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Working with
IMAGINATION
Special Feature on
RENÉ
MAGRITTE



THE “ORDINARY” WORLD OF RENÉ MAGRITTE

Find out how imagination
can transform even the most everyday places.

Imagine a world in which shoes grow toes, trains scream out of fireplaces, an eye stares out of the evening meal, and people fall out of the skies like April showers; what kind of place is this and what kind of person invented it?

The twentieth-century Belgian painter René Magritte, created some of the strangest visions in the history of art. In Europe, during the 1920s, artists and writers who had survived World War I were rebelling against all conventional values. They developed a new kind of art called *Surrealism*. The Surrealists turned inward, taking refuge in a private reality based on dreams, memories and feelings. While all the other Surrealists were exploring fantastic techniques, the new science of psychology and the “unconscious,” Magritte worked with ordinary images from the real world. He painted objects—chairs, tables, dishes, windows—exactly the way he saw them. And he described his universe as a “real world we think we know but don’t know at all.” His painting style is very realistic—no strange techniques, thick brushstrokes or impossible colors. Magritte’s visions achieve such power be-



cause the images are so familiar and painted in such a lifelike way.

Look at the two works on these pages, and at the cover painting. Exactly what is it that is so fantastic about them? Put your hand over the toes in the work on the cover, and then over the apple floating in front of the man’s face, left. Imagine the picture on the right *without* the little men suspended in the sky. Would the resulting paintings be at all strange? Would they even be interesting? Magritte believed “there is a secret link between certain images. When you discover it, you will be able to create a new image which will be absolutely right.” By imaginatively changing certain aspects of the familiar world surrounding him, Magritte seemed to discover a new reality.

René Francois Magritte was born in the small Belgian town of Lessines in 1898. The son of a middle class merchant, Magritte was the oldest of three boys. When he was 16, he met the girl who was to become his wife six years later. Young René was not a scholar, so he left college to study art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels. When he graduated, he got a job as a designer in a wall-paper factory, and later



Both paintings you see here are of the artist himself, but have you ever seen self-portraits like these before?

he designed posters. It was not until he was nearly 40 that he was able to paint full time.

The creator of such shocking and fantastic images as *Red Model* (on the cover) and *Portrait* (on page 4) lived most of his life in an ordinary house in an obscure Belgian suburb. In fact, there was only one unusual event in Magritte's entire life. When he was 14, his mother drowned herself. As you will see later, this

tragic incident had a great effect on his art.

Magritte, the suburban commuter in his black suit and bowler hat, turns up again and again in his paintings. His silent and solitary figure stands with his back toward us, his face hidden behind objects (left), or as all the floating men raining from the sky in the painting above. Magritte's ability to turn dull, ordinary objects into unforgettable,

haunting visions is one of the most imaginative achievements in modern art.

In this issue, you'll learn more about the way in which Magritte created his strange images and see how other artists have used imagination. You'll meet a young artist who uses several art forms to communicate her own unique fantasies, and finally, you'll have an opportunity to express your own imagination in a new way.

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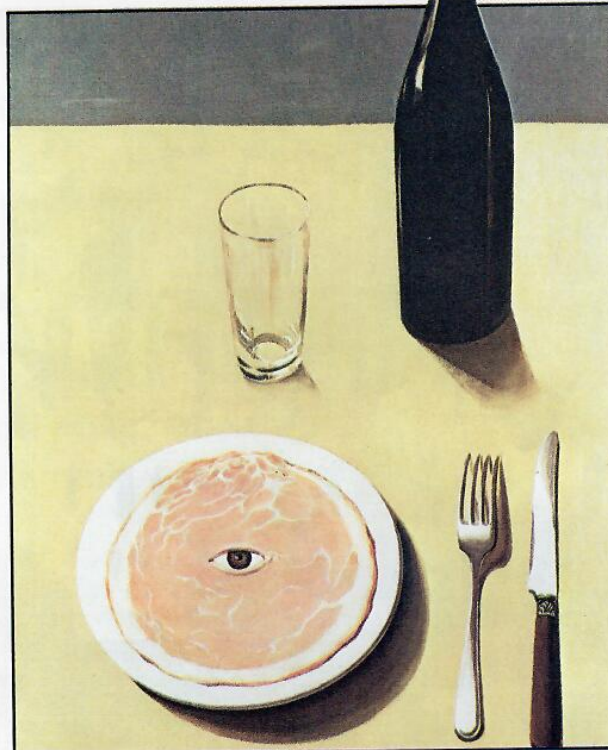
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MAGIC ROOMS

