PAINTING THE MUNDANE: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF BANALITY IN THE LIFE AND CAREER OF RENÉ MAGRITTE

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PAINTING THE MUNDANE: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF
BANALITY IN THE LIFE AND CAREER
OF RENÉ MAGRITTE

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2013

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the important role René Magritte's biography plays in relation
to his work as a painter. His works were primarily inspired by his middle class lifestyle
and upbringing, something that was uncommon among the Surrealists. He is largely
associated with the Surrealist movement of the 20th century, although he primarily
worked without specific allegiance to an artistic group.

A thorough examination of his life sheds light on his uncharacteristically un-avant
garde lifestyle. His rejection of luxury and excess were in contrast to the fortune and
notoriety sought by some of his contemporaries. While other Surrealists desired to live
the bohemian, artistic lifestyle expected by the public, Magritte rebuffed the notion and
aimed to live as an anonymous bourgeois man.

The effect Magritte's biography had on his work is examined through his career as
a commercial artist, his use of the Bowler-Hatted man, and his influence on the 1960s
Pop Art movement. The relationship between biography and work is made by René
Magritte's own words, those of his colleagues and contemporaries, and several noted
scholars of Magritte.
APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Painting the Mundane: An Examination of the Life and Career of René Magritte,” presented by Amye M. Rappé, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mystery of René Magritte is that there is no mystery. There is no sordid past and no scandals. He maintained an air of formality throughout his career, and was almost always photographed in a suit and tie, more suited to a banker than a prolific artist. His home was a modest one, situated in a middle class neighborhood in Brussels. Extravagance and excess do not appear to have been part of his nature. His staid exterior belied his innumerable contributions to surrealism; praised by André Breton as a pillar of the movement, albeit quite belatedly. Today Magritte is held in high regard, with a current exhibition titled "Mystery of the Ordinary" at the New York Museum of Modern Art. The current exhibit and catalog focuses on his Surrealist years from 1926 to 1938, as well as some of his well-known works outside the Surrealist fold. Additionally, two expansive permanent exhibits dedicated to him in his hometown of Brussels.

His skill as a painter is mentioned only slightly more often than his unassuming appearance. He was the modest creator of a body of work that has inspired artists and designers for decades. Because Magritte's personality and his artistic talent were such a contradiction, his talent and bland attitude were difficult for critics and contemporaries to

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1 Luc Sante, “Magritte the Detective,” The Threepenny Review, no. 56 (Winter, 1994), 27.
3 And later traveling to The Menil Collection in Houston, and The Art Institute of Chicago.
4 The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels has a large collection of his work permanently on display, and the Musée Magritte is located on the Place Royale.
reconcile. Unlike the outsider status or the bohemian lifestyle of the avant-garde, René Magritte life was one of an average middle class existence.

Magritte is best viewed through several major studies: Suzi Gablik, an art historian who lived with Magritte and wrote a lauded monograph; David Sylvester, an art critic; and Magritte himself, through a series of letters collected by his friend and lawyer, Harry Torczyner. Various critics and scholars have studied the work of Magritte, and it is becoming more popular to examine his work from a psychological standpoint.

The current definitive source in Magritte scholarship is a six-volume written and edited by David Sylvester and Sarah Whitfield, an art historian and a member of the authentication committee for the Fondation Magritte. The extensively researched volumes include facts Sylvester and Whitfield gleaned from various historical sources: correspondence, population records, postmarked items, interviews with Magritte's widow, Georgette Magritte, and several neighbors, as well as ledgers and receipts detailing sales of Magritte's work.

Each volume of the catalogue raisonné is divided into two sections: chronology and catalogue. The chronology details each year of Magritte's career, presented in a year-by-year format along with all pertinent information to the incidents, encounters, sales, and meetings presented. The catalogue portion details works in chronological order, shown in small-scale reproduction with provenance and corresponding reference to information previously outlined in the chronology. When applicable, the catalogue details when and where an object was exhibited.
Written over the course of several years and published between 1992 and 2012 (the current sixth volume details lost and previously unknown works), the lengthy set presents a detailed account of Magritte's early life, meetings and encounters, and whereabouts of documented and authenticated works. When possible, Sylvester and Whitfield consulted living persons with direct knowledge of Magritte: either to clarify, support, or contradict accepted statements about the artist and his work. In some cases, it was necessary to delve into the lives of Magritte's associates in order to resolve varying accounts. One such case is Magritte's first encounter with de Chirico's Song of Love. For Sylvester and Whitfield to put this encounter into the chronology meant a deep investigation of the circumstances in which Magritte would have seen the reproduction. An examination of Magritte's correspondence at the time, as well as the correspondence of his friends to other parties, lead the authors to a scenario that lined up with the chronology Magritte himself set forth.

Ledgers, receipts, and correspondence also clarified the provenance of many of Magritte's sold or gifted works. In the second half of each volume (excluding the fifth volume, which updates and corrects information present in the first four), appears a detailed chronology of identifiable extant works by Magritte. Sylvester notes in his preface to each volume a significant abbreviation system used to document each piece. He also notes that where applicable, the original work was viewed; and in rare cases, such as the work has been destroyed or lost, a photograph. It is also noted in the preface the change in preference for owners of works to begin being referenced to as "private collector" rather than by name. Sylvester notes their decision to leave the names present
where it simplifies the record or maybe cause the reader to inaccurately determine that a work as been sold.

No doubt an extensive undertaking to create, this chronology offers the most thorough analysis of the facts surrounding Magritte and his works. Very little is speculative, as the volumes rely completely on substantiated (either through written documents or oral accounts) information collected by the authors. Each volume is an invaluable resource in verifying the timeline of Magritte's life, as he was one to embellish, forget, or evade facts.

The sixth and most current volume of the catalogue raisonné was published in 2012 and cover recently discovered and authenticated oil paintings, gouaches, and drawings. Whitfield notes in her preface that this is the first volume to catalog Magritte's drawings: previous volumes included drawings as comparative illustrations alongside the oil paintings and the gouaches. The Comité Magritte authenticated these works over the course of several years, after careful consideration and a review of evidence and documents. Whitfield is a member of the Comité Magritte.

An examination of René Magritte’s personality through the writings of friends and scholars supports the notion that Magritte had little interest in an extravagant lifestyle. His own writings, in the form of letters to his lawyer, provide great insight into his apathetic attitude toward fame and concern for his reputation. His lifestyle of simple middle class man led him to paint what he knew, not what was popular among the avant garde. His concern was not in cultivating the artistic persona so many of his
contemporaries favored; rather he desired his work to be celebrated on its own merit, independent from any legend or myth that may develop around him.

The writings and early monograph on Magritte from his friend Louis Scutenaire, provide a somewhat humorous and light account of Magritte's life and personality. He published one of the earliest monographs on Magritte in 1947, which included an incomplete version of Magritte's "La ligne de vie" lecture.

Magritte's connections to surrealism are tenuous: at first he is desperate to be a part of its ranks, only to remove himself abruptly from the group when he was displeased with André Breton. He preferred to remain singular in his work, rather than part of a movement. There does not appear to have been a major breakdown, no epic clash of ideas and philosophies, and certainly no immoral acts or affairs. He continued his artistic life much as he began it: in his home, without concern for other artists, and the ingenuity of Magritte hidden behind the façade of an ordinary man.

Magritte's ubiquitous Bowler-Hatted Man evidenced the artist's uncanny ability to barrage his viewer with the absurdity of the everyday object. The repetition of the bowler-hatted man (he appears in nearly fifty paintings over Magritte's career) is frightening and comforting, as Magritte pushes the viewer to look closely and examine a pervasive character. It is as if the bowler-hatted man hides in plain view, never entering our thoughts until Magritte reminds us that he is there. Magritte strives to live like his bowler-hatted man: someone who becomes part of the background despite his pervasiveness in the world.
The work Magritte did in advertising, concurrent with his fine art career, provides valuable insights into the artist's work and iconography. His ads, unlike those of his contemporaries, did not rely as heavily on status as a fine artist to be successful. Although he relied on a similar aesthetic in his graphic art and fine art career, they were separate entities that both managed to mystify the ordinary. Magritte's graphic career facilitated his fine art: he was able to create fine art by supporting himself through commercial endeavors.

Not surprisingly, Magritte's embrace of the everyday popular culture was influential on Pop artists emerging in the 1960s. Magritte's capacity to de-familiarize the familiar resonated with Pop artists. This connection shows the important and lasting impact Magritte's choice in working from conventional subject matter was on emerging artists.

This thesis considers Magritte's choice of a bourgeois lifestyle and its accouterments as his primary subject matter. In choosing so, Magritte developed an iconography that is unique among artists of the modern era. The iconography of Magritte was fed by the objects, relationships, and locations that surrounded him. He led a middle class life, and his works referenced middle class objects. Extravagance and luxury were not part of Magritte's lifestyle, and excluding his advertising works for luxury goods, were not features of his works. His paintings have a familiarity that connects with a variety of viewers, not just those privy to the art world. The lack of artistic persona and use of conventionally middle class elements make Magritte distinct among artists of his time.
CHAPTER 2
OVERVIEW

Personality, Attitude and Major Themes

Many historians, authors, and artists have contributed to the dialogue on René Magritte, and Suzi Gablik captured his personality particularly well. Gablik describes Magritte as suffering from ennui, the "bizarre affliction which was at once the source of all his ills and all his melancholic progress."¹ She describes Magritte’s attitude toward painting as “an almost constitutional dislike, feigning something between boredom, fatigue, and disgust.”² In an expansive single-volume history, David Sylvester contends that Magritte’s work is a celebration of the banal and “grey country”³ in which he grew up. Magritte is often referred to as “the quintessential Belgian”,⁴ so perhaps what Gablik, as an American, sees as an affliction is perhaps better characterized as culturally Belgian.

