, by turning the laws of space inside out, this creates an effect quite different from the usual one.

Here it is roughly: the man grabs hold of the woman, he is in the foreground. Of course the man hides part of the woman, where he is in front of her, between her and us. But the point is the man stays within the outline of the woman.

The drawing: *L’Aube désarmée*, illustrating *Distances*, no. 3, was later entitled *Les Jours gigantesques*.

- p. 36, *L’Idée Fixe*: Henri Storck rediscovered this scenario and dates it from memory to 1936. This unpublished manuscript is included here, as it is impossible to date it precisely.
- p. 45, *just recently, once again the success of sordid visions*: See *Les Faits mystérieux de Beauraing* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer) from *Études carmélitaines* (1933, I), introduction by Bruno de Jésus-Marie, p. 9: “In Walloon Belgium, on the borders of the Ardenne and the Famenne, from 29th Nov. 1932 to 3rd Jan. 1933, five children between the ages of nine and fifteen apparently saw some thirty-three ‘visions’ of the Virgin Mary.”
- p. 46, *Reply to the Questionnaire on the Crisis in Painting*: Magritte’s reply is introduced by a commentary: “Magritte agrees with the Communist point of view. What does he think of the USSR’s ‘official art’ as it was shown to us, last summer, at the Venice Biennale? If one is Communist in art is one Surrealist in politics? At each step, a new understanding and a new ambiguity. The clarity of statements such as

- René Magritte's is merely superficial. But 'there are glimmers' which we are happy to catch in the mirror (the least distorting possible) of our questionnaire."
- p. 48, *Georges Braque... Beaux-Arts*: This exhibition ran from 24th Nov. to 13th Dec. 1936.
- p. 50, *Georges Rogy*: Georges Rogy (1897–1981) was a Belgian genre painter, portrait painter, still-life and landscape painter, who studied under Fabry, Richir and Montald at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.
- p. 50, *W. Bartoszewicz*: Włodzimierz Bartoszewicz (1899–1983) was a Polish painter, graphic artist, illustrator, set designer, caricaturist, portrait painter, genre painter, war painter and painter of sacred art.
- p. 50, *Alfred Wickenburg's*: Alfred Wickenburg (1885–1978) was an Austrian painter, engraver and graphic designer, who took inspiration from Cubism and Futurism..
- p. 57, *Titine*: Léontine, Georgette Magritte's sister.
- p. 59, "Freedom – the colour of man," cries André Breton: From the poem 'Il y a pas à sortir de là' ('There's no way out'), in *Clair de terre* (1923).
- p. 59, *he paints Le Chant d'amour, where we see a pair of boxing gloves*: These are in fact red surgeon's gloves. Magritte would correct this in subsequent versions.
- p. 59, *In his illustrations of Paul Éluard's Répétitions: Répétitions* (Paris: *Au Sans Pareil*, 1922).
- p. 59, *Derain*: André Derain (1880–1954) was a French artist, painter, sculptor. He was one of the founders, with Henri Matisse, of Fauvism.
- p. 59, *Duchamp, who simply... Rembrandt as an ironing board*: Marcel Duchamp, *Marchand de sel* (Paris, Terrain Vague, 1958), p. 44. See also his *La Mariée mise à nu* (1934) and André Breton and Paul Éluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1938), p. 33.
- p. 59, *a small provincial town*: Soignies, where Magritte stayed with his grandmother and two aunts.
- p. 60, *Then, by a curious stroke of luck, I was given... Futurist painters*: According to Waldberg, p. 84, it was Pierre Bourgeois who "doubtless... in 1919 gave Magritte an illustrated catalogue of Futurist painters", possibly from the *Grande Esposizione Nazionale Futurista* (Milan, then Genoa and Florence, 1919), with a preface by Marinetti.

