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What's New in the Surreal World

Surrealism isn't dead—it's dreaming.

By Terrance Lindall

Over the past few years I have noted the major shows on surrealism launched at the Guggenheim, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Academy of Design in New York, as well as the Philadelphia Museum and the Pompidou Centre in Paris. They document the subject very well—on the assumption that surrealism died in the 1960s or that only a vestigial group of surrealists still practice, such as Leonora Carrington in Mexico. However, nothing can be further from the case. In fact, one of the largest and most



dynamic art movements worldwide today is surreal/visionary.

What do Surrealism, Surreal/Conceptual, Visionary, Fantastic, Symbolism, Magic Realism, the Vienna School, Neue Invention, Outsider, the Macabre, Grotesque, Singulier Art, Characterism and Massurrealism have in common? Though each has fine differences, they all evolve from an artistic style inherent to the thinking of André Breton, the leader of the surrealist movement.

In recent years there has been a dispute internationally among my colleagues regarding the artists who can truly be considered surrealists, but to make things simple I decided to

Yuko Nii, "Sand Harbors of the Ancient Planet," 1996, oil on linen.
Kelly Newcomer, "Hello I Love You Robot" (left), 2003, acrylic on ceramic with LEDs.

include all derivatives of surrealism under the category "Pansurrealism" to describe an all-inclusive artistic style derived from ideas in Breton's 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*. There are three reasons to use this term. First, all of these art types being debated evolve out of or are inspired by dream states and the subconscious (as put forth by Breton) or an autonomous "re-aspecting" of reality. Second, class theory in philosophy compels the naming of the class to which these art types belong. And third, by using one term rather than an expression, it is most accurate to call the class to which these common art types belong "Pansurrealism." While one could just call them all "surrealists," the purists cannot seem to allow it and the debate would continue ad infinitum.

In his *Manifesto*, Breton defines surrealism as "pure

H.R. Giger, "Birth Machine Baby," 1998, bronze.



Top Contemporary Surrealists

Following is a list of some of the top new surrealists; one can collect the best of these artists for \$2,000 to \$100,000:

◆ **United States:** Roberto Venosa, Yuko Nii, Antanas Adomaitis, Chris Kuksi, Chris Mars, Christina Dallas, Dana Parlier, Tim Slowinski, Madeline von Foerster, Theo Kamecke, Bethany Jean Fancher, Alex Grey, Richard Huck and Cynthia von Buhler.

- ◆ **Europe:** H.R. Giger, Von Strop, De Es Schwertberger, Daniel Hanequand, Hawk Alfredson and Wolfgang Grasse.
- ◆ **Russia:** Dmitry Yakovin, Sofia Baturina and Dmitry Pahomov.
- ◆ **Colombia:** Mariu Suarez.
- ◆ **Philippines:** Bienvenido "Bones" Banez.
- ◆ **Australia:** Damian Michaels.

Madeline von Foerster, "Self Portrait," 2005, oil and egg tempera on panel in wood frame.

psychic automatism" by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought—thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason and outside of all moral preoccupations. In its purest form in the plastic arts, surrealism would be abstract expressionism; critic Clement Greenberg recognized this. However, Breton was most interested in the dream state. The dream is the important central sustaining foundation of what the surreal, visionary and fantastic are about. This is not specifically what the abstract expressionists are offering, but it is what the surreal/visionary and fantastic artists of what I call "The New International Surrealist Movement" (NISM) are pursuing in their art.

In 2003 I produced "Brave Destiny," the world's largest show of works by living surrealists. Showcasing nearly 500 artists and held at the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center in Brooklyn, "Brave Destiny" expressed a broad notion of surrealism as an artistic style. It exhibited a



preponderance of excellence in draftsmanship and composition. Most of these artists are admirers or followers of Ernst Fuchs, rediscoverer of the Misch technique used by 16th-century masters. Classical rendering in oils has been disparaged recently by the nonrepresentational artists and their champions, especially of the New York School, resulting in the lack of representation in galleries in recent decades. Thus, visitors to "Brave Destiny" were astounded to see artists of such skill.

Today, surrealism has diversified, with installation art becoming a facet. Photography, which has been in use since the Golden Age, has now become a major expression of the new surrealists. Surrealism is also

robust in the areas of dance, theater and film.

The influence of surrealism in commercial mass media has been notable to everyone in the world of comics. Comics as we know them began to appear in 19th-century American Sunday newspaper supplements, starting with Richard Felton Outcault's "The Yellow Kid." Later, Winsor McCay's masterpiece "Little Nemo in Slumberland" appeared—a character who would not seem out of place in any surrealism show. In Europe, the adult fantasy magazine *Metal Hurlant* (known as *Heavy Metal* in the United States), which appeared in the 1970s, became a mass-media outlet for surrealists, and artists such as Moebius, Rod Kierkegaard Jr. and Phillippe Druillet became well known. These comics have had a direct influence on artists working today in the commercial worlds of fashion, advertising, video games and the like, as well as the fine arts.

Japanese "mass surrealism" (Manga) burst forth internationally as a global phenomenon in the contemporary art market initiated by a new generation of artists who were absorbed by Pop subcultures. Much the same way as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein were influenced by comics and advertising, many contemporary surrealist artists are incorporating images from a new and international phenomenon of pop culture,



Chris Mars, "A cleansing at Blue Bay," 2004, oil on board.

