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Contact: press@gallerywendinorris.com

SCIENCE IN SURREALISM
Victor Brauner, Max Ernst, František Janoušek, Marcel Jean, Matta, Gordon Onslow Ford, Wolfgang Paalen, Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, Remedios Varo

May 16 – August 1, 2015

Saturday, May 16:
2–3PM: Curatorial Conversation with Gavin Parkinson, Senior Lecturer of European Modernism at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London
3–5PM: Opening Reception

April 14, 2015 – San Francisco, CA – Gallery Wendi Norris is pleased to present Science in Surrealism, the first exhibition devoted to Surrealist artists who were interested in investigating the scientific advances of the first half of the twentieth century, especially those related to quantum physics and the Theory of Relativity. The exhibition, which opens Saturday, May 16 and will be on view through August 1, will include approximately 20 pristine works that have rarely been exhibited, including oils by Victor Brauner, Max Ernst, Marcel Jean, Matta, Gordon Onslow Ford, Wolfgang Paalen, Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, and Remedios Varo, as well as a selection of rare 1930s works on paper by František Janoušek. The exhibition will be accompanied by a 70-page, hardbound catalog featuring an essay by Gavin Parkinson, Senior Lecturer of European Modernism at The Courtauld Institute of Art in London. Parkinson is also the author of Surrealism, art and modern science (Yale University Press 2008), which served as the jumping-off point for the exhibition’s curatorial framework. On Saturday, May 16 at 2PM, Parkinson and a distinguished curator will present a talk at the gallery focusing on the connections between science and the Surrealist movement.

“Many exhibitions have been devoted to Surrealism and its relation to themes of sex, death, fantasy and magic, but no exhibition to date has yet demonstrated how the context of modern physics and its revelatory theories provided fresh insight into Surrealist art and its surrounding discourse,” said gallery owner Wendi Norris. “The discussions and debates that ensued in the 1920s and 1930s around discoveries like relativity spawned new compositional directions that have continued to influence decades of artists ever since. Through this exhibition and these works, we see how the Surrealist artists began to shape how we perceive the world around us based on a greater understanding of the universe, and how their explorations created one of the most significant paradigm shifts in the history of artistic production.”
Investigation of “the new physics,” as it was referred to at the time, was spearheaded by scientists such as Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr and Max Planck, among others. Its impact is reflected throughout the work of many Surrealist artists and writers in abstracted yet definitive ways. Matta’s paintings evoke the random scatter of subatomic particles; Ernst drew analogies between the Eros of psychoanalysis and the electromagnetic attractions and repulsions of mathematical science; Onslow Ford was known to have engaged in ongoing research on the links between art and metaphysics throughout his practice; Janoušek’s drawings feature symbolic objects with explicit anthropomorphic associations; Paalen titled his paintings with reference to science, using names like Between Matter and Light Unbound and Space Unbound; Tanguy incorporated geological imagery sourced from his travels through Africa into his canvases; and Varo, inspired by both her father (a hydraulic engineer) and brother (Venezuela’s Chief of Epidemiology for the Ministry of Public Health), often included scientific and medical imagery into her otherwise ethereal paintings.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Victor Brauner (b. 1903, d. 1966) attended the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, where he painted Cézannesque landscapes. He was introduced to the Surrealists when he settled in Paris in 1930. In 1934, Brauner had his first solo show in Paris at Galerie Pierre. At the outset of World War II, he fled to the South of France, where he developed his own graffito technique made from candle wax. In 1945 Brauner returned to Paris and was included in the 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme at Galerie Maeght. In both 1954 and 1966 Brauner’s work was shown at the Venice Biennale.

Max Ernst (b. 1891, d. 1976) was one of the central figures of Surrealism. He studied philosophy at the University of Bonn in 1909, and in 1911 joined the Rheinische Expressionisten group. Ernst first exhibited his paintings in 1912 at Galerie Feldman in Cologne, and shortly after was introduced to the work of Cézanne, Picasso and van Gogh. In Paris, where he moved in 1922, his friendships with André Breton and Paul Éluard led to his active participation in the Surrealist movement. In 1923 he collaborated with Joan Miró on designs for Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes, and later with Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel on the film L’Age d’or. In 1932 Ernst had his first U.S. exhibition at Julien Levy Gallery in New York and in 1936 he was included in the exhibition Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1954 he received the Grand Prize for painting at the Venice Biennale, and in 1975 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum held a major retrospective of his work that also traveled to the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris.
František Janoušek (b. 1890, d. 1943) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague from 1917 through 1922. After graduating, Janoušek became a member of the Manes Union of Artists. By 1929 his work was decidedly Surrealist, including imaginative and illusionistic imagery of ill-defined, symbolic objects detailed with organic and anthropomorphic associations. Most of Janoušek’s works are filled with intriguing grotesqueries that confuse and distort the essential anatomical forms of the human body.