“I want to make the most familiar objects scream aloud.”
—René Magritte



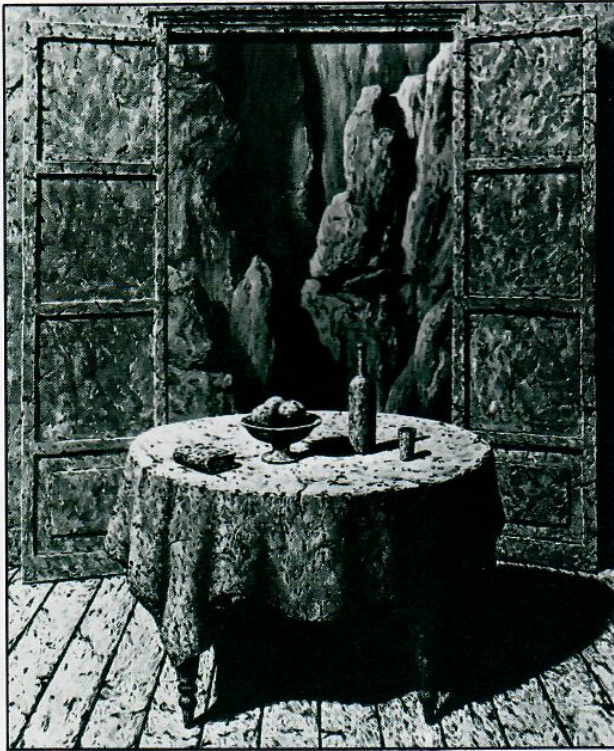
Portrait, 1935. Museum of Modern Art, NY. Gift of Kay Sage Tanguy.

What makes this image of a simple table setting one of Magritte's most popular paintings?

To look at a Magritte painting is to step through the barriers of time, space, and reality. The experience is almost like going “through the looking glass”; up is down, small is large, living things are stone, solid rock is lighter than air. These effects didn't just “happen.” Magritte used a number of very definite imaginative techniques to communicate his world to other people.

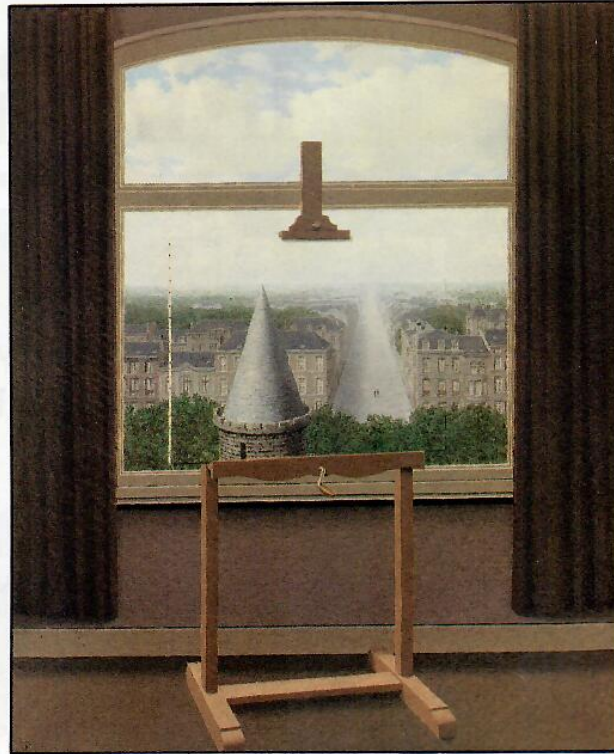
Transformation was one of his favorite devices. Objects change right in front of our eyes. A woman becomes a fish, people turn to wood, or old boots grow toes (or are the feet on the cover becoming shoes?). Two images can be *juxtaposed*, or joined together, in impossible combinations. A new and sinister image can be created with this technique, such as the ordinary man who, with his face hidden behind an apple, has become the mysterious and frightening figure on page 2. Many of these same men, who would be unnoticed if standing at a bus stop or walking in the street, become menac-

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Memory of a Journey III, 1951. Private Collection, NY.

How can the element of texture completely change an ordinary scene?



Euclidean Walks, 1955. The Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Look at this picture carefully. Are you really looking out the window?

ing figures when *juxtaposed* above the rooftops of a city scene (page 3). Magritte also used the device he called *levitation* (a term employed by magicians when they suspend things in the air). Heavy objects such as people, apples, and mountains appear fantastic when they float above the earth as if by magic.

