

# THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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## ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO ACQUIRES SURREALIST OBJECT

BY CLAUDE CAHUN

### Work Highlighted in New Installation of Selections from Museum's Renowned Surrealist Collection

The Art Institute of Chicago is pleased to announce the addition of **Claude Cahun's** *Object* (1936) to the museum's rich collection of Surrealist art. This small, enigmatic work is currently on view in a new installation of some of the museum's Surrealist holdings in **Gallery 273**. There viewers will find such icons of the collection as René Magritte's *Time Transfixed* and Salvador Dalí's original plaster *Venus de Milo with Drawers* (acquired in 2005), as well as works by Yves Tanguy, Man Ray, Balthus, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst, Angel Planells, and six boxes from the Lindy and Edwin Bergman Joseph Cornell Collection.



“Chicago collectors have long had a passion for Surrealism, and the Art Institute’s collection reflects this important history. Many of the works featured in our new installation are the gifts of some of the city’s greatest supporters of modern art—

passionate collectors who saw in Surrealism a powerful demonstration of the effect of the unconscious on artistic creativity,” said Stephanie D’Alessandro, Associate Curator of Modern Painting and Sculpture at the Art Institute. “We’re extremely pleased to bring this wonderful object to the museum—Cahun’s work is incredibly rare and wonderfully inventive. It’s the right kind of work to add to our collection and continue the artistic legacy of our city.”

*Object* gives form to many of the preoccupations central to the Surrealists, particularly their fascination with sight and touch, which was critical to Surrealist investigations in not only painting and sculpture but also in film and literature. Like a three-dimensional collage, *Object* combines a number of curious elements: a fully exposed eye is mounted next to a child-like, grasping hand; a stiff cloud-shaped plane of wood rests atop the eyeball; coarse, dark hair gathers loosely on the orb in counterpoint to the starkly erect eyelashes. The entire sculpture is affixed to a small wooden platform penned with a statement referencing the French national anthem.

Celebrated and complicated by Cahun, sight and touch were also fundamental components of Sigmund Freud’s theories of sexuality and thus even more appealing to Surrealist artists. Elements of *Object* are thus echoed throughout the new installation, beginning with a small, seductive painting of a woman’s blue eye by René Magritte, which located in the same case. Across the gallery viewers can find a strikingly similar grasping hand by Man Ray, titled *Puericulture*. The 25 works in the installation, rife with overlapping elements (eyes, hands, pipes, overt sexuality and hyper-reality), offers visitors the chance to see both the cohesion and the distinctions at work in the Surrealist community.

Cahun herself embodied the psychosexual energy found in much Surrealist work. Born Lucy Schwob in 1894, Cahun took on the androgynous pseudonym she is known by today some time around 1919. With her shaved head, mannish clothes, and radical attitudes about gender, Cahun transcended stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. In fact, until the mid-1980s, scholars assumed she was a man. Her brazenly unconventional and creative persona led her to fellow members of the avant-garde. Shortly after meeting Surrealism-founder André Breton in 1932, she became an active member of the Surrealist movement, producing key writings on art, revolution and sexuality. She also participated in numerous Surrealist exhibitions, including the landmark 1936 exposition of Surrealist objects at the Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris—an exhibition which inaugurated object-making as an integral part of Surrealist practice and where Cahun first debuted the Art Institute's newly acquired *Object*.

Preparing the modern and contemporary collections for installation in the Art Institute's Modern Wing necessitates, over the next two years, relocating and reinstalling parts of the permanent collection. The Art Institute is making every effort to inform visitors of the reinstallation of favorite objects and to use the moving process to highlight selections from the collections in new locations. This select group of 25 works will represent the museum's Surrealist collection as the majority of those objects are relocated in preparation for their installation in Modern Wing in 2009.

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**HOURS UNTIL MEMORIAL DAY**

10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

**10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Thursday free after 5:00 p.m.**

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

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**The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.**