Thus, it is unsurprising that a man who embraced the prosaic nature of his homeland and decried the importance of his work as a painter, had little interest in seeing the rest of the world. Aside from a brief period of nearly three years living in Paris, Magritte rarely left Belgium. He took the odd trip to France or London for an opening, if only to please his wife Georgette.⁵ In a letter from 1961, Magritte lamented the possibility that he must travel to London to view an exhibition. He stated that he had “no

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² Ibid
³ David Sylvester, Magritte (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2009), 9.
⁵ Sylvester, Magritte, 402.
desir to at all to go to London, but I will probably have to give in the pressure of my wife, who feels that my presence at the opening is indispensible and that I must respond to the invitations I receive, too many to my taste." Is it the thought of travel that makes him weary, or the possibility he might lose his relative anonymity if he gains further fame? It certainly must be travel itself, considering that only four months prior, Magritte was delighted at the prospect of being recognized by actors he admired. In a letter dated May 6th, 1961, Magritte wrote to Torczyner:

I heard from my sister-in-law Léotine that someone who has “come back” from America had heard that there, film actors are very fond of my painting and that one of them, John Wayne, is a particular fan that he is supposed to have said very nice things about me to some reporters. That pleases me, since Wayne is an actor I like a great deal. I’ve seen “Stage Coach” a number of times and have even rented the film to view it at home.7

The idea of names excited Magritte perhaps only when his clout reaches those he admires, instead of the anonymous masses.

In Magritte’s view, artists who strive for recognition are bound to produce mediocre work. The desire for fame or accolades should not play a role in the creation of art, because “[f]ame will come on its own, or it won’t…The fame of da Vinci, Galileo or Mozart adds nothing to their achievements.”8 He claimed to need no trophies or medals to validate his work, but was affronted when he was left out of the art historical record. In a 1960 letter to Torczyner, Magritte relayed the news of his recently awarded 150,000-

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7 Ibid, 64
franc state prize. He appears to have felt no exaltation, only detachment, stating that he will “persist in feeling myself perfectly capable of going on with said career- no better or no worse than in the past.” His potential exclusion from an anthology on modern art prompted him to request Torczyner to take to any means of communication to make it clear to “Mac Millan” publishers his displeasure. It seemed to Magritte that his life long project of “put[ting] the real world on trial” and finding mystery in the everyday certainly merited a mention in a volume dedicated to significant artists, as it was atypical subject matter for an artist at that time.

His enterprise of mystifying the mundane resulted in hundreds of extant works, often executing the same theme repeatedly, either to work out a poetic problem or simply to satisfy the demand for his art. The repetition of imagery and themes found in Magritte’s work seemed to amplify his desire for the viewer to look at, rather than within, his paintings. What better way to mystify the ordinary than to bombard the viewer with it? Magritte used repetition to his advantage, by degrading the trust of the viewer and subtly undermining reality. The technical skill with which Magritte painted serves his purpose well. He desired to paint a “meta-reality which would transcend our knowledge

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9 Magritte and Torczyner, Letters Between Friends, 51.
10 Ibid, 37
12 Gablik, Magritte, 15.
13 Sylvester, 402.
of the phenomenal world”,¹⁴ and to force the viewer to embrace what he calls “the mystery”.

Magritte used a variety of themes and visual vocabulary throughout his oeuvre. Certain imagery or techniques appear again and again, many times with no discernable difference between iterations. However, Magritte did keep a short list of objects he would not paint. First and foremost, he will not paint a syringe. He says “it’s a utensil I find difficult and nugatory to depict in a picture.”¹⁵ In the same letter, Magritte went on to say there was a “whole list of objects I would not paint, and syringe has pride of place, along with carburetors, electric wires, lighters, still or motion picture cameras.”¹⁶ He offers no explanation as to his rejection of these objects. Perhaps his rejection of these objects stems from their lack of presence in his own life.

One such object Magritte renders frequently, especially in his early works, is the bilboquet. Sylvester describes the long and baton-like bilboquet as “a wooden object manufactured on a lathe, but less particular.”¹⁷ Through the various catalogs, articles, and quips written about Magritte’s subjects, the bilboquet is sometimes referred to as a pillar, baton, baluster, or pin. Much of its ominous quality arises from the fact that it can be any of those things; something entirely familiar and unfamiliar at once. Magritte succeeded in mystifying something as unassuming as a carved baton by rendering it at giant proportions or giving it a human quality, or placing it in unfamiliar surrounding. A

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¹⁴ Gablik, 12.
¹⁵ Magritte and Torczyner, 32.
¹⁶ Ibid
¹⁷ Sylvester, 86.
baluster is almost never the focus of the staircase; rather a decorative element not meant
to be viewed in singular. When Magritte removed the baluster from the balustrade,
increases its size ten-fold, and gives it humanoid features, it mutates from unassuming
construction component to something haunting. One of the earliest iterations of the
bilboquet in Magritte’s work is in Cinéma Bleu (fig. 1). The bilboquet lies in right front
corner behind the street sign, like an overturned vase or castaway pin. In this early
instance, the bilboquet is not the focus. However, it could be argued that the central
female figure is reminiscent of a bilboquet. In later works, the pillars reach gigantic
proportions (fig. 2), and later become anthropomorphic (fig. 3). The progression of the
balustrade from innocuous to animate is somewhat disconcerting, but not unexpected
given Magritte’s propensity to make banal and overlooked parts of life unsettling.

Cut paper is another component of Magritte’s visual vocabulary. There is an
innocent quality to the cut paper, reminiscent of folded and snipped paper snowflakes,
delicate doilies, or intricate lace knitting. The fragile nature of the cut paper heightens its
absurdity when presented at gargantuan scale or in conjunction with unrelated objects,
such as water. As seen with the bilboquets, scale is always flexible. If the other objects in
the paintings are to scale, the filigreed paper ranges in size from useable size, such as
writing paper, human size, or gigantic (figs. 4 and 5). As Magritte’s work progressed, the
cut paper imagery seemed to fall out of favor. It did not completely disappear, but
evolved into more complicated imagery. What came after the filigreed paper was what
Gablik refers to as the “inside/outside” theme. In the beginning stages, the cut paper was an opaque element, blocking what was behind it and casting a shadow. In later stages, the “cut paper” is a cut out of an object with dimension, flattening it and creating a “window” into a different view (fig. 6). The same level of detail and complexity exists in both executions, but anxiety of the later cut paper is a result of its transparency and subsequent view into another dimension.

Similar to this theme is the “problem of the window”. German art historian Siegfried Gohr limits this visual theme to Magritte’s paintings of paintings, making another canvas, rather than a cut-paper window, a portal into another world. Works like The Human Condition (fig. 7), which is the title of several paintings spanning many years, present a painted canvas within a painted canvas, with the image on the internal canvas being precisely the same as what it is blocking. Gohr states that this is Magritte working through the fundamental relationship between “interior and exterior” world. This a theme Magritte worked on through the majority of his career, often using one name for many pieces. This theme may be an attempt to work through the notion that the exterior is not always reflective of the interior, or perhaps that the true nature of something is never visible. Whatever Magritte’s intention, the images relating to the problem of the window display a confusing visual conundrum but showing a variety of objects mismatched to their interior. The unsettling feeling brought about the “problem of the window” paintings perhaps arises from the viewer being confronted with the notion

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18 Gablik, 94.
19 Siegfried Gohr, Magritte: Attempting the Impossible (Antwerp, Belgium: Ludion, 2009), 87.
20 Ibid.
that not everything is how it seems, or that there are endless hidden elements beneath the things that we presume to know. Magritte creates a confounding enigma through something as simple as layering dissimilar objects.

Arguably the most distinct of Magritte’s career-spanning thematic elements is the Bowler-Hatted Man. He exists in over 50 different configurations and his presence extends nearly all of Magritte’s career. He appears alone, in multiple, with his face obscured, with his back turned, floating, flying, and in pieces (fig. 8). He is the most ubiquitous and mysterious character in Magritte’s creations; his familiarity is disturbing and comforting. An in-depth discussion of the Bowler-Hatted Man appears in chapter four.

Titling a work was often the last step in the creative process for Magritte. His belief, in line with that of his surrealist contemporaries, was that a work was finished without a “poetic” title. For the vast majority of his career, the titles of Magritte’s works had no relationship to their content. It is only a handful that are named according to their pictorial content, such as The Menaced Assassin (fig. 9). One of his largest works, The Menaced Assassin depicts the aftermath of a brutal murder. It may be a pictorial depiction of a poem piece by Magritte's friend, Paul Nougé. The piece describes a murder scene wherein the corpse is found in a room where "...[t]out s'y trouve d'une netteté le plancher propre, la table où l'on ne voit que peu d'objects, un haut guéridon de bois

21 Ibid, 271.
22 Ibid, 288.
sombre.” Nothing is out of place despite the savaged corpse. If said work is directly inspired by, or a representation of, Nougé's writing, the title of "l'Assassin menacé" is directly taken from his poem.

The purpose of these ambiguous or illogical titles is, as argued in Michel Foucault’s prominent essay on Magritte, "pour tenir en respect la dénomination."

This act of naming is most emphasized in Magritte’s images of pipes proclaiming not to be pipes (figs. 10). A viewer might expect the text on the image itself to be informative, perhaps even clarify the title, or even be the title itself. But, as Foucault so aptly described, it is the not the name that gives meaning to the work, the name is often just a name. The incongruity of title and image lends further mystery: instead of the title providing clarification, it confounds the viewer and brings attention to the arbitrary nature of naming.

This confusion is deliberate. Magritte rejects fixing a meaning onto his work on two principles: he does not subscribe to the Surrealists use of psychoanalysis, and he believes once the work has been interpreted, the meaning is gone, as the work becomes an “ideological stand-in, a prop to protect against emptiness”. Interpretation makes a work safe and comforting, as there is no mystery to haunt the viewer or critic. Its subtlety can be explained away through precedent and symbolism, through a careful

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25 Ibid.
26 Michel Foucault, Ceci n'est pas une pipe (France: Fata Morgana, 1973, ), 48.
28 Ibid, 12.
analysis of the artist’s life. Magritte’s images were provocative, but he actively rejected the “compartmentalizing views of art historians”\textsuperscript{29} to classify the elements of his work.

