

Surrealism holds a broad appeal in the popular imagination and has had a particularly strong influence on many Chicago artists, collectors, and institutions. Showcasing more than 120 works from the MCA Collection, the exhibition explores the ongoing impact of Surrealism on artists from a wide range of backgrounds. Surrealism emerged in Paris in 1924, spearheaded by writer André Breton, and quickly became international, encompassing poetry, literature, film, theater, and especially the visual arts. A basic tenet of the movement was experimentation, especially automatic writing and other methods that helped access the subconscious. During the turbulent years following World War I, European artists were drawn to the personal, psychological expressions infused with social and political commentary that characterized Surrealism, and the style flourished in the 1930s. Although it was eclipsed by abstract expressionism and other movements in the 1950s, Surrealism has continued to inspire artists to the present day.

Paintings and sculpture by founders of the movement René Magritte, Matta, Max Ernst, and Yves Tanguy—as well as women surrealists Dorothea Tanning, Kay Sage, and Remedios Varo, who have been historically overlooked—are shown on the inner wall of the central spiral. On the outer wall are works from the 1950s to the present, showing the varied influences of Surrealism. Works by Chicago-based artists that show Surrealism’s continuing resonance in this city are shown on the perimeter walls of the gallery. Each of the works on view rewards close examination; they are filled with symbols and themes that unleash the imagination and characterize Surrealism and its enduring legacy.

The exhibition is organized by Curator Lynne Warren.

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