Thesis: **The Influence of the Renaissance on Surrealism**

Name: **Athanasios Tsolkas**

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Front cover image: Salvador Dalí, *Geological Echo: La Pietà*, 1982,
oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, Dalí Theatre-Museum, Figueres

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Abstract

This thesis will investigate the relationship between Surrealism and Renaissance art.

Ostensibly, Surrealism rejected the Renaissance as a manifestation of the rational classicism and bourgeois individualism that Surrealists were rebelling against. André Breton, the leading theorist of Surrealism, stated his opposition to Renaissance art and culture in several texts, including the first Surrealist Manifesto of 1924. Yet a recurring influence of Renaissance art can be identified in the works of leading surrealist artists like Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst, or even in Breton's own writings.

The Italian Renaissance artists chosen for analysis are Paolo Uccello, Piero di Cosimo and Leonardo da Vinci; the Northern Renaissance artists are Hieronymus Bosch, Matthias Grünewald and Peter Brueghel the Elder. The main questions that will be explored are the following:

1. How were Surrealist artists influenced by these Renaissance artists?

2. Can elements of irrationality and unconscious creativity be identified in Renaissance art?

3. Was the Renaissance more 'surreal' than Breton allowed?

4. Why did Surrealists like Dalí and Ernst have an obsessive interest in Renaissance art and how did this manifest itself?

5. Why did the Surrealists and other twentieth-century artists employ figures, symbols, themes and motifs deriving from Italian and Northern European Renaissance art?

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Introduction

Surrealism, that early twentieth-century avant-garde movement that fundamentally shaped all subsequent artistic and aesthetic developments in the Western world, was dedicated to the abolishing of all previous styles, including the destruction of any artistic and ideological movement based on rationality and logic.[1] Yet this aim would lead to several apparent contradictions.

The fundamental texts of Surrealism are the two Manifestoes of André Breton (1896-1966), the principal theorist and leader of Surrealism. Written in 1924 and 1929, the two texts helped to cement the movement and also enabled an easier distribution of its novel ideals. From the very beginning of his first *Manifesto*, Breton defines Surrealism, clarifies its principles and denounces logic as an element in Art.[2] Surrealism, he argued, would be the most revolutionary movement since the Renaissance, because it rejected oppressive notions of rationality, logic and order that were notoriously manipulated by Fascism, Capitalism, the Church, and even the Classical World. In the realm of the 'rational' and the 'logic' he included all those works of art which are completely and immediately understandable, including paintings and sculptures rooted in Realism, but also anything related to the Classical Antiquity of Greece and Rome.

Like many of his contemporary thinkers and artists, Breton was attempting to free the modern world from the classical cultural paradigms that had dominated Western European thought and art since the Renaissance, especially in the era since the

[1] See Breton, André, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), pp. 9-10: 'We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately expedient, and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense. Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices. It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer -and, in my opinion by far the most important part-has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally forming by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much further, authorised as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them-first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason'.

[2] Breton (1969, p. 26) defined Surrealism as such: 'Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner-the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern'.

Enlightenment. As the philosopher notoriously put it in one of his collage-poems: "*How beautiful is the world / Greece never existed*."[3]

Hence, as the leader of the Surrealist movement, Breton was distancing himself from Classicism and the Renaissance. Nevertheless, several important Surrealists plainly acknowledged their influence from previous art movements, especially from the Renaissance. Breton himself would often cite Renaissance artists and intellectuals such as Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Andrea Mantegna, Sandro Botticelli, Cosimo Tura, Paolo Uccello, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Piero di Cosimo, as well as more recent predecessors, such as Gustave Moreau and Georges Seurat.[4]

The purpose of this thesis is to examine in depth both this debt and this contradiction. It will draw on various of Breton's writings beside the *Manifesto*, including *L' Art Magique, Communicating Vessels*, *Nadja* and *Surrealism and Painting*. It will discuss relevant articles in the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure*, writings of Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) like *Oui* and the memoir *The Secret life of Salvador Dalí*,[5] as well as the autobiography of German painter, sculptor and poet Max Ernst (1891-1976) *Beyond Painting*.[6] It will also bring attention to a variety of Surrealist artworks that demonstrate influences from the art of the Renaissance period.

Dalí, for example, not only recreated Renaissance works and subjects via his own Surrealist prism, but he boldly termed himself as a "man of the Renaissance", or even as 'the successor of Leonardo and Raphael in a "New Renaissance"'.[7] In *Secret Life* and *Oui* he even drew parallels between incidents and visions in his own life and those of Da Vinci, Uccello and Bosch.[8]

Ernst unequivocally stated that he was influenced by Leonardo da Vinci's notes and sketchbooks, and that Leonardo was the source of the *frottage* technique that he developed around 1925. His great admiration for the Renaissance period is testified by his autobiographical sketch in the form of a table with favourite painters and poets who had influenced him (fig. 1), including Renaissance artists like Da Vinci, Di Cosimo, Uccello, Vittore Carpaccio, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Pieter Brueghel, Piero Della

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[3] 'Que c'est beau le monde/La Grèce n'a jamais existé', see Breton, André, *Poèmes 1919-48* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 236.
[4] Breton, André, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26.
[5] Dalí, Salvador, *Oui* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2004), pp. 27, 33 and 92; and Dalí, Salvador, *The Secret Life of Dalí* (London: Deicide Press, 2016), pp. 9, 26, 30 and 66.
[6] Ernst, Max, *Beyond Painting. And Other Writings by the Artist and his Friends* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948).

[7] Taylor, Michael R., *The Dalí Renaissance, New perspectives on his life and art after 1940* (New Haven, CA: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 29; and Dalí, 2016, p. 323.
[8] As in note 5.

Francesca, Hieronymus Bosch, Matthias Grünewald, Hans Baldung Grien and Albert Altdorfer.[9]

Figure 1: Max Ernst, 'Max Ernst's Favourite Poets and Painters of the Past', in the Surrealist magazine *View*, Special Max Ernst Edition, edited by Charles Henri Ford, series II, no. 1 (April 1942), pp. 14-15.

To give a few more examples, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), the most famous among the 'momentary Surrealists', was fascinated by Matthias Grünewald's Crucifixions; Duchamp (1887-1968) elaborated on perspective games and hermaphroditic interventions around the *Mona Lisa*; Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978) relied on Renaissance architecture for his metaphysical paintings, Yves Tanguy (1900-1955) inspired his mythical monsters from the art of that period, and the collaged boxes of Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) were dedicated to Piero di Cosimo.[10]

All these references come to conflict with Breton's obsessive desire to create a purely innovative movement, uncovering contradictory elements and consequences within the

[9] Ernst, Max, 'Max Ernst's Favourite Poets and Painters of the Past', in the Surrealist magazine *View*, Special Max Ernst Edition, edited by Charles Henri Ford, series II, no. 1 (April 1942), pp. 14-15; and Ernst, Max, *Beyond Painting. And Other Writings by the Artist and his Friends* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), pp. 4ff.

[10] Ades, Dawn, Berggruen, Olivier, Marandel, Patrice, Hall, Nicholas, *Endless Enigma: Eight Centuries of Fantastic* (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018), p. 168.

principles of the Manifesto. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to assemble and assess all the evidence that show the direct relationship between the twentieth-century artistic movement of Surrealism and the Renaissance, a cultural movement that developed almost 400 years ago. It will also examine the difficulties created by Breton's idea that the Surrealist Movement was a novel movement that had no relation or debt to any artistic past. Rival Surrealists and Modernists, perhaps reacting against Breton's absolute stance, acknowledged that some of their work was strongly influenced by the "magical" world of the Renaissance. But of course the Renaissance was itself a groundbreaking and innovative artistic movement, despite its own evident debt to the history and themes of Classical antiquity and Christianity.

So we must then analyze the intentions and creative needs of the Surrealist artists who were inspired by aspects of Renaissance art. How did these references serve them, either as techniques or themes realizing the Surrealist dream as they understood it? An important matter in this investigation is how the principles set out in Breton's *Manifesto* interact with the actual outcome of the artworks by Surrealists. It will be equally interesting to uncover the hidden intentions of a twentieth-century movement based around automatism and the theory of dreams in regard to its connection with fifteenth-century intellectual humanism, especially given the contradictions in Breton's claims about the artistic sources of the movement.

The thesis is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter explores the relationship of Breton with the Renaissance and the Classical period. It examines his attitude towards notions of 'logic', and it analyses the principles of his *Manifesto*. His references to artists and works from the Renaissance period are presented in detail, including those spoken of with admiration and used by Breton to reinforce his arguments concerning Surrealism. Herein lies the great contradiction already mentioned, whose exploration is one of the purposes of this study.

Each of the following three chapters is dedicated to an Italian Renaissance artist whose work proved influential to Surrealism. The second chapter focuses on Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), a favourite artist amongst several Surrealists, including Dalí. The philosophy of Uccello's works, as well as his life – known to us by the Italian biographer of artists Giorgio Vasari (1511-74) – were important to writers and poets related to Surrealism, including the avant-garde actor, playwright, and essayist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948). It will be argued that Uccello's work can be seen as a far forerunner of Cubism, Surrealism and Modernism in general, but it can perhaps also be related to modern three-dimensional artistic forms such as puppetry and videogames.[11]

Following a short visual section that presents relevant themes and notions in Duchamp's work, the third chapter investigates the influence of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) on Surrealism. The multi-faceted fascination of Ernst and Dalí with Leonardo was mostly

[11] For example, the philosopher Jean Louis Schefer (1938-2022) described Uccello's magnificent *Flood* (1432-36) as a floating stage with puppets, see Schefer, Jean Louis, *The Deluge, The Plague: Paolo Uccello*, trans. by Tom Conley (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 76 and 102.

related (but not limited) to his practical advice for the evocation of artistic inspiration, geometrical explorations of perspective, the androgynous elements of his figures and an interest in dream interpretation.

The fourth chapter analyses Piero di Cosimo's relationship with the Surrealists. Di Cosimo (1462-1522) is the most grotesque, primitive and mythological painter of the Renaissance. His subject matter and his understanding of the world and the human species are often characterised as "prehistoric".[12] The Surrealist circle, including Breton, was influenced by the wildness of his landscapes and the awkward diversity of his forms. The anthropomorphism of Di Cosimo's elements of nature and fantasy that play so prominent a role in his work bring to mind the *trompe-l' œil* (realistic optical illusionism and three-dimensionality) found in many Surrealist works, as well as the designs of Walt Disney,[13] who, in turn, had been inspired by Surrealist art.

The fifth chapter investigates the influences that Surrealism received by Northern Renaissance artists, most notably Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516) and Matthias Grünewald (1470-1528). The inclusion of the Northern Renaissance period alongside the Italian Renaissance was considered by this author as of crucial importance, since they both emerged in about the same period and they both had a strong impact on the evolution of early modern art. Especially Bosch enchanted the Surrealists with his incomparable fantasy and grotesque art which presented an early revelation of new artistic avenues of expression. Special mention is made of Picasso, whose Surrealist period (c. 1925-38) was strongly inspired by the horror scenes of Grünewald and Bosch, most notably by the former's harsh and eerie depiction of the passions of Christ.

[12] About Piero di Cosimo's extraordinary conception of primitive (primordial) life, ubiquitous in his pictures, especially in paintings like *The Return from the Hunt* (1494-1500), see Erwin Panofsky, 'The Early History of Man in a Cycle of Paintings by Piero di Cosimo', *The Warburg Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1937), pp. 12-30. The lifestyle of Piero di Cosimo strikingly fitted his art. To quote William Sullivan: 'As described by Vasari, [Piero di Cosimo] was an idiosyncratic and personally rather crude man, more "brute" than human, who lived on hard-boiled eggs, neglected the "material comforts" of his life, refused to allow "his rooms to be swept" or his trees and bushes to be pruned, and was generally "considered a fool for his uncouthness" and eccentricities. Vasari's Piero is an ill-tempered man, extremely sensitive to noise and especially terrified of thunderstorms, which force him to "wrap himself up in his mantle, shut up the windows and doors of the room and crouch into a corner until the fury of the storm [has] passed." A barbarian among the civilised…', see William J. Sullivan, 'Piero di Cosimo and the Higher Primitivism in Romola', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1972), p. 391.

[13] See Pudelko, Georges, 'Piero di Cosimo, Peintre Bizarre', *Minotaure*, vol. 5, no. 11 (May 1938), p. 24.

1: The attitude of André Breton towards the Renaissance

Surrealism is a twentieth-century art movement. The French poet André Breton (fig. 2), one of the movement's core founders, wrote in 1924 and 1929 two Manifestoes defining its purpose. The identifying characteristics that current art critics and historians use to categorise a work of art as Surrealist include hyper-realistic and dreamlike scenes, distorted figures, illogical juxtapositions, deeply personal and subjective iconography, a focus on dreams and psychoanalytic interpretations of them, mythological themes and fantastic imagery, often transformed and distorted, as well as automatism and a spirit of unconscious spontaneity.[14] As a consequence, much that is seen as Surrealist doesn't necessarily adhere to Breton's strict definitions.[15]

Figure 2: Breton in the 1960s,
image in the Public Domain

Breton's first Manifesto starts with a blatant attack on a massive range of thinkers from Thomas Aquinas[16] to Anatole France[17], for their commitment to realism and the morality of their teachings that have shaped Western thought for many centuries.[18] Breton insisted that there is "no reality in painting".[19] His conception of Surrealist Visuality was

[14] Nadeau, Maurice, *The History of Surrealism* (London: Plantin Paperbacks, 1987), p. 16.
[15] Grant, Kim, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts: Theory and Reception*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 169.
[16] Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), an Italian Dominican friar and priest, was an immensely influential philosopher, theologian and jurist in the Scholastic tradition. Aquinas seized on several of Aristotle's ideas and attempted to synthesise the Aristotelian philosophy of logic with Christianity.
[17] Anatole France (1844–1912) was a Nobel-prizewinning French poet, journalist, and novelist.
[18] Breton, 1972, p. 6.
[19] Levy, Silvano, 'Introduction', in *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*, ed. by Silvano Levy (Keele: Kelle University Press, 1997), p. 10.

that of an affront to the world arising from conventional wisdom and habit. "Surreality, and not reality," he maintained, "will rightfully reassert itself."[20]

With the publication of Breton's first Manifesto in 1924, Surrealism officially emerged as a movement in art – although perhaps not immediately as a movement in the visual arts (indeed at the time of its publication, no conception of Surrealist painting yet existed).[21] And here lied an interesting contradiction: since the movement combined the ideas of the major avant-gardes, including Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Metaphysical Art, and Dadaism, was it also not in debt to the naturalism of the Renaissance?[22]
If the European avant-gardes reflected the grotesque public aftermath of World War One, then the Renaissance spoke rather to society's common enlightenment in recent centuries. The term 'Renaissance' commonly refers to a cultural movement that flourished in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries.[23] It is primarily associated with the European country of Italy, although at that time this region was divided into city-states and other territories that had emerged following the fall of the Roman Empire. Renaissance Italy was a major trade centre that attracted great wealth and boasted a diverse world of great artists and scholars. But there was also a 'Northern Renaissance' in Netherlands, Flanders and Germany, which, as we shall see in the fifth chapter, also had great pertinence for Surrealism.
Breton's poetic sensibilities were of course broadly defined by preceding ideas and developments in the European art world – including the establishment of the avant-garde as a radical break with the recent past.[24] Aiming to revolutionise life through art, Surrealism succeeded in shaping the history of modern art by transforming perception in unexpectedly complex ways.[25] It was a consequence of established streams of human creativity, but also the child of a modern spirit. This dream of revolution had been heralded by history – especially if one chose the correct history! On the whole, those histories routinely accepted as the routes to the radically new within modern art were at the time rejected by the Surrealists, as irrelevant and sometimes ridiculous.[26] They favoured instead selections determined by their own particular hopes and wishes – and to study these selections is to discover much about the nature of Surrealism.
Nevertheless, Breton's lengthy text mentions the plastic arts only in a footnote where he groups together various ancient and contemporary artists, from Uccello to Gustave Moreau (1826-98) and Georges Seurat (1859-91).[27]

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Rubin, William, *Dada & Surrealist Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), p. 64.
[22] Barr, Alfred, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), pp. 10-11.
[23] The philosopher Bertrand Russell once described the Renaissance period as a "large and fruitful disorder", Witoszek, Nina, *Leonardo da Vinci our Contemporary* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 129.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Arnason, Hjorvardur Harvard and Mansfield, Elisabeth, *History of Modern Art* (London: Pearson, 2013), p. 32.
[26] De Gerando, Joseph-Marie, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, 2e partie* (Charleston, NC: Nabu Press, 2010), p. 197.
[27] Breton, 1972, p. 27.

Many of the essential techniques of Surrealism had also been somewhat present in Dada, albeit in chaotic ways – including biomorphism and found objects, artistic play with accident and experimentation with automatism, all bound up in a drive towards social revolution. Within Surrealism, they would become systematised, especially when brought into contact with the ideas of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).[28] What had been a therapy for Freud would become a philosophical and literary point of departure for Breton and many other Surrealists who found Freud's ideas about dreams, the unconscious mind and the Oedipus complex fascinating and relevant.[29]

Breton and other Surrealists were also greatly influenced by the French writer, poet, essayist, symbolist and late Romantic Gerard De Nerval (1808-55), who also had a fascination with the Renaissance.[30] If few before Breton had attempted to explore the notion of Surrealism, Breton's beloved De Nerval had at least provided a precursor for the word with his term "Supernaturalism". Indicating for the first time effects beyond the limits of natural reality and logic, De Nerval's term is found in his book dedication of *The Daughters of Fire* (1854), an anthology of texts including a series of sonnets about Greek and Roman antiquity, as well as other Renaissance themes.[31]

In 1903, the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) wrote a play entitled Les *mamelles de Tiresias: Drame surréaliste* (*The Breasts of Tiresias: A Surrealist Drama*). Based on the Greek myth of the clairvoyant Tiresias, who was transformed into a woman for seven years, the play's feminist content shocked its Parisian audience by proposing, among others, a switch of gender roles in a society where men are responsible for childbirth. Apollinaire's version tells the story of Thérèse, who becomes a woman in order to obtain a position of influence among men, with the intention of unsettling customs and establishing equality among the sexes. The term 'Surrealism' in fact derived from the subtitle of this play, being Apollinaire's description of his new drama – from whence it was taken up by the group of artists and writers that we now know as the Surrealists. Staged in 1917, the play served as a rudimentary model for Surrealist ideas, including the questioning of conventions and the free association of ideas.

If Surrealism was boldly new, Breton insisted, the issues it raised were anything but novel. In 1928 he asked: "Am I to believe then that everything begun with myself? There were so many others, heedful of the dash of gold lances under a black sky – but where are Uccello's Battles? And what is left of them for us?".[32] Uccello serves as Breton's most

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[28] The Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the founder of psychoanalysis, which aimed to cure psychological pathology via sessions of dialogue between patient and analyst. Central to his theory of the mind was the "unconscious". While this notion had long been recognised by poets and philosophers, Freud believed that he was the first to bring it to the attention of science. Freud believed that dreams protected the dreamer from thoughts that would wake them, by transforming them into fulfilled wishes.

[29] Andersen, Wayne, *Freud, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Vulture's Tail, A Refreshing Look at Leonardo's Sexuality* (New York: Other Press, 2001), pp. 1-61.

[30] Breton, 1972, p. 25

[31] De Nerval, Gérard, *The Daughters of Fire* (Independently published, 2020), p. 5.

[32] Breton, André, *Surrealism and Painting* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), p. 8.

insistent and distinct reference to a Renaissance artist and the Renaissance period. He had presumably seen the Louvre part of Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*,[33] and *Saint George and the Dragon* from the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris. He was fascinated by the Italian painter, especially by the way he placed figures in his battle paintings, his preoccupation with geometry and his excessive use of the newly invented linear perspective. Hence, Uccello served for Breton as a far forerunner of Surrealism both in its historical perspective and idiosyncratic approach.

The view of the immediate past of art was not dissimilar. For example, the notion that the techniques of Georges Seurat (1859-1891) advanced the scientific study of optics left the Surrealists indifferent. What they instead admired was the disturbing effects caused by his magical and confusing lighting. Likewise, while it is true that Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) had developed the decorative flat colour fields that inspired Henri Matisse (1869-1954), that was an art history of no interest to the Surrealists. Rather, it was Gauguin's primitive mythological innocence that allowed them to feel that he converged with their own projects. Seurat and Gauguin were accepted as forerunners to Surrealist art only when seen as part of a new history and when recast as the equivalents of poets who had attacked the world of appearances such as Rimbaud and Lautréamont.

Nevertheless, for Breton, writing as late as 1953, the concern with "art" was misguided, and any search for the "aesthetic" elements in Surrealism placed its history in a false light. For Breton art always threatened to be an illusion that takes you away from the "real".[34] If Surrealism had been conceived as an aspect of language, it would represent the search for the "prime matter" of language, a search undertaken in those regions of the unconscious where desires rise unbidden and unfettered. This is how art was to be newly understood and newly configured – and everything that mattered to it had to lead towards the real through these intentions and techniques.[35]

A key concept here is that of compulsion: only the artists whose work had been given concrete form through some internal compulsion were to be admitted to the Surrealist pantheon. It was compulsion that shaped the relevant history, rather than this or that new use of line or colour. In the first international group exhibition of Surrealists, held in the Galerie Maeght in Paris in 1947, the first room was dedicated to the so-called "Surrealists despite themselves". It included works of Renaissance painter Giuseppe Archimboldo (1526-93), famous for his extravagant, grotesque figures fashioned from fruits, vegetables or animals.[36] It also included paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-

[33] Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (c. 1435-60) is a set of three paintings currently divided between the collections of the Louvre Museum in Paris, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and the British Museum in London.
[34] Hughes, Robert, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), p. 382.
[35] Fer, Briony, Batchelor, David and Wood, Paul, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 182.
[36] Breton, André, *L'Art Magique* (Paris: *Phébus,* 1992), p. 218.

1516), whose bizarre and frightening fantasy visions had long appealed to present-day audiences.

Devoutly religious and outwardly normal, Bosch had mostly painted works based on the life of Christ.[37] But something in his imagination had departed from that of the remainder of the Low Countries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: here was a marginal landscape of devils and monsters, half-animal, half-human, existing and acting fantastically within imaginary spaces and architectures.

If Breton's criteria included clarity and concreteness, then the superbly realistic style of Bosch's images certainly fit the bill – but here, too, a primitive vision was made manifest, as a chapter in a history that included several naturalistic artists. What Bosch did as an artist was to impose the reality of his vision on the beholders, while transforming their familiar relationship to such images: here was the real, yes, but necessarily here too was the unreal. All this is discussed in Breton's 1928 essay *Surrealism and Painting* (started in 1925) in which the visual languages are brought into line with the poetic ones, issues already explored by him in 1924: visual art is challenged, its new goals are set out, and its avatars past and present are placed before us, now Picasso, back in the Renaissance Bosch.[38]

The most powerful of our physical faculties is perhaps the visual since it gives us control over our surroundings. The Surrealists' respected it because they valued reality – or, anyway, their own definition of reality. For Breton, a "few lines" and "blobs of colour" offered a palpable power.[39] Irrespective of subject matter, the formal elements of painting can compel us into the illusion of the world that they represent. But this widespread effect is not in itself enough to bring any work into the Surrealist canon. The Surrealists desire something more specific, so not everything calls to them or answers their call. There must also be an internal vision, more potent than the external model, such that neither supplants the other in our attention.[40]

This explains why so much Surrealist writing about the nature of art is confusing, and never more confusing than when it invokes and insists on reality. There was a great deal of "I know it when I see it", and much refusal to prescribe any formulae for the achievement of it. Reality was being rewritten in order to embrace what had been previously excluded; that which was "invisible" to the ordinary conscious eye.[41] The Surrealists yearned for the ability to see a different, more primitive world.

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[37] Pilar Silva Maroto, María, *Bosch: The 5th Centenary Exhibition* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2016), p. 286.
[38] Hughes, 1991, p. 382
[39] Leslie, Richard, *Surrealism: The Dream of Revolution* (New York: New Line Books, 1997), p. 16.
[40] Ibid., p. 16
[41] Arnason, Hjorvardur Harvard and Prather, Maria. F., *History of Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), p. 109.

One might even argue that Surrealists were opposed to vision, at least as it pertained to the merely passive organ of perception. During a BBC interview in 1961, Max Ernst, who is often considered as a pioneer of both the Dada and the Surrealist movements, remarked:

> "Seeing means usually you open your eyes and you look to the outside world [...] you close your eyes and you look into your inner world. And I believe the best to do is to have one eye closed and to look inside […] and with the other eye you have it fixed on reality and what is going on around the world […] If you can make a kind of a synthesis of these two important worlds you come to a result which can be considered as a synthesis of objective and subjective life".[42]

In February 1933 the first issue of the magazine *Minotaure* appeared in Paris, running until 1939. According to the French Surrealist André Masson (1896-1987), it developed out of an informal meeting of Surrealists, including Breton and literary publishers. As Masson recalled in 1942, Bataille and Picasso were at that time fascinated with the most mysterious creature of Greek and Iranian mythology.[43] Thus, they proposed the name *Minotaure*, with Picasso creating a collage featuring the Minotaur for its first cover. The commencing issue included Breton's article *Picasso in his Element* and 60 photographs by Brassaï (1899-1984)[44] of Picasso's recent sculpture inspired by classic myths.[45]

In order to support his ideas, Breton often dropped names and elements from Renaissance and classical studies into his writings. In his sophisticated poetic text *The Soluble Fish* (1924), produced by a process of 'psychic automatism' and inspired by the death of the Greek warrior Achilles at Troy, we read the sentence "That head is the Achilles' heel of nature". The shield of Achilles also appears as a metaphor in the discussion of a dream in his novel *Nadja* (1928).[46] Discussing photographic portraiture, which he saw as hovering in an indeterminate space between iconic likeness and enigmatic sign, Breton recalls an early (1911) self-portrait in profile by Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978)[47] painted in the traditional style of the Renaissance nobleman, which has

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[42] Electronic source: Youtube, 'Max Ernst and the Surrealist Revolution', BBC interview, 1961: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFeQ7aIuApk, 0.19-1.00 [accessed on 12 October 2023].
[43] Georges Albert Maurice Victor Bataille (1897-1962), was a French philosopher and intellectual working in philosophy, literature, sociology, anthropology and the history of art. He was also the author of *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*.
[44] "Brassaï" was the pseudonym of Gyula Halász, a Hungarian-French photographer, sculptor, writer and filmmaker.
[45] Francis Frascina, 'Picasso, Surrealism and Politics in 1937', in *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*, p. 136.
[46] Breton, André, *Nadja* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1999), p. 122.
[47] Giorgio de Chirico – a greater supporter of the Metaphysical movement in art than of Surrealism – apparently declined the honour: "Just another misunderstanding. I never went through a Surrealist period. Quite simply there was a period when I painted subjects than had had nothing to do with naturalism. The Surrealists wanted to draw me into their ranks, like Leonardo da Vinci". Mazars, Pierre, *Giorgio de Chirico, Yale French Studies, No31, Surrealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 115.

inscribed on its frame the Latin words: *Et quid amabo nisi quod ænigma est* ("What shall I love if not the enigma?").[48]

Breton became also tellingly obsessed with the stylistic differences between Greek and Celtic coins, stumbling as he realised on a very rich, perhaps even subversive and liberating, moment of Western history, which could (if properly handled) transform a flagging Parisian art world. The Gallic and Celtic coins were progressively degrading the realism of the Greek originals. Such progressive adaptation, unraveling and destruction of classical anthropomorphism would connect the radical present to a forgotten past, standing as the key to explaining the reemergence, after so long, of a particular mode of lyrical present-day abstraction.[49]

Influences and innuendos from the classical world had a significant presence in Surrealist art in general, intellectually as much as artistically. It is important to recall that the Renaissance signified the 'Revival of the Classics', a period linked to Antiquity in the face of Christian disapproval, and very drawn to those Greek scholars whose work had reached the West after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453. As new ideas spread across Europe through the recently invented printing press - cementing a resurgence in the arts while preserving and distributing many ancient texts as books- the Renaissance saw a shift from the scholasticism of earlier medieval times towards the humanities. Its new emphasis on realism and objectivity included drawn studies of form, line, lighting and the human figure as it was first modelled in the Greek and Roman period.[50]

Renaissance art and Surrealism both strongly emphasised the study of human beings, attempting realistic interpretations of the anatomy of the body and of the human mind.[51] The Renaissance focused more on the former, delving into such topics as the ideal proportions of the human figure, while Surrealism focused more on the latter, producing works of art that abstracted thought processes and depicted dream sequences.[52] Of course the two periods were also often dissimilar: for example, the Renaissance artists favoured the rational approach developed in the Greco-Roman philosophical studies, while Surrealism leant towards the absence of 'reason' in producing works of art. This is partly because Surrealism was more of a reactive protest against the styles and influences before it, whereas the Renaissance tended to embrace earlier styles and influences.[53]

Moreover, the Renaissance tended to depict scenes steeped in moral dilemmas and to recreate religious and moral scenes from history and texts. Surrealism, on the other

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[48] Breton, 1999, p. 15.
[49] Guilbaut, Serge, 'The Year the Gaulois Fought the Cowboy', *Yale French Studies*, no. 98, The French Fifties (2000), p. 178.
[50] Ades, Dawn, *Writings on Art and Anti-Art: Selected Writings* (London: Ridinghouse, 2015), p. 204.
[51] Hughes, 1991, p. 7.
[52] Rubin, 1967, p. 18.
[53] Fer, Bachelor and Wood, 1993, p. 179.

hand, sought to transcend the influence of morality.[54] Its ultimate truth was to be found behind rational forms and orderly appearances, that is in mystery thoughts, dreams and other manifestations of the unconscious mind shaping the experiences of the more conscious state of being. In other ways, though, Surrealism followed the tradition of the Renaissance, for instance when adhering to the classical properties of form and colour, even when exaggerated or taken to extremes, including the attachment of new meaning to everyday objects, so as to force a response.

Let us first think the famous oil painting by Hieronymus Bosch titled *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510): a triptych on oak wood with a grisaille that, when closed, reflected the idyllic Earth pre-Creation.[55] On the three leaves of the interior panels of the triptych we see a depiction of Heaven, 'present-day' Earth, and Hell. The contrast in use on each panel of colour and imagery changes as we move from left to right, while recurring themes, concerning humans and animals, are portrayed in the corresponding moral tone.

Now consider Salvador Dalí's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937), a similarly themed oil-on-canvas painting from the Surrealist era. Here figures depict the mythological story of Narcissus:[56] on the left a figure gazes into a pool, enamored with himself; on the right, a figure echoes that on the left, but with a narcissus daffodil growing out of it, as in the mythological tale of Narcissus. Human and animal forms are again deployed to convey subtler shades of meaning, while vivid colour contrasts present an underlying change of tone.

The Renaissance was viewed as an emergence from the Dark Ages that followed the fall of the Roman Empire, during which time there was little to no catalogued study of the era of classical antiquity.[57] With many wars waging in Europe and constant changes in political regimes, various works of art had been destroyed or lost. Similarly, the two Zurich-based art movements, Dada and Surrealism, developed a reaction against the horrors and follies of the war trenches, the 'dark ages' of World War One, when nationalism and collective irrationality led to unspeakable atrocities, the decimation of human life and the wreckage of humanity's hopes for the early twentieth century. This can explain why Dada art, poetry and performance, generated by automatic methods of creation, had often been either absurd or satirical in nature.