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{29} Herding, “Hamburg and Rome: René Magritte and Surrealism,” 470.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Early Life, Beginnings of Art and Surrealism

René François Ghislain Magritte was born in Lessines, Belgium November 21st, 1898. He was the son of a salesman, Léopold Magritte, and a former hatmaker, Régina Bertinchamps. He was raised with his two younger brothers, Raymond and Paul. Aside from the most basic of facts, little is known about Magritte’s formative years.30 In February of 1912, when Magritte was 13 years old, his mother left in the night and threw herself into the River Sambre. Her body was discovered seventeen days later in March. There are some unsubstantiated accounts that a young Magritte was present when her body was found, and that her nightgown was wrapped around her face.31 Magritte’s longtime friend Louis Scutenaire recalls being told this story, but states that Magritte had little feeling or memory of the events surrounding his mother’s death, aside from the attention he received as Child of a Drowned Woman.32 However, it is difficult to know what is truth and what is myth about Magritte’s beginnings. He emphatically stated that he detested his own past,33 and little of his early life is documented.

The facts of Magritte’s training and early interest in art are solid. In 1910 he began taking art classes above a sweatshop, and created several works, three of which are extant.34 Works between 1910 and 1916 have not surfaced, but there is evidence that he was painting during this time. One painting from 1916 shows how early his technical

30 Sylvester, 10.
31 Ibid, 12.
32 Ibid.
34 Sylvester, 34.
skills developed (fig. 11). The skill he demonstrated so early in life became key to his images later in life. Realism is essential to his desire to communicate through his painting.  

Some time in 1923, Magritte had occasion to see Giorgio de Chirico’s *Song of Love* (fig. 12), published in *Valori Plastic*. This entirely changed his view on painting. This work of de Chirico’s showed Magritte the importance of poetry in painting, rather than adhering to academic conventions. By 1926 Magritte had created his first “poetic” painting, *The Lost Jockey* (fig. 13). Over the course of his career, Magritte recreated this image several times. The earliest two iterations feature a man on horseback in at the long end of a roadway lined with bilboquets. Subsequent versions would utilize the technique of papier collé. In a 1954 autobiographical sketch, Magritte states the works were created "sans préoccupation esthétique, dans l'unique but de REPONDRE à un sentiment mystérieux, à une angoisse 'sans raison', une sorte de 'rappel à l'ordre' qui apparaît à des moments non-historiques de sa conscience et qui, depuis sa naissance, orient sa vie."  

Magritte briefly served in the Belgian military from December 1920 to September 1921. While serving, he was fortunate enough to maintain his interest in the arts by taking art courses at the military academy and painting portraits of various officers. Following a brief return to service in March, Magritte married his wife Georgette in 1922, and quit the wallpaper factory where he was designing patterns in favor of pursuing

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36 Gablik, 23.  
38 Sylvester, 51.
a career in design. After several miscarriages, René and Georgette decided to raise Pomeranians instead of children.

His burgeoning career as an artist began to come alive in the 1920s. Magritte exhibited twice at the Centre d’Art in Belgium in 1920. His work appeared in the poster section and featured his advertisement for “Pot au feu Derbaix.” Another exhibition at the Centre d’Art contained one of Magritte’s early cubist ventures, Youth.

It is not the cubist, quasi-futurist, or graphic works for which Magritte became known. His involvement with André Breton and the Paris Surrealist group cemented his position in future anthologies and discussions about art. Breton initially left Magritte out of his list of artists he claimed in his new movement. But once the movement began to take shape, Magritte became a fixture.

Although Magritte is often brought up in conversations about surrealism, he was not a true member of the group for very long, nor did he entirely want to be fixed with the label "surrealist". His tenure as a member ended as it began: unceremoniously. Like some of his contemporaries, such as Dalí, he style and manner of painting never strayed too far from what that which initially brought him into the surrealist fold.

The movement began in 1924 with Breton publishing the definitive Surrealist document, Manifeste du surréalisme. In this document, Breton implicitly states the importance of Freud’s writing and studies as a guiding principle in defining the

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40 Ibid, 41.
41 Gablik, 21.
parameters of Surrealism.\textsuperscript{43} However, Breton’s use of Freudian principles was both discerning and arbitrary. By selectively using and dismissing various Freudian methods, Breton was able to manipulate Freud’s work to suit the endeavors of the Surrealists. In \textit{Compulsive Beauty}, Hal Foster specifically deals with this premise. Foster proposes that what Freud calls “the uncanny”, Breton calls “the marvelous”, and Freudian “death drive theory” and Breton’s “love” are one in the same. In Foster’s presentation, the basis of surrealism is founded on the manipulation of Freudian principles.\textsuperscript{44} For the purposes of Surrealism, Breton states that “le merveilleux est toujours beau, n'importe quel merveilleux est beau, il n'y a même que le merveilleux qui soit beau.”\textsuperscript{45} While Breton’s “marvelous” is open to interpretation (who is to decide what is beautiful?), Hal Foster offers a more concise and concrete definition that incorporates many other Surrealist principles and ideals. To Foster, the marvelous is not only an ethereal feeling invoked by something beautiful, it is also the chief project of the surrealists, to seek “the reenchantment of a disenchanted world.”\textsuperscript{46}

The movement was initially conceived as being literary. The manifesto goes as far to say that Surrealism was an inevitable development, as “le langage a été donné à l'homme pour qu'il en fasse un usage surréaliste.”\textsuperscript{47} Breton wanted the artists of the movement, be they literary or visual, to create works from a state that Freud contended the conscious mind cannot be. Dreaming occurs in an unconscious state, and to bring

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 3.
\item\textsuperscript{44} Hal Foster, \textit{Compulsive Beauty} (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 17.
\item\textsuperscript{45} Breton, \textit{Manifeste du surréalisme}, 5.
\item\textsuperscript{46} Foster, \textit{Compulsive Beauty}, 19.
\item\textsuperscript{47} Breton, \textit{Manifestoes of Surrealism}, 12.
\end{itemize}
those dreams to the conscious state destroys their ability to function as dreams; they become conscious thought. Earlier in the manifesto, Breton acknowledged that what he wants to achieve is not possible given the parameters of consciousness set up by Freud. Breton makes note that what he aims for with Surrealism is not to merge the conscious and the unconscious, but to create a bridge between the two in which Surrealism can function one step away from either state. This state is deemed “surreality”\(^\text{48}\) by Breton, but could just as easily be called the preconscious by Freud. Surreality does not attempt to merge conscious and unconscious, it seeks create a fluid path between them, functioning the manner of the preconscious.

The first examples of the Surrealists literary effort, what Breton terms “automatic writing”, is a collaborative project between Breton and Philippe Soupault called “Les Champs magnétiques”\(^\text{49}\). Published in 1919, this work employed a technique Breton was developing called “le cadavre exquis”.\(^\text{50}\) This was a type of parlor game in which a folded paper was passed among the participants who added words or phrases without knowing what the other participants had written.\(^\text{51}\) The end result is a contorted and jumbled literary work with no discernable narrative or story. Eventually this technique was adapted to the visual realm (fig. 14).

\(^{48}\) Ibid, 5.
\(^{49}\) Ibid, 13.
\(^{50}\) Breton, \textit{Le surréalisme et la peinture}, 288.
\(^{51}\) Ibid, 289.
It is automatism that Breton sought as the defining principle of Surrealism. Admission to the Surrealist movement required only that the artist employed the technique of automatism, rather than adhering to certain visual conventions. Breton felt some artists, who never identified themselves as Surrealists, fit perfectly into the movement and were the visual equivalent of the fluid state of consciousness he was seeking. In Breton’s eyes, Picasso was the embodiment of Surrealist principles and goals. Picasso exemplified the Bretonian notion of painting; the only creative impetus for the work should be the aesthetic rendering of the inner workings of the mind.

Magritte was initially intrigued by the ideas of Breton, and wanted desperately to be a part of the new group. He was so moved by their repudiation of bourgeois values that he vowed to “henceforward live with danger, that life and the world might thereby come up in some measure to the level of thought and the affections.” René and Georgette moved to Paris in September, 1927. Their inability to find a home near the center of the city that was not exclusively an artist’s studio was futile. Magritte’s preference for painting in his home, usually in the kitchen or the sitting room, lead them to find a place on the outskirts of Paris. The Magrittes where not isolated outside of Paris: not long after their move, Magritte's brother, Paul, a composer, moved close by. Paul Magritte visit often, eating dinner with René and Georgette, and often using their

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52 Breton, Manifeste du surréalisme, 8.
54 Breton, Le surréalisme et la peinture, 9.
55 Magritte, “Lifeline,” 244.
56 Sylvester, 154.
piano to practice and compose music.\textsuperscript{57} By the autumn of 1928, the move to Paris paid off. Not only was Magritte now embraced as a full-fledged Surrealist, Breton owned four Magritte works, and he asked the artist's opinion on how far to concern the group with political action.\textsuperscript{58}

The publishing of the surrealist magazine \textit{La Revolution Surréaliste} coincided with Breton's publishing of \textit{Manifeste du surréalisme}. The magazine ran for five years and included poetry, images, surrealist games, and letters of importance. The works of Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, and Man Ray appeared frequently in the journal, as well as reproductions of work the surrealists applauded.\textsuperscript{59} When the number 12 (1929) edition of \textit{La Révolution Surréaliste} was published, it contained four contributions by Magritte, two of which were significant to the ongoing theme of “word and image” in Magritte’s work (fig. 15 and 16).\textsuperscript{60} Both images are part of Magritte's continued investigation into the nature of names and words. In \textit{Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt}, Magritte relies on the image to be a substitute for the word. It is necessary for proper reading of the text for the viewer to arrive at the missing word as "femme" (arguable, "fille" might also be appropriate), thusly Magritte renders the form of a woman in an instantaneously recognizable way: the female nude. The second piece in the theme of naming is \textit{Les mots et les images}; a pictorial essay on the arbitrary nature of names. In this essay, Magritte investigates the arbitrary nature of names. He shows the relationship, or lack thereof,

\textsuperscript{57} Sylvester and Whitfield, \textit{René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné I: Oil Paintings · 1916-1930}, 77.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 204.
\textsuperscript{59} The full text of all issues of \textit{La Révolution Surréaliste} are available through Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique. online.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 207.
between the word and the thing it represents. Both pieces appeal to the literary nature and background of the Surrealist movement.

