

## Dada and Surrealism Comparison

Freedom has been a word of power and persuasion throughout the ages of mankind. From the beginning of our species and up through the present moment, freedom has been an idea that has provoked very intense feelings among people. Our very own country was predicated on the notions of freedom and liberty. So to believe that freedom didn't play a role in the French avant garde movement during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be a mistake.

Andre Breton provided a very eloquent description in the **Surrealist Manifesto** concerning the part freedom had played in his surrealist intentions. *"The mere word 'freedom' is the only one that still excites me"* (Breton, *Surrealist Manifesto*) speaks volumes about a man who dedicated his craft to living life in an unrestricted and edgy way.

Capturing the essence of a moment through imagination seems to be a centralized depiction of *all* the avant garde years. Leaning on imagination to relinquish all thoughts of mistake was a wonderful way to deal with the oppression that was plaguing France and Europe during this period. Yes, freedom and imagination were definitely there from the beginning.

Henri Rousseau, in a short autobiographical piece, believed "*that complete freedom of production should be granted any initiator whose thoughts reach up toward the beautiful and good.*" (*The Banquet years*, p.56) Written in 1895, this short note gives us proper insight into what the avant garde idea of thought was at that moment in France. Rousseau was an artist who lived for his work and reflected that joy and ambition in his paintings. He was able to capture feelings of the moment in a way which had not been done before. Concerned less

with attention to starch details, Rousseau instead turned to unique and sometimes unrealistic imagery to capture his feelings in and on the canvas. Although not as radical as future extremists would be, Henri Rousseau did help to pave the way to what would become a revolutionary artistic movement in France.

The catapult from the "banquet years" to Dada and surrealism forever punctuated the goals of freedom in this period. Figures such as Max Ernst and Arthur Rimbaud pushed the envelope of art and poetry. Rimbaud, a young poet, was looked upon as a key contributor to the movement. An excerpt from ***Lettre de Voyant*** puts his genius into perspective; *"All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts within himself all poisons, and preserves their quintessences. Unspeakable torment, where he will need the greatest faith, a superhuman strength, where he becomes*

*among all men the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed—and the Supreme Scientist! For he attains the unknown!”*

This selection says a great deal about the exuberance these artists possessed. Paintings of the period continued to grow with regards towards free expression. Works such as Giorgio De Chirico's *Hector and Andromache* portray little to be identified with the rational mindset of the common social classes. The piece instead gives us complete freedom of imagination and interpretation. This achievement is the goal in which the Dada and Surrealist movements were aiming for.

Dada and Surrealism, although slightly different in ideology, *both* strived towards the goal of complete and absolute freedom. They were, together, founded on the cause to free the mind from the commonalities and repetition of everyday life. This magnificent idea has inspired generations of

free-thinkers and literally changed the outlook in which many of us have chosen to subscribe. We should always acknowledge and pay tribute to a generation who taught us how to "think outside the box".