

27 Man Ray, *Rayograph*, 1923, on the cover of the first edition of the catalogue for the exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," 1936. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism: “A Serious Affair”

Anne Umland and Talia Kwartler

On December 9, 1936, the exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” opened to the public at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.¹ It was the second in what its organizer, the museum’s founding director Alfred H. Barr Jr., envisioned as an ongoing series of “exhibitions planned to present in an objective and historical manner the principal [*sic*] movements of modern art.”² Today, “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” has achieved landmark status as “an exhibition that contributed fundamentally to the historicization and canonization of surrealism in the United States,”³ and many art historians have written about it. Most recently, Sandra Zalman has carefully analyzed the exhibition’s contribution to the spread of the image of surrealism in popular culture in the United States.⁴ Earlier, Lewis Kachur examined its relationship to the “International Surrealist Exhibition” in London (June 11 to July 4, 1936) and surrealist group exhibition strategies.⁵

1 The exhibition ran from December 9, 1936, to January 17, 1937. Although it was originally scheduled to open on December 2, the opening was delayed one week “because of the great number and variety of the art and objects to be shown, many of which were late in arriving at the museum.” See the MoMA advance press release for the exhibition, n.d., https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325073.pdf, accessed January 12, 2018. Note that the museum had previously listed the incorrect opening date for the exhibition as December 7; this has subsequently been corrected in MoMA’s records following the authors’ research.

2 Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Preface,” in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed., exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, first edition, 1936), p. 7. The first exhibition in the series was “Cubism and Abstract Art” (March 2–April 19, 1936), followed by “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” (December 9, 1936–January 17, 1937), and “Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives of Europe and America” (April 27–July 24, 1938).

3 Email from Julia Drost to Anne Umland, January 12, 2018.

4 See Sandra Zalman, *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture. Dissident Modernism* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), especially Chapter 1: Surrealism Between Avant-Garde and Kitsch, pp. 11–46.

5 See Lewis Kachur, *Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), especially the section in Chapter 1: Ideological Exhibition Spaces and Surrealist Exhibitions on “The International Surrealist Exhibition” (1936) and “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” (1936–37), pp. 10–19.

What has received less attention to date is the role of art historian Margaret Scolari Barr in the planning of the exhibition; the specifics of Barr's installation, which were distinctly and deliberately different from those of the surrealist artists themselves; and the impact of "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" on the museum's permanent collection, where its legacy lived on long after the exhibition closed. This essay's primary focus is on these three topics: Scolari Barr's contribution to the organization of the exhibition; the exhibition's relatively undocumented, ephemeral installation; and its afterlife, as represented in the museum's collection and collection displays. Related details concerning the particularities of "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," key lenders to the project, and its reception in New York are also considered, drawing primarily on the rich resources of the Museum of Modern Art's archives.

Planning

In his preface to the "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" catalogue, Alfred Barr describes surrealism as "a serious affair."⁶ His words were quoted by various reviewers of the exhibition, all the better to scoff at the perceived frivolity of its content. Edward Alden Jewell, in the *New York Times*, provides an example of the tongue-in-cheek tone of many of the show's critics: "Dada rides in the saddle, messieurs, mesdames. The bars are down and the season of exquisite mal-de-lune has blossomed in all its splendor of hokuspochondria."⁷ Barr's characterization of surrealism as "a serious affair," however, is a telling indicator of his determination not to produce a *surreal exhibition*, but an *exhibition about surrealism*. He had, after all, been a university professor before becoming a museum director, and this impacted on his selection of works for the exhibition, the way he chose to display them, and the various publications he produced to accompany it. These publications include an exhibition brochure authored entirely by Barr, a special issue of the *Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art* that featured an advance copy of surrealist Georges Hugnet's essays on "Dada and Surrealism," and a much delayed catalogue that was published in late December 1936, after the show had opened.⁸ By the time it closed in

6 Barr, "Preface" (note 2), p. 8.

7 Edward Alden Jewell, "Exhibition Opens of 'Fantastic Art,'" *The New York Times*, December 9, 1936, press clipping in A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks, 42, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (hereafter cited as MoMA Archives).

8 Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s "A Brief Guide to the Exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" is held in the A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks, 42 (note 7); see also Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Albums 3.44, MoMA Archives. Georges Hugnet's article "Dada and Surrealism," *Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art*, no. 2/3 (November–December 1936), is held in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Albums, 3.41, MoMA Archives. Note that although Hugnet's essays are titled "Dada and Sur-

New York on January 17, 1937, the exhibition had been seen by over 50,000 visitors.⁹

Among the earliest archival traces of the exhibition that was to become “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” is a telegram from Barr to the surrealist poet Paul Éluard dated March 12, 1936. It references the forthcoming “International Surrealist Exhibition”—organized by Roland Penrose and the London surrealists in collaboration with Éluard, André Breton, Georges Hugnet, and Man Ray¹⁰—that would be held at the New Burlington Galleries in London later that year. “CABLE DATES SURREALIST EXHIBITION LONDON,” Barr wrote Éluard, “WHAT CHANCE DO WE HAVE TO OBTAIN IT FOR NEW YORK NOVEMBER DECEMBER.”¹¹ Éluard responded the following day: “LONDON JUNE STOP NEW YORK POSSIBLE NOVEMBER.”¹² In the end, however, Barr—working in close collaboration with Margaret Scolari Barr, a multilingual art historian whom he had married in 1930—made the decision to organize their own show.

The Barrs (figs. 15 and 16) spent much of the summer of 1936 working abroad on “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Scolari Barr’s chronology “‘Our Campaigns’ 1930–1944,” published in the *New Criterion* in 1987, provides an important firsthand account of their activities. They arrived in Paris on May 18 and stayed there through August 1. According to Scolari Barr, “The first visit is to André Breton. ... [T]o give what he calls his *adhésion*, he wants the show to be exclusively Dada and surrealist and insists on dictatorial powers.”¹³ She also reported on the need for support from Éluard, “the other high priest of Surrealism ... to enlist the coop-

realism” on the cover of the *Bulletin*, they are respectively titled “Dada” and “In the Light of Surrealism” inside the publication. They were translated by Margaret Scolari Barr, and were reproduced in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed., exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, second edition, 1937).

9 Although this was one of the more widely attended exhibitions in MoMA’s early history, it did not receive as many visitors as “Vincent van Gogh” (November 4, 1935–January 5, 1936), which was visited by 123,339 people (see MoMA press release for the exhibition’s circulating tour, n.d., https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_333032.pdf, accessed January 12, 2018). It is worth noting that “Vincent van Gogh” ran more than two weeks longer than “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” In total, 50,034 visitors attended the latter exhibition, far more than the 29,272 visitors who attended “Cubism and Abstract Art” (March 2–April 19, 1936). For attendance statistics on these two exhibitions, see Michelle Elligott, “Chronology,” in Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter, eds., *Dada in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), pp. 307, 309.

10 Kachur, *Marcel Duchamp* (note 5), pp. 10, 12–13.

11 Telegram from Alfred Barr to Paul Éluard, New York, March 12, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives: “CABLEZ DATES EXPOSITION SURREALIST LONDRES QUELLE CHANCE NOUS AURIONS DE L’OBTENIR POUR NEW YORK NOVEMBRE DECEMBRE.” All translations from the original French are by the authors and Charlotte Barat.

12 Telegram from Éluard to Barr, Paris, March 13, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives: “LONDRES JUIN STOP NEW YORK POSSIBLE NOVEMBER [sic].”

13 Margaret Scolari Barr, “‘Our Campaigns,’” *New Criterion*, August 1987, p. 44.



15 Margaret Scolari Barr in the 1930s, in *Our Campaigns: An Album*, special issue of *The New Criterion*, Summer 1987. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



16 Alfred H. Barr Jr., ca. 1932–33. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

eration of the artists.”¹⁴ Scolari Barr describes long visits to artists’ studios, including those of Jean (Hans) Arp, Max Ernst, Leonor Fini, Valentine Hugo, and Joan Miró. Even though these meetings were convivial, the Barrs knew they could not “take for granted” the artists’ willingness to “risk rejection from the Surrealist circle” by supporting the exhibition.¹⁵ Therefore, they made the strategic decision to enlist Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray as intermediaries in their negotiations with surrealist artists.