Following his inclusion in what would be the final issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Magritte met with promoter and arts patron Camille Goemans, who intended on financing a gallery for his works in Paris. Goemans invited the Magrittes to spend time on the Catalan coast of Spain, down the road from Salvador Dalí.\textsuperscript{61} In this time at Cadaqués, Magritte witnessed Dalí working on his piece, *The Lugubrious Game* (fig. 17).\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 225  
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 226.
\end{footnotesize}
Mid-life, Surrealism, and Post-Surrealism

Despite his inclusion with the Surrealist movement, Magritte never paraded the label of surrealist. He continued to paint in the same manner he had been painting, only this time under the gaze of André Breton. He did not look in awe at his contemporaries; he was rather disdainful of some of them. Magritte becoming a surrealist was not cause for celebration. He continued on in just the manner that got him to this point: without fanfare, and without acclaim.

Despite their insistence there was no stylistic protocol, Magritte's involvement seemed likely, given the aesthetic similarity found among his works and that of the group. He rejected the formal principles of painting he was taught in his youth, primarily by the disruption of depth and space. This rejection fell right in line with Breton’s “marvelous”, which relied heavily on surreal beauty being found in unexpected shifts in scale and unnatural spatial relationships. Magritte used these visual conventions to shine light on the strange nature of banal objects.

Magritte termed his first period of works as member of the Surrealists as “cavernous”, mostly due to their largely vacant compositions, like looking at a small object in an entirely empty room. They are strange and bare images, with one central figure or object in an otherwise deserted chamber. They invoke a feeling of anxiety “without making the audience privy to the sources of this tension” (fig. 18). One such

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69 Gablik, 42.
work from the "cavernous" period, *Person Meditating on Madness* (1929), evokes a feeling of terror. A man holds writing implement to his face while gazing across an empty surface. The viewer is not privy to what lies at the other end of the surface, nor the reason for the man's stance: he looms next to the tabletop with an almost expectant gaze, in a darkened room. There is not a clear representation of the space housing the man and table, only a dark and saturated background. It is a haunting image, giving the impression of vast and empty space for miles around the sole figure.

During this first period of painting, Magritte was executing almost one painting a day. This frenzy of activity resulted in the creation of many of the themes and imagery seen in his later works. The major cornerstone of nearly all of Magritte’s work is the “mystification of banalities” and the desire to work from non-artistic or “trivial” sources, something that led him directly to the Surrealist milieu.

However, Magritte’s acceptance into the group did not necessarily influence his opinions of his fellow group members. There were no ties of loyalty or allegiance strictly because these artists all fell under the term "surrealist". Critiquing and criticizing members of the movement was not an attack on his surrealist allegiance, most likely because Magritte felt no allegiance.

He felt strongly about his contemporaries. In some cases they were positive: he held Max Ernst in particularly high regard, despite Magritte's disinterest in Ernst’s espousal of new techniques and mechanical artistic advancements. He particularly hailed Ernst’s ability to use his skills to “represent the world that exists beyond

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71 Gablik, 41.
72 Schneede, 11.
73 Gablik, 59.
madness”\textsuperscript{74} in such a convincing way that the viewer begins to question reality. Some works of both artists share a similar quality of realism, and occasionally have visual elements in common. There is no evidence of mutual influence, although they did have occasion to meet when Ernst was exhibiting in Paris, just a “curious overlapping of iconography.”\textsuperscript{75} Both frequently used botanical elements, including botanical and avian hybrids, and displayed a tendency to animate the inanimate.\textsuperscript{76} Magritte's hybrids appear in several paintings, and the avian hybrid seen in \textit{The Flavor of Tears} (1948) reappears several times under the same name. Ernst does not appear utilize repetition the way Magritte does, but his avian creature in \textit{The Robing of the Bride} (1940) bears some visual similarity to that of Magritte. Both birds are slender, and almost unnaturally elongated. Each appears to be composed of leaves or other foliage in a naturalistic color palette. Ernst's bird-hybrid holds a weapon, but Magritte's does not; yet both are menacing.

Magritte praises Ernst for his use of repetition and the use of collage and alternative methods in the 1938 lecture \textit{La ligne de vie}.\textsuperscript{77}

Magritte did have the same high regard for any of his other contemporaries. At best, he was fond of Roberto Matta. In letter written in 1937 to his friend Scutenaire, Magritte states that Matta “does painting[s] which are a thousand times better than those of Miró.”\textsuperscript{78} Curiously, he finds Matta’s receiving of a religious education and the detail that he resides in a “flat in a white house”\textsuperscript{79} important enough to mention.

\textsuperscript{74} Torczyner and Bassard, \textit{Magritte: The True Art of Painting}, 46.
\textsuperscript{75} Gablik, 60.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Louis Scutenaire, \textit{Avec Magritte}, (Brussels: Argon, 1977), 44.
\textsuperscript{78} Torczyner and Bassard, 47.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
Magritte was also did not have a taste for the work Yves Tanguy. In Magritte’s eyes, he was reductive and “always stuck to redoing the same painting.” He found it curious that his and Tanguy’s works were hung in the same show, owing that it takes a “museum curator’s mentality” to find congruity between them.

Despite their initially pleasant if infrequent interactions, Magritte developed a strong, critical distaste for Dalí. He called Dalí’s flaming giraffes in *The Burning Giraffe* (1937) “superfluous”, “facile and useless”, and contended that it was the easiest solution to the problem. Magritte opined that his solution was superior, seeing that he had worked through this visual problem thoroughly and resolved it at a flaming trumpet in his work, *The Discovery of Fire*. (fig. 21 and 22), and a flaming giraffe must have been too overstated. Perhaps the giraffe was an inappropriate choice for its lack of context in most viewers' everyday lives.

In the late 1930s, Magritte again took issue with Dalí’s glib solutions to various visual problems. Both tackled the function of mirrors, Dalí with his 1935 *The Angelus of Gala* (fig. 23) depicting his wife Gala gazing at her reflection in an invisible mirror, and Magritte in his 1937 *Not to be Reproduced* (fig. 24) where the function of the image’s mirror is entirely impossible. *The Angelus of Gala* is another appearance of Dalí’s fascination with Jean-François Millet's 1857 work *The Angelus*. Dalí's representation of the pious woman, here played by his wife Gala, is almost threatening. Gala faces her double underneath a reproduction of Millet's work as if she is about to pounce. The double has her back turned to the viewer, presumably being glared upon by the frontal
Gala. This mirroring that Dalí presents is conventional: the viewer is presented with two views of the same figure, sans mirror. Magritte’s solutions give the viewer prolonged anxiety, and as such, his solution is much more thought provoking. In *Not To Be Reproduced* (1937), Magritte shows one view of the same figure. The figure, with his back to the viewer, looks into a mirror where it is expected to see his face; however, it is again his back that is shown. Magritte disrupts expectations of mirroring by giving a wholly unexpected result.

Magritte also found Dalí’s unconventional frame of *Couple with Their Heads Full of Clouds* (fig. 25) not be a fully realized solution. His response to this work was 1937’s *Reproduction* (fig. 26). Dali’s composition shows two human-form frames housing a dreamscape painting. The implication may be that the dreamscape arises from the thought processes of "human" frames. Magritte's composition includes a nude female form, from navel to upper thighs, surrounded by gold frame. Perhaps it is Magritte’s execution of the framed figure rather than an unexpected background in the frame that makes his image a more superior solution.

However, it was not the criticisms Magritte had of his colleagues, or an abrupt stylistic change, that led to him and Georgette leaving Paris. He began to become disenchanted with the surrealists' methods and began to abhor psychoanalysis and the notion of automatism.84 There was also an encounter with Breton that accelerated the Magrittes return to Brussels in 1930. Magritte often pestered Breton, a staunch anti-Catholic, on matters of religion. During a surrealist gathering, Breton took notice that Georgette was wearing a delicate golden cross that she inherited from her grandmother.

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84 Magritte and Torczyner, 73.
To express his disapproval, Breton announced loudly that to don religious emblems was in extremely poor taste. While Breton did not specifically address Georgette, Magritte took offense that Breton would chastise his wife for wearing what she pleased. René and Georgette left the gathering, and shortly after, left Paris.  

This experience, coupled with Magritte’s lack on interest in participating in Breton-led lengthy discussions of politics, led him to ignore subsequent invitations to exhibit in Surrealist galleries. His disillusionment with Surrealism culminated in vitriolic criticism of Breton, written in a letter to Maurice Rapin in 1957:

Surrealism” (like “Fantastic Art”) has only a very vague meaning, which is false if it is given a meaning other than the very limited one it has: Surrealist is what suits Breton, what he says is valid. (This doesn’t mean he really thinks it is.) So I am not very “Surrealist.” For me, the word also signifies propaganda (a dirty word), with all the idiocies necessary to propaganda’s success. I may be “in practice” considered a “Surrealist,” but this is part of a stupid “game.” I have shown with “Surrealists,” such as Labisse, Couteau, etc.… It goes without saying that I do not participate in, nor am I part of, this artistic-cultural Ballets Russes movement.

His departure and subsequent criticism of surrealism may have stemmed from his preference for remaining somewhat reclusive as an artist, and conflicted with his desire to remain unaffiliated from groups or political associations.

