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## **Surrealism and Psychoanalysis**

### **A Study of the Works of De Chirico and Magritte**

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which the devastation of a village and therefore the destruction caused by the concept of war is illustrated.

For example, the symbol of the "bull" is one of the powerful images used by Picasso in the canvas. The work is huge and is packed with images of death and despair. The wings, although not black and white, are very powerful, as they are from the destructive forces, or so defined itself. On the canvas, the bull is standing with its back to the main body of the painting, its head is turned towards the viewer, looking directly at the viewer.

The "bull" is a symbol used throughout the work as a symbol of brute strength. The bull is a symbol of the bull itself. By using the bull as a symbol, the artist is able to convey the message of the work in a very simple and direct manner.

## Chapter 1

### Psychological interpretations of dreams - the creation and interpretation of imagery.

In order to fully understand the nature of dreams and their content, it is necessary to look at Freud's discoveries about the manner in which dreams reflect a condensation of memory and daily occurrences which lead to an accurate reflection of a patient's mental state.

A dream is a series of images which together create a homogeneous whole, a short scene which is a subconscious reflection of the dreamer's conscious state. It is necessarily condensed. Whilst the span of a dream is relatively short, each image is in itself a condensation of several other related images, thereby giving the dream many layers of meaning and unlimited ramifications.

The metaphor for the poetic/artistic image begins to become apparent: a symbol is that which represents to the artist a conglomeration of many different ideas. It is a succinct way of representing a whole concept - Picasso's "Guernica" for example consists entirely of symbols through





which the devastation of a village, and therefore the devastation caused by the concept of war is illustrated.

For example, the symbol of the "Bull" is one of the pivotal images used by Picasso in the canvas. The work is huge, and is packed with images of death and despair. The village, unprepared for attack was utterly powerless to hide from the destructive forces, or to defend itself. On the canvas, the bull is standing with its back to the main body of the painting, its head is turned, averted from the carnage, looking directly at the viewer.

The "Bull" is a symbol seen throughout the ages as a symbol of brute strength. It also represents Spain itself. By inference it can also stand for animal stupidity. By using this particular symbol, Picasso suggests all of these concepts on his canvas. However, Picasso then added to the power of the symbol by placing it within the context of the whole work in such a way as to both lend to and draw from the significance of the whole. The bull is impotent, powerless to either attack or defend. It does not look at the carnage, but gazes rather outside of the work in the hope of assistance.

Such is the nature of symbolism. The imagery one creates whilst in the dreaming state is similar to this, due to the way a dream can represent a concept or an event.

Conscious and subconscious imagery does differ, however, in the extent to which the objective observer may fully relate to it. A dream is a perfect hermetic whole. One's dreams give a window looking out into one's particular experience of life, and this is unique to each person. We may manage to recreate images which are broadly similar to those of other people, but which still defy full explanation since the image's origin may be obscure, buried somewhere in memories of childhood, for example, or even beyond. On



the whole, however, one can attempt a reading of consciously generated imagery as seen in the plastic arts.

There are exceptions to this, of course, as in the work of the Dadists and in hermetic poetry. However, there is a correlation between the two, defined as conscious and subconscious imagery.

In order to further define this, it is necessary to discover the mechanical origins of dreams. The state of dreaming and the functioning of the human brain during sleep have long fascinated scientists. Through the use of the electroencephalogram it is possible to trace the different stages of sleep and dreaming as they occur.

At the most basic level, it is possible to say that a dream, and therefore the imagery contained within is merely the result of variations on our brain patterns. However, scientific fact apart, it is also true to say that for the duration of a dream our experiences are as valid as anything experienced whilst awake. To the conscious mind a remembered dream is a bizarre tangle of unrelated images. To the sleeper, the dream is immediate reality and is perfectly logical within its own apparently arbitrarily created parameters.

Proof of the validity of the world as experienced in dreams can be found in the fact that experiments carried out on sleepers have shown that whilst body movement is controlled in this state by a 'damper' on the spinal cord which automatically prevents movement to a large degree, the eyes move rapidly, 'following' events taking place. For example, those watching objects falling to the ground would have a prolonged vertical eye movement, or watching a tennis match would cause horizontal eye movements.

When one awakens from a 'bad' dream, one's body is reacting to the fear generated within the dream in the same way in





which one would react to fear experienced whilst awake. The difference lies in the fact that in dreams the emotions experienced are intensified because of a lack of control by higher critical brain functions. In nightmares, therefore, one is reacting to extremes of fear not normally felt in daily life.

As stated above, a dream consists of a series of intensified images, which collectively solicit intense emotional responses in the dreamer. In order to examine the nature of this imagery and the method of its creation, we will examine closely one such dream, as illustrated by Freud, and thereby attempt to determine the origin of its imagery.

The dream to be examined is Freud's own, from July 23-24th. 1895, and which provides a clear insight into the nature of dream symbolism.<sup>1</sup> He takes us through a dream which anticipates events (going to his Summerhouse, for example), and which for the most part is concerned with medical matters. (He is seen telling a patient: "if you still get pains, its really only your own fault, but no matter, dysentery will supervene, and the toxin will be eliminated").

The most striking images are those of the dream's setting, a large hall", the predominance of Freud's medical colleagues, and the number of times the patient (Irma) is actually examined.

The most obvious fact about the dream is that it reveals Freud's attraction to this particular patient, and his anxiety to ensure a proper diagnosis of her illness (hence the repeated examinations), and the presence of his colleagues. There are also references to the fact that Freud is aware of this subconscious attraction, particularly in the phrase "we were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection".