- p. 61, *Paul Valéry seems to have felt like... viewer's eyes*: "Knowing that the level of the tranquil waters is horizontal, they do not realize that the sea stands up at the back of the view", in *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (Paris: NRF, 1919).
- p. 62, *he appears to be unaware... a reactionary minority*: Allusion to the politics of "non-intervention", then to the fall of the Popular Front government.
- p. 62, "When we have conquered on a world scale... biggest cities in the world.": 'On the Role of Gold Today and after the Victory of Socialism', in *Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language Editions, 1948), vol. 11, pp. 918–25.
- p. 63, "Certainly I have won the world war... realm of art": The quotation cannot be traced and is considered apocryphal.
- p. 64, *it was very useful to see... a new light: La Vierge retroussée*, in *Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (Paris: 15th May 1933), p. 28.
- p. 64, *Paul Nougé in a work entitled Les Images défendues: René Magritte ou Les Images défendues* (Brussels: Auteurs associés, 1943). However, the extracts Magritte mentions appeared in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (Paris: 15th May 1933), pp. 24–28.
- p. 65, *In La Réponse imprévue I showed a closed door... the night*: See 'London Lecture', p. 53.
- p. 66, *In memory of one of Baudelaire's poems: Les Fleurs du Mal*, no. XIX: 'La Géante'.
- p. 67, *Nietzsche thinks that without a hyperactive sexual system... madonnas*: "If an artist is worth anything, he is endowed with a strong temperament (body as well), he is excessively powerful. He is sensual; without a certain hyperactive sexual system, you couldn't imagine a Raphael..." In *The Will to Power*.
- p. 69, *Rimbaud wrote on church walls: "Shit on God!"*: See Étienne, *Le Mythe de Rimbaud: Structure du mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 143.
- p. 73, *Jacques Wergifosse*: Jacques Wergifosse (1928–2006) was a Belgian poet and writer, who at sixteen was sent by his family to Brussels to escape the German offensive. Setting out to meet artists shortly after arriving in Brussels, he struck up a friendship with Magritte by ringing at his door one day. This was the beginning of a long-term friendship, correspondence and collaboration. Magritte's text goes with a double drawing by Wergifosse: *Jeune fille* and *Max Ernst*.
- p. 74, *James Ensor*: James Ensor (1860–1949) was a Belgian painter and printmaker, and an important influence on Expressionism and Surrealism.

- p. 74, *the James Ensor exhibition: Hommage à James Ensor*, Brussels, Galerie Giroux, 13th Oct.–4th Nov. 1945.
- p. 76, *The Breendonk torturers*: The fort of Breendonk was used as a Nazi prison camp during the German occupation of Belgium in the Second World War. See Georges Thone, *Le Camp de tortures de Breendonk* (Liège: Commission de Crimes de Guerre, 1948).
- p. 80, *IJOWESCU*: The name of the professor means, in the Walloon dialect: “He plays with his ass”.
- p. 84, *Le Jour nul des Poètes*: A play on the title of *Le Journal des Poètes*, founded in 1931. The idea for this collection came from Magritte at the end of the Second World War, at the time when the poet Paul Claudel had just composed an ode to Charles de Gaulle, after he had written one for Marshal Pétain during the occupation. The reappearance of *Le Journal des Poètes* in 1946, with a portrait of Claudel by Flouquet on the cover, prompted Magritte to produce this special issue, which he intended to publish as if it were a genuine publication from Flouquet’s office. Flouquet was a painter, journalist and literary figure who had studied under Constant Montald at the Académie des Beaux-Arts with Magritte. The two had shared a studio and exhibited together, but fell out in 1925.
- p. 84, *Father Morel*: Perhaps a figure created for the purposes of Magritte’s epistolary satire.
- p. 85, *But good always triumphs in the end... Hollywood connoisseurs*: At the Festival Mondial du Film et des Beaux-Arts (Brussels, 1947), Ernst had received the prize for painting; the theme was the Temptation. The competition was organized by United Artists.
- p. 86, *Pierre Emmanuel*: Pierre Emmanuel (1916–84) was a French poet of Christian inspiration.
- p. 86, *Fabre-Luce*: Alfred Fabre-Luce (1899–1983) was a French writer and journalist.
- p. 86, *Tytgat, De Smet, Delvaux, Pieter*: Edgard Tytgat (1879–1957) was a Belgian painter. Gustave De Smet (1877–1943) was a Belgian painter and, with Constant Permeke and Frits Van den Berghe, one of the founders of Flemish Expressionism. Paul Delvaux (1897–1994) was a Belgian painter associated with the Surrealists, but whose work tended to blend Surrealist elements with the minutely detailed tradition of Flemish realism. Pieter Jansz Saenredam (1597–1665) was a painter of the Dutch Golden Age known for his paintings of whitewashed church interiors.
- p. 87, *Brusselmans*: Jean Brusselmans (1884–1953) was a Belgian painter known for his Fauvist rendering of peasant scenes, landscapes, interiors