Surrealism as a cultural movement appeared in the early 1920s. Critical articles outlining its emerging stages reference Botticelli (c. 1445-1510), Urs Graf (c. 1485-1528), the Baroque era, Theodore Géricault (1791-1824) – and of course Uccello, Da Vinci and Di

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[54] Silvano Levy, 'René Magritte: Representational Iconoclasm', in *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*, ed. by Silvano Levy (Keele: Kelle University Press, 1997), p. 29, n. 21.
[55] De Tolnay, Charles, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Reynal Publication, 1966), p.76.
[56] Lomas, David, *Narcissus Reflected: The Narcissus Myth in Surrealist and Contemporary Art*, (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2011), p. 11.
[57] The most influential proponent of an Italian 'Renaissance' (meaning 'rebirth') that radically broke with the medieval past was the nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, author of the emblematic work 'The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy' (1878).

Cosimo.[58] But Breton was determined to present Surrealism as a self-centred, autogenous movement independent from all previous ideas and artistic periods. He flashes and fights at many points of his texts, especially when it comes to the selection of Surrealist paintings in his book – perhaps because the thematology of so many of them reminds us of the Renaissance. Certainly all this anxiety to prove the purity of Surrealism as an innovative and revolutionary movement brings him into conflict with the future likes of Dalí, who was far more open to Renaissance themes.

As an art movement, Surrealism sought to move beyond the borders of art and to challenge other areas of expertise, including science and political thought.[59] Being its founder and leader, Breton was insistent and explicit in his assertion that Surrealism was a genuine revolutionary movement, one capable of unleashing the minds of the masses from the rational societal order. And certainly it has had a major impact on many artistic movements since it reached the popular realm. Many of Salvador Dalí's works have long become cultural icons of a heavily commercialised use, the *Persistence of Memory* (with its melting watch) being perhaps his most best-known painting. Following Dalí, artists everywhere began to paint unnerving, illogical scenes with photographic precision, to create strange creatures from everyday objects, or (following Ernst, Masson and Miró) to develop automatic techniques of abstract creation drawing that opened them up to the unconscious.

Breton's reported aim was to "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality".[60] Some critics argue that Surrealism ended with the passing of André Breton, but its ubiquitous presence far and wide suggests that it never really ended.

[58] Read, Herbert, *Surrealism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 158.
[59] Janover, Louis, *La révolution surréaliste (Paris: Plon*, 1989), p. 91.
[60] Quoted by Ian Chilvers, *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 611.

2: What are the connections between Paolo Uccello and Surrealism?

This chapter demonstrates the important influence of Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) over the Surrealist movement. It brings attention to a variety of Surrealist sources, both textual and visual, that praised and quoted the works of Uccello, the most significant precursor of Surrealism, according to Breton, among the artists of the past.[61] A stylistic and iconographic comparison between Uccello's paintings and Surrealist works further highlights the connections between this pre-modern artist and Surrealism.

Relatively unknown prior to the early twentieth century, works of Uccello such as *The Profanation of the Host*, *The Flood*, and *The Battle of San Romano* were admired for their idiosyncratic style and bizarre subject matter. What is more, the obsession of Uccello with linear perspective, as well as his indifference for accurate representations of the visible world made him highly popular among Surrealists like Duchamp and Dalí, who were fascinated with explorations of theatricality, subjectivity and novel forms of expression combining the revolutionary and the primitive.

Giorgio Vasari, author of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550-1568) and the principal biographer of Renaissance artists, writes extensively about Uccello's works.[62] In his very first line, Vasari speaks of Uccello's potential as the most delightful, inventive, and ingenious artist in the history of painting, if only he had not become so consumed by the attempt to solve problems of perspective.[63] He also describes the frequent tendency of artists to "become solitary, eccentric, melancholy, and impoverished like Paolo Uccello who [was] endowed by Nature with a meticulous and subtle mind."[64] Of particular interest in his biography of Uccello is Vasari's discussion of the painter's eccentric use of colour, namely his blue fields, red houses, and any other colour triggering his imagination.[65] His landscapes create a unique sense for the viewer, fermenting mystery, whether factual or mythical, via the use of colour blends and faultless painting.[66]

As far as Surrealism is concerned, the name of Uccello is evoked numerous times by Breton. This becomes significant given the antipathy of Breton for all artworks created prior to the nineteenth century, including those from the antiquity. In fact, Paolo Uccello and Leonardo da Vinci were the two Renaissance artists that were most unreservedly

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[61] Breton, 1969, p. 27.

[62] For the historical value of Vasari's world-renowned biographies, see Brown, Gerald Baldwin, *Vasari on Technique* (New York: Dover Publications, 1907), p. 2.

[63] Vasari, Giorgio, *The Lives of the Artists* (Oxford: Oxford Press University, 1998), p. 74.

[64] Ibid., p. 74.

[65] Ibid., pp. 76-78.

[66] Originally named Paolo di Dono, his nickname Paolo Uccello ('Paolo of the Birds') derived from his inclination towards representing birds and other animals in art, as for example in the *Scenes from the Life of Noah* fresco at Santa Maria Novella Church in Florence. Uccello, says Vasari, "always kept around his home paintings of birds, cats, dogs, and every kind of strange animal for which he could obtain a drawing, since his poverty prevented him from keeping live animals. And because he loved birds most of all, he was given the nickname of Paolo Uccello; see ibid., p. 77.

admired by the Surrealists, and most often identified with Surrealism, invoked by many in the modernist ambit in the art and literature of that time.

In the novel *Nadja*, [67] Breton discusses a postcard sent to him from the Surrealist poet Louis Aragon in Italy. It depicted Uccello's *The Profanation of the Host* (1467-69), a six-panel predella painted in tempera for the Confraternity of the Corpus Domini and their oratory in the Corpus Domini church in Urbino. Finding the painting unfamiliar, Breton expresses his surprise: "I saw it reproduced in its entirety only a few months later. It seemed to me full of hidden intentions and, in all respects, quite difficult to interpret".[68] Running from left to right and with each scene marked from the next by separately-painted half-balustrades , the painting unfolds as a tale of desecration that was presumably inspired by the medieval anti-Semitic legends about Jews profaning the Host and other Christian symbols.[69] Aragon's postcard is a form of "objective chance" and Breton no doubt relished its subversive potential more than its very overt anti-Semitism. The reference to Uccello for supporting his story in *Nadja* arises – so I believe – as much as anything through automatism, making it a kind of unconscious object itself, and thus revealing a hidden, and perhaps unadmitted, affinity that Breton had for the Renaissance, despite his protestations against it.

In the *Manifesto of Surrealism* itself, the primary text that set out the principles of Surrealism, Breton separates the artists and philosophers who influenced the movement into two specific groups: those predating the nineteenth century,[70] and those who lived between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. Uccello is the only artist of the first group,[71] which indicates that Breton had no wish to link the innovations of Surrealism to other pre-modern art streams. It seems extremely significant that Uccello is placed in a group distinct from any of his contemporaries: hence the need to pin down what was original and unique about Uccello, and to explain why Breton was drawn to no other artist of that period but him.

Beginning to examine Uccello's contribution to the evolution of Surrealism, we can perhaps begin with the metaphysical elements in his art. The philosophical domain of 'Metaphysics', first defined by Aristotle, deals with the first principles of things and our knowledge of them – e.g. how we know anything about the world, how we determine identity, what is the basis for time and space. "Metaphysical art", by contrast, is an art movement in early twentieth-century Italy largely associated with De Chirico and Carlo Carra (1881-1966). It involved mysterious arcaded squares and strange juxtapositions of objects, dream-like senses of interiority and representations of hallucination. At about the same time, the experimental paintings and collages of Max Ernst, which defined the

[67] "When I wake up I open Aragon's letter from Italy; with is a photographic reproduction of the central detail of a painting by Uccello unfamiliar to me. This painting is called: *The Profanation of the Host*." Passage from Breton, 1999, p. 94.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Mormando, Franco, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 255.
[70] Breton, 2002, p. xxi.
[71] Ibid., p. 27.

canon of Surrealism, offered a similarly uneasy movement between the concrete and the oneiric.

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), another principal artist of the Surrealist movement, tried to replace the concept of aesthetic pleasure with that of geometric pleasure by applying principles of geometry and rules of physics to his sculptures and installations -and subsequently by his interest in the work of Uccello.[72] Uccello and Duchamp shared a great interest in perspective, in Euclidean geometry and mathematical calculations in general.[73] Duchamp was attracted to this aspect of Uccello's art, particularly the deliberate use of perspective to create 'super-real' effects reminiscent of dreams. So for Breton, Uccello was a representative at the crossroads of the inner traditions that met in the art of Duchamp.[74]

Both artists used geometrical rules of perspective to create a sense of extended vision and depth in their pieces.[75] They both also deployed mathematic principles to give the viewer the sense of looking through a keyhole in a door – as very characteristically given in Duchamp's *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage (1946-66), Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* (1946-66, fig. 3).

Figure 3: Marchel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage/ English translation, Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*, 1946-66, mixed technique of sculpture, 242.6 x 177.8 x 124.5 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Similarly, the objects in Duchamp's *Large Glass* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*; 1915-23) are hung behind two glassy panels (figs. 4-5), creating an

[72] Adcock, Craig, 'Conventionalism in Henri Poincaré and Marcel Duchamp', *Art Journal*, vol. 44, no. 3 (Fall 1984), p. 253.

[73] Vasari recalls that Uccello often discussed Euclidean problems with his friend Giovanni Manetti, see Vasari, 1998, p. 80.

[74] Breton, 1945, p. 381.

[75] To follow this discussion clearly and visually see section 2a below.

illusion of abstract objects engraved on the glass, just like “puppets” in rotation. The use of a geometric progression allows viewers to be drawn into the illusory rotation of its objects -an imagined orbit- thus the whole piece creates the impression of three-dimensionality. Duchamp had by then also been influenced by the Swiss-French architect, painter and writer Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier (1887-1965). His work relied increasingly on Renaissance notions of harmonic proportion and synthesis, at a time when special importance was given by the French Schools of Fine Arts to factors of symmetry and the harmonic rules of composition, including the use of the Golden Section.[76]

Figure 4: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass*), two different views, 1915-23, sculpture, 277.5 x 177.8 x 8.6 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

[76] Taboada, Manuel Franco, *Critique of Ulf Linde’s Geometric Analysis of the work of Marcel Duchamps*, *Revista de Expresión Gráfika Arquitectónica*, vol. 30 (2017), pp. 206-13.

Figure 5: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass*), 1915-23, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Composed in two areas or "realms", the *Large Glass*, is a primary example of this kind: the upper part has the shape of a square (the form commonly known as "landscape") and the lower part (the so-called "figure") is a 'Golden rectangle'. It is interesting to note that both the lower part and the entire installation respect the ratio expressed by the algebraic figure φ=1.6180, the so-called Golden ratio. Duchamp had certainly studied the sketches of two pioneers of the introduction of perspective in art (figs. 7 and 24), namely the French cleric and scholar Jean Pélerin (c. 1445-c. 1524) and the French mathematician and essayist Jean Dubreuil or Du Breuil (1602-70).[77] As shown below in section 2a, Duchamp was looking to position his "*malics*" (puppets) and to give his objects the perspective of a seeming circular orbit, so as to create the impression of a perpetual movement. This installation surely reminds us of Uccello's *Scenes from the Life of Noah:* (*The Flood and the Waters Receding* and *The Sacrifice and Drunkenness of Noah*), as well as his fresco *The Creation of the Animals and Creation of Adam* at Santa Maria Novella, both of which are divided into an upper and a lower part.

[77] Clair, Jean, *Abecedaire Marcel Duchamps* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), p. 135.

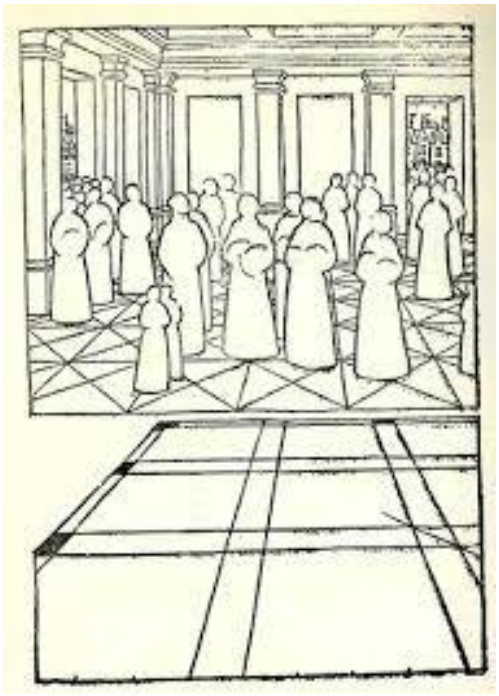

Figure 7: Jean Pélerin, perspective drawing for squared pavement (bottom); staging of figures in perspective (top), in *De Artificiali Perspectiva*, 1505

The 'hung objects' in the *Large Glass* are placed at a low level, impelling the viewer to stoop down and try to see most of them, which, in turn, forces the body into a position like someone trying to look through a keyhole. The experience can be likened to an effort to approach an unconscious level through processes which, even when commencing from a "rational" geometrical viewpoint, they produce irrational results. A similar phenomenon seems to occur in Uccello's representation of *The Flood* (fig. 8), where Noah looks like a puppeteer managing the figures beneath him, but also in his *Battle* scenes which also resemble a puppet show with toy-like horses and men.[78] But was this geometrical approach of the unconscious mind intentional or not?

[78] Gombrich, Ernst Hans, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1968), p. 254.

Figure 8: Paolo Uccello, *The Flood,* 1432-36, fresco,
215 x 510 cm., Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Uccello's *Flood* is constructed so as to evoke a sensation of progressive rotation marking the dynamic of a massive catastrophe. Uccello uses geometric perspective – including the squaring of the ground and the cubification of the image – to force the viewer to visually penetrate the evolving events of the perspective space in the depicted story. Additionally, the uprooted plants possess a rotational quality that again simulates an illusory motion resulting from the vortex that frames the painting's organisation. As a visual experience, this perhaps resembles the mind's journey through its own historic memories. Doubtless the painter has mined his own subconscious to deliver something reminiscent of a historical natural disaster, so as to provide a mythical underlayer to his religious vision. His painting intelligence relies on the innovative placement of his figures and the allegorical irony that arises from the opposition of the 'rescued' Noah and the rest of the world experiencing their last moments on the earth.

Another artistic-technical connection between Duchamp and Uccello concerns their shared admiration for sculpture. The latter's *Funerary* (or *Equastrian*) *Monument to John Hawkwood* (1436), a fresco in the Duomo in Florence (fig. 9), is characteristic of its *chiaroscuro* technique and the precision of the plinth-base. The knight and horse come in perfect harmony with their three-dimensional depiction.[79] Writing in 1934, the

[79] Vasari, 1998, p. 82.

Figure 9: Paolo Uccello, *Funerary Monument to Sir John Hawkwood*, 1436, fresco, 820 x 515 cm., Santa Maria Del Fiore, Florence

critic Georges Pudelko would celebrate Uccello's sculptural approach as a "dated and fully authenticated work of the master chiseled in stone but frescoed in *terra verde* on a background of dark an illusion of statuesque".[80] Hence Pudelko links Duchamp and Uccello through qualities of painting that relate to sculpture,[81] whereas Breton's interest in the painter relates more to what is internal, the so-call "esoteric".[82]

Connections between Surrealism and Uccello are further found in the Renaissance artist's multi-scene paintings such as the *Thebaid* (fig. 10). Its celebration of monasticism combines parallel events from a monk's life with the Passion of Jesus, Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata, and St. Jerome in a cave adoring a Crucifixion. In one particular scene, a rainbow appears above two praying monks, and in another one various animals behave in different ways, with swans swimming into an indefinite stream made by rocks. The presence of water here is almost invisible.

[80] Pudelko, Georges, 'The Early Works of Paolo Uccello', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 16 (1934), p. 232.
[81] Breton, 1945, pp. 380-81.
[82] Ibid., p. 381.

Figure 10: Paolo Uccello, *The Thebaid*, 1430, tempera on canvas,
81 x 110 cm., Uffizi Gallery, Florence

The technique of *trompe l'oeil* – later used by Magritte and Dalí[83]– was originally deployed for decorative purposes in the late medieval period.[84] Uccello used the technique prominently in his *Creation of the Animals* fresco at Santa Maria Novella (fig. 11).[85] Despite his realistic tone, the volumes and positions of the animals at the lower left point are vague. For example, a chameleon is placed in front of a calf (figs. 12-13). It covers the bulk of this calf except for the back of its head. From a distance, the two animals look identical, and only if we observe closely does the chameleon reveal itself as what it is. While this complex of animals has a relatively large size, the facial details are interspersed almost as a bunch of grapes where each fruit possesses an indistinct face composed of realistic features. Thus the paintings are scaled, with one character becoming the continuation of the other. This conception raises aesthetic questions about the anatomy of the figures, the viewer's creative confusion about the function within the stage set of both forms, and the message Uccello is organising via the image.

[83] Examples of Dalí's *trompe l'oeil* are *Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire* (1940) and of course *Overture in Trompe l'Oeil* (c. 1972).
[84] Borsi, Franco and Borsi, Stefano, *Uccello* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), p. 196.
[85] Ibid., p. 182.

Figure 11: Paolo Uccello, *Creation of the Animals, Creation of Adam, Creation of Eve, The Original Sin*, 1432-36, fresco, 244 x 478 cm., Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Figures 12-13: Paolo Uccello, Chameleon and calf, details from *Creation of the Animals*, 1432-36, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Uccello is primarily known for his three San Romano *Battles*, three parts of the same battle scene. Each tableau was painted differently, complete with the lances that Breton invoked in his *Manifesto* ("Am I to believe then that everything began with myself?

There were so many others, heedful of the dash of gold lances under a black sky—but where are Uccello's Battles? And what is left of them for us?").[86] The horses in the Uffizi version are outlined with curves, as 'cloud-horses', while the soldiers are almost invisible behind a complex of armours. In the background scenes there is a contrasting group of farmers in the act of farming and hunting, which also appears in the background of the National Gallery's piece, though here we see the Florentian leader with a red hat in two phases, one as a young man and one as an older warrior. Meanwhile, the orange fruits look like lanterns and the blossomed bushes with bright white flowers look like decorative light bulbs on the green hedge. Instead of receding into space, the landscape seems to rise up on plane, like a picture itself or like a stage backdrop, hence the treatment of perspective depicts the war as a theatrical ceremony.[87] In the Louvre version, the commander and the soldiers seem like ghosts under their golden lances within the night. And indeed Breton is less excited about the *Battle*'s clash of armies itself than the questions it allows him to raise about the proto-Surrealist pioneer who created it.[88]

Uccello 'roots' his system of perspective on the ground, and then echoes this chessboard in the debris of lances,[89] which for Breton was enough to establish him as an influence. The chessboard technique was used by Uccello in order to deliver the anticipated perspective in his work. A chessboard is comprised of a squared panel or surface, and Uccello uses various painting methods to create these squares, such as a ladder on the ground of *The Flood*, the green patches in *St George and the Dragon* (fig. 14), the floor tiles in *The Profanation of the Host*, the broken lances set in squares on *The Battle of San Romano*, and the quadrated fields in the background of many other paintings.

The technique used by Uccello for constructing a perspectival squared ground or 'pavement' was outlined in the famous treatise *On Painting* (1435) by Leon Battista Alberti.[90] It is hard to tell whether the artist intended to use the squares merely for resolving problems of linear perspective. It is very likely, though, that he wanted to set up his characters "scenographically" on a chess-stage, positioning them on the board to play or fight, or to tell us a story – a technique mainly used in themes with battle action such as *The Battle of San Romano* and *St George and the Dragon* (figs. 14-15) or in disturbing narratives involving groups of people, like *The Flood* and *The Profanation of the Host*.

Surrealists like Ernst and Dalí had a keen interest in the game of chess, but especially Duchamp was obsessed with it. The chessboard concept was applied to many of his works, such as the *Étant donnés*, with the floor of the installation being a squared pavement with black and white tiles, plus the squared brickwork behind the keyhole. In

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[86] See note 32.
[87] Davies, Penelope, Denny, Walter, Fox Hofrichter, Frima, Jacobs, Joseph F., Roberts Ann S. and Simon, David L.*, Janson's History of Art: The Western Tradition (London: Pearson, 2010),* p. 538.
[88] Breton, 2002, p. xxi.
[89] Borsi and Borsi, 1994, p. 156.
[90] Alberti, Leon Battista, *On Painting* (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), p. 27.

his interview with Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp declared that he devoted more time to chess than to art, noting that "chess is a competition between my mind and his mind."[91] Perhaps the most appropriate remark to elucidate his passion for the game chess was the following: "Chess is purer, socially, than painting, for you cannot make money out of chess. When someone does a painting, he frames it and sells it, while at the end of the game you can cancel the painting you are making… Painting should not be exclusively retinal or visual; it should have to do with the gray matter… That is why I took up chess."[92]

Figure 14: Paolo Uccello, *The Battle of San Romano*, 1435-60,
egg tempera, 182 x 320 cm., Louvre Museum, Paris

[91] Tomkins, Calvin, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interview* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2013), pp. 40-41.
[92] Witham, Larry, *Picasso and the Chess Player* (Hanover, NH and London: The University Press of New England, 2013), p. 161.

Figure 15: Paolo Uccello, *St. George and the Dragon*, 1470,
tempera, 55.6 x 74.2 cm., National Gallery, London

Uccello used all the above-mentioned techniques, including linear perspective, foreshortened forms and *trompe l'oeil*, for the creation of an illusionistic atmosphere.[93] These techniques were later developed by great masters like Piero Della Francesca and Leonardo with greater breadth and exactness. Tackling potential precursors of Surrealism in *Minotaure* in 1935, including Arcimboldo, Leonardo and Piero di Cosimo, Georges Pudelko admired Uccello's hunting scenes and declared *The Hunt in the Forest* (1470), in particular, to be "magic calligraphy… reborn in a new life and later found in modern art, surrealist painting."[94]

Figure 16: Paolo Uccello, *The Hunt in the Forest*, 1470, oil painting,
65 x 165 cm., Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

When I myself saw the *Hunt in the Forest* (fig. 16) at the Ashmolean Museum, it seemed to me as a ritual scene or the revival of a custom or pagan celebration, except with an absolute absence of violence, rush or blood. It resembled a game between the grass and the trees, where deer and dogs run like dancers on the stage with slick movements between the hunters. But the strangeness was not confined to the movement of animals; the human figures advanced with an elegant, almost dancing, grace. So Pudelko's interpretation, that here is a calligraphic rhythm, is understandable. By 'calligraphy' he seems to have meant an artist's selection of linear, curved or geometrical setting or style on paper or canvas for his letters, symbols or objects. At its root, calligraphy is based on symmetry and harmony. Many writers of Dada and Surrealism – among them Tristan Tzara and Guillaume Apollinaire – wrote their poems in the shape of various objects, figures and animals, calling these works *calligrammes* (fig. 17).

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[93] Ford, Charles Henri, Neiman, Catrina and Nathan, Paul, *Parade of the Avant-Garde*, (Berkeley, CA: Publishers Group West Edition, 1991), p. 52.
[94] Pudelko, Georges, 'Paolo Uccello peintre lunaire', *Minotaure*, vol. 7 (1935), p. 37.

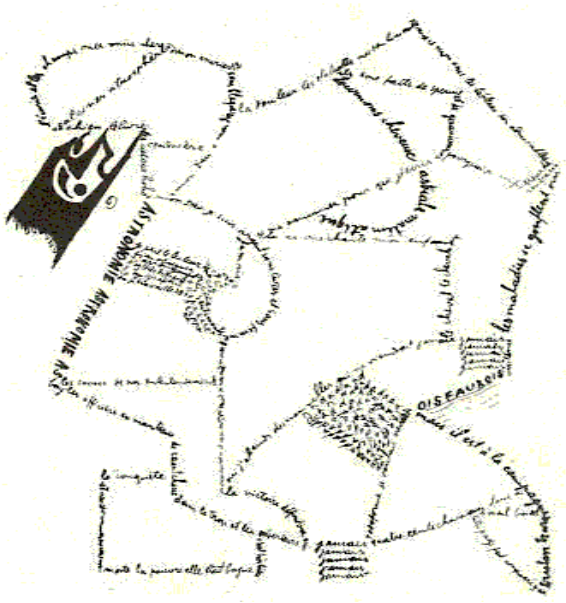

Figure 17: Tristan Tzara, *Calligramme*, 1916-59, zincograph, 22 x 17 cm., The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, The Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection of Dada and Surrealist Art

It is worth quoting here the English translation of Pudelko's commentary on Uccello's *Hunt in the Forest*: "The characters running almost do not touch the ground with their feet, so much weight is absorbed by the calligraphic rhythm. The forms look intangible; the beings are completely depersonalised and decorative. There is in the parallelism of movements, with the coincidence of forms and the correspondence of the lines, a mysterious and magical result, a magic from which the primitive peoples and all oriental arts have been used in their symbolic forms."[95] Pudelko identifies here the intention of Uccello to trigger our imagination and to introduce the spectator to the painter's magic world via symbolic forms and shapes. He also alludes to the dreamlike character of Uccello's work, a quality consistently sought after by Surrealists in their explorations of the unconscious.

Most of Uccello's works have this otherworldly rhythmical effect, creating a dream image of geometrical precision.[96] In most of his works the depicted scenes are set in the afternoon or evening with no clear sunlight. *The Hunt in the Forest* takes place at night under the moonlight, and without torches (of course in real life people rarely hunt at night because of the absence of light). Perhaps as a consequence, Uccello creates a

[95] Ibid., p. 37.

[96] This framework allows Pudelko to enthuse about "Uccello's magic cubism", as being the only cubist painting we have ever seen, see ibid, p. 37. To project the Cubist movement back to the Renaissance sounds of course anachronistic, but one should note that the philosopher Jean-Louis Schefer concurs with Pudelko by describing Uccello's *Flood,* a scene which floats among objects and bodies, as "a scene of cubism and metaphysical painting"; see Schefer, 1995, p. 102.

penumbra in his works, leading Pudelko to term this work a “lunar” painting and Uccello’s art a “lunar world”.[97]

The placement of objects and figures in Uccello’s paintings can be intensely dramatic in effect, creating the impression of vitality and motion. His deployment of perspective as a new technique allows him to fashion a stage on which his figures appear convincingly solid and real.[98] It is characteristic of Uccello to portray a variety of human emotions via specific elements within the painting.[99] In *The Flood*, for example, the sense of movement creates a plethora of responses, as these elements seem to evolve.

Deep within Uccello’s work we can find many dramatic elements with a determined theatricality or cinematographic style. The Renaissance elements within this theatricality are significant to the continuity of this study, particularly as they pertain to the creation of a sense of theatricality in Surrealist masterpieces. These include the setting of Uccello’s figures and objects on his canvas, the three-dimensional visualization through the dramatic perspectives, and the pauses of the human and animal figures in his paintings.

One of the most imposing and representative examples is the aforementioned fresco of *The Flood* in Santa Maria Novella, Florence. The scene takes place between two cubical volumes. One volume is the Ark of Noah; the other is a wooden wall that seems to manifest as an anti-ark (trapping people rather than saving them). The background figure on the wall attempts to protect himself from the strong wind, as if praying at this “sacred wall” for salvation from the deluge (fig. 18), a vivid expression of human despair and powerlessness against the destructive power of Nature and God.

Figure 18: Paolo Uccello, detail of fig. 8,
The Flood, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

[97] Pudelko, 1934, p. 253.
[98] Gombrich, 1968, p. 191.
[99] Pudelko, 1934, p. 253.

Within the 'cubist' delirium of *The Flood*, we also see some yellow-gold barrels, as well as a raft on which human figures seem to balance. In conjunction with the floating ladder of the same colour, these smaller square blocks highlight the dramatic situation of the scene, as well as the material connection between the two ark-walls. As before, the metaphysical painting, "follow[s] in an anachronistic way" the technique of "De Chirico (and his like), whose dreamy works with the intense contrasts of light and shadow often have a vaguely threatening, mysterious and enigmatic quality which cannot be seen".[100] The dominant colours are grey, yellow, and dark green, strictly distinguishing the materiality of the Ark and other objects, the natural kingdom (water and flora), and the living kingdom (people and fauna). Incorporating the tricolour of the work, the setting of the figures and objects insinuates a great and masterful collage, successfully depicting the subject of the wall painting nearly threefold. The barrels and mazzocchio add a three-dimensional chance element to the fresco.

In one of his essays in *Minotaur*, Pudelko described Uccello as a revolutionary artist who turned to nature in search of a new form of "primitivism" that would radically renew pictorial form.[101] He evokes the battle paintings via a series of exotic metaphors: the seemingly mundane lances become the nocturnal forests of dreams, while the soldiers are compared to terrifying "Negro" (black) masks. He deploys visionary terms: "The plumes of the helmets, in magical incandescent colours, sway like monstrous serpent heads and appear to be transformed into fantastic ferns in virgin forests." He carries on, enchanted: "features erased in the evening light, sprung from the rhythmic movement innumerable axe blows as precise as the gnashing of the wolf's teeth digging in its victim".[102] He then goes on to discuss Uccello's intense attempt – certainly intentional, in my opinion– to create dramatic expression,[103] mainly via effects of lighting, body plasticity and the location management of his figures.[104] To exemplify his comment about a vague or abstract theatricality, Pudelko cites *The Flood*, and once again Jean-Louis Schefer concurs, in a thorough analysis of *The Flood*, recounted here for comparison.[105] Going beyond notions of theatricality,[106] the latter discusses the quasi-

[100] Ibid.
[101] Pudelko, 1935, pp. 33-41.
[102] ibid, p. 41. A similar slippage between Canadian forest and visionary scene can be traced in a text by the German-Austrian-Mexican painter, sculptor and art philosopher Wolfgang Robert Paalen (1905-59): "The long flights of the great crows, sounding like black veil tearing, ceaselessly ties and unties beach and forest. Profiles of men and beasts, inextricably tangled, features erased in the evening light, sprung from the rhythmic movement of innumerable axe blows as precise as the gnashing of the wolf's teeth digging into its victim." Paalen, a member of the Abstraction-Création group from 1934-35, was a prominent Surrealist from 1935-42, see Adamowicz, Elza, *Surrealism: Crossing/Frontiers* (Bern: Peter Lang Editions, 2006), pp. 212-13.
[103] Pudelko, 1934, p. 253.
[104] Ibid, p. 243.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Schefer, 1995, pp. 39-40, 58, 61, 76, 110-11, 126 and 128.

filmic visualization of myths and monstrosity:[107] "the cinematic absurdity as a signifying body is meaningless, painful, embarrassing and stubborn comedy".[108]

Uccello's interest in absurd fictions and monstrous myths explains the fascination of Surrealists both with his work and his life. One such example is Marcel Schwob, a late symbolist French writer, often described as a "Surrealist precursor".[109] His *Vies Imaginaires* (*Imaginary Lives*), a collection of 22 short stories first published as a book in 1896, was an early work in the genre of biographical fiction, mixing the known and the fantastical. One of the narrated lives was *Paolo Uccello, Painter*, narrating Uccello's love for weird colours, multiple vanishing lines, the mystery of the universe and alchemy. The most remarkable point in the story is the tale of Uccello's wife Selvaggia, neglected because of Uccello's devotion to his art – but, as Schwob tells it, another Renaissance artist, Donatello, is secretly in love with her. Chiefly, this text honours the unusual love of Uccello for his art, caring to sacrifice his personal happiness for the discovery of new lines in the perspective of painting.[110]

Let us turn now to Antonin Artaud, actor, playwright and pioneer in the Parisian avant-garde theatre of the 1930s. His work combined poetry, design and drama, meaning almost inevitably that he was a member of the Surrealist movement (until equally inevitably he was expelled from it).[111] Schwob's story inspired Artaud to write in 1929 his great essay *Uccello le poil* (*Uccello the Hair*), as well as his stage-play script *Paul les Oiseaux* (*Paul the Birds*).[112] The latter, along with two other texts of the same period, *The Blood Spray* (*The Jet of Blood*) and *The Vitre d'amour* (*The Glass of Love*), were published together in several collections, including *Art and Death*, *L'ombilic des limbes* (*Umbilicus of Limbo*) and *Three Tales of Antonin Artaud*. The term "tale" is at once justified here by the narrative structure and imaginary dimension of these three texts, all of which, in accord with the Surrealist narrative, take the form of a delirious mixture.