The Barrs traveled to London in June to visit the “International Surrealist Exhibition” and upon their return to Paris they continued their efforts to reach an agreement with the surrealist poets Breton and Éluard.¹⁶ On July 12, Barr met with Éluard, who sent him a letter the following day in which he set out a number of demands, notably that the exhibition be titled “Exposition surréaliste” and that Barr include the artists that he and Breton proposed. Éluard also encouraged Barr to reach out to Duchamp concerning the selection of American artists for

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kachur explains that the Barrs left Paris for London on June 25, 1936. See Kachur, *Marcel Duchamp* (note 5), p. 14. For discussion of the Barrs’ return from London, see letters from Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Jean (Hans) Arp and E. L. T. Mesens, both Paris, July 14, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

the show.¹⁷ According to Éluard, if Barr agreed to the conditions he and Breton requested, they would eagerly contribute “to the success of the exhibition, to the success of true Surrealism in America.”¹⁸

Barr’s reply to Éluard’s letter indicates that even though he found its tone “dictatorial,” he appreciated Éluard’s “desire to clearly state [his] position” and hoped to maintain the “friendship that I have always felt for you and Mrs. [Nusch] Éluard.”¹⁹ The same day, at Éluard’s suggestion, Barr wrote to Breton, whom Barr had been unable to meet again before Breton left Paris for the countryside. In this letter, Barr explains his plans for the exhibition, informing Breton that he could not concede to their demands, particularly regarding the inclusion of specific surrealist artists as it was not within his power to “put the Museum exclusively at the service of Surrealism.”²⁰

In subsequent letters to Arp, Duchamp, and Ernst to request the loan of works, Barr reported on the disapproval of the show expressed by Breton and Éluard. To Duchamp, Barr wrote, “They had expected to have an official surrealist manifestation at the Museum but this is not possible, especially as it would involve showing artists merely because they had signed a manifesto.”²¹ Barr also asked Duchamp for his “American suggestions,” as Éluard had advised, noting that he already had a list of around fifteen artists. Writing to Ernst, Barr described “a letter from Breton saying that he disapproves of the exhibition and would not collaborate in any way, nor would Éluard,” which would prevent him from borrowing “several good Ernsts.”²² To Arp, Barr remarked, “Mme. [Sophie Taeuber] Arp has doubtless spoken to you of our conversation about the attitude of the surrealist poets. I now have word from M. Breton saying that he disapproves of the exhibition and will not collabo-

17 Letter from Éluard to Barr, Avignon, July 13, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

18 Letter from Éluard to Barr, Avignon, July 13, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. Excerpted from: “Je suis certain, en vous demandant tout ceci, d’être accordé avec André Breton et avec tous mes amis. Je crois d’ailleurs que vous n’y verrez que la ferme volonté de concourir, par le succès de l’exposition, au succès du surréalisme véritable en Amérique.”

19 Letter from Barr to Éluard, Paris, July 18, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. Excerpted from: “Bien que je ne puisse m’empêcher de trouver dictatoire le ton de votre lettre, je comprends et j’apprécie votre désir d’établir votre position. Je désire sincèrement de maintenir dans le cours de cette discussion l’amitié que j’ai toujours ressentie pour vous et pour Mme. Éluard.”

20 Letter from Barr to André Breton, Paris, July 18, 1936, Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. Excerpted from: “En tant que directeur de l’exposition je suis enchanté de recevoir vos conseils et ceux d’Éluard particulièrement pour ce qui concerne les artistes surréalistes mais je n’ai pas le pouvoir de mettre le Musée exclusivement au service du surréalisme.”

21 Letter from Barr to Marcel Duchamp, August 7, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

22 Letter from Barr to Max Ernst, August 7, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

rate.”²³ Barr told Arp he was deeply distressed by his disagreement with Éluard and Breton, but also expressed his surprise “at their assumption of the right to dictate either to artists or to the museum.”²⁴

Although Scolari Barr deflected attention from herself in “Our Campaigns,” her correspondence with Barr and various surrealist artists held in MoMA’s archives reveals her deep involvement in the planning of the exhibition, especially during her stay in Paris in September 1936 after Barr had returned to New York.²⁵ In addition to her keen intellect and training as an art historian, Scolari Barr’s language skills, particularly in French and her native Italian, were far superior to Barr’s and she translated much of his correspondence during this period. She also played an essential role in securing support from Breton and Éluard in Paris during the last crucial months leading up to the show.

Scolari Barr met with both Éluard and Breton in late September, with Duchamp assisting in arranging various important meetings.²⁶ On September 19, Barr sent her a telegram concerning the exhibition title: “CONSULT MAN RAY ADVISABILITY OF CALLING EXHIBITION SURREALISM AND FANTASTIC ART.”²⁷ Scolari Barr replied with further details about her efforts with the surrealist group: “RECONCILIATION DINNER ELUARD TWENTY FIRST WILL PUSH PICASSO DALI ... WHAT BORROWS FROM BRETELUARD.”²⁸ Scolari Barr’s list of appointments for the following week details her meetings, which included lunch with Valentine Hugo and dinner with Leonor Fini on 25 September, followed by a morning studio visit with Breton and an evening meeting with Éluard at Café Flore on 26 September. The same week, Scolari Barr also met with Duchamp at the Hôtel Lutetia.²⁹

23 Letter from Barr to Jean (Hans) Arp, August 7, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

24 Ibid.

25 Barr departed Europe on August 12 by boat, arriving in New York five days later on August 17. Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns” (note 13), p. 48.

26 See letter from Marcel Duchamp to Margaret Scolari Barr, Paris, Wednesday [September 16, 1936], The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. Duchamp writes, “J’ai donné rendez-vous à Breton pour demain jeudi déjeuner / Pourrais-je vous voir, après, vers 2 h ½ au Lutetia?” (“I have organized a meeting with Breton for tomorrow Thursday lunch / May I see you after that around 2:30 p.m. at the Lutetia?”). It was only later that week that Scolari Barr was finally able to meet with Breton. In a letter to Barr of September 25, Scolari Barr writes, “[A]m seeing Breton tomorrow only (Saturday, just a week since I got here).” See letter from Scolari Barr to Barr, September 25[–28], 1936, Alfred H. Barr Jr., Papers, I.B.3, MoMA Archives.

27 Telegram from Barr to Scolari Barr, Greensboro, Vermont, September 19, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.2, MoMA Archives.

28 Telegram from Scolari Barr to Barr, Paris, September 19, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

29 Margaret Scolari Barr, list of appointments for September 23–26, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.2, MoMA Archives.

In addition to negotiating a *détente* with Breton and Éluard and securing key loans, Scolari Barr pursued discussions concerning the texts to be commissioned for the exhibition catalogue. Barr had originally hoped for Hugnet to contribute a text on Dada and for Breton to write one on surrealism. Predictably, Breton's initial resistance to the overall concept extended to the writing of a text for the catalogue, and he even went so far as to ask Barr in early August to "also excuse Georges Hugnet."³⁰ As a result, Barr's plans for the catalogue remained in flux in late September, when he wrote Scolari Barr, "WANT BRETONS PRESENT POSITION SURREALIST ART HUGNETS BRIEF HISTORIES DADASURR-/EAILIST [*sic*] ART."³¹ He reminded her that the texts needed to arrive by mid-October to be included in the publication.³² In a long letter started on September 25, Scolari Barr remarked on the state of Hugnet's essay: "[He] was authorized to settle down to work yesterday. ... [H]e's promised me the dada section for the evening of the 29th so I and Man Ray can translate it on the boat."³³ She also addressed the missing essays and the two other major unresolved aspects of the show—the loan of works from surrealist artists and the exhibition title—in a cryptic, heavily annotated telegram of September 27: "BRETLPIC TANGUYMAAR HUGOPENROSE HUGENTKOCHNI LENDING DALIGAFFE JAMES PROBABLY ROSENBERG BRAQUEKAHN ABSENT BRETUGNET WRITING ... TITLE SURREALISM RELATED MOVEMENTS MUCH LIKED."³⁴ To Barr, however, the meaning was clear—Scolari Barr had succeeded in obtaining the agreement of both Breton and Éluard to collaborate and lend works, along with the support of many other surrealist artists. He replied the next day: "CONGRATULATIONS MAGNIFICENT WORK."³⁵

Although Breton eventually agreed to contribute a text on surrealism, its potential inclusion in the catalogue so greatly angered Dadaist leader Tristan Tzara that he wrote to Barr on October 6 threatening to withdraw his extensive loans from the exhibition.³⁶ As for Hugnet's essay, Barr finally received it on October 19, with an accompanying note stating, "In any case, I have shown [the text] to Breton and to Éluard and

30 Letter from Barr to Georges Hugnet, Badenweiler, August 4, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. "Il me prie d'excuser aussi Georges Hugnet."

31 Telegram from Barr to Scolari Barr, Greensboro, Vermont, September 21, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.2, MoMA Archives.

32 Ibid.

33 Letter from Scolari Barr to Barr, September 25[–28], 1936, AHB.I.B.3, MoMA Archives.

34 Telegram from Scolari Barr to Barr, Paris, September 27, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.

35 Telegram from Barr to Scolari Barr, New York, September 28, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.2, MoMA Archives.

36 Letter from Tristan Tzara to Barr, Paris, October 6, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.5, MoMA Archives.

they didn't make the tiniest objection, and even seemed very happy."³⁷ In the end, Breton's essay never materialized. Barr explained to Tzara in a letter of November 7 that he had asked Breton to "write a short statement on *the present position of the Surrealists*. He has not, however, found the time to do so."³⁸ Barr no doubt hoped that Breton's failure to submit a text would appease Tzara, and the Dadaist did, in fact, lend a large number of works to the exhibition. Even so, Barr remained disappointed in the catalogue, writing to Breton on November 29, "I can only strongly regret the lack of your text, because I have always admired the content and lucidity of your writings, and because of your decisive and essential role within Surrealism."³⁹ Barr wrote to Éluard the same day, remarking specifically on his support in late September: "Mrs. Barr told me in great detail all that you did to aid our exhibition and all of the kindness that you gave her. I thank you for her and for the exhibition."⁴⁰ "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" would open a week later in New York, with many of the loans from surrealist artists secured thanks to Scolari Barr's efforts in Paris.

