Global Surrealism (Chicago, 4-5 Nov 16)

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, Nov 4–05, 2016
Deadline: Jun 30, 2016

Stephanie D'Alessandro

Global Surrealism
Convening Session

Organized by:
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Matthew Gale, Curator of Modern Art and Head of Displays, Tate Modern

In Fall 2020 the Art Institute of Chicago and Tate Modern will present an exhibition dedicated to the topic of global surrealism. The project takes as its poetic inspiration the moment in 1941 when a core group of Paris-based Surrealists including Victor Brauner, André Breton, Oscar Dominguez, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Helena Holzer, Wifredo Lam, Jacqueline Lamba, and André Masson, were living in Marseille and anxiously awaiting their exit visas to escape from war-torn Europe. They lived a tight communal existence and made art—group collages and exquisite corpse drawings, as well as a set of Tarot cards that symbolizes the unknown fate they faced together. The group would soon disperse and by the end of the war, though many Surrealists survived, Surrealism itself would never be the same. Historical assessments of careers today are defined by the war, and the legacy of Surrealism in the U.S. is most often traced to the birth of Abstract Expressionism. The Art Institute and Tate Modern's project, however, seeks to retrace these routes and re-draw the map of this most important movement of the twentieth century. It challenges the simple linear trajectory of influence that came to dominate most historical accounts in order to explore Surrealism beyond the mainstream and to open critical re-thinking. The foundations of the project can be found in the history of the movement itself: indeed, the need for a true "International Surrealism" was identified already in 1935 by poet Benjamin Péret, who warned that "to keep from drying out," the movement should "go beyond the narrow framework of this country's borders and adopt an international aspect."

Our aims are wide and include charting the global nature of Surrealism before World War II; identifying the changing vehicles of international transmission and exchange (exhibitions, journals, and mail) during and after the war; re-imaging models of artistic influence in light of artists' networks; identifying the character of international Surrealism after World War II beyond the link between automatism and abstraction; and reassessing the late careers of key early Surrealists (and early careers of key later artists) within this larger global and postwar context. The goal will be to understand Surrealism afresh with these international perspectives and how we might even draw a new Surrealist map of the world.

To begin to address our goals, we will organize a two-day, closed-door convening session in Chicago in the fall of 2016. Papers from a multitude of disciplines are invited to consider topics, which could include, but are not limited to: what constitutes Surrealist art? How did national traditions and differing social and political contexts across the globe inform local manifestations of Surrealist art before, during, and after World War II? How did these manifestations cohere to, form links with, or differ from one another? How does the concept of Surrealist art stand up to scrutiny once we consider it in a global context? How did Surrealist art influence the language of architecture, design, advertising and marketing, and what are its most significant manifestations? How did Surrealism impact the social and political unrest of the 1960s? These and other questions will be critical to our discussions.

To participate please send an abstract of 1-2 double-spaced pages, cv, and a letter of interest by 30 June 2016 to:
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