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[107] Ibid, pp. 66 and 106-07.
[108] Ibid, p. 100.
[109] Rosemont, Franklin, *Jacques Vache and the Roots of Surrealism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2007), p. 13.
[110] Schwob, Marcel, *Vies Imaginaires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 89-96.
[111] In 1926, Antonin Artaud, historian Robert Aron and playwright-poet Roger Vitrac founded the Théâtre Alfred Jarry, which was active from 1927-29. Despite being so short-lived, a large number of artists attended the productions. Artaud and Vitrac were both associated with the Surrealists, but both would be expelled: partly for their involvement with theatre (which many Surrealists deplored as bourgeois and anti-revolutionary), but also because the Surrealists were increasingly linked to the French Communist Party. Artaud in particular was expelled by Breton in 1927. In his 'Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre' (1926/27), Artaud, who was hostile to ideologies in general, directly attacked the Surrealists as "bog-paper revolutionaries". Writing "I shit on Marxism," he saw Communism as a "lazy man's revolution' and demanded a "essential metamorphosis" of society, see Le Clézio, Jean-Marie Gustave, 'Antonin Artaud: le reve Mexicain', *Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle*, 667-68 (1984), pp. 110-20; and https://essentialdrama.com/2017/01/13/artauds-encounter-with-the-surrealists-artaud-vs-breton/ [accessed 18 November 2023].
[112] Artaud, Antonin, 'Paul les Oiseaux ou la place de l'Amour', in Artaud, Antonin, Schwob, Marcel and Vasari, Giorgio, *Vies de Paolo Uccello*, (Paris: Éditions de l'éclat/éclats, 2019), pp. 41-48.

The Vitre d'amour is like a partly dreamt narrative, while *The Blood Spray* is a purely theatrical scene. As for *Paul the Birds*, it is in a sense a "work in progress": as the dramatic transposition of a biographical narrative, it adopts the point of view of a speaker-spectator who is sometimes actor and sometimes director of this adaptation. This formal choice corresponds to a specific objective.

When Artaud discusses his earlier texts *L'ombilic des limbes* and *La Révolution Surréaliste* in *Uccello le poil*, he declares "It is me now, Paul the Birds."[113] But this identification is far from categorical: instead Artaud declines the analogy in a conflictual back-and-forth between fusion and distancing, lyricism and irony, an image of his own inner struggle with his alter ego. As the case with Schwob before him, the challenge of this fight related to artistic expression, but as the author of *Imaginary Lives*, Schwob was to offer us a '"*Tragedy of Abstraction"*.[114]

On 19th April 1924 Comoedia published two sketches and captions: "*Diagram of Architecture*, by Antonin Artaud, for *The Place of Love*, mental drama after Marcel Schwob". In André Masson's 1976 memoir *Le Rebelle du Surrealisme*,[115] in which he references his theatrical collaboration with Artaud in the famous Paris studio at 45 Rue Blomet, Artaud's admiration for Uccello is specifically noted, with a "project piece" on the painter being announced. Masson is also quoted in one of Artaud's texts as a double of the Italian painter. Alongside Masson, claims the author, he attempted to create a spiritual work in *Comoedia*,[116] fashioned around his own mythology and that of Uccello.[117]

Schwob's writing about the imaginary life of Uccello and his wife apparently suggested a direction to Artaud. Schwob himself was a lover of theatrical dialogue, a form he had used several times, and which reappears here in Artaud's dialogues. Schwob allows his painter-hero to embody the perspective of temptation: an idea, a fantasy perhaps, but quite the opposite of his own achievements. For Artaud too, Uccello is a sort of ghost, a foil crystallizing his obsessions: frozen impotence, loss of self, intellect cut off from the real. As Artaud wrote in his introductory text, "We must finish with the Spirit as with literature." He was dreaming of a book that would be "an open door (...) a door just closed with reality."[118]

Thus, the dramatization that we see in *Paul the Birds* becomes the "theatre where everything is played" ,[119] a form chosen "at (this) moment" to express "this dull and multifaceted crystallization of thought...of the ego".[120] It allows Artaud to expose his internal conflict through various roles, and specifically through the lens of a privileged

[113] Ibid., 45.
[114] Masson, André, *Le rebelle du Surrealisme* (Paris: Édition Hermann, 2014), p. 108.
[115] Ibid, p. 81.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., p. 105.
[118] Vadé, Yves and Berg, Christian, 'Marcel Schwob chez quelques surréalistes', in *Marcel Schwob d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2002), p. 330.
[119] Artaud, Antonin *L'Ombilic des Limbes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 11.
[120] Ibid.

person; in this instance through the painter Paolo Uccello. But the choice of the dramatic form also prevents Artaud from being invaded by his character, whereas Schwob had betrayed his obsession by using a falsely extradiegetic third person narrator and by resorting to an uncertain focus, adept at superimposition until confusing the object and the subject of the biography in the crucible of the imagination. By objectifying the one who fascinates him, theatricalization separates Artaud from this ghost.[121]

Other authors have seen Uccello as a stimulus not only for visual Surrealist art but also for the performative art of theatre. According to John Stout, Artaud's play *Heliogabalus* (1933) takes inspiration from Uccello's pictorial characters.[122] For Artaud, the realm of theatre is physical and plastic, not psychological, explaining his persistent advocation of a move away from the theatre that he associates with Renaissance humanism. Hence, *Heliogabalus* should instead be seen as a metaphysical play. And here we find themes in common with Breton's attitude to the classical world: combining a non-anthropocentric dimension to reveal the end of the corrupted Western world through Greek-Roman culture.[123] Historically, Heliogabalus was a Roman Emperor originating from Syria, noted for his corruption, violence, and cruelty towards the population throughout the Empire. In similar fashion, *Heliogabalus* is considered to be among the works of Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty',[124] and one perhaps inspired by Uccello's so-called 'lunar side'. Let us recall here that Uccello's *Flood* amplifies the human and physical disaster through a tragic theatrical depiction, while his foreshortening of the dead soldiers in his battles is a dramatic expression of the madness of war.

Similarly, in *The Profanation of the Host* (fig. 19) Uccello is exploring the human curiosity, even the conceit, to degrade or desecrate the sacred symbols of a different religion. In a sequence of frescoes, a woman is shown selling the Host to a Jew for the purpose of desecration. During the profanation, the army discovers the scheme due to the miraculous bleeding of the Host; what directly follows is the punishment of the Jewish family and the woman who initially sold the Host. The same myth was tackled by Dalí, as mentioned below, though we will first look at how the American-English post-modernist Abstract Expressionist Ronald Brooks Kitaj (1932-2007) confronted it.

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[121] Other writers used biographical resources in similar ways for presenting stories about Renaissance artists. In the fifth chapter of *Feminies*, writer and journalist Octave Uzanne (1851-1931) presents a fictional dispute between several artists of the Italian Renaissance about the women who inspired their works – this was reprinted in 1896 under the title *Art*, in *Spicilège*, a much-admired collection of literary studies within Artaud's preview, see Lhermitte, Agnès, ''Paul les oiseaux': Paolo Uccello au miroir de Marcel Schwob et d' Antonin Artaud', *La revue des resources* (20 October 2004), pp. 1-8, and https://www.larevuedesressources.org/Paul-les-oiseaux-Paolo-Uccello-au-miroir-de-Marcel-Schwob-et-d-Antonin-Artaud.html [accessed on 5 February 2023].

[122] Stout, John C., 'Modernist Family Romance: Artaud's Héliogabale and Paternity', *The French Review*, vol. 64, no. 3 (1991), p. 423.

[123] *Lübecker*, Nikolaj, 'Artaud and Sun: Heliogabalus and Contemporary Non-Anthropocentric Theory', *Image & Narrative*, vol. 17, no. 5 (2016), p. 25.

[124] As developed and theorised by Artaud in the mid-1930s, the 'Theatre of Cruelty' was a form of drama that worked to shock audiences via gesture, image, sound and lighting.

Figure 19: Paolo Uccello, *The Profanation of the Host*, 1467-69, oil on panel, 43 x 348 cm., Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino

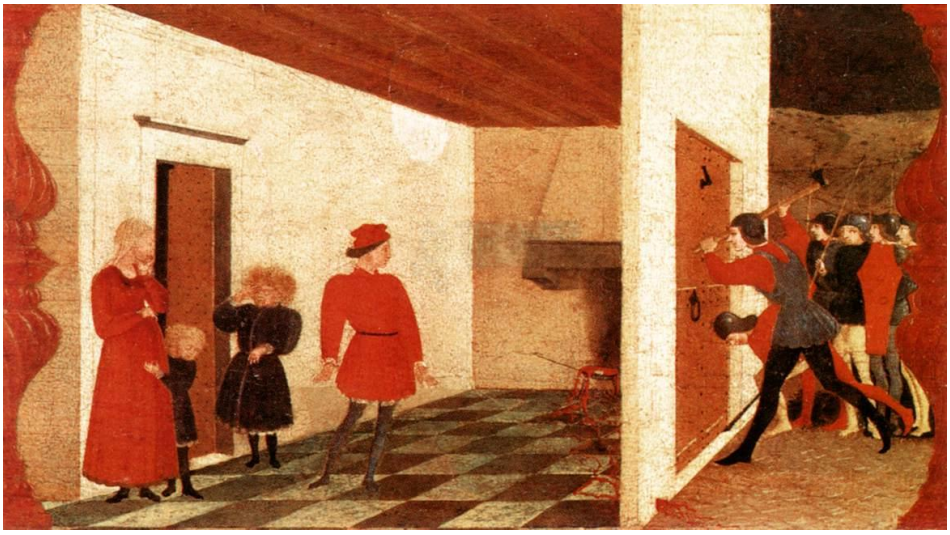

Figure 20: Paolo Uccello, detail of fig. 19, *The Profanation of the Host*

Uccello narrates this six-part story across a predella panel on an altarpiece, starting from the point of sale of the Host and concluding to the punishment of the guilty (1467-69). Until the fourteenth century, the interior painting of churches often took this kind of successive form, featuring biblical histories or stories from the life of Christ. This innovative Cathedral decoration resembled a cinematic sequence, with a clearly evolving plot and an emotional loading to each scene. The dramatic imprinting, the emotional affects, the stirring of impressions and questions upon the observer about the story and its meanings, all this certainly resembles a film, even down to the old-fashioned camera negatives.

A Eucharist wafer has (supposedly) been purchased by a family of Jews to be thrown into a fire, where it starts to bleed. We see a gang of Christians attacking the door of the Jewish home, to rescue the bleeding Host. The 'guilty' Jewish merchant and his family, conceived here as faithless heretics, are eventually burnt at the stake for this crime against Uccello's religion. Powerful religious and political motivations are coursing though the imagery, including a campaign against usury which aimed to reduce dependence among Christians on money lending, in favour of Catholic alternatives.

Uccello's story was retold by Kitaj, a major recent representative of Jewish Art inspired by the Surrealists. In 1989 Kitaj published his First Diasporist Manifesto, a playful personal essay that examines what it means to be an outsider as an artist, and specifically to be a Jew, as well as his modernist inspirations, artistic and literary, and the present-day importance of figurative art. Key to his work, visual and written, is recent Jewish history, which of course very much includes anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. "Diasporism" is the shrewd term he uses, to elucidate the paradoxes of the outsider condition.

To Kitaj, Uccello's original project must be inverted, its details carefully recast, the hatred at its heart brought to the fore, and attention turned to the conflicting relevant visual traditions of Judaism and of Christianity. In his painting *Eclipse of God* (1997-2000), after the Uccello panel called *Breaking Down the Jew's Door*, Uccello's Jews are given an expressionist handling and they become sympathetic characters (fig. 21). Their pathos is contrasted with the calculated geometries of the raging Christian mob, as they besiege the Jewish household. One of them, with his back towards us and wearing a red coat, bears the word "god" on its neck.

Figure 21: Ronald Brooks Kitaj, *Eclipse of God* (after the Uccello panel *Breaking Down the Jew's Door*), 1997-2000, oil and charcoal on canvas, 91.3 x 121.8 cm., The Jewish Museum, New York

There is an ambiguous tension to this portrayal from behind as it acknowledges, but also challenges, the Jewish ban on representations of the deity. It also echoes the passage from Exodus 33:23, saying that God can only ever be seen from behind. The work's title, *Eclipse of God*, invokes the text of the same name authored by existentialist philosopher

Martin Buber (1878-1965), and thus also becomes a commentary on the absence of God during those historical times moments when the entire Jewish community's existence was under threat. This work continues Kitaj's fascination with anti-Semitic imagery that begun in 1980 with the strikingly vast *The Jewish School (Drawing a Golem)*, which derives from a nineteenth-century popular print. By contrast, *Eclipse of God* readdresses in contemporary vocabulary the content and form of this Old Master, a practice Kitaj is also well known for.[125]

By contrast, Salvador Dalí's *The Profanation of the Host* (1929) is complicated with many parallel representations, using Uccello's work as an inspiring precedent. From the first page of *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, the artist states: "In any case Paolo Uccello painted armour that looked like little ortolans and he did this with a grace and mystery worthy of the true bird that he was and for which he was named."[126] As ever, Uccello's art had the magical touch to trigger the Surrealists to dream and imagine visions that they had never seen before.

Dalí's awareness of Uccello was probably owed to Breton,[127] who had mentioned the Renaissance artist in many of his works, as already mentioned. Looking from a distance at Dalí's own version of *The Profanation of the Host* (fig. 22), it seems that a central figure is holding a glowing pan – or does the fire rise from the ground beneath the pan? A complex of dreamlike paralysis unfolds; here are expressions of anger about the desecration of Host, and the blur of phantasms.

A tripartite figure, almost a Holy Trinity, delivers feelings, cravings, and mystical thoughts. Perhaps the white figure is the Holy Spirit: it has the fuzzy features of a person, its abnormal mouth indefinite in shape and type, an alarming phantom resembling the foetus of a horse or a frog, or perhaps a new species of phallus; an unspecified penis. As the fire affects faces as it passes to the left, three small tails like spermatozoa form. Here is the genesis of the monsters of the Host.

Meanwhile, the central face seems weak and incapable of doing anything. We recall that something similar happens in Uccello's *Creation of the Animals* fresco, where the chameleon-calf has a double face. The third face shows respect and perhaps curiosity, about the Host standing above the grail. In the foreground, a mass of figures with female bodies and male heads attempt to seduce each other.

Once we compare it with Uccello's work, the intentions and hidden thoughts behind the bruising of the Host and the flood of flammable blood are much plainer. If this blasphemy can free the spirit and flesh of man, does it not also merely limit and punish

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[125] Berger, Maurice, *Masterworks of the Jewish Museum* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2004), pp. 194-95.
[126] Dalí, Salvador, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. by Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Dial Press, 1942), p. 9.
[127] Rothman, Roger, *Tiny Surrealism: Salvador Dalí and the Aesthetics of the Small* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2012), p. 194.

him, either as a follower or an enemy of religion? This painting reminds us of Marquis De Sade's philosophy, and the deepest taboos and needs of human existence.

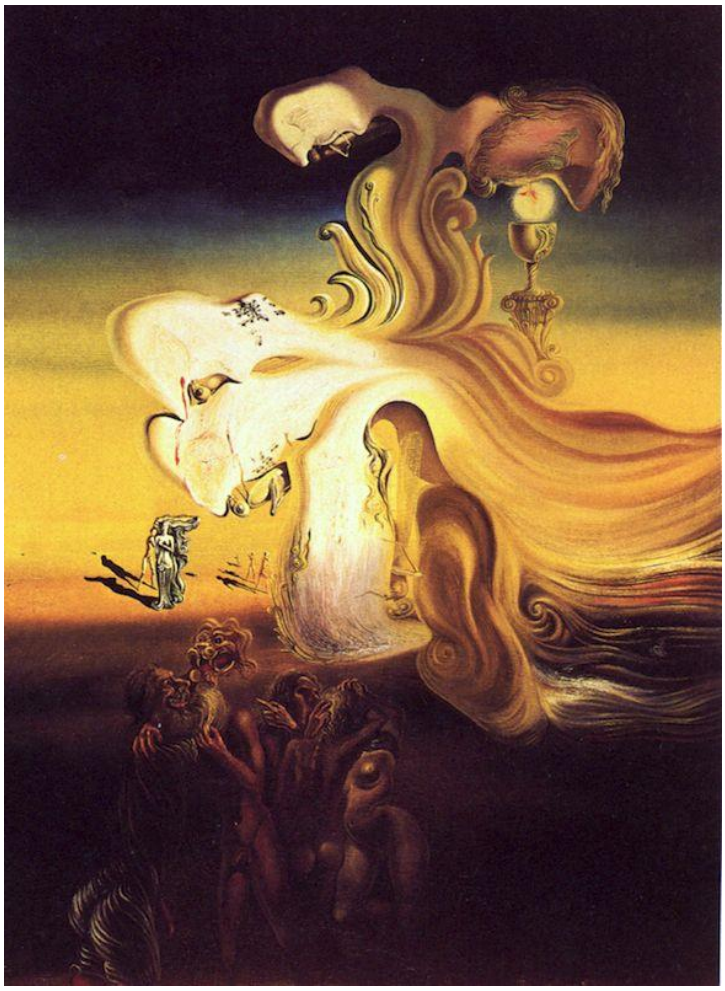

Figure 22: Salvador Dalí, *The Profanation of the Host*, 1929,
oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm., Dalí Museum,
St Petersbourg, Florida

In the distance slender figures – soldiers or perhaps working farmers – practise with their swords, and we recall that Uccello too draws soldiers and peasants in the backgrounds of his battle scenes, characters doubtless more determined, followed emboldened by the Miracle of the Host. What is the purpose of these seemingly random figures in both artists' paintings? And what are the parallels?

In Dalí's background, as an expression of modesty or a personification of purity, a seemingly fossilised white figure quietly half-conceals her breasts – or perhaps reveals them. In fact the central figure, the one attempting to burn the Host, is also the only one to adopt a modest position, dedicated to this task and a strong belief in this ritual. She is conscientious and devout. Does she map onto the woman in Uccello's piece who sells the Host to the Jewish family? Did she do so out of a hatred of Christ? Or out of great love and faith, so that a miraculous revelation of the Lord's power could be brought to

light? Perhaps such questions can be resolved via further iconographic analysis and interpretation. But Dalí reveals his intentions about hidden desires and passions by presenting them as a complex hallucination. By contrast, Kitaj's piece hymns the power of art to trigger the human memory, and to offer a powerful statement about the historical and artistic facts of anti-Semitism.

Figure 23: Salvador Dalí, *The Great Masturbator*, 1929, oil paint, 110 x 150 cm., Museo Nacional, Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid

Dalí's *The Profanation of the Host* has many commons with *The Great Masturbator* (1929, fig. 23), a painting of the same date that represents his own severely conflicted attitudes towards sex. When the artist was young, his father had shown him a book full of explicit photos of the diseased and damaged genitalia of those with venereal disease, advanced and untreated. These horrific photos stayed with Dalí well into his adulthood, and he always associated sex with putrefaction and decay.[128] The foetus-penis below Dalí's yellow female figure maximise the perspective aspects of these piece, as did the similar tiny figures in the background of Uccello's *Battles*. Both of Dalí's paintings deploy his own personal shame and disgust towards sexuality – meaning that the taboos confronted in the *Profanation of the Host*, linked as they are with his feelings towards his father, become more sexual than religious.

[128] Rubin, Edward, 'The Great Masturbator In Retrospect: Salvador Dalí at the Philadelphia Museum of Art', *NY Arts Magazine* (11 May 2011); https://www.theartstory.org/artist/dali-salvador/; https://nyartsmagazine.net/the-great-masturbator-in-retrospect-salvador-dala%C2%AFaa%C2%BD-at-the-philadelphia-museum-of-art-edward-rubi/ [accessed 18 October 2023].

In Uccello's work, the woman's soul is claimed in the final panel by devils and angels. Was this the desecration of the Host or the facilitation of a miracle? Certainly Dalí's woman remains bifurcated, suspended in Dante's Purgatory. Is her task to perpetuate the Christian miracle, or to continue her profanation as she releases people from the constraints of the sin of the body? Notably, in both paintings the blood visibly bursts. For Uccello, the consequence of the act of profanation is a trial, implying punishment for the guilty – but Dalí associates it with liberation from clothing and from sin.

For both artists the body and blood of Christ are the Holy Communion brought about by the miracle. Nevertheless, in Uccello's work the figure of the older ("frizzy-haired") Jewish child seems panicked, as if man is everywhere afraid of all wickedness and sin. This element is lacking in Dalí's family – perhaps because, since the Trinity has been manifested through the blood of Host, there is no need to fear any longer. Perhaps this group of hermaphrodite people is now the family; allegorically new people free from the fear of obscenity and moral code violation. In any case, the child of undetermined sex is still crying, suggesting that Dalí's issues of faith and sexual identity remain distorted by his personal feelings about sex. Even in Kitaj's *Eclipse of God*, the 'big-haired' child is the major and most remarkable figure in the piece. Was the intention of Uccello to identify religious blasphemy, or to show that these trapped souls confined to human bodies are confused by desires and curiosity? It is perhaps worth looking back at the reference in Breton's *Nadja* to the Host, which opposes Church and Desire, treating Blasphemy as a rational thing.

In conclusion, by examining Uccello as an influence on Surrealists, and especially on their interpretation of *The Profanation of the Host*, we observe a wide variety of reactions and approaches to representation.[129] Uccello endeavoured to incorporate human desires, emotions, and actions in a field constructed through theatrical sceneries and mathematic principles. His pioneering techniques of perspective bring the viewer into intimate relationship with his intentions in the painting. His objective was not limited to social-religious commentary on the late medieval Western world, but it was also to shock, arouse and challenge the religious modesty of his times. Following his unconventional, idiosyncratic lead, Surrealists like Breton, Dalí and Duchamp delved behind their own ideas and visions in order to express the world of the unconscious. The result was a dramatization of the inner world's deeper realities, revealing a multitude of hidden intentions in Surrealist forms.

What mattered above all to the Surrealists – and what made Paolo Uccello part of their history – was his excessive use of a technique applied to the natural world, how it gave his figures their unnatural look, ensuring that this was a battle between the real and the unreal. As was the case with Hieronymus Bosch, whose works are discussed in chapter

[129] The list of Surrealists who drew inspiration from Uccello must also include Pavel Tchelitchew (1898-1957) who used similar techniques to create an illusional environment in his *Metamorphoses* works, see Ford, Neiman, and Nathan, 1991, p. 52.

five, Uccello was admired because he was obsessed by a particular vision which deployed – yet also perverted – 'normal' vision.

2a: Geometries, comparisons and key information for Duchamp's works:

¶ Si ex eleuata sede: vtendũ est inclinata piramide a puncto subiecto vel altero ex terciis exeunte: cuius latitudo basis/aperiatur/ad altitudinem proxime seu maioris persone/in spacio statuende: secundũ au⁹ piramidis iarctationẽ/ persone huiusmodi/ a plãtis ad summa capitum/ accipient minorationem: vt figura sequenti: ordinata secundum sedem paulum eleuatam tantum/que tamẽ altius potest eleuari: etiã supereleuari: et linea orizontalis/ac acies piramidis inclinate/simul inaltari/prolongari ue/aut dilatari/vt prenotatũ est/in articulo de figuris elementaribus: prout et plane comprehendetur ab intentis speculatoribus. Obicumq; autem pueri vel adolescẽtes erunt fingendi: pro etatibus singulorũ veniẽt in q̃titate altitudinis metiendi: Quib⁹ pueris/ceterisq; vbilibet assignatis psonis/proportiones legitime dabũtur pro magnitudinib⁹ suis. Et quod de psonis per oĩa dicitur: de ceteris animãtibus similiter intelligitur.

Figure 24: Jean Pélerin, figures in perspective,
in *De Artificiali Perspectiva*, 1505

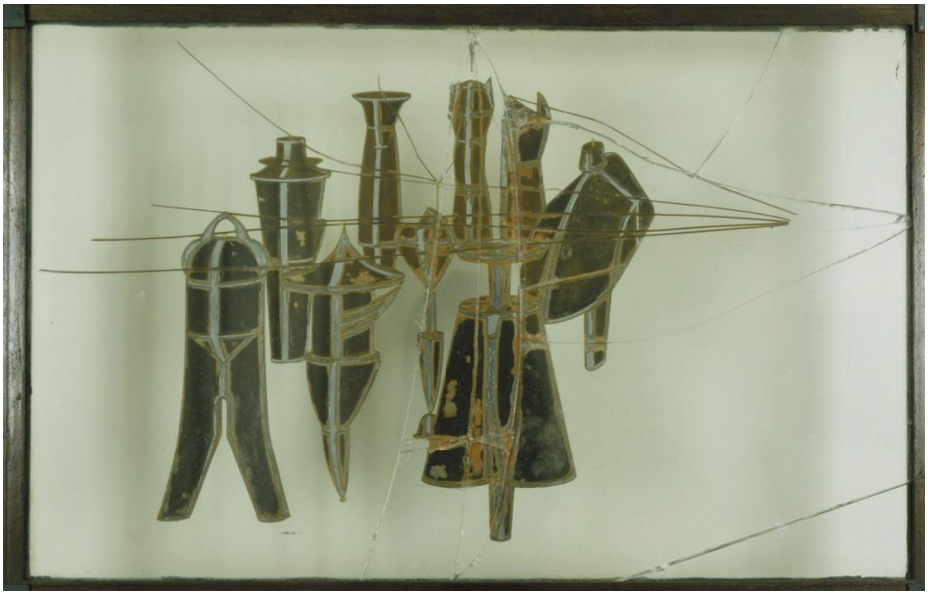

Figure 25: Marchel Duchamp, *Neuf Moules Mâlic (Nine Malic Moulds)*, 1914-1915, sculpture, glass, lead, oil paint, varnished steel, 66 x 101.2 cm

Figure 26: Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: Backstage in perspective 1*

Figure 27: Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: Backstage in perspective 2*

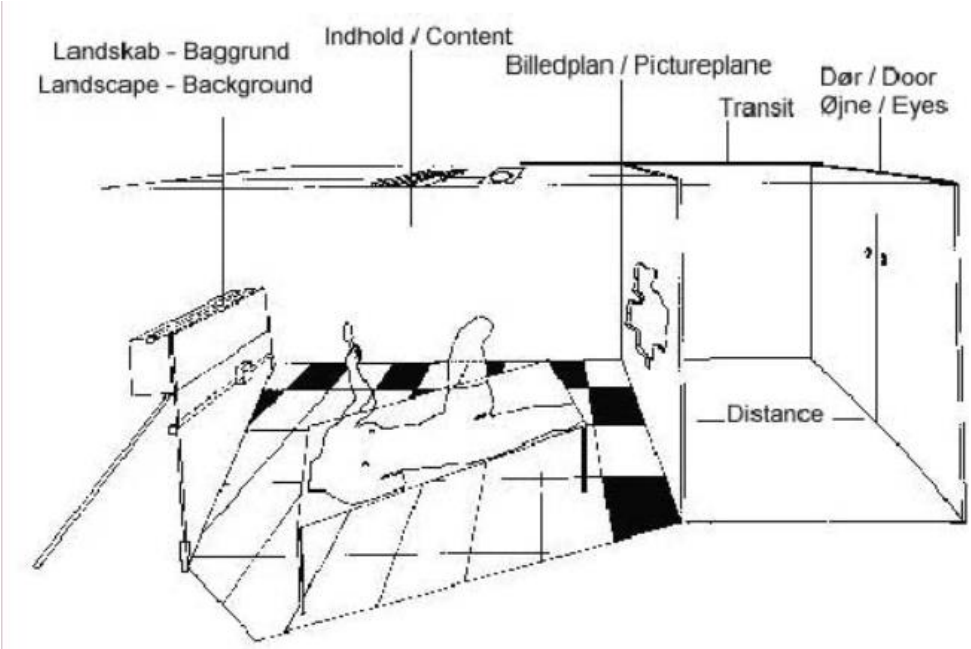

Figure 28: Marcel Duchamp, the cross-section of the peepshow construction of Etant donnés: 1º la chute d'eau / 2º le gas d'éclairage, diagram, 1946-66

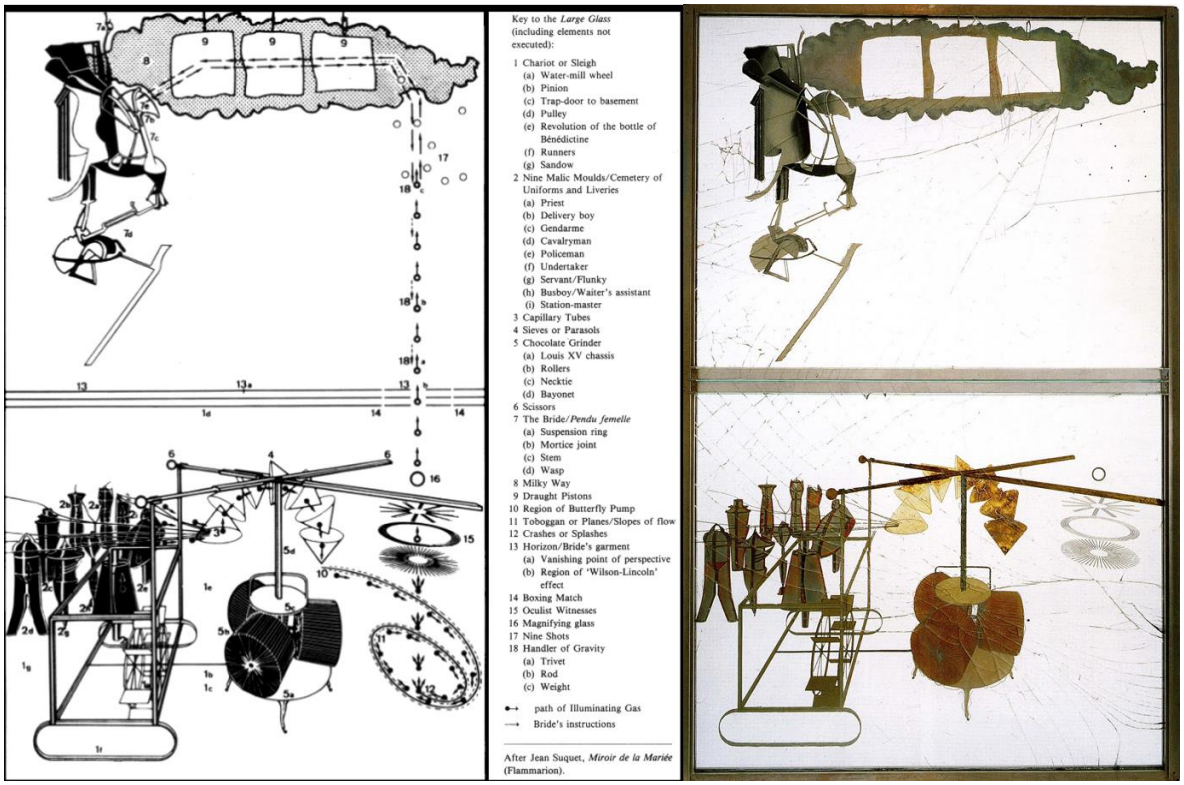

Figure 29: Marcel Duchamp, *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, with an annotated diagram of the parts

3: What are the connections between Leonardo da Vinci and Surrealism?