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<sup>1</sup>Freud and the Humanities, edited by Peregrine Horden.





One of his colleagues, referred to as "Dr. M" appears in this dream, although with changed appearance. " He was very pale, he walked with a limp, and was cleanshaven". Here, Freud clearly is making a composite image, created from the personality of one man coupled with the appearance of another, or indeed several others.

The fact that this dream was an anxiety dream is clear at the very end, where, after Irma is given an injection by one of the other Doctors (which may in fact have been Freud himself, who wished to completely deny his attraction by attributing it to another person, thereby distancing himself from an act of adultery which he was not willing to commit) Freud says "Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly... and probably the syringe had not been clean".

As can be seen from the above, the dream is indeed a condensed episode from Freud's life where the restriction of the conscious mind has been lifted to reveal the underlying fears and desires. normally repressed.

In the dream, Freud represents his medical career (the series of examinations), his home life (the hall) and the "infection" found in the patient, which is interpreted as being at once her illness and her attractiveness, which Freud cannot react to as a married man. In the dream, in short, we get a glimpse of the essence of Freud and his life.

Whilst much of the dream took place in dialogue, there are also several visual images, the "examination" of the patient's throat, the strange appearance of "Dr. M", the written-out chemical formula, the areas of infection and the giving the "injection". Each of these images has several layers of meaning - the "examination" for example: Freud may have been struggling with the medical ethic which protects the patient under intimate physical examination. This is all the more difficult when Freud is attracted to the patient, and represents a deeper struggle, between his own



moral ethics and those of the Hippocratic oath. On one level, Freud, as a doctor, must be both intimate and detached. On another, Freud as a man may be both attracted and detached. This dual anxiety runs right throughout the dream.

Therefore, it can be seen that there is a parallel to be drawn between the succinct, intensified imagery as experienced in dreams and the images invoked by artists in any work of art. In poetry for example, words are chosen with the utmost care, in order that the full impact may be felt on the reader - In the work of T. S. Elliot<sup>1</sup>, a dream-like state is often recreated in order to give the reader a sense of chaos:

#### Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn ...

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying "Strephon  
you who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

That corpse you planted last year in your garden  
has it begun to sprout?"

In the above quotation the images are bizarre and disquieting. Note for example the imagery of "planting" and how it is twisted and developed to take in the notion of "sprouting" - in the vernacular one can indeed "plant" a body, but in the poet's mind the question springs - "does it sprout?". That which is planted invariably grows.

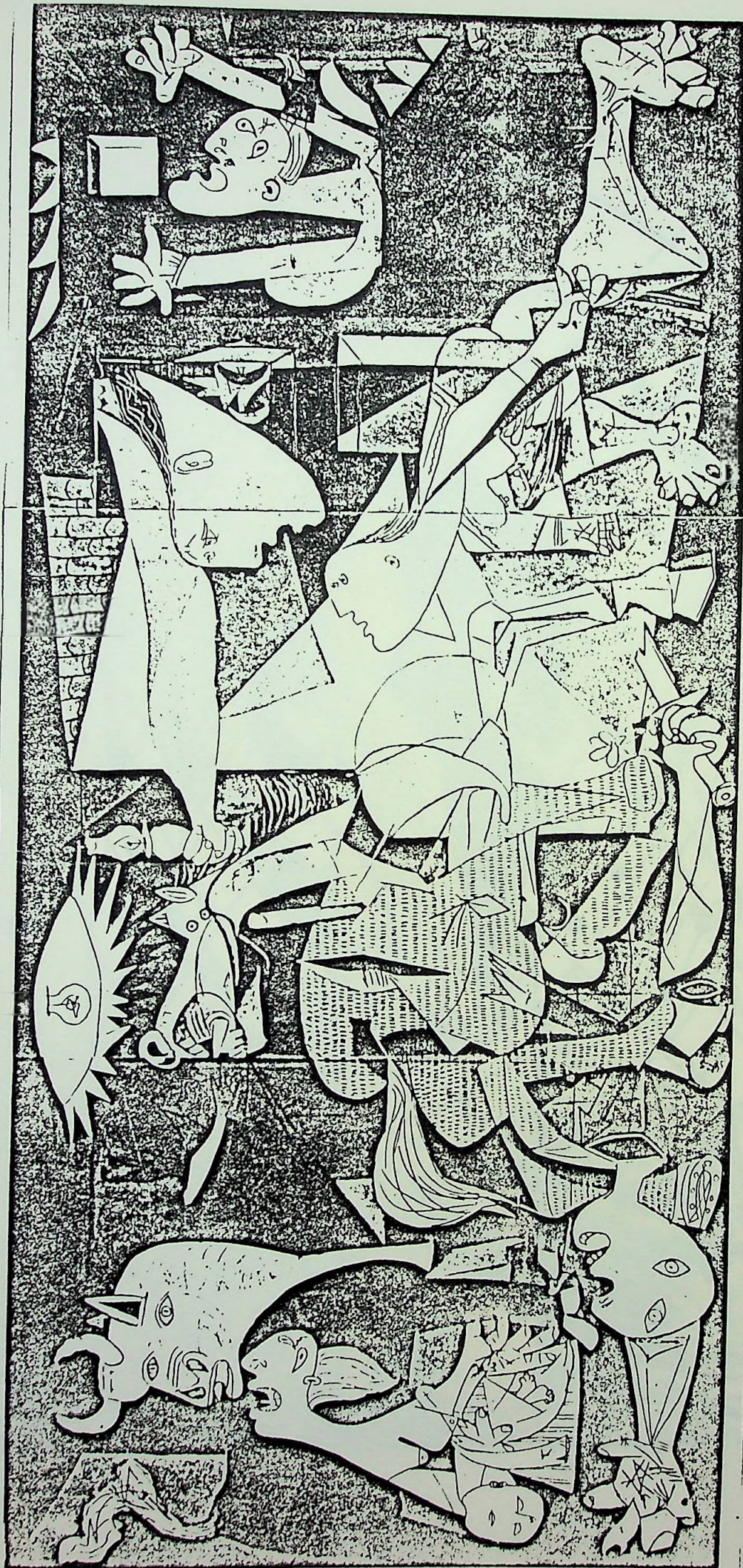
The play on words and therefore images is exactly what occurs in the dreaming mind. However on the canvas the same concept applies, the imagery is merely visual instead of verbal.

