



Foreword

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Casting a view across surrealism's long history and wide international scope, one can justifiably say that the historiography of the movement has experienced ebbs and flows, much like the fluctuations of interest in the various individuals and groups constituting its wider network. Turning to the example of the Paris group formed in the 1920s, one will note that scholarship has considered the relationship of artists to the art market, but owing at least partly to the conflicted attitude of the surrealists to employment (as opposed to an occupation of pure creativity) much is still to be done. Two areas rich for consideration quickly come to mind: the relationship between artists and collectors, who the former regarded as necessary conveniences; think, for instance, of Louis Aragon and André Breton, both employed at certain points by Jacques Doucet. Another is the sale of many of the surrealists' own collections, whether through financial necessity or aesthetic upgrade; here, for instance, one could turn to the 1931 auctions of Breton's and Paul Éluard's works from Africa, America, and Oceania, as well as the latter's 1938 sale of his painting collection to Roland Penrose. This volume, then, is a welcome contribution to a still-open field.

The Paris market was often close to surrealism, even determining certain directions and methods of production, especially in the 1930s when there was a concerted interest in its internationalization. Because of, and despite, the Depression there was a determined effort to grow the American market in order to provide a lifeline for European artists (which prefigured the actual lifeboat the country would represent to many at the start of World War II). This area of study has recently offered new information on the means by which many surrealist artists and writers in exile sustained themselves on a daily basis. Associated with this topic is the distribution and popularization of their work and certain styles in the United States, and, consequently, the relationship between the availa-

bility of their works and acquisitions by North American museums that produced concentrations of surrealism in the country. Ultimately, such unrivaled resources in the United States in comparison to more limited support in Europe brought an official acceptance of surrealism that the earliest European surrealists had difficulties countenancing. This was the situation that met those surrealists who reached safety in the United States and in Mexico in the 1940s, and their presence, in turn, helped to formulate the reductionist narrative of surrealism and the birth of abstract expressionism we try to counter today. To some extent this can be seen now as a triumph of inventive commercialism and, in some cases, recognizable style, mediated by important supporters and fellow travelers often hitherto pressed into the shadows—Chick Austin, Peggy Guggenheim, Julien Levy, Pierre Matisse, James Thrall Soby—all familiar names but rarely (with the exception of Guggenheim) central to surrealist narratives.

The texts in this volume, like the original conference that gave them voice, help to transform this important and largely latent field of surrealist studies. They also offer a wider understanding of the vital relationship, within a capitalist structure, between creativity and distribution, art and commerce, as North American and European surrealism spoke to each other across the Atlantic. This can be seen as a history of the decentralization of power, as the Paris surrealists had to relinquish control in order to be able to prepare the ground for the growth and, therefore, wider reception of work. Artists such as Salvador Dalí and Marcel Duchamp, in very different ways, exploited the commercial imperative, while others appear to have been borne along on the rising wave of success.

The development of this branch of study is, to a certain extent, a logical outcome of our times, but the ways in which it allows a rethinking of the world at the time of the surrealists is vital. It offers a deeper understanding of the place of the work of art in a complex structure of relationships made more acute by the troubled contexts extending out from the 1930s. The specific atmosphere of the economic and political history of the United States that allowed this market, and is the focus of these studies, was not readily translatable to other places at other times. As the field moves to reach more broadly across and beyond the traditional geographical and chronological definitions of surrealism, so it is crucial to assess its echoes and its silences. The reconsideration of one of its most visible markets serves to reaffirm the significance of how detailed scholarship into the local inflects, in various ways, the understanding of a multitude of contexts. The conference from which these essays emerge was erudite and collegial, and, as this publication demonstrates, underpinned by a subtle choreography by its expert organizers—a sensitivity that, like the most inventive surrealist *cadavre exquis*, allowed the parts to be constituted into a fertile and innovative whole.