This chapter explores the influence of Leonardo da Vinci over Surrealism. It highlights the importance of dreams as a primary source of artistic inspiration for both Leonardo and Surrealists, as well as their common emphasis on the limitless power of imagination. An examination of works by Duchamp, Dalí and Ernst further indicates that they had studied in detail Leonardo's artworks, sketches and notes, as well as Giorgio Vasari's biography of his life. They were so much inspired by his unique mindset and endless reach for the impossible to the point of considering him their precursor.[130]

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) has been a source of reference to countless artists and historians across the centuries.[131] His novel perception of the human figure, as well as his imaginary monuments and landscapes, served as exemplary models for Renaissance

[130] Barr, 1936, pp. 23-24.
[131] Artists inspired by Leonardo include Raphael, Rubens, Dalí, Ernst and Duchamp, see Belkin, Kristin Lohse, *Rubens* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), pp. 52-57; Dalí, 2016 pp. 321-23; Ernst, Max, *Beyond Painting* (Chicago: Solar Books, 2009), p. 12; and Tomkins, Calvin, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), p. 129.

artists like Raphael (1483-1520) who took immediate inspiration from works such as the unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 30, 1481).[132]

Figure 30: Leonardo da Vinci, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1481,
oil on wood, 243 x 246 cm, Uffizi Gallery

In his renowned *Lives*, Giorgio Vasari notes the "supernatural" character of Leonardo's talents:

> "The greatest gifts often rain down upon human bodies through celestial influences as a natural process, and sometimes supernaturally; a single body is lavishly supplied with such beauty, grace, and ability that wherever the individual turns, each of his actions is so divine that he leaves behind all other men…each of his actions is so divine that he leaves behind all other men and clearly makes himself known as a genius endowed by God (which he is) rather than created by human artifice."[133]

Leonardo's paintings and designs are evidently some of the most exemplary kinds of artisanship of the Renaissance period. But perhaps more notable still is the sense of mystery of his works, the enigmatic figures in his paintings, with their host of obscured intentions. For instance, his painted figures often exhibit a degree of androgyny, which triggers questions in a viewer about sexuality and gender – think for example of his

[132] Eissler, Kurt Robert, *Leonardo da Vinci* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), p. 284.
[133] Vasari, 1998, p. 284.

depiction of *St. John the Baptist* (fig. 31). Of great importance are also the notes that survive him (often called the Leonardo Notes or the *Codex Atlanticus*), which have become the subject of eager research through the last decades.

Figure 31: Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint John the Baptist*, 1513-16,
oil on walnut wood, 69 x 57 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris

One of the most intriguing facets of Leonardo's thinking relates to his recorded fantasies and dreams. In fact, one of the most under-researched aspects of the entire Renaissance period is its fascination with the irrational, yet tremendously vivid, reality of dreams and nightmares. If there was one subject able during that period to accommodate monstrosity and evil alongside truth that was the dream, which of course also brought in the demanding task for the artist of representing a dreamer's visions.[134] In the representation of a dream, without the need of mediating figures or coherence between levels, the phenomena of nature can be placed in perfect continuity with the supernatural, and the anti-natural substituted or upheld. A remarkable example from the Italian Renaissance, one that Breton and Dalí may have been aware of, is the engraved composition of Marcantonio Raimondi *The Dream of Raphael* (c. 1509), an astonishing 'proto-Surrealist' invention of archetypal night-terrors and disturbingly distorted animals (fig. 32).

[134] Cecchi, Alessandro, Hersant, Yves and Bernard, Rabbi Chiara *La Renaissance et le Rêve* (Paris: RMN-Grand Palais, 2013), p. 14.

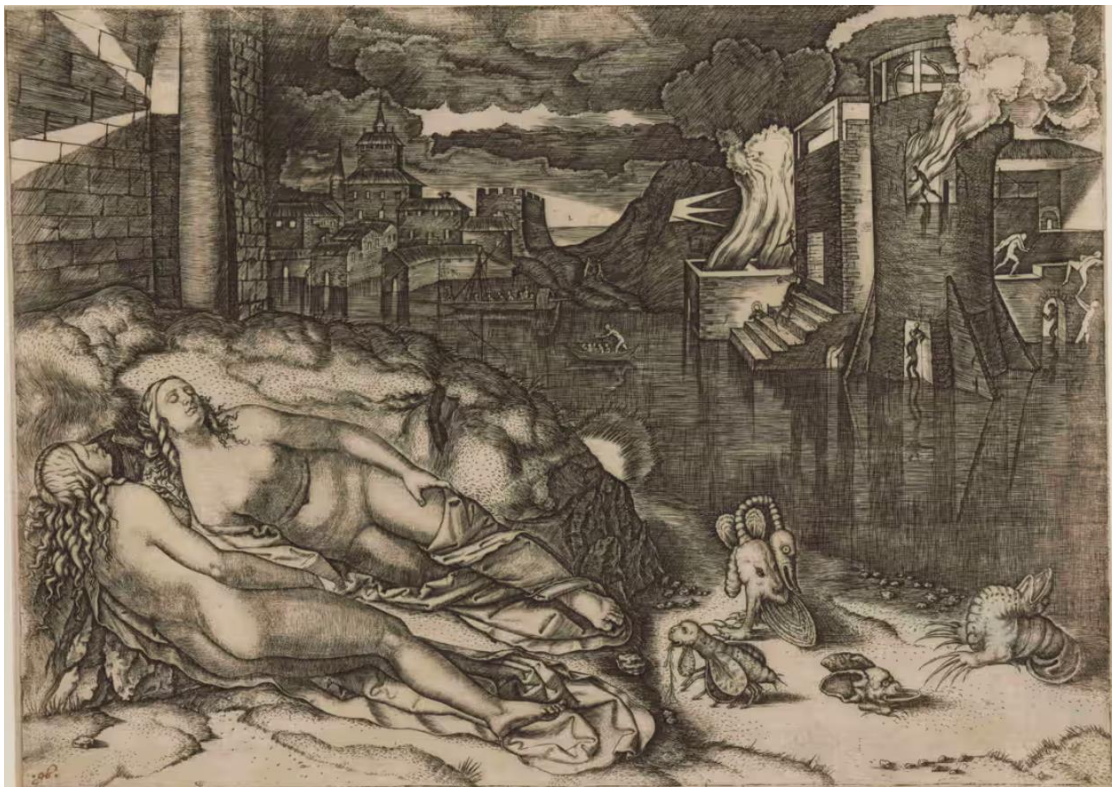

Figure 32: Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Dream of Raphael*, c. 1509, engraving, 23.6 x 33.4 cm, possibly after a drawing by Raphael, National Gallery of Art, Washington

North of the Alps, artists drawing us into that kind of insomnia include Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525-69), Jan Mandijn (1500-60), and Herri met des Bles (1510-55). In their world the rule is hybridization: a conjunction of heterogeneous elements, either monstrous or playful. As our daytime memory capitulates, the objects of the night appear, and boundaries between form and chaos erased. And in this mutating space, where phantasy is not constrained, the imagination of the artist is also freed.[135]

The formula is ancient and famous: *Ut pictura poesis*, "as poetry so painting".[136] As poetry resembles painting, so painters embrace the limitless audacity of poets. But arguably in this period Leonardo da Vinci begins to demonstrate the superiority of painting, by representing so wide a variety of imaginary or inconsistent things, including lights, shadows, clouds, fumes and dust.[137] It was Leonardo who first asked the question '*why does the eye see a thing more clearly in dreams than the imagination awake?*',[138]

[135] Ibid. p. 19.
[136] The phrase "*ut pictura poesis*" comes from Horace's *Art's Poetica* – where he also describes badly composed poems as like monsters in a "sick man's dream".
[137] Cecchi, Hersant and Bernard, 2013, p. 22.
[138] Notebook of Leonardo da Vinci, 'The Codex Arundel' (1478-1518), British Museum, Arundel MS 263, 278v, in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, trans. Edward MacCurdy (Los Angeles, CA: G. Braziller, 1958), vol. I, ch. I.

and it was also his recollection of a famous 'infantile' dream that made Sigmund Freud write a remarkable psychobiography of the artist, more of which below.[139] Commenting on Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1490, fig. 33), Daniele Barbaro (1514-70) talks of the "dreams of painting", whereby in the dream the imagination "represents to us confusedly the images of things, often putting together various nature, the same goes for the grotesques, which no doubt can be called dreams of painting".[140]

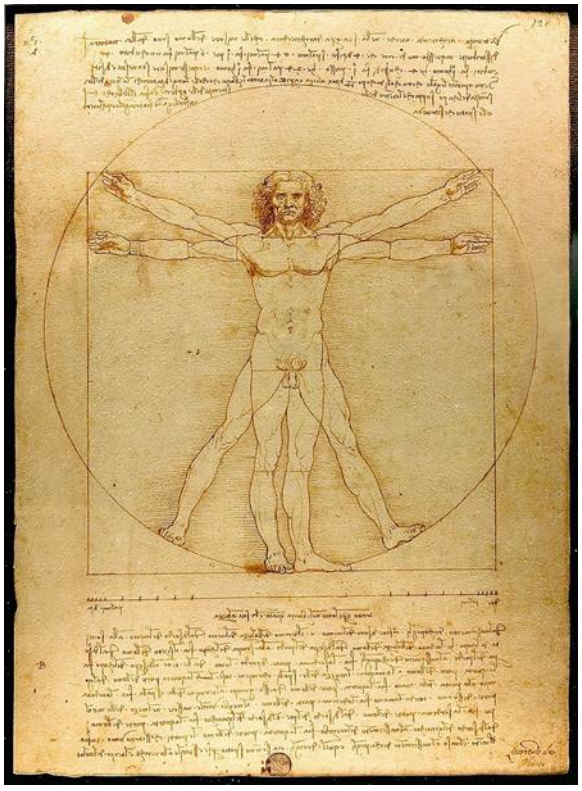

Figure 33: Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*, 1490, pen, brown ink and watercolour over metalpoint on paper, 34.4 x 24.5 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

The issue of the Renaissance as present-day inspiration underscores how deeply we have felt, since the Middle Ages, that images on one hand and the dream on the other are profoundly interwoven, and even converging in mystical vision.[141] The dreams that visit the sleeper allow for metamorphoses and fantasies – and in the Renaissance this often served as a metaphor for the art painting.[142] Accordingly, the Renaissance culture surrounding dreams and how reality is transformed into the fantastic foreshadows the

[139] Freud, Sigmund, *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965).
[140] Ibid, p. 14.
[141] Ibid, p. 29.
[142] Ibid, p. 61.

uses, concepts and intentions associated by future and successor artists with 'supernatural' or 'surreal' art.

As a psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud was working in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century to bring his clients' subconscious thoughts to the fore. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), a book revised some eight times, Freud introduced his theories of the unconscious and the dream-symbol, beginning to explore what would become the theory of the Oedipus complex. In particular he considered dreams to be a revelation of the unconscious. Shortly later, the Surrealists were self-consciously enacting a revolution against the constraints of the rational mind and society's oppressive conventions. Hence, they were drawn to Freud's writings, borrowing his methods to stimulate their own writing and art, valuing what might emerge from within the subconscious as more potent and authentic than any conscious process. The importance to the group of dreams, hallucinations, and related states and phenomena, is illustrated by the series of trances they organised in 1922, a well-known and crucial episode in the evolution of the movement, which the historian Maurice Nadeau named "The Season of Sleeps" (L'Époque des Sommeils').[143]

One term within psychoanalytical discourse is 'automation', which refers to those involuntary processes beyond of the control of the conscious mind – among them respiration and nervous tics, and of course dreams. Surrealist techniques that overlapped with automation in this sense included spontaneous or automatic writing and painting via the free association of images or words, and collaborative creation through wordgames, such as the *Exquisite Corpses* (fig. 34).[144]

The Surrealists were also deeply interested in the interpretation of dreams, as a portal towards unknown emotions and desires. The artworks explored here did not begin with a preconceived end in mind, but rather were brought into being via dreams or subconscious association between images, texts, and their concepts.[145]

[143] Wilson, Simon, *Surrealist Painting* (London: Phaidon Press, 1991), p. 10.
[144] The Exquisite Corpses word-game was developed in 1925. Like many other games it was designed for group participation: phrases are fashioned collectively, as each contributor adds a new word to the growing word-group (which they have not yet seen), according to what rules have been decided on. Its character as a product of a shared or oceanic unconscious, and its deployment of chance methods to disrupt rationality, both reflect Surrealist beliefs and attitudes.
[145] Leslie, 1997, p. 64.

Figure 34: Cadavre Exquis with André Breton, Jacques Hérold, Yves Tanguy, and Victor Brauner, *Figure (Exquisite Corpse)*, 1934, composite drawing of pencil on paper, 25.6 x 16.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Defining Surrealism in the first *Manifesto* in 1924, Breton described it as "psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."[146] Noting that we "live under reason", Breton explored humanity's imagination and asked how we can maintain a certain sense of creative madness.[147] For Breton, while the insane are at fault for their actions, they are also victims of their imagination. As a species, humanity is a dreamer. As we age, we become moderate and satisfied, looking back on our childhood as a charming time in contrast to an ever-more fleeting life. The dreams of sleep are a neglected element in mental activity, and Breton is scornful about those who attach greater weight to "wakefulness events". He argues that within limits, dreams manifest both continuity and organization.

[146] Breton, 1969, p. 26.
[147] Ibid., p. 5.

In sleep he likes to "surrender himself to the dreamers"[148] – as if the dreams of one night somehow follow on from those of the previous night. Thus the mind embracing surrealism enthusiastically rediscovers the best elements of its own childhood.

In particular, Breton defines the term Surrealism "once and for all" as an attempt to express how thought operates, either verbally, or in the written word, or by any other form of art. Surrealism is based in a belief in neglected associations – such as in dreams. Breton concludes that the world is "just about thinking", and claims that surrealism offers the chance opportunity to explore again.

It is then reasonable to assume that Surrealist authors and artists would have been captivated by Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910). Based on a reading of Leonardo's Notes and his *Codex Atlanticus*, as well as of two of his most famous panels, the *Mona Lisa* (1503-07), and the *Virgin Mary and Child with Saint Anne* (1510, fig. 35), Freud's work is an attempted psychoanalytic study of the artist's life.

Figure 35: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, 1501-19, oil on wood, 168.4 x 130 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris

[148] Paul, Stella, *Twentieth Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Resource for Educators* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), p. 152.

Freud gives special emphasis on Da Vinci's childhood recollection of the vulture: while still in the crib, a vulture visited the future painter, and with its tail penetrated his mouth several times. Freud weaves three theories out of this story.[149] In the first explanation, he sees it as a manifestation of Da Vinci's homosexuality, according to which the scene is not a memory but a phantasy, formed later and transposed into his childhood. In Freud's reading, this image represents *fellatio*, the sexual act in which the penis is put into the mouth of the person involved. Curiously, Da Vinci's phantasy here is utterly passive in character, resembling the dreams and phantasies that Freud believed were found in women or passive homosexuals.[150]

As a visual or physical phantasy, the story recalls similar memories claimed by Surrealist artists, most characteristically Salvador Dalí. When Dalí was ten years old and playing in the countryside, a grasshopper banged his mouth.[151] He described the event as "the 'Terror of Terror'. Features: Grasshopper – loathsome insect! Horror, nightmare, martyriser and hallucinating folly of Salvador Dalí's life".[152] He returns to the deadly appearance of this grasshopper, with its belly filled with a decomposing ant, both of which form a continuous leitmotif within his work. This first oral contact with an alien body inspired him to create one of his most significant paintings, *The Great Masturbator* (fig. 23).[153] What is common to these fantasies is the shared element of erotic oral contact for Dalí, a repulsive experience yet for Da Vinci, a sweet and sensual or affectionate remembrance suffusing the unconsciousness of a baby. For both artists the childhood vision also remerges in a tableau of a painting enacting this memory: Dalí's *The Great Masturbator* and Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (1501-19, fig. 36).

[149] Freud, 1965, p. 32. See also James Beck, 'The Dream of Leonardo da Vinci', *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 14, no. 27 (1993), pp. 185-98.
[150] Ibid, p. 37.
[151] De La Durantaye, Leland, 'Vladimir Nabokov and Sigmund Freud, or Particular Problem', *American Imago*, vol. 62 (2005), p. 107.
[152] Dalí, 2016, p. 104.
[153] Ibid, p. 196.

Figure 36: Salvador Dalí, *Saint Anne*, 1965, hand-coloured etching, 76.3 x 56.3 cm, Private Collection

The connections between Surrealism and Leonardo are certainly not limited to their common interest in dream interpretation. To begin with Duchamp, in the so-called 'Green Box' (a set of 94 documents, published in 1934, concerning the genesis and sources of Duchamp's *Large Glass*), many of the notes mention Leonardo's influence on this particular artist. In Calvin Tomkins's biography, Duchamp recalls that back at the turn of the century, the examination committee of the Rouen School of Fine Arts had asked him various things about Leonardo, an initial impulse that prompted him to delve deeper into the works and texts of the Renaissance master. Like Max Ernst (1891-1976), who had studied the *Codex Atlanticus* and all of Leonardo's notes, Duchamp points out the importance of the famous *Treatise on Painting*: "In this, Leonardo discusses the myriad landscapes and battles my spots form on the walls",[154] typically suggesting that "looking at the spots on a wall and other random signs" will help develop and create mystery.[155] The importance given by Surrealists to random discoveries and chance elements cannot be overemphasised, and it is worth noting that Leonardo da Vinci's

[154] Da Vinci, Leonardo, *Leonardo Da Vinci's Notebooks* (London: Franklin Classics Trade Press, 2015), p. 156.
[155] Tomkins, 2014, p. 129.

advice to his pupils to find inspiration for their subject by fixing their stare at an old, crumbling wall had been also mentioned by Breton.[156]
Other connections can be also found between the mental preoccupations of Da Vinci and Duchamp. Both were interested in mathematical systems, geometrical perspective, science, rotating mechanisms, optical phenomena and the use of chance to spur the imagination. Similarly, they shared a belief that art should not only be a visual experience but rather a "thing of the mind".[157] The phrase *Pittura è una cosa mentale* ('painting is a mental thing/intellectual process') has been often attributed to Da Vinci, although his precise phrase was *La pittura è di maggior discorso mentale e di maggiore artificio e maraviglia che la scultura* ('Painting is of greater mental discourse and greater artifice and wonder than sculpture').[158] In any event, for Leonardo, viewing alone can fail to deliver understanding, so richly complex can a pictorial work be, hence perhaps the emergence of Conceptual Art. "Duchamp," suggests Tomkins in the *Afternoon Interviews*, "would talk about how he wanted to restore art to the service of the mind." That art that which Da Vinci had described as mind art or idea art had gradually dwindled into what Duchamp would describe as 'retinal' art, as "something that appealed to the eye, and to the eye alone."[159]

Similarly to Leonardo's preoccupation with the principle of variety, Duchamp was notoriously filled with horror at the idea of repeating himself. As Tomkins suggests in his biography, the inability to produce new ideas meeting his criteria for freeing the mind doubtless led to his subsequent commitment to idea art. Rather than simply giving up, as he often pretended to have done, "he would become the principal curator and preserver of his earlier ideas, in the hope, perhaps, that those ideas might reveal themselves in greater depth and complexity."[160]

In any event, Duchamp's work *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) can easily be seen to expand on a Renaissance theme, being a cheap postcard reproduction of Da Vinci's famous *Mona Lisa*, with a moustache and beard added in pencil (fig. 37), the whole hung in his studio to be exhibited later. In Duchampian jargon, here was an assisted ready-made, and like most of his works it operates on several levels of meaning. The graffiti desecrates the sacredness of the art, for example, while the title marks the subject as a sexual woman, *L.H.O.O.Q.* being a phonetic reworking of a French phrase indicating sexual interest ("Elle a chaud au cul", meaning "She has a hot ass"). Meanwhile, with the moustache 'he' marks 'her' in a cross-construction of gender.[161]

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[156] Breton, André, *L'amour fou, Mad Love*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 86.
[157] Ibid., pp. 218-19.
[158] Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della Pittura* (Paris, 1651), I, 36.

[159] Tomkins, 2013, p. 13.
[160] Tomkins, 2014, p. 297.
[161] Leslie, 1997, p. 42.

Figure 37: Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919,
30.3 x 23 cm, Tate Modern, London

Very much in fashion in 1919 – which also happened to be the 400th anniversary of his death –Leonardo da Vinci was considered the most elusive and mysterious of Renaissance masters. Two years later, Duchamp was photographing himself as a female model (fig. 38), a '*travesti*', in a game provoking rumours as to the identity of the model:[162] the portrait would be called *C'est la vie, Rrose Sélavy* (1921). When Duchamp adopted this pseudonym, he was marking himself as he had previously marked the *Mona Lisa*.

In his works as both author and patron, the name that Duchamp adopted, 'Rrose Sélavy', is a phonetic reworking of the phrase "*Eros, c'est la vie".* Thus Duchamp, identifying as both male and female, wittily emphasised that 'Eros' was a principle or a way of life.[163] Rrose Sélavy posed for Man Ray's camera, wearing a fur neckpiece and a cloth hat that descended to her eyebrows. Her features were clearly Duchamp's and perceptibly masculine – unlike the Mona Lisa, Duchamp proved an unconvincing crossdresser, but

[162] A 'travesti' – or 'travesty' – is someone dressing at odds with their assigned sex at birth.
[163] Leslie, 1997, p .45.

the sexual overtones here are irresistible to the Freudian antennae.[164] Both Da Vinci and Duchamp had been solitary and secretive, but they were also greatly admired for their personal charm. Here the Duchampian world met and touched the Leonardesque world (or perhaps better say "*osculated*", the geometrical term for when two touching curves briefly share a common tangent at the point of contact). And still, Leonardo's influence on the Surrealists extended further, most notably in the works of Dalí and Ernst.

Figure 38: Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy*, 1920-1921, gelatin silver print, 21.6 x 17.3 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Salvador Dalí saw Surrealism as a new Renaissance in art, a brand new movement echoing the spirit of creativity and individuality that characterised fifteenth and sixteenth-century art.[165] Religious paintings that he made -some of which for Pope Pius XII (1939-58)- such as *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* (fig. 39), *Crucifixion* (fig. 40), and *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (fig. 41) introduce a novel approach of the geometrical perspective and three-dimensionality of Renaissance art. The *Madonna*, in particular, was heavily inspired by stylistic and iconographic aspects of Piero della Francesca's *Brera Madonna* (1472, fig. 42), which Dalí reintroduced in a Surrealist manner, most notably by the stereometrical forms of the Renaissance master and his symbolic inclusion of a seashell and an egg hanging over the Virgin.

[164] Tomkins, 2014, p. 453.
[165] Dalí, 2016, p. 321.

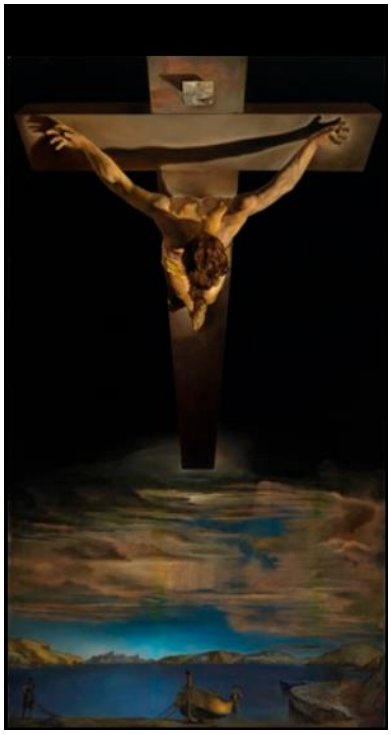

Figure 39: Salvador Dalí, *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, 1951, oil on canvas, 205 x 116 cm, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow

Figure 40: Salvador Dalí, *Crucifixion*, 1954 oil on canvas, 194.3 x 123.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Figure 41: Salvador Dalí, *Madonna of Port Lligat*, 1949, oil on canvas, 48.9 x 37.5 cm, Haggerty, Milwaukee

Figure 42: Piero della Francesca, *Madonna and Child enthroned with Saints*, 1472, tempera on panel, 248 x 150 cm

Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

Dalí expressed particular admiration for Raphael (1483-1520), who appeared to his eyes as a 'true god', and whose splendid forms could not be approximated by any other artist.[166] But he also fashioned himself as a new Leonardo da Vinci, as a pioneer of this cultural regeneration, finding inspiration in many of his works.[167] His interest in Leonardo may have been sparked by the analysis of Freud. During the late 1920s and 30s the work of Dalí would undergo a dramatic transformation towards complex allegories of war and devastation, with Oedipal psychological dramas characterizing his surrealistic paintings.[168] Conversing with his idol about Surrealism and psychoanalysis, Dalí was particularly struck by Freud's comment that "in the paintings of the Old Masters one immediately tends to look for the unconscious, whereas, when one looks at a Surrealist painting, one immediately has the urge to look for the conscious."[169] This observation would have hit home and might have even been the reason why Dalí gradually moved away from Surrealism. His intention "TO BECOME CLASSIC!" was proclaimed in capital letters in the foreword of the brochure for his 1941 exhibition at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York,[170] although the Surrealist elements of his art would never disappear.

Comparing himself with Leonardo, Dalí must have realised the impossibility of crystallising his genius in a form consonant with the Renaissance artist. Instead, Dalí echoed Duchamp by creating his own parody of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*: in a collaboration with photographer Philippe Halsman he placed his likeness, with its eccentric moustache, on the famous sitter's face (fig. 43), a gender reversal possibly inspired from Leonardo's striking fascination with the androgyny. In a retake that wittily trumps Duchamp, as reproduced in the book *Dalí's Moustache* (1954), the same photographer shows Dalí impersonating Mona Lisa, except this time with a real moustache (fig. 44).[171] Late Dalí can of course be lazy, glib, trivial, slapdash, a foolish embarrassment, and when he returned to painting with such frenzy, this moment seems unavoidably to hover behind it all.

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[166] Dalí, 'The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí', 2013, pp. 4-5.

[167] Taylor, 2005, p. 1.
[168] Ibid., p. 5.
[169] Vattimo, Gianni, *The Death or Decline of Art*, trans. J. R. Snyder, in *The End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 53.
[170] Taylor, 2005, p. 5.
[171] Ibid., p. 183.

Figure 43: Salvador Dalí, *Self Portrait as Mona Lisa*, painting and photomontage, 77 x 53 cm, 1954. Photographic elements by Philippe Halsman from: Marcel Duchamp [the catalogue of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art] 1973, p. 195.

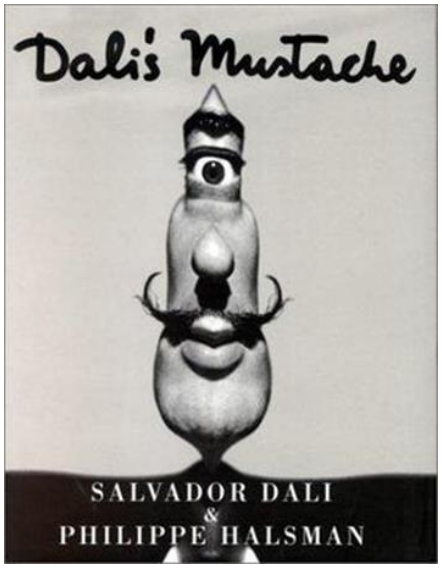

Figure 44: Salvador Dalí & Philippe Halsman, *Dalí's Mustache*, 1954, Museum of Modern Art, New York

At the same time, though, the artist studied and admired Leonardo probably more than any other Surrealist. In 1955, just after becoming a Roman Catholic, Dalí painted the *Sacrament of the Last Supper* (fig. 45), a modern interpretation of Leonardo's famous fresco in Milan (fig. 47). Dalí clearly took pains in absorbing the techniques and methods of Leonardo, and especially his preparatory drawings (fig. 46) followed the original work in a strikingly close manner. Twenty years later, an entire portfolio of twelve coloured engravings by Dalí under the title *Hommage to Leonardo da Vinci* (figs. 48-49) would be dedicated to the Old Master, including a series of scientific ideas and original inventions by the two artists. Their common ambition to explore the entire range of the human experience through artistic means was actually the theme of a 2015 exhibition at the Dalí Museum 'Dalí & Da Vinci: Minds, Machines & Masterpieces' (fig. 50),[172] an impressive show revealing the similar aims and methods of the two geniuses.

Figure 45: Salvador Dalí, *The Sacrament of the Last Supper*, 1955,
oil on canvas, 167 x 267 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

[172] To quote the exhibition's press release: 'The show features more than 75 works and reproductions, including reproductions of Da Vinci diagrams, Dalí manuscripts and paintings from the permanent collection, and reproductions of the invented objects both Da Vinci and Dalí proposed in advance of their times. The exhibit shows how these two great artists shared an ambition to use the tools of art to explore the whole of the human experience, including math, anatomy, motion devices, religion, and visual perspective. They both imagined fantastical devices and inventions, some of which became reality, while others remained sealed in sketches and manuscripts. Visitors will explore five major thematic groupings that demonstrate the range of shared themes, interests, and ongoing dialogue between the two across the centuries, these are: Youthful Scientific Dispositions, Psychology, Invention, the Power of Mathematics, and Painting', https://thedali.org/exhibit/dali-da-vinci-minds-machines-masterpieces/ [accessed on 24 September 2023].