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<sup>1</sup>T.S.Elliot, "The Wasteland".















mar. 1917 49



subconscious mind, they resorted to various methods such as the use of automatism, automaticism and the study of dream imagery.

Their path led ultimately to Freud, whose revolutionary theory of psychoanalysis through the study of dreams opened for them the much sought vision of imagery and its perception.

The chief impulse of the Surrealists was to liberate images, all images. Their programme of the artistic world was to liberate its images and to liberate, finally, directly from the subconscious to the surface. They described not the world as it is, but as it is perceived. It is for this reason that they were called "Surrealists", i.e. as Breton defined, "The Surrealist".

## Chapter 2

### SURREALISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS.

Surrealism is a school of thought which by defining itself defies definition. Its basic tenet was, according to Andre Breton, one of its first exponents, the "abandonment of logical thought"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, as with their Dadist predecessors, the aim of those painters and writers loosely bound under this banner was to free the artistic impulse from the shackles of reason or conscious thought in order to allow it to be expressed in all its purity.

The Surrealists were, however, men of ideas and directed their thinking into the realms of philosophy and psychology in order to forge a way through to the underlying realm of subconscious imagery which they were convinced existed. In order to gain access to the

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<sup>1</sup>"Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism", Andre Breton.

subconscious mind, they resorted to various methods such as the use of automatism, spiritualism and the study of dream imagery.

Their path led obviously to Freud, whose revolutionary theory of psychoanalysis through the study of dreams opened for them the much sought vistas of imagery and its perception.

The artistic impulse of the Surrealists was to describe images, not objects. Their perception of the outside world was as objective as possible and transferred, ideally, directly from the subconscious to the canvas. They described not the world as it is, but as it is perceived. It is for this reason that they were called "Surrealists", or, as Breton preferred, "Superrealists".

In the world of literature, for example, the works of James Joyce are written in a similar 'stream of consciousness' style. The works resulting from the adoption of this dialectic may at first appear meaningless (as with the Dadists), but in reality this is not so. Surrealism is necessarily hermetic. The Surrealists were not didactic, and had no general wish to communicate with others or convey a message of world-wide significance through the depiction of an object in a particular, conscious manner. Rather were they introspective, and wished only that their work be accepted objectively by the observer, or to stimulate the observer to a similar state of introspection. For example, it would not be true to say that these works are 'symbolic', as symbols are succinct images generated by a shared, conscious view of reality. The works are purely subjective.

Freud said of the Artist, that he is a man who "turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands"...He finds a way back to reality, however, from







this world of fantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his fantasies into truths of a new kind, which are welcomed by men as precious reflections of reality".<sup>1</sup>

The Surrealists embarked on an odyssey of this kind in order to gain access to the plane of consciousness which Freud describes as the "primary process", a child-like state wherein one may advance wish fulfillment by fantasising. (The next stage is the confrontation with reality which will necessarily occur as the child grows older, the "reality" principle)

Once achieved, the aim of the Surrealist is to reproduce the images found therein as faithfully as possible. In order to do this, according to the Surrealists, the artist must submerge his conscious self, ignore his reasoning self and let the images find their own expression. It is not humanly possible to fully deny the conscious mind, to surrender oneself to the subconscious, this state may only be approximated, and the Surrealists embarked on a number of experiments with automatism as a means to this end.

In his essay on Surrealism, Herbert Read states that possibly the most succinct description of the aim of Surrealism was Dante's line

"The idea which comes from a dream" <sup>2</sup>

Ideally, if one could describe one's dreams whilst dreaming still, one would then achieve the Surrealist aim.

As stated above, this is not truly possible. The nearest one can get to this, artistically, is to employ the 'stream of consciousness' method spoken of earlier. Joan Miro described the process thus:

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<sup>1</sup>"Psychoanalysis and Creativity". Freud, quoted by Anthony Storr.

<sup>2</sup>"Surrealism", Herbert Read, introduction.

".. I need a point of departure, even if it's only a speck of dust or a flash of light. This form begets a series of things, one thing giving birth to another thing..."<sup>1</sup>

The results of this free association of ideas were works which to the reasoning observer appear to be unreasonable.. Breton stated that Surrealist art was an 'abandonment of logical thought', and a surrendering to lateral thinking. The works represent this association on many levels, and therefore open up vistas of artistic possibilities touched on previously by the Dadists, for example.

It is therefore obvious that the observer must accept these works as they are seen on the canvas, and not attempt to find therein some elusive symbolic values. These works are eclectic, and could not be completely understood by the observer. The artist himself may not be fully aware of the underlying artistic thrust of a work, and it would be therefore futile for a mere observer to try to attempt this.

Because of this underlying theme of the free association of ideas, one sees that the technique of collage is frequently used , whereby objects are placed beside each other randomly, with no real significance in their order other than the fact that in the artists mind one was associated with the other on a subconscious level.

