Defiant and pioneering Surrealist works come to the Art Institute of Chicago this spring with the opening of two landmark exhibitions that focus on artists Claude Cahun (French, 1894–1954) and Jindřich Heisler (Czech, 1914–1953). These two artists, who operated often at the margins of the Surrealist movement yet were admired by Surrealist leader André Breton and his circle, have been rediscovered only in recent decades. The show on Cahun is in fact the first monographic exhibition on her in the United States, while Heisler’s is the first museum exhibition in the world devoted to him. The two exhibitions will take place concurrently in adjoining galleries: Entre Nous: The Art of Claude Cahun is on view through June 3, 2012 in Gallery 1; and Jindřich Heisler: Surrealism under Pressure will be presented in Galleries 2–4 from March 31 through July 1, 2012. Both shows emphasize personal wit and political defiance, both as part of the Surrealist opposition to conventional social identity and in pointed resistance to Nazism: Cahun and her female partner were imprisoned by the Nazis in 1944-45, while Heisler was in hiding from late 1941 until mid-1945 to avoid deportation to the concentration camps.
In the first exhibition devoted to the artist in the United States, *Entre Nous: The Art of Claude Cahun* explores the prescient and provocative work of French Surrealist Claude Cahun. Born Lucy Schwob to a family of French Jewish intellectuals and writers, Claude Cahun—who adopted the pseudonym at age 22—is best known for the staged self-portraiture, photomontages, and prose texts she made principally between 1920 and 1940. Rediscovered in the mid-1980s, her work is a noted precursor to feminist explorations of gender and identity politics. In her self-portraits, which she began creating around 1913, Cahun posed in costumes and elaborate make-up as various personae: man and woman, hero and doll, both powerful and vulnerable.

Cahun and her partner and artistic collaborator Suzanne Malherbe, who called herself Marcel Moore or more commonly simply Moore, allied themselves with eminent Surrealists such as André Breton, Robert Desnos, and Henri Michaux—all pictured in the exhibition—and embraced leftist politics in their work. For their political activity, which included an active and witty campaign of misinformation to combat the Nazi invasion of their home on the Isle of Jersey, Cahun and Moore were arrested and spent a year in solitary confinement during World War II. Drawing attention to and subverting gender norms, propaganda slogans, class, and national identity, Cahun dismantled conventions of self and sexuality. Almost a century after their making, the artist’s innovative photographs and assemblages remain remarkably relevant in their treatment of gender, performance, and identity.

The exhibition presents over 80 photographs and published material by Cahun and Moore, including photomontages from their 1930 collaborative publication *Aveux non avenus* (*Disavowals*), and the only surviving object by Cahun, which is in the Art Institute’s permanent collection.

*Entre Nous: The Art of Claude Cahun* was organized by Jeu de Paume, Paris, and coproduced with La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona. Generous support for the Chicago presentation is provided by Helen and Sam Zell and the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. In Chicago, the exhibition is curated by Michal Raz-Russo, Departmental Exhibition Manager, Department of Photography.

*Jindřich Heisler: Surrealism under Pressure*  
March 31, 2012–July 1, 2012 in Galleries 2–4

In the first solo retrospective of the artist in the world, the Art Institute explores the rich and concise oeuvre of Czech poet, photographer, and object-maker Jindřich Heisler in *Jindřich Heisler: Surrealism under Pressure*. Heisler, the child of a mixed-faith marriage, joined the Surrealists
Group in Czechoslovakia in 1938, on the eve of the Nazi dismemberment of his country. Heisler produced a remarkable series of books between 1938 and 1941, including *From the Strongholds of Sleep* (*Z kasemat spánku*), one of the rarest and most important photobooks produced in the 20th century. In that book—of which only six copies are known to exist—poems appear as elements of tabletop sculpture in professionally made photographs that are tipped in alongside imaginative block-stamped titles. (The entire book, one copy of which is owned by the Art Institute, has been made available online through the museum’s Ryerson and Burnham Libraries website).

For three and a half years afterward, Heisler lived clandestinely to avoid death in the Nazi camps. While in hiding he made dozens of highly inventive photographic works, using sundry items like chicken bones or dolls, as well as working with heated vaseline on glass plates or possibly the plate glass of a photographic enlarger. In 1947, sensing the return of totalitarianism to Czechoslovakia, Heisler and his closest friend, the painter Toyen (Marie Čermínová) moved to Paris and cemented a long-standing affiliation with the French Surrealist movement. Heisler founded the first postwar Surrealist journal, called *Néon*—which is owned complete by the Art Institute as well—and continued to make work at the intersection of sculpture, mechanically reproduced imagery, and literature. His final and greatest work was a fully functional, proportionally designed alphabet made of ornately cut wood faced with elaborate montages of 19th-century woodcuts (1952). Heisler died suddenly of heart failure in January 1953.

*Jindřich Heisler: Surrealism under Pressure* will feature 70 works—more than half the artist’s lifetime output—including two copies of *From the Strongholds of Sleep* and a complete run of *Néon*, along with never-before-seen drawings for that journal and other manuscripts purchased by the Art Institute from the estate of André Breton.

A beautifully illustrated 144-page exhibition catalogue, distributed by Yale University Press, accompanies *Jindřich Heisler: Surrealism under Pressure*. The catalogue—the first book ever published on Heisler other than in Czech—is edited by Matthew S. Witkovsky, Richard and Ellen Sandor Chair and Curator, Department of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago; and Jindřich Toman, professor of Slavic linguistics and Czech culture at the University of Michigan. The book includes 80 color images of Heisler’s assemblage pieces and introduces English-speaking
audiences to his work by translating many of his writings for the first time. The catalogue will be available April 2, 2012, in the Art Institute’s Museum Shop for $40.

*Jindřich Heisler: Surrealism under Pressure* is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago and curated by Matthew S. Witkovsky, Richard and Ellen Sandor Chair and Curator, Department of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago. The exhibition and publication are made possible by the generous support of Helen and Sam Zell and the Black Dog Fund. Additional support is provided by the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation and Roy and Mary Cullen.

**IMAGES:**

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