

Rene Magritte

Belgian Surrealist artist René Magritte was not only a master of the obvious, but of the obscure as well. Magritte used everyday objects, human habits and emotions in his paintings, and placed them in foreign contexts, questioning their familiar meanings and causing the viewer to do so as well. Magritte depicts the world of reality in such an unusual way, that I am forced to believe that the mystery of his work is not evoked by some sentimental transfiguration, but rather by his thoughts and associations.

Magritte was born in 1898 in the small town of Lessines, a cosmopolitan area of Belgium that was greatly influenced by the French. Twelve years later, Magritte, along with his family, moved to Châtelet, where he studied sketching. During his childhood Magritte spent a great deal of time playing in a cemetery, in the underground vaults, trap doors and the such like. These childhood visions have greatly influenced his art work, as wooden caskets and granite tombstones recur in many of his paintings.

In 1912, when Magritte was 14, Régina Bertinchamp - Magritte's mother, committed suicide by drowning herself in the Sambre River. When the Magrittes found her dead body, her face had been concealed underneath her nightgown. Again we see Magritte's paintings relate to his past, as several of the subjects in his paintings are veiled in which sheets; as a reference to his mother's suicide.

A year later the family moved to Charleroi, where Magritte later met his future wife on a carousel at the town fair, Georgette Berger. However, the two did not meet again until a chance meeting in Brussels years later. In 1914 Magritte asks his father's permission to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, and enrolls as a pupil there. Four years later the remaining Magritte family also moved to Brussels, and soon after, there was a new member of their family.

In 1922, Magritte and Georgette ran into each other at a botanical garden and they were soon married. Magritte began painting wallpaper designs and designing posters, to support Georgette and himself. It was during this year that Magritte was shown Giorgio de Chirico's painting, *The Song of Love*; and was deeply affected by the manipulation of reality in it, almost moving him to tears.

"He was the first man to dream of what must be painted and not how to paint"

- Magritte

In 1925, Magritte painted his first surrealist work, "Le Jockey Perdu", which he considered to be his first major work. Support through a contract from the Gallery Le Centaure, allowed Magritte to turn his full attention to serious painting. In 1927 he held his first one man show at the Gallery, which had disappointing feedback. Yet Magritte persevered, moved to Paris, and continued to produce more bizarre and macabre scenes.

While in Paris, Magritte became acquainted with much of Surrealist theory, like their romanticized notions of scandal, crime and disguise. However, he soon became disgusted by the Parisian Surrealists dependence on dreams, drugs and magic for vision; causing him to move back to Brussels three years later.

Even still, his work remained clearly Surrealist, bringing him recognition in all the important Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s. Magritte's art work became increasingly distinguished throughout the world, creating a name for himself, with his precise technique and unforgettable images.

The German occupation of Belgium marked a turning point in Magritte's art work. During this time Magritte experiments with Impressionist techniques, only he used bright colours in contrast to the dull colours of the time. In 1943, Magritte and his wife moved to the south of France in Carcassonne, where he tried out a new style of painting, which he referred to as his 'Renoir' or 'Solar' style. Magritte continued to use this style, with his customary style until 1947, when he began his "Vache" (cow) period.

Magritte wished to annoy the French public, who he found to be egotistically self-satisfied in their artistic tastes. So he began to paint erotic, nude women; which were featured in an exhibition in Paris, later that year. The exhibition won few admirers, but caused much more scandal. Soon after, Magritte resigned to his original style of painting.

On August 15, 1967, Magritte died in Brussels. Unlike many of his Surrealist counterparts, Magritte lived quite humble and died doing what he loved. He did not draw much attention to himself, and live his life quite uneventfully. Despite his inconspicuous lifestyle, Magritte managed to leave an artistic legacy of transforming the ordinary into the fantastic.

I am so interested in Magritte's work because I believe that his work goes beyond escapism and serves to reveal some of the murkier and complex aspects of the human condition, while others may think that he just wanted to oppose the triviality of everyday life. And this is why I picked him as my artist, because he is not afraid to question, or express himself by means of art, which I find very admirable.

Three of the subjects that I picked from Magritte's work were pipes, clouds, and words. Using these as my starting point, I went on to explore the surrealist relation they could possible have, and produced work of my own.