Returning from Paris to their beloved Brussels in 1930, René and Georgette settled at 135 Rue Esseghem, where they would live until 1954. In this apartment, Magritte could have his studio in the sitting room (fig. 27), just as he preferred. In this

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85 Gablik, 65.
86 Schneede, 32.
87 Torczyner and Bassard, 49.
post-Surrealist period, Magritte developed the idea of “affinities.”\textsuperscript{88} The discovery of affinities struck Magritte in the middle of the night in 1936:

I awoke in a room where a cage and the bird sleeping in it had been placed. A magnificent visual aberration caused me to see an egg instead of the bird, in the cage. I had just fastened upon a new and astonishing poetic secret, for the shock experienced had been provoked by the affinity of two objects: cage and egg, \textit{whereas before, I had provoked this shock by bringing together two unrelated objects}. From the moment of that revelation I sought to find out whether other objects besides the cage might not likewise show – by bringing to light some element that was characteristic and to which they had been rigorously predestined – the same evident poetry as the egg and cage had produced by their coming together.\textsuperscript{89}

Perhaps it was poetic license at play, or this concept was only given a name in 1936, but Magritte was executing the concept visually as early as 1933. This visual relationship consisted of unsuspecting yet not unrelated imagery: a birdcage with an egg inside, or an umbrella topped with a glass of water.

His sunlit, or sometime called his Renoir or Impressionist period, was his first major stylistic break in over twenty years. World War II had an effect on his attitude, leading him to break from the anxiety he had been expressing to focusing on the charm in painting. One example, \textit{The Harvest} (1943), is reminiscent of Pierre-Auguste Renoir's various \textit{Bathers} (fig. 28).\textsuperscript{90} This period ended in 1947, and the entire catalog of ‘sunlit’ images, the terminology he preferred, ended with approximately 50 images.\textsuperscript{91} Almost immediately after the sunlit period ended Magritte began, and two weeks later ended, his \textit{vache} period.\textsuperscript{92} In that short time period, he painted seventeen oils and twenty two

\textsuperscript{88} Gablik, 100.
\textsuperscript{89} Magritte, “Lifeline,” 244.
\textsuperscript{90} Gablik, 145-146.
\textsuperscript{91} Sylvester, 327.
\textsuperscript{92} Gablik, 149.
gouaches, a great many of which were shown at his first one-man show in Paris in March and April of 1948. These works were extremely polarizing, and were received very poorly, possibly because they were an even further departure than the sunlit images. (fig. 29). Despite his popularity, none of the vache paintings sold, nor were any, save one, shown in exhibitions until after his death.
Maturity

In the latter half of his life, Magritte lived much in the manner he lived in the beginning of his life: without flourish or spectacle. He travelled minimally, and always for purpose rather than pleasure. His popularity rose, but not to the artist's delight. He painted, as was expected of him, but little else of note. A friendship with his lawyer, Harry Torczyner, and his art dealer, Alexandre Iolas, appear to be his strongest ties to the art world.

Magritte’s star continued to rise in the 1950s. A 1954 exhibition entitled *Words vs. Image* held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in Manhattan brought Magritte attention from young American artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.95 The first major catalog essay and American analysis of Magritte’s work came in 1960 by Douglas MacAgy for the exhibition *René Magritte in America* in Dallas.96 In 1962, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis opened *The Vision of René Magritte*, accompanied by a catalog in which Magritte disdainfully dismissed psychoanalysis and automatism,97 the two key tenets of the Surrealist movement he worked so tirelessly to be admitted into. Two years later, Dominique de Menil organized *Magritte* at the Arkansas Art Center in Little Rock.98

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95 Gohr, 215.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
His popularity in America skyrocketed and Magritte decided to seek an international lawyer to assist in his dealings. During their relationship, Magritte and Harry Torczyner grew to be more than just council and client; they became friends. Many of the letters exchanged during the ten years they worked together were addressed “Dear Friend” and signed “Affectionately Yours”. It is no surprise that Magritte created a portrait for Torczyner in 1954 referencing his chosen career (fig. 30).

One person who was partially responsible for Magritte’s reputation in America was gallery owner and art dealer Alexandre Iolas. The former principal dancer of the Monte Carlo Ballet, Iolas became Magritte’s primary American art dealer in 1947. Iolas and Magritte had one major point of dissension: Iolas continually demanded that Magritte provide him with works that were poetic, inspired, and saleable; while Magritte believed those qualities were all seldom found in the same work. During his contract with Iolas, Magritte continued to paint for his European dealers. During this period of dual contracts, he often backdated his works to a time before he was under contract with Iolas, thus adding to the difficulty of chronicling his works.

Despite his reputation, he was not financially secure enough to paint whatever he wanted all of the time. Many of his works in the 1950s, specifically the gouaches, were repeats and variants of other images, created only to sell through dealers, which further exacerbates the chronology obstacle. But 1953 brought about a new commercial venture:
a casino mural in Brussels (fig. 31). Previously Magritte had executed smaller murals, such as a theater’s circular ceiling, but nothing of this magnitude. Each mural was over four meters high and seventy-two meters long. The work was done by a team of artists provided with detailed models projected onto the walls. Magritte created two smaller murals following the casino, one in 1956 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Charleroi, and the other in 1961 Palais du Congrès in Brussels.

Iolas was a primary consultant for John and Dominique de Menil. The Parisian couple came to America in 1941 to escape Nazi occupation, and settled in Houston, Texas to facilitate John’s role in his family’s oil business. The Menils amassed a large collection of artwork over their lifetimes, and started collecting Magritte’s work at the urging of Iolas and Marcel Duchamp (fig. 32). Eventually The Menil Collection in Houston was built to house their large assemblage of modern artwork. It is because of the Menils that Magritte made his first and only trip to America in 1965. He briefly attended the opening for his retrospective exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York before continuing on to Houston for the opening of the Menil’s show on Magritte at the University of St. Thomas. The trip to America in 1965 caused Magritte considerable trouble as he insisted on traveling everywhere with his dog. The airlines were not as receptive to these travel arrangements as Magritte had hoped they would be, recounting

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid, 88.
in a letter to Torczyner that they had to “put up considerable argument to have LouLou with us in the cabin: they made such a fuss as if it had been a calf!” Magritte even brought LouLou the rodeo in Simonton, Texas, probably to the chagrin of his hosts, the Menils.

The final seven years of Magritte’s life showed a change in disposition. In the early 1960s, he became intensely concerned about his reputation. In a letter to Torczyner written in February of 1960, Magritte threatened to write a letter to a journalist who “said stupid things about me in a television program.” He anger was more intensely directed in the direction of the Belgian government which had eliminated the legal “right of reply” meant to keep this sort of thing from happening, yet the without that law in place artists and thinkers were “at the mercy of any silly comment these wretches are completely free to make.” In 1963, he refused to speak at a hotel’s opening, citing that he “loathe[s] the ‘thing’ they are inaugurating, part of that replacing the good with the bad,” in reference to the new hotel replacing an older version of itself. Again in 1965 he expresses his disapproval of journalists, this time in regards to a Benelux Match article incorrectly stating that he lives in Anderlecht and “goes on to provide other data as erroneous as they are banal.”

His exasperation reached beyond Belgian and European journalists into the American pool of writers as well. By 1966, Magritte’s contempt for the media spread

109 Magritte and Torczyner, 103.
110 Ibid, 53.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid, 82.
113 Ibid, 100.
from regional news outlets to that of *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek*. In a letter to Torczyner after his trip to America, Magritte was particularly annoyed. He has a cast on his wrist from a fall earlier in the year; he is overwhelmed with phone calls demanding to purchase pictures he does not have. Immediately following his trip to America, Magritte arrived in Paris with the intention of signing a book written about him by Patrick Nellins. Unfortunately, a bout with indigestion kept him confined to his hotel room, and he lamented to Torczyner that he had “taken the whole trip for nothing.”[^114] He goes on to say that “newspaper reporters are still interviewing me for nothing, since the ones here, like the ones in New York – judging by *Time* and *Newsweek* – pay no attention whatsoever to what I tell them and alter it in a way devoid of intelligence.”[^115] One week later on January 24th, 1966, Magritte writes to Torczyner again reciting yet another tale of journalistic idiocy:

> Once again I was repelled by the reporters: the ones on TLV and in the printed rags are all alike: The one (from TLV), who apparently “meant well,” made sure to ask me a last question with a ghastly pun that revealed his innermost nature: “May I express the hope that you’ll have Surrealism as a dada for a long time to come?” Which left me so completely dumbfounded, as I always am when confronted with self-satisfied stupidity.[^116]

Winter of 1965 marks the last major exhibition on Magritte to open in his lifetime at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[^117] Over the next two years, his letters to Torczyner communicate a severe decline in health and an increasingly unhappy

[^114]: Ibid, 129.
[^115]: Ibid.
[^116]: Ibid, 131.
disposition. David Sylvester had an opportunity to ask Louis Scutenaire for his insight into Magritte’s change in manner. Scutenaire suspected Magritte was unable to handle success; he simply was not made to enjoy it. He tells Sylvester of an instance in which Magritte plainly stated that “I’ve painted enough pictures to bring down, let’s say, the throne of China, and instead of that I’ve got five hundred thousand francs in my pocket.” Scutenaire reiterated that money and honors were never something Magritte sought, and felt quite unnerved when they came. Magritte’s longtime friend tells Sylvester that Magritte “was much less agreeable [now] than when he was poor, less warm, less happy with himself.”