Look at the magic scenes on these two pages. They are really based on objects that can be found in any ordinary room—two table settings and a window. But how eerie they are. Only one simple change has been made in *Portrait* (above left), but what a change. Magritte often removed one object from its usual environment and placed it in an unfamiliar one, a process he called *dislocation*. But why did he choose an eye? Why not an ear, a mouth, or a whole face? What makes the eye exactly the “right” feature of the human face to *dislocate*? Magritte also liked to *reverse the laws of nature*. He would show fireproof objects bursting

into flame, skies of solid blue cubes, and rooms made of stone. Impossible textures and *scale* changes (such as the gigantic items in this month’s Masterpiece on pages 8-9) were other ways in which Magritte changed nature.

Many of Magritte’s techniques can be found in the work, above, right. Here he questions reality in several complex ways. What are we actually seeing through the window? Is it the “real” scene or the painted version, which matches the view exactly? But what is behind the painted version? To visually illustrate his statement, “Painting is something different than the reality it represents,” Magritte uses the device of *transparency*. One part of the picture “reads” in two very different ways. The *picture within a picture* technique presents the canvas in front of the arched window framed by curtains, almost like a theatrical drama. And what part do the positive and negative shapes of the tower and the road play in this drama?

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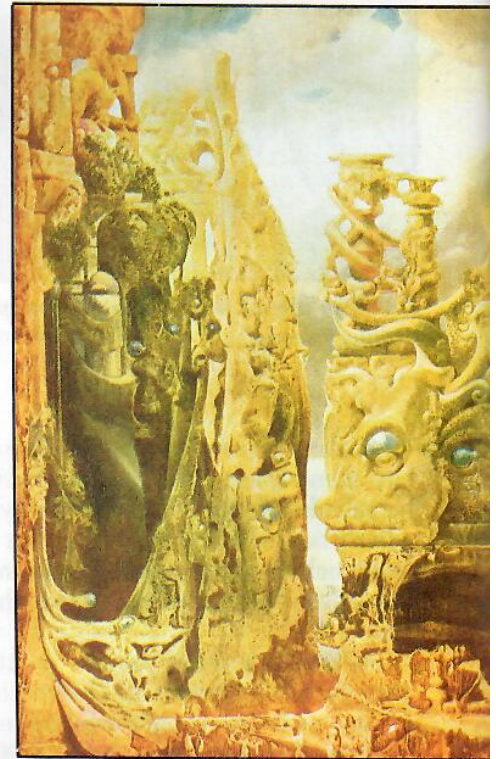
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IMAGINARY WORLDS

Discover other ways artists have been able to communicate their very private visions.

A World of Monsters

During the Middle Ages, the church was one of the most important forces in Europe. Nearly all artists worked for the church and it was their job to show people exactly what would happen to them if they were “bad.” The underworld, Hell, was shown as a dark, cold, dangerous, and terrifying place from which there was no escape. Horrible monsters, such as those shown here in the engraving by the 15th-century German artist Martin Schongauer, tortured those sinners who had been wicked enough to have been sent to Hell. The artist combines some of the more frightening aspects of real animals—scales, forked tongues, tentacles, hooves, horns, teeth, tails, claws, beaks, fur, wings—with human features. By exaggerating and distorting “natural” forms, Schongauer showed the people of the time a nightmare world that it would be best to avoid.



Visions of the Mind

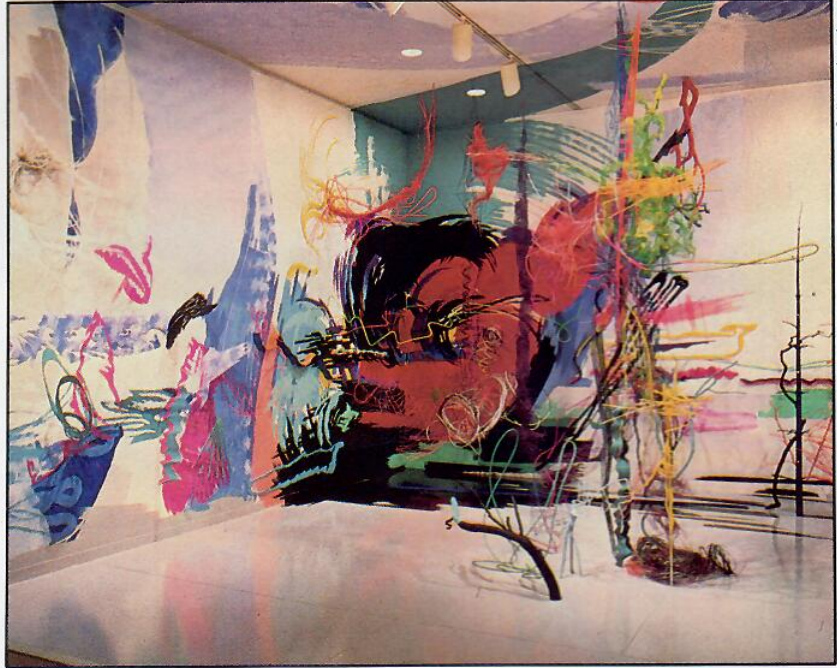
Some artists create a world in which everything is totally fantastic. Does the landscape depicted by the 20th-century German Max Ernst, called *The Eye of Silence*, bear much resemblance to anything you’ve ever seen before? Shapes drip and ooze, tendrils creep and twine, and eye-like growths seem to stare out from every corner of this horrible universe. The art of Ernst and most of the other Sur-