Installation

According to the checklist for "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," by the time the exhibition opened to the public on Wednesday, December 9, 1936, it had grown to comprise more than 700 works, including paintings, collages, drawings, sculptures, photographs, films, prints, journals, and architectural projects (represented by photographs, studies, and models), as well as comparative works created by children, self-trained artists, and commercial designers, and various objects of "Surrealist character."⁴¹ Within this gargantuan selection, forty-five works were lent from the museum's permanent collection, just under 650 were specially borrowed

37 Letter from Georges Hugnet to Barr, [Paris,] October 19, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.2, MoMA Archives. "En tout cas, ici, je l'ai montré à Breton et à Éluard qui n'ont pas fait l'ombre d'un objection et qui, même, paraissaient fort contents."

38 Letter from Barr to Tzara, November 7, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.5, MoMA Archives.

39 Letter from Barr to Breton, November 29, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. "Je ne peux que regretter très vivement le manque de votre texte, soit parce que j'ai toujours admiré le contenu et la lucidité de vos écrits, soit à cause de votre rôle décisif et essentiel dans le surréalisme."

40 Letter from Barr to Éluard, November 29, 1936, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives. "Mme Barr qui m'a raconté en grand détail tout ce que vous avez bien voulu faire pour aider l'exposition et toutes les gentillesques que vous avez eu pour [sic] pour elle. Je vous remercie pour elle et pour l'exposition."

41 "Catalog of the Exhibition," in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed., exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, first edition, 1936), p. 238. All page references to the exhibition checklist refer to the first edition of the publication.

for the occasion, and around thirty-five were photographic reproductions of works that Barr considered important to his exhibition concept but was unable to borrow. Artworks began arriving from abroad in late October, although a number of loans were delayed and shipments continued to trickle in to the museum through November into early December.⁴²

The museum's previous exhibition closed on November 22, leaving just over two weeks before the evening preview of "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" scheduled for December 8.⁴³ Taking into account the need to de-install much of the museum, Barr probably had around ten days at his disposal to install a vast exhibition featuring an extraordinary variety of objects in MoMA's first permanent home.⁴⁴ Located at 11 West Fifty-Third Street, the five-floor Beaux-Arts-style townhouse was originally designed by C. P. H. Gilbert for the linen merchant William Barbour in 1901 (fig. 17).⁴⁵ The Rockefeller family had purchased the building in 1924 and subsequently leased it to the museum from 1932; it would be demolished by 1938 to make way for a modern, international-style building designed by architects Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone.

To date, neither floor plans nor elevations for the Gilbert townhouse have been located,⁴⁶ either from the time it was built or from 1936 when Barr installed "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism." Likewise, there do not seem to be any surviving installation plans for the exhibition. This limits

42 See the document, "Regarding Insurance Lists for Exhibition of Surrealism and Fantastic Art," sent by MoMA to W. D. Mayer of Farjean, Ballin & Co, the museum's insurer, detailing the arrival of shipments from abroad. The French shipments arrived on the S. S. *Lafayette* (October 22, 1936) and the S.S. *Champlain* (November 4, 1936); English shipments arrived on the S.S. *American Banker* (October 20, 1936), the S.S. *Georgie* (October 26, 1936), the S.S. *Aquitania* (October 27, 1936), and the S.S. *Queen Mary* (November 11, 1936). An Italian shipment arrived on the S.S. *Rex* (October 23, 1936) and a Swiss shipment arrived on the S.S. *Manhattan* (October 30, 1936). "Waybill No. 2611" (October 22, 1937), prepared by Farjean, Ballin & Co. concerning the return shipments for the exhibition, shows that the last shipment to arrive in New York was on the S.S. *Black Falcon* (December 3, 1936). The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.11, MoMA Archives.

43 "John Marin. Watercolors, Oil Paintings, Etchings" (October 19–November 22, 1936) preceded "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism." The press release for the exhibition (dated October 21, 1936) details that it was installed on the first and second floors of the museum; https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325070.pdf, accessed January 12, 2018.

44 Advance press release, 1936 (note 1).

45 Christopher Gray, "With a Museum for a Neighbor..." *New York Times*, May 2, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/realestate/momas-history-of-demolishing-potential-landmarks.html>, accessed January 12, 2018.

46 Neither floor plans nor elevations are held in The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; the Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow; or New York City's Municipal Archives. Thanks to the tremendous support of MoMA colleagues Tunji Adeniji (Chief Facilities and Safety Officer) and Vincent Bosch (Manager of Buildings Operations), the authors were also able to pursue research in New York City's Department of Buildings. MoMA's current site incorporates numerous official addresses, and it was not possible to locate records for this specific building at 11–13 West Fifty-Third Street, though it is still faintly possible such records exist. Historical floor plans for the building at 23–25 Fifty-Third Street were consulted, and they confirmed the authors' understanding of historical Beaux-Arts buildings on this block.



17 Beaumont Newhall, facade of the original townhouse of the Museum of Modern Art at 11 West Fifty-Third Street, showing a Calder mobile displayed in the exhibition “Cubism and Abstract Art,” 1936. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

the accuracy of any attempt to reconstruct the specifics of Barr’s display, including the sequencing of galleries, floor-by-floor layouts, and wall-by-wall groupings of artworks, and to analyze the broader arguments broached by his display strategies that might impact interpretive views of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Nevertheless, working from sources that include reviewers’ comments on the installation published in the press at the time; the twenty-five photographs of the displays that Barr commissioned from photographer Soichi Sunami (which document only some 140 individual objects out of a total of over 700); installation photographs of other museum exhibitions presented in the same building between May 1932 and July 1937, which reveal more of the interior design; Barr’s correspondence with artists included in the exhibition; and painstaking scrutiny of flooring types, wall treatments, and moldings as photographed, certain hypotheses can be advanced.

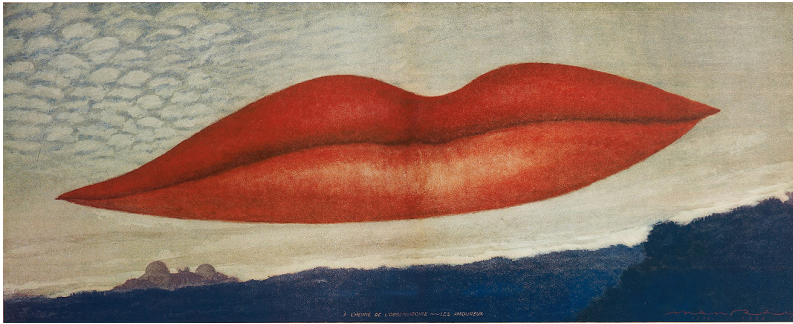
On February 1, 1937, after the exhibition had closed in New York, Barr wrote to Duchamp in Paris, enclosing installation photographs and describing how Duchamp’s *Rotating Apparatus* “faced the entrance of the Museum and made a very fine effect. At the right are your *Stop-*

18 Soichi Sunami, installation view of the exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1936. Showing *Orator* by Man Ray, 1935 (center), above *Rotating Apparatus* by Marcel Duchamp, 1920; and *3 Standard Stoppages* by Duchamp, 1914, above a display case containing three of Duchamp’s *Rotoreliefs*, 1935. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



pages-étalon, underneath which revolved your *Roto-reliefs*”⁴⁷ (fig. 18). Barr’s letter, combined with the installation photographs he sent, make it clear that the first thing visitors who walked through the front door of 11 West Fifty-Third Street would have seen was Duchamp’s *Rotating Apparatus* (*Optique de précision*, 1920), which according to the press release could have its speed adjusted by viewers to their liking, as well as his *3 Standard Stoppages* (*Stoppages-étalon*, 1914), and a case with three spinning *Rotoreliefs* (1935). Over Duchamp’s whirling optical machine, as documented in the photograph, Barr hung Man Ray’s *Orator* (*L’Orateur*, 1935), a wood and glass object. This was not, however, the work that was displayed in this position on the night of the exhibition preview, which was attended, as reported by newspapers, by trustees such as A. Conger Goodyear, the museum’s president, and Mrs. Cornelius N. Bliss, chair of the museum’s Membership Committee, along with artists including Salvador Dalí, Leonor Fini, and Man Ray.

47 Letter from Barr to Duchamp, February 1, 1937, The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.4, MoMA Archives.



19 Man Ray, *Observatory Time—The Lovers*, 1932–34/1970, colored lithograph after an oil on canvas, 68 × 104 cm (dimensions of original painting shown by Barr, now lost: 99 × 251.5 cm). Collection Clo and Marcel Fleiss, Paris.



