
Carolyn Butler-Palmer

*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. The main emphasis of the exhibition, which Ades edited, was a characterisation of 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, and Ann Fienup-Riordan's foreword to the accompanying catalogue—delineates an unprepared canvas with the cursive caption, "This is the Colour of My Dreams)—that provided the name for the exhibition. 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 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 Miro’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 Miro's painting—a splat 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 Miro’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-
encouraging 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.1

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 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.

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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 worldviews 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).


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. Suîtcède 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 bibliographiques 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.