On August 2nd, 1967 Georgette Magritte sent a letter to Harry Torczyner with an update on her husband’s condition. She stated that a bout with jaundice had Magritte hospitalized, but the outlook was good and he should only remain in treatment for two weeks. René François Ghislain Magritte died August 15th, 1967 of pancreatic cancer, sharply ending a storied career of an artist who revealed the strangeness of the familiar and hid his brilliance with a bland, bourgeois façade.

\[\text{Sylvester, } 407.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER 3

MAGRITTE AND ADVERTISING

The surreal aesthetic was a rational representation of the irrational mind, a tactile piece of the dream-state. Breton’s fundamental *Nadja* states that “la beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas”¹, setting the groundwork for a divergent new aesthetic. The surrealists found rationality and convention to be the greatest sins against art, as freedom and imagination are not found within the regimented ways of the past. True convulsive beauty cannot be demonstrated when rationality reigns over creativity, and cannot be created by those who “suffer from the control of reason”.²

It seems contradictory that Surrealism would fit within the realm of commercial art, even more so that Magritte’s vein of illogical and subversive imagery would find a home within advertising. Yet, because the Surrealists embraced modernity, they were able to exploit the nature of the emerging commercial art culture to expand their vision into the commercial realm.³ There was an effort to move art into the realm of experimentation, challenging what had been long held standards of fine art, and the Surrealists embraced this change as an effort to express their “unrelenting contempt for established forms and values”.⁴ Magritte and the other Surrealists found that their

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¹ André Breton, *Nadja* (France: Gallimard, 1963), 155.
³ Georges Roque, 2007, The Surrealist (Sub-)version of Advertising, 162.
tendency to break rules and conventions is just as well suited to fine art as it is to advertising due to the newly arising trends in advertising.  

Magritte worked in design out of necessity rather than desire, something that set him apart from his contemporaries dabbling in the realm of advertising. Perhaps because Magritte was not universally known, his ad work had to be successful by advertising standards, rather than by his marketability. Again, we find Magritte just on the fringes of the success some of his contemporaries were experiencing: talented enough to create effective ads, but not recognizable enough to create them without standard advertising parameters. Magritte’s craft, specifically his careful rendering of objects to imitate reality, lent itself well to advertising. His decision to render his subject in paint, rather than drawing or photomontage, afforded the works a level of legibility and accuracy that may not be found in other mediums, thus giving his images maximum impact.

The ads created by Magritte utilized the same principles Surrealists applied in creating their art. Isolation, juxtaposition of disparate elements, hybridization, shifts in scale, and paradox, all part of the Surrealist “crisis of the object”, applied to the creation of their advertisements. The function of the surrealist object is primarily psychological, meant to trigger an unconscious reaction in the artist and the viewer. Hal Foster contends that the unconscious reaction should be shock and hysteria, stemming from the uncanny

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representation of familiar things in an unfamiliar way, and ultimately creating a direct path to the subconscious.\(^9\) If a viewer is shocked or outraged at a surreal object, it is possible that this reaction originates from a disparity of seeing something normal presented in a way that is abnormal, and triggering the viewer’s anxiety. This anxious reaction brings unconscious feelings to the surface and asks the viewer to confront the irrationality of the object head on, the psychological reaction the surrealists might be looking for.

Magritte's primary motivation was not to bring the surrealist aesthetic into commercial art; after all, Magritte was in this field out of necessity. Rather it was by virtue that Magritte was stylistically similar to the surrealists that his ads began to take on a surrealistic feel. Magritte fell in line behind his predecessor Giorgio de Chirico as a participant in executing the surrealist aesthetic that became popular in advertising in the 1930s. In the mid-1930s *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue* commissioned artists, chiefly those with a surrealist-leaning aesthetic, to create magazine covers.\(^10\) The January 1936 issue featured an image by de Chirico (fig. 33). His cover utilizes elements similar to his works that influence the Surrealists: open space, exquisite detail, and exaggerated scale.

The use of surrealist aesthetic was paramount for the creation of Salvador Dalí’s ads, particularly his ad for Bryans Hosiery. While de Chirico’s image is stylistically surrealist, Dalí’s image is conceptually surreal. The image is executed in a manner very typical of Dali’s dream landscapes with vast spaces and elongated figures and rendered in

\(^9\) Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 49.

stunning realism (fig. 34). But, his ad emphasizes the sexual and fetishistic aspects of hosiery. The clothed legs appear at considerable scale and positioned to frame an ornate gilded throne room, all being serenaded by the elongated figure and its opulent trumpet. Aside from the text identifying the image as being Bryans Hosiery, little about it is recognizable advertising vocabulary.

In addition to Dalí and de Chirico, other artists were trying their hand at design and commercial art. Kurt Schwitters pursued design for financial reasons like his fellow Belgian, Magritte. To Breton’s mind, there was no reason for a surrealist to engage in advertising as it glorified commodity and luxury. While he and other surrealists may have rejected displays of extravagant wealth, they did embrace modernity. Contemporaneity, modernity, and reform were principles surrealism embraced; they were able to exploit the nature of the emerging commercial culture to expand their art into the commercial realm.

At some points, Magritte found designing to be a necessity as he was not financially stable enough to live off of his fine art income. But at other points, he thought a career in design would lead him to “employment in which there was a hope of being, to some extent, himself.” The freedom that wallpaper design afforded Magritte was presumably greater than the freedom he was given by his commercial clients. It was not until 1946 that Magritte was able to manage without commercial work to supplement his

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12 Siegried Gohr, Magritte: Attempting the Impossible (Antwerp, Belgium: Ludion, 2009), 53.
13 David Sylvester, Magritte (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2009), 92.
fine art income. He began his career at a wallpaper factory in Haren run by the firm Peters-Lacroix, and worked there for nearly two years. He quit the factory in 1924 in favor of a full-time career as a designer. In the years prior to his venture to Paris to attempt to join the ranks of Breton’s surrealists, Magritte was making so little money that he received a one-time government grant to paint, which amounted to less than one month’s salary at the wallpaper factory. Between 1924 and 1929, even during his time in Paris, Magritte was designing magazine advertisements for luxury goods (mainly haute couture), and brochures. His best client was socialite and fashion trendsetter Norine. Norine, born Honorine Deschryver, was the wife of Magritte's art dealer Paul-Gustave van Hecke. She was a socialite and often promoted luxury goods for clients of her husband. For several years Magritte designed full-page spreads and brochures depicting Norine’s predictions for the next direction of couture (fig. 35).

On the heels of those advertisements was a full brochure for Belgian furrier, Maison Samuel (fig.36). Magritte took to this project with friend and fellow artist Paul Nougé. The two were close friends and artistic associates, first meeting in 1925. Sylvester quotes from Nougé's writing describing Magritte as "la rigueur en personne." The catalogue for Maison Samuel was one of many projects Magritte and Nougé collaborated on. The brochure, measuring 20 by 25 centimeters, displayed fourteen fur

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14 Gohr, Magritte: Attempting the Impossible, 51.
15 Sylvester, 53.
16 Ibid, 93.
17 Ibid, 94.
18 Ibid, 95.
coats and four fur stoles. It was a hand-held, loose-leaf folder help together with green cord. Each full landscape page presented a single fur coat with title, name, type of fur, and "pithy poetic commentary." Only the stoles were shown together, with all four on the final page, and without commentary. The whereabouts of the original work are unknown, although Sylvester is "virtually certain" that the entire brochure was in color, despite the presence of black and white images in the reproductions.

During his time in Paris Magritte was under contract with van Heck in addition to creating ads. His production skyrocketed and he was exhibiting with other surrealists in van Heck’s Paris gallery. When he returned from his three-year stint in Paris, Magritte was without any advertising work and the sale of his fine art was not keeping him afloat. The apartment at 135 Rue Esseghem a shed located at the back of the property near the garden (fig. 37). In this space Magritte and his brother Paul established Studio Dongo, a small design shop that furnished posters, window displays, exhibition materials, and other design work. Studio Dongo was in business until 1946.

Magritte’s fine art and advertising evolved concurrently, therefore it is unsurprising that both utilize the same themes and have a similar poetic voice. Magritte’s skill and consistency as a painter afforded his work an ease of reading and some level of recognition as being his, even though he was opposed to stylistically defining his work. Even without his signature, his advertisements and paintings have a common thread of,

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20 Ibid, 60.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 93.
23 Ibid, 244.
24 Gohr, 46.
25 Roque, 167.
for lack of a better word, “Magritte-ness” that alludes to their maker. Several factors contribute to the Magritte-ness: a consistent level of legibility, balanced compositions, and repetition of themes and imagery specific to Magritte. While this could be said of many artists and their works, a vast majority Magritte’s paintings and advertisements arguably have a graphic quality that is specific to him. Magritte’s illogical combinations of imagery and desire to point out the absurd in the everyday object come to light in his graphic work.²⁶

The MEM perfume advertisement (fig. 38) is an expression of absurd Surrealist imagery crossing into the commercial art realm. By 1947, Magritte was fortunate enough to have built up his reputation enough to no longer need advertising to financially support himself and Georgette.²⁷ This may have afforded him greater freedom in his chosen advertising ventures, as he was not as restrained by the client’s demands and was able to take on projects that work in direct relation to his fine art. The hybrid image of tree and house is almost quintessentially surreal, and idea of a tree opening itself up to house a commodity (perfume, living space) is slightly startling. The images are intriguing in their use of scale. How large must a tree be to house a set of door inside of it? And conversely, how small must a tree so that it does not dwarf three perfume bottles? The comparative image to the MEM advertisement, Blood Will Tell (fig. 39) was so successful in its own rite that it went on be used as a book cover for a novel called The House in the Tree.²⁸

²⁸ Roque, 172.
Later in his career, Magritte was not necessarily commissioned to do advertising, rather his work was used without his consent in advertisements. In 1960, Magritte’s lawyer Harry Torczyner wrote a letter to Magritte informing him of the use of his image *The False Mirror* (fig. 40) as the basis for the CBS logo produced by William Golden (fig. 41). Torczyner did not seek legal repercussions, but requested that CBS would “reproduce the picture in their ads and mention the painter.”\(^29\) A similar problem arose in 1964 in which a textbook company reproduced one of Magritte’s painting for its cover although not in its entirety. Magritte found the cropping of this work wholly unacceptable and enlisted the help of Torczyner to remedy the issue.\(^30\) Magritte was quite thrilled, however, to have his work used by the airline Sabena. His “sky bird” was to be used on Sabena’s airplanes after a negotiation that “put a good deal of butter on my spinach, as we say.”\(^31\)

It was a necessary for Magritte to generate commercial art in order for him and Georgette to afford the lifestyle with which they had become accustom. His contempt for his career as a fine artist (which Suzi Gablik described "an almost constitutional dislike")\(^32\) no doubt spilled over into his commercial art career. And as with his fine art, his commercial art was lumped under the umbrella of "surrealist" because of similar visuality, something that Magritte was displeased about given his break with the surrealists.

