

*This is Not A Zine:
The Art of Rene Magritte*



Ceci n'est pas une zine.

*A Zine by
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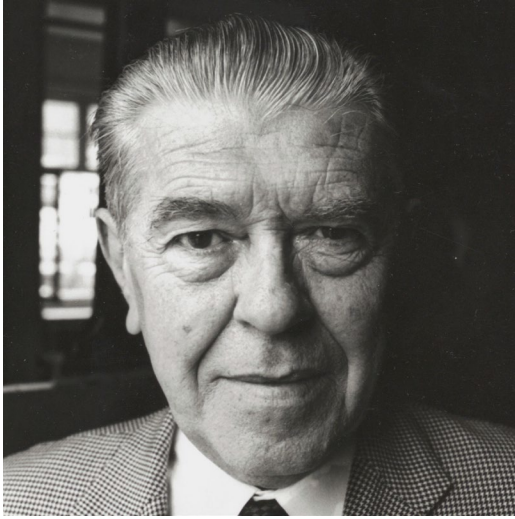
Introduction

René Magritte was a mid twentieth century painter who disrupted the traditional ways of seeing. Magritte's paintings like *The Treachery of Images* portray the message that images and words are not the same as what they represent. Magritte's paintings are filled with visual puzzles to represent this. He uses a realistic, calm painting style and stages impossible scenes that seem strange. Magritte was a key figure in the Surrealist movement as he used his art to question language, reality and perception.

This zine explores Magritte's life, his contribution to Surrealism, some examples of his paintings and his lasting influence on the future of art.



Life of Magritte



René François Ghislain Magritte was born in Lessines, Belgium in 1898 to a middle-class family. His mother was a milliner, and his father was a tailor and textile merchant. When Magritte was only fourteen years old, his mother died by suicide which can be seen as a motif for parts of his art pieces.

Magritte started art lessons around the age of twelve and later studied at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels where he first encountered Futurism and Cubism in art. Starting in the 1920s, Magritte started shifting towards Surrealism. In 1927, he and his wife, Georgette, moved to Paris where he joined a Surrealist group. Magritte was not financially successful in Paris, so he returned to Brussels in 1930. While continuing to paint, Magritte made money there by doing advertising and commercial design. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, he developed the style that shaped his work. For instance, ordinary objects put together in strange ways and images that make the viewer question what he is seeing. After the second World War, Magritte's reputation grew. By the 1960s, he was recognized as a Surrealist painter. In 1967, Magritte died in Brussels but following his death, his work only continued to be known. Until today, there are exhibitions and museums around the world that are dedicated to Magritte and his artwork.

Magritte and Surrealism

The Surrealism movement emerged in the 1920s and its goal was to free the mind from the constraints of bourgeois norms, rationality and traditional art. In 1924, André Breton wrote his Manifesto of Surrealism. He described Surrealism as “pure psychic automatism,” meant to express the true functioning of thought without being controlled by any outside factors. Surrealists used Freud's psychoanalytic theories as they experimented with dream imagery, symbolic transformations and juxtapositions.

Magritte's approach to Surrealism looks different than other Surrealists. Magritte's paintings look conservative at first, but the combinations are astonishing. For instance, a train emerging from a fireplace or a street at night under a bright blue sky. These combinations questions our assumptions about time, space and logic.



Magritte's Surrealism is more about big ideas and less about spontaneous painting. He hid faces, repeated similar figures and named his works with surprising titles to express that words, images and real things do not always match. Magritte's essay *Words and Images* explores how pictures and language work. He also explores this idea in his painting *The Treachery of Images*. Magritte is a key Surrealist with art that is poetic and deeply thoughtful.

Magritte's Art

The Treachery of Images (1929)



The Treachery of Images is an oil painting on canvas. The background is a neutral, beige color and a brown tobacco pipe is in the center. Under the pipe, Magritte neatly wrote “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.”

Magritte’s style is similar to that of commercial advertising or illustration. He pairs the photographic looking image with a statement that contradicts it. The French statement translates to “This is not a pipe.” He’s creating a contradiction between visual and verbal information. He uses a clam composition along with a basic color palette so the viewer can focus his attention on the pipe and the statement. This emphasizes a clear tension between what looks like a clear image and the contradicting sentence under it.

