

Surrealism: The Unbound Kit

Information and ideas for teachers
and A-level students visiting
Surrealism: Desire Unbound,
20 September 2001 – 1 January 2002

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Surrealism: Desire Unbound
Sponsored by Morgan Stanley

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Sheet 1: Essential Information

About this kit

Teachers of all ages will be inspired by this kit. However, because the exhibition deals with erotic aspects of surrealism we have decided to target this at teachers of A-level and other post-16 courses.

The exhibition contains:

- many 'classic' works
- many Tate works that will be displayed in future
- many unfamiliar works, for example by women artists
- plenty of contextual material

so it provides an immensely rich opportunity for learning and looking.

However the exhibition contains some explicit material that could be considered offensive. A planning visit is highly recommended.

We have called this 'The Unbound Kit' because it is unconventional like the exhibition - it does not try to define or tie up the surrealist movement. It aims to unravel some themes that you may not have seen in other introductory texts. It is also literally unbound - sheets can easily be photocopied or given directly to students. After discussing a work in focus together, you could give the thematic sheets to small groups, who can investigate and report back in a plenary session.

The exhibition in a nutshell

It looks at a central theme of surrealism: the ways that desire fuels the creation of mental images.

There are 13 thematic rooms in the following sequence:

1. **The Bride Stripped Bare** - about erotic desire as a mechanical impulse; works by Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp and others.
2. **The Child's Brain** - about the influence of Freud; works by Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico and others.
3. **Before the Mirror** - about identity and gender ambiguity; works by Claude Cahun, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp and others.
4. **Dawn Over the City** - about desire as a blind force

driving man in pursuit of unspoken goals; works by Paul Delvaux, René Magritte, Salvador Dalí and others.

5. **Anatomies** - about photography of the body; works by Lee Miller, Man Ray and others.

6. **The Imprint of Desires** - about automatism; works by André Masson, Jean Miró and Hans Arp.

7. **Love, Poetry** - about surrealist books, often written in partnerships and inspired by relationships; numerous documentary texts, photographs and drawings.

8. **The Accommodations of Desire** - about representing taboo aspects of sexuality; works by Dalí, Magritte, Meret Oppenheim and others; cinema showing Louis Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*, Dalí and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* and Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

9. **Her Throat Cut** - about the darker side of surrealist desire, including themes of violence and domination; works by Giacometti, Picasso and Louise Bourgeois

10. **The Games of the Doll** - theme as for previous room; specifically focusing on Hans Bellmer's dolls.

11. **Eros** - about erotic texts and illustrations; a separate room, containing explicit material.

12. **The Robbing of the Bride** - about woman as muse and sorceress, including women artists' take on the question; works by Ernst, Frida Kahlo, Eileen Agar, Dorothea Tanning and others.

13. **Erotic Objects** - about objects as vehicles for private fantasy and emotion; works by Bourgeois, Duchamp and others.

Surrealism in context

Before visiting, a reminder of the social and political context could be useful.

There were surrealist groups in many European countries, including Britain, from the 1920s until the 1960s. Breton's *Manifesto* was published in 1924. The artists and writers surrounding Breton in Paris formed the most famous and international group. Artists such as Dalí and Miró came from Spain and Ernst from Germany to live in Paris. Attitudes towards desire have to be seen in the light of various factors at the time, which are very different from today. To focus on France, they include:

- A stiflingly conservative social ethos
- Strict censorship laws
- The pervasive influence of the Catholic Church

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- The stark legal and social inequalities between men and women
- The political and ethical dilemmas posed by the rise of fascism and communism
- The experience of the two world wars
- The collapse of the French empire and an influx of people from its colonies.

Matthew Gale's *Dada and Surrealism* Phaidon 1997 is an excellent contextual history.

Links with other displays

Katharina Fritsch - major exhibition alongside Surrealism: Desire Unbound

German woman sculptor. Familiar objects and fairy-tale figures are made strange by shifts in scale or colour. Mental images are translated into 3D by mass production techniques. Giacometti links well with Fritsch because he visualised his sculptures entirely then made them without altering his vision. Ask for the Fritsch Teachers' Kit (tel 020 7401 5064).

