

The word 'Surrealism' was originally used by the French writer Guillaume Apollinaire. Describing a 1917 production of Jean Cocteau's ballet 'Parade', which featured both the music of Erik Satie and stage designs of Pablo Picasso, Apollinaire claimed that the performance revealed a truth beyond the real, 'a kind of sur-realism'.

From the mid 1920s, many Surrealist artists, including most notably Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, and Rene Magritte, produced 'dream paintings', works either based directly upon dreams experienced by the artist, or which alluded to the condition of dreaming.

Roland Penrose, soon after the defeat of France, was mobilized as an instructor of camouflage. He taught young recruits to smear their faces with cow dung so they would not be seen by the enemy. He was also asked to try out an ointment which was greenish that was made by a cosmetics firm. He covered his friends body in it, who then could not be seen against the landscape.

Roland was born in London in 1900. His parents were devout Quakers who raised Penrose alongside his three brothers according to a strict moral and religious code. After WW2 he married the American photographer Lee Miller. She died in 1977. As well as being a painter and sculptor Penrose used his money to promote art and fund other artists. He also wrote many books including one about Pablo Picasso.

In 1937 he painted 'Seeing is Believing - The Invisible Isle' which was oil paint on canvas. The island in this paintings title does not have much natural landscape instead it is made of other elements, some building shapes, an upside down head hanging from a sky that starts off as a night sky, then turns into rainy storm clouds, then proceeds to become blue and almost sunlit. It also has a strange hand rising up from the bottom of the painting. I think the painting could also be viewed upside down, as it would still appear as a surrealist painting.

Salvador Dali was born into a middle class family on May 11th 1904 in Spain. Dali was very politically involved and had some extreme opinions. He was fascinated with Hitler. He married Gala Eluard in 1958. As a child Dali was very strange. His parents first child, also called Salvador, died before he was born. His parents treated their second son as their first child. He was very confused because of this. He had strange dreams and often had fits of hysteria and rage. Even when he was a grown man he still did things to attract attention to himself. He said that his moustache acted as an antenna and said that he could receive messages from outer space.

In 1937 he painted 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' which was also oil on canvas. This story tells the story of a beautiful boy, Narcissus, who looked at his reflection and fell in love with it, and died of longing. Where he died a flower grew and was named after him. There many images in the painting. I think if you look at the painting from far away it simply looks like Dali just painted the same thing twice, although the two sides are similar, I think they are nothing alike.

The blue decaying hand is crawling with ants. On top of this is an egg with the Narcissus sprouting from it. I think there is a display of life from death as the ants make their home on the dead hand. To the right of this is a starving

dog eating fresh meat. Behind this is a chessboard with a man standing on top looking around the landscape, and even further at the back there are mountains with the again repeated shape just hiding behind them

In both 'Seeing is Believing - The Invisible Isle' and 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus', water is a strong element, and whereas Dali's water is quite detailed and you are unable to see the brushstrokes, Penrose's brushstrokes are quite visible and more blurred than detailed.

Another feature in both paintings is a hand. In Dali's painting the hand to me gives the impression of being decayed because it is blue. It does not look like a real hand would, and is growing out of the ground, starting at the wrist. It holds an egg with a Narcissus blooming from it. In Penrose's painting I feel the hand is very realistic, and I think it looks as if it is reaching up towards the woman's face, or perhaps even the island. Also characteristic in both paintings is the sky. I think both skies are very similar because they both have clouds which are dark in the centre and get lighter towards the outside, although in Penrose's painting the sky is day just above the island and night towards the top.

People are also present in both paintings. In Dali's painting there is the body of Narcissus crouching beside the water, and a group of people in the distance, as well as a man standing on top of a box. In Penrose's work of art there is merely a large head cut off at the neck, hanging eerily from the clouds. In Dali's painting the body of Narcissus does not look like a real body, but like a stone body. I think the man standing on the box also looks as though he may be a statue. The women standing in the background, at closer inspection may also be statues, as they appear to be unclothed, but give the impression that they are dancing. In Penrose's painting, I think the face appears to be expressionless, just staring into the distance. It, unlike Dali's painting, looks like a real human face and is a lot more realistic

My favourite painting out of the two is 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' because it is weird and is based on mythology. I also like it because it is more detailed and there is a lot more to look at in Dali's painting than Penrose's painting, however I also like 'Seeing is believing - The Invisible Isle' because it is strange and can be interpreted in different ways.