20 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: *The Surrealist Poets Paul Éluard, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, René Crevel, Benjamin Péret, René Char* by Valentine Hugo, 1935; *Puzzle of Autumn* by Salvador Dalí, 1935; *Daily Torments* by Richard Oelze, 1934; and *Observatory Time—The Lovers* by Man Ray, 1932–34 (top center). New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Instead, according to Scolari Barr and several newspaper critics, Barr initially positioned Man Ray’s *Observatory Time—The Lovers* (*À l’heure de l’observatoire, les amoureux*, 1932–34) (fig. 19) opposite the entrance, above Duchamp’s *Rotating Apparatus*.⁴⁸ Speaking of the Man Ray painting, Scolari Barr recalled, “A vast pink mouth, like a cloud at sunset. . . . Here for generations to see are the lips of Lee Miller, Man Ray’s mis-

48 See the clipping of “Ga-Ga Season Is On and in Display of New York’s Artistic Fringe” (unattributed), in *Pantagraph*, December 9, 1936, Department of Public Information Records, 30 [mf 7:749], MoMA Archives.

tress. The trustees are shocked and feel that the picture should be hung less prominently.”⁴⁹ By the time Barr called Sunami in to document the exhibition, the “vast pink mouth” had been moved to what was likely a gallery on the second floor, where Barr placed it above works by Dalí, Valentine Hugo, and Richard Oelze (fig. 20). This incident is a vivid reminder that Breton and Éluard were not the only involved parties with whom Barr had to negotiate in order to realize “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism”—he also had to reassure various skeptical trustees, A. Conger Goodyear chief among them.⁵⁰

To the immediate right of the museum entrance, according to reviewers, Barr placed a six-foot tall assemblage by American artist Wallace Putnam (fig. 21).⁵¹ Critics enjoyed enumerating all the recognizable real-world elements in the various assemblages Barr included in the show, and Putnam’s *Agog* (1935) was no exception: the photograph of the work confirms reports of a “rolling-pin capped by a green glass insulator, two umbrella handles, a tin strainer, a rubber, a large picture frame, a barrel hoop and automobile reflector, a piece of rubber hose, and the top of a refuse barrel.”⁵² The same *New York Herald Tribune* reviewer also noted at the entrance level, along with Putnam’s *Agog* and Duchamp’s *Rotating Apparatus*, the enigmatically titled work by Duchamp, *Why Not Sneeze?* (1921), consisting of a marble-cube-filled birdcage. Installation photographs document this work as being placed at the center of a wall near other works by Duchamp (fig. 22).

Judging from the similarity in flooring, it seems likely that Barr installed a wall of abstract, mechanomorphic paintings by Duchamp’s New York Dada partner, Francis Picabia, in the same gallery as *Why Not Sneeze?* and the other Duchamps (fig. 23). If this conjecture is true, and taking into account the initial presence of Man Ray’s *Observatory*

49 Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns” (note 13), pp. 48–49.

50 In addition to Scolari Barr’s account that A. Conger Goodyear demanded that the Man Ray painting in the entrance to the exhibition be swapped after the opening, Goodyear also attempted to force Barr to remove various artworks from the traveling exhibition early the following year. Barr wrote insistently to Goodyear on January 13, 1937, “I cannot agree to the arbitrary omission from the tour of the exhibition the objects in question. . . . [M]atters of principle and procedure are involved as well as the value to the exhibition of the objects themselves.” Goodyear replied on January 15, “[T]he item to which I most strongly object is [Meret Oppenheim’s ‘Fur-covered cup, plate and spoon’]. . . . However, on further consideration I am inclined to think that the best solution of the matter is to leave the decision as to what articles are to be included in the exhibition entirely in your hands, merely registering my protest.” Goodyear was objecting to the inclusion of eight works by the artists Oscar Dominguez, Marcel Duchamp, Georges Hugnet, Oppenheim, and Wolfgang Paalen, in addition to a scientific model of lichen. See correspondence between Thomas Maybury and A. Conger Goodyear, New York, January 8, 1937; a letter from Barr to Goodyear, New York, January 13, 1937, and Goodyear to Barr, New York, January 15, 1937, A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks, 42, MoMA Archives.

51 Jewell, “Exhibition Opens of ‘Fantastic Art’” (note 7).

52 “Fur-Line-Cup School of Art Gets Spotlight” (unattributed), *New York Herald Tribune*, December 9, 1936, press clipping, A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks, 42, MoMA Archives.



21 Wallace Putnam, *Agog*, 1935, Exhibition albums for “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Time, which was subsequently replaced by his *Orator*, it means that Barr introduced his “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” exhibition with the key triumvirate of New York Dada: Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray.

Also mentioned by a reviewer as being installed in the room “next to” Duchamp’s *Why Not Sneeze?* was Max Ernst’s *The Gramineous Bicycle* (*La Bicyclette graminée de grelots*, ca. 1921) (fig. 24):

“The pièce de résistance in the next room is a large oil [painting] of several cross-sectioned peanuts infested with termites. Some of the peanuts have stomachs and one is equipped with flippers in the manner of a seal. It was painted by Max Ernst, a German, and the title (get set) is: ‘The Gramineous Bicycle Garnished with Bells The Pilfered Grey Bears and the Echinoderms Bending The Spine in Search of Caresses.’”⁵³

53 Joseph L. Myler, “Night Mare Material At Surrealist Exhibit,” *The Independent*, December 18, 1936, Department of Public Information Records, 30 [mf 7:764], MoMA Archives.



22 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: Marcel Duchamp’s works *The King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes*, 1912; *Coffee Mill*, 1911; *The Bride*, 1912; *Why Not Sneeze?*, 1921; and *The Bachelors*, 1914. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



23 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: Francis Picabia’s works *Catch as Catch Can*, 1913; *Amorous Procession*, 1917; *Object Which Does Not Praise Times Past*, 1916; and *Infant Carburetor*, 1918. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

If the reviewer’s “in the next room” is to be trusted, the implication is that Barr installed all the Dada works, including those produced in New York and those produced in Europe, on the entrance level, thus grounding his show’s narrative sequence in the discoveries of Dada and not, as one might have expected if his presentation were strictly chronologi-



24 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, right to left: *The Gramineous Bicycle Garnished with Bells the Pilfered Grey Beards and the Echinoderms Bending the Spine to Look for Caresses* by Max Ernst, ca. 1920; on a black background, works by Ernst (*Here Everything is Floating*, ca. 1919; *Sculpture: The Chinese Nightingale*, 1920; and *Dadamax with Caesar Buonarroti*, 1920, visible) and works by Johannes Theodor Baargeld (*Typical vertical scrawling as disguise of the Dada Baargeld*, 1920; *The Human Eye and a Fish, the Latter Petrified*, 1920; and *Drawing*, 1920, visible); *Dada Head* by Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 1920 (on a pedestal); *Birds in An Aquarium* by Jean (Hans) Arp, 1920; works by Christian Schad on a black background (including his *Schadographs*, 1918), next to his *Babylonian Apocalypse*, 1918; *Colored Woodcut* by Marcel Janco, 1916; *Miller* by Jean (Hans) Arp, 1916; and in a display case (lower left), two or more unidentifiable works. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



25 Soichi Sunami, detail of the wall text in “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” showing the word “COLOGNE” above works by Johannes Theodor Baargeld and Max Ernst. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

cal, in the earlier “old master” precursors, who were represented by the “fantastic art” referenced in the exhibition title.

It is significant that Barr’s display of works by the European Dadaists was scrupulously historical: it brought together Arp’s early polychrome wood reliefs, Christian Schad’s photograms, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s *Dada Head* (*Tête dada*, 1920) as representatives of Zurich Dada, while works by Ernst and Johannes Theodor Baargeld, the primary protagonists of Cologne Dada, appeared beneath block letters spelling out the city’s name (fig. 25). This small, barely visible detail in the installation photograph suggests that Barr was probably the first to use a city-center model to display Dada objects, an organizing structure that has prevailed through to the present day.⁵⁴

Also on the street level, most likely to the left of the main entrance on Fifty-Third Street, was a table used for displaying catalogues and other printed matter (fig. 26). Above it appeared the exhibition title, “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” and three reliefs by Arp.⁵⁵ Perpendicular to



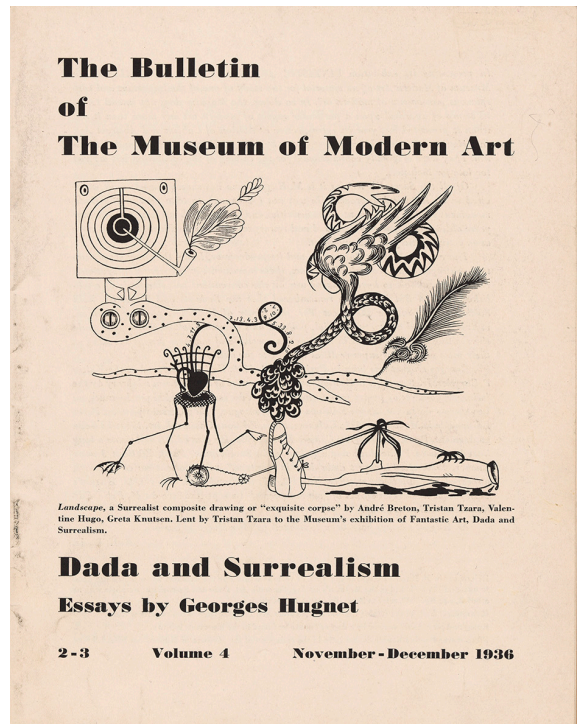
26 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: Jean (Hans) Arp’s works *Torso and Head*, 1930; an unidentified relief; and *Constellation*, 1928. On the table are two open copies of the exhibition catalogue, with eight closed copies on the left below eight other museum publications, including *African Negro Art*, 1935; *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750–1900*, 1923; *Modern Painters and Sculptors as Illustrators*, 1936; *John Marin: Watercolors, Oil Paintings, Etchings*, 1936; and three unidentified books. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

54 Anne Umland, “Dada in the Collection: A Permanent Paradox,” in Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter, eds., *Dada in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), p. 18.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 37; Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns” (note 13), p. 45. The leftmost relief has been identified as *Torse et tête* (1930) and the rightmost relief as *Constellation* (1928); the center relief is unidentified.