In the '20's and '30's, philosophers were leading the trend towards a general acceptance of freedom of thought. The world was attempting to free itself from pre-war pre-conceived notions. It was the period of decadence. Hence, the art world was moved towards this new enlightenment of thought which took emotion and sensation into account as being fundamentally worthy of consideration on the same level that intellectualism had been previously accepted.

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<sup>1</sup>Joan Miro



In the subconscious mind, freed from the restraints of the intellect, emotions and senses fuse with images to create a reservoir of artistic possibilities tapped by the Surrealist artists and poets.

Therefore, their images are evocative, the intangibility of the dream as experienced by the dreamer being expressed in the atmosphere of the works. This 'atmosphere' is evident in the works of Ernst, Dali, De Chirico and Magritte amongst others, and in the literature of the time in the works of Joyce and Beckett.

The Surrealists attempted to gain access to a more primitive plane of the mind, wherein there is no place for reason or logic. They left themselves " Passive and receptive, ready to soak up new ideas and images, and illustrate their perceptions of these new images.

Some members of the movement were drawn, because of their interest in automatism and the new theories of Hypnosis, towards mysticism, that awe felt by primitive man for his surroundings, the fear of the child in the dark. Thus, paradoxically, whilst the Surrealist dialectic was in its theory intellectual, it was in practice very clearly part of the world of the senses, using the intellect as merely a path to their artistic aims.

Therefore, the parallel to be drawn between the studies done by Freud in the field of the scientific study of psychology and the Surrealist dialectic is this: For Freud, the way towards the scientific analysis of the human mind was to study the subconscious mind as illustrated in dreams and under the influence of hypnosis. His aims were purely scientific, to achieve a greater understanding of the complex subject. He used his subjects' descriptions of their dreams as his canvas, on which the images drawn gave clues to the dreamers state of mind.

The aim of the Surrealists was, on the other hand, broadly similar; they too wanted to gain access to the subconscious and attempted to do so by way of dreams and hypnosis. As Freud wished to understand by close inspection, so the Surrealists sought to explore the perception of objects by the mind by way of reproducing these images as directly as possible from the mind, excluding the intellect if at all possible. However, they sought only to explore and discover, not to explain or teach.

Their work gains its power from its emotiveness. The observer must keep his mind as 'open' as possible in order to fully appreciate the works. They may not be fully understood. However, the salient point is that the Surrealist era was a dynamic time of the formulation of new ideologies. The formulation of new psychological techniques and theories did not so much directly influence these artists, but rather provided them with an ambience of radical thought which was in itself a trigger for the artistic impulse.

They certainly were aware of the possibilities offered by psychological investigation, but did not find their genesis in it. It could be said that for the Surrealists these psychological innovations were their "point of departure", their "flash of light".

Herein lies the paradox, however: without the intellect as a repository for ideas, and as the place wherein these ideas are formulated, the dialectic itself could not have been recognised. It may have existed within the subconscious, but because of the illogical, irrational nature of the subconscious mind, no coherent thinking about how to prove and illustrate the existence of this miscellany of images could have been possible.

Therefore, whilst the Surrealists' artistic hinterland has always existed, they did require the guidance of of the



intellect and its pathways of logic in order to fully appreciate the existence of these images.

Surrealism and psychoanalysis are inextricably joined, and are yet, at their very bases, mutually exclusive. This paradox can be taken further when one considers that, of all the schools of art, it is the Surrealists who most sought to deny the artistic importance of the intellect and logic, but who most depended on it for their existence.





and harmony of Greek architecture and sculpture, it appeared to awaken in him a dormant aesthetic impulse which, tempered with the predominant artistic thinking of his own time, became transformed into works which are redolent of neo-classicism, but are enigmatic and thereby surreal. He describes his reality in terms of his fascination with, and subliminal harking back to the earlier period, thus satisfying Freud's theory of the primitive urge for wish-fulfillment which was one of the Surrealists' basic tenets.

Classical architecture was based on theories of symmetry and harmony, and was, together with sculpture and painting, to provide the world with its first theories of aesthetics. Therefore, it was a time of idealism, where nature was represented in its most perfect form, reality being tempered within the mind of the artist to become super-reality.

Where this was a new and burgeoning ideology for Praxiteles and his contemporaries, to modern artists it became an integral part of any study of the history of Art. Thus it would have been assimilated into De Chirico's mind, and would have provided him consciously or unconsciously with his own artistic impetus.

The works which result from this are at once harmonious and drawn with restraint and control, as opposed to the vagaries of the usual surrealistic works (such as Ernst's work, "Young man fascinated by the flight of a non-Euclidean fly", which relies on a tin of paint suspended over a canvas for its effect). This applies both to the individual objects drawn and to the overall composition of the canvas. However, true to the Surrealist maxim of "One thing giving birth to another thing", De Chirico placed objects on his canvas in a way which was similar to "The chance

encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table"<sup>1</sup>.

As in a dream. De Chirico's canvases are full of objects which are incongruous and enigmatic. They conjure up a world of anarchic yet intensely meaningful statements. In one's dreams, the most unusual imaginings take on a new and logical complexion. The mind in the dreaming state has thrown off the bounds of reason and accepts the irrational as the norm. The atmosphere of this world which exists only in the subconscious is dimly remembered upon awakening with a lingering sense of having experienced an intense emotion. One is struck with, and remembers the near tangibility of the dream world because of its strange aura of mysticism.

