**Surrealism: Artists & Characteristics**

WHAT IS SURREALISM

Surrealism, is an artistic movement stressing on the artists subconscious, where the artist focuses on their imagination, for imagery or to exploit unexpected juxtapositions. These juxtapositions are unexpected, because the appearance of the forms/subjects don’t look real, and oppose reality. In surrealist artworks, the subjects look like out their out of reality, in fact some surrealist artworks are inspired by the artist’s dreams. It means the union of the conscious and the unconscious thoughts, as if a dream or a fantasy gets real, also known as surreal. The movement made artists find beauty in the unexpected and the uncanny subjects. The world surrealist suggests beyond reality, it’s a combination of both realism and imagination too.

What are the characteristics of Surrealism?

In Surrealism, the artist writes down their own thoughts without any stopping or structure, this is called automatic writing. The Juxtaposition of the forms in a surrealist painting is usually showing imagery to put irrelevant objects together. However, even though they may be irrelevant, Surrealist try to put association between the 2 objects of surrealism, using the unconscious, and rendering these associations with such Juxtapositions. A key characteristic of Surrealism is that the artist relies on their unconscious, but reality and the conscious combines with this state of consciousness when the unconscious finds a way to express the reality and render it into the canvases that these artists make. Some artists may use Dreams and Fantasy to make an expression of the reality, and this can create a Dreamlike drawing that has meaning, whilst others depend on simply where their subconscious brings them, just like in automatism. Many various techniques can be used like frottage, where the texture below the paper is imprinted onto the paper by implementing it using tools like the wax crayon. Automatic drawing is an example of simply drawing without any planning of the conscious, whilst automatic painting was drawing shapes around randomly formed shapes, which can be made by apply sand and glue onto the canvas.

Who are the Significant Artists of this art movement and their artistic style?

Salvador Dali (Dreamlike) – Salvador Dali was a significant surrealist, born in 11th of May, 1904 in Figueres (Girona), son of Salvador Dali Cusi hand Felipa Domenech Ferres. In 1908, Anna Maria, Salvador’s little sister was born, and Salvador got enrolled into the State Primary School, under the teacher Esteve Trayter. In 1910, he was enrolled into a Hispano-French school, to learn French, his future cultural vehicle. In the 1920s, he got accepted to the San Fernando Academy in Madrid, then 4 years later, he got expelled as he didn’t want his artworks to be judged by examiners. He had experimented on futurism and cubism, on a trip in Paris, Andre Breton showed him Surrealism. In 1925, his first solo exhibition was held in Barcelona. After that, he returned to Catalonia, where his artworks become more bizarre and grotesque. In 1938, Salvador was influenced by the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, when he had evolved his art style, and was expelled from Surrealism. In the 1940s, he teamed up with Alfred Hitchcock to create dream-like sequences for movies like Spellbound. In the 1950s, he created 19 canvases with themes of religion, history and science, which he had called, “nuclear mysticism”. He loved the idea of geometry, DNA, divinity, and visual illusions. By the 60s, he was focusing on space and science, playing around with dimensions like immortality. In the 70s, his health had started declining and he died of heart failure on January 23, 1989.

A huge effect on Salvador’s artistic style was that his mother was a religious Catholic, and his father was an atheist, which showed how Salvador drew about real worlds combined with the imaginative thoughts and beliefs, kind of like what Surrealism really is. Within his meeting with Sigmund Freud, Salvador has used the Freudian theory, where he draws his dreams and hallucinations into rendered paintings. Eroticism, death and even decay are themes that occur across his paintings, as a part of his reflection of psychoanalysis theories, he had drawn his childhood memories deliberately as if to make an autobiography. He had shown easily interpreted imagery in his works as well. He was once part of Andre Bretons theory of automatism, but he drew misunderstandings together with his conscious. He draws landscapes beside the sea, similar to the one in his house at Figueres. His works were more of dreamlike.

André Breton (Automatism) – André Breton was born on 19th of February, 1896, in Tinchebrady, Normandy, France. At a young age, he learned about medicine and psychiatry, and studied mental illnesses. During World War 1, he worked in psychiatric wards in Nantes, whilst looking at the works of Sigmund Freud. In 1916, he joined the Dadaist movement in France, with other artists like Man Ray, and Marcel Duchamp. He had major literature works too, wherein 1920, he wrote a book of literary “Surrealism”, titled “Les Champs magnetiques” (Magnetic Fields), which started surreal automatism writing. In 1924, he founded the Bureau of Surrealist research to start the movement of Surrealism. In 1935, at the “International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture”, he had gotten into an argument with other Surrealist, thus all Surrealists were banned from the Congress. Along with World War 2, he had been into the medical corps for his country, the French. The Vichy Government disqualified his writings, so in 1941, André had escaped to the U.S, where from 1953 to 1958, he had penned numerous works, including literature, and also artworks, like “Manifestos of Surrealisms”. From 1959 to 1965, he made a display in Paris to showcase all of his works. André Breton had died at the age of 70, at Paris, on the 26th of September 1966.