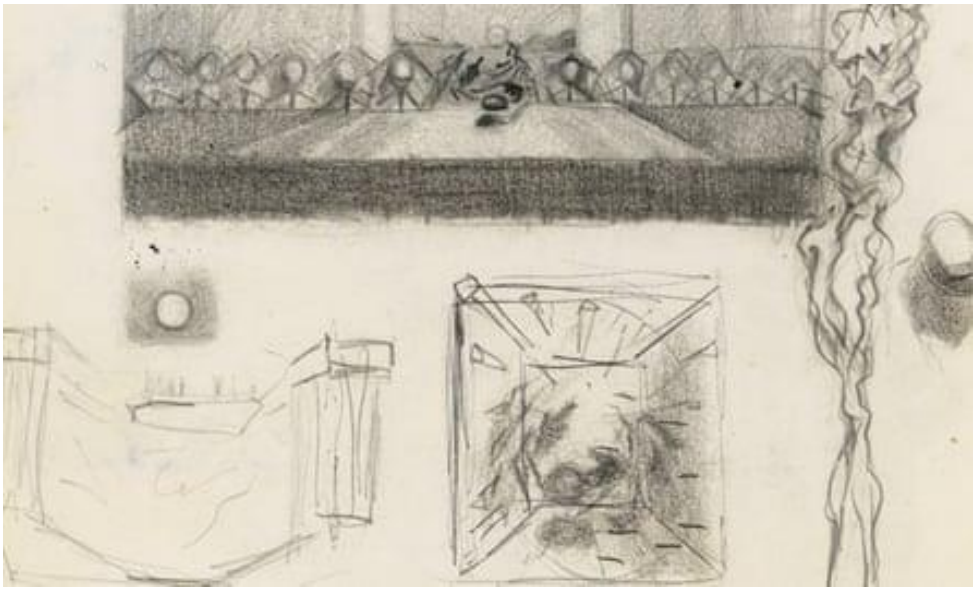

Figure 46: Salvador Dalí, *Study for the Sacrament of the Last Supper*, drawing.
Photograph: Christopher H Brown Collection

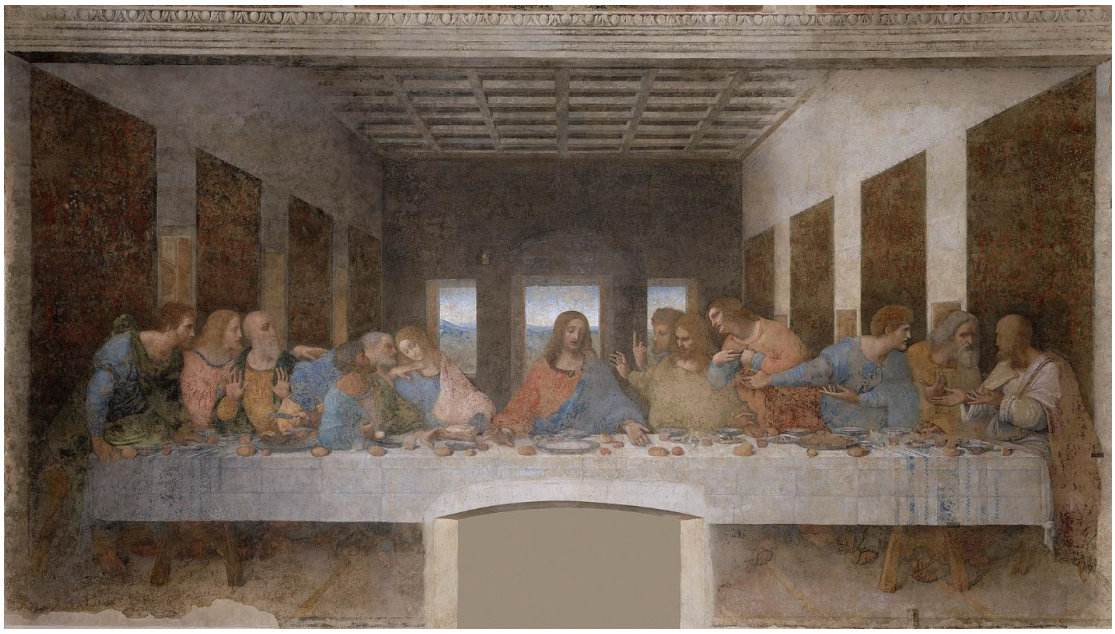

Figure 47: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, 1495-98, tempera on gesso,
pitch and mastic, 460 x 880 cm, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan

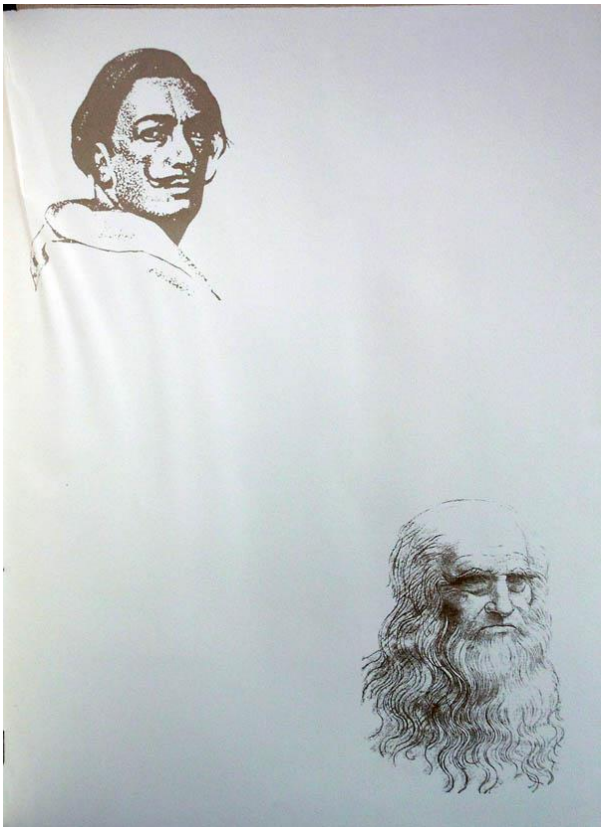

Figure 48: Salvador Dalí, *Hommage to Leonardo da Vinci*, 1975, inner folio, *self-portrait of Dalí, and copy of a presumed portrait of Da Vinci*

Figure 49: Salvador Dalí, *The Telephone (Hommage à Leonardo da Vinci)*, hand-signed drypoint and etching, 1975, 51 x 37 cm

Figure 50: Virtual advertisement of the exhibition 'Dalí & Da Vinci: Minds, Machines and Masterpieces' at the Dalí Museum, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lzk5bu0AjOE [accessed 7 August 2023]

The German Surrealist Max Ernst was also greatly inspired by Leonardo, sharing artistic thoughts, biographical parallels and even a common interests in the occult science of alchemy.[173] His tremendous admiration for Leonardo was demonstrated, among others, in the Max Ernst Fountain in Amboise (figs. 51-52), designed and sculpted by the artist in 1967. *The Génie of Amboise* on its top was dedicated to the extraordinary genius of Leonardo da Vinci, whose last residence was in the French city of Amboise. Ten years earlier Ernst had created two hypnotic masterpieces of painting, also dedicated to his idol (figs. 53-54). Both titled 'Project for a Monument to Leonardo da Vinci', these abstract works highlighted Ernst's fascination with the geometrical and artistic theories of Leonardo that revolutionised early modern culture.

Figure 51: Max Ernst, *Max Ernst Fountain*, 1967, sculpture, Amboise

[173] For Leonardo's interest in alchemy, see Vasari, 1998, p. 296. For Ernst's deep interest in alchemical philosophy and symbolism, see M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001).

Figure 52: Max Ernst, *The Génie of Amboise* (dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci), detail of *Max Ernst Fountain*

Figure 53: Max Ernst, *Project for a Monument to Leonardo da Vinci*, 1957, oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm, Private Collection

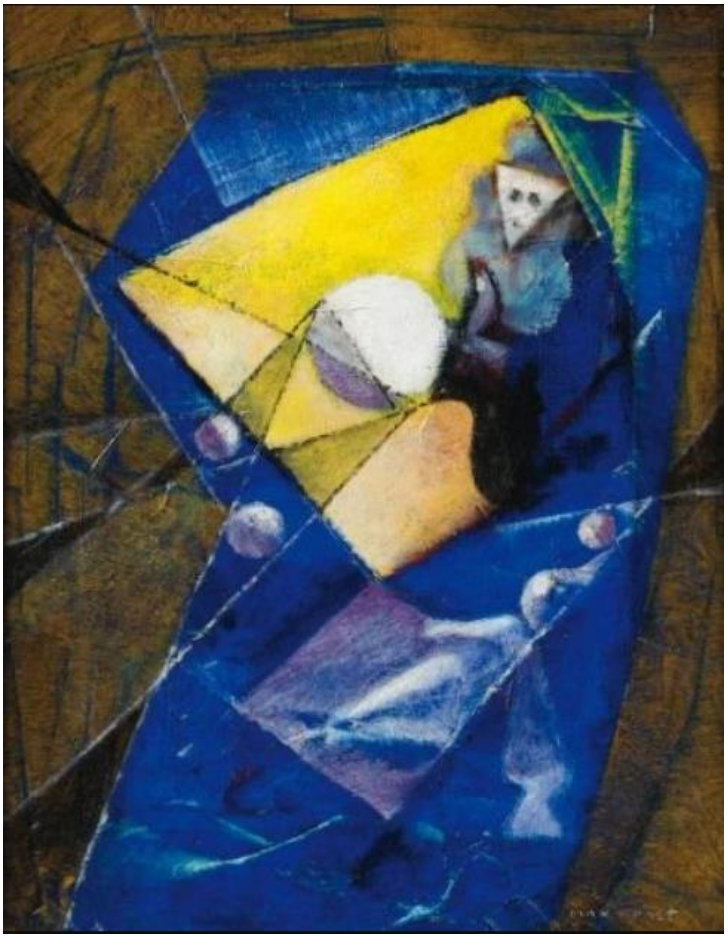

Figure 54: Max Ernst, *Project for a Monument to Leonardo da Vinci*, 1957, oil on canvas, 36 x 28 cm, Private Collection

The first point to note regarding Ernst's work is its enormous variety. He has been praised as the "complete Surrealist" due to his mastery of illusionism and abstraction – the dream pictures and automatic paintings which correspond to the two major aspects of Surrealist theory.[174] Ernst developed his own artistic techniques, one of which he termed *frottage*, in which rubbings are made from textured objects. For the development of this technique Ernst was reportedly inspired by the famous passage in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* wherein the author speaks of "spots and stains on the walls, certain aspects of ashes on the hearth, of streams",[175] which may with careful attention lead one towards the most admirable inventions. In *Beyond Painting*, a Surrealist text with autobiographical elements, Ernst tells of how an overpowering obsession with the visual led him to discover the means of putting Leonardo's lesson into practice.[176] Through his clear realisation of Leonardo's descriptions, Ernst became convinced that "the field of vision and of action opened by frottage is not limited by the

[174] Turpin, Ian, *Ernst* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), p. 5.
[175] Leonardo da Vinci, 2015, p. 156.
[176] Ernst, 2009, p. 13.

capacity of the mind's faculties of irritability. It far surpasses the limits of artistic and poetic activity".[177]

Ernst would also go on develop an extensive understanding of Freudian theory, the unconscious mind, and the interpretation of dreams, a world whose vividness had amazed Leonardo too. Dreams often contain long-forgotten memories, and such recollections may also be stimulated during our waking days. Stemming from both, memories often play an important part in Surrealist painting. Around 1940, with *The Robing of the Bride*, a masterpiece of this phase, Ernst returned to a modified version of his early, oneiric manner. Complete with a remarkable feathered cloak, it appears to be a Surrealist rendering of that significant moment, the loss of virginity.[178] Just as Leonardo, with his remembered tale of the *nibbio*'s tail, Ernst was experiencing his first sensual and perhaps even sexual activity, possibly losing his virginity, certainly losing his innocence.

Ernst also borrowed ideas from the religious paintings of Leonardo reconstituting them through the personal outlook of his psyche and his empirical memory in order to find a different perspective on Leonardo's themes. The most important works of this category are the *Pietà or Revolution by Night* (1923, fig. 56) and *One Night of Love* (1927, fig. 55).

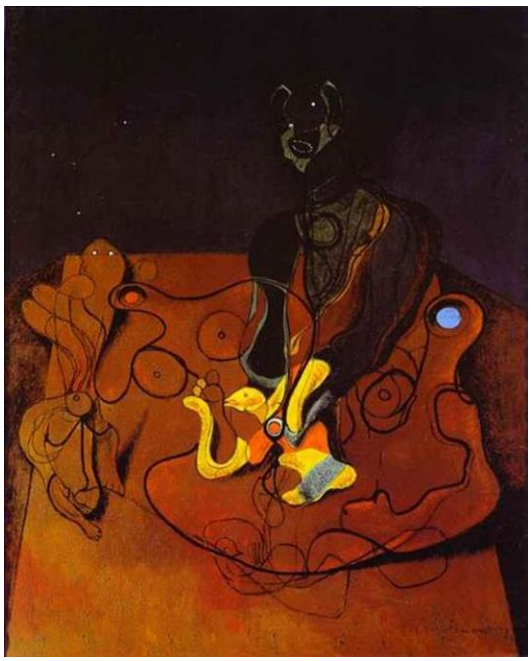

Figure 55: Max Ernst, *Night of love*, 1927,
oil on canvas, 162 x 130 cm, Private Collection

[177] Ibid., p. 19.
[178] Wilson, 1991, p. 98.

Figure 56: Max Ernst, *Pietà* or *Revolution by Night*,
1923, oil paint on canvas, 116 x 89 cm,
Tate Modern Gallery, London

Here Ernst invented for himself a mythical psychobiography, drawing on and attempting to explain elements in his work as a classical Oedipal construction, wherein he either witnessed or else fantasised the sexual act between his parents. Here too is the Holy Family as depicted in Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* – except where Leonardo's family lacks a father. Ernst's *Pieta* contains no mother. Meanwhile the vulture-*nibbio* story of Leonardo inspired Ernst to cultivate his own version, with *One Night of Love* manifesting a sense of violence, domination, and even dismemberment, just as the legs-body positions in Leonardo's painting provoke confusion in the viewer. Thus, the work offers a transformation of Da Vinci's tableau, with some possible formal relation between the two compositions. A possibility, arising from the comparison, is that the combination of birds and bodies does indeed reference Oskar Pfister's discovery of a vulture hidden in the drapery of Leonardo's Virgin.[179] In Ernst's version more than one bird can be seen, while the divine child is replaced by a yellow bird approaching the phallic object.[180]

To summarise, the overall importance of Leonardo for Surrealism cannot be overemphasized. Duchamp, Dalí and Ernst repeatedly acknowledged their debts to him by paying different tributes to his works and ideas. To them, Leonardo epitomised the essence of the visionary, unconventional Renaissance genius whose experimental works and methods shaped the history of Western art perhaps more than any other individual. To their mind, especially Dalí's, only Leonardo would have been able to understand the

[179] According to the psychoanalyst Oskar Pfister (1873-1956), the Virgin's blue garment in Leonardo's painting reveals a vulture when viewed sideways, see Eissler, 1962, p. 51.
[180] Ibid., p. 46.

originality of their own contributions to art and culture, hence only they could claim of being his worthy successors and pioneers of a new 'Renaissance' of the twentieth century.

4: What are the connections between Piero di Cosimo and Surrealism?

Let us now turn to the Florentine painter Piero di Cosimo (1462-1522) and his influence over Surrealism. This chapter demonstrates that the revival of interest for Piero's art in the early twentieth century was largely owed to the Surrealist movement. Breton and Pudelko, for example, saw him as a spiritual ancestor of Surrealism. Breton in particular praised the animistic, primitive spirit of his works, which he considered to be fundamentally important in his mission to restore 'magical art'.[181] It will also be shown that for Ernst and Dalí too, Piero di Cosimo was a prime example of proto-surrealist artist and a model of eccentric behaviour due not only to his art but also to his bizarre character and lifestyle.

Piero di Cosimo was, according to Vasari, one of the most solitary and eccentric painters of the Renaissance period, 'leading the life of a man who was less man than beast'.[182] Since the time of his youth, Piero was extravagant in his inventions and drawn to fanciful elements, especially masquerades staged during carnivals. That, in turn, explains his joy in painting chariots and triumphal cars covered with ornaments, trophies and the most bizarre things of fancy.[183] His landscape backgrounds, full of strange trees and grottoes, are also strikingly unconventional and awkward. Emphasizing his harmonious painting skills, Vasari calls him a "great master of colouring in oils". Interestingly, though, Vasari did not commend Di Cosimo for the bizarre quality of his landscapes, omitting them from his list of the elements in those of Di Cosimo's works that he considers beautiful and worthy of praise. Presumably the semblance of the bizarre was not entirely fitting in Vasari's eyes, with the grotesque and fantastic forms of the landscapes being out of keeping with the function and seriousness of the image.[184]

Modern critics have characterised Piero as a painter with a chameleon-like approach to style and a plurality of moods.[185] His approach to the themes is poetic, but it also comes

[181] Breton, 1992, p. 191; see also https://www.cassone-art.com/magazine/article/2015/04/between-poetry-and-paint/?psrc=around-the-galleries#:~:text=Andr%C3%A9%20Breton%2C%20who%20regarded%20himself,Breton's%20pre%2DSurrealist%20idols%20were [accessed 15 October 2023].

[182] Vasari, Giorgio, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. by Gaston De Vere (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd and The Medici Society, 1912-15), vol. IV, 1912-15, p. 126.
[183] Ibid., p. 128.
[184] Fermor, 1993, p. 183.
[185] Geronimus, Dennis, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 4.

with a narrative structure: the colourful and exotic *Liberation of Andromeda* (fig. 57), for instance, is divided in three different phases; first the arrival of Perseus, then the killing of the monster, and finally Andromeda's celebration of her liberation.

Figure 57: Piero di Cosimo, *Liberation of Andromeda*, c. 1510-13,
oil on panel, 71 x 122 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

One of the most enthusiastic modern admirers of Piero's art was the aforementioned art historian and journalist Georges Pudelko. In his articles in the important Surrealist-oriented journal *Minotaure* (1933-39), he mentioned two key painters of the Renaissance, Uccello and Di Cosimo, fairly representative of their period, yet also characterised as unusual or even strange for their time. Enchanted by the art of Di Cosimo, Pudelko insistently connected it to the unconscious mind as a kind of mysterious, magical force springing up as a spontaneous, demonic expression. He argues that, just as Freud had seen Leonardo da Vinci as a case study for psychoanalysis, a similar 'surreal' point of interest in Di Cosimo's work can certainly be identified. Piero's universe can be expanded to transform the entire Renaissance into a majestic view of the dreamlike world and the unconscious.[186]

Some of the special elements creating eccentricity in Piero's painting, according to Pudelko, include the bestiality of its figures, the fantastic landscapes, and the animistic nostalgia for nature, as well as the erotic desire hidden away in the figures' disguises. In the metamorphosis of his forms, the artist's hallucinations seem like ancient religious ideas reborn as a reinforcement of their unreal character – just as we marvel at the crazy masquerade of nature in a drawing by Disney.[187] With all these indications, Pudelko demonstrates a unique, imaginative, bizarre and primitive Piero di Cosimo.

[186] Pudelko, Georges, *Minotaure*, (Milan: Skira, 1938), p. 22.
[187] Ibid., p. 24.

Di Cosimo was a valuable source of inspiration for several Surrealist artists, predominantly for Max Ernst. In 1941, visiting the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Ernst was startled by Piero's *Allegory* (fig. 58). As he wrote in the 1946 bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), "I was amazed by the resemblance between the iconographic features of this picture that I had never seen before, and those I had employed in my painting – for instance the horse dancing, graded by a female figure with wings, the string and the sea monster in front."[188]

Figure 58: Piero di Cosimo, *Allegory*, c. 1500, oil on panel, 56.2 x 44.1 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Within these landscapes one finds mixed unremarkable objects and motifs with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms, conventional symbols, settings and other elements that have no obvious rationale.[189] For example, in the *Forest Fire* (fig. 59) there are two animal-shaped figures with human faces. One has the body of a wild boar, the other the body of a deer. And ditto for how it depicts the flora: the trees give a sense of movement by spreading their branches as human beings spread their hands. Their proportions are divided like human bodies, with chest, hands, fingers and the cave as

[188] Sweeney, Johnson James, 'Eleven Europeans in America: André Masson, Amédée Ozenfant, Kurt Seligmann, Fernand Léger, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Yves Tanguy, Jacques Lipchitz, Jean Hélion, Marc Chagall and Piet Mondrian', *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1946), pp. 16-17.

[189] Fermor, Sharon, *Piero di Cosimo, Fiction Invention and Fantasia* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), p. 171.

abdomen. A similar spirit to these morphisms could be tracked in the works of Max Ernst. The Surrealist poet and art critic Nicolas Calas (1907-88) argues that "Ernst's pictures exist through a terrific force. His infantile dreams merge with his powerful anthropomorphism as one of the most profound interpreters of the world of our time. What saves his abstract pictures from failing into the aridity of conventional non-figurative art is the realistic outcome of his abstract experiments."[190]

Figure 59: Piero di Cosimo, *Forest Fire*, 1505, oil on panel,
71 x 202 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Two of Piero's most representative paintings are *The Discovery of Honey* (fig. 60) and *The Misfortunes of Silenus* (fig. 61). The former has been praised for its zoomorphic elements,[191] and the latter for its raw depiction of humankind's savagery, an unconscious delirium where metamorphosis is the incarnation of old pagan, mythical and early Christian beliefs.[192] All these aspects had of course a great appeal to Surrealists. The fascination of Breton, in particular, with both of these paintings is well documented. In his book *L'Art Magique*, he notably relates Piero's depicted discovery of honey to the discovery of wine, an interpretation pushed to the point of eroticism, as signalled by grass, stone and the wild beasts.[193] For the *Misfortunes of Silenus*, Breton notes: "his [Piero's] main preoccupation is the creation of ancient naturalism, of which polytheism is only the face".[194]

[190] Ernst, 2009, p. 163.
[191] Art historian Sharon Fermor writes about Piero's intentions for *The Discovery of Honey*, "it seems likely that he is alluding to zoomorphic trees with their fleshy, bulbous trunks, claw-like roots and skeletal branches", see Fermor, 1993, pp. 181-83.
[192] Ades, Berggruen, Marandel and Hall, 2018, p. 31.
[193] Breton, 1992, p. 191.
[194] Ibid.

Figure 60: Piero di Cosimo, *The Discovery of Honey*, 1499, oil on panel,
79.2 x 128.5 cm, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester

Figure 61: Piero di Cosimo, *Misfortunes of Silenus*, 1500, oil on panel,
80.1 x 129.3 cm, Harvard Art Museum, Cambridge, MA

Another famous series of Piero's paintings, made of two parts, narrates the story of Prometheus (figs. 62-63). According to Ovid's version of the ancient Greek myth, the Titans Prometheus and Epimetheus created humankind from clay in the image of Gods, a creation ordered by Zeus and the Olympians. But unlike the Titans, the Olympian Gods cared nothing for the fate of humankind. Feeling sorry for them, Prometheus stole fire from the Gods, then taught primitive man its proper use, thus allowing for human

civilization to emerge on earth. Zeus punished Prometheus by tying him to a rock in the Caucasus Mountain and sending an eagle to eat his entrails every day. As he was immortal, his martyrdom continued for a long time, until Hercules freed him by killing the eagle and breaking the strong chains made by the smith-god Hephaestus.[195]

Figure 62: Piero di Cosimo, *The Myth of Prometheus*, first part, 1515, oil on panel, 68 x 120 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich

Figure 63: Piero di Cosimo, *The Myth of Prometheus*, second part, 1515, oil on panel, 64 x 116 cm, Museum of Fine Arts of Strasbourg

[195] Geronimus, 2006, p. 118.

It has been argued that Piero's paintings of Prometheus were influenced by the revolutionary ideas of the puritanical reformer and radical preacher Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98, fig. 64), which Piero di Cosimo identified with. Hence, Prometheus is depicted by the painter as a revolutionary battling against power, as well as an educator, inventor and master craftsman who leads the ignorant and malformed human race towards higher things.[196]

Figure 64: Fra Bartolomeo, *Portrait of Girolamo Savonarola*, 1498, oil on panel, 46.5 x 32.5 cm, Museo di San Marco, Florence

Di Cosimo knew that the initiated Renaissance viewer would recognise in his visual metaphor an implicit declaration of the painter's own creative potential. Just as Prometheus garnered eternal renown as a teacher of the arts and as the first and most fearless of all craftsmen of the mythical age, thus also Piero who knew that he too could instill life in his figures and characters just with his brush.[197]

Remarkably, Di Cosimo's paintings were iconographically enriched with details never mentioned in Ovid's or Lucian's texts.[198] From his audacious use of literary sources we grasp a deeper sense of how he peopled his imaginative worlds. Most of his characters are Centaurs, Satyrs and Silenuses, monsters, anthropomorphic animals and lower deities, such as Tritons, as well as divine heroes like Prometheus.

Piero was apparently fascinated by pastoral fables and prehistoric myths such as the stories of Vulcan or of Prometheus. In the Roman pantheon, Vulcan (the equivalent of Greek Hephaestus) was the god of fire and the blacksmith of the gods, who forged the

[196] Ibid., p. 121.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Fermor, 1993, p. 80.

weapons of gods and heroes. His story shares with Prometheus the dimension of punishment: when he was born he was so ugly and red-faced that his appalled mother, Juno, threw him from the summit of Olympus down to earth -as a consequence Vulcan was crippled. Landing on the island of Lemnos in the Aegean where he was looked after by the inhabitants. This particular scene was chosen by Piero who depicted Hephaestus being helped to his feet by a band of nymphs (fig. 65). As the son of Jupiter and Juno, he was married to Venus, the Goddess of love, who in the course of their marriage cuckolded him with Mars, the god of war.

Figure 65: Piero di Cosimo, *The Finding of Vulcan on Lemnos*, c. 1495,
oil and tempera on canvas, 155 x 174 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT

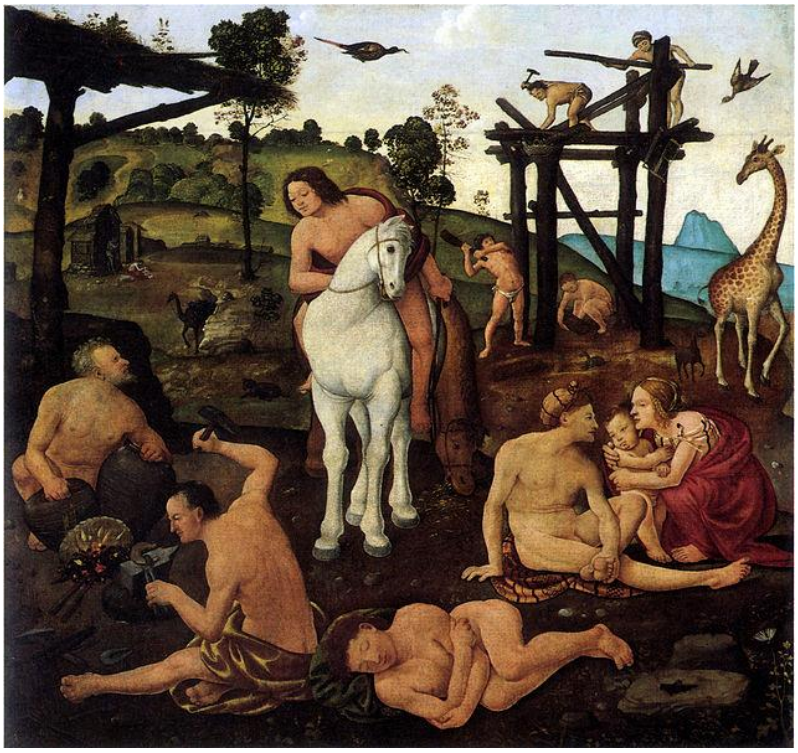

Figure 66: Piero di Cosimo, *Vulcan and Aeolus*, c. 1495, oil on tempera on canvas, 155.5 x 166.5 cm, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa

In his autobiography *Beyond Painting* (1947), Ernst discusses identity and nature, arguing that "the conscious and organised Prometheus, that *thief of the fire* guided by thought, persecutes her [Nature] with an implacable hatred and grossly injures her. This monster is pleased only by the antipodes of the landscapes."[199] These words unavoidably bring to mind images of Piero's works such as *The Forest Fire*, *The Hunting Scenes*, *Prometheus* and *Vulcan and Aeolus* (fig. 66). The passion of life from those creatures in his paintings matches Ernst's thoughts about Prometheus.

In the same work Ernst tells us that, "on the 10th of August 1925 an overpowering visual obsession led me to discover the means of putting Leonardo's lesson into practice."[200] When extolling the "paranoiac-critical activity", Breton wrote of two separate elements. For Ernst, the first would be the lesson taught by Piero di Cosimo and Leonardo da Vinci, that one's attention become absorbed in the contemplation of streaks of dried spittle or the surface of an old wall, until the eye can spy an *alternative* world, which painting is just as capable of revealing; the second is when such processes as frottage become the means of "*intensifying* the irritability of the mental faculties".[201]

[199] Ernst, 2009, p. 33.
[200] Turpin, 1993, p. 14.
[201] Breton, 2002, p. 74.

Via decalcomania,[202] grattage and frottage Ernst created his own abstract landscapes just as Piero and Leonardo had taught him.[203] His uneven rocks that fall between a human figure and an eroded object create images of a prehistoric or primitive situation that haunts the viewer and the subject of the work.

One of the most excellent examples of this kind is *Europe after the Rain II* (fig. 67). This work depicts an abstract, apocalyptic landscape, reminiscent of classical paintings of ruins. In the centre of these ruins stand a creature, half-man and half-bird, wielding a spear at a green woman, whose back is turned to him and the viewer. This surreal, multicoloured landscape seems to represent the destruction of a mythical or futuristic war with its strange crumbling structures hiding an array of figures and details.[204] Ernst's manipulation of the landscape, flora and fauna it seems almost identical executing his surrealistic vision.

Figure 67: Max Ernst, *Europe after the Rain II*, 1941, oil on canvas,
54.8 x 147.8 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT

As already noted, Max Ernst was obsessed with birds. He created two series of collage novels, *The Hundred Headless Woman* (1930) and *Une Semaine de Bonté* (*A Week of Kindness*, 1934), both featuring anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figures, many of these characters with human bodies and a bird's head. Fascinated also by the myth of Prometheus, Ernst created two relevant works that may have had Piero di Cosimo's *Prometheus* in mind: a 1926 lithograph titled *Prometheus*, and a reproduction after collage of the same name published in 1929 in *The Hundred Headless Woman* (fig. 69).[205]

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[202] *Decalcomania* is a blotting process whereby paint is squeezed between two surfaces to create a mirror image. *Grattage* is a surrealist painting technique that involves laying a canvas prepared with a layer of oil paint over a textured object and then scraping the paint off to create an interesting and unexpected surface. *Frottage* is a surrealist and 'automatic' method of creative production that involves creating a rubbing of a textured surface using a pencil or other drawing material.

[203] Ernst, 2009, p. 13; and Breton, 2002, p. 74.

[204] Breton, 2002, p. 74.

[205] In his essay *The Dream and Desire in Max Ernst's Prints and Collages*, Evan Maurer says of the Prometheus series of collage that "it reinforces the viewer's visual memory and enables us to unify a

Figure 68: Piero di Cosimo, *Human animals in The Forest Fire* (detail from *The Forest Fire*), 1505, oil on panel, 71 x 202 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

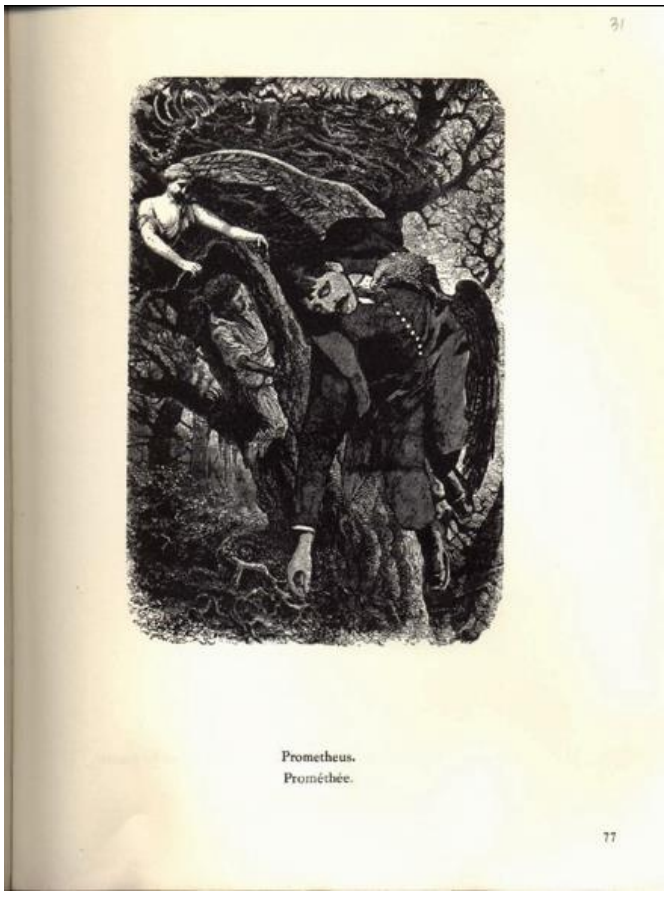

Figure 69: Max Ernst, *Prometheus* from *Hundred Headless Woman*, illustrated book, reproduction after collage, 1929, 25.1 x 19.2 cm

series in which the identity of the characters shifts irrationally with each image; see Greet, Anne Hyde, Maurer, Evan M., Rainwater, Robert and Gregorian, Vartan, *Max Ernst Beyond Surrealism* (New York and Oxford: The New York Public Library and Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 69.