Marcel Jean (b. 1900, d. 1993) who studied at the École nationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, moved to the United States to work as a textile designer in 1924 but returned to Paris shortly thereafter due to his growing interest in André Breton and the Surrealist movement. In 1936, he participated in the exhibition Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and was included in 1947’s Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme at Galerie Maeght. In 1978 he published the Autobiography of Surrealism, an anthology of Surrealist writings.

Roberto Antonio Sebastián Matta Echaurren (b. 1911, d. 2002), known as Matta, studied architecture and interior design at the Catholic University of Santiago in Chile. In 1933 he left South America for Europe and worked in Paris for Le Corbusier, where he met the poet Federico García Lorca, who introduced him to Salvador Dalí and André Breton. In 1937, Matta officially joined the Surrealist movement. Forced to leave Europe due to World War II, he arrived in New York in 1938, where his explorations of Surrealist automatic composition influenced the nascent Abstract Expressionist movement. In 1948 Matta was expelled from the Surrealists after a disagreement with Arshile Gorky. In the 1950s and 60s Matta became more socially involved in Latin American politics, and created a large mural for Chilean President Salvador Allende, which was painted over during the Pinochet regime and then restored and re-installed in 2008.
**Gordon Onslow Ford** (b. 1912, d. 2003) spent his early years in the British Royal Navy. Determined to pursue painting, he resigned in 1937 and went to Paris, where he met Matta, who introduced him to the Surrealist group, which he soon joined. With Matta, Onslow Ford continued to research links between art and metaphysics. Later, Onslow Ford lectured on Surrealism in New York and organized an exhibition of Surrealist works at the New School for Social Research. After spending time in Mexico, during which time he broke from the Surrealists, Onslow Ford and his wife moved to San Francisco, where in 1948 he had a retrospective exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

**Wolfgang Paalen** (b. 1905, d. 1959) was the son of Austrian-Jewish inventor Gustav Robert Paalen, and as such was exposed at an early age to elite members of artistic and academic circles, including Hans Hofmann, Fernand Léger, Albert Einstein, and Sigmund Freud. In 1936, following his first solo show in Paris, André Breton and Roland Penrose included Paalen’s work in the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London and the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* in Paris. In 1939, Paalen fled war-torn Europe for Mexico, spending time with Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivero. Over the course of his life Paalen amassed an important collection of ethnological artifacts, many of which now belong to New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the early 1940s, exiled from the Surrealists in Mexico, Paalen distanced himself from Surrealism in an attempt to reconcile its mystical tendencies with his own philosophy of contingency. In 1951 he re-joined the Surrealists in Paris, returning to Mexico a few years later before committing suicide in 1959.

**Kurt Seligmann** (b. 1900, d. 1962) studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Geneva and the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence. He moved to Paris at the end of the 1920s, where he was introduced to Jean Arp and Jean Hélion, who invited him to join the artist group Abstraction-Création Art Non- Figuratif. By 1939, with the onset of World War II, Seligmann was the first Surrealist to leave Europe for New York, where he exhibited his work at Karl Nierendorf Gallery and collaborated on the magazines *View* and *VVV*, which introduced the principles of Surrealism to American audiences. Later, he acted as mentor to artists including Robert Motherwell and Nell Blaine, and was an instructor at Brooklyn College in New York.
Remedios Varo (b. 1908, d. 1963) was influenced by the dichotomy of beliefs represented by her mother, a devout Catholic, and her father, an atheistic hydraulic engineer who favored reason, mathematics and free-thinking over religion. Through her work, Varo channeled the dualistic forces of the mystical and the scientific. In 1924 she attended the Academia de San Fernando in Madrid along with Salvador Dalí. In 1936, due to the Spanish Civil War and the end of her marriage, Varo left for Paris with poet Benjamin Péret, who introduced her to André Breton. Though she grew close to all of the Surrealists and was included in the 1938 *International Surrealist* exhibitions in both Paris and Amsterdam, as a woman she was often overlooked as an integral member of the movement. In 1941 she moved to Mexico, and later spent time in Venezuela, where she began studying and drawing mosquitoes for a campaign against malaria. In 1956 Varo had her first solo show at Galerias Diana in Mexico, which was widely celebrated.

ABOUT GALLERY WENDI NORRIS

Gallery Wendi Norris presents both a contemporary and Modern program that showcases a variety of artists working over many geographic locations and in a wide array of media. The gallery, located at 161 Jessie Street in downtown San Francisco, often shows two exhibitions simultaneously in order to encourage a re-contextualization of work by Modern artists while providing connections with the contemporary. Gallery Wendi Norris is active locally as well as internationally, working with individual collectors and museums alike in both primary and secondary markets. Founded with an emphasis on scholarship and education, the gallery produces researched exhibition catalogues, sponsors artist talks, hosts visiting academics, and engages in local public art projects, among other initiatives. Learn more at gallerywendinorris.com