Juan Munoz *Double Bind* - Turbine Hall installation

An extra storey floats off-kilter in the Turbine Hall, inside which is a strange labyrinthine world. We can't go up and the lifts don't stop there, but small grey men play mysterious games or disappear into corridors.

Surrealism in Tate Collection 2001

- Landscape/Matter/Environment
Has a room of surrealist painting, entitled 'Fantastic Worlds'. This has been rehung recently so that key works could go into the exhibition.
- Still Life/Real Life/Object
Key works by Duchamp have gone into the surrealism exhibition. The room 'The Subversive Object' includes contemporary art that links with surrealism. You can find some works with a surreal flavour by Arman and Colin Self in the room 'The 1960s and the New Realism'.

- Nude/Body/Action
Head for the room containing work by Louise Bourgeois (her drawings and the installation *Cell: Eyes and Mirrors*) and Annette Messager's pikes stuck with contorted childrens' toys and drawings of atrocities. Also, look at the room 'Transfigurations' to see artists like Jean Dubuffet who championed 'raw' art by children or the mentally ill.

- History/Memory/Society
More contemporary works linking with surrealism are by Cathy de Monchaux (erotic folds and panes of glass), Rebecca Horn (upside-down grand piano) and Jannis Kounellis (reminiscent of de Chirico) in the room 'Staging Discord'. You could also look at the room 'An Art of Commitment'.

Guidelines for visiting the exhibition

To book tickets for Surrealism: Desire Unbound please call Tate Ticketing on 0207 887 8888, school and group booking line
Ticket prices are £2.50 per student.

Combined tickets with 'Katharina Fritsch' - £4 per student.

Please note that this kit is aimed at groups of post 16-year-old students. Younger students are allowed to visit the exhibition but please be aware that this is at your discretion. Because of the content of the exhibition we have decided not to focus our resources or study days at students younger than 16.

Explicit material is in the rooms 'Her Throat Cut', 'The Games of the Doll' and 'Eros' (room numbers 9, 10 and 11), which do not form part of a through route in the exhibition so can be avoided. People may also consider works explicit in the rest of the exhibition, particularly in rooms 4, 5, 8 and 13.

Please see the enclosed exhibition guide for a plan of the exhibition showing you the situation of each of the rooms.

We highly recommend that you make a planning visit before bringing a group of students.

Please call Tate Modern Schools Liaison on 020 7401 5234 if you would like further advice.

Sheet 2: Mapping Links from one Artwork

This shows how one work of art can be a resource for debate, investigation and creative activity across the curriculum*. The same approach could be applied to any work.

* The author takes the view that works of art should not generally provide mere springboards for tangential leaps into other curriculum areas. Nor is it likely that any one work will be relevant to all the curriculum areas in balance. Rather, illuminating loops and links can be made between the work of art, and the students' experiences and your cross-curricula knowledge. Works of art are contradictory and do not merely encapsulate themes or messages.

Dorothea Tanning *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*

(in the room 'The Robing of the Bride')

See image on enclosed postcard

THE OBJECT

QUESTIONS

TOPICS AND LINKS

What is it made from? ▶

Materials

How is it made? ▶

Processes in art making

How is it framed and displayed? ▶

Issues of display and the functions of art.

How big is it? ▶

Scale

CONTENT

Sunflower ▶

Why is it so big? ▶

Scale

Why is it growing indoors and upstairs? ▶

Surrealism in traditional stories, for e.g. *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

About its sense of aliveness and menace. ▶

The Day of the Triffids

Do you sense that it is 'ambulant', that it can wander at will like an animal? ▶

Categorising differences between animals and plants (and exploring how art makes category mistakes).

Sunflowers turn to face the sun. ▶

Science - how does it work and why?

You can see multiple spirals in the seed heads. ▶

Maths - Fibonacci sequence.

This flower is the one children are most often encouraged to grow, to see how big it can become. ▶

Children are often linked with nature in art and literature.

CONTENT (continued)

Nature ▶

How else does nature seem to have entered the house? (Is that the sun shining from the door? Is the wind blowing?) ▶

Dreams and category mistakes. Explore the idea that modern living in houses isolates us from nature.

The house ▶

What kind of house is this? ▶

19th century, wealthy. (Could this be Tanning's childhood home? Women could only make it as artists if they were from such backgrounds).