The latter work continues a series called *Immaculate Conception* (fig. 70) As Evan Maurer notes, the theme of self-generation that leads into the novels also shapes the next group of three collages, which Ernst titled *L'Immaculée Conception Manquée* (meaning *The Failed Immaculate Conception*), a Christian reference triggering yet more streams of associations. The three scenes are set in dark interiors where men in frock coats conduct unsuccessful experiments in the generation of life.[206]

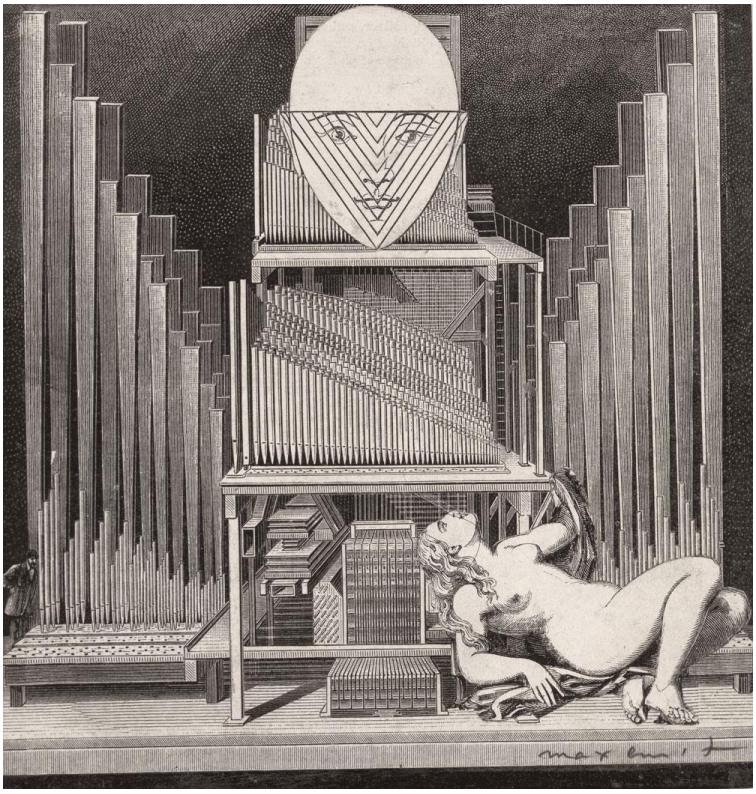

Figure 70: Max Ernst, *Immaculate Conception* from *Hundred Headless Woman*, 1929, collage on paper, 14.2 x 14.5 cm, Private Collection

In the last collage in the novel, again entitled *Immaculate Conception* (fig. 71), the generative attempts referred to in the first series of images are finally resolved. A nude woman lies seductively at the base of a multi-piped organ, above which floats an idealised oval face diagrammed by a series of graduated triangles. The juxtaposition of the woman with the anthropomorphised organ pipes overtly references the sexual act, which leads to fertilisation and thus to creation. The intimate moment is voyeuristically observed by a tiny male figure (lower left) closely resembling the frock-coated gentlemen of *The Failed Immaculate Conception* series, here witnessing a successful completion of the earlier abortive efforts.[207]

[206] Greet, Maurer, Rainwater and Gregorian, 1986, p. 65.
[207] Ibid., p. 67.

Ernst sometimes also employed the perspective systems of Uccello and Piero dela Francesca for burlesque effect, as for example in the lost version *Immaculate Conception* from c. 1922 – but even here there is also arguably a sense of the hallucinating possibilities of this technique.[208] The absolute execution of his surrealistic vision depends on themes and techniques used by Piero di Cosimo and others. In Piero's own *Immaculate Conception* (c. 1485-1505), the Virgin is on the top of the altar watching the Holy Spirit in an ecstasy under the blessing of Heaven, while saints and priests watch from a lower level (fig. 71). The whole composition is an enormous triangle set, just like Ernst's, who has a church organ of a grassy knoll and a lolling naked woman instead of Maria, her ecstasy being more erotic than religious.

Figure 71: Piero di Cosimo, *Immaculate Conception*,
c. 1485-1505, oil on panel, 206 x 172 cm,
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

It then turns out that one of Surrealism's most important written texts is *L'Immaculée Conception* by Breton and Éluard, an astonishing 1930 prose-poem sequence described by Maurice Nadeau as a plunge into the deepest waters of Surrealism.[209] Though individual images from Breton's and Éluard's other solo works are remarkable, this collaboration produced something that surpassed whatever they elsewhere achieved on their own (indeed the art historian Katharine Conley felt compelled to title her essay

[208] Gee, 1997, p. 50.
[209] Nadeau, 1987, p. 171.

about it *Writing the Virgin's Body*).[210] Here was an attempt to represent the capital moments in life from conception to death[211] – just as Di Cosimo had done, via the use of fables, religion and nature.

It is also worth observing that Salvador Dalí created two art pieces entitled *Immaculate Conception*: a lithograph and a collage (figs. 72-73). Like Ernst, Dalí's fascination with Renaissance painters, from Da Vinci and Uccello to Di Cosimo, was strong and obvious, as was his admiration for the classical world of antiquity, and his belief that Surrealism would be a cultural revolution equal to that of the Renaissance. He also experimented with themes and techniques often found in the Renaissance, including myths, triangular representations, the smooth gradation of colours and the technique of *trompe l'oeil* (French for 'deceive the eye').

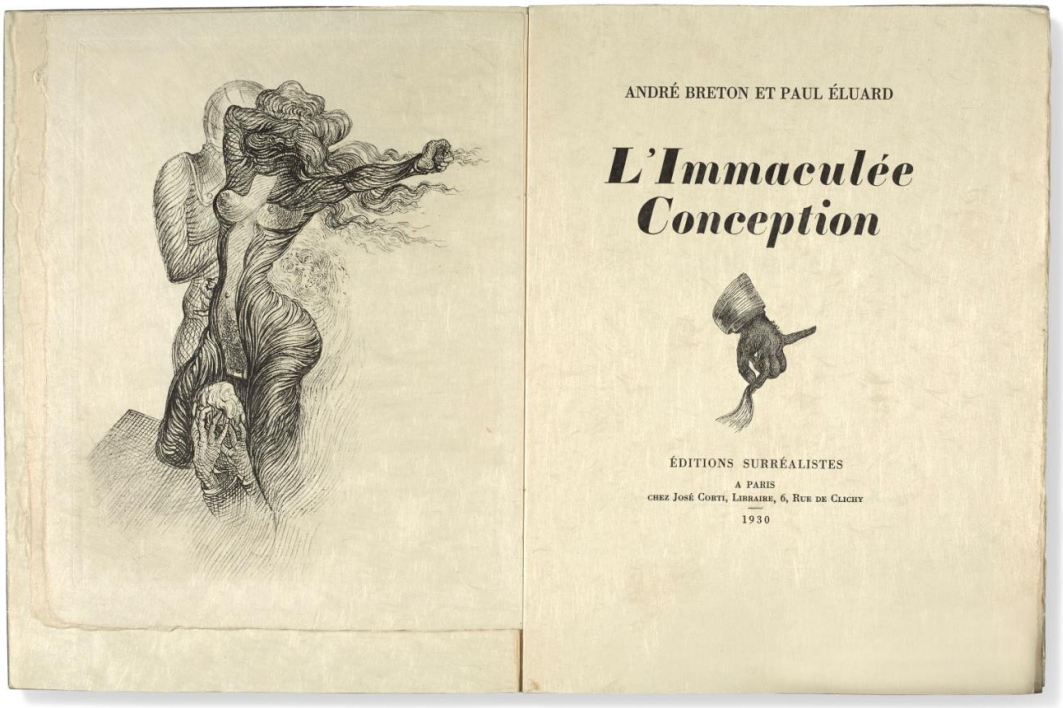

Figure 72: Salvador Dalí, *L'Immaculée Conception*, 1930,
lithograph, 27.9 x 21 cm, Paris, Éditions Surréalistes

[210] Conley, Katharine, 'Writing the Virgin's Body: Breton and Eluard's Immaculée Conception', *The French Review*, vol. 67, no. 4 (1994), pp. 600-08.
[211] Nadeau, 1987, p. 170.

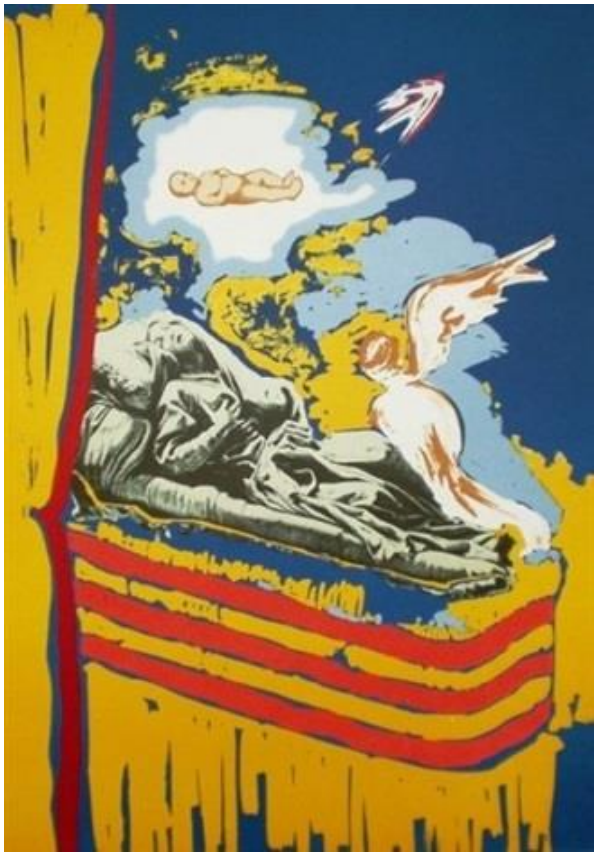

Figure 73: Salvador Dalí, *L'Immaculée Conception*, collage-lithograph on colour paper, 1979, 41 x 58.5 cm, Private Collection

Speaking of *trompe l'oeil*, Dennis Geronimus, one of the most significant scholars of Piero di Cosimo, praised the illusionistic elements of the painter's *Visitation with Saint Nicholas and Saint Anthony* as such (1490, fig. 74): "The seductive *trompe l'oeil* effect of St Nicholas's attribute of the golden balls is complemented by Piero's attentive rendering of the more prosaic objects surrounding Anthony, shown writing with a quill in an illegible scrawl and holding an ink horn in this other hand."[212] The key here is that the setting up of dream images, just like a *trompe l'oeil*, can be fragile – because only with great vigilance can the discoveries of automatism be kept from being spoiled.[213] It is the search of exactly this peril and this delicacy that the artists of both the Renaissance and Surrealism are undertaking. As the ancient philosopher Heraclitus put it: "If you do not seek the unexpected you will not find it, for it is painful and hard to find".

[212] Geronimus, 2006, p. 202.
[213] Del Renzio, Toni, 'Un Faucon et un Vrai', in *Surrealism, Surrealist Visuality*, ed. by Silvano Levy, (Keele: Keele University Press, 1997), p. 153.

Figure 74: Piero di Cosimo, *Visitation with Saint Nicholas and Saint Anthony*, 1490, oil on panel, 184.2 x 188.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Meanwhile, the art historian Joost Keizer affirms the Surrealists "coming to terms with a long history of distortions and appropriations of Piero di Cosimo's work, and sheer admiration of the presumably troubled soul responsible for these apparent visual phantasms by the likes of Ernst and Dalí."[214] Because of course these characterisations of Di Cosimo as transforming from painting to painting – Keizer uses the word chameleon[215] and Geronimus the word Protean[216] – could just as well be used of Dalí. As Vasari too had acknowledged of Piero, the painter's style seems to change from painting to painting.[217] Interestingly, Dalí was accused by other Surrealists as having (unlike them) a limited vision and that he cared only about painting, not about changing the world. Despite its contradictions, and in contrast to most Surrealists, Dalí's vision was simply focusing on the fact that we perceive the world in very different ways, and to systematise this apparent perceptual confusion. In this he exactly resembles Di Cosimo's viewpoint, that one should not only look at the whole picture but also at the details revealing an alternative picture.[218] As Dalí wrote in 1939: "Piero di Cosimo, [like Leonardo], drawn by the vertigo of repugnance, analytically and with horrified complaisance, observed the viscous and mucous and bloody contours of tubercular spit,

[214] Keizer, Joost, 'Review of ''Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange'' by Dennis Geronimus, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 71, no. 1 (2008), p. 136.
[215] Ibid., p. 137.
[216] Geronimus, 2006, p. 5.
[217] Keizer, 2008, p. 137.
[218] Lordan, Dane, 'A Modern Renaissance Man?', *Books Ireland*, no. 362 (July/August 2015), p. 21.

that there might arise into view enigmatic and atavistic compositions, fire, and the horrible dragon of the oyster."[219]

Back to the iconography of Piero di Cosimo, his themes find their source in the literature and poetry mainly of Roman and Greek classical writers, including Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Pliny, Lucretius and Lucian.[220] Their stories excited his Florentine imagination, and as a result his works have a dynamic that is almost narrative, as his scenes unfold with intense vividness. In *The Death of Procris* (fig. 75), for instance, the directness and the intimacy of the action, at once reticent and deeply emotive, seems peculiarly modern, while the didactic significance seems to dwindle. But this is typical, as is his freedom from rhetorical and dramatic convention, even if this reflects a lack of experience in large-scale storytelling.[221]

Figure 75: Piero di Cosimo, *Death of Procris*, 1495, oil on panel,
65.4 x 184.2 cm, National Gallery, London

Nevertheless, excellent examples of storytelling can be found in Piero's painting, such as *The Liberation of Andromeda*, the *Bacchanal* series (the latter one of the more playful readings of this already playful mode of storytelling), *The Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs* (fig. 76) and *The Return from the Hunt* (fig. 77). In contrast to more traditional sequential arrangements, Di Cosimo's continuous narrative device allows for a greater manipulation of focus.[222] In Surrealism, Dalí is probably the main artist to use Di Cosimo's technique, allowing for deeper storytelling and deployment of focus: examples being *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, *The Napoleon's Nose*, *The Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire* and *The Profanation of the Host* (figs. 78-81).[223]

The parallel stories and scenes seen in these works suggest a perpetual circularity of the depicted actions in respect of time. The parallel small scenes amplify the central thematic idea, manifesting as the staged ensemble that tells the tale. Narration becomes

[219] Ades, Dawn, *Dalí* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p. 109.
[220] Fermor, 1993, pp. 190-93.
[221] Ibid., p. 54.
[222] Geronimus, 2006, p. 100.
[223] Ibid., p. 10.

kind of automatism, which the surreal style for figures and objects confirms. Such iconographic treatment resembles Di Cosimo's style, because of its similar effects.

Figure 76: Piero di Cosimo, *Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs*, 1510-15,
oil on wood, 71 x 260 cm, National Gallery, London

Figure 77: Piero di Cosimo, *The Return from the Hunt*, 1494-1500,
tempera and oil on wood, 70.5 x 169 cm, Metropolitan Museum, New York

Figure 78: Salvador Dalí, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, 1937,
oil on canvas, 50.8 x 78.3 cm, Tate Modern, London

Figure 79: Salvador Dalí, *Napoleon's Nose*, 1945, oil on canvas,
51 x 65.7 cm, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres

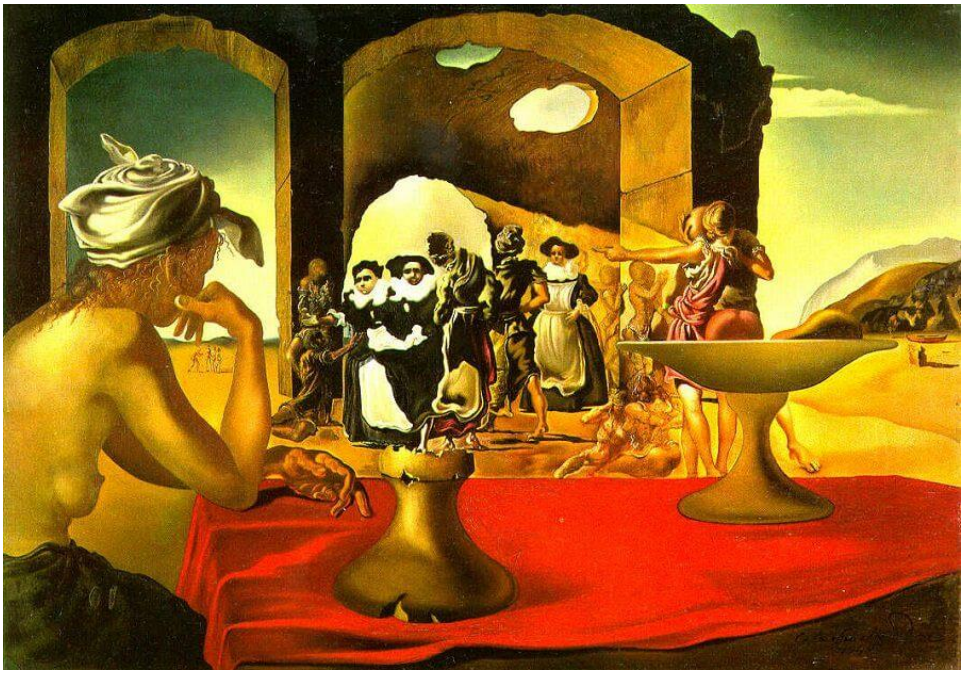

Figure 80: Salvador Dalí, *Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire*, 1940, oil on canvas, 47 x 66 cm, Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida

Figure 81: Salvador Dalí, *The Profanation of the Host*, 1929, oil on canvas, 99.6 x 71.2 cm, Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida

Nor does the list of Surrealists linked with Piero di Cosimo end here. Art historian Simon Wilson, analyzing *The Ribbon of Extremes* by Yves Tanguy (1900-1955, fig. 82), sees further battling Centaurs, Satyrs, Lapiths and Silenuses: "Here the suggestion is almost of a procession or *Bacchanal* of biomorphs along the beach, although ultimately the scene remains completely undefinable.[224] As Breton wrote of Tanguy's paintings of this type: "the tide ebbs, revealing an endless shore where hitherto unknown composite shapes creep, rare up, straddle the sand, sometimes sinking below the surface or soaring into the sky."[225] Meanwhile, in an essay about the Greek tradition in art, the American historian George Boas (1891-1980) even invokes Henry Rousseau, the pioneer of the Primitive manner (fig. 83), known as Le Douanier: "It is certainly true that the island of Lemnos in Piero di Cosimo's picture is no more Mediterranean than a landscape by Henri Rousseau would be."[226]

Figure 82: Yves Tanguy, *The Ribbon of Extremes*, 1932,
oil on canvas, 35 x 45.2 cm, Private Collection

[224] Wilson, 1991, p. 82.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Boas, George, 'The Greek Tradition', *Parnassus*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1939), p. 33.

Figure 83: Henri Rousseau, *Negro Attacked by a Jaguar*, 1910,
oil on canvas, 162.5 x 116 cm, Private Collection

Delving into established mythologies and deepening them into his own characteristic world, Di Cosimo was channeling information from the landscapes and creatures he depicted about an unknown prehistoric period both geophysically and morphologically. His uniqueness and eccentricity ensured that later historians and artists placed his work in the sections labeled 'fiction' or 'invention' or 'fantasy'. Contemporary researchers considered him "unremittingly bizarre".[227] Probably his classical narratives and motifs were less his direct models than liberating forces for his imagination.[228] For Breton, Di Cosimo's repertoires of metamorphosis took him far beyond anything that myopic realism even suspected existed.[229]

Curated by Nicholas Hall and David Zwirner in Hall's Gallery at New York, *Endless Enigma, Eight Centuries of Fantastic Art* (2018) gathered artists seeking to explain their world in terms of alternate or imagined realities and the subconscious, as well as poetry, nature, myth, and religion. In the catalogue, in the essay called 'Sense of Place', Piero di Cosimo is linked with Joseph Cornell (1903-72), whose works were by design based on places he had never visited, including his boxed collages that refer to specific locations in Paris or collections of everyday ephemera (fig. 84).[230] Like Cornell, Di Cosimo created his

[227] Campbell, Stephen J., *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450-95* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 50.
[228] Geronimus, 2006, p. 3.
[229] Breton, André, *Manifeste du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 64.
[230] Ades, Berggruen, Marandel and Hall, 2018, p. 168.

own imaginary worlds in his box, expressing his passion for the unknown, life and nature through a personal isolation and eccentricity in the social environment.

Figure 84: Joseph Cornell*, Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery*, 1943, mixed media, 39.3 x 28.27 x 10.8 cm, Royal Academy of Arts

Also worthy of note is Di Cosimo's attraction to fire and wood as materials. According to Vasari, the painter regarded public execution as an enviable way to die – under an open sky, with a big audience.[231] Perhaps he had in mind the dramatic hanging and burning of Savonarola. Di Cosimo's most important patron, a wool merchant named Francesco del Pugliese,[232] somehow squared a similar enthusiasm for Savonarola with a taste for the Roman poet-scientist and Epicurean philosopher Lucretius, whose lately rediscovered doctrines surely favour atheism. For Del Pugliese, Di Cosimo painted visions of early-human barbarity weirder than almost anything south of Bosch in the European art of the time. For the art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) these were less an Arcadian nostalgia than the "emotional atavisms"[233] of "a primitive who happened to live in a

[231] Vasari, 1912-15, p. 134.
[232] Fermor, 1993, p. 161.
[233] Atavism is the recurrence of or reversion to a past style, manner, outlook, approach or activity.

period of sophisticated civilization," yet seemed "to have re-experienced the emotions of primeval man."[234]

Overall, the elements that relate Piero di Cosimo to Surrealism include his ingenious imagination and eccentricity, his unconventional approach of classical myths and biblical themes, the way he works with flora and fauna, as well as with human instincts and emotions. All this plus the bizarrity of his fantastic scenes and the even greater awkwardness of his primitive lifestyle (as both Vasari and Breton emphatically stated, "Piero was more animal than human").[235] What is more, his revolutionary spirit, identified in the Renaissance with Savonarola's call for more spirituality, urging for less consumption of unnecessary products and for a reduction of wealth, somehow resembled the Marxist and Neo-Communist period which also spawned Surrealism.

James Johnston Sweeney (1900-86), the American art curator, considered Piero di Cosimo a spiritual ancestor of modern art as a whole. Discussing the *Allegory*, he concludes that it is "these two qualities, his clarity and the integrity of his plastic realism, rather than any literary or superficial links with surrealism, that have brought Piero di Cosimo so strongly in favour today."[236] In the same article Sweeney also discusses the French literary Surrealists: for example Raymond Queneau, inspired by Vasari's description of Di Cosimo's misanthropy, writes a brilliant satirical skit in his novel *Odile*, in which the fictional painter Vladislav shares the lifestyle and other features of Di Cosimo.[237] As Sweeney writes: "For Vladislav in Queneau's novel also recounts how he had practiced necrophily in Brittany one stormy day, and how he could only paint barefoot… and how in the country after the summer rains he would sit in the warm mud to renew his contact with the mother earth, and how he would eat raw meat that he made tender in the manner of the Huns which gives it an incomparable flavour. Listening to him, no one could doubt he was a painter of genius''.[238]

To close this chapter, let us recall the lines written by W. H. Auden (1907-73) in *Bucolics: 2. Woods (for Nicolas Nabokov)*:[239]

Sylvan meant savage in those primal woods
Piero di Cosimo so loved to draw,
Where nudes, bears, lions, sows with women's heads
Mounted and murdered and ate each other raw…

[234] Geronimus, 2006, p. 125.
[235] Breton, 1991, p. 190; and Vasari, 1912-15, p. 126.
[236] Sweeney, James Johnston, 'Exhibitions in New York', *Parnassus*, vol. 10, no. 7 (1938), p. 12.
[237] Queneau, Raymond, *Odile* (Funks Grove, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1988), pp. 15-18.
[238] Sweeney, 1938, p. 10. A similar affection for the Renaissance artist can be found in the poem *For Piero di Cosimo* by David Wheatley, a poet, philologist and fan of Queneau, see Wheatley, David, 'For Piero di Cosimo', *Poetry Review*, vol. 102, no. 3 (Autumn 2012), p. 13.
[239] Auden, Wystan Hugh, *The Shield of Achilles* (London: Faber and Faber Editions, 1955), p. 149.

5: What are the connections between Northern Renaissance Artists and Surrealism?

The last chapter explores the influence of the Northern Renaissance on Surrealist art. A close examination of various textual and visual sources demonstrates the great interest of Breton, Ernst, Dalí, Picasso and other artists who engaged with Surrealism in the strange and phantasmagoric works of painters like Hieronymus Bosch, Matthias Grünewald and Pieter Brueghel the Elder.

The cultural phenomenon of the 'Renaissance' (rebirth) was far from limited to fifteenth and sixteenth-century Italy. Numerous great artists of that period lived and worked north of the Alps, namely in Germany, Netherlands, Flanders, France and England. Names of these artists are often praised by Surrealists. Breton, to start with, mentions very often Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), the Dutch artist who became famous for his fantastic illustrations of religious allegories and awkward narratives of the magical and the unreal. In *Surrealism and Painting* (1928), the poet Breton described the visual arts exactly as he had described literature in 1924: by calling its task, disclosing its true goals and noting its present-day activists, like Picasso, as well as its precursors, like Bosch.[240] First, he notes that Max Ernst is creating pictures with a similar mental energy in his *Collages.*[241] Then, in his chapter on the Autodidacts ("Naïves"), he observes that the art of Henri Rousseau at the close of the nineteenth century signifies the "burgeoning of an entirely new branch marvellous tree one had thought dead". Here was what Breton saw as the renewal of that primitive Renaissance vision once found in the paintings of Giotto, Fouquet, Uccello, Grünewald and Bosch.[242]

Decades later, in *Art Magique* (1957), Breton lists various artworks of the past that he sees as the first evidence of Surrealism in Art: it includes all the great artists of the Northern Renaissance, namely Brueghel, Grünewald, Dürer, Cranach and Bosch.[243] An important denominator between these artists was their common interest in hermetic philosophy, occult sciences and magic, an interest also shared by Italian humanists artists such as Leonardo.[244] These were all routes that also preoccupied the Surrealists, who had a deep and long fascination with occultism and esotericism.[245]

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[240] Leslie, 1997, p. 16.
[241] See Breton, André, *Selections*, ed. by Mark Polizzotti, (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 2003), p. 26.
[242] Ibid., p. 26.
[243] Breton, André, *L'Art Magique* (Paris: *Phébus* 2003), p. 161.
[244] Breton, 2003, pp. 65-66.
[245] Ibid., pp. 161, 322-23. For a thorough exploration of the role played by western esotericism in Surrealist art, see Bauduin, Tessel, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014). Patrick Lepetit, in his book *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism*, studies Serbo-Croatian Surrealism, in the person of the poet Marko Ristic (1902-1984), whose obsessions included Judeo-Christian myths, Hermeticism, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and even magic ceremony and ritual of Greek antiquity, such as the Kabirian Mysteries of Samothrace, see Lepetit, Patrick, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism: Origins, Magic, and Secret Societies* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014), p. 38. The more recent Serbian Surrealist Vojo Stanic (b. 1924), with his wry romanticism that calls to mind

Breton especially admired Bosch because his phantasmagoria and symbolism conjured gloomy and difficult images that challenge every dimension of logic.[246] As with Piero di Cosimo in the South, the Northern Renaissance European artists Bosch, Grünewald and Dürer pursue a sibyllic path through prehistoric promises and prophecies which invoke the human journey in its agony towards.[247] Bosch, argues Breton, creates chaos with satanic grace,[248] exploring the roots, causes and intentions of the dark side, to effect an "interiorisation" that leads to catharsis.[249] Again this strongly resembles the concerns and techniques of the Surrealists, especially the admiration of Ernst and Dalí for the monstrosity of grotesque images and figures, as both innovative source and liberation.

Bosch in particular (in Breton's opinion) leads the viewer through a dizzying cosmology and fantasy of images in European magic. Like Archimboldo (and also like Dalí), his anthropomorphic landscapes create new "Lands of Miracles"[250] in art – with myths, spirits, monsters and mere mortals who cannot escape their deadly sins and post-mortem destinies.

Setting aside the occult sciences, works like Leonardo's *Madonna of the Rocks* (fig. 85) Bosch's *The Haywain Triptych* (fig. 86), or the unknown woodcut illustrator of Polyphilus' dream (fig. 87)[251] are all charged with their own magical force – which brings us back to them and compels us to linger, as if our destiny depended on it.[252] Here in particular we see a similarity between the painters of the Northern Renaissance, including Bosch, and the artists of the Italian Renaissance. This was a period when traditional forms were being recast in order to release powerful new imagery, so that for example the delicate colourwork in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1504, fig. 88) is despite its delicacy often anything but delightful. Likewise, Surrealist paintings, literary works and films reworked familiar devices to queasy and unsettling end.[253]

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elements of Belgian Surrealism, bear traces, argues the art critic Robert Boyers of the variety and density we associated with Bosch, see Boyers, Robert, 'An Editor's Notebook', no. 116/17 (Fall/Winter 1997), p. 264.

[246] Breton, 2003, p. 11.

[247] Ibid., pp. 65-66, 68.

[248] Ibid., p. 159.

[249] Ibid., p. 180.

[250] Ibid., p. 218.

[251] The identity of its illustrator has at different times been speculated to be Andrea Mantegna, Benedetto Montagna or Sandro Botticelli.

[252] Breton, 2003, p. 277.

[253] Smith, Ralph A., 'Aesthetic Criticism: The Method of Aesthetic Education', *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1968), pp. 24-25.

Figure 85: Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna on the Rocks*, 1483-86, oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm, Louvre, Museum, Paris

Figure 86: Hieronymus Bosch, *The Haywain Triptych*, 1516,
135 cm × 200 cm**,** Prado Museum, Madrid

Figure 87: Unknown artist (perhaps Andrea Mantegna,
Benedetto Montagna or Sandro Botticelli,
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: Poliphilo
Flees a Dragon, 1499, woodcut

Given Breton's own approval in the *Manifesto*, many Surrealist artists drew on Freud's interpretation of dreams, attempting to capture the unknown paths of the subconscious as manifested via the imaginary dimension of dream expression.[254] Thus they systematised Dada and Surrealism's concern with the irrational, a concern which combined with their radical political ideas could perhaps implement a new and better world.[255] Self-knowledge, the Surrealist goal, was to be achieved through a variety of methods, primarily through automatism and dream interpretation, as well as other forms of artistic expression insofar as they provided revelations by such means. But art cannot be made from life alone, even less from particular psychological methodologies; more than anything else it is made from art.

Erwin Panofsky once said that he had never been interested in Bosch's art because he is "too psychoanalytic".[256] Indeed, many of Bosch's paintings fairly cry out for a psychoanalytic interpretation – though such analysis is surprisingly rare. Many of Bosch's most important paintings from the middle and later period of his life are weird, surrealistic, beautiful and utterly fantastic.[257] But he could also paint with marvellous realism and superb craftsmanship. This combination of real and surreal tends to produce the disquieting feeling that all this non-reality is actually real. It evokes a simultaneous sense of reality and counter-reality, filled with dynamic, intense emotions.[258]

For the American-German psychologist and essayist Erika Fromm (1909-2003), in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (fig. 88) as well as in other triptychs, Bosch -in the role of the 'observing ego'- was able to transform the polymorphous perverse fantasies that flooded his 'experiencing' ego into marvellous art. Polymorphous perversity is common in childhood, but generally rare when we become adults. But Bosch was able to let his unconscious fantasies approach his conscious mind close enough for observing and externalizing them but without being overwhelmed by them.[259]

[254] Rubin, 1967, pp. 63-64.
[255] Ibid., p. 15.
[256] Fromm, Erika, 'The Manifest and the Latent Content of Two Paintings by Hieronymus Bosch: A Contribution to the Study of Creativity', *American Imago*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1969), p. 145.
[257] Ibid., p. 145.
[258] Ibid., p. 146.
[259] Ibid., p. 161.

Figure 88: Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490-1510,
oil on oak panels, 185.8 x 172.5 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid

Figure 89: Hieronymus Bosch, *The Temptation of St Anthony* (triptych), 1501,
oil on panel, 131 x 228 cm, National Museum of Ancient Art, Lisbon

Figure 90: Hieronymus Bosch, *Last Judgment*, 1489, oil-on-wood triptych, 163.7 x 242 cm, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

The triptychs in question are the following: *The Haywain Triptych* (fig. 86), *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (fig. 89), *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and *The Last Judgment* (fig. 90). Bosch depicted here the real, the non-real and the Surreal: people with animal faces, unusual animals and landscapes, tools and materials used in various weird ways.[260] Anachronistic as it may sound, one could argue that Bosch visually expressed many of the ideas that would become cornerstones of Freud's psychoanalytic theory four hundred years later in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, [261] but also ideas of fundamental value for Surrealist artists.[262]

A more sexual psychoanalytic interpretation of Bosch's art was attempted by art Historian Wilhelm Fraenger (1890-1964) who used a mixture of Jungian and personal symbol interpretation to explain the meaning of its imagery.[263] Equally committed to

[260] The art historian Kenneth Clark (1903-83) in his book *The Landscape of Fantasy* argues that Bosch's and Brueghel's scenes are fantastic because of the emotive effect of the sharp contrasts of flaming light and the jagged forms of actual flames, see Clark, Kenneth, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 2nd edition, 1997), p. 41.