\(^{31}\) Magritte and Torczyner, 136.
\(^{32}\) Gablik, 9.
CHAPTER 4

THE BOWLER-HATTED MAN

René Magritte’s bowler-hatted man is everyman and no man. He is a visual representation of Magritte’s quest to highlight the mysteries of the banal. The physical representation of the man in the bowler hat lacks enough to detail to be specifically identified as one individual, yet retains enough detail to possibly be construed as many different individuals. He is a distilled version of a thousand average men, a man who does not stick out in a crowd, and someone Magritte identified with. But he was not the creation of Magritte. The Bowler-Hatted Man had existed in the realm of art for sometime, used mostly when the artist wanted to represent himself or someone else as a “respectable man”.

The origins of the bowler hat are befitting of an accessory that would later come to be associated with normalcy and anonymity. The hat made its debut in 1850, meant to be the perfect combination of style and function. It was designed by hatters James and George Lock for William Coke II, a gamekeeper who was in search of low, formfitting hat that would not get entangled with branches and protect the head from falling object while riding through wooded areas. The bowler became the chosen riding hat, known as a Derby hat in America for its popularity at the Derby horserace in Epsom Down.

Bowlers quickly developed into a standard part of the uniform for horseman, and had

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1 Ibid, 105.
3 Ibid, 15.
4 Ibid, 16.
earlier uses as an informal hat for sportsmen.\(^5\) It was worn with a lounge suit, a rough tweed suit with a short jacket, trousers, collared shirt, and waistcoat.\(^6\) The bowler was less formal than a top hat, but both made of a hard black shellacked material, usually beaver. However, the top hat was far more expensive than a bowler hat, mainly being worn by the upper echelons of society and only seen in the lower class then the hat was passed down to them.\(^7\) The bowler was cheap, versatile, and informal, making it a favorite hat for all levels of society. It blurred class lines, with vendors and customers sporting bowlers, roadworkers and business all wearing the same headwear.\(^8\) The hat became such a staple of dress that one who wears such a hat was no longer “a man wearing a bowler hat”; he became a “Bowler-Hatted Man”.\(^9\) The hat began to communicate the idea that the wearer was middle class man who performed any number of middle class jobs and lived in a city where middle class life flourished.\(^10\) It communicated just how regular and ordinary the wearer was, without needing him to speak a word.

But this was not always the case. Magritte's bowler-hatted man is the innocuous middle class, but its predecessor, dada's bowler-hatted man, is the confrontational middle class. George Grosz's man in a bowler hat is the counterpoint to Magritte's. With it's

\(^5\) Ibid, 18.  
\(^6\) Ibid, 23.  
\(^7\) Ibid, 22.  
\(^8\) Ibid, 46.  
\(^9\) Ibid, 31.  
\(^10\) Ibid, 31.
emphasis on politics and heavy communist leanings, dada spawned a group of artists determined to destroy the norm. Grosz's bowler-hatted man, seen in Republican Automatons (1920), was not the unobtrusive watcher of Magritte's time; rather the dada bowler hatted man was a comical representation of the "patriotic robot bourgeois." This bowler-hatted automaton is in stark contrast to Magritte's self-sufficient and restrained man.

By the time Magritte depicted his Bowler-Hatted Man, the bowler had fallen out of favor for the chesterfield hat. But the stereotype of the Bowler Hatted Man was still very active and known. At this point, the Bowler Hatted Man was almost a caricature of middle class anonymity. The first appearance of Magritte’s Bowler Hatted Man was in 1927 in The Menaced Assassin (fig. 9). It is the first appearance of a character that will show up over fifty paintings and in twenty drawing and collages over the course of Magritte’s career. During the first thirty years of Magritte painting, the Bowler Hatted Man (with the exception of his first appearance in The Menaced Assassin) always had his back to the viewer. His face was not revealed until 1960 in The Presence of Mind (fig. 42) in which he turned and faced the viewer with an indifferent gaze. He continued to appear in works through the remainder of Magritte’s career, often with his face obscured, and sometimes in multiple (figs. 8).

13 Ibid, 89.
14 Ibid, 26-27.
15 Gohr, 98.
16 Ibid, 280.
Is Magritte’s Bowler-Hatted Man a character, caricature, or a portrait? Given the nature of Magritte to want to exist with some degree of anonymity, perhaps the Bowler-Hatted Man was emblematic of Magritte, rather than a self-portrait, or another pathway to the anonymity that he craved but had not yet achieved. What is it about him that is so enigmatic? Magritte intended him to be an average middle-class Belgian man who is so average that they almost disappear, much like Magritte tried to do himself. His melancholic condition drove him to boredom with painting and with the title of “artist”. Magritte had no studio, preferring to work in his dining room or living room. Like his character, Magritte, chose to exist between a “staid exterior and an active inner life”. Even his home was ordinary and typical, resembling the suburban homes seen in his work, with no evidence of the creative.

The Bowler-Hatted Man may have been Magritte’s best attempt at the invisibility that ubiquity can provide. The bowler hat was part of the costume of the middle class, a signifier that the wearer was a participant in city life just like everyone else. He had no discernable history or past, which is just was well for someone like Magritte who abhorred his own. The Bowler-Hatted Man is a symbol of modern life, an observer who longs to be just like everyone else. Ultimately, the Bowler Hatted Man is just another common entity that becomes mysterious in his conventionality when closely studied.

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17 Sante, “Magritte the Detective,” 27.
18 Ibid, 28.
19 Gablik, 9.
20 Miller Robinson, 141.
21 Ibid, 140.
CHAPTER 5

MAGRITTE AND POP ART

Magritte broke artistic ground by highlighting the mystery and absurdity of commonplace objects. Anthropomorphic balusters, canvases in front of canvases, and the same mysterious man wearing a bowler hat were only a fraction of the everyday items he used to show that there is still something inexplicable to be found in what we encounter every day. Surrealism was a logical fit for Magritte as it too rejected traditional artistic principles in favor of absurd scale, realistically rendered impossible dream-scenery, and wild hybridizations of pedestrian objects. It is no surprise that the artistic generation following Magritte’s took this celebration of the banal to a higher level. In many respects, Pop Art seemed to be the logical extension of Magritte’s exploration of the banal.

Suzy Gablik, who lived with and wrote a monograph on Magritte, also wrote extensively with John Russell on Pop Art. Together, she and Russell defined the movement as art that “offers a coincidence of style and subject, that is, [it] represents mass-produced images and objects using a style which is also based upon the visual vocabulary of mass production.”¹ It seems that the Pop Artists were informed by advertising in a similar way that Surrealists were formed and informed by advertising of their time, Magritte particularly. Precision and realism were important, enhancing the absurdity through near-exact reproduction. To see Magritte’s influence on Pop Art, it is

necessary to examine this new movement’s connections to surrealism, and look directly at several artists who had contact and knowledge of Magritte and his works.

The Pop Art movement was not so removed from the time of the surrealists that it needed a history book to absorb their methods. Many surrealists were living and still producing work, although the public’s interest had waned. The art world saw a resurgence in interest in Surrealism in the 1960s, with *Artforum* dedicating an entire issue to the movement. The cover was designed by Ed Ruscha and contained a half-page image of Magritte’s *Treachery of Images.*

Gablik and Russell contend that it was also a shift in culture that made the Pop artists want to try their hand at critiquing the banal: replication and production made anything accessible in quantity which, when coupled with the rapid stylistic change happening throughout the 1950s and 1960s, made high and low cultures come together in a way that there was “no inherent value contradiction implied in enjoying Bach and the Beatles.”

With the advent of the ability to reproduce art, music, and literature at a rate almost as quickly as it was created, the elite were no longer the possessors of high-cultural knowledge.

Magritte seemed to be an excellent point of departure for Pop and he was very popular in America in the 1960s. William Copley’s gallery in Beverly Hills exhibited quite a few of Magritte’s works beginning in 1948. Copley went on to represent several

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2 Barron, 26. I have been unable to located this volume beyond an image of the cover photo.
3 Russell and Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined*, 49.
4 Ibid, 41.
American Pop Artists such as Richard Hamilton and Andy Warhol. Magritte was also exhibited frequently in New York in the 1950s, thanks to his gallerists Sidney Janis and Alexandre Iolas. In 1965, two years prior to Magritte’s death, the Museum of Modern Art in New York held a major retrospective of his work, which no doubt was seen by many of New York’s artists.

The first major catalog essay was written in 1960 by Douglas MacAgy for the exhibition *René Magritte in America* held in Dallas. The essay focused on Magritte’s concept and ideas rather than meaning, since Magritte was insistent his work had no meaning to find. Following this exhibition was *The Vision of René Magritte* (1962) at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Magritte's work was a museum hit, and in 1964 Dominique de Menil organized *Magritte*, an exhibit, in Little Rock, Arkansas at the Arkansas Art Center. With this exhibition came André Breton’s late praise of Magritte’s work, some thirty-five years after Magritte sought it.

Iolas’ push for Magritte to produce more work that contributed to a rise in popularity and massive commercialization of his work. Iolas needed work that was saleable, the buyers wanted work that looked like Magritte’s 1930s work, and Magritte saw an opportunity to thoroughly work through all of the themes of his earlier catalog

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6 Barron, 10.

7 Ibid.

8 Tashjian, Magritte’s Last Laugh: A Surrealist’s Reception in America, 57.

9 Ibid.
and still remain financially secure.\textsuperscript{10} Many of his works from the 1950s and 1960s were gouaches, a medium which allowed him to work far more quickly than oil.\textsuperscript{11} He desired ubiquity and saw an opportunity for it in recreating his works with slight variants. In a letter to poet André Bosmans, Magritte discusses an upcoming show of his work at Iolas’ Paris gallery, he states that he has “redone a gouache with the pipe and its inscription (this is not a pipe), because it is desirable that such a thing is found in as many ‘households’ as possible.”\textsuperscript{12} But the same change in culture that allowed Magritte’s work to be seen and collected by so many, also made his works available to a new generation to analyze, be inspired by, and critique.