Why are we in a passage? ▶

Explore rites of passage.

Why can we see no rooms or windows? ▶

Explore the idea of non-spaces.

What's happening in the room at the end? ▶

See below (The artist)

The girls ▶

Are they excluded from where something is happening? ▶

Feelings of exclusion from adult life.

Why are they semi-naked? ▶

Feelings of emerging sexuality.

What state are they in? (trance?) ▶

Surrealists felt young women had special abilities to tap into their unconscious and produce automatic art and writing.

The artist ▶

Is this a memory from her childhood? (Tanning said it was a memory of her sister being born.) ▶

Feelings about siblings/new babies. Using childhood memories for creative writing.

Does she set other scenes in passages and enclosed interiors? ▶

Compare with *The Birthday* (another work in the exhibition by Tanning). Explore the feelings and symbolism of passages.

What was her background? ▶

Explore women in surrealism.

Sheet 3: Group Discussion about Works of Art

You can adapt this sequence of activities and questions to any work of art. You don't need prior knowledge because you can work together to create personal interpretations and decide what you need to research to answer any of the questions. Offered here are two examples, one tailored to a sculpture, the other to a painting. Both examples are self-portraits by women artists, so you can compare one to the other.

Louise Bourgeois

Torso: Self-Portrait 1963-4

(in the room 'Erotic Objects')

Looking before talking - Icebreaker Activity

Ask students to look at the work from afar, then come closer. Then, as this is a sculpture, walk round it, stretch up to see it from a high viewpoint, then down to see a lower viewpoint. Make several quick sketches. Everybody could give one-word responses at this point.

A PERSONAL APPROACH

Questions towards interpretation

Allow everybody to ask their own questions about what the work means. One person could write down those questions, then everyone can think of some answers to each question in turn. Students' questions might include the following (which teachers could ask of the group if students don't think of them):

- Is it perfectly symmetrical? If so, why?
- Why doesn't it have a head, or arms or legs?
- If those curves at the bottom are supposed to represent a bottom, why are they at the front of the body?
- Why are the ribs and breastbone (or is it a spine?) so exposed when it is also very fleshy in its curves?
- Why is it a pear shape?

You could also ask:

- What does it remind you of in nature?
- How does it make you feel emotionally?
- Does it stir any memories?

LOOKING AT THE OBJECT

Questions to focus on the object in its space

- What is the scale? Is it life-size, more or less?

- How has it been displayed in the room? Where is it in relation to our bodies?
- What are the best and worst places to view it from?
- Do you have any physical feelings when you look at this? Does it make you want to do anything with your body?
- What is it made from? Can we tell from looking? How has it been made? With what tools? Did she need help?
- In what ways does it relate to reality and in what ways is it not realistic?

LOOKING AT THE SUBJECT

- What do you think the artist intends to communicate?
- Is this really a self-portrait? Did she really look at herself? Is she portraying herself as every woman? If it was just called 'Woman' would it mean something different to us?
- Is the artist a mother?
- Is she a feminist?
- How does the choice of material (and its colour and finish) contribute to the subject of the sculpture (its combination of hard inside bones and soft outside)?
- Compare it to a male artist's representation of a female torso (for example a Man Ray).
- Compare it another work that is similar in some way (e.g. one of Frida Kahlo's self-portraits).

Further information

Louise Bourgeois is a French American artist who, at the age of 90, is still producing very contemporary art. Her work raises questions about how we communicate and understand each other's pain, especially the pain issuing from childhood memories and traumas. Some of her work refers to the creativity involved in sex, procreation (she was a mother) and domesticity and sometimes she makes metaphorical connections between women's bodies and

houses. Her work is not feminist in an overtly political way. For more information, read the Tate catalogue for the Bourgeois installation in the Turbine Hall 2000, available in the Clore Study Room or for sale in the shop.

Follow-up idea

As this is clearly a female form (we know it is a self-portrait) what would an equivalent sculpture of a male form look like? If the essential shape of a woman in metaphorical terms is a pear, for example, what could be a natural metaphor for a man? Everyone could search for a natural object that they think has masculine qualities. Make sketches from this, metamorphosing it into a symmetrical torso. Then make models from clay or modroc (or to respond more closely to Bourgeois you can try carving.) You could investigate and compare other sculptures of male and female torsos.

