

**Dawn Ades, ed., *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art*, Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, exh. cat., 2011, 336 pp., 120 colour illustrations, \$65, ISBN-13: 9781895442878**

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## Book Reviews

### Comptes-rendus de livres

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Dawn Ades, ed., *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art*, Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, exh. cat., 2011, 336 pp., 120 colour illustrations, \$65, ISBN-13: 978-1895442878.

*The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution* was an innovative exhibition guest-curated by Dawn Ades for the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2011. An astonishing array of Surrealist photographs, objects, paintings, and film were shown together with spectacular Northwest Coast masks and poles to tell a story of Surrealism from its inception and to show the aesthetic diversity of individual Surrealists. Vancouver Art Gallery Director Kathleen S. Bartel's foreword to the accompanying catalogue—which is edited by Dawn Ades—characterizes the exhibition as offering a “new perspective on the development of surrealist film” and “breaking new ground by exploring, for the first time in an exhibition, the Surrealists’ intense interest in indigenous art of the Pacific Northwest” (p. 12). Film was indeed one of the main emphases of the exhibition, which also showcased the Surrealists’ interest in the Pacific Northwest by including clusters of Native objects once in their possession. At the entrance of the exhibition, for example, sat the Kwakwaka’wakw frontlet and pole that were once held in the collections of André Breton and Max Ernst respectively. Despite the importance of film and indigenous objects in the exhibit, only two of the twenty-one essays are devoted to film—including one on Wolfgang Paalen’s journey to British Columbia and Alaska—and five focus on the Pacific Northwest.

Ades’s catalogue makes a significant contribution to an important yet rarely pursued line of scholarship that bridges the gap between the discourses of Surrealism and indigenous object studies. This scholarship includes Evan Mauer’s 1984 “Dada and Surrealism,” which appeared in the Museum of Modern Art’s *“Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* exhibition catalogue, and Ann Fienup-Riordan’s 1996 Anchorage Museum of History and Art exhibition catalogue *The Living Tradition of Yup’ik Masks: Agayuliyararput: Our Way of Making Prayer*. Like Mauer’s essay, Ades’s volume situates the Surrealists’ interest in indigenous objects within their cultural milieu. She also employs a collections approach similar to the one in Fienup-Riordan’s catalogue by tracing the history of specific objects once held in the collections of individual Surrealists. *The Colour of My Dreams* catalogue, as a whole, calls attention to the need for more careful and critical probing of the multidirectional relationships between Surrealism and indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest.

Ades’s introductory essay, “Exhibiting Surrealism,” is the longest in the volume, at thirty-seven pages. With a non-academic audience in mind, she artfully summarizes other

scholars’ arguments regarding the movement’s vast compass. She touches upon Surrealists’ own writings and publications, as well as their creation, collection, and exhibition of objects. Much of Ades’s essay focuses on the ways the group’s members criticized Western realism’s rational underpinnings and aesthetic values through the creation of collage, writing, photographs, and film. She also deftly maps links between the practices of Surrealism and their displays of found objects and images, including those made by indigenous people from Oceania, America, and Africa. Ades’s account of sales of objects from these regions by André Breton and Paul Éluard during the Surrealists’ 1931 anti-colonial exhibition might prompt further inquiry as to whether the Surrealists were aware of differences between practices of colonialism in the Americas, Africa, and Australia. For example, European nations such as France, Spain, Belgium, and England deployed different strategies of religious conversion, recognition of indigenous land rights, and access to resources, and modified them from place to place and over time.

The main body of the book is divided into eight sections that follow the exhibition’s structure. Each section is comprised of one to six essays and includes brief illustrated passages that interject Surrealist voices throughout the volume. The essay “Haunting Fathers: Giorgio de Chirico’s *The Child’s Brain* and Max Ernst’s *Pietà or Revolution by Night*,” also authored by Ades, considers two prominent works displayed in the opening section of the exhibition. It introduces readers to art featured in the exhibition and maps some complex and occasionally fraught relations between individual Surrealists.

Some essays are less accessible to the general public or to a student readership. Anne Umland’s “Painting As Object: Joan Miró’s *Photo: Ceci est la Couleur de mes Rêves*, Paris 1933,” for instance, promotes new thinking and is more suited to a reader familiar with the Surrealists and their aesthetic practices. Umland focuses on Miró’s painting—a splotch of leaden blue applied to an unprepared canvas with the cursive caption, *Photo: Ceci est la Couleur de mes Rêves* (Photo: This is the Colour of My Dreams)—that provided the name for the Vancouver exhibition. Umland describes two distinct historical moments of Miró’s painting. She begins by examining the painting’s meaning at the time of its creation in 1925, calling attention to elements depicted within the painting itself—specifically the juxtaposition of text and colour splash—to articulate the Surrealist ideals of automatic image-making and poetry. The second moment Umland analyzes concerns a black-and-white photograph that she argues may have been taken by Salvador Dalí in 1933. It shows the painting as the backdrop against which other objects are displayed, revealing a link between photography and painting. The sum of these two moments calls attention to the Surrealists’ blurring of the boundaries between artistic disciplines by refer-

encing more than one medium within a single piece. Umland's multilayered argument is greatly supported by the accompanying images, but I wonder if she might have developed it further by discussing the photographic image as a performative space with respect to the work of other Surrealist photographers such as Man Ray.

