

Alba, **Fondazione Ferrero**

from 27 October 2018 to 25 February 2019

From Nothingness to Dreams

Dada and Surrealism

from the Collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

Curated by Marco Vallora

The exhibition "From Nothingness to Dreams. Dada and Surrealism from the Collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen" will take place at Ferrero Foundation in Alba from 27th October 2018 to 25th February 2019. It was conceived by Marco Vallora following an exhibition logic reflective of Surrealist suggestions, both in the way works are showcased and how art is no longer presented as a slumbering museum piece.

In around ten sections with captivating titles, such as The Dada zero degree of art; Dreams, Eros, amour fou, erotic transgression; The unconscious, the double, the unsettling; Art and nature, man reinventing himself; Sade, Freud, Marx, disquieting muses of surreal living; Was there a Surrealist architecture?, and so forth... works of high quality and impact follow one another, in a sort of ghost-gallery of avant-garde fantastic imagination. Some can also be quite easily recognised, because they have been featured on the covers of our most cherished books (by Man Ray, Magritte, Dalí, Max Ernst, etc.). These works communicate with one another, in harmony or counterpoint, and follow a progression that is mostly thematic, paying attention to the chronology of events. Reflecting some problems and themes that help distinguish Dada's nihilistic poetics from the more propositional one of Surrealism: chance, the aesthetic ugliness, dreams, the unconscious, the relation with ancient art, the connection between art and ideology. For those who really love art and enjoy unexpected beautiful things, the promising and well-renowned Dutch Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam is a real gem of a collection. It showcases precious glassware and rare design pieces, old drawings by Dürer, prints by Goya, and fashion prototypes; rare works of Gothic, Renaissance, and 18th-century Italian art, from Beato Angelico to Jacopo del Sellaio, from Butinone to Francia, from Veronese and Titian, to Guardi and Piranesi. But also, of course, Flemish masters, in the likes of Van Eyck, Bosch and Brueghel, Rubens and Van Dyck, Rembrandt and the School of The Hague, with Van Gogh and Toorop, and the French, from Fragonard and Boucher to Monet, Degas, Cézanne, and also Picasso, Mondrian and Rothko, not to mention contemporary artists, from Nauman to Cattelan.

Very important is the collection of artists from the historical avant-gardes, not only Cubists and Dutch Constructivists, but especially Dada and Surrealists, many from the selective collection of Edward James (1907-1984), an extravagant patron-collector, a poet and a traveller, who had a passion for both Magritte and Dalí, becoming the latter's eccentric art dealer. In Alba, we will see *La reproduction interdite* (1937), his famous double portrait in the mirror, painted by René Magritte, whose cosmopolitan art dealer he was hoping to become.

Therefore, many are the masterpieces that today are crossing borders and all convene at Ferrero Foundation, having previously had a very limited circulation. As curator Marco Vallora explains: «In a thought-out and articulate display, the Foundation presents, in October, a new international exhibition for

its biennial show of great art. This original show is different from the previous ones, because it will include books, poems, magazines, pamphlets of fuming mutual polemic, film clips, music excerpts, all connected to the two movements, letters and posters, alongside canvases and sculptures that are innovative and often ground-breaking, highly evocative, and historically relevant».

Unlike Foundation Ferrero's previous shows, with spectacular masterpieces but with a monographic outlook (on Casorati, Carrà, Morandi and Balla), not only does this exhibition feature impressive works like the large-size triptych (*Landscape with a Girl Skipping Rope*, 1936), or Mae West's sofa-lips (also known from design replicas, but here in a unique vintage original of the time) by Salvador Dalí, or also Magritte's unsettling, yet evocative, mysterious canvases, but it also includes rare documents from the unexplored vaults of the Museum's library. To accompany the exhibition display, with discretion and yet explosive power, useful to explain some of the aesthetic achievements of the various movements and sub-groups, subtly in conflict with one another. As is known Breton was the unwavering, authoritarian Pontiff of the Surrealist movement, who occasionally excommunicated his pupils and colleagues, from De Chirico to Cocteau, from Bataille to Aragon, from Dalí to Queneau. Many of the documents come from his personal library, which was shockingly auctioned off a few years ago. Sometimes still complete with their sending envelopes, inscriptions or the author's underlinings. So photographs, calendars, post cards, illustrated books, historic magazines with visually effective covers, designed by artists like Duchamp, Masson, Picasso, Ernst, for instance for the innovative magazine «Minotaure». Its trailblazing and prophetic articles were penned by thinkers like Bataille, Lacan, the ethnologist and art critic Michel Leiris, the student of imagination and dreams Roger Caillois, politicians like Naville, film historians like Sadoul. Within this picture, one of the most spectacular elements in the exhibition will be the excerpts or frames from experimental and radical films by Desnos, Dulac, Buñuel, René Clair, Eggeling, Richter. Not to mention the fact that Dalí created sequences specially requested by Alfred Hitchcock and Walt Disney. Actually, not only must the title, employing the shock-word "Nothingness", surprise and enthrall, but also follow one of Dada's most radical beliefs. Not solely relying on Chance and on the rejection of the omnipotent artist and master of his work, Dadaism is rather subject to the rules of hazard and play, and particularly intends to champion the negation of art, the rejection of museum Beauty, and with its ready-mades, the rejection of decorative and reassuring art. The work of art, that is almost no longer a work nor art, must raise unsettling feelings, malaise and especially doubts.