[261] Fromm, 1969, p. 146.

[262] That said, one should be cautious with not overemphasizing the conception of Renaissance artists as 'proto-Surrealists'. In the catalogue *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism*, Alfred Barr warned against too hastily associating the work of such artists as Bosch and Brueghel with the "sub-conscious and irrational expression" of Surrealism. For Barr, Bosch's scenes of Hell are fantastic because of the presence of double images and hybrid monsters, see Barr, 1936, pp. 70-72.

[263] Fraenger, Wilhem, *The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 6-18. Wilhelm Fraenger was a specialist in the epoch of the German Peasants' War and in the mysticism of the Late Middle Ages. He wrote important studies of Jerg Ratgeb, Matthias

symbol-reading drawn almost entirely from the sexual sphere, the art historian Charles de Tolnay (1899-1981) remarked that in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Bosch drew "from his memory and experience dream symbols that are valid for all mankind."[264] Exploring the same painting's intentions and identities, the British scholar and art critic Marina Warner finds a striking "cornucopia of metamorphoses": people coupling and merging with fruits and flowers. Bosch's surreal images of naked innocent youth engaged in "a boggling, bizarre, and profane, and yet there appears to be no punishment for such excess, no old age, no carnality, no death"[265] – just as it happens in our dreams.

The historian David Jasper, who specialises in theology, tracks a similar link from a different disciplinary angle:[266] "Theology, fantasy, a gift for modern post-Freudian thinkers in art claimed as a forerunner of Surrealism; Bosch is a gift for the unease of contemporary critical thinking. For my purposes I want to concentrate on just one corner of Hell as a prelude to thinking about text and writing in theology and theological thinking." Karl Barth (1886-1968), another theologian, saw the entire of Bosch's art as a bad nightmare, even *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, in which nothing takes priority and all things have equal claim to inclusion, among a vortex of monstrous and bizarre scenes.[267]

In 1936, the American art historian Alfred Barr (1902-81), who was also the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, organised an exhibition called *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. The show presented the fantastic and the marvellous in the European and American art of the past five centuries, presenting Bosch as a precursor of Surrealism, a link which by that time was rather casually made.[268] Yet as Surrealism sought illustrious predecessors in European museums in the 1950s, this conception of an obscure and esoteric Bosch evidently troubled Erwin Panofsky, very much a man of his generation. The great iconologist wrote: "In spite of all the ingenious, erudite and in part extremely useful research devoted to the task of decoding Jerome Bosch, I cannot help feeling that the real secret of his magnificent nightmares and dreams has still to be disclosed." [269]

Grünewald and Hieronymus Bosch. His work on Bosch was very influential in its day and considered Bosch under the aspect of occultism, seeing him as an artist guided by an esoteric mysticism.

[264] De Tolnay, 1966, p. 43. Charles de Tolnay, born Károly von Tolnai, was a Hungarian art historian and an expert on Michelangelo.

[265] Lindon, Sandra, ''In the Garden of Unearthly Delights', review of '*Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*' by Marina Warner', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2003), p. 537.

[266] Jasper, David, 'From Theology to Theological Thinking: The Development of Critical Thought and its Consequences for Theology', *Literature and Theology*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1995), p. 293.

[267] Ibid., p. 294.

[268] Barr, 1936, p. 7.

[269] Stoichita, Victor and Martens, Didier, 'Review of ''*Die Erfindung des Gemäldes: Das erste Jahrhundert der niederländischen Malerei*'' by Hans Belting and Christiane Kruse', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 78, no. 4 (1996), p. 734.

More recent scholars, like Peter Egri, have agreed that Surrealist artists such as Dalí and Duchamp added significant Renaissance elements in their art.[270] For example, *Invention of the Monsters* (fig. 91) by Dalí includes both a Leonardesque Madonna and a Boschian monster at the centre of the painting. A small figure, winged and masked, is handing over a head-like object to the bare bust of a horse-headed woman. Perhaps we can discern here the ominous overtones of a Surrealist annunciation, with a burning giraffe to the right recalling a painting by Dalí of the same title (1936-37), completing the haunting quality of the piece.[271]

Figure 91: Salvador Dalí, *Invention of the Monsters*, 1937,
oil on canvas, 51.4 x 78.4 cm, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Connections between Surrealism and Bosch are further tracked in the reception of works that were defined in a broader sense as Surrealist. For example, the French Expressionist painter Georges Rouault (1871-1958) was considered by the American art collector and author Sam A. Lewisohn (1884-1951) to be a true Surrealist because of the subconscious aspects of his art and because his fantastic figures are as symbolic as those

[270] Egri, Péter, 'Playing Games with Renaissance Art: Leonardo, Duchamp, Dalí, Rauschenberg and Warhol', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1995), p. 59: "A critic argues and an artist creates. If the artist is also a critic, he recreates. If he is a witty artist, then his recreation is also an intellectual recreation, a spirited reinterpretation and reassessment. If he exercises his talents at historical moment of crucial change, then his artistic critique may embody fundamental shifts in value systems. In extreme cases, an incongruous reconstruction may prove a comic deconstruction. The vicissitudes of Renaissance masterpieces in Modern times provide prominent examples of paradigmatic importance."
[271] Ibid., pp. 71-72.

of Bosch.[272] It is perhaps also worth noting that Rouault was one of the favourite students of the great Symbolist Gustave Moreau (1826-98), and that he later became the curator of the Moreau Museum in Paris, a museum that Surrealists revered.[273]

Another common element between Bosch's paintings and Surrealist artworks relates to their iconographic complexity and multiple layers of meaning. In the 2016 exhibition *Beyond Bosch: The Afterlife of a Renaissance Master in Print*, the art historians Marisa-Anne Bass and Elizabeth Wyckoff examined in detail a multitude of extant prints after Bosch's work. They aimed to establish how each one might connect to the actual body of the painter's art, whether as pastiche or via the creative overlap of Pieter Brueghel the Elder, who actually created one of the key prints and would be known as a "new Bosch." Bass and Wyckoff also attempt to repeat the kinds of symbol decoding that Erwin Panofsky had achieved so successfully in early Netherlandish painting (though of course Panofsky omitted Bosch's iconography, as being beyond him: "This, too high for my wit, I prefer to omit").[274] The show's treatment of the intentionality underlying Bosch's visual exploration of the demonic underworld was what distinguished it from all that followed.

Reviewing this exhibition, the art historian Armin Kunz examined how Bosch shaped his own future, as well as the fate of his works in the hands of future artists. We all know what "Kafkaesque" means, she says (and without reading Kafka; all you need to do is fill in a tax return) – but how would we translate Boschian? She associates it with the "monsters and chimeras" that crowd the artist's compositions, his "obsession with the idea of hybrid forms as the offspring of mismating and unnatural union in the world… Horrid, malformed creatures with distended torsos or none at all wave insect-like appendages; bulbous bodies turn into fish or sharp-beaked birds; animal, mineral, and vegetal hybrids mix and squirm from rotting vestments, cracked eggs, and metallic casings''.[275] His surreal worlds are full of fantastic creatures – monsters, demons and devils, voluptuous nudes and temptresses, all mingling with the artist's own contemporaries.[276] It could also be argued, though, that since Bosch largely ignored the nobility and based his work on the peasant life he witnessed in Northern Brabant, he is

[272] Lewisohn, Sam A, 'Roualt-Master of Dissonance', *Parnassus*, vol. 5, no. 6 (1933), p. 5. It is worth quoting one of Lewisohn's comments: "The chief function of the artist in the Renaissance was to sell orthodox religion, which includes the great struggles within the soul. Pity, torture, cruelty and renunciation are the everyday subject matter with which they dealt. We also have Hieronymus Bosch's unpleasant symbolical figures that illustrate morality stories produced in the service of orthodox theology. Any pattern, no matter how shocking it may be as an individual effort, becomes acceptable and respectable when offered as a part of a group's ideology, just as murder becomes respectable when it is war."

[273] Ibid.

[274] Panofsky, Erwin, *Early Netherlandish Painting: its origins and character*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 357.

[275] Kunz, Armin, 'Review: The Lure of the Weird: How Hieronymus Bosch Became a Brand', *Art in Print*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2015), p. 15.

[276] Ibid., p. 14.

hunting for traits of justice and democracy, challenging any power which oppresses the people or even more accurately the "commonalty".[277]

From the *Description of the Low Countries* by Lodovico Guicciardini (published in Antwerp, 1567) we know that in his own day Peter Brueghel the Elder was considered a "great imitator of the knowledge and fantasies of Jerome Bosch."[278] Now mainly considered to be the creator of modern landscape painting, Brueghel's reputation in life owed more to the satirical element in his paintings and other works. This satire was wide-ranging, with fantasy as a single element within it, and varying with the tone of his respective pieces – but fantasy is also the key to his method, as the only style that could harmonise the many visual incongruities. Brueghel was adapting what Bosch had popularised half a century earlier, as a tool that he could use in his own way. Especially late in his life, in the engraved composition *Fall of the Magician Hermogenes* (fig. 92) Brueghel totally departed from the straightforward realism seen in the Virtues in order to fully take up Bosch's style,[279] but without following Bosch's moralizing.[280]

Figure 92: Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Fall of the Magician Hermogenes*, 1565, engraving, 22.1 x 29.2 cm, British Museum, London (not displayed)

A great example of the influence of Bosch and Brueghel on Surrealists can be found in one of Dalí's most celebrated pictures, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (fig. 78). Drawing on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a narrative Roman poem almost contemporary with the birth of Christ, Dalí creates his own transformations, both in a painting and a

[277] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[278] McParlin Davis, 1943, p. 291.
[279] Ibid., p. 295.
[280] Ibid.

contemporary poem of the same theme. As Robert Descharnes noted in 1942, this painting meant a great deal to Dalí, since it was the first Surrealist work to offer a consistent interpretation of an irrational subject.[281] Dalí's approach to the painting can be related to Breton's "paranoiac-critical activity": a dynamically charged method that identifies or creates within one image a second hidden image of a sometimes contrary character, one that capably conveys alterations in matter across a sequence of time. That is to say: a metamorphosis.

Ovid's version of the Narcissus myth contains two primary themes. First, there is a young man in love with his own beautiful face. He pays for this sin by dying, so that his reflection merges with the water and the flower called Narcissus grows in his place. The second theme is the nymph Echo, whose love for Narcissus goes unrequited: she is transformed into nothing but a fading voice, an echo.[282]

Dalí's Narcissus appears in two modes, the separate stages suggesting the passage of time inherent to such a process. The figure on the left is completely naked, his body depicted in warm colours and surrounded by warm and even fiery primary-nature substances, as well as by colours that we associate with blood, mud and poop. His head is supported by his knee and he is partially reflected in the water, which contains shadows of undefined substances. The body's reflection reminds us of Caravaggio's version of the theme (fig. 93) both in the realistic portrayal of the knee and in the immediate continuity of the limbs with their reflection. On the right of Dalí's picture, a counterpart of Narcissus's figure is shown: here we see something cold and stone-like, representing the successor stage; there are cracks in the stone, and ants are crawling on it suggesting death. The head of Narcissus is transformed into an egg held by an ossified grey hand, which in itself is a transformation of the original body. Yet a flower breaking through the egg's shell means a new beginning; a narcissus emerges. The two together

[281] Descharnes, Robert and Néret Gilles, *Salvador Dalí: The Paintings*, 2 vols (Köln: Benedict Taschen, 1994), p. 299 and 757, reproduced pl. 645 in colour.

[282] Kontogonis, Konstantinos et al., *Epitome of Greek mythology* (Athens: Andreou Koromilas, 1852). In addition to Ovid's version in the *Metamorphoses*, Greek Mythology hands down several connected myths about the sexuality and tragic death of Narcissus. *The first version*: sitting near a spring one day the beautiful Narcissus saw his face in its waters. He was fascinated by his image reflected in the water. Desiring to grasp it he dipped his arm in the water but of course he did not succeed. So he stayed there, admiring himself until he withered and died. Thus the flower that bears his name, the *narcissus daffodil*, sprang up as a symbol of decay. *The second*: Indifferent to the love that the handsome young man Ameinias had for him, Narcissus had already become responsible for the latter's suicide. As punishment, Narcissus was enticed via the same passion into seeing his own image in the water, falling in love with it and eventually dying from unrequited love for himself. *The third*: After the death of his beautiful twin sister Echo, with whom he was in love, Narcissus could only find consolation in his own reflection in the spring water at Thespiae, so he sat there until he died. *The fourth and best known version (which is Ovid's)*: Narcissus, a handsome youth from Boeotia, one day sat on the banks of the river admiring his own perfect physique. He paid no attention to the declared love for him of the nymph Echo, as she constantly called out to him. Gradually her voice weakened, until only the final syllables could be heard, while Narcissus died admiring himself in the river that he used as a mirror.

reconcile opposites, and thus a whole cycle of the metamorphosis of matter is symbolised.[283]

Figure 93: Caravaggio, *Narcissus*, c. 1597-99, oil on canvas, 110 x 92 cm, National Gallery of Ancient Art, Rome

By depicting an actual process of transformation, Dalí diverges from traditional pictorial treatments of the theme. Whereas earlier paintings concentrate on a single moment in time, his artistic language is both polymorphous and simultaneous – which is in a sense closer to the literary source, in its narrative fourth dimension.

His iconographical alterations are equally striking. First, where the story centers on self-love, expressed via the admiration of the beauty of one's own face, Dalí's painting shows no face at all, but rather a mere ovoid form, lacking individuality: a faceless face. This embryonic ovoid head implies the potential metamorphosis of the next stage, in which an egg appears. Secondly, the watcher's sexual gender is conspicuously not defined, despite his nudity, which echoes the kind of classical form you might find in the magnificent frescoes of Pompeii (fig. 94).[284] Thirdly, Echo is not directly visible in the picture at all – her presence can only be deduced via iconographic analysis. Finally, there is Dalí's main iconographic addition: the hand holding the egg.

[283] Heyd, Milly, 'Dalí's "Metamorphosis of Narcissus" Reconsidered', *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 5, no. 10 (1984), p. 122.
[284] Pincus-Witten, Robert, 'Man Ray: The Homonymic Pun and American Vernacular', *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 8 (April 1976), p. 57.

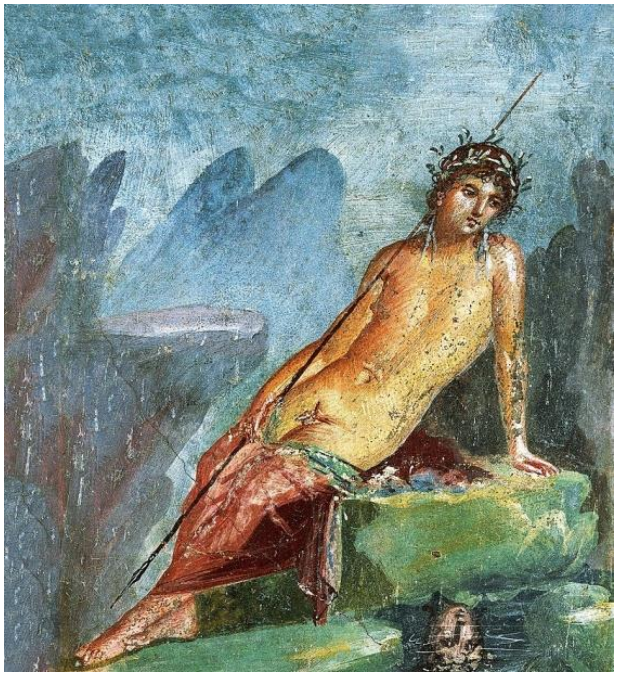

Figure 94: Unknown artist, *Narcissus*, fresco,
AD 79, Pompeii, Italy

The image of an egg derived from the world of alchemy, where it symbolises the philosopher's stone, as for example in *Emblema VIII* by the alchemist Matthaeus Merian, 1568-1622, in which the egg is about to be split (fig. 95). To understand Dalí's deployment of it here, we must take a detour to discover Dalí's attitude – and that of other Surrealists – towards alchemy. Alchemy was primarily concerned with the purification of metals: in particular the transformation of base metals such as lead into gold. Its study became particularly popular during the sixteenth century with various Renaissance artists developing a fascination with it, most notably Parmigianino (1503-40) who was so much absorbed in alchemical experiments to the extent of totally losing his interest for painting.[285]

[285] Vasari, 1912-15, pp. 252-53.

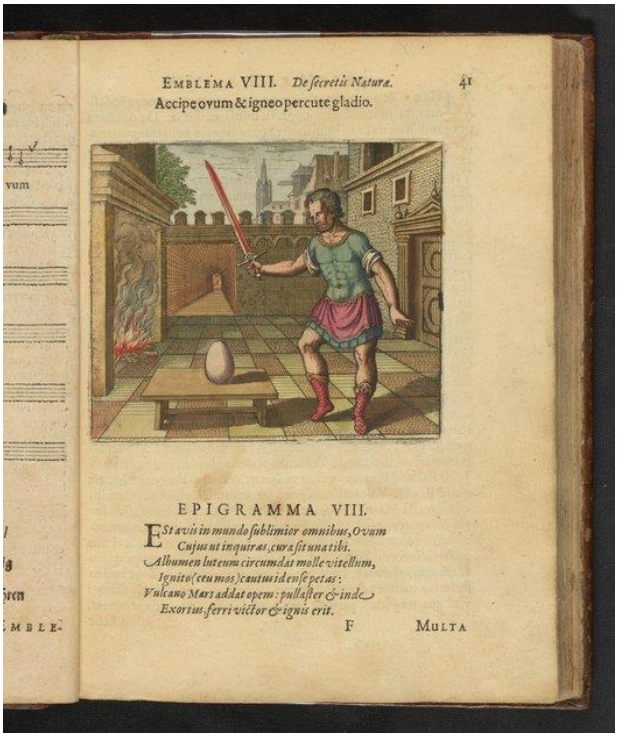

Figure 95: Matthaeus Merian, Emblema VIII: **'**Take the egg and smite it with a fiery sword**'**, Part of *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618, engraving, Oppenheim, Germany

The Surrealists' approach to this ancient science is expressed by Breton in the second Surrealist Manifesto (1929). His analogy is that both Surrealist painting and alchemy are a means of liberating the imagination. Alchemy is a tool for gaining what he called "the profound, the veritable occultation of Surrealism".[286] Wisdom is achieved in unexpected contexts, by means of the condensation of qualities which expose the truth. What Surrealists do via the deployment of dreams, the alchemists once achieved through the composition of materials that make up the so-called 'Philosopher's Stone'. The new composition eliminates all which is superfluous, thus purifying the remainder: "I would appreciate your noting the remarkable analogy, insofar as their goals are concerned, between the Surrealist efforts and those of the alchemists: the philosopher's stone is nothing more or less than that which was to enable man's imagination to take a stunning revenge on all things, which brings us once again, after centuries of the mind's domestication and insane resignation. to the attempt to liberate once and for all the imagination by the 'long, immense, reasoned derangement of the senses,' and all the rest.'"[287]

Returning to *Narcissus*, it seems that Dalí was haunted by the thought of his brother, who shared his name and died nine months before the painter was born. Dalí describes his relation to his dead brother's shadow as madness: "Only through paranoia, that is the prideful exaltation of self, did I succeed in saving myself from annihilation of

[286] Breton, 1969, p. 178.
[287] Ibid., p. 175.

systematic self-doubt."[288] Furthermore, Dalí says: "I first conquered death with pride and narcissism" – the latter being the characteristic so deplored by Ovid and for which Narcissus is punished. In Dalí's eyes it apparently becomes a virtue, a redeeming feature – and it is this redemption that is explores in this painting.[289]

The split in the head can be read as a symbol of meningitis, with the flower growing out of the split a symbol of Dalí's redemption. We can take this even further: the image of a flower growing out of a cracked head reminds us that the cure for madness in the Renaissance involved opening the patient's head, to remove parts of the brain – as documented in paintings such as Bosch's *Cutting the Stone* or *The Cure of Folly (*1494, fig. 96), Brueghel's *Cutting out the Stone of Madness* (1550, fig. 97), and *The Stone Operation* or *The Witch of Mallegem* (1559), also by Breugel – noting that in the right-hand corner of the last one, the operation takes place inside an egg and that a leaf sprouts from it![290]

Figure 96: Hieronymus Bosch, *Cutting the Stone* or *The Cure of Folly*, 1494, oil on board, 48 x 35 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid

[288] Parinaud, André, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí / As Told to André Parinaud* (New York: Morrow, 1976), p. 13.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Heyd, 1984, p. 128.

Figure 97: Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Cutting out the Stone of Madness* or *An Operation on the Head*, 1550, oil on panel, Musée de l'hôtel Sandelin, Saint-Omer

In Bosch's operation for the cure of folly, the flower emerging from the wound is removed from the patient's head, while another flower – a tulip, a symbol of madness – lies on the table-top. While Dalí appears to use a related therapeutic method, to rid himself of his brother's haunting image, he treats madness in itself and narcissism as the salvation.

Thus, contrary to the ordinary understanding of paranoia, for Dalí this condition has a positive liberating power – hence no doubt the marked difference in atmosphere between the two paintings. In Bosch's picture, the funnel on the surgeon's head and the expression of the faces betray lack of confidence in the operation.[291] Dalí, on the other hand, has turned the operation into an internal transformation in whose success he seriously believes.

Dalí also acknowledged that his *Temptation of St Anthony* (fig. 89) had been influenced by Bosch's triptych of the same name.[292] But another reading of this story is what we now turn to: the version of *Temptation of St Anthony* on the panel of the famous *Isenheim Altarpiece* at Colmar in France (1515), executed by Matthias Grünewald (1470-1528), a contemporary of Bosch. Grünewald was a German Renaissance painter of

[291] Ibid., p. 129.
[292] Taylor, 2008, p. 3.

religious works, whose style begins to pull us towards full-blown romanticism.[293] His *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512-16), an extraordinary movable altarpiece and perhaps the greatest masterpiece of German Renaissance art, consists of three, equally breathtaking, parts: *The Crucifixion* (fig. 98), the *Birth of Christ and the Resurrection* (figs. 99-100) and the *Temptation of St Anthony* (fig. 101). The last part contains a grotesque mob of demonic figures, as lurid and perverse in their variety as anything found in Bosch – except that Grünewald places these creatures almost everywhere, to be discovered, lurking, by the dismayed present-day viewer paying careful attention.[294] So his veneration by various Surrealists – including Breton, Dalí and above all Picasso – is no great surprise.

Although it is today displayed so as to reflect and respect its original role and placing, the viewing experience of it remains puzzling – or even disturbing – due to its riot of dark images. The lively colours are startling and the jumps of scale between figures are certainly bizarre, even if one is already familiar with the work's reproductions. If the suffering on display in the panels is painful, many are even more upset by its placing next to details we would file as fantastic. Perhaps the correct word is indeed "surreal".[295]

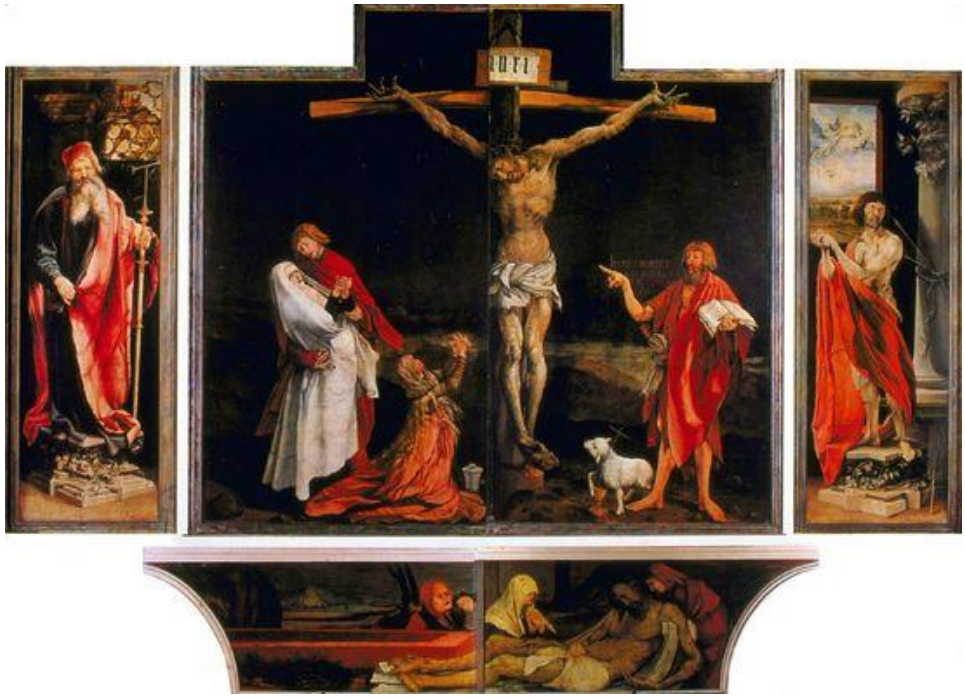

Figure 98: Matthias Grünewald, *The Crucifixion, portraits of St. Anthony and St. Sebastian, predella with Lamentation*, first view of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512-16, oil on wood, 269 x 307 cm, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar

[293] Wallis, Nevile, 'Review of ''Bosch: Grünewald: The Van Eycks: Delacroix. World's Masters New Series'' by Anthony Bertram', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 98, no. 4821 (19 May 1950), pp. 570-71.
[294] Wright, A.D., 'Review of ''The Devil at Isenheim: Reflections of Popular Belief in Grünewald's Altarpiece'' by Ruth Mellinkoff', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1990), p. 105.
[295] Ibid.

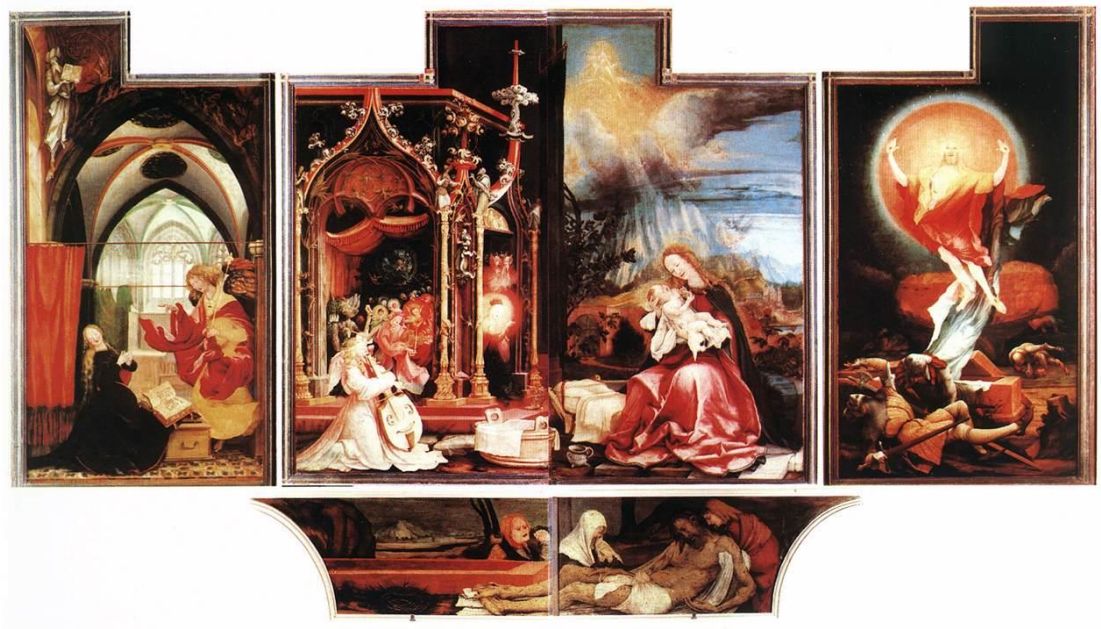

Figure 99: Matthias Grünewald, *Annunciation, Nativity with Concert of Angels*, *Resurrection*, outer view of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512-1516, oil on wood, 269 x 307 cm, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar

Figure 100: Matthias Grünewald, *Concert of Angels*, detail of fig. 99, 1512-1516, oil on wood, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar

Figure 101: Matthias Grünewald, *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, inner view of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512-1516, oil on wood, 269 x 307 cm, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar

For Picasso the *Isenheim Altarpiece* would ultimately return in surprising form during his Surrealist period (c. 1925-38): "Working from reproductions of this deeply moving masterpiece he [Picasso] made a remarkable series of studies… of great importance as being the forerunners of Guernica, painted seven years later."[296] But the route was not as simple as this version of the story might suggest – Picasso spent many years finding his way through and into Grünewald's mystical and visionary iconography, from the 1930s onwards. As art historian and journalist Willard E. Misfeldt (1930-91) argues – drawing on his studies of the painter's transformations and changing stance towards the "theme of the cock" – around this time Picasso underwent a profound personal shift, as he became increasingly affected by "broader human issues, problems which do not seem to have bothered him during the First World War."[297] In works of Picasso's Surrealist period such as the *Seated Bather* (fig. 102) of 1929 and the *Crucifixion* (fig. 103) of 1930, Picasso begins to make a "connection with the visible world" – while in the various ink drawings that explore elements from the Grünewald Altarpiece, his

[296] Sokol, David M., 'Review of *''Robert Henri and His Circle'' by* William I. Homer', Art Journal, vol. 30, no. 1 (1970), p. 243.
[297] Ibid., p. 243.

deployment of the grotesque and the ugly becomes a method of communicating the deep and often conflicting passions of human affairs.[298]

Figure 102: Pablo Picasso, *Seated Bather*, 1929, oil on canvas, 163.2 x 129.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Picasso first encountered Grünewald's *Crucifixion* (fig. 104) between 1930-32, with the lamenting Magdalene (fig. 105) captivating his attention, as we can see in the eight drawings in Indian ink that he made at this time.[299] Grünewald's visualization of the "essence of agony" can be observed resurfacing in Picasso's own *Crucifixion* drawings after 1932 (fig. 106), and later in his master painting, *Guernica* (1937, fig. 107). In fact, a profound empathy in respect of what Diane Apostolos-Cappadona has since described as the "agonised hapticity" of the female body can be discerned between the

[298] According to Sir Kenneth Clark the great masterpieces of Western Art shared certain common characteristics. Two of them relate to the *Isenheim Altarpiece* and its effect on Picasso. A masterpiece, Clark argues, must so recreate traditional forms as to become expressive of the artist's own time, and yet maintain a link with the tradition of past masterpieces. And its themes should bring together memories and emotions so as to form a single idea. Here that traditional form is the image of the Crucifixion, the idea of the "essence of agony", see Clark, Kenneth, *What is a Masterpiece?* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), quoted by Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane, 'The Essence of Agony: Grünewald's Influence on Picasso', *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 13, no. 26 (1992), p. 31.
[299] Ibid.