- and still lifes with geometric structures, broad expressionistic brush strokes and delicate muted colours.
- p. 87, *Pasque*: Aubin Pasque (1903–81) was a Belgian painter.
- p. 87, *Dasnoy*: Albert Dasnoy (1901–92) was a Belgian painter.
- p. 87, *Henri Storck*: The Belgian author, filmmaker and documentarist Henri Storck (1907–99) was not the creator but only a co-scriptwriter and assistant in the production of Henri Schneider’s film *Le Pèlerin de l’enfer*.
- p. 87, *Moulaert Junior*: Pierre Moulaert (1907–67) was a Belgian composer, educator, violinist and critic who composed the music for Schneider’s film *Le Pèlerin de l’enfer*. He was the son of Raymond Moulaert, thus Magritte’s use of “Junior”.
- p. 94, *Le Vierge, le Vivace et le Bel Aujourd’hui... La Terre n’est pas une vallée de larmes*: The titles of two collections of poems and texts, ed. Marcel Mariën, Éditions La Boétie, Brussels, 1946 and 1945 respectively. The first borrows its title directly from a sonnet by Mallarmé.
- p. 95, *So-called Surrealists... not to mention their “native land”*: See the attacks on Aragon and the “poetry of the Resistance” in several issues of *Salut Public*. The same accusations were levelled against Éluard in a plan for a letter in *La Destination*, letter no. 169, note.
- p. 95, *Facteur Chevals*: Ferdinand “Facteur” Cheval (1836–1924) was a French postman who spent thirty-three years of his life building Le Palais Idéal (the Ideal Palace) in Hauterives by picking up stones on his daily mail rounds and carrying them home to build the Palace. The building is regarded as an extraordinary example of “Naive” art.
- p. 95, *Douanier Rousseaus*: Henri “Douanier” Rousseau (1844–1910) was a French customs officer and Post-Impressionist painter in the “Naive” or “Primitive” manner.
- p. 97, *Dialogue in 1934*: In *Documents* 34, special issue June 1934. A.B. = André Breton, M.F. = Marcel Fourier.
- p. 97, *a lecture in 1942*: ‘Situation du surréalisme entre les deux guerres’, Yale University, 10th Dec. 1942: “With all due reverence and respect to a few impatient gravediggers, I can claim to know better than they do what could mark Surrealism’s last hour; the birth of a more liberating movement.”
- p. 98, *It seems to be quite futile... perceived as opposites” (Breton)*: The publication of *Lumière noire* was announced, by Breton in 1945 in London (English translation by Simon Watson Taylor, with illustrations by Eileen Agar, J.B. Brunius, Max Ernst, René Magritte, André Masson, Mesens, Valentine Penrose and Philip Sanson). It did not appear (W 214).

- p. 98, *Alphonse Allais*: Alphonse Allais (1854–1905) was a French poet, writer and humorist.
- p. 98, *Isidore Ducasse*: The real name of the Comte de Lautréamont (1846–70), a French poet born in Uruguay who became a major influence on modern literature, particularly the Surrealists and Situationists, when in 1917 the French writer Philippe Soupault discovered a copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror* in a Parisian bookshop and was so captivated by it he gave the book to André Breton the next day. He was regarded by the likes of André Gide as “the gate-master of tomorrow’s literature” and an even more significant influence than Rimbaud or Baudelaire.
- p. 99, *On its green path... a little rabbit: Shéhérazade*, 1946, *Alice au pays des merveilles*, 1946.
- p. 99, *Peter Ibbetson*’: The protagonist of the eponymous 1935 film noir directed by Henry Hathaway, based on George du Maurier’s 1891 novel of the same name.
- p. 100, *Rex Stout*: Rex Stout (1886–1975) was an American writer and broadcaster best known for his detective fiction, most notably his Nero Wolfe series.
- p. 102, *We have neither the time... at Surrealist art*: “The search for this famous mental point where high and low etc. seem to us to be merely the game of a senile old man trying to breathe life into a corpse. The attainment of this much desired point is one of the least important results of amentalism, which refuses to attribute any qualities to the a-mental, be they high or low, real or unreal, etc.” (MAGRITTE’S NOTE)
- p. 104, *Berkeley*’: George “Bishop” Berkeley (1685–1753) was an Anglo-Irish philosopher best known for advancing a theory he called “immaterialism” (later referred to as “subjective idealism”), which denies the existence of material substance and instead contends that familiar objects like tables and chairs are only ideas in the mind of the perceiver, and thus do not exist without being perceived.
- p. 106, *we will not participate in the Antwerp Conference*: A reference to the International Conference of Communist Artists in Antwerp on 2nd Nov. 1947.
- p. 107, “*The Queen’s visit...*”: The exhibition which the Queen visited was entitled *L’Exposition de peintures, sculptures et arts décoratifs: Maîtres belges et étrangers* in Brussels at the Maison de la Presse Communiste on 11th Oct. 1947 (W 280).
- p. 107, *where there is in addition an excellent free advert for a car*: The queen arrived at the exhibition in “an elegant Buick” according to *Le Drapeau rouge*, 22nd Oct. 1947.