After an introductory tunnel welcoming and sheltering visitors as they come in (as well as simulating a sort of journey into the human body and the meanders of the unconscious, but also a ghost train – not for children only – in one of those funfairs that avant-garde artists loved so much, with lights, advertisements, billboards, graffiti and mug shots, by Duchamp), are the Dada works which open the exhibition. They are those by Man Ray, a fashionable photographer who often worked with Duchamp. Schwitter's abstract collages and Arp's sculptures, or the quirky and provocative canvases by the Spanish-turned-Parisian dandy Picabia. Canvases with awkward titles like *Come with me over there*, *Egoism* or *Radio concerts*. They are not in themselves beautiful or adulating, like other classic works and even those of the avant-gardes, but they are shameless games of imagination, exercises of non-painting and anti-art, and so in this sense they do not have to be explained, but put in a context of rejection, subversion and anarchy. Because one must not forget that, however different their assumptions are, Dada and Surrealism share a common background and the same influences, which range from Sade's and Marx's political ideas, to poets like Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Poe, and Proust's crazy nemesis, Raymond Roussel, a dandy, a homosexual, a pill addict, who died in Palermo (perhaps killing himself), as evoked in a beautiful story-enquiry by Leonardo. Convinced he could become as famous as Verne, he wrote foolish plays in convoluted rhymes, and riddle-novels with ciphered keys, he was much loved by Perec and by the Nouveau Roman, by Duchamp and Giulio Paolini.

On display are the preparatory drawings and an amazing canvas by Dalí, inspired by Rousell's book *New Impressions of Africa*. Another very significant work is Lautréamont's imaginary portrait by Man Ray. Imaginary in that the 19th-century author of the *Chants de Maldoror*, illustrated by both Dalí and Magritte, is a mysterious figure. Indeed, we do not know if he was the aristocratic Isidore Ducasse born in Montevideo, or if he even existed at all, or rather if he was a more famous author in disguise. And under an ironing board cover (wrapped up as if it were a Christo work), a tarp covering a monument before inauguration and in this case concealing the person portrayed, Man Ray hid a Singer sewing machine – perhaps a homage to Winnaretta Singer, a great patron of the movement and of the films on display. The artist was certainly paying tribute to a now famous dictum of Lautréamont: «Beautiful as the chance meeting of a sewing-machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table».

Thanks to the loans of the Boijmans, we have the rare opportunity to display three different versions of Marcel Duchamp's *Boîtes* (*La boîte verte*, *La boîte-en-valise*, *À l'infinifif*). Since the 1930s Duchamp had stopped being an artist, and had apparently become only a chess player, and in these boxes he scandalously put away all of his oeuvre, with the polemic and sarcastic intent of destroying the idea of the artist-genius, replacing the pompous Museum display with a simple briefcase, ready to follow his constitutional nomadism and his caustic, corrosive irony.

The exhibition section about *Dreams* exemplifies a sort of new beginning, after the Dadaists' annihilation and radical rejection of art. For this reason, the word *Dream* (which for Dalí becomes a private and historical nightmare, as the Spanish artist was very compromised by the Francoist dictatorship, unlike Picasso and other people engaged with the Communist party and ideology) stands for freedom, lightheartedness, but also introspection and penetration of the unconscious. All this is reflected in Tanguy's underwater paintings, in Brauner's visionary creations, in Bellmer's sadomasochistic dolls, in Claude Cahun's photographs, and in the shadow boxes of a poet-craftsman like Joseph Cornell. But that's not all.