Contemporary artist Judy Pfaff.



Max Ernst (1891-1975). *The Eye of Silence*, 1943-44. Washington University Art Gallery, St. Louis.

realists was greatly influenced by new psychological ideas. Ernst believed that dreams and feelings could flow directly from the “unconscious” mind to the canvas. He used new, unplanned techniques which required little conscious thought. He poured, scraped, splattered, and even burned his paintings. The bizarre shapes and textures in *Eye of Silence* were created by pressing two wet oil paintings together, then pulling them apart.



Judy Pfaff (b. 1945). *Kabuki* (from “Deep Water” series, 1961. Holly Solomon Gallery, photo by Julius Kozłowski).

A Fantasy for Today

The fantasies of today’s artists take many forms. They are not limited to conventional paintings, drawings or sculptures. American artist Judy Pfaff recently completed an unusual environmental sculpture that occupies an entire room. *Deep Water* shows us what it might be like to move through a coral reef located on the ocean floor. It is like escaping into a colorful, silent world far from reality. But it is also like being inside a bright, three-dimensional abstract painting. A wavy, green spiral of cardboard grows out of a painted tree branch. Up ahead, red hatchings slowly weave through a large, shiny, plastic swirl. Wildly painted brushstrokes on large transparent sheets give the feeling of moving tides or layers of ocean currents. Lines, shapes, and colors seem to hang suspended, breaking up the room and making us more aware of the spaces in between.



PERSONAL VALUES

by René Magritte

art &
man

Masterpiece of the Month 3



The Meaning Behind *Personal Values*

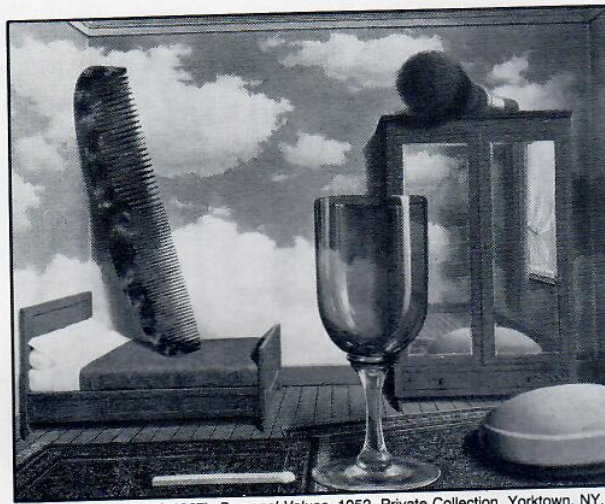
“The invisible is only the visible hidden.”

—René Magritte

A comb, a glass, a match, a piece of soap and a shaving brush—all ordinary objects except for one thing—their size. They tower over the tiny bed and cabinet. They nearly burst out of the small room that encloses them. The anxiety produced by the sight of this confining little cell is relieved only by the “opening” of the mirror on the right. What else is strange about this painting?

What does this work *mean* to you? What do you think it is all about? Magritte saw hidden, sometimes very sinister, meanings in the most ordinary objects. There is something frightening about a bar of soap as big as a person or a huge comb leaning over the bed, its sharp teeth ready to fall. These small personal objects have become huge and menacing and we have become tiny, powerless, and trapped in the room with them. Could there be a hint of violence in the old shoes which are becoming living toes, on the cover, or the eye leering out of the ham slice on page 4? Perhaps Magritte is saying something about the importance of objects in our lives and how they can change and turn on us. What comments might Magritte be making about conformity, routine, and industrial society in *Golconda* on page 3? And look at the objects on the ground surrounding the feet on the cover—old coins, a match, a cigarette stub and the crumpled fragment of a newspaper. What might this say about change and a “throw away” world?