The painting emphasizes the idea that reality and representations are not the same. The pipe in the painting is not an actual pipe but rather a painting of a pipe. In terms of Surrealism, the painting focuses on the treachery of images in museums, advertisements and culture. In this witty way, Magritte draws attention to the gap between what is seen, read and assumed.

The Treachery of Images is a powerful piece by Magritte. It is simple but also sparks deep thought. As a painting of Surrealism, it challenges how people view and read information in a gentle way. Just through a single sentence and object, Magritte causes viewers to think critically about representation.

Magritte's Art

The Son of Man (1964)



The Son of Man is an oil painting on canvas. It shows a man in a dark coat and a red tie standing in front of a stone wall with a body of water and the cloudy sky in the background. He is wearing a black bowler hat, and a green apple is floating right in front of his face. The colors are mostly gloomy and neutral. The apple stands out as it is bright green and the only part of the painting not in subdued colors.

The composition of this painting is symmetrical.

man's clothes and skin look realistic which makes the apple seem more out of place. The bowler hat connects to a theme present in many of Magritte's pieces. It represents the anonymous "everyman" figure. The simple background is also a contrast to the strange green apple.

The title, Son of Man, comes from a biblical phrase suggesting that is a representation of the human condition. The apple alludes to the original sin but functions as an obstacle obscuring the man's sight. The implication is that we hide from others, or ourselves, through the social roles, appearances or the images we project.

The Son of Man is one of Magritte's most famous and highly reproduced images. This painting is so successful because he takes many complex ideas and combines them into one painting. Ideas of identity, temptation, religion and anonymity are all represented. Contemporary viewers feel like they are looking at a current painting. This painting clearly shows how a basic image can really encompass who we are as complex human beings.

Magritte's Lasting Influence

Magritte's influence on art reached beyond Surrealists. He is described as the father of Pop art by many historians and critics. Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns are artists who borrowed Magritte's strategies of using ordinary objects, flat backgrounds and subtle irony to question reality.

Magritte's work also impacted conceptual art and contemporary theory. Philosopher Michel Foucault wrote about Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*. He used it as an example of how language and images can disrupt conceptual meanings. Many museums have exhibitions on Magritte and contemporary art. These exhibitions, like the one at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, show how Magritte's paintings echo in later generations of artists and photographers.

Magritte's art is also borrowed in advertising and can be seen in popular culture. Ad campaigns use his motifs like floating men or objects labeled in shocking ways to make images that spark thought. His art can also be seen online on album covers, in movies and in memes.

Magritte's popularity continues to grow. His museum presence is more abundant, and his paintings sell at high prices. New exhibitions are reinterpreting his paintings. Magritte's paintings still have the ability to captivate a twenty first century audience.



Magritte and the Future of Art

Surrealism, and the art of Magritte in particular, are a powerful example of the type of art that is becoming more important in today's world. There has been a clear shift in the art world. Historically, artists differentiated themselves primarily based on their technical skills. Michaelangelo's David, perhaps his most celebrated piece, was renowned for achieving a level of realism far greater than virtually any artist of his time. The talent to create realistic art was revered.

Today, the technical skill that the art demonstrates is often subordinated to the message of the art. After all, if realism was the main goal, we are not so far from the day when AI surpasses even the greatest artist in that respect. Although Magritte was clearly a technically skilled artist, his surreal style was not prized for its realism, but for the messages, meaning, ideas, and feelings that his art conveys. With piece after piece that challenges the perceptions of the viewer and forces him or her to contemplate ideas of truth and reality, Magritte genuinely represents a contemporary window into the future of art.



Conclusion

René Magritte's paintings encourage viewers to question what they see, read and think they know just like a riddle. He places familiar paintings into unfamiliar combinations to reveal the unpredictability of images and language. Whether it's a pipe that is "not a pipe" or a man whose face is replaced by an apple, Magritte's paintings leave its viewer deep in thought.

Magritte's paintings forces the viewer to focus on the gap between reality and representation. His art is not only an example of Surrealism, but also a constant reminder to look at the world carefully and creatively.



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