All of this is captured dramatically by the artist in his work. Therefore, the works are hermetic, but may be analysed by the observer. However, as Magritte said of his work that those who sought to find a meaning within the works have totally missed the point, it is preferable to look at the works of De Chirico as a whole, as one destroys the ambience created therein by dissection. The works "have no reducible meaning, they ... are a meaning...".

De Chirico himself summed his work up thus: "To be really immortal, a work of art must go completely beyond the limits of the human. Good sense and logic will be missing from it. In this way it will come close to the dream state and also to the mentality of children".

Obviously the works will therefore be totally divorced from reality, taking their themes from the artifice of the ancient world. The feeling recreated in the works is of a place suspended in time. His dream world is static and peaceful, a corroboration of his representation of items of beauty and

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<sup>1</sup>Lautremont, quoted by Laura Rosenstock in "De Chirico's Influence on the Surrealists".



grace, timeless themselves. The overwhelming atmosphere is that of a perfect afternoon, caught whilst the shadows were just about to lengthen into evening. It is absolutely a world of contrast between light and shade,, between the angularity of the plinth and the smooth roundness of the idealised human form, the Doric column.

Perhaps the sense of intrigue the observer feels when viewing the works stems from the tension created in the contrasts outlined above. One may observe the works, and not hope to analyse them. By allowing oneself to respond fully to the engendered sense of mystery, one is in fact fully comprehending the work on its intended level. They appeal to the intellect by first appealing to the heart.

In his work entitled " The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon", one sees the ideas which are seminal to the later surrealist-influenced works in possibly their purest form.

On this canvas, De Chirico has captured for the observer the somnolence and hostility of a sunny afternoon. The Piazza is deserted, save for the statue which, high on its plinth, suffers interminably under the glare of the sun. In this composition, which is balanced between the stark whiteness of the left side and the shade of the right side, between the lightness of the sky and foreground compared with the shade of the middle ground. The eye is drawn to the figure of the statue which dominates the whole because of its size and clarity. The statue is itself suggestive of the Greek era, as are the buildings with their angular rows and perfectly rounded columns.

The overall effect of this work is the creation of a feeling of grandeur and elegance, the balance of the evenly matched composition lending the air of harmony to the work. It gives the impression of being a prelude to another work, wherein perhaps lies the explanation as to what lies behind the drawn curtain.



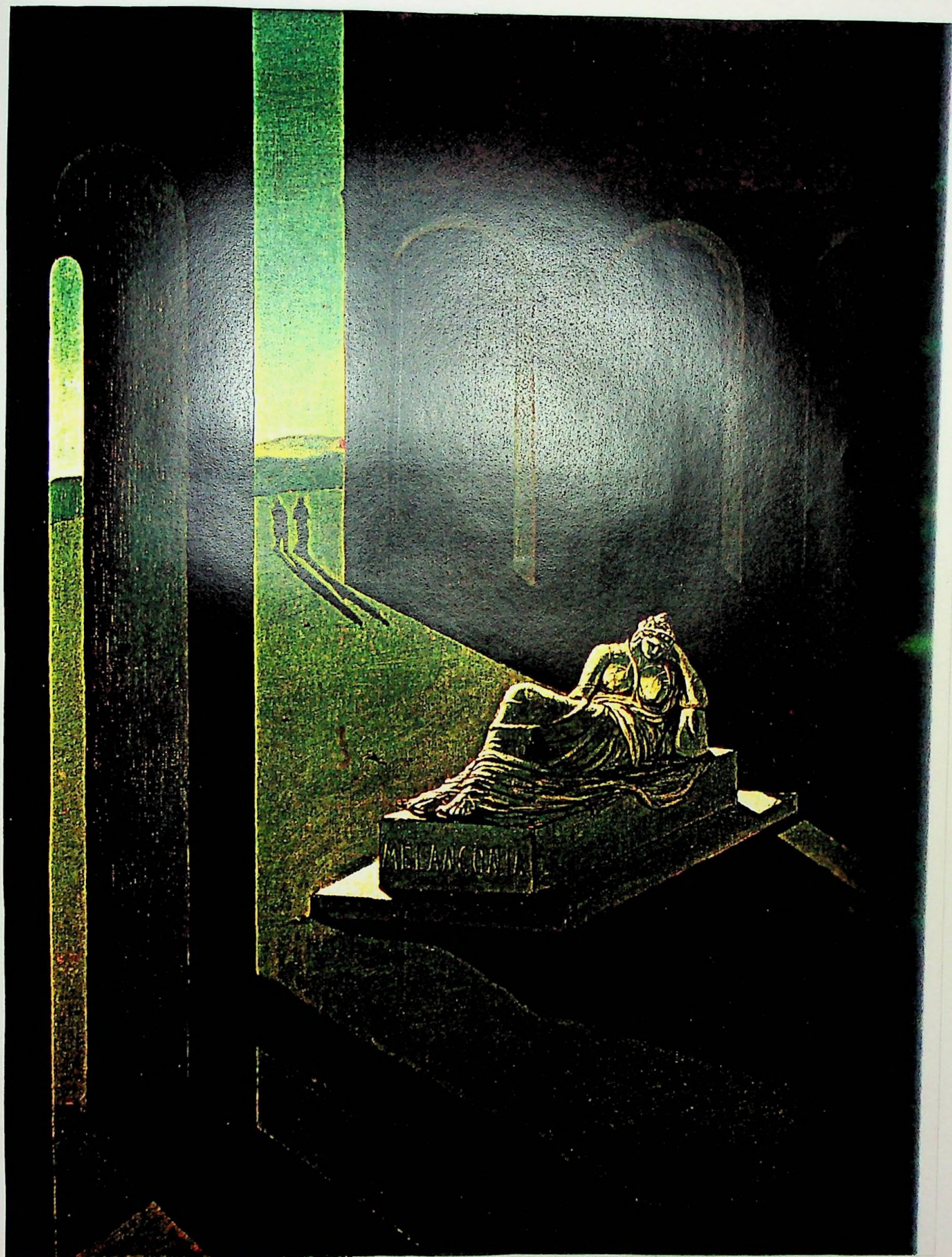
In this work De Chirico is giving us his impression of the meaning of art, in its purest, most aesthetic form, bereft of any smear of humanity. It is, perhaps his innermost desire to reach towards a perfect plane of sheer beauty, seen in the clean lines and angles, the perfect roundness of the statue's form, and the resultant tension between the two. This is a work, however, which is pleasing to look at. One is invited to appreciate to absolute peace and harmony, and in so doing enter De Chirico's artistic, static world.

