ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO PRESENTS MAJOR MAGRITTE EXHIBITION

Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938 Runs June 24–October 13

René Magritte, the playful and provocative Belgian Surrealist who set out to create works that would “challenge the real world” by making “everyday objects shriek out loud,” is the focus of a major exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago: Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938. The show opens June 24, 2014 and runs through October 13, 2014 in Regenstein Hall. A collaborative effort between three museums, the exhibition will make its final stop at the Art Institute following its premiere at The Museum of Modern Art in New York on September 28, 2013 and its current run at the Menil Collection, Houston.

The period of 1926–1938 was Magritte’s most prolific. It was a time of bold experimentation that cemented his reputation as a leading Surrealist painter. The exhibition begins with paintings and works on paper he created in 1926 and 1927 as he prepared for his inaugural one-person show in Brussels. It follows him to Paris in 1927 where he joined Surrealists André Breton, Salvador Dalí, and Joan Miró, and made his breakthrough word-image paintings. After returning to Brussels in 1930, he continued to search for new forms of image-making and three years later, began a remarkable series of paintings that make unexpected, often disturbing, and frequently humorous associations between everyday things.

The exhibition ends in 1938, with Europe on the brink of war, when Magritte delivered his noted
autobiographical lecture entitled “La Ligne de Vie” (“Lifeline”), during which he assessed his own development and achievements in Surrealism.

Magritte’s innovative image-making tactics during these essential years include doubling, displacement, transformation, the “misnaming” of objects, metamorphosis, and the representation of visions seen in half-waking states.

The exhibition encompasses approximately 118 paintings, collages, and objects, including a selection of photographs, periodicals, and Magritte’s early work in the field of advertising. A richly illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition with essays by Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art at the Art Institute Stephanie D’Alessandro, as well as Michael Draguet and Claude Goormans, Josef Helfenstein with Clare Elliott, and Anne Umland.

The Art Institute has long been a strong supporter of Magritte, beginning with a group exhibition of Surrealist artists in 1949, followed by a major retrospective of his work in 1966. Over the years, the Art Institute has added several important works to its Magritte collection. Among the most notable are those that came from the extensive Surrealist collection of noted poet, arts patron and collector Edward James.

In 1937 Magritte accepted a commission from James for three large paintings in the latter’s London home, including the Art Institute’s own On the Threshold of Liberty. This represented an artistic and professional turning point for the artist. It was his first major commission and the dimensions of the pieces were larger than any he had painted before. This work quite literally gave him an opportunity to present his work on a grand scale.

“Magritte’s time in London would have a stimulating effect on his art—and possibly even played a role in his presentation of himself as an artist. In April 1938 he was again in England, now preparing for a solo exhibition at Mesens’s London Gallery. A series of publicity photographs for the exhibition show Magritte physically interacting—literally performing—with his works,” writes Art Institute curator
Stephanie D'Alessandro in an essay in the new Magritte catalogue. “Most telling is one photograph in which the artist—perhaps for the first time—presents himself as the world would come to know him for the rest of his long career, in the dramatic persona of the bowler-hatted man. Posing with the now-lost 1928 painting *Le Barbare (The Barbarian)*, Magritte looks out to the viewer—not unlike his paintings in James’s home, beckoning from the other side of a picture frame—inviting us to enter the phantasmagorical world of his art.”

*Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938* dials back Magritte’s fame and unpeels his famous artistic celebrity, going back to the moment that he fixed on the idea of making a new kind of art. The result? Images that are cemented in the public’s mind as much for their importance as artworks as for their adoption in popular culture.

“Our city is incredibly fortunate to have a cultural treasure like the Art Institute of Chicago,” said Tim Maloney, Illinois President, Bank of America. “We believe art has the singular capability to connect people and communities. We are proud to be a long-time partner on many of their rich and culturally important exhibitions including Magritte. This exhibit will challenge our sense of reality and stimulate an on-going conversation, which Magritte did so well.”


Bank of America is the National Sponsor of *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*.

Funding for the Art Institute of Chicago presentation is generously provided by Helen and Sam Zell and the Auxiliary Board of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Lead Affiliate Sponsor. Additional support is provided by Sylvia Neil and Daniel Fischel and the Prince Charitable Trusts.

Annual support for Art Institute exhibitions is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Goldman Sachs, Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Thomas and Margot Pritzker, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, and the Woman’s Board of the Art Institute of Chicago. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.


René Magritte (Belgian, 1898–1967). *The Treachery of Images (La Trahison des images)*, 1929. Oil on canvas; 60 × 81 cm (23 5/8 × 31 7/8 in.). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Purchased with funds provided by the Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection. © Charly Herscovici – ADAGP – ARS, 2014

www.artic.edu
Twitter
Facebook

MUSEUM HOURS
Daily: 10:30–5:00
Thursdays until 8:00

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s days.
Children under 14 always free
Members always free

The Art Institute of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the citizens of Chicago.