28 Alfred H. Barr Jr., *A Brief Guide to the Exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, 1936. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



29 *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* with George Hugnet's essays, *Dada and Surrealism*, 1936. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

the title wall was a display of "Publications of The Museum of Modern Art," which included eight copies of the first edition of the exhibition catalogue (fig. 27),⁵⁶ with two open copies of the book on the table and two related publications—Barr's *A Brief Guide to the Exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (fig. 28) and a special issue of the *Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art* (vol. 4, nos. 2–3, November–December 1936), which included Hugnet's essays on "Dada and Surrealism" (fig. 29). The photograph must have been taken after the first edition of the catalogue was published and after the exhibition's public opening on December 9. Due to the catalogue's delay, Barr's introductory text was initially printed in a "Brief Guide" to the exhibition. This was a give

56 Ultimately there were three editions published of the "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" catalogue: the first edition bears a publication date of December 1936 and has Man Ray's black-and-white *Rayograph* (1923) printed on the cover; the second edition was published in July 1937, with the same Man Ray cover but printed in green ink; and ten years later, in 1947, a third, expanded and rearranged edition was published, but with a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, *The Evil Genius of the King* (1914–15), chosen by James Thrall Soby, replacing the amorphous Man Ray originally selected by Barr for the cover.

away pamphlet that included a “List of some of the devices, techniques, and media shown in the exhibition,” compiled by Barr and keyed to individual works in the show. The two open catalogue spreads visible in the photograph feature works by Arp from MoMA’s collection and two works by Dalí borrowed from the surrealist poet and patron Edward James. This display was most likely set up to echo what Barr described as the two primary categories of surrealist paintings: relatively spontaneous abstractions and “hand-painted dream photographs.”⁵⁷

Visitors who proceeded up the stairs to the left of this display would have arrived at what were probably relatively spacious carpeted galleries. Here, Barr installed at least three walls of de Chirico paintings presented in a single line with ample space between them—a picture hanging practice that was first seen in the late nineteenth century and was particularly well suited to presenting a historical narrative of art (fig. 30).⁵⁸ De Chirico was one of several artists that Barr chose to present in a monographic manner. Another was Max Ernst, who was also the most



30 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: Giorgio de Chirico’s works *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, 1911; *Toys of a Philosopher*, 1917; *Duo or the Mannequins of the Rose Tower*, 1915; and *Melancholy and Mystery of the Street*, 1914. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

57 Alfred H. Barr Jr., “A Brief Guide to the Exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” unpaginated, in A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks, 42; Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Albums 3.44, MoMA Archives. This quote is taken from the reproduction of this essay, which was printed as the “Introduction” in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed., exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, second edition, 1937), p. 11. Barr’s “Introduction” was not published in the first edition of the catalogue.

58 John Elderfield, “The Front Door to Understanding,” in John Elderfield, ed., *Modern Painting and Sculpture: 1880 to the Present at The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), p. 41.



31 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: *Animals Devouring Themselves* by André Masson, 1928; *Woman Asleep in an Armchair*, 1927, and *Seated Woman*, 1927, by Pablo Picasso; *Mask of Fear* by Paul Klee, 1932; and *Catalan Landscape* by Joan Miró, 1923–24. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

heavily represented artist in the exhibition, with some forty-seven works included. Yet another was Arp, who had twenty-five works on the checklist. Both he and Ernst were key figures not only within Dada, but also in surrealism, which at least in part explains their prominence in the show.

Barr’s approach to the presentation of works showed considerable variation, underscoring the richly complex legacy of the exhibition. In places, he intermixed works by Paul Klee, André Masson, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso (fig. 31)—perhaps, as John Elderfield has suggested, arranging them according to “the size, orientation, and visual weight of adjacent pictures.”⁵⁹ This hanging strategy differs from the historical, city-centric rationale used for the groupings in the Zurich and Cologne Dada display. Barr also included, most likely on the second floor (judging by the carpet), works by American artists such as Peter Blume and Georgia O’Keeffe, whom he categorized in the catalogue as “artists independent of the Dada and Surrealist movements,”⁶⁰ but whom he nonetheless chose to exhibit.

In typical Beaux-Arts townhouse style, the upper-floor rooms of the exhibition were probably smaller, with lower ceilings and various types of wood floors. Extrapolating from the photographs, it is possible to

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁰ “Catalog of the Exhibition,” in Barr, *Fantastic Art* (note 41), p. 231.

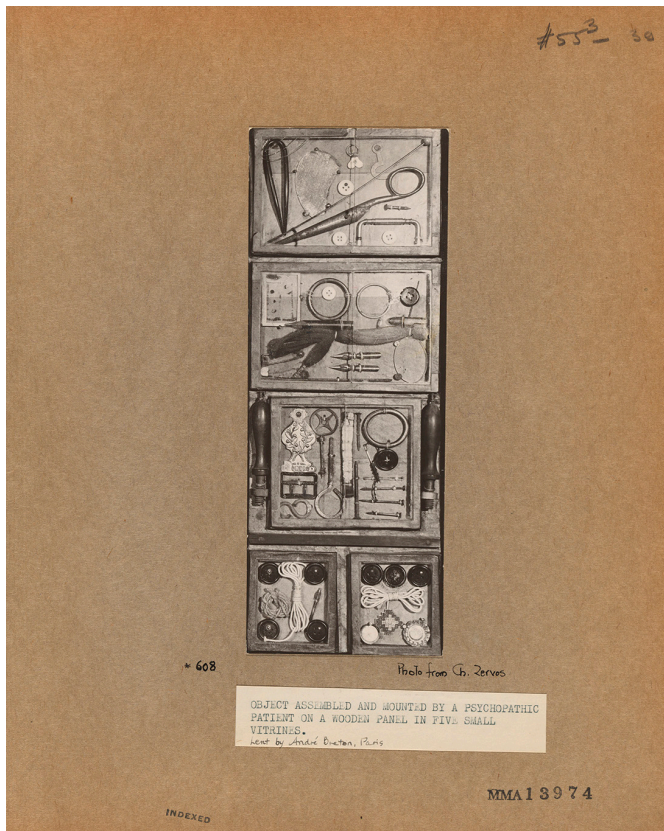


32 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: *A God of War Shooting Arrows to Protect the People* by Jeane Hoisington, undated; *The Exact Hour* by Wolfgang Paalen, ca. 1935; *Object* by Joan Miró, 1936; *Soap Bubble Set* by Joseph Cornell, 1936; *Spectre of the Gardenia* by Marcel Jean, 1936; an object assembled by a psychopathic patient; and unidentified works on dark panels. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



33 Jeane Hoisington, *A God of War Shooting Arrows to Protect the People*, undated, colored chalk. Current whereabouts unknown.

speculate that on the third floor Barr installed a gallery filled with surrealist objects (fig. 32), such as Wolfgang Paalen’s *The Exact Hour* (ca. 1935) and Miró’s *Object* (1936), along with a colored chalk drawing by the then eleven-year-old Jeane Hoisington (fig. 33) and an “object assembled by a psychopathic patient” lent by André Breton (fig. 34). Such “comparative” material included by Barr went largely undocumented in the commissioned installation views, yet was the source of considerable contrepemps: perhaps most notoriously, the Société Anonyme founder,



34 Object assembled and mounted by a psychopathic patient on a wooden panel in five small vitrines, undated, exhibition albums for “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

artist, and modern art collector Katherine Dreier withdrew her seven loans from the exhibition following its New York presentation due to her objection to Barr’s decision to include children’s art and the “art of the insane” in the show.⁶¹

In the same room, presumably on the third floor, along with works by Miró, Paalen, Hoisington, and others, Barr dedicated a display cabinet to the New York artist Joseph Cornell. It featured his *Soap Bubble Set* (1936) and *The Elements of Natural Philosophy* (1936), and seems to have

61 For the clash between Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Katherine S. Dreier, see the letter from Dreier to Barr, New York, February 27, 1937: “The fact that you claim that from the surrealist point of view a person’s insanity only adds greater interest—shows how confused they are as to what is art. . . . Personally I considered it very dangerous for our American public who are not art-conscious to present such a fare. . . . Most people left your exhibition feeling wuzzy!! And it seemed as if you had deliberately hung the pictures to give the emphases [*sic*] to the abnormal. It was most painful.” See The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 55.2, MoMA Archives. Note that the “Art of the Insane” is Barr’s terminology; see the “Catalog of the Exhibition,” in Barr, *Fantastic Art* (note 41), p. 237.



35 Joseph Cornell, *Soap Bubble Set* (installed as part of *The Elements of Natural Philosophy*), 1936, box construction, 40 × 36.2 × 13.7 cm. Hartford, CT, Wadsworth Atheneum. Photographed by Soichi Sunami. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

been the only vitrine in this section that Barr asked Sunami to document in a detailed, close-up view (fig. 35). This object-filled gallery, along with the Zurich and Cologne Dada gallery, and a display devoted to “Fantastic Architecture,” is one of only three photographed installation views that are more interdisciplinary and crowded. Possibly also on the third floor, Barr exhibited groups of smaller paintings. In one documented instance of another display that followed a city-center model (fig. 36), paintings by London-based surrealists were hung together, among them John Banting’s *His Royal Highness* (1935) and Eileen Agar’s *Quadrige* (1935). The latter was lent by the English surrealist writer and collector Roland Penrose.