His later work entitled "The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour" captures a similar artistic hiatus. Once again, the canvas is balanced between curve and angle, and light and shade, with a similar use of shade to give the feel of a late afternoon whose shadows are lengthening into the fall of evening.

However, De Chirico moves away from the blatant use of the Greek idiom and merely suggests this influence on his canvas, in the construction of the long corridor on the left. The tower and the wall (centre and right) are of a later architectural period, being solid and less aesthetic in design.

Where one associates Greek statuary with being in an upright position, designed so as to illustrate the tensions of the finely-built, idealised human form, De Chirico's statue is here reminiscent of those Greek idols, but is reclining in a slightly awkward position, again not part of the Greek ideal, as this spoils the perfection of the form. Also the stasis and peace of the afternoon is invaded by a partially hidden steam locomotive, whose tracks move off into the landscape beyond. Moving towards the background are two figures, diminutive in comparison with the huge statue in the foreground.







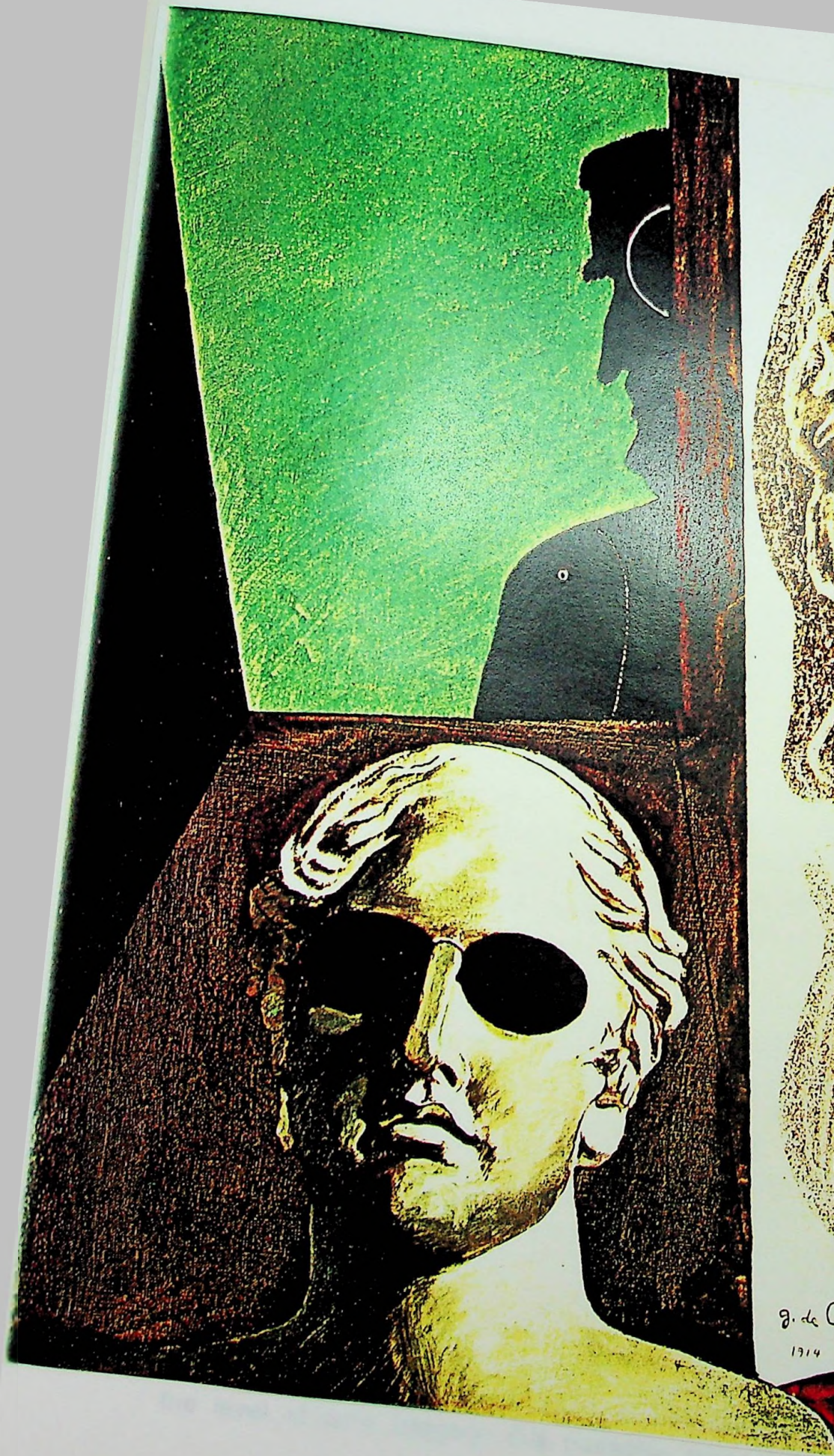
The perfect stillness of the previous work is suggested once again here. However, in this work, De Chirico has combined this with exaggeration (between perspectives) and incongruities (the flatness of the fore- and middle-ground compared with the roundness of the undulating hills in the background). The work is effective because none of this is blatant. One feels that there is something out of order, a lack of control, but it requires close inspection to discover the cause of this artistic rankling, which is so miniscule as to be almost, but not quite, inobtrusive. However, the observer finds the effect of this work in its quiet clash of harmony with discord.

