

Dear Parents,

Today, your child learned about the Surrealist art movement, and the artists Salvador Dalí and René Magritte. For their project, they created a surrealist drawing, using the Magritte's painting "Personal Values" as inspiration.

Surrealism is a major artistic movement which began in the early 1920's, characterized by artists attempting to represent the world as seen by the unconscious mind. "Sur" means beyond, so surrealism means "beyond reality". Surrealist artworks were inspired by dreams and imagination and usually contained scenes that were fantasy-like and unreal. Paintings often depict bizarre images of objects that may be based in reality, but changed by the artist so they look more dream-like.

Surrealists found ways of making art spark creativity, often using automatic techniques – without thinking about the creation, and allowing images and idea to flow freely from their imagination. They sought to jar our perception of everyday things by creating unusual placement of images or juxtapositions of images or actual objects, changing their appearance, scale, or placement. Below are a few of the techniques used:

- Laws of nature reversed – Making living things lifeless
- Juxtaposition – Putting two different things side by side that don't normally go together
- Transformation – Turning something usual to something unusual and disturbing
- Metamorphosis – Turning an object into something else
- Symbols – Using the same objects over and over again to represent something
- Double image paintings – One form contains two or more images
- Dislocation -- Placing an object in unusual or unfamiliar surroundings
- Scale change -- Changing an object's usual size
- Replacement -- Replacing an expected object with an unexpected one
- Levitation -- Floating objects, defying gravity

Two of the most influential artists of the Surrealist movement were Salvador Dalí and René Magritte. Dalí was born in Spain on May 11, 1904. He began drawing and painting at a young age, and attended a prominent art school in Madrid, where he learned the technical skills of the masters. His eccentricity drew him to Paris in 1926, where he met Pablo Picasso, and was ultimately influenced by his work as well as the work of Miró, Raphael, Bronzino, Francisco de Zurbarán, Vermeer, and Velázquez (who also inspired his moustache).

Dalí's best-known painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, featuring his famous melting clocks, was completed in August 1931. As the story goes, he had just eaten some Camembert that had gone all soft and runny and couldn't stop thinking about this gooey cheese. He returned to his studio, where the background of a painting showing the beach at Port Lligat was almost complete, but the foreground was still empty. Thinking of the cheese, he decided that melting clocks would be the answer, and promptly finished the painting by adding them in the foreground. Dalí's art went beyond Surrealism, as he was proficient in many styles. He also wrote books, designed furniture, created sculptures in everything from bronze to plaster (including his famous Lobster telephone), and collaborated on movies, like Hitchcock's *Spellbound* and *Destino* which he made with Walt Disney.

Dalí was highly imaginative, and enjoyed indulging in unusual and grandiose behavior. His eccentric manner and attention-grabbing public actions (e.g., showing up to an important speech dressed in a diver's suit) sometimes drew more attention than his artwork. He wasn't just an artist who painted surrealist paintings; he lived art, and was himself surreal. He has been quoted as saying "The only difference between me and a madman is that I'm not mad." and "My audience mustn't know whether I'm spoofing or being serious; and likewise, I must not know either." Dalí spent his final years in Spain, and died on January 23, 1989 at the age of 84.

René Magritte was born in Belgium in 1898. His father was a tailor and textile merchant, his mother a milliner (hat maker). He began drawing lessons in 1910, and studied art at a prestigious school in Belgium from 1916-1918, but found the instruction dull. His early work was largely influenced by the Impressionists, but left him uninspired. For a time, he designed wallpaper and made advertising posters to earn money. He sought a new way of painting,



and like Dalí, discovered the latest work being done by Picasso and Max Ernst. However, it was a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, depicting a small wall which had mounted on it a Greek sculpted head and a surgeon's glove with a green ball below, that gave Magritte the inspiration he needed to begin creating his new paintings.

Magritte ultimately developed strategies and techniques to defamiliarize the familiar – to make, in his words, “everyday objects shriek out loud” and “challenge the real world”. Like the other surrealist painters, his works combined real objects in an unusual or nonsensical way to stir up ideas and feelings in the viewer. However, unlike other surrealist artists, he painted these objects in a very realistic way, combining them with incredible imagination. Perhaps the best example of this is the painting *Personal Values*, where a comb, a glass, a piece of soap, a shaving brush and a match become enormous, and all shown in a bedroom that has wall decorated with a cloudy sky. As a result, these ordinary objects appear new and exciting.

Another well known work is *The Treachery of Images*. This is a very realistic painting of a pipe, with the text: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This is not a pipe). The painting is not a pipe, but rather an *image* of a pipe. As Magritte stated: “The famous pipe. How people reproached me for it! And yet, could you stuff my pipe? No, it's just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture ‘This is a pipe,’ I'd have been lying!” By putting us constantly on the wrong track, Magritte forces us to think about reality and art.

Magritte was also fascinated by what could be hiding behind things. In *Carte Blanche*, he shows a woman riding through the woods. Most of the trees are behind her and the horse, but one trunk that originates behind her obscures part of her body. In *Clairvoyance*, a self-portrait, Magritte shows himself looking at an egg, but knowing that a mature bird will eventually hatch out of it, he depicts himself painting a bird. Again employing the symbolism of the egg, *Elective Affinities* portrays a large egg in a cage. The egg and the cage are both made to hold a bird. This is an example of Magritte's interest in putting images together what were surprisingly different, but at the same time had something in common.

