

Automatism and veristic surrealism



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“ Surrealism was a means of reuniting conscious and unconscious realms of experience so completely, that the world of dream and fantasy would be joined to the everyday rational world in an absolute reality, a surreality.”

Andre Breton, a major spokesman of the movement gave this proclamation as the principal founder of Surrealism. This paper will start off by explaining the main influences on Surrealism art; The cultural Movement called Dada, the principal founders of Surrealism; Andre Breton, Sigmund Freud and a psychiatrist, Carl Jung. Two separate forms of expression in Surrealism arose through different conceptual theories which derived from specific formations such as Dadaism and the theories of Breton, Freud and Jung. Through the clarification of the founding and influences on Surrealism, the research question: “ Surrealism art and the comparisons of the two formations of Automatism and Veristic Surrealism” will be responded.

The founding of the Surrealist movement has a great deal to do with the development of the two eccentric groups; Verisitic surrealism and

Automatism. The beginnings of the Surrealist movement and how it derived from the Ideas of the Dada movement in World War I will be explained in the first section of this paper. The Dada movement was a cultural movement that came to believe that the true cause of the war arrived upon the ideas of excessive rational thought and bourgeois values. Surrealism flourished as a reaction to Dadaism, but rather than the negative approach Dadaism had, Surrealists developed a constructive approach in sharing their beliefs of rational thought to society.

Surrealism has been greatly influenced by Andre Breton a French writer and poet, and the discoveries of Sigmund Freud and his co-workers. During the war Andre Breton trained in medicine and psychiatry where he used psychoanalytic methods of Sigmund Freud, with the aim of trying to expand the potential of the mind by reconciling the opposing states of dream and reality. 2 Freud was able to develop techniques allowing individuals to release their imagination through his exertion of work with free association, dream analysis, and the unconscious, which ultimately became of great importance to the Surrealists. Their accomplishments and investigations will be discussed further to form a basis of knowledge of the founding of Surrealism in order to be able to understand and compare Veristic Surrealism and Automatism to the fullest.

In the next section Carl Jung will be discussed in relation to the formation of Automatism and Veristic Surrealism. A Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, was the founder of analytical psychology. Carl Jung was the first modern psychologist to deeply investigate the human mind and stated that our minds are in nature religious. He profoundly explored dream analysis as did

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Sigmund Freud. Jung stated that the images of the subconscious should be accepted as they came into consciousness and not be judged purely so that the images could be accurately evaluated. This principle is what founded the surrealism style of Automatism and is therefore a significant element to this paper.

The automatists came to express themselves in the abstract tradition, while the Veristic surrealists expressed themselves in the symbolic tradition. As a result of extracting the resemblance and contrasts in the judgments of the Veristic and Automatist groups, the research question will most efficiently be answered.

Two famous artists: Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí, arrived from the principal ideas of Surrealism, yet they had very different ways of approaching their art styles which were formed by two different groups; Automatism and Veristic Surrealism. The works of Dali and Picasso will be compared thoroughly in this paper to further emphasize the distinction of the two groups. Picasso used and believed in the Automatism form of surrealism while Salvador Dalí was a practitioner of the Veristic form of Surrealism. Picasso's work developed into a more primary form of art rather than the traditional artistic practices where precision was essential. A majority of his work was based in the notion that children's ingenuity can present us directly to the unconscious. Salvador Dalí's work juxtaposes anachronistic images which developed more directly from Dadaism. Dalí profoundly believed that art should be studied and mastered, and that expression of the unconscious would become visible from metaphor.

An important quality to surrealist works is the element of surprise, where often images are used with apparent lack of relative meaning in comparison to its context. Surrealism art is created through the subconscious mind with its purpose to create incomprehensible visual imagery. Relying greatly on theories from Sigmund Freud, Breton viewed the unconscious as the source of our imagination. The Surrealist movement carries on thriving throughout the world with persistent thought processes and investigations into the mind which have produced some of the finest art ever seen. 1 With this thought kept at the back of ones mind while reading this paper, the exhilarating question of the importance of Surrealism and how it came to evolve to two separate forms: Automatism and Veristic Surrealism will be carefully examined.