Renaissance master and Picasso even in the latter's canvases of the Crucifixion predating his first encounters with Grünewald's images.[300]

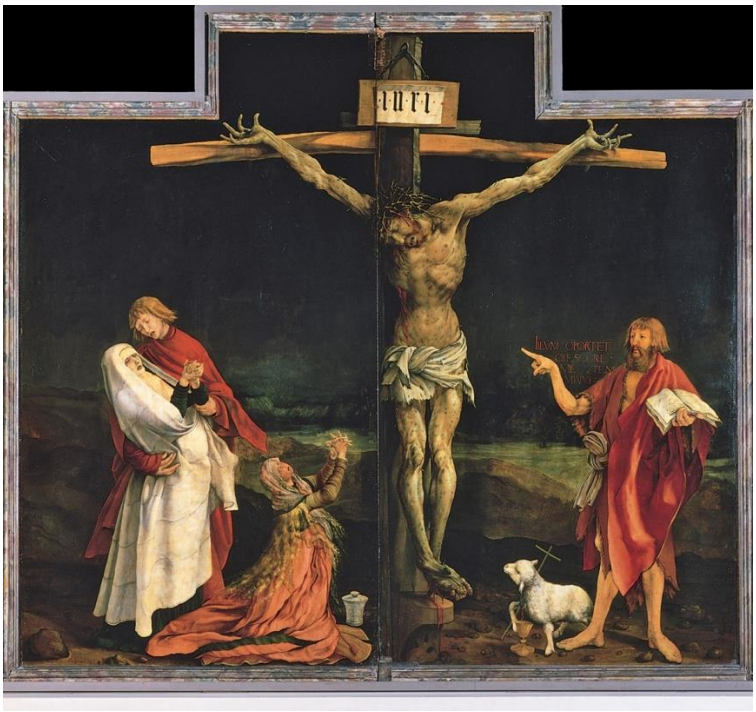

Figure 104: Matthias Grünewald, *The Crucifixion*, detail of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512-1516, oil on wood, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France

[300] Ibid, p. 34.

Figure 105: Matthias Grünewald, *Mourning of the Virgin and Mary Magdalen*, detail of *The Crucifixion*, 1512-16, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar

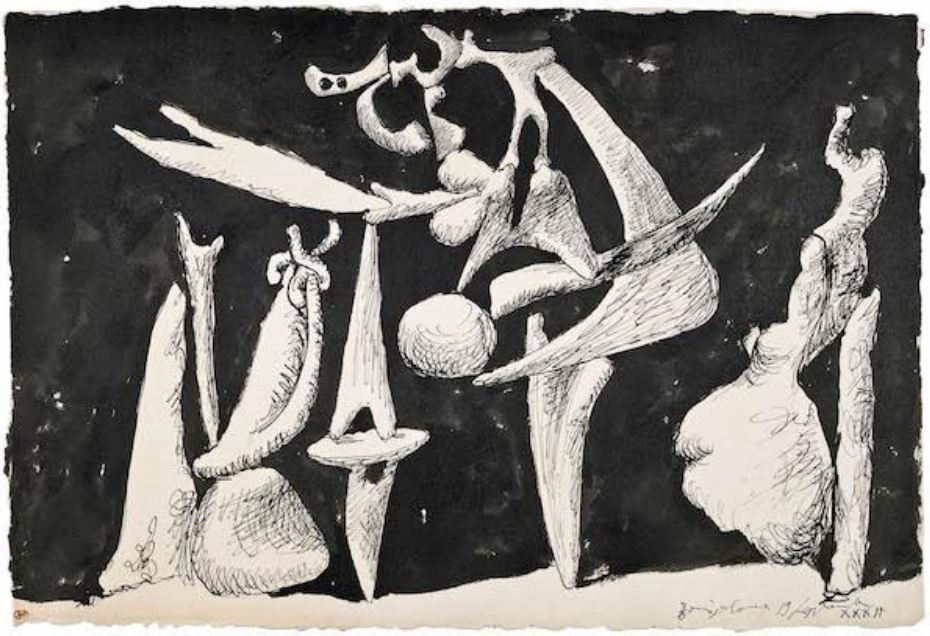

Figure 106: Pablo Picasso, *Crucifixion*, 1932, ink drawing, 34 x 51 cm, Picasso Museum, Paris

Figure 107: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349.3 x 776.6 cm, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid

In his time Matthias Grünewald was caught between the changeability of economic patronage and the restless pathologies of the religious radicals during Luther's insurrection. He was seemingly so abandoned at this time that, as the German historian

Sandrart (1606-88) famously observed,[301] "no living man was able to provide an oral or written account of his activities." Like Cranach, Dürer and Baldung, he shared the revulsions of the age of Reformation and the loss of political and spiritual ties, torn between hope, practicality and the immanence of transcendence.[302]

What matters here is the timely leap, the ecstatic realisation which transforms the common world into the fate-filled imagery of fantastic; where art becomes as Picasso so alarmingly said, a "fiction that enables us to know the truth." The evidence suggests that Picasso came to know Grünewald's masterpiece from two sources, the writings of Breton and those of Picasso's friend Christian Zervos (1889-1970).[303] Breton was of course already writing about Surrealism and painting in the late 1920s - early 1930s,[304] and his arguments helped make Grünewald seem an appropriate resource for the Surrealist investigation "of the irrational through primitive art forms." But it was probably Zervos who brought the actual images of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* to the artist's attention – he was writing an essay about it, with black-and-white reproductions including details of the hands of Jesus, Mary, St John the Baptist, and the Magdalene, for the volume he was working on of the *Cahiers d'Art* (which he dedicated "*à Picasso*... Paul Éluard"). In the autumn of 1932, Picasso created his eight ink drawings inspired by Grünewald's masterpiece.

In his essay, Zervos described the Altarpiece as one of the rarest creations of art, despite being out of the public mind for almost 400 years (until retrieved by the likes of Picasso, in fact). Grünewald, claimed Zervos, was able to capture the power of the dream within a vision of reality, with a fusion of the precise consciousness of each, without lessening the power of either to observe. Here was a sustain attention to sensibility, the concentration in one painting of curiosity, passion and spiritual emotion: everything we find in Grünewald, which makes his work so energetic, seems recognizable around us.[305]

In his drawings, Picasso didn't attempt to copy the style, but instead the essence of what Zervos had called his "spiritual emotion, endless curiosity, and sensual ardor." But the exaggerated gesticulations of Grünewald's Magdalene are very much there in Picasso's drawings of October 4, 1932. Here is the physicality of haptic agony, as distinct from the common grief of tragedy.[306]

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[301] Sokol, 1970, p. 244.
[302] Ehresmann, Donald, 'Review of ''Northern Painting: From Pucelle to Brueghel. Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries'' by Charles D. Cuttler', *Art Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1970), p. 118.
[303] As well as a personal friend of Picasso, the Greek-French art historian, critic, philosopher, collector, writer and publisher Christian Zervos was the main curator of his exhibitions.
[304] Apostolos-Cappadona, 1992, p. 40.
[305] Zervos, Christian, *Matthias Grünewald: Le Retable D'Isenheim* (Paris: Editions Cahiers d'Art, 1936), p. 39.
[306] Throughout his studies of gesticulation in Western art, the art scholar Moshe Barasch (1920-2004) noted that a significant factor in Giotto's art was this development of a dramatic vocabulary, drawn from classical and from Byzantine models. Gesticulation not simply as movement but also as a form of communication, an evocation of emotion, is not limited to the hands. The entire body is its source and communicative vehicle – and for Picasso especially the female body, see Barasch, Moshe, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 125.

For the Surrealists who heeded Breton's call, Giotto to Grünewald was no great distance, when both artists rooted so much of the work in the drama of the hands and the fingers. Two drawings from September 17, 1932, reveal a Picasso building upon this iconography, the agony of the female body, expressed with such power in his *Crucifixion*, reached its zenith in *Guernica*.[307]

Grünewald, it should be noted, offers his viewers the promise of a cleansing and a healing, whereas Picasso offers only ambiguity. The original viewers of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* encountered an object intended visually to ease their sufferings and offer solace.[308] As the art historian Andrée Hayum explained, the river flowing behind St John the Baptist signified the healing baths intended to cleanse the many skin ailments treated at the Antonite hospice, whose monks had commissioned the Altarpiece.[309]

Picasso offer no such solace. He ignores Grünewald's depictions of the body of the resurrected Christ or the perfect baby Jesus; his vision revolves entirely round his empathy with the "agonised hapticity" of Mary Magdalene. This was all he considered present in the modern world: the cathartic experience of art and the sensitive dynamism of woman. Even in the age of secular spirituality, the theme of the "essence of agony" continued to be reinterpreted through the contorted female body.[310]

Picasso's line, the art critic Louis Danz once noted, is like the dancing of the American choreographer Martha Graham (1894-1991). Graham dances the path of feeling as its flows through her body (fig. 108), and it does this until it comes out. In her choreography of the agony of the Spanish Civil War, *Deep Song* (1937), Graham, like Picasso, limits herself to black-and-white.[311] On an empty stage, a single female dancer in black-and-white performs on and around a white bench against a black backdrop. This convulsed and tormented figure, like Grünewald's and Picasso's Magdalene, celebrates the haptic power of the female body as the one possible vehicle for the "emotional memory" which "survived all the intervening years" for the viewer.

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[307] Sleptzoff, Lola, *Norms and Variations in Art: Essays in Honour of Moshe Barasch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), pp. 63-80.
[308] Hayum, Andrée,, 'The Meaning and the Function of the Isenheim Altarpiece: The Hospital Context Revisited', *The Art Bulletin*, LIX, no. 4 (1977), pp.501-17.
[309] Wright, 1990, pp. 501-17.
[310] Apostolos-Cappadona, 1992, p. 46.
[311] Danz, Louis, *Personal revolution and Picasso* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1941), p. 18.

Figure 108: Martha Graham, *Lamentation Choreography*, *Show*, 1930, Elliott's Theatre archives, New York City

As for Picasso's painted *Crucifixion* (1930), it brings together the biomorphs and the bone structures of his late 20s and early 30s work, with its more distorted figures mostly rendered as less Synthetic Cubist patterning in a Surrealist reading (fig. 103).[312] Yet the huge green sponge with the vinegar on the upper left and the tiny centurion on horseback are more realistic mode, unsettlingly so. Perhaps these disparities in size are clues, that everything is being seen by the man on the cross.[313] This takes it far out outside the historical or the sacred tradition of Crucifixion iconography – though it does place it alongside the violent anguish of Picasso's Surrealist years. Elements in this painting, along with the surreal elaborations on Grünewald's Altarpiece, will come together in the *Guernica* – after all, he synthesised ideas in the *Guernica* from most of the movements he had taken part in.[314]

[312] Raleigh, Henry, 'Image and Imagery in Painting', *Art Journal*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1962), p. 161.
[313] Rubin, 1967, p. 58.
[314] Ibid., p. 127.

Figure 103: Pablo Picasso, *Crucifixion*, 1930, oil on canvas,
51 x 66 cm, Picasso Museum, Paris

Continuing with Max Ernst, his attraction to the Renaissance is not dissimilar to that of his French or Spanish Surrealist colleagues caught up in the visual arts in the 1920s-30s. But it also very much reflects the long-held Northern fascination with Italian Renaissance painting with its harmonious clarity, along with the growing art historical interest in what was so distinct about early German Art:[315] Bosch, Brueghel, Baldung, Cranach and Grünewald.[316]

Ernst admired Bosch and Baldung for their visionary quality and power to express the irrational; Cranach he admired for his eroticism.[317] These qualities can be seen in his famous painting *The Robing of the Bride* (1940, fig. 109), discussed above: its sources include Cranach, Baldung, Freud and Masonic ritual. Its subject is an eroticized, hallucinatory female body within a dislocated Renaissance space to an explosive yet static decalcomania.[318] The monstrosity, the illusionism and the deformity in the landscapes and the figures proclaim and even narrate Ernst's historical affinity with his Germanic and Northern Renaissance ancestors and artists, recasting them into a newer version.[319]

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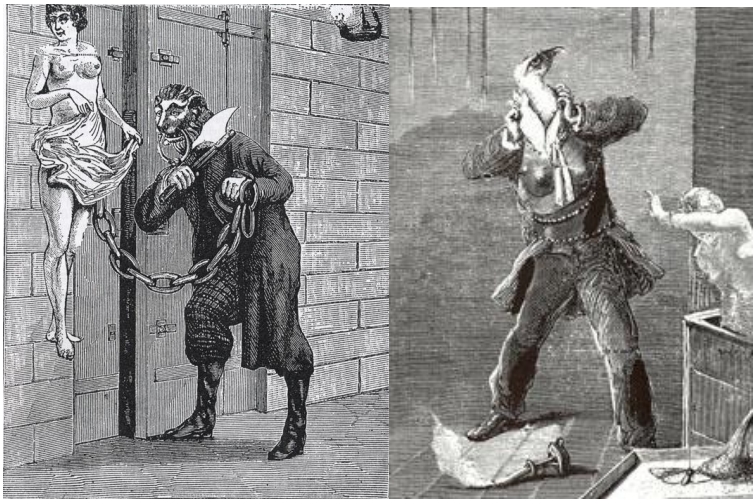
[315] Gee, 1997, p. 50.
[316] Greet, Maurer, Rainwater and Gregorian, 1986, p. 61.
[317] Gee, 1997, p. 50.
[318] Ibid., p. 53.
[319] Erskine, Peggy, 'Reviewed works: Berenson, Bernard, *''Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts'';* Arp, Jean*, ''On My Way'';* Ernst, Max, *''Beyond Painting''*; Hoffman, Hans, *''Search for the Real''*; Greenberg*,* Clement, *''Joan Miro''*; Soby, James Thrall, *''Contemporary Painters''*; Seltman, Charles, *''Approach to Greek Art''*; Clark, Kenneth*, ''Florentine Paintings''*; Wilenski, R.H., *''Degas''*; Venturi, Lionello, Kimball, Fiske*, ''Great Paintings in America'';* Ciaranfi, Anna Maria, *''Beato Angelico: Les Fresques de Saint Marc'''*, in *The Sewanee Review* vol. 58, no. 2 (Apr-Jun, 1950), 359-60.

Figure 109: Max Ernst, *The Robing of the Bride*, 1940, oil on canvas, 129.6 x 96.3 cm, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

Another work of Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934), a series intended to provoke and intrigue the observer, with its scenes of animal-shaped characters (figs. 110-11), is directly reminiscent of Bosch's paintings and intentions.[320] As Breton had already noted in 1927, Ernst connects here his painting with the "temptation" in Bosch's art.[321]

[320] Warlick, M.E., 'Max Ernst's Alchemical Novel: Une Semaine de bonté', *Art Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art**,** Spring, 1987), p. 62.
[321] Breton, 1969, p. 136.



Figures 110-11: Max Ernst, illustrations of *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1934, Dover Publications

To Ernst, as well as to Joan Miró (1893-1983), both enchanted by the art of Bosch and Brueghel, here was a way to reveal the unconscious mind and to disturb everyday realities.[322] They both also here sought pictorial solutions to pictorial problems. Collaborating with Miró on the sets and costumes for the Ballets Russes' *Romeo and Juliet* in the mid-20s, Ernst cited Leonardo da Vinci as the source of his *frottage* technique, as already noted.[323] Meanwhile, the work of Miró, whose fantastical themes and hybrid figures combined abstract art with Surrealist imagination, was beginning to orbit the organic yet distorted inventions – the demons and the grotesques – of the Northern Renaissance. He had certainly seen Bosch's work in the Prado in 1928, and contemporaries were noting similarities even earlier, for example in *The Harlequin's Carnival* (1924-25, fig. 112), with its chaotic responses to the German's monstrous imagery. As the Paris correspondent of *De Telegraaf* observed: "Miró… is a great grandson of Hieronymus Bosch."[324]

[322] Erskine, 1950, pp. 359-60.
[323] See notes 175 and 201.
[324] De Haan, Panda and Van Halem, Ludo, *Miró in Holland: The Dutch Interiors (1928)*, *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (2010), p. 236.

Figure 112: Joan Miró, *Harlequin's Carnival*, 1924-25, oil on canvas,
66 x 90. 5 cm, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo

The hauntingly grotesque art of Surrealist painter and novelist Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) was also influenced by the Northern Renaissance.[325] Her youthful involvement with Ernst and his circle in Paris brought her into contact with Surrealism, though her work only fully matured after her move to Mexico in 1943. Often intimate in scale, her paintings are sometimes amusingly dense with strange creatures performing arcane rituals. As in Bosch, her terrains seem embedded with obscure symbolism, until the observer is as baffled as they are enchanted.[326] For example, two of her early Mexican works, *Palantine Predella* (fig. 113) and *Tuesday* (fig. 114), both from 1946, seem to employ a Surrealist dreamscape of occult journeys and fairytale awakenings. The continuity of the narrative, structurally reminiscent of medieval panel painting, but also of Bosch and Brueghel, suggests a teeming plethora of archetypal yet mysterious psychic realities.[327]

[325] Mary Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) was a British-born Mexican artist, Surrealist painter, and novelist.
[326] Aberth, Susan, 'Review of ''Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years, 1943-1985 by Holly Barnet-Sanchez''', *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 3 (1992), p. 83.
[327] Ibid., p. 83.

Figure 113: Leonora Carrington, *Palatine Predella*,
1946, 33.8 x 20.9 cm, Private Collection

Figure 114: Leonora Carrington, *Tuesday*, 1987, colour lithograph,
65 x 91.5 cm, Private Collection

Finally, to bring us almost up date, the Neo-Surrealist and Magic Realist Gregory Gillespie (1936-2000) has pursued the darkly bizarre absurdity and grotesque monstrosity that we recognise from the North Renaissance, creating faces with little parallels in modern art, and closer in sensibility to Brueghel or Bosch.[328] Yet even as it returns to such Renaissance conventions as *sogni dei pittori*,[329] conventions too easily

[328] Lutchmansingh, Larry D., 'The Grotesque in the Early Work of Gregory Gillespie', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1990), p. 49.
[329] Translation from Italian: 'Dreams of painting'.

masked under by the notion of the grotesque perhaps it does also remind us of Surrealism.[330]

Figure 115: Gregory Gillespie, *Goldie's Dream*, 1999,
oil on panel, 50.8 x 49.53 cm, Private Collection

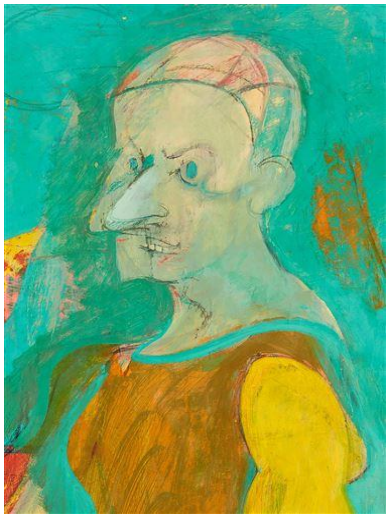
Overall, the second World War and its immediate aftermath witnessed a renewed interest, especially in the US, in the fantastic, horrific and irrational works of Bosch and Brueghel, works that perfectly suited a time when all these seemed omnipresent in ordinary reality, that is, transformed by war. As it must now be very clear, the Surrealists had already claimed Bosch as a precursor before the war, a claim surely confirmed by his inclusion in Alfred H. Barr's 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism.* But they were certainly not alone in their appreciation for the strange and grotesque masterpieces of the Northern Renaissance.

As David Anfam has argued, the Dutch-American Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning (1904-97) also seemed at a certain point to be operating in the Netherlandish universe of Bosch and Brueghel and their imitators: what are the concrete early sources of those motifs identified with the notion of Carnival, pleasure, pain and despair, caricature, bodily distortion, social chaos, judgment and transcendence?[331] In 1983, Harry F. Gaugh asserted – on the basis of interviews with De Kooning's wife, Elaine – that the artist "has always been fascinated by Bosch's work", and there are clear signs

[330] Lutchmansingh, 1990, p. 52.
[331] Anfam, David, 'De Kooning, Bosch and Brueghel: Some Fundamental Themes', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 145, no. 1207 (American Art, October 2003), p. 705.

that he was taking inspiration from the northern Renaissance of the late fifteenth to sixteenth centuries.

As Gaugh has convincingly suggested, De Kooning's *Seated Man* (1941, figs. 116-17) paraphrases the seated man-devouring demon, often identified as Satan, located at the lower right of the right-hand panel of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. And in the summer of 1969, while in Spoleto, Italy, De Kooning made several drawings openly based upon a reproduction of Brueghel's *Parable of the Blind*.



Figures 116-17: Willem de Kooning, *Seated Man (Clown)* and close detail of the same painting, 1941, oil on masonite, 61.3 x 40.8 cm, Private Collection

Researching the imagery of Bosch's *Judgment Day*, Lisa Mintz Messinger has suggested its four anthropomorphic beings resemble Brueghel's monstrous creatures – and notes that De Kooning was an avid reader of the Metropolitan Museum of *Art's Bulletin*,[332] adding that its issue of June 1943 had reproduced several of Brueghel's prints, full of these creatures, most accurately termed *grylli*.[333]

[332] Messinger, Lisa Mintz, *Abstract Expressionism: Works on Paper, Selections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Fashion Studies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 22-30.
[333] The term *grylli* is applied to the fantastic creatures seen, for example, in the marginalia of medieval manuscripts, with their heads and legs jammed into their nearly spherical bodies. Various late drawings by Kooning unequivocally depict such quasi-human beasts.

Anfam also refers to Bosch's "savant-like synthesis of absurdity and sageness" and what he calls "the wisdom of the riddle".[334] But what about the angry glare of *Seated man (Clown)* or indeed the bulbous fleshy physiognomy and protuberant nose of *Seated figure (Classic male)* (1941-43, fig. 118), and indeed several faces painted by De Kooning during this phase?[335] The demeanour of the former surely recalls the beady-eyed, big-nosed and scowling, toothy faces often found in works of Bosch and his followers, such as the crowds in his *Ecce Homo* (1470s, fig. 119) or in one of his follower's *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 120). The details of the latter – lips, eyebrows, nose, body – resemble the bagpiper in Brueghel's *Peasant Wedding* (fig. 121) even if attached to a Picassoid physique (and the red and olive/ochre colour pairing is also mutual).[336]

Even later, in the 1950s, when De Kooning brazenly returned to figuration with *Woman I* (1950-52), the themes and mood that Bosch and Brueghel inspired him to pursue perhaps seemed to retreat – yet elements remain of the psychological and iconographic confrontation that entered De Kooning's repertory with *Judgment Day*.[337] The mood shifts in De Kooning still resemble the logics and juxtapositions of Bosch and Brueghel's time, including bodily abjection and metamorphosis, alongside tragedy and bawdy humour and the overthrow of conventions and boundaries.[338] Here apparently remains the late medieval and Northern Renaissance tradition of Carnival.

[334] Anfam, 2003, p. 707.
[335] Yard, Sally, *Willem de Kooning*, 1st edition (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1997), pp. 134-43.
[336] Anfam, 2003, p. 707.
[337] Anfam and Duncan both referred to *Woman I* as the "gorgon's gaze", from the mythological creature of antiquity, who turned those who looked at her into stone Duncan, Carol, 'The MoMA's Hot Mamas', *Art Journal*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1989), pp. 171-78.
[338] Anfam, 2003, p. 715.

Figure 118: Willem De Kooning, *Seated Figure (Classic male)*, 1941-43, oil and charcoal on wood panel, 137.2 x 91.4 cm, Private Collection

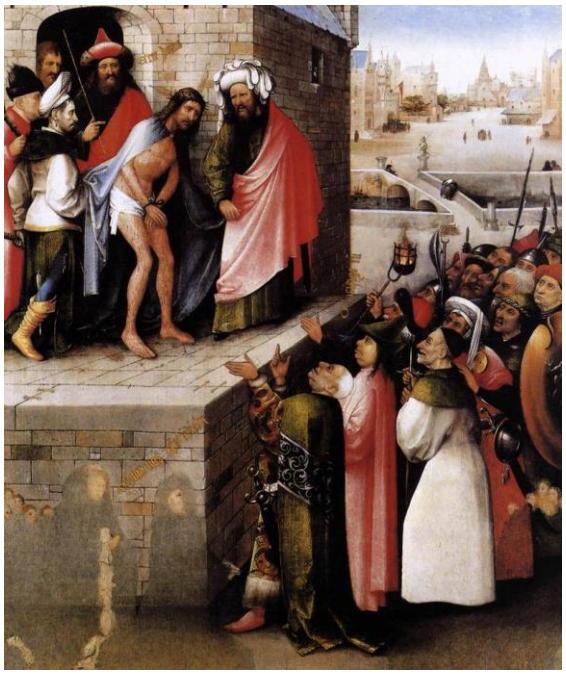


Figure 119: Hieronymus Bosch, *Ecce Homo*, c. 1475, tempera and oil on oak panel, 71.1 x 60.5 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt

Figure 120: Follower of Bosch, *Christ Carrying the Cross*,
c. 1515-35, oil on panel, 74 x 81 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent

Figure 121: Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *The Peasant Wedding*,
1567, oil on panel, 114 x 164 cm, History of Art Museum, Vienna

One might object here that, judging from the direction his work took in the 50s, art history has categorised De Kooning as an Abstract Expressionist who was known to be hostile – or at least indifferent towards Surrealism. However, to omit him from this argument would be to overlook how by the 1940s Bosch had become less a proto-Surrealist than someone whose vision was always already stylistically 'modern', and

deeply imbued with the anxieties and the rough menace of the human condition.[339] Daniel's illustrated 1947 monograph on Bosch amplified this newly popular conception of the Netherlander's modern relevance, citing the "almost incidental surrealist characteristics of Bosch, the smoke and fire of devastating Hell, violent death, the nightmare to end all nightmares, the landscapes and weird constructions disappearing into infinity. All that makes him so interesting to the people of our troubled world."[340]

Simultaneously, articles reproducing Bosch appeared in such mainstream and vanguard journals as the *Magazine of Art* or *The Tiger's Eye* respectively, with the latter also illustrating De Kooning's work. Kurt Seligmann, writing on Bosch for *The Tiger's Eye*, even began by viewing *The Garden of Earthly Delights* as though it were an 'all-over' Abstract Expressionist composition: "Despite the wide expanse there is little feeling of space. Background, middle distance and foreground are painted with equal intensity and distinctness. Perspective is willfully destroyed by gigantic objects spread over the whole panel, counteracting the flight into depth of gradually diminishing things and beings."[341] Probably the most apposite of all discussions for our purposes came from the leading champion of Abstract Expressionism, the essayist and visual art critic Clement Greenberg (1909-94).[342] Greenberg's interest was in fact divided between Modern Expressionism and the Renaissance, and in his essay *The Necessity of the Old Masters* he praises the significance of Bosch and Brueghel to the art of the twentieth century.[343]

To conclude, of all the early Northern artists that we have examined, Bosch is the one that seems best to exemplify how an abstruse symbolism, neglected for centuries, fits into the later ideals of Surrealism,[344] whether his monsters sprang from his subconscious, or – as some those less persuaded by Freud believe – they arrive to underline (and to exaggerate) a moral point from the shared symbols of his time. Other than Bosch, the list of Surrealist artists influenced by the Northern Renaissance is long and diverse. Perhaps the links we have striven to make in this chapter are best summarised by the present-day Californian artist Paul Pratchenko: "I maintain a continuing interest in Romanesque and medieval European art; so-called primitive and 'outsider' forms; Pieter Brueghel the Elder; true visionaries such as William Blake and Hieronymus Bosch; Dada and Surrealism, specifically Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Rene Magritte, and Joseph Cornell."[345]

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[339] Ibid., p. 708.
[340] Daniel, Howard, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Hyperion Press, 1947), p. 5.
[341] Selingman, Kurt, *The Tiger's Eye: The Art of a Magazine No 9* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 61.
[342] Greenberg, Clement, *The Flemish Masters* (New York, Nation Publication, 1945), p. 31.
[343] Ibid., 1945, p. 15.
[344] Wallis, 1950, pp. 570-71.
[345] Pratchenko, Paul, 'Painting and Drawing as Manifestations of Visual Perception', *Leonardo*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Autumn, 1983), p. 279.

6: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate whether the Renaissance period was an important point of reference and inspiration for Surrealism despite the hostility towards the existing cultural past shown by its founder, André Breton, who was the first to describe this new movement. And if the Renaissance served as inspiration, then who were the artists who most influenced the Surrealists?

The Italian artists that were chosen for analysis were Paolo Uccello, Piero di Cosimo and Leonardo da Vinci. The primary Northern artist under examination was Hieronymus Bosch, and to a lesser extent Matthias Grünewald and Pieter Brueghel the Elder. A general conclusion extracted from the investigation is that works of these artists proved influential for a diverse range of Surrealist artists, including, but not limited to, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Marcel Duchamp.

Aspects of Renaissance art that made the greatest appeal to Surrealism were the orientation of its artists towards archetypal myths and radical reinterpretations of classical artworks, their interest in multi-layered symbolism, dreamlike imagery and hybrid creatures, irrational realities, the unconscious mind and all kinds of fanciful flights of the imagination.

In fact, the abundance of connections between Renaissance and Surrealism enables a deeper appreciation of both movements. Despite their obsession with irrationality and disorder, Surrealist artists had an interest in certain aspects of classical and Renaissance culture such as scientific study and geometrical perspective. At the same time, the profound appreciation of Surrealist artists for Renaissance art highlights lesser-known aspects of the Renaissance, a period still often misconceived as a triumph of 'order' and 'reason'. Artists like Uccello, Di Cosimo, Leonardo and Bosch actually demonstrated a passion for grotesque fantasies and primitive rituals, the ability for abstract thought, intuition and creative 'disorder', multi-layered language of expression and ambiguity.

Another point of discussion was Breton's conflicted relationship with every movement containing elements of Classicism – which of course includes the Renaissance. The conclusion was that Breton indeed admired certain Renaissance painters and was drawn to certain names and myths from Greco-Roman mythology, as well as to the idea of magic, which richly suffused the earlier artistic periods and movements. It also turns out that Renaissance related not only ideologically but also creatively within Surrealism, even at the level of technique: the most important examples are Ernst's *grattage* and *frottage*, both techniques drawn from Leonardo's notes, and Duchamp's and Dalí's experiments with perspective, which had been pioneered in Uccello's frescoes.

Especially Dalí went so far as to declare his Surrealism a crusade in defence of Greco-Roman civilization.[346] He even fashioned himself as a new Renaissance man in the type of Leonardo, an artist to whom both he and Max Ernst dedicated important artworks.

[346] Dalí, 2016, p. 232.

Dalí's gradual orientation towards the aesthetical principles of the Renaissance made him actually claim that he had done a lamentable task as a Surrealist, which had been far better accomplished by the likes of Picasso.[347] Those who escaped, though, from Breton's strict guidelines were able to take their work in a different direction. Dalí's appreciation for the Renaissance was summarised in one of his most problematic aphorisms: "When I reflected that the heirs of the intelligence of Raphael Sanzio [*meaning the painter Raphael*] had fallen into such an aberration, I blushed with shame and rage. I had to find the antidote, the banner with which to challenge these blind and immediate products of fear, of absence of intelligence and of spiritual enslavement; and against the African 'savage objects' I upheld the ultra-decadent, civilised and European 'Modern Style' objects."[348] Notwithstanding his perceived notion of 'civilisation', this is how literally Dalí seized on the old and made it new, thus regenerating, as he believed, the true roots of Western civilisation, whose new shape was given by him by following classical and Renaissance values.

The need to see the links between certain Surrealist works and the Renaissance proves that this was always an underlying tendency, precisely because these modern artists looked for innovation in the old and the classical by deconstructing or distorting them. This demonstrates that the influence of the Renaissance on Surrealism could never be overshadowed, at least not without challenging the notion that twentieth century was the most innovative era, and one without any previous influences. Yes, Surrealism left a strong imprint on world art forever. After all, the term 'surreal' is used every day to describe something unusual or strange. This happened with no artistic movements before it. But when he discussed the importance of metamorphosis in art, Dalí noted that he would continue from the beginning: 'since I began by finishing, my end here must therefore be once more a beginning, a renaissance'.[349] Thus the final last sentence *of The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*: 'Instead of Reaction or Revolution, RENAISSANCE!'[350]

[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid., p. 321.
[350] Ibid., p. 323.

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