Magritte was also very preoccupied with the sky, day and night and inside vs. outside. In *The Dominion of Light*, he combines a night scene and a daylight sky. Darkness dominates the bottom of the painting. Only a street lamp and the light in an upstairs room shine and are reflected in the water by the house. The sky is bright as during the day. The dark outline of the trees stands out against the blue sky and white clouds. Magritte portrays another suburban scene in *Golconda*, depicting nearly identical men dressed in dark overcoats and bowler hats, each of which seem to be a drop of heavy rain (or floating helium balloons) against a backdrop of buildings and blue sky. In *Human Condition*, an easel stands in front of a window. But the painting on the canvas in front of the window is an exact copy of the scenery which is hiding. The landscape is both inside and outside of the room.

Many people think of Magritte as the man with the black bowler hat. His portrait *The Son of Man*, depicts a man dressed in a suit, wearing a bowler hat, his face hidden behind an apple. This painting might be a self-portrait, but it is not clear. “Everything we see is hiding something else,” he said. He believed that we always want to see what is hidden behind another object. This was his way of arousing our curiosity. Magritte died in 1967.

#### References:

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Raimondo, Joyce, *Imagine That: Activities and Adventures in Surrealism*, Watson-Guption Publications, NY, 2004

Adventures in Art, *Now you see it – now you don't -- René Magritte*, Prestel Publishing, 1998

Venezia, Mike, *René Magritte*, Children's Press, NY, 2002

I hope your children enjoyed the lesson! If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

To Bring:

- 4 paintings
- Video
- Pads of paper, crayons
- Word sheets

Enjoy coming, as each time I do a presentation, I choose something from the collection that I don't know, and learn about the artist and his work. Today study Surrealism and two of its most prominent artists.

Current collections are **Twentieth Century** and **Surrealism and Fantasy** – have paintings from both collections as the Surrealist movement is a major contributor to 20<sup>th</sup> Century art.

Most famous probably *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dalí and *Personal Values* by Renée Magritte. Also have the *Human Condition* by Magritte and *Apparition of a Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*

Surrealism -- major artistic movement began in the early 1920's

Artists attempted to represent the works as seen by the unconscious mind.

Sur = beyond, so surrealism means "beyond reality".

Inspired by dreams and imagination; scenes were often fantasy-like and unreal.

Depict bizarre images of objects based in reality but changed them so they look more dream-like.

SHOW VIDEO ABOUT SURREALISM. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST52WsmUIM> FOCUS ON DALI

Show 2 paintings – the hidden stuff in Apparation.

Picture of Dali – eccentric – known for moustache –painted surrealistic paintings, but also lived his art – he himself was surreal. Went dressed in a diver suit to give a speech.

- "The only difference between me and a madman is that I'm not mad."
- "My audience mustn't know whether I'm spoofing or being serious; and likewise, I must not know either."

Died in 1989 at 84.

Magritte born in Belgium in 1898. Mother a millner (hatmaker)

Took formal art lessons, but not inspired.

Worked making wallpaper and ads (show picture of ad)

Saw a painting by *Giorgio de Chirnio* (show picture) –gave him the inspiration to create his own style. Wanted to challenge the real world.

- Like other surrealists, his works combined real objects in an unusual or nonsensical way
- Unlike other surrealist artists, he painted these objects in a very realistic way

Interested in Day/Night/Sky/ Inside and Outside



- *Show Dominion of Light*
- *Show Golconda* (means a source of wealth, advantages or happiness)
  - Note bowler hats, and floating vs. raindrops
- *Show Human Condition*

What can be hiding behind things. "Everything we see is hiding something else," Believed that we always want to see what is hidden behind another object.

- *Show Carte Blanche*
- *Show Clairvoyance*
- *Show Elective Affinities*

Consider reality vs. image

- *Show Treachery of Imagination*. What does he mean "This is not a pipe"?

Symbolism

Bowler hats and apple, like *Gloconde*.

*Show The Son of Man* – might be a self-portrait hidden behind the apple, but was how he dressed.

Demonstrates his belief that everything we see is hiding something else, and we want to see what is hidden behind another object.

Magritte died in 1967.

Exercises

- 1) An Eye for Magritte
- 2)
- 3) René Magritte was a Belgian surrealist artist who became well known for a number of witty and thought-provoking images. He wanted to challenge viewers to think about what they were looking at and to ask themselves "What does this painting mean?"
- 4) 1. Take an old CD and trace it in the center of an 8.5" x 11" paper. Add lines around the circle to turn it into an eye, including eyelashes.
- 5) 2. Trace all the pencil lines with a black marker.
- 6) 3. Draw an image inside the eye which reflects something you like to look at. This could be anything BUT the drawing of the inside of an eye. The more mysterious, the better! Color all the shapes with colored pencils.
- 7)
- 8) CA Visual Art Standard: Grade Five
- 9) 2.7 Communicate values, opinions, or personal insights through an original work of art.