Frida Kahlo *Self-portrait with Cropped Hair* 1940

(in the room 'The Robing of the Bride')
See enclosed postcard

Adapting the questions for a 2D work
Give time to look before talking, then:

LOOKING AT THE SUBJECT / A PERSONAL APPROACH Questions towards interpretation

Allow everybody to ask their own questions about what it means. Students' questions might include the following:

- What does the Spanish writing say? Does it fit with the music? Is it a traditional song or something she made up?
- Is it Van Gogh's yellow chair? What could that mean?
- Did she really cut off her hair for the self-portrait or is it imagined?
- Is it her husband's suit?
- Why has she left on an earring and women's shoes?
- Why is there so much hair? Why is it spread out all over the floor and knotted round the chair? Is it living and part of her still?

You could also ask (about this and any work):

- What does the image remind you of? Does it stir any

memories? (In particular, what does the hair remind you of - compare to Tanguy or Masson's organic forms.)

- How does it make you feel emotionally?
- What do you think the artist intends to communicate? Is there a specific message or is it just meant to stir a whole range of thoughts?
- Compare it to a male artist's portrait (for example, Man Ray's photograph of Duchamp dressed as Rose Selavy). Compare it to a self-portrait by a woman artist (for example, Louise Bourgeois' *Torso*).

LOOKING AT THE OBJECT

Questions to focus on the object, in its space

- What kind of space are we in? (Indoors, outdoors? Observed, imagined?)
- What is the scale? (Why is it so small? Does it remind you of other small paintings?)
- Can you imagine a more ideal way or place to view this? (At home, holding in the hands, in a book?)
- Do you have any physical feelings when you look at this? Does the painting-as-object make you want to do anything with your body? Then, looking into the space of the picture, ask the same question.
- What is it made from?
How has it been made? In what ways has it been painted?
- In what ways does it relate to reality and in what ways is it not realistic?

Further information

The easiest book to find is *Kahlo* by Andrea Kettenmann, published by Taschen.

The Spanish text is from a Mexican popular song: 'See, if I loved you it was for your hair; now that you're bald, I don't love you any more'. The suit is probably her husband's. When she divorced from him she symbolically removed the signs of her femininity as if to say 'that's all you loved me for'. He was having an affair with Kahlo's sister. When Frida and he remarried the following year, she went back to wearing the traditional Mexican dresses and plaited hair that he liked.

Was Kahlo a surrealist? She was not impressed by them - she said, 'They make me vomit', and, 'They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality'. However, Breton stayed with her in Mexico and promoted her work as surrealist.

Sheet 4: Extra Unbound

Surrealist games and activities

Surveys

All the European surrealist groups were very fond of compiling questionnaires on topics such as love, desire, freedom and encounters, to stimulate debate. If you wanted to debate any topic - for example, whether surrealism is anti-feminist - a survey could help participants reflect on their opinions before speaking. Draw ideas together on what the questions should be.

Also, you could think of ways that surveys can be incorporated into creative work. For example, a survey could be distributed widely asking people to state and draw their 'objects of desire'; students could make 'material gifts' of those objects or attempt to create an amalgam - a collective 'object of desire'.

'Dialogues'

A favourite surrealist game can be adapted to engage with a single work of art, working either in pairs or the whole group split in two. One half of the group or pair writes a question beginning 'what is...?' (reflecting on the work of art) on a piece of paper, folds it and passes it to the second, who writes an answer (without looking at the question). Repeat a few times then unfold and read.

The surrealists used nothing except imagination as a stimulus, which you could also try. Their results included 'What is beauty? It is an ethereal cry' and 'What is mystery? It is the proud wind through a suburb.'

Automatist techniques you can try

Masson developed sand painting. He dripped and smeared glue on paper or canvas at random, then sprinkled sand over the surface. Then he painted and drew around the sand patches, as they suggested for example mountains or figures.

Ernst developed frottage and grattage. Frottage is rubbings, with the paper laid over various interesting surfaces. He could then paint or draw over the rubbings as they suggested forms to him. Grattage is a development

from frottage using paint instead of dry materials. He painted a canvas thickly and randomly, laid it over a surface such as knotted wood and fishbones, then scraped the paint thin to reveal the patterns beneath.