Most artists use titles to clarify the meanings of their works. The names Magritte gives to his paintings are of very little help. In fact, Magritte’s titles were made up sometimes years after the painting



René Magritte (1898-1967). *Personal Values*, 1952. Private Collection, Yorktown, NY.

was finished, and many were suggested by Magritte’s friends. “The titles of my paintings accompany them in the same way that names go with objects—without explaining them.” What do the words “personal values” mean when you look at the painting on the previous pages? Does the title *Golconda* help in figuring out the meaning of the work on page 3? *Golconda* was a city in ancient India famous for

diamonds. Are the men diamonds? Are the dull, depressing buildings a satirical comparison to a rich, fabled, exotic city? And what about *Euclidian Walks* on page 5? Euclid was a Greek mathematician who developed geometry, a science having to do with shapes such as circles, squares, and triangles. There are two tiny figures walking down the road in the painting. Who might Magritte have meant them to be? What geometric shape do both the tower and the “walk” beside it take? What feeling do you get when you look at the positive and negative versions of this shape? Notice that not only are the two shapes alike, but their textures and shading are very similar. Do they seem to change as you stare at them?

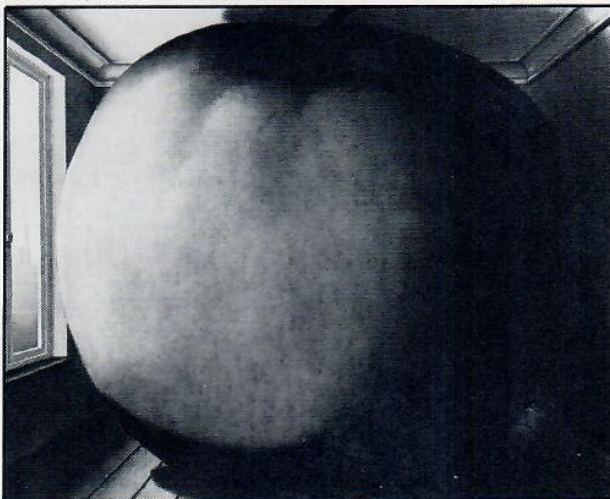
We know how Magritte worked and a few things about his life, but Magritte didn’t like to talk about his art. The more we learn about his paintings, the less certain we can be about their “meanings.” One thing we do know is that Magritte’s works have an immediate and powerful impact. Like all great art, his paintings can be interpreted differently by each person who sees them. René Magritte felt that his images should speak for themselves, so when he was asked what he painted and why, he would answer, “Life obliges me to do something, so I paint.”



The Lovers, 1928. Richard S. Zeisler Collection, NY.

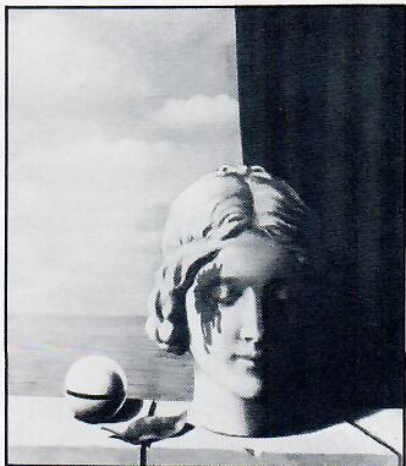
Magritte's figures all look alike. When we see their faces, they are always calm, expressionless, and blank. However, most of the faces are hidden—by apples, or birds, or veils, or shrouds, such as those covering this pair of Lovers.

The Listening Room, 1953. Private Collection.



*Magritte's paintings are filled with small rooms crowded with gigantic objects that seem to swell up and push us to one side, such as the one in Personal Values. This one, *The Listening Room*, is occupied by an enormous, bloated apple.*

*This painting, *Memory*, is one of Magritte's most direct references to the death of his mother. The calm, unreal, stone head of a woman sits on a windowsill in front of a watery landscape. The cold, marble statue is spattered with red, living blood.*



Memory, 1942. Private Collection.

A Haunted Moment

Every life has a turning point. René Magritte's occurred early one March morning.

René Magritte lived 69 years—practically all of them very ordinary, conventional and almost dull. His days were very regular. He painted very neatly in a corner of his bedroom in his little home in a Brussels suburb. He was always well-dressed in a black suit and bowler hat. By looking at Magritte's paintings, would you have guessed him to have been a person like this? His images are sinister, absurd, frightening, and highly imaginative. And there was one incident in his life that turns up again and again in his paintings.