Magritte was harshly critical of Pop Art, often accusing it of being a fad, and essentially disposable. In an interview with Belgian journalist Claude Vial, Magritte let his disapproval be known:

Yes, I know I’m called the father of Pop Art, Op Art, and all kinds of other “arts” …But Pop Art is nothing but another version – an infinitely less audacious one – of the good old Dadaism of fifty years ago! Modern painting went through an evolution that ended with Picasso. Everything touted today as novelties is only a variation on what was already done so many years ago. How will painting evolve from here? Well… any way it can! …And Pop! Let’s just say that it’s not very serious, and that it’s probably not even art? Or perhaps [it is] poster art, advertising art, a very temporary fashionable art. It is effective enough in the streets, I admit, on young girls’ dresses.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Dawn Ades, Surrealist Art: The Lindy and Edwin Bergman Collection at The Art Institute of Chicago, (Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, 1997), 176.

\textsuperscript{13} Torczyner and Bassard, Magritte: The True Art of Painting, 48.
Magritte felt no pride in being the impetus for an artistic movement. He only found Pop Art to be reductive and unnecessary.

Despite his displeasure with the movement, many Pop artists were influenced by Magritte: mostly on a conceptual basis, although some artists responded to him in a purely visual manner, and some only through a similarity in process and history. Andy Warhol followed a similar career path as Magritte, first beginning his career with design and illustration for luxury shoe companies.\(^14\) Warhol’s career showcased his lifelong fascination with ads and their imagery and language, and a great deal of his later career was strictly commercial art.\(^15\) He favored repetition as Magritte did, and even executed his works in silkscreen making his multiples as quickly as possible. Like Magritte, he favored imagery that was omnipresent: food products, celebrities, and existing advertisements. He differed from Magritte in that Warhol embraces changes in technology and used them to his advantage, such as inconsistencies in the silkscreen gave his works a less-than-polished feel,\(^16\) whereas Magritte rejected advancements in technology and stayed true to his oil or gouache-painted realism.

Claes Oldenburg utilizes the colossal scale and vastness that is often found in Magritte’s work. In both Personal Values (fig. 43) and one image from the various works titled The Listening Room (fig. 44), ordinary objects are increased to gargantuan proportions, making them somewhat comical and frightening. The theme of inanimate


\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Joan Rothfuss and Elizabeth Carpenter, Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole: Walker Art Center Collection (New York: Walker Art Center, 2005), 573.
objects conveying meaning is everywhere in Oldenburg’s work. He employs the same comically large scale as Magritte (fig. 45), although Oldenburg does so to communicate something about the nature of the item, the viewer, or the site, Magritte does it merely to subvert conventions.

Ed Ruscha began his career as a graphic artist, similarly to Magritte. His word and image works function similarly to Magritte’s in that the text is mainly a visual element, not meant to convey further meaning to the viewer. Ruscha first encountered Magritte’s work in the libraries of his native Oklahoma City and recognized him as a “powerful figure”. He states in an interview with Lynn Zelevansky that he did not see an original Magritte until “maybe the late sixties.” When he moved to Los Angeles, Ruscha encountered Magritte’s work at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which is currently home to The Treachery of Images. Ruscha also encountered Magritte’s work through pictures and catalogs belonging to his dealer, Alexandre Iolas who was also representing Magritte in the 1960s. Shortly before Magritte died, Ruscha met him in Venice, Italy. Ruscha commented that “he looked more like a banker than an artist.” The artists and several other people had lunch together in the garden of a restaurant, as Magritte insisted on bringing his dog LouLou. Ruscha, in the same interview, described

17 Ibid, 435.
18 Rothfuss and Carpenter, Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole: Walker Art Center Collection, 493.
20 Ibid, 142.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 137.
Magritte as “a total gentleman, a kindly man”, which he found impressive given the magnitude of Magritte’s work and fame. Later in the interview, Ruscha states that he was not directly influenced by Magritte, but rather he was influenced by the impact Magritte had on his contemporaries, such as Jasper Johns.

Both Magritte and Jasper Johns show us everyday objects in unexpected ways, forcing us to rethink our relationship to them. Both artists worked through many variants on a theme: Magritte had his pipes, Johns had his flags (fig. 46). Like Magritte, Johns used a commonplace item to test the limits of painting and calling into question the nature of the images: is it a flag or a representation of a flag? Although Johns has never specifically referenced Magritte as an influence, the two did at least meet and Johns was an admirer of Magritte’s skill. In 1965 the two met at Magritte’s retrospective opening at MoMA in New York, and Magritte gifted Johns with a small sketch of works (fig. 47). It was the only time the two ever met, but Johns did collect at least one other work of Magritte’s during Magritte’s lifetime. Johns and Magritte both sought to redefine the viewer’s relationship between image, object, and representation.

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23 Ibid, 138.
24 Ibid, 140.
26 Ibid, 111.
27 Ibid, 114.
28 Ibid, 110.
29 Ibid, 11.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

In many ways, Magritte's personality was the polar opposite of his contemporaries. Flamboyance and extravagance apparently did not appeal to him. His own words show a man who has a greater concern for his reputation as an artist than of his legend as man. He lived discretely, painting without a traditional studio and shying away from the political upheavals that seemed to fuel his colleagues.

The antipathy for indulgence is seen in his choice of iconography: the common, recognizable objects over the distorted and unfamiliar dreamscapes. Magritte preferred to paint what he knew. At his inspirational disposal was an entire middle class lifestyle, strange in and of itself, if only for its unwavering consistency.

While Breton encouraged the Surrealist movement to abhor advertising on political principle, Magritte embraced it out of necessity to maintain gainful employment. A strong desire to maintain the lifestyle in which he and his wife were accustomed led Magritte to perfectly sensible and bourgeois career of commercial art. While his Surrealist colleagues used their term in commercial art to further their fine art career, it was essential that Magritte create commercial art in order to maintain a fine art career. Despite his recognition, Magritte's notoriety was less substantial, and therefore less lucrative, than some of his more ostentatious contemporaries such as Salvador Dalí.

Instead, Magritte chose to live like his bowler-hatted man: someone who becomes part of the background despite his pervasiveness in the world. The lifestyle of the
everyman, rather than that of the outspoken, artist allowed Magritte to stay close to the bourgeois elements that provided inspiration. He did not rely on the "persona" of artist to drive home his point that there is mystery everywhere if we just stop to look. The Bowler-Hatted man was a relatable figure because he was an extension of an already established stereotype. Because Magritte lived a staid, bourgeois existence, his bowler-hatted man feels authentic as a spotlight on bizarre world all around, rather than a caricature meant to lampoon middle class life.

No surprise that Magritte was displeased in being an inspiration to Pop Art. Being selected by these artists as one of the harbingers of Pop put Magritte up above his usual vantage point of average man: he was now a celebrity. This shift in popularity had a marked effect on damaging Magritte's ability to live a somewhat anonymous life. As seen through his writings, he was constantly vexed by media attention, and often annoyed with accolades and applause. He saw no need for the artists to be inspired by him, as he felt they were just paraphrasing the dadas before him. But perhaps it was Pop Artists modification of Magritte's state from bourgeois man to celebrity artist that caused him the most anxiety.

Magritte's concern for his reputation as an artist rather than a character seems to have served him well. It is often difficult to separate the artist from the artwork, as they exist as part of the character of Artist. But Magritte's did not embrace that character, instead wanting his work to stand for itself. He wanted to remain unseen, letting his work be discussed and remembered for its own artistic merits rather than his colorful lifestyle.
His life's project was to highlight the enigma of everyday, to expose the mystery in what is commonplace. He continued to draw inspiration from the mundane because that is how he lived his life. His conventionality was his greatest inspiration.
Fig. 1 *Cinéma Bleu*, René Magritte, 1925. Oil on canvas. 64 x 54 cm. Private Collection.
Figure 1. *The Difficult Crossing*, René Magritte, 1926. Oil on canvas. 65.3 x 80 cm. Private Collection.

Figure 2. *Cicero*, René Magritte, 1965. Oil on canvas. 99.4 x 81.3 cm. Private Collection.
Figure 3. *The Finery of the Storm*, René Magritte, 1927. Oil on canvas 81 x 116 cm. Private Collection.

Figure 4. *The Annunciation*, René Magritte, 1930. Oil on canvas. 113.7 x 145.8 cm. Tate Gallery, London, England.
Figure 5.  *The Flash*, René Magritte, 1959. Gouache and pencil on paper. 25.1 x 19.7 cm. Private Collection.
Figure 6. *The Human Condition*, René Magritte, 1933. Oil on canvas. 100 x 81 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland OH.
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Figure 46. *Sketches*, René Magritte, 1953. Pencil on paper, 26.7 x 21.6 cm. Collection of Jasper Johns.
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VITA

Amye M. Rappé was born October 22, 1982 in St. Louis, Missouri. She attended public schools and graduated from Parkway Central High School in 2001. After high school, she attended the University of Missouri-Columbia for two years, focusing on general education. In 2003, Amye moved to Kansas City to attend the Kansas City Art Institute. She graduated in a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Design from KCAI in 2007.

After working in consumer electronics for several years, Amye decided to pursue a Graduate Degree in Art History at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She was awarded a Graduate Teaching Assistant position with the UMKC Gallery of Art for two semesters. During her time at UMKC, Amye interned in the Photography department at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Other education has included several courses in bookbinding from Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and Penland School of Arts and Crafts, and an intensive six-week language immersion course at the Université Lumière Lyon 2 in Lyon, France.

Currently, Amye is in her second season as a volunteer violist with the KU Medical Arts Symphony. She plans to complete her degree requirements for a Master of Arts in Art History from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Fall of 2013.