Decalcomania involves various ways of squishing thick paint between two surfaces (e.g. thick paper) then pulling the sheets apart.

Stoppages. Duchamp used chance elements in his works, for example leaving *The Large Glass* to collect a thick layer of dust, then fixing this in parts of the image. He also created stoppages, dropping string onto a canvas and fixing them where they lay. Try making art by fixing what gathers and drops onto a surface. Use the time that elapses between lessons to allow things to gather (ants, rain, crumbs, oozing paint), which is the artistic tool Duchamp called 'delay'.

Investigate automatism in contemporary art. Many recent and contemporary artists continue to use automatist techniques to discover forms. Sculptor Lee Grandjean placed a large sheet of paper under a tree on a sunny day, drawing from the shapes suggested by the dappled flickering shadows. Damien Hirst has made circular spin paintings, often with children helping to throw the paint - although he does not work over the spun paint to create images, you could try doing that.

'Hands take the imprint of desires'

This line from the poetic text *The Immaculate Conception* written in 1930 by Breton and Eluard could inspire a printmaking activity. Everybody could list what comes to mind with this line. You could all try different ways of making prints, perhaps of the line-patterns in your hands, working the images so that hints of other forms (symbols, dreams, shadows, objects) can be seen. Try automatist methods: for example produce monoprints or collagraphs by scratching marks or pressing shapes using significant objects such as combs, jewellery, clothes labels or hair.

Quotes, aphorisms and definitions

'Surrealism is not a style. It is the cry of a mind turning back on itself'. Antonin Artaud

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'...A certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions'.

André Breton, *Second Surrealist Manifesto*

A definition from the 1924 Manifesto:-

SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express either verbally, or in writing or in any other way, the true functioning of thought. Thought expressed in the absence of any control exerted by reason, and outside all moral or aesthetic considerations...Surrealism rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association hitherto neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought.

More surrealist themes

If you want to create your own thematic sheets for students, or if you want to structure a debate, here are some other terms or concepts crucial to surrealism.

Marvellous beauty

The marvellous is that reached via dreams, altered states and strange encounters. Breton said 'it is only the marvellous that is beautiful'. Do you agree?

Freud

Freud's emphasis on the repression of sexuality as the root of neuroses has been discredited by psychologists throughout the 20th Century, although they acknowledge his importance in developing psychoanalysis. The surrealists took a less scientific approach than these critics and embraced the emphasis on desire, the unconscious, myths and dreams. What do you think about Freud?

Automatism

Max Morise in *Enchanted Eyes* proposed that only art made with automatist methods was truly surrealist and that the dream-like oil paintings by de Chirico and Ernst were too controlled to count. Do you agree with him?

(Those who disagreed felt that surrealism should have no style but should be open.)

Objects

What is the difference between a sculpture and an object? Try to identify examples of the different types of surrealist object. All the terms are those used by surrealists - some objects may be more than one type: the found object; the natural object; the interpreted or converted found object; the interpreted natural object; the readymade (a mass-produced object in a new context); the assemblage (a sculpture made from found or natural objects); the incorporated object (into a painting or collage); the phantom object (something that might be made, suggested by a description); the dream object (a humble object made sumptuous); the box (various elements in a box; Cornell); the poem object (a combination of things and words); the optical machine (Duchamp); the mobile and mute object (Giacometti); the symbolically functioning object (expressing a repressed desire; Dali); the objectively offered object (an object made while thinking of a person); the being object (Bellmer's dolls or people dressed as things).

Bibliography

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Thematic sheet A: Liminality

Liminality is a useful term for examining the lines or borders between states, in particular between the conscious and the unconscious. The surrealists took from Freud the realisation that in our unconscious we hold deep reservoirs of unknown unbound energies that could be tapped. The surrealists began a search of this reservoir, also trying to define its borders. Their paintings and poems are full of imagery of veils, doorways, mirrors and windows suggesting the passage from one state to another. A recurring image is of a mirror that one can pass through.