It was evening, March 11, 1912, in the small Belgian town of Chatelet, and the members of the Magritte family were getting worried. It was almost midnight, and still there was no sign of Regina Magritte. They remembered that she had been more worried and tired than usual and had spent the day in bed. Finally, Magritte's father went to the police station. Everyone searched frantically throughout the night. At dawn, in desperation, they began to search the river. Fourteen-year-old René was there when his mother's body was found. Her face was shrouded in the nightdress she had been wearing. It is said that when her face was uncovered, it wore an expression of calm beauty. Magritte showed no reaction at the time, but when, knowing this story, we look at his later paintings, many images become clear.

Artist of the Month

RANA YOUNER: “Beyond Reality”

We usually think that photography has to do with the *real* world. But seventeen-year-old Rana Youner has used it to create a fantastic one.

Rana Youner has created a surprising work called “Beyond Reality.” When we look at it, our eyes go first to the pink cat and the girl with orange hair. Then we look to the brightly colored world beyond them. How was it made? Is it a drawing or a photograph?

Rana Youner is a senior at Hastings High School in New York. She told us more about her Scholastic Award-winning work when we met her in person.

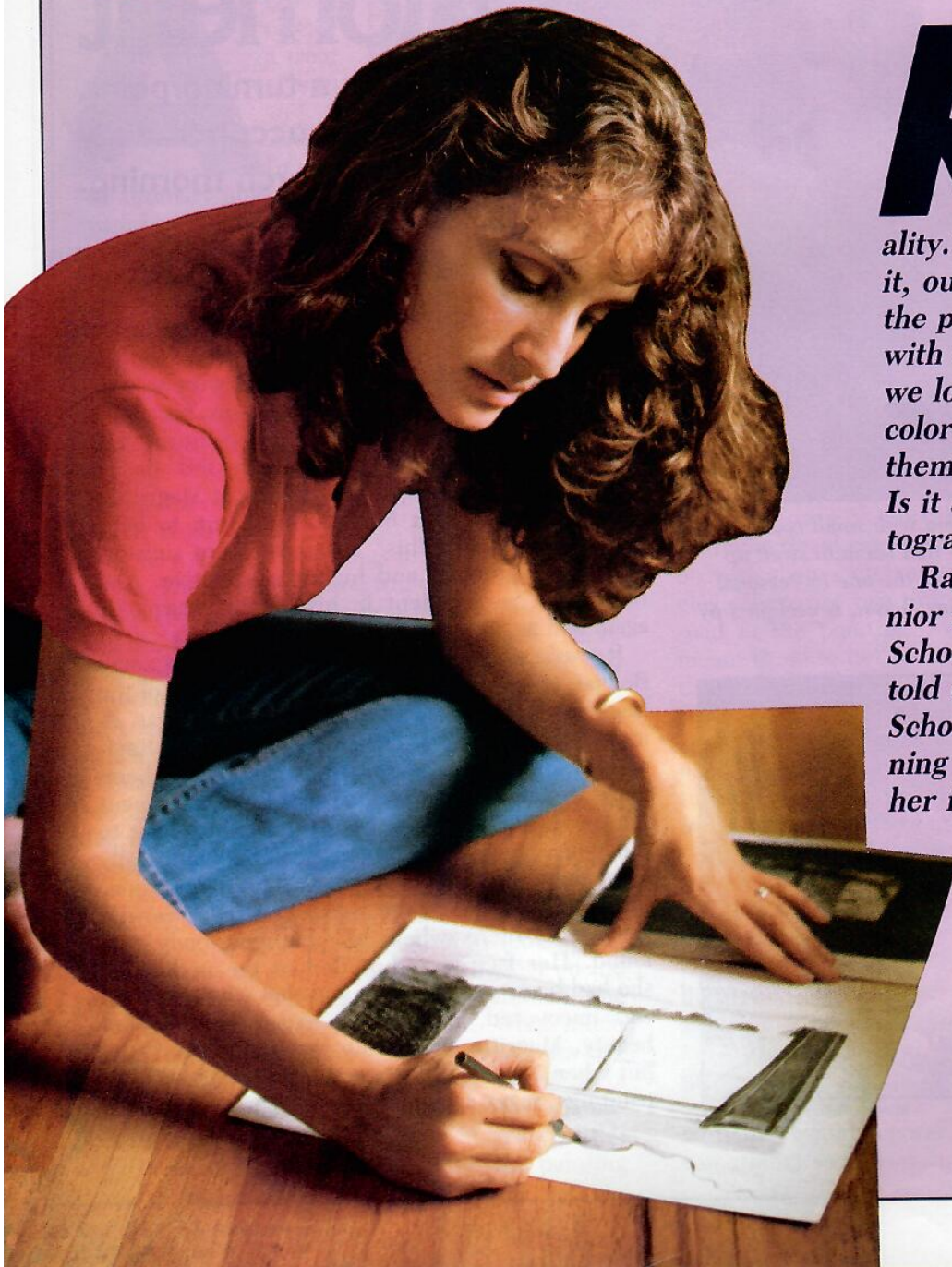


Photo by Janet Soderberg

How did you get interested in art?

I was born into art. I didn't have much of a choice. My mother's an art teacher and my father's a graphic designer. Wherever we traveled, the first thing we would look at was the local museum. For a while I rebelled. I refused to go to any more art museums. And my parents didn't force me. Slowly I came around. I began drawing—especially faces since my older sister was doing that.

How did your work "Beyond Reality" come about?

In the past couple of years I've also been involved in photography. The girl in the picture asked me to take her senior class candid for the yearbook. I didn't really think to color it. That came later.

By itself, the photograph is an unusual one. How did you happen to take it?

During the shooting, the two of us were talking about different societies and different worlds. So we thought, "Let's do something like in *another world*." So she went out of her bedroom window onto the roof. Then suddenly her cat jumped up on the windowsill. So I said, "Hold the cat!" And luckily I caught the shot.

It was a black and white photo, right? When did you decide to color it in?

Well, my friend and I had a joke about punk styles. The year before I had taken a photograph of her and a few other girls, and I colored it with punk colors—blue eye shadow, pink hair, red cheeks, and so on. It was very strange. And her mother really liked it and she hung it up on their refrigerator. Every time I would go over there, I would look at it and think, "Oh, I could have done