David Lomas's "Philosophy in a Painting: André Masson's *Ophelia* (1937)" moves the book's discussion of Surrealist painting in another direction. Instead of focusing upon the relations of poetry, photography, and painting, the essay argues that in the 1930s, the period during which he developed his theory of painting, André Masson tended towards the tenets of Romanticism, specifically those expressed by Goethe. Lomas uses *Ophelia* to reveal Masson's idea of nature as a vital force that presumably cannot be controlled through the rationalizing forces of modern science—a sensibility that spread throughout the Surrealist movement. Lomas's careful reading of *Ophelia* also draws visual links between Masson's rendering of an oak leaf in this piece and *Meditation on an Oak Leaf*, which Masson completed in 1942 while exiled in the United States.

The focus upon painting comes to a close with Whitney Chadwick's "Surrealist Hybridity and Wilfredo Lam's Deity," which reveals personal and aesthetic connections between this New World artist and the Surrealist circle in Marseilles. Chadwick's scholarship contributes valuably to the little-studied connections between the Surrealist automatist philosophy and American modernists. Additional links to the Pacific Northwest could have been forged through an examination of dancer Franziska Boas, the daughter of the eminent Northwest Coast anthropologist, and her relationship to automatist philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Richardson's "Surrealism in Film" and Andreas Neufert's "Ten Rolls of 8mm Film Documenting Wolfgang Paalen's Journey Through British Columbia in Summer 1939" reflect upon two aspects of Surrealist filmmaking. While they introduce important questions about the ways in which documentary film fits within the Surrealists' overarching interests in anti-realism and popular culture, these two essays do not approach the broad span of film included in the exhibit. The Surrealists' initial attraction to film was its capacity to challenge the tenets of Western realism; a challenge exemplified by the work of George Méliès (*Le Voyage dans la lune*) and of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí (*Un Chien Andalou*). Richardson argues that film came to be linked to the Surrealists' general interest in the aesthetics of popular culture as Hollywood emerged as a filmmaking leader. Neufert, by contrast, offers a detailed description of a documentary film created by Paalen and his travel companions as they journeyed through the Pacific Northwest.

Several essays focus on the Surrealists' interest in objects. Timothy Baum, a collector who lent many pieces to the *Colour of My Dreams* exhibition, opens up this discussion with

"The Surrealist Object: Progeny of Poetry and Art." Baum's overview essay creates philosophical links between the Surrealists' rich array of discoveries (flea market finds, natural objects, mathematical objects, ready-made objects, and American and Oceanic artifacts) and their own subsequent creations, which include collaborative drawings and lensless photographs ("exquisite corpses" and "rayographs" respectively). Baum concludes with a discussion of the specific and unique interests in objects of Breton, Dalí, Magritte, and Cornell. His overview sets the stage for deeper interrogations of objects such as Dalí's *The Lobster Telephone* and Brassai's "Involuntary Sculptures," which are also subjects of study in accompanying essays by Sharon-Michi Kusunoki, Quentin Bajac, and Anthony Shelton. The anonymously created drawing *The Surrealist Map of the World* (1929), which emphasizes areas of indigeneity by enlarging their space on the map, is introduced by Shelton as a key to interpreting Breton's displays of Easter Island figures and Hopi Katsina figurines in his Paris apartment. Shelton's essay is illustrated with a beautiful array of previously unpublished colour photographs of Breton's home.

"The Lure of the Pacific Northwest" section makes a rare contribution to studies of Surrealism by calling specific attention to an interest among some of the group members to create an archive documenting their experiences with Pacific Northwest objects. This section begins with "A Conversation with a Tsimshian," a translation by Dawn Ades of a similarly titled piece contributed by Kurt Seligmann to a 1939 issue of *Minotaure*. Seligmann reveals something of the Surrealists' documentary sensibility. Their practice of record-making also occupies Neufert's essay on Paalen's filmmaking, suggesting that at times some Surrealists drew from the tenets of Western rationalism. Yves Le Fur's "Magical Notebooks" begins by recounting a familiar tale concerning Robert Lebel's drawings of Yup'ik masks and the Surrealists' collecting practices in New York, which were facilitated by Julius Carlebach and the Heye Foundation. Le Fur's contribution is enriched by new details concerning Lebel's plans for a book that was never published. The reproductions of Lebel's drawing that accompany the article are far superior to those found in previous publications.