Dadaism:

The Dada movement was a cultural movement which flourished in the 20th century between world war I and II. They were known for questioning political culture in order to test the human mind and challenge it to view things in an entirely different manner than used to. The principal growth point of Surrealism was the founding of Dadaism during World War I, when famous artists and writers initially from Paris spread and became part of the Dada movement. 2 The Dada movement created works of anti-art prior to World War I, which purposely defied reason. Surrealism emphasis was not on abolition of popular culture but on reinforcement of the power of positive expression of the mind. The Dada movement expressed a response against what they perceived as the destruction shaped by “rationalism” in the past

which lead European culture and politics and began the terror of World War I.

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Due to the Dadaism attack on society at the end of the First World War, the Surrealist movement gained momentum. Tristan Tzara, the leader of the Dada movement aimed to attack society through scandal. Tzara strongly believed that art is not worthy for a society that creates war. Therefore he decided to give society anti-art; which is defined as ugliness rather than beauty. They intended to insult the new industrial commercial world, however they weren't insulted, but instead thought that their rebellion was directed to the old art and patrons of feudalism and church domination.

The Surrealist artists were those that did not embrace anti-art which got rid of what all artists have learned and passed on about art. Surrealism split into two separate groups in the 1930's when artists expressed themselves in the more symbolic or abstract tradition. These two groups were the Automatists and the Veristic Surrealists. 2 The artists in the movement studied the works of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. To understand the Veristic and Automatist surrealists, the work of Freud and Jung will be analyzed in the next section.

Andre Breton and Sigmund Freud:

Andre Breton, a French writer and a poet, was the principal founder of Surrealism. Throughout World War I, Breton skilled in medicine and psychiatry at the neurological hospital, where he employed Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic techniques with soldiers suffering from shell-shock. Using the psychoanalytic studies of Sigmund Freud, the surrealists attempted to increase the mind's potential by integrating the separate states of dream

and reality. Breton and his companions tried to place themselves in a hallucinatory state, in which they thought they were able to perfectly obtain their subconscious minds and extract pure thoughts, uncontaminated by the conscious mind and its rational restrictions. 2

Freud's work with free association, dream analysis, and the unconscious, was essential for the Surrealists so that they could discover new ways to liberate the minds thoughts. They embraced unusual behavior, while rejecting its chance of mental illness. They emphasized the reality that " one could combine inside the same frame, elements not normally found together to produce illogical and startling effects." In 1924, Breton included the idea of the juxtapositions in his manifesto: " a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be — the greater its emotional power and poetic reality."

The literary journal *Littérature* contained a published record of dreams and writings of their experimentation of automatic writing, written by André Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. Automatic writing is where they were able to write and draw impulsively without containing their judgment.

While they developed their theories and continued publishing, they concluded that Surrealism sustained the idea that " ordinary expressions are essential, but that the logic of their understanding must be fully open to the full imagination." In the end, the movement intended to change and modernize human understanding and experience, in all aspects; personal,

cultural, social, and political. They ultimately aimed to release citizens from false wisdom, and restrictive customs.

Carl Gustave Jung:

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) a psychiatrist from Switzerland was significant in the analytical movement. Freud laid the scientific foundation for Jung to investigate further how the unconscious reveals itself through symbols. To recognize and understand his dreams, Jung painted and sculpted his own visions.

Jung's theory of the human mind consisted of three fractions: the ego (conscious mind), the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious which we yet can never be directly aware of is "the reservoir of our experiences as a species, a kind of knowledge we are all born with." It manipulates all of our decisions indirectly, particularly the emotional ones.

Automatism was termed as Jung stated that one should not judge the vision of thoughts, but accept them purely as they are for personal and proper analysis. The suggestions of these new psychological theories captivated many artists. From the theories they were able to recognize that the unconscious has essential messages for the conscious mind, and that it is at first perceived through images while in the end communicated through language.

Surrealist artists sought after the relation between the abstract spiritual realities and the actual forms of the material world in their work. The object in actuality stands as a metaphor for an inner deeper truth. By analyzing

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their art work, artists could bring the inner realities of the subconscious to the conscious mind, so that their significance could be made sense of.

“ Therein lies the social significance of art: It is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is more lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious, which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. The artist seizes on this image and, in raising it from deepest unconsciousness, he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries according to their powers.”

