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# Magritte: The Mystery Of The Ordinary, 1926-1938



## Synopsis

Published in conjunction with a major exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in collaboration with The Menil Collection, Houston, and The Art Institute of Chicago, *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938* focuses on the breakthrough Surrealist years of René Magritte, creator of some of the twentieth century's most extraordinary images. Bringing together nearly 80 paintings, collages and objects with a selection of photographs, periodicals and early commercial work, it offers fresh insight into Magritte's identity as a modern artist and one of Surrealism's greatest painters. Beginning in 1926, when Magritte first aimed to create paintings that would, in his words, "challenge the real world," and concluding in 1938—a historically and biographically significant moment just before the outbreak of World War II—the publication traces central strategies and themes from this seminal period, particularly those of displacement, isolation, transformation, metamorphosis, the "misnaming" of objects and the representation of visions seen in half-waking states. The publication also includes an illustrated chronology outlining significant moments in the artist's life during this period, including travel, connections with other Surrealist artists and writers, contributions to journals and important exhibitions and reviews.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Featuring works from more than 50 collections, this exhibition catalogue reproduces and contextualizes René Magritte's development as a surrealist artist from 1926, when he began his quest, until 1938, when he presented a lecture that summarized his accomplishments in this genre. The introduction explains Magritte's cubist work prior to 1926 and explores how the artistic influence of Giorgio de Chirico and Max Ernst shifted his work toward surrealism. The catalogue proper and

four additional essays divide the 13-year period into segments based on the artist's physical location--from Brussels to Paris, back to Brussels, and finally to London, where he completed commissions for Edward James. Contributors focus on Magritte's development of specific techniques to make ordinary objects seem unfamiliar. These included recontextualization (placing an object into a location where it would not normally be found), metamorphosis (the visual transformation of one object into another), and deliberate mislabeling (creating a disjunction between visual objects and their textual names). While this book does not replace the five-volume catalogue raisonn  , it provides a reasonably priced alternative containing both well-known and lesser-known works, including Magritte's work for periodicals ranging from *Vari  t  s* and *Le Centaure* to *La R  volution Surr  aliste*. Summing Up: Recommended. Lower-level undergraduates through graduate students; general audience. (E. K. Mix CHOICE)

The name Rene Magritte (1898-1967) is widely recognized by art lovers and agnostics alike, and for good reason: He utterly transformed our expectations of what is real and what is not. When someone described something as "surreal," or recalls a dream, chances are good that the images in his or her head have been informed, consciously or not, by a Magritte, seen either in reproduction or in person. [...]

From the get-go, Magritte's intent was to undermine our perceptions of reality by using the conventions of realism: first through odd juxtapositions of figures and items within traditional illusionistic space; next, by seamlessly morphing together textures and objects; and finally, by deploying language itself to decouple imagery from its representational function - most famously in his painting of a pipe above the legend THIS IS NOT A PIPE. (Howard Halle *Time Out New York*)

"Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926-1938" focuses on the years when Belgian artists produced some of his most important Surrealist paintings. Highlights include *The Menaced Assassin* (1927), a macabre scene of lust and murder that blurs dream states and reality. (The Editors *Art in America*)

This is the catalogue of the exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art in New York and mounted there from September 2013 to January 2014. It will subsequently travel to Houston's Menil Collection (February to June 2014) and The Art Institute of Chicago (June to October 2014), both of which institutions collaborated with the MoMA in producing the exhibition and catalogue. All those museums have extensive holdings of Magritte's works (the Menil alone is surpassed only by the collection in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels, which includes the Magritte Museum itself), and their contributions make up the majority of the works exhibited, augmented by significant loans from Brussels and from some fifty further collections and private lenders worldwide. Many of

the expected and iconic paintings are here, alongside many far less well known images, collages, objects, commercial catalogue and periodical pages, and photographs of and by the artist and his circle of "accomplices," as they called themselves. This is, in other words, a major and comprehensive exhibition; it is likely to remain the definitive show of Magritte's Surrealism for some time to come. The catalogue, edited by Anne Umland, MoMA's senior curator of painting and sculpture, does full justice to the exhibition. There are 132 plates of exhibited works, mostly printed full-page or, in the case of photographs and periodical illustrations, two to a page, and there are several two-page detail enlargements of the paintings. The essays are also accompanied by numerous companion illustrations. Four scholarly essays follow on a general introduction by the show's curators; these trace Magritte's path during this period of his life, from his initial involvement with Surrealism in Brussels (1926-27), his decision to live in Paris in order to be closer to the center of the movement and the failure to become satisfactorily established there (1927-30), his return to Brussels (1930-36), and his brief work in London, creating panels for the decoration of Edward James's town house (1936). This is a concentrated period of time; it takes Magritte from his twenty-eighth year to his fortieth, the years most fruitful for the development of his Surrealist style and which set the foundation for the remaining thirty years of his life. Throughout, the writers are keen to relate their discussions to Magritte's project of illuminating the "mystery of the ordinary" through his various "alienating" or "defamiliarizing" devices like the "misnamed" objects in the early word paintings, the morphing of figures into one another, the effects of optical illusion and trompe l'oeil, etc. The essays and their notes have frequent quotations from the artist's writings to elucidate the semiological motivations behind the paintings, the quest to reinvest meaning into things that have lost their meaning through everyday familiarity and routine inattention. Magritte's interaction with his friends and fellow artists (most of them writers) is also highlighted enough to give the sense of Surrealism being a cooperative and collaborative effort, a real group movement. I found these essays to be very informative and helpful, even though they average only about fifteen pages each--which of course means that the majority of the volume is given over to reproducing the art. There is also a detailed and annotated chronology of Magritte's life during these years, which provides information and material beyond that given in the essays. The volume concludes with a checklist of the exhibition giving full curatorial information including the Sylvester/Whitfield catalogue raisonne numbers, a selected bibliography and an index of photographs and figures. This is about as comprehensive and informative a book on the artist's founding Surrealist years as we are likely to see for some time, very solid and professionally produced and highly recommended.

Wonderful book---until now I'd only seen a few of the more familiar Magritte works. Exciting to see so many new ones! Large, quality reproductions and not too much text.

Good book, but reproductions need work. Too dark and grainy.

Excellent book. High quality reproductions. Great information and writing. For anyone who likes surrealism and/or Magritte, this is a book for you.

Great book, has both the reproduction of paintings + background and biography of Magritte. Good deal.

Great!

An artist who seemed to be ignored in the surrealism movement of the 1920's, this book is a fine overview of his life and times and all his creations.

Print quality about what you'd expect from newsprint. Maybe it made a great exhibit guide.

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