The work dating from 1912 entitled "Melancholy" seems to me to mark De Chirico's transition away from pure aesthetics and towards Surrealism, which is more obvious in the work previously considered. In this work, the canvas is dominated by the architecture which completely dwarfs the two figures and extends out beyond the scope of the canvas itself. These structures are harmonious and perfectly formed, but their effect on their surroundings is that of casting large and gloomy shadows, underneath which is the recumbent figure of "Melancholy".

Once again the figure which is redolent of its Greek forebears is awkwardly posed, its face downcast. By investing this statue with the demeanour of a dejected human, De Chirico has moved away from the idealism of the earlier period and made a statement about the period of Humanism which followed. Intellect and emotion are fused, the result being this work, suggestive perhaps of an artistic impasse, the illustration of the artist's feelings about his transition from one phase of his work to another.

This is therefore very much a work of introspection, and whilst the observer may again appreciate the balance and harmony of the composition, one is nonetheless fully aware of the artist's desire to illustrate an emotion, since one





g. de Chirico

1914



responds intuitively to the gloomy effect of the shadows and dark expanses.

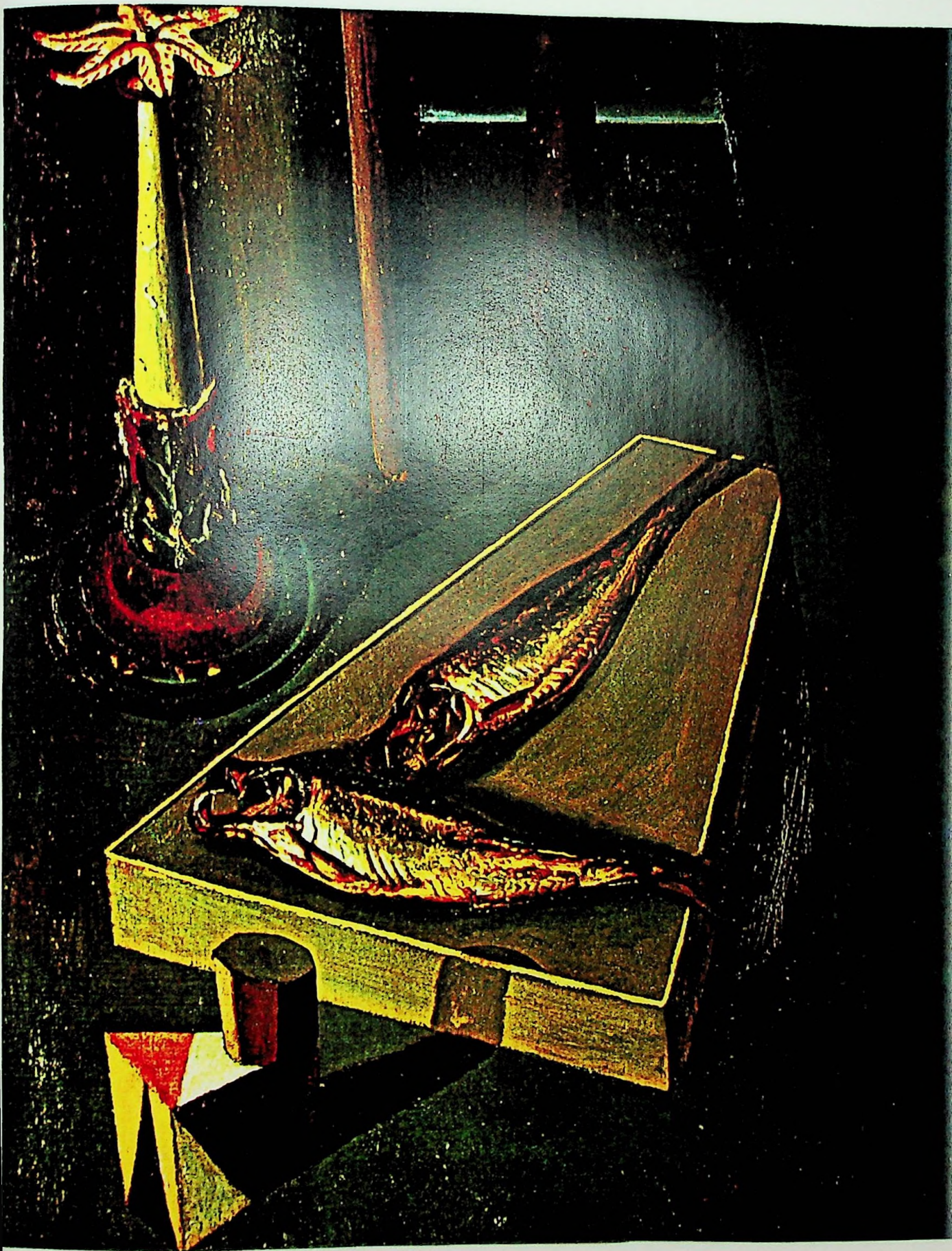
In "Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire", the influence of Surrealistic thinking becomes more obvious. Still retaining the central motif reminiscent of his interest in Greek culture (i.e. in the bust with its balanced and strongly moulded features), this motif has been modulated by the addition of dark glasses in place of the normally blank eyes. The composition of the work reflects in similar manner the strong and beautiful lines of the earlier works, together with another echo of a previously - used motif in the right edge of the work wherein we have a barely - discernible glimpse of an arcadian window or doorway. The Surrealistic influence is most clearly seen in the images added to the work - the almost fossil - like fish and shellfish, and the menacing silhouette.