This section also delves into the history of individual Surrealists' collections of Northwest Coast objects. One of the highlights of the volume is Colin Browne's "Scavengers in Paradise." This essay adds detail to our knowledge of collecting practices in New York, a subject also touched upon by Le Fur. It situates the Surrealists' collections within the violent histories of colonialism and calls attention to aspects of indigenous life to which they were blind. Marie Mauzé's essay carefully traces the history of the Kwakwaka'wakw peace mask that was once in Breton's collection. She highlights the fact that Breton acquired some of these objects following his return to Paris, where

they were seemingly detached from the forces of colonialism that had set them in motion. The section concludes with Robert Houle's observation in "Shape-Shifting Images" that the Surrealists' interest in and display of Pacific Northwest objects has left an indelible mark on indigenous communities that must now shape responses to Surrealist representations of their objects and cultures. Given the exhibit's locale (Vancouver) and its emphasis on the Pacific Northwest, it is somewhat surprising that neither the book nor the exhibition examine Surrealism as a point of departure for contemporary Pacific Northwest artists such as Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupton (Coast Salish) and David Neel (Kwakwaka'wakw). This absence reveals much about the current state of Surrealist scholarship that tends to sidestep the various ways the activities of this modernist group impact the work of indigenous artists through the present day.

The catalogue ends with "Anatomies of Desire," in which Ades incorporates a brief consideration of the controversies surrounding the Surrealists' attitudes towards women. A rich array of drawings and photographs of women's bodies by Hans Bellmer, Claude Cahun, and Pierre Molinier accompanies her essay: it is a mini-exhibition in its own right. A significant lacuna both here and in the exhibition as a whole is the absence of a discussion of the Surrealists' poor treatment of women—compare, for example, Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London, 1991). The exhibition did close with the suggestion that the legacy of Surrealism is manifest in the work of subsequent women artists, such as Louise Bourgeois.

Many of the images found in *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art* have been but rarely or poorly reproduced in earlier volumes. This ought to be reason enough to render it a staple for Pacific Northwest and EuroAmerican specialists alike. The catalogue also brings critical attention to complex intersections between EuroAmerican modernism and indigenous cultures: the essays that regard indigenous world-views and that call attention to the unevenness of the Surrealists' grasp of colonialism do much to enrich important earlier studies like those of Mauer and Fienup-Riordan. The exhibition and catalogue present significant contributions to the dialogue of cultures, though they do not reflect a true conversation among them, such as may be found in Ruth B. Phillips's *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700–1900* (Seattle, 1999), for example. Despite some shortcomings, *The Colour of My Dreams* lays an important foundation for further examination into the relationships, both past and present, between the arts of the Pacific Northwest and the activities of the Surrealists.

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#### Notes

- 1 See Allana Lindgren, *From Automatism to Modern Dance* (Toronto, 2003).

Anne-Marie Ninacs (éd.), *Lucidité. Vues de l'intérieur / Lucidity. Inward Views*. Montréal, Mois de la Photo à Montréal, 2011, 345 p., 34,95 \$, ISBN : 978-2-9808020-3-4

Le dernier Mois de la Photo à Montréal, qui s'est tenu du 8 septembre au 9 octobre 2011, a mobilisé quinze lieux de diffusion et différents espaces publics extérieurs à travers la ville pour présenter vingt-cinq expositions individuelles d'artistes canadiens et internationaux. Pour la douzième édition de cette biennale, la commissaire invitée Anne-Marie Ninacs a choisi d'explorer la question de la lucidité à travers des pratiques en photographie et vidéo assez diversifiées, de l'autoportrait à l'installation, en passant par l'appropriation d'images existantes et un renouvellement de la photographie de paysage.

Si l'ensemble peut sembler éclaté, la publication *Lucidité. Vues de l'intérieur* qui accompagne cet événement d'envergure lui donne un axe directeur et un angle à partir duquel aborder les œuvres, et ce, dès le texte d'introduction de la commissaire qui vient préciser ce que recouvre la thématique. Succède à cette présentation une importante section consacrée

aux œuvres, qui occupe près de la moitié du catalogue et dans laquelle le travail de chaque artiste est abondamment illustré. Comme toujours avec les publications du Mois de la Photo, le travail d'édition est d'une grande qualité. La mise en page dynamique des images réussit à rendre compte du rythme des vidéos et rappelle la mise en exposition des photographies, souvent juxtaposées pour créer un effet de sérialité, ou disposées sous forme de constellations. La deuxième partie du catalogue présente six essais de philosophes et historiens de l'art, parmi lesquels un second texte de la commissaire où elle traite des œuvres de l'exposition, de même qu'un entretien avec un des photographes. Une dernière section rassemble les repères biographiques sur les artistes (apport intéressant, une citation de chaque artiste vient éclairer sa démarche), la liste des œuvres exposées, de même qu'une bibliographie sélective, peut-être un peu limitée. La force de la publication est véritablement d'ouvrir la thématique à différents points de vue et champs de recherche qui déploient les enjeux abordés dans les pratiques exposées et qui donnent l'occasion d'approfondir les propositions des artistes.