On the fourth and last floor of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” Barr took yet another tack, installing examples of what he categorized as “Fantastic Architecture” (fig. 37).⁶² Here he juxtaposed documen-

62 “Catalog of the Exhibition,” in Barr, *Fantastic Art* (note 41), p. 239.



36 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: an unidentified work; *His Royal Highness* by John Banting, 1932; *Quadriga* by Eileen Agar, 1935; an unidentified work; and *Hostesses* by Edward Burra, 1932. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



37 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: photographs of Kurt Schwitters’s *Merzbau*, 1925–1935; *The Palace at 4 a.m.* by Alberto Giacometti, 1932; and etchings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi from the *Carceri* series, ca. 1745. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

tary photographs of Kurt Schwitters’s *Hannover Merzbau* (1923–36) with Alberto Giacometti’s mysterious wood, glass, and string construction *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (*Le Palais à 4 heures du matin*, 1932), and eighteenth-century etchings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, folding the



38 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” Showing, left to right: a landscape-head painting in the tradition of Arcimboldo; a photographic reproduction of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* by Hieronymus Bosch; a School of Bosch rendition of *Descent into Hell*; a North Italian School rendition of *The Fall of Phaeton*; and *Shipwreck—Miracle of St. Nicholas of Bari* by Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia, ca. 1450. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

differences in eras, locations, and intentions that produced these disparate works into a grand transhistorical narrative.

Also on the fourth floor, in a counterintuitive, anti-rational, quasi-“surrealist” maneuver, Barr displayed the very earliest works included in the show, making it clear that his installation was far from strictly chronological (fig. 38). These works ranged in date from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, and according to the catalogue and master checklist, included both original works of art and photographic reproductions. Hieronymus Bosch’s *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, for example, was represented by a framed photograph, but hung next to it was *Descent into Hell*, an “original” painting attributed to the School of Bosch, lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. All the other works documented in the photograph of this display are originals, perhaps explaining why this grouping was photographed “for the record,” while other displays of precursors of surrealism were not.

It is interesting to consider Barr’s varied installation tactics in relation to those of two other, now legendary, surrealist exhibitions of 1936 that preceded his: the “Exposition surréaliste d’objets,” held at the Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris from May 22 to 29, and the “International Surrealism Exhibition” held at the New Burlington Galleries in London from June 11 to July 4. We know that Barr and Scolar Barr visited London to see the latter exhibition and that early on, Barr had expressed

interest in the possibility of the London show traveling to New York. Somewhere along the line, however, Barr and Scolari Barr decided to organize an independent project that positioned contemporary surrealist art in relation to what had come before it. Although the decision to consider surrealism together with its “Fantastic” and “Dada” precursors can be questioned, Barr’s clear, straight-line installations testify to both his didactic intent and his determination to demonstrate that surrealism was “a serious affair.”



39 Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, oil on canvas, 24.1 × 33 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

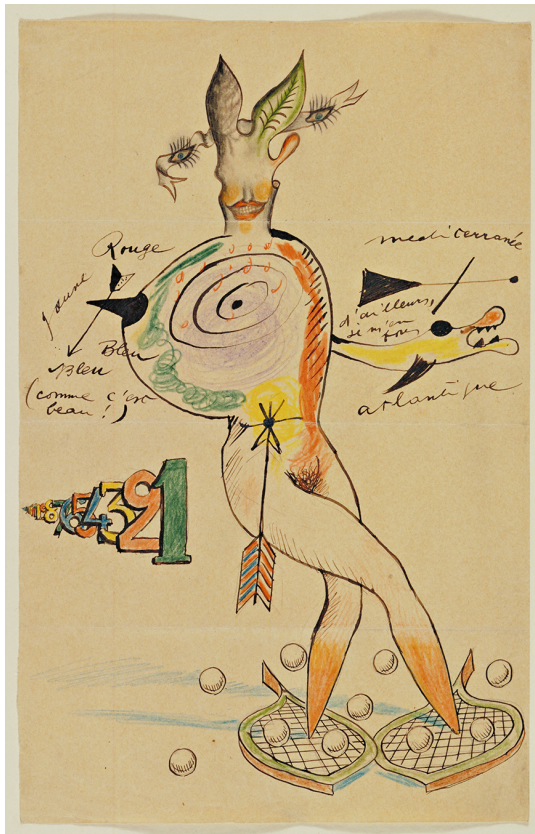
Collection

Barr acquired works exhibited in “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” for the museum before, during, and after the exhibition’s presentation in New York.⁶³ Works acquired before the show include contemporary surrealist paintings like Salvador Dalí’s *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) (fig. 39); surrealist films and “fantastic” film precursors like Georges Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la Lune*, 1902) (fig. 40); key examples on paper of surrealist chance procedures, such as the game

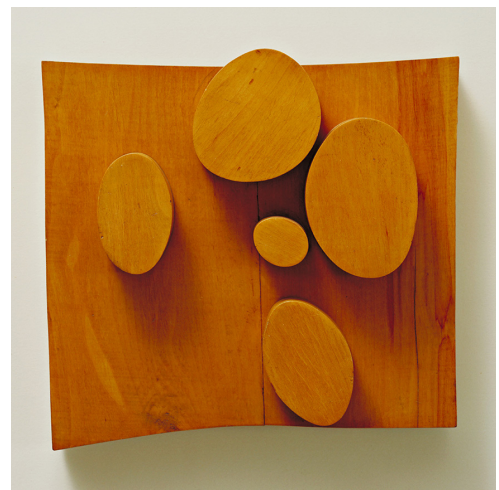
63 Although beyond the purview of this essay, the touring exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism”—note the added “and”—traveled to six domestic venues after the close of the exhibition in New York on January 17, 1937. It was shown at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, Philadelphia (January 30—March 1); Boston Museum of Fine Arts (March 6—April 5); Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts (April 12—May 10); Milwaukee Arts Institute, Wisconsin (May 19—June 16); University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (June 26—July 24); and the San Francisco Museum of Art, California (August 6—September 3). See Department of Circulating Exhibition Records, II.1.59.1, MoMA Archives.



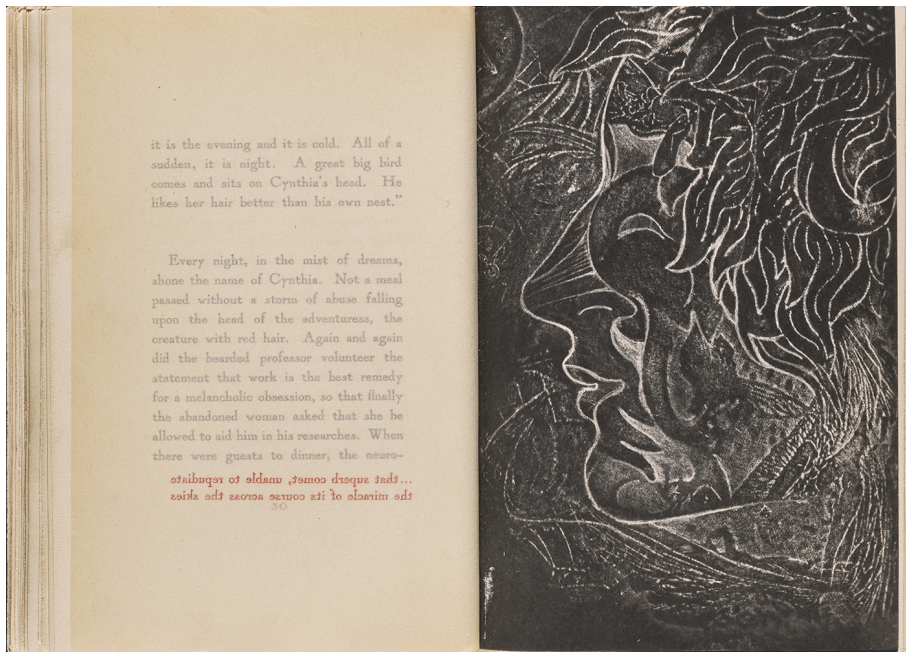
40 Georges Méliès, frame still from *A Trip to the Moon*, 1902, 35 mm film (black and white and hand-colored, silent), 11 min. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.



41 *Nude, cadavre exquis* by Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray, 1926–27, composite drawing in ink, pencil, and colored pencil on paper, 35.9 × 22.9 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.



42 Jean (Hans) Arp, *Objects Arranged According to the Law of Chance*, 1930, wood, 26.3 × 28.3 × 5.4 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.