- p. 126, *apéritif concerts*: The first “apéritif cocktail” was scheduled by Belgian radio for Sunday, 12th March 1950, the day of the “popular consultation” on King Leopold III’s fitness to continue to reign. The letter was sent to Theo Fleischman, who was at that time general administrative director of French-language programmes.
- p. 133, *The workers... political action*: Antonina Grégoire (widow of Jean Bastien) writes in *Le Drapeau rouge*, 26th April 1950: “The party invited artists to show their work to the workers. Two meetings took place: the first with dockers and ship repairers at Antwerp; the second with miners, Walloon and Brussels workers in Brussels.” The artists invited participated in the exhibition *L’Art et la Paix*, organized in Lyon, in the old chapel of the Ampère high school, on 15th April 1950: Andrée Bosquet, Frans Depooter, Georges Lallemand, Kurt Peiser and René Magritte.
- p. 141, *Armand Permantier’s*: Armand Permantier (1895–1960) was a Belgian painter.
- p. 144, *Nat Pinkerton*: Fictional detective featured in a series of books and films produced in Denmark, France, Germany and Italy.
- p. 147, *Jane Graverol*: Jane Graverol (1905–84) was a Belgian Surrealist painter. She met Magritte in 1949 and lived with Marcel Mariën for ten years.
- p. 149, *At present it merely leads to confusion... feelings and ideas*: “For example: The sympathy we can feel for a stone. The idea of creation without a creator, etc.” (MAGRITTE’S NOTE)
- p. 152, *Évelyne Brélia*: Singer, friend of André Breton and, in 1923, the subject and purchaser of the first painting that Magritte ever sold. She also sang the song ‘Norine Blues’ on which René and Georgette collaborated with René’s brother, Paul, at a gala for Norine Couture.
- p. 152, *The darkest eyes enclose the lightest*: From *Au Défaut du silence* (1925).
- p. 152, *Camille Goemans*: See second note to p. xi.
- p. 153, *P.G. van Hecke*: Paul-Gustave van Hecke (1887–1967) was a Belgian journalist, author, art dealer, promoter, fashion designer and film-festival organizer. He was a long-time friend of Magritte’s.
- p. 153, *Achille Chavée*: Achille Chavée (1906–69) was a Belgian aphorist closely aligned with the Surrealists in the 1930s as a founding member of the Rupture group.
- p. 153, *Albert Ludé*: A founding member, with Achille Chavée and others, of the Surrealist Rupture group.
- p. 153, *Robert Giron*: Robert Giron (1897–1967) was a Belgian Surrealist painter who attended the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels from 1919 to 1920, where he met Magritte, Delvaux, Flouquet, Cocq