Beyond Reality won a 1981 Scholastic Art Award.

so much better if only—" So I decided this year I'll make a better one. And one night when I was supposed to be doing my homework, I started coloring in the photo I had taken of her on the roof.

How did you decide which parts to color?

Whatever was outside—or free. Like the cat is inside but it's free to move outside.

How did you get the colored and uncolored parts and the drawing and the photo to all work together?

The boundary between the color and the non-color is a natural boundary—the window. The hard part was getting the drawing to match the gray tones in the uncolored parts of the photo. Sometimes my drawing would be too dark and I'd have to erase it. On the edges I just let it fade out to suggest a larger world beyond it.

Were you aware that you were making a picture within a picture?

No. But I saw that she was being framed by the inside and the curtains. I really liked the

curtains. They were made out of a soft, thin material like chiffon. They were flowing with the wind and the sunlight was coming through.

How is it that a photograph can be made to work in a piece of fantasy?

You don't usually take a picture of someone outside the window. That was unreal by itself. And then I chose strange colors to make it more unusual.

If it had just been a drawing, it could have been anything. I could have had a cat flying out the window. But being a photo—documented evidence—makes it seem real and unreal at the same time.

What are your plans for the future?

I'd like to go into film—acting, directing, and cinematography. I'm studying acting now.

Why not art?

My whole family is in art. Not another one! No, I'm always going to do art. I'll never just drop it. It's like drama. It's just in me. Math isn't in me. Chemistry isn't in me. I can't pinpoint why. Art is just there.

Creating a “SURREALIST” OBJECT

Try finding the most ordinary object you can, then use your imagination to make it extraordinary.

There is a natural order to all things. Heavy objects like rocks stay on the ground. But the natural place for a helium balloon is in the air. By twisting and disrupting this natural order, we can create a surprising new way of seeing things.

You've already read about the Surrealists who took the real world and disrupted it. Magritte and

other artists used specific methods to alter reality. Such as:

Dislocation: or putting a fish in a tree or your shoes on your ears. Dislocation means taking an object and placing it in an unexpected environment.

Reversal: or using a pair of scissors for seeing, or a radio to pick up smells. Reversal is giving an object very different properties than it usually has.

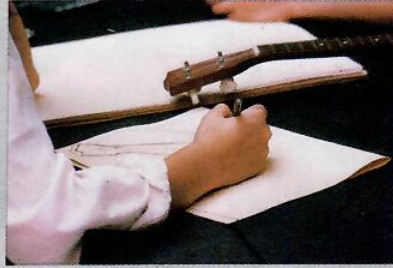
To do this lesson you will need a simple, everyday object. Our class used a fork, a toy ukelele, and a light switch. Choose items like these that have a specific function. Since surrealism is based on reality, it's important to work from a real object. Have it in front of you through the entire project.