Breton described how he received a 'knock on the windowpane of his unconscious' as he was falling asleep when the sudden phrase, 'There is a man cut in two by a window', came to his mind. He interpreted this as a barrier between the conscious and the unconscious.

- Can you sketch the picture that this phrase conjures up for you?

Marcel Duchamp *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* 1915-23 (in the room 'The Bride Stripped Bare')
Tate work, often on display

In this work, sometimes called 'The Large Glass', Duchamp represented the erotic relationship between men and women using imagery drawn from physics and engineering. The 'bride' is boxed into the upper part, like an insect dangling in a museum case, and the 'bachelors' are like machine components below.

- What comes to mind when you think of this glass? What could be the advantages and meanings for Duchamp in using glass instead of canvas? (He referred to the glass at various times as window, camera lens, photographic glass negative, mirror, device in the construction of perspective, glass box, but most importantly as absence. It is also a device for including the viewers and the surroundings within the 'picture'.)

- What links can you make with Duchamp's *Fresh Widow*? (This is a visual and verbal pun on French Window.)

- How do images or parts of *The Large Glass* make you think about boundaries, for example between male and female, natural and manmade, the conscious and the

unconscious, fluid desire and machine-like reproduction? What images or parts of it make you think about how forces pass through barriers, connecting these different states (for example, can you see the sieves)?

(It will help to investigate this work in more detail, but there is no space for such analysis here. The easiest book to find is *Marcel Duchamp* by Ades, Cox and Hopkins, published by Thames & Hudson. The authors say that you can't apply logic to *The Large Glass* to try to tell a sensible story or to understand how the machine works.)

Dorothea Tanning *Birthday* 1942 (in the room 'The Robbing of the Bride')
Postcard available in shop

These endlessly opening doorways suggest that the passage from the conscious to the unconscious is not a single or simple border, but a repeated journey to an unreachable place.

- What is the significance of a birthday? (It is a rite of passage, from youth to age. But in some ways it is only another day, another door.)
- What is suggested by the combination of Victorian dress with bare breasts and the seaweed-or-roots skirt?
- If the creature is a guide, where would it take her? (Can you make a picture of this?)

Salvador Dalí *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* 1937 (in the room 'The Accommodations of Desire')
Tate work, often on display
Postcard available in shop

Dalí never clearly separates the borders between reality and illusion, but always explores the melting and blurring between them. This painting is inspired by the myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection and drowned trying to reach it, and then became a daffodil. Dalí had overheard some fishermen talk of a local madman who stared in the mirror all day. They said he had a bulb (e.g. a flower bulb) in his head. The painting is a result of the thoughts that linked from this.

- How does this painting link with the common surrealist theme of a mirror you can pass through?

- Draw a diagram to work out how Dalí is telling the story and to show the changes taking place.

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Thematic sheet B: Playing with Identities

Before the twentieth century the self was seen as a unified unchanging identity. All 'normal' people were supposed to know exactly who they were and to feel whole. Freud and others challenged this by proposing the existence of the non-self or id, the part of you which came before, and is beyond, your conscious control (the self, the ego) and which can reach out to, or absorb, the other outside of oneself. In his book *Nadja* Breton writes about the woman he loves, but she is also a projection of himself or the part of himself beyond his control. Surrealists began to make poems and art, by creating other identities, or portraying characters with unfixed identities. For example, Marcel Duchamp produced works of art under a female pseudonym, Rose Sélavy.

Look out for Man Ray's photograph of him dressed up as Rose.

- This exhibition emphasises the surrealists' interest in the other gender, but what other types of 'others' could an artist reach out to or pretend to be? List some examples you see in the exhibition.

Claude Cahun's photographs (in the room 'Before the Mirror')

Born Lucie Schwab, she took the more androgynous name Claude Cahun and lived in Paris as part of an openly lesbian couple. She made self-portraits in which she continually appeared different by shaving off her hair or wearing various disguises.

- What point do you think she is making with these self-portraits?
- Which image do you think is the closest to her 'real' or conscious self or all they all equally masquerades?

Frida Kahlo *Self-portrait with Cropped Hair* 1940 (in the room 'The Robbing of the Bride')

See image on enclosed postcard

When Kahlo divorced from Diego Rivera she cut off her hair and wore a man's suit, to make a statement that she felt she had only been loved for the signs of her femininity. The suit however, was probably Diego's, so she was acting his part in a way. Later they remarried and she went back to wearing traditional Mexican women's dress.