- and Singer. In 1932, he became director of exhibitions of painters at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.
- p. 155, *Archipenko*: Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964) was a Ukrainian-born American avant-garde artist, sculptor, graphic artist and educator.
- p. 157, *Jean Stévo*: Jean Stévo (1914–74) was a Belgian artist, poet, essayist and art critic.
- p. 159, *And so it is a sort of courage... René Descartes: Les Passions de l'âme (Passions of the Soul)* 111, 177.
- p. 160, *The black sun of melancholy*: Gérard de Nerval, 'El Desdichado' in *Les Chimères*.
- p. 162, *Gallieni's*: Joseph Gallieni (1849–1916) was a French soldier, military commander and administrator. Called out of retirement at the outbreak of the First World War, he played an important role as Military Governor of Paris.
- p. 163, *Marshal Foch's*: Marshal Ferdinand Jean Marie Foch (1851–1929) was a French general, Marshal of France, Great Britain and Poland, and a military theorist and Supreme Allied Commander during the final year of the First World War.
- p. 164, *Oinos... Poe*: From Poe's prose poem 'The Power of Words' (1850), translated by Baudelaire in *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*.
- p. 168, *B*: Julien Benda (1867–1956) was a French philosopher and novelist. A master of French belles-lettres, his best-known work is the 1927 book *La Trahison des clercs*.
- p. 169, *Our consciousness... phenomena*: From Nietzsche's *Will to Power*.
- p. 169, *Sunlight in the Head*: The name (Le Soleil dans la Tête) of a gallery-bookstore run, in that era, by Jean-Jacques Lévêque in Rue de Vaugirard in Paris. It is also the name of a painting by Jean-Jacques Gailliard (1890–1976).
- p. 169, *Médium*: Reference to the magazine *Médium*, which, in its new series, was defending the cause of Tachism.
- p. 170, *C*: Paul Caso (1924–2000), Belgian art critic, columnist for *Le Soir*, professor at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels from 1955 to 1977.
- p. 171, *C's article*: Jean-Paul Crespelle (1910–94) in *France-Soir* on the Magritte exhibition in *Les Cahiers d'art* (W 503).
- p. 173, *the illustrious writer (whose name escapes me)*: The French Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux (1861–1940) – see Breton's Surrealist Manifesto.
- p. 175, *Baldung Grien*: Hans Baldung Grien (1484–1545) was a German painter and printmaker whose work dealt with the religious and the profane – death, erotic allegories, sorcery and witchcraft.

- p. 175, *Madame d'Aulnoy*: Madame d'Aulnoy aka Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville (c.1650–1705) was a French writer known for her fairy tales. In contrast to the later Grimm folk tales, d'Aulnoy's style was more conversational and risqué (English adaptations were often extensively edited).
- p. 182, *Georges d'Amphoux*: Georges d'Amphoux aka Louis Thomas (1885–1962) was a French writer, journalist and man of letters.
- p. 183, *Garemyn*: Jan Anton Garemyn (1712–99) was a Flemish painter and engraver.
- p. 190, *Luc de Heusch's*: Luc de Heusch (1927–2012) was a Belgian filmmaker, writer and anthropologist, professor emeritus at the Free University of Brussels. In 1960, he made the film *Magritte ou La Leçon de choses*.
- p. 190, *showing Lecomte a shattered pane... landscape is still clinging: La Clé des champs*, situated at the start of the “human condition” series.
- p. 190, *Irène Hamoir*: Irène Hamoir (1906–94) was a Belgian novelist and poet, the leading female member of the Belgian Surrealist movement. She published under the pseudonym “Irine” and appeared as “Lorrie” in the writings of her husband, Louis Scutenaire, and in the works of Magritte.
- p. 192, *the name of the prize*: Magritte had just been awarded the Belgium quinquennial prize for the culmination of a career.
- p. 196, *The Question of Words*: This text is preceded by ‘The Question of Words’, by André Bosmans:

What are we to think about the very fact of choosing words, of having to limit their meaning, of having to manifest their hitherto unknown rigour? Every word is a new light, depending – on the one hand – on the composition of the image: that is to say, on whatever is in exact proximity with this word, which we have to make known; but depending – on the other hand – on what the word evokes in itself.

Indeed, having undertaken the composition of the image whose meaning the words convey, the poet will appreciate that certain words evoke impossible thoughts: corner, cell, money, modulation, crucifix, athleticism, sweat, etc. The poet will only envisage words that are capable, according to his inspiration, of meriting the necessary research: ocean, mirror, chain, furniture, rain, lamp, forest, statue, sun, glass, reverberation, dome, mask, dust, etc.

Appreciating the interest of the problem, René Magritte has published the following clarification [in *Rhétorique*].