Automatism & Veristic Surrealism:

Michael S. Bell, a specialist in American Art, has been a major voice in the academic art world to distinguish Visionary Art. He researched the Surrealist phenomena where he recently was the first to discover two separate forms of expression in surrealism; Automatism and Veristicism. “ Automatism is a form of abstraction. It has been the only type of surrealism accepted by critical reviewers after the war.”⁶ While both groups point of view stayed the same, their foundation was different due to their diverse interpretations of the works and experiments of Breton, Freud and Jung.

Automatism: Automatism is mainly for the intention of self analysis where like Jung stated, one does not evaluate the image of the subconscious but accepts it as they come into consciousness so that it can be accurately analyzed. For the Automatists, Surrealism was interpreted as a control of the consciousness which supports the sub conscious. Automatists were more

concerned about the true feelings rather than the analysis itself. It was their automatic way in which their subconscious reached their conscience. Rather than what was really there they focused on emotions and feelings that took place before the final image, therefore their paintings were also a lot more abstract in comparison to the Veristic Surrealists.

Although free expression of feelings had always been an important factor in the history of art, the Automatists didn't believe in it. To them, abstractionism was simply the only approach that was able to carry life to the images of the subconscious. Automatists took a more Dadaist approach where they presented scandal and disrespect towards those that were privileged and thought that through lack of form in their art, they were rebelling against them.

Automatism is an abstract artistic form greatly influenced by Carl Jung & Sigmund Freud. The most significant painters of abstract Surrealism or Automatism were; Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro and Andre Masson. The automatic drawings of André Masson's in 1923, are often used as an illustration of the point of recognition of Surrealism and the break from Dada, in view of the fact that they reveal the influence of the idea of the unconscious mind. Andre Masson was very passionate for automatic drawing. By forcing himself to work under very strict conditions, Masson would for example draw under the influence of drugs or after long periods of time without food nor sleep. By forcing himself into a reduced state of consciousness he believed it would facilitate his art to get closer to the mechanism of his subconscious mind and therefore be free from rational control.

“ Bison on the brink of a chasm 1944, Andre Masson”

Veristicism

The Veristic Surrealists, viewed academic discipline as the assets to represent images of the subconscious with reality. This was a way for them to congeal images that normally would be forgotten if not recorded. They aimed in discovering a way to go after the images of the subconscious until the conscience could be aware of their significance. The image itself is the language of the subconscious, as the consciousness learned to interpret the images so that it could translate it into its true meaning. For the Veristic surrealists, the images represent a metaphor for the inner reality. They wanted to authentically characterize these images as a bond between the abstract spiritual realities, and the real forms of the material world. 6

The Veristic surrealists split from Automatism principally by defining the unconscious as visualized by psychiatrist Carl Jung. The universal unconscious was Jung’s theory that every individual holds an instinctive knowledge and understanding of images, as the images are universal in nature and recur constantly in literature and art. Veristic surrealists hoped to understand and gain access to unconscious thoughts by looking into the image and what it represents.

Paintings of the Veristic Surrealists usually consisted of images portraying people and objects which appeared to look realistic but were shown in an odd manner. A good way to define Veristic Surrealism is as “ representational” Surrealism. Some of the most famous painters of Veristic Surrealism were Salvador Dalí, Rene Magritte and Max Ernst.

Veristic Surrealism in its progression has become a new kind of art that in the words of Donald Kuspit, “ Must first show that it has democratic appeal-appeal to those generally unschooled in art or not professionally interested in it. Then it must suffer a period of aristocratic rejection by those schooled in an accepted and thereby ‘ traditional’ form of art-those with a vested interest in a known art and concerned with protecting it at all costs.” 6

Individuals who are able to follow the images of the subconscious, and with endurance, cannot only paint their thoughts but also analyze them carefully, have a great understanding of the spiritual interactions between the psychological, and the physical areas.

Salvador Dalí and Veristic Surrealism

Salvador Dalí is an example of a famous and successful Veristic surrealism painter. He often juxtaposes contrary or anachronistic images into his art work which follow similar ideas coming directly from Dadaism. Salvador Dalí expressed his thoughts in his paintings through symbols and imagery in a direct and vulgar way which relates more closely to the way in which the Dadaists approached their ideas. On the contrary, Dalí believed that art should be studied and mastered, and that artistic skill was of great importance, which is something the Dadaists principally did not follow.

Dadaism made anti-art, unattractive art made to frown upon the bourgeois and to make a higher statement of their values against them. Salvador Dalí also believed that expression of the unconscious would be revealed through metaphor when analyzing a painting. 17