- Was she getting closer to her 'real' self by dressing as a man or by dressing as an 'ultra' woman? Or was it neither?

Max Ernst *The Robbing of the Bride* 1940 (in the room 'The Robbing of the Bride')

Ernst had an alter ego (another self) called Loplop, who was a bird character. He had been upset as a child when his pet bird had died and he became obsessed with birds. This painting has been said to be about losing virginity.

- This painting is clearly about a woman, but are there elements of himself, his masculinity or his bird-self?
- Can you see any evidence of his bird-self in his other works of art that you can find in the exhibition?

Thematic sheet C: Informe

'Informe' is the idea that a body (or any other object) does not have to be shown as a complete, unified being. It is a very important idea in modernist art, but is especially visible in surrealism because there are so many figures in it (compared to more abstract art). 'Informe' figures might be

- broken, shattered or headless,
- merging with a background or morphing into something else,
- represented by only a part (reified or 'thingified'),
- rearranged to seem like a machine or made-up creature
- shown in movement.

- You could make sketches of the three most 'informe' figures you see in the exhibition. Look for different types.
- Setting aside the fact that more female figures are to be seen in this exhibition overall, do you think women are more likely to be shown as 'informe' than men?
- Can you find and sketch any examples where women artists have represented women as 'informe'?

Man Ray *Anatomies* 1929 (in the room 'Anatomies')
Postcard available in the shop

The model is believed to be the photographer Lee Miller, Man Ray's lover. Because it makes an instant image, photography was a very important catalyst that encouraged painters and sculptors to represent figures in more fluid and varied ways. We know this is a head but where there should be facial features we see only an uplifted chin.

- What does it remind you of?
- Does it seem to be a masculine or feminine form?

Hans Bellmer's dolls (in the room 'The Games of the Doll')

Bellmer said 'I shall construct an artificial girl whose anatomy will make it possible to recreate physically the dizzy heights of passion...' His doll consisted of parts that could be put together in endless combinations, which he

photographed to suggest different scenarios of seduction, love, mutilation and monstrosity. He wanted to protest against the values of father and the Nazi regime, in favour of the freedom to express sexual pleasures and anxieties.

- Do you feel these are perverted or wrong in their treatment of women or do you perhaps feel they highlight the reality of how women are perceived as bodies?

Salvador Dalí *Autumnal Cannibalism* 1936 (in the room 'The Accommodations of Desire')
Tate work often on display
Postcard available in the shop

This painting was intended as a reflection on the stupidity of the Spanish fighting each other in the Civil War. You could also read it as a man and a woman devouring each other. For the surrealists there were no fixed boundaries between the lover and the loved one.

- Draw a diagram so that you can see where the two figures are.
- Write a list (or make lots of tiny sketches) of everything you are reminded of by this painting.

Alberto Giacometti *Woman with her Throat Cut* 1932
(in the room 'Her Throat Cut')
See enclosed postcard

This is a powerful image of sexual pleasure and violence, despite the abstract nature of the work. The insect-like forms of the 'woman' are inspired by the praying mantis, which is said to devour its mate after copulation. One of the arms ends in a cylindrical weight that, according to the artist, was inspired by the nightmare of not being able to lift an arm to push an attacker away.

- Do you think he is thinking of a man or a woman being unable to push an attacker away?
- This is one of what Giacometti called 'open sculptures'. What do you think that means (thinking about 'informe') and can you find other examples by Giacometti or other artists?

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Thematic sheet D: Women

The case against

The surrealists have been criticised for the way they portrayed women as:

- the object of male sexual desires
- often headless (and perhaps therefore brainless)
- as irrational beings closer to nature than men
- broken and violated
- idealised, always symbolising truth, beauty or poetry, but never being 'herself'

- Can you find, and perhaps sketch, five works of art that could be evidence for those five complaints?

The case for

Can the surrealists be defended as supportive of women?