- p. 197, *Israel Shenker*: Israel Shenker (1925–2007) was a reporter for *Time Magazine* and *The New York Times*, a prolific interviewer and author

- of numerous books about language, lexicography and Jewish life. In the late 1940s, he studied briefly at the Sorbonne in Paris before embarking on his journalistic career.
- p. 197, *The title, which Magritte took from a book*: It was the title of a novel by Léon Cladel (1835–92): *Ompdrailles, le tombeau des lutteurs* (1879).
- p. 197, *It's action, non painting*: In response to a question concerning the style referred to as action painting.
- p. 206, *Aimé Declercq*: In 1919, along with the Bourgeois brothers (Pierre and Victor), Aimé Declercq helped organize Magritte's first exhibition (of two commercial gouaches, one for Sherlock and the other for Monnaie Butterfly) at the Belgian Galerie Centre d'Art.
- p. 206, *an Englishman*: A reference to Edward James (1907–84), a British poet known for his patronage of the Surrealist movement. He allowed Magritte to stay in his London house to paint and appears in two Magritte works – *La Reproduction interdite* and *Le Principe du plaisir (Portrait de Edward James)*.
- p. 218, *Indeed yes... indeed, the portrait of a commander or captain*: Reproduced in W, p. 78, *L'Officier*.
- p. 224, *Valéry says that too: "True tradition ... in another time"*: In *Tel Quel*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 193.
- p. 229, *Rimbaud writes: "The hand... plough"*: 'Mauvais sang' ('Bad Blood') in *Une saison en enfer (A Season in Hell, 1873)*.
- p. 229, *Michaux says in an interview: "The beings with whom... life is"*: Henri Michaux (1899–1984) was a Belgian poet, writer and painter, known for his esoteric and idiosyncratic yet accessible style, who later took French citizenship. The quotation is from an interview with Alain Jouffroy in 1959.
- p. 233, *Serge Creuz*: Serge Creuz (1924–96) was a Belgian painter and artist.
- p. 234, *Pushing up from the earth... vanishes into the air*: Scutenaire in *René Magritte*, 1947, p. 69, introduces this text: "For him [Magritte] the right word is extremely important. He is even more interested in the meaning of words. Here is a definition of tree that he worked out." The drafting of Scutenaire's book was completed in 1942.
- p. 236, *Prey for the Shade*: In *E.A.*, no. 32, Feb. 1970. Mariën notes: "In the early 1950s, Camille Goemans was in contact with a film-production firm, and he invited his friends to suggest scenarios for commercial films. This is the reason that brought Magritte to write the present synopsis, which, as far as we know, was not accepted."
- p. 240, *The criterion for... the Absolute*: Handwritten manuscript under a gouache in the exhibition *25 Gouaches*, Brussels, New Smith Gallery, 18th Nov. 1970.

- p. 241, *I saw some photographs... of the child*: On 12th Apr. 1967, Magritte wrote to Bosmans: "I wrote a sentence that I found 'curious'; and on the 14th: "I found in some scrap papers this sentence with the mother and the child. I don't remember under what circumstances I wrote it."
- p. 244, *Albert Landry*: A New York City gallerist who hosted a show of Magritte's images in the Albert Landry Galleries from 17th October through to 4th November 1961.
- p. 245, *Geert Van Bruaene*'s: Geert Van Bruaene (1891–1964) was a Belgian actor and gallerist who, throughout his career and at his many galleries over the years, exhibited the work of such artists as Paul Klee, Otto Dix, Jean Arp, Jean Dubuffet and René Magritte. After the Second World War he also ran several pubs in Brussels, including the Het Goudblommeke in Papier, at which, along with his Surrealist friends, René Magritte was a regular.
- p. 245, *Léonce Rigot*: Léonce Rigot was a Belgian writer and Magritte contemporary.
- p. 245, *We only ever see one side of things*: From l. 41 of the poem 'À Villequier' (*Les Contemplations* IV, 15).
- p. 248, *a Chicago lawyer*: Barnet Hodes (1900–80), a prominent Chicago attorney and Democratic politician, and one of Magritte's most important patrons.
- p. 249, *When I go off on a journey... when I come back*: Quoted in an interview with Georgette Magritte by Stan Laurysens, in *Panorama*, Antwerp, 6th Aug. 1974.
- p. 249, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*: A controversial but critically successful 1939 crime novel by James Hadley Chase (1906–85), one of the many pseudonyms of the British writer René Lodge Brabazon Raymond, who was among the best-known thriller writers of the time. It was adapted into a British film in 1948.
- p. 250, *a film by Clouzot... Suzy Delair playing opposite Jouvet*: The film by Henri-Georges Clouzot (1907–77) is the 1947 police procedural *Quai des Orfèvres*. Suzy Delair (1917–) is a French actress and singer, one of French cinema's earliest legends, who played Jenny Lamour opposite renowned French actor and director Louis Jouvet (1887–1951) as Inspector Antoine.
- p. 250, *Rachel Baes*: Rachel Baes (1912–83) was a Belgian Surrealist painter who, in 1929, at the age of seventeen, achieved recognition upon exhibiting work at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris, where she was a member of the Surrealist group affiliated with Magritte.
- p. 251, *Benjamin Péret*: Benjamin Péret (1899–1959) was a French poet, Dadaist and founder of the French Surrealist movement. He