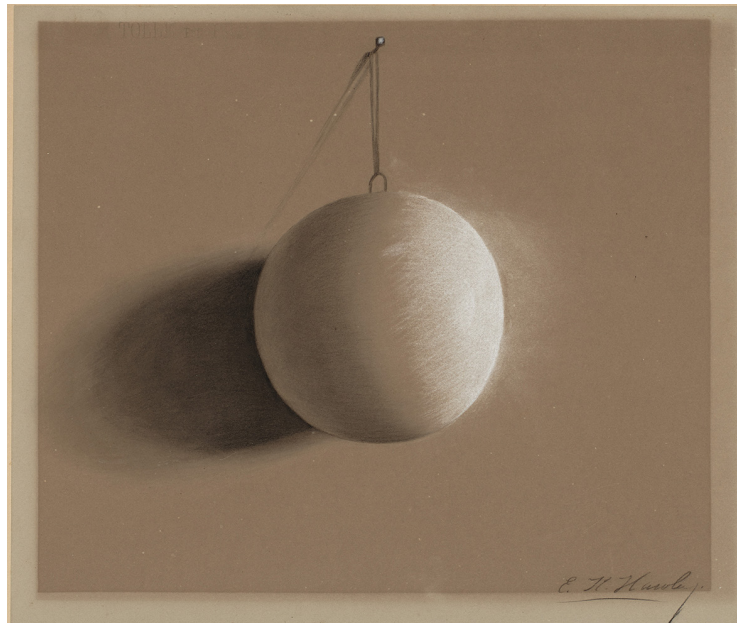
43 Max Ernst, illustration for *Mr. Knife, Miss Fork* by René Crevel, 1931, gelatin silver print, page size 17.8 × 11.3 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

of *cadavre exquis* (fig. 41) and automatic drawings; relief-objects that eschewed traditional categories of painting and sculpture (fig. 42); and a large number of important surrealist books (fig. 43).⁶⁴ Prior to the exhibition opening on December 9, Barr had acquired thirty-four of the artworks for the museum's permanent collection. During the New York run, he acquired another twelve, followed by another forty-five between the close of the exhibition at MoMA and the end of 1941, when the museum presented a show titled "New Acquisitions. Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" (July 23 to September 29, 1941). In the subsequent years, Barr, as well as later generations of curators, would acquire a further thirty-six works that had been included in "Fantastic Art,

⁶⁴ Soon before "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" opened in New York, Walter P. Chrysler Jr., then chairman of MoMA's Library Committee, made a very substantial gift to the museum of "the rare and most complete existing collections of literature pertaining to the surrealist movement. ... The 700 items, including books, pamphlets, broadsides, and other memorabilia, were assembled from the collections of Paul Éluard and Dr. Camille Gausse, both of which were bought last summer by Mr. Chrysler after they had been on the market for about two years." See Philip Boyer Jr., "Rare Surrealist Data a Gift to Museum Here" *New York Herald Tribune*, November 29, 1936, press clipping, A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks, 42, MoMA Archives. Many of these publications are not included in the total acquisition counts from the exhibition (see note 67), as they were not accepted into either the permanent collection or the study collection. Rather, these materials were given to the Museum of Modern Art Library, where they are held today in its special collections.

Dada, Surrealism.” Today, the number of works in the museum’s collection and study collection, which include various comparative materials (fig. 44) presented in the exhibition, totals 133.⁶⁵

Although it is true, as Sandra Zalman has pointed out, that there were “no major exhibitions of surrealism in the United States between 1936 and 1968,”⁶⁶ many of the surrealist works shown in “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” remained at the museum after the exhibition moved on from New York on January 17, 1937, to embark on its seven-month, six-venue domestic tour until September 3, 1937. These works were



44 Elizabeth King Hawley, *Hanging Sphere*, ca. 1875, pastel on paper, 29.2 × 34.3 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

65 These numbers are drawn from the collection database of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The total number takes into account four works shown in “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” which were acquired by the museum but later deaccessioned. It also includes twelve objects in the study collection, a special group of non-accessioned objects that MoMA owns, around seven of which are comparative objects acquired between 1936 and 1937. In the “Catalog of the Exhibition,” Barr categorized such works as “Comparative Material: art of children,” “Art of the Insane,” and “Miscellaneous objects and pictures of surrealist character.” See “Catalog of the Exhibition,” in Barr, *Fantastic Art* (note 41), pp. 237–238. One of the acquisitions Barr made after the exhibition was a drawing by then eleven-year-old Jeane Hoisington, *A god of war shooting arrows to protect the people* (n.d.). Margot Yale, cataloguer in MoMA’s Department of Drawings & Prints, recently discovered that the Hoisington drawing was transferred to the Manhattan Laboratory Museum in 1985 (email to Alison Guh, February 4, 2019). The Manhattan Laboratory Museum later became the Children’s Museum of Manhattan. Lizzy Martin (Director of Exhibit Development & Museum Planning) indicated that CMOM does not currently hold this drawing (email to Talia Kwartler, February 25, 2019).

66 Zalman, *Consuming Surrealism* (note 4), p. 7.

included in various displays of works from the museum collection, where they would have been seen by MoMA's ever-expanding public including artists, students, and art-enthusiasts alike. Of particular note are the first three synoptic collection presentations that Barr installed in 1945, 1954, and 1964, all of which he intended to instruct the general public on the history of modern art. Collectively and individually, these collection displays encourage consideration of the ways that the legacy of "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," as manifested in collection works, remained present at the museum and in New York City, even when there was not a major surrealist loan exhibition on view.

On June 20, 1945, during what would prove to be the last months of World War II, the museum opened what it billed as the "first general exhibition of the Museum Collection of Painting and Sculpture."⁶⁷ This was the first time that Barr installed works from the collection in an interpretive sequence aimed at describing "the complex and contradictory ways ... modern art developed over the decades."⁶⁸ The exhibition galleries in Barr's 1945 installation illustrated the major movements of modernism for museum visitors. Works by surrealist artists that had been included in "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" were shown on the museum's third floor. In the press release (there was no catalogue produced), Barr explained, "The paintings on the third floor spring from two radically different artistic—and human—problems, both of fundamental importance in the modern world. One concerned with the relation of man to society [and the other] springing from the relation of man to his subconscious mind ... more or less inspired or justified by modern psychology and the aesthetics of Surrealism."⁶⁹

Although Barr used the word "surrealism" in one section of the press release, the galleries showing works by artists such as Dalí, Ernst, Magritte, and Tanguy grouped them under the heading "Fantasy: Dream Perspectives"—the artists were not described as surrealists, but as "masters of dream realism, of vivid wonders and incongruities"⁷⁰ (fig. 45). The galleries that followed featured works presented under the title "Fantasy: Out of Chaos" (fig. 46), described by Barr in the press release as follows: "In contrast to [dream realism's] calculated magic, the artists

67 Press release, "Museum of Modern Art Opens Large Exhibition of Its Own Painting and Sculpture," n.d., p. 1, https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325481.pdf, accessed January 12, 2019.

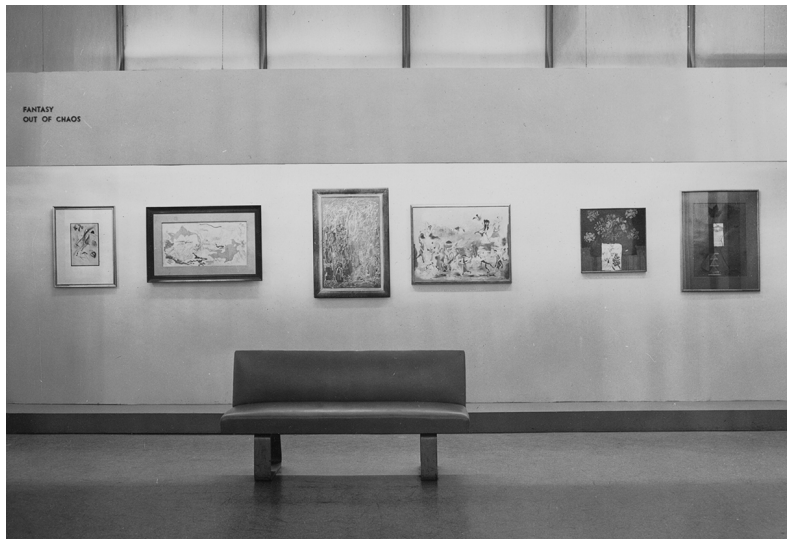
68 Elderfield, "The Front Door to Understanding" (note 58), p. 46.

69 Press release, "Museum of Modern Art Opens Large Exhibition of Its Own Painting and Sculpture," n.d., p. 2, https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325481.pdf, accessed January 12, 2019.

70 For the heading of the exhibition section, see installation photo (fig. 45). For a description of this section of the exhibition, see press release, "Museum of Modern Art Opens Large Exhibition of Its Own Painting and Sculpture," n.d. (note 69), p. 2.



45 Soichi Sunami, installation view of the exhibition “The Museum Collection of Painting and Sculpture,” 1945–46, featuring the wall titled “Fantasy: Dream Perspectives.” Showing, left to right: *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale*, 1924, and *Napoleon in the Wilderness*, 1941, by Max Ernst; *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, and *Portrait of Gala*, 1935, by Salvador Dalí; *Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph* by Man Ray, 1919; *Mz 379. Potsdamer* by Kurt Schwitters, 1922; and *The Hat Makes the Man* by Max Ernst, 1920. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



46 Soichi Sunami, installation view of the exhibition “The Museum Collection of Painting and Sculpture,” 1945–46, featuring the wall titled “Fantasy: Out of Chaos.” Showing, left to right: *Untitled* by Wassily Kandinsky, 1915; *Battle of Fishes* by André Masson, 1926; *Threading Light* by Mark Tobey, 1942; *The Tranquility of Previous Existence* by Walter Quirt, 1941; *Grandmother* by Arthur Dove, 1925; and *Street Singer* by André Masson, 1941. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



47 Soichi Sunami, installation view of the exhibition “The Museum Collection of Painting and Sculpture,” 1945–46. Showing, left to right: an unidentified work; *Pancho Villa, Dead and Alive* by Robert Motherwell, 1943; an unidentified work; and *The She-Wolf* by Jackson Pollock, 1943. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.