STARTING OUT



1. Ask yourself: What is the function of my object? Where is it usually found? Now picture the object in your mind and change it. Dislocate it—envision it in a completely different environment. Reverse it—give it an entirely different use. Doodle, or picture in your mind, as many different dislocations and reversals as you can. Try combinations too.



2. Pick your best idea and work up a surreal sketch. Have you dislocated your object, reversed it, or both?



3. Do your finished drawing on a large piece of paper. Remember to draw from the actual object in front of you. Surrealism is very realistic in technique. By adding watercolor, you can make your drawing more lifelike.



4. Which colors will best express your idea? Bright ones or muted ones?



5. Are you satisfied? Hang it up and see.

SOME SOLUTIONS



What would it be like to use a fork as a skateboard or take a subway down a guitar? And looking over at the tropical landscape, what do you suppose happens when the light switch is turned on and off?

Have the three artists shown



above dislocated their objects, reversed them, or both? These pieces “work” because of the *ideas*. What do the sharp teeth of the fork say about skateboarding? What does the light switch suggest about tropical sunsets?



Notice the excellent use of design. The palm tree stretches out and fills the whole space. In the other two, neither the fork or the guitar is completely pictured. Both are closely “cropped” and cut strong diagonals across the page.

Arts Alive

Puppets as Art

What do you think of when you hear the word "puppets"—Miss Piggy, the Muppets, Howdy Doody? Today, puppets are considered to be suitable only for young children, but this wasn't always the case. A major exhibition *Puppets: Art and Entertainment* will give you an entirely new idea of puppetry. You'll see ancient pottery pup-



Nineteenth-century marionette.

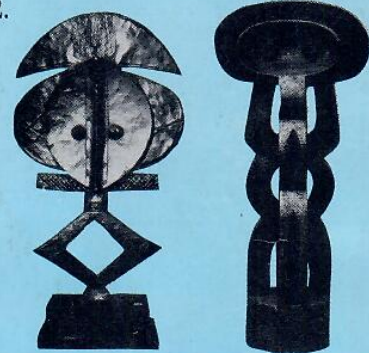
pets from South America, 19th-century "Punch and Judy" shows, life-sized marionettes from Mexico, and the 14-foot giant figures who perform in the "Bread and Puppet Theatre's" modern political satires. The show, which has been touring the country, is currently at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City until Feb. 21, 1982 and will then go to the Detroit Institute of Arts, June 1-Aug. 31, 1982.



Eugène Atget (1857-1927). Tuilleries, Paris. Museum of Modern Art, NY.

Twins

Look at the two sculptures below. Were they made at the same time and in the same place, perhaps even by the same artist? The one on the right was done in 1930 by the American Jacques Lipchitz. However, the figure on the left was created hundreds of years ago by an unknown African sculptor. It was at the beginning of the 20th century that European sculptors "discovered" the vital, inventive, and elegant art work done in places such as Africa, South America, and Alaska. Picasso, Gauguin, Max Ernst (pages 6-7 of this issue), and Henry Moore, among others, began to do new kinds of sculptures based on these works. If you live in, or are visiting Canada this winter, you can see a new show called *Gauguin to Moore: "Primitivism" in Modern Sculpture* at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, until January 31, 1982.



LEFT: Funerary Figure, Bakota, Gabon. RIGHT: Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1979). Figure, 1930. Private Collection.

"Old France" in the U.S.

Next March in *Art & Man* you will be reading about the relatively new art of photography. One of the pioneers of this art form, a Frenchman named Eugène Atget, worked at the turn-of-the-century. He took over 10,000 photos and died nearly unknown. Now his beautifully composed and almost magical pictures of French life are being rediscovered. A large show (the first in a series of yearly exhibitions of this artist's work) will give you a chance to see Atget's photos for yourself. It is currently at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City until Jan. 3, 1982 and will be going to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, from Jan. 16-Feb. 28, 1982. It will then travel to the St. Louis Art Museum from April 1-May 16, 1982; the Art Institute of Chicago from June 15-Aug. 15, 1982; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts from Sept. 13-Nov. 7, 1982; the Detroit Institute of Arts from Dec. 6, 1982-Feb. 6, 1983; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from March 12-April 18, 1983.