André Breton’s artistic style included him focusing on collage and printmaking, sometimes focusing on combining texts and images. His ideology was to combine the unconscious with symbols to express oneself. He was focusing more on automatism too, where once the tool is on the canvas, it would never leave the canvas until the work is done, it’s like writing in cursive, where once the pencil is on the paper, it would only leave the paper once a word is written. The strokes of the tool are controlled by the unconscious of the artist.

When and Where did Surrealism start?

Surrealism originated in the late 1910s and the early 1920s, and it was officially brought up by Andre Bréton, who was a critic and poet, born in 1896 and died in 1966, when he had published the Manifesto of Surrealism.

What art movements came before and after Surrealism?

Before Surrealism, there were a few movements. A really good example is the Dada movements, which occurred around World War 1, and it defied reason, but unlike the Dada movement, Surrealism didn’t focus on negation but rather on positive expression. Surrealism was also an alternative to Cubism, because it had more freedom in terms of the shapes and forms. Modern art, also done by Salvador Dali, had occurred after surrealism, it focused on projecting the subjects into the world based on the artist’s own perspective.

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Why is Surrealism unique among other art movements?

What makes Surrealism different is that the artwork is more controlled by the unconscious mind, to see the creativity and imagination in its purest from one’s mind. Unlike Dadaism, it wasn’t anti-art, it wasn’t limited to negation, and expressing opinions with other factors like politics. Surrealism focused on one’s imagination, some artists can even use their dreams, but the artworks aren’t clear, the nature in the images don’t make sense, just like the nature of our unconscious and dreams. Unlike fantasy, Surrealism has some reality in it, since it’s a combination of the reality, and the unconscious, and they express once mind, not just making up different images that would not exist in the real world. In surrealism, the images may sometimes feel incomplete, not full of much details, or variety, they keep themes limited to a few, but not too many, it’s like taking a photo of one’s mind, not what they simply imagine, or look at, but express by using unconscious mind and the conscious real world.

How do Surrealist Artists utilise objects around them to create their artworks?

Surrealist artists use the objects around them in many ways. For example, Salvador Dali had used objects from his childhood memory to implement into his artworks, it is possible that the landscape from his painting “The Persistence of Memory”, is part of a seaside in one of the places he lived in, like in Catalonia or Figueres. However, a reasonable explanation is that the objects around them can be used as stimuli for their subconscious thoughts, which the surrealist renders into the canvas. The essence, or the opinion behind those objects is expressed by unconscious, or the objects are simply combined from the perspective the artist wants to look at the artwork, like in the “Son of Man”.

Analysis

The Persistence of Memory – Salvador Dali

Colour and Value: The artwork is based on natural colours, the colours are simply based on showing the audience what that object is, not add any expression into it. For example: the sky is coloured blue, simply to show that that’s the sky. The value in the colours is adjusted to where the sunlight is supposed to go to. For example: the background is full of light colours, that’s more warm, just to show the sunlight reflecting off the cliff, the ocean, and most importantly the sky shows the sunrise/sunset. However, the tables are in darker colours, simply because not a lot of light is reaching there, and the colours start to get a bit more monochromatic there.

Line: The artwork uses lines appropriately, just to show what’s going on clearly. The clocks have more curved lines to show that they are not solid, and more of melting, whilst the table uses geometric, straight lines, to show that they’re rigid.

Shape: The shapes are used to make sure the audience knows what the objects are, but the shapes of the clocks don’t look rigid, just to signify that the clocks aren’t really rigid.

Texture: The painting feels smooth, as they painting simply wants to show a landscape and look realistic, so the painting style doesn’t require any special techniques to show other expressions.

Space: The objects aren’t compact together, the cliff and the ocean are far away, whilst the furniture and the clocks are moderately apart from each other.

Form: The form is 3D objects rendered in 2D forms, that may look real, but the state of the clocks is what sets of the surrealism effect, it puts this image of non-solid clocks onto real solid objects, combining the thoughts of the unconscious with the conscious world where realities and memories are rendered. Its composition is full of a setting or rising sky, with a cliff to show a distance, and the living room furniture to show the location of the clocks. In addition to that, the clocks are the most symbolic part of this painting, and they are the only things that kind of add the surrealism effect, along with the fact that a living room is outside in the painting.

Contrast: The juxtaposition of the melting clock on the edge of the furniture shows how flexible the clock is, shows that the clock is melting. Salvador has used things like use to show some other effects too, like when you find an old decaying place, it’s covered with insects, nets, etc. It’s interesting how one of the clocks is covered with ants, which symbolises that the clock may be old and decaying. That’s a very good technique that Salvador, where he leaves a trace of what’s happening as an object in the painting, like a clue in a crime scene. Salvador also added darkness, or shaded behind objects to show the shadows, and so the direction of where the light source is.

Repetition and Pattern: To put it simply, there isn’t really any patterns in the painting. There may be a repletion or pattern, since only clocks melt, but not anything else, showing a symbol, but also a general rule in this painting.