- moved to Mexico in the early 1940s with his lover, the Spanish painter, Remedios Varo, becoming involved with the intellectual European expatriate community in Mexico City, where he lived until 1947, after which he returned to Paris, where he lived until his death.
- p. 251, *That damned Péret... a joke like that*: Reprinted, with variations, in Scutenaire's *Mes inscriptions (1945–1963)*, p. 57.
- p. 251, And in order to convince me... a villain or not: *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- p. 252, *the author's*: Harry Torczyner (1910–98) was an international lawyer, art collector and writer known for promoting the causes of Israel and his native Belgium, and for introducing Magritte to a broader audience. One of Magritte's most significant correspondents, his letters with the artist were collected in *Magritte/Torczyner: Letters between Friends* (1994).
- p. 255, *Épinal print*: Épinal prints are comic-strip-like cartoons in bright colours that illustrated popular topics; named after the birthplace of the first publisher of such prints, Jean-Charles Pellerin (1756–1836), and his publishing house, Imagerie d'Épinal, founded in 1796.

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René Magritte was born on 21st November 1898 in Lessines, in the Hainaut province of Belgium, to Léopold Magritte, a textile merchant and tailor, and Régina Magritte (*née* Bertinchamps), a hat-maker prior to the marriage. The eldest of three sons, Magritte was deeply affected as a child by his father's financial struggles and his mother's suicide in 1912 by jumping into the Sambre River.

Starting at the age of twelve, Magritte took art lessons from a local schoolteacher, and he moved to Brussels in 1914 to study at the Académie des Beaux-Arts. In 1922, he married Georgette Berger. This union would last forty-five years, and she became his model and muse. While studying at the Académie, Magritte produced his earliest paintings, which initially were in the Impressionist style. After completing his studies, he served in the Belgian infantry from 1920 to 1921, and from 1922 to 1923 he worked as a draftsman in a wallpaper factory with his friend Victor Servranckx, with whom he produced some of his earliest writings. In 1922, he met his brother Paul's piano teacher, E.L.T. Mesens, a Dadaist who influenced Magritte's aesthetic, and in 1923 the poet Marcel Lecomte introduced him to the painting *The Song of Love* by Giorgio de Chirico; these encounters set him off on his lifelong exploration of Surrealism, whose starting point Magritte dates to 1926 with his painting *The Lost Jockey*. Magritte had been working as a designer of posters and advertisements until he signed his first contract with the Galerie Le Centaure in Brussels that year and devoted himself to painting.

Aside from three years in Paris from 1927 to 1930 (during which he stayed and worked with the Surrealists there, headed by André Breton), Magritte was based in or near Brussels, surrounded by his friends in the Belgian Surrealist group, including Paul Nougé, Mesens, Lecomte, Camille Goemans, Louis Scutenair and André Souris. Magritte had his first American solo exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York in 1936, and throughout the 1930s he enjoyed the patronage of the eccentric British poet and supporter of Surrealism, Edward James.

Because of the German invasion of Belgium in 1940, Magritte temporarily moved to the south of France, and after the war he developed the bright and impressionistic style he called “surrealism in the sunshine”, which in 1948 was followed by his ill-received Vache period, comprised of deliberately crude and grotesque images. After these short departures, Magritte returned to the witty, linguistically and visually playful Surrealist style that would remain his signature. His reputation and popularity grew steadily throughout the 1950s and 1960s, thanks to the gallerist Alexander Iolas, as well as to Magritte’s friendships with the New York–based lawyer Harry Torczyner and the art collector Dominique Menil, culminating in his 1965 show at MoMA. As his international profile grew, so did the impact of his work and imagery on pop, conceptual and minimalist art, as well as on advertising.

Magritte remained prolific and productive until the end of his life. He died at the age of sixty-eight on 15th August 1967, having become one of the most renowned and influential artists of his generation.

Jo Levy has also translated Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Ghosts in the Mirror*, Hélène Cixous’s *Angst*, Louis Aragon’s *The Libertine*, and Arthur Adamov’s *Man and Child*.

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