48 Soichi Sunami, installation view of the exhibition “The Museum Collection of Painting and Sculpture,” 1945–46, featuring the wall titled “The Free Form.” Showing, left to right: *The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers* (from the *Constellation* series) by Joan Miró, 1941; *Birds in An Aquarium*, ca. 1920, and *Mountain, Navel, Anchors*, 1925, by Jean (Hans) Arp; and an unidentified work. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

in the next gallery create images from a chaos of weaving, automatic brushstrokes.”⁷¹ As documented in installation photographs (fig. 47), this section juxtaposed the work of André Masson and others with contemporary American artists like Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock, visually narrating the now familiar story of surrealist automatism’s impact on abstract expressionism and the New York School. A third gallery space was titled “The Free Form” (fig. 48), in which “the spontaneous, almost automatic method then finds a more calm and lucid expression in the nearly abstract ‘free form’ compositions of Arp and Miró.”⁷² Although Max Ernst’s sculpture *Lunar Asparagus* (*Les Asperges de la lune*, 1935) was presented alongside paintings, Giacometti’s quintessential surrealist sculpture *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1932) was relegated to a separate sculpture display. This is an important reminder of how relatively medium-specific and painting-and-sculpture-centric the museum’s story of surrealism, as represented in its collection galleries, was in the past—one that invites recognition and reckoning with the tremendous sway this image of surrealism as a movement driven by painters and sculptors has had on perceptions of surrealism in the United States.

Barr’s 1954 collection display was, as in 1945, a temporary exhibition, on view from October 19, 1954, to February 6, 1955, held in celebration of the museum’s 25th anniversary. According to the press release, “Expressionist, realist, and fantastic paintings since 1910 occupy the second floor,” with installation photographs documenting the presence of surrealist works on this floor. These included major monographic presentations of the work of Ernst and Miró, who were described as among “the painters whom we, at mid-century, like to think of as a master.”⁷³ The big news in 1954, however, was the museum’s commitment to contemporary American abstract expressionist artists such as Jackson Pollock, whose work was featured prominently on the third floor.

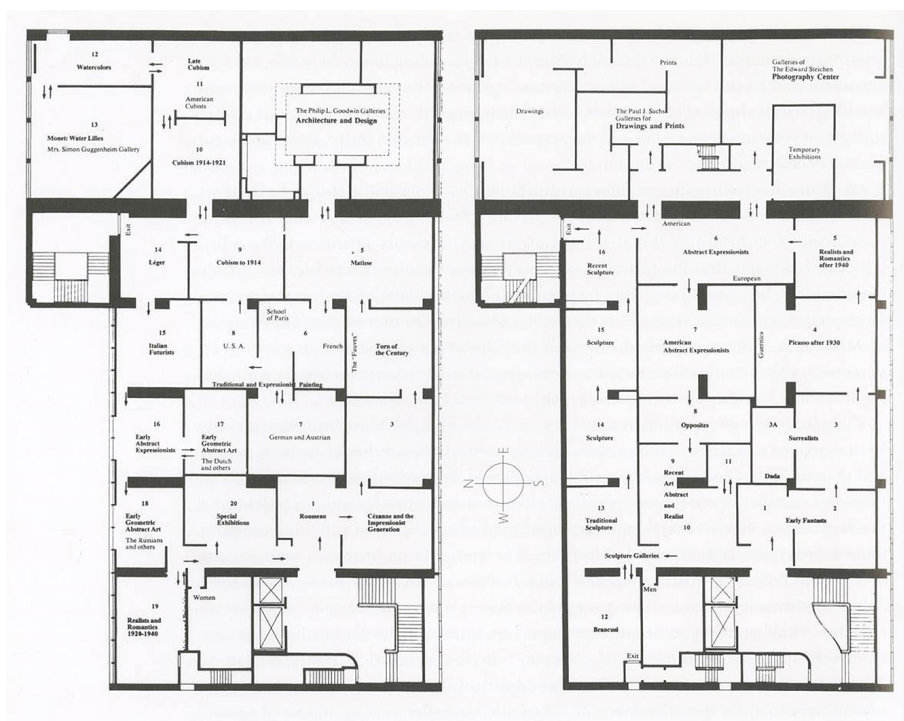
It was only in 1964, when the museum reopened after a significant expansion designed by architect Philip Johnson, that its collection became “continuously visible” and that as a result, surrealism went on “permanent” view.⁷⁴ Here, fortunately, there are floor plans documenting Barr’s presentation of works, which occupied the museum’s second and third floors (fig. 49). According to the press release, Barr, working with curator Dorothy Miller, decided to begin the third-floor installation with “the powerful movement toward the fantastic, marvelous, and

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Press release, “Paintings from the Museum Collection: Opens Museum of Modern Art’s 25th Anniversary Year Celebration,” for release October 17, 1954, pp. 1, 3, https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325959.pdf, accessed January 12, 2019.

74 Elderfield, “The Front Door to Understanding” (note 58), p. 40.



49 Second and third floor information plans, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1967. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

antirational which, like realism, was partially a reaction against abstract art.”⁷⁵ In Gallery 3 and Gallery 3A (fig. 50), Barr exhibited “the abstract surrealists” Arp, Masson, and Miró; “dream photographers with realistic techniques” like Dalí and Magritte; and the “versatile Max Ernst.”⁷⁶

Gallery 3A was a smaller space in which, according to the registrar’s records, Barr installed Giacometti’s *The Palace at 4 a.m.* and Meret Oppenheim’s fur-covered teacup, along with works by Cornell, Arthur Dove, George Grosz, Schwitters, and even a small Picasso painting. The intermingling of Dada and surrealist works, and artists not necessarily associated with either, underscores the extent to which for Barr the stakes were always far higher than whether something was classified or labeled as “Dada” or “surrealist.” What mattered most was his grand dialectical schema of rational and irrational forces, conceived against the backdrop of the rise of fascism in Europe, which led him in 1936 to present the consecutive exhibitions “Cubism and Abstract Art” and

75 Press release, “Painting and Sculpture from the Museum Collection,” May 25, 1964, pp. 3–4, https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326325.pdf, accessed January 12, 2019.

76 Ibid. (note 75), p. 4.



50 Soichi Sunami, installation view of “Art in a Changing World, 1884–1964: Painting and Sculpture from the Museum Collection,” 1964. Showing, on the foreground wall, left to right: Max Ernst’s works *Lunar Asparagus*, 1935; *Birds above the Forest*, 1929 (lower left); *Woman, Old Man and Flower*, 1923–24 (top center); *Nature at Daybreak*, 1938 (bottom center); *Napoleon in the Wilderness*, 1941 (top right); and *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale*, 1924 (bottom right); *The False Mirror* by René Magritte, 1929 (above door opening); and, on the right, *Meditation on an Oak Leaf*, 1942, and *Battle of Fishes*, 1926, by André Masson. On the background wall, left to right: *Multiplication of the Arcs and Slowly Toward the North* by Yves Tanguy, 1942; and *Phases of the Moon* by Paul Delvaux, 1939. New York, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

“Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” at a time when surrealism was still very much contemporary art. These exhibitions gave European artists, writers, and intellectuals a prominent, American stage in the waning hours before the outbreak of World War II. During this time, support for avant-garde artists continued to dwindle across continental Europe, nowhere more dramatically than in Germany. Mere months before the tour of “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” came to a close, works by many of the artists shown at MoMA in Barr’s two shows were included in the Nazis’ defamatory “Degenerate Art” exhibition, which opened in Munich in mid-July 1937.⁷⁷ Considered within their own historical, social, and political context, Barr’s curatorial projects constitute what

77 The touring exhibition was titled “Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism” and traveled to six venues across the United States between January and September 1937. For further details on the exhibition venues and dates, see note 63.

has been described as an act of “resistance to an emergent totalitarian culture,”⁷⁸ making not only “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” but also “Cubism and Abstract Art” serious affairs, indeed.

Note Regarding Captions & Acknowledgements

The captions for images of the exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” are drawn from the “Catalog of the Exhibition,” published in July 1937 in the 2nd edition of the exhibition catalogue. Titles and dates are taken from this source. Sometimes the historical titles and dates vary from that generally accepted in the current scholarship.

Many different individuals at the Museum of Modern Art in New York generously shared their time and expertise with us. We would especially like to thank our colleagues in the MoMA Archives—Michelle Elligott, Michelle Harvey, Elisabeth Thomas, Christina Eliopoulos, Nicole Kaack, and Ana Marie Cox—who kindly supported our research over many months. We are also grateful to Tunji Adeniji, Vincent Bosch, Nancy Adelson, and Patty Lipshutz, who assisted in obtaining files relevant to the museum’s original townhouse; to Charlotte Barat, who collaborated in our translations of archival materials from the original French; and to Alison Guh, who supported us in myriad ways.

⁷⁸ Leah Dickerman, “Dada Gambits,” *Dada*, Summer 2003, p. 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3397679>, accessed January 12, 2018.