- They described women as 'free and adored'
- they refused love to be separated from sexuality
- they used women to epitomise crucial beliefs such as sexual liberty (stereotypes were essential for counter-attack against the view of women as mothers or wholesome virgins promoted by church and state)
- some surrealists were Communists and did believe strongly in equality (although it was their frank approach to sex that caused conflict between surrealists and Communists)
- women artists were attracted to the movement and were invited to join, especially from the 1930s
- the surrealists' re-definition of the feminine also meant questioning masculinity and the boundaries of gender identity

- After seeing some of the exhibition, which do you think is the strongest case, for or against?

René Magritte *The Elusive Woman* 1928 (in the room 'Dawn over the City')

The title and the image both suggest women are 'other' and unreachable. A naked woman is fixed into a stone wall. The male hands seem to be wishing to touch her but are blindly angled away from her and are fixed as stones.

- How would it make you feel if the hands were turned towards the woman, or even touching her?

- What is suggested by the fact that man is represented by cut-off hands whereas woman is a naked body?

- What is the character and posture of this woman? Is it easy to tell if she is hard or soft, inviting or off-putting, ashamed or confident?

Max Ernst *The Robbing of the Bride* 1939 (in the room 'The Robbing of the Bride')

Postcard available in shop

This is an example of a common surrealist theme: women shown as powerful sorceresses. The woman is also merging with nature.

- Can you list everything about this that makes the girlish bride seem so powerful and bewitching?

- Can you find other examples in the exhibition of women as witch-like?

Compare this to his wife Dorothea Tanning's painting *Birthday* 1942, in which she appears as a bare-breasted enchantress. Do you think she was happy to adopt the ways that male artists represented women? Has she done it differently?

Louise Bourgeois *Fillette* 1968 (in the room

'Erotic Objects')

Postcard available in the shop

This combines both male and female qualities. Although it looks like a penis, its title means 'little girl'. Bourgeois posed for photographs cradling it in her arms. 'From a sexual point of view I consider the masculine attributes to be extremely delicate', she said. 'They're objects that the woman, myself, must protect...'

- When you saw the piece, what were your first reactions?

- Do you think this is a feminist view, wanting to protect a symbol of masculinity?

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Thematic sheet E: Encounters

'...The beauty of a chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table' Comte de Lautréamont

The idea of the meeting of two very different things or people was behind many of the surrealist games, debates and art works. They were fascinated by spaces like streets or flea markets, which offered many possibilities for erotic or strange encounters. Many of their writings describe chance meetings, in which a fated couple are guided towards each other. Breton's novel *Nadja* is an account of his intense but brief relationship with a woman he glimpsed in the street.

From the 1930s the surrealists began making surreal objects, bizarre combinations of found objects seen as symbolic expressions of hidden desires. Collage is another method for setting up possibilities for strange encounters - look out for Ernst's collages in the exhibition. Surrealists were also interested in the coincidental encounters between the material world and human minds (or the idiosyncratic ways in which we interpret things).

- Can you find and draw the strangest encounter in the exhibition?

René Magritte's *The Lovers* 1928 (in the room 'Dawn over the City')
Postcard available in the shop

A couple find each other and kiss, despite the white cloths over their heads.

- What does this mean to you? (Is it suggesting they are fated to meet despite their appearances? Is it trying to represent what it is like to forget yourself in love?)

Salvador Dalí *Lobster Telephone* 1936 (in the room 'The Accommodations of Desire')
Tate work, often on display
Postcard available in the shop

This is a simple striking encounter between the natural (except that this is an artificial fish-shop lobster) and the manmade (telephones for him symbolised modern communications that led to alienation and war). Dalí felt that surreal objects were projections of the self (a second-self) and expressed hidden desires.

- Can you update this by imagining an encounter between a mobile phone and something else? Make a sketch. Does it express anything?

Meret Oppenheim *Object (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)* 1936

An ordinary cup, saucer and spoon are covered with the fur of a gazelle, a wild animal linked with femininity. This is more than an encounter but a merging of object with animal (the object comes to life, but the animal dies).

- Many people have said this work of art suggests sexuality. What do you think they see?
- Can you imagine (and draw) an encounter between this work of art and a suitably-unsuitable character who might drink from it? You could look around at the exhibition visitors for inspiration!
- Find Oppenheim's *Ma Gouvernance*. How is it similar?