As the precise psychological origins of these images may only be speculated upon, the observer may therefore only surmise how the sequence of images was arrived at. (as explained above) The result is an intriguing work. However, it is in pondering the intriguing possibilities offered that one may most fully appreciate the work.

A similar atmosphere is created in the 1919 work "The Sacred Fish". Here, the Grecian motives are obvious only in their stylisation - the work is composed of strong, straight lines and rounded columns, but these are far removed from those first seen in "The Enigma of an Afternoon" from 1910. The "Sacred Fish" is an emblematic work, with the artist honing and refining his ideas until they reach this pitch of clarity and depth.

The "fish" in the picture are "sacred" merely because they have been placed on an "altar", the sacred candle beside them being topped with a starfish instead of a flame. On the level of pure imagery, this transition from flame to fish







was logical because it is a visual possibility, which within the artist's imagination and within the Surrealist dogma becomes feasible. This sublimation also helps to bind the "fish" motives, thereby lending a thematic depth to the work.

However, perhaps the most significant image in the work is that of the object which De Chirico places at the bottom left of the picture. Composed of angles and a column which casts its shadow on the altar, in this object one is presented with something which is at once the succinct symbol of the absolute refinement of the artist's work, and of its essence.

This is a stylisation of De Chirico's preoccupation with the architecture of the ancient civilisation, visible in its strong, angular composition. It casts its shadows on the altar, an echo of the way in which the artist used light and shade to create areas of contrast and tension in his work. Again, when viewed firstly as a whole, the objects on the canvas appear to be a series of apparently disparate images. They appear incoherent since the logical mind of the observer who is not privy to the innermost workings of the artist's mind, can see no immediate relationship between them, or indeed define exactly what they are.

When one looks at this work, however, one may appreciate the underlying artistic consciousness which created it, one may enjoy the beauty of the lines, the definition of the shadows, the observer may become immersed in the mystery of the shadowy, twilight world and its equally mysterious inhabitants. De Chirico's work comes from the subconscious, and appeals directly to the subconscious of the observer. In order to allow oneself to acknowledge the true artistic value of the work, it is necessary, in short, to subject oneself to a Wordsworthian "willing suspension of disbelief".







The works of Rene Magritte differ substantially from those of De Chirico, but are yet essentially true to the Surrealist dialectic. It was possible for the works of the artists who adhered to this school of thought to differ substantially and materially from one another since its essential reliance was on the individual experience of the artists to provide its theories with their credibility. Therefore it is in fact necessary for the works of the Surrealists to differ substantially, in order to be true to the fundamental principle of hermeticism .

It is the philosophy itself and the methods of accessing the subconscious mine and its contents which are broadly similar in the works of De Chirico, Magritte, Ernst , Miro and Dali amongst others. Magritte, like De Chirico illustrated his flow of ideas directly in his works, unadulterated save for the essential intervention of the conscious mind and its artistic techniques without which these ideas would remain trapped within the mind,

bereft a a means of execution. The flow of his thinking led him away from reality towards a plane of consciousness wherein, as in a dream, logic has no value and all things are possible. He moved, therefore, with his mind and emotions in harmony, as his artistic adherence to the concept of freedom of thought allowed him to range freely through the whole of his existence and illustrate his ideas about reality in terms of this absolute freedom.

The general air of liberation of thought created an artistic ambience within which Magritte worked to create his own philosophy of art, a philosophy which was in fact a philosophy of creative thought since he saw painting as being merely a medium for the expression of ideas, his creativity which was of paramount importance to him. Essentially, his philosophy was as follows: "The mind loves the unknown, since the meaning of the mind is unknown"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Magritte, quoted by Suzy Gablik in "Philosophy and Interpretation".

Magritte embarked on an odyssey towards a higher reality. He sought to explain the workings of the mind in terms of visual imagery, since it is that which is perceived which is conveyed to the senses, principally by the eyes. These images of reality are then stored in the mind and accessed by the artist.

For this reason, Magritte's works are largely concerned with the manner in which we perceive things in the first instance. His works are best known for their deceptive, illusory nature, wherein we believe we see an object in a certain way, but on closer inspection we realise that the image is not what we believed it to be. The works are also composed with the stream-of-consciousness technique, whereby thoughts are illustrated as they occur, a technique mostly used in literature, the most famous example of this being perhaps James Joyce's "Ulysses"..

For this reason, Magritte reiterated that his works have no ulterior meaning. Each idea on his canvas was created from the previous one, and the whole may have been sparked off by a flash of light, a chance brush stroke on a bare canvas, a glimpse of the sky.,

On one level, it would appear that the works of Magritte and the other Surrealists may be shallow, lacking in any real depth and therefore bereft of any true artistic value. This is not so, however - the works of Magritte have their value on many levels, the most basic of which being that which is perceived on the canvas, the mind - deceiving trickery of the eye. On another level, however, the artistic value of the works lies in the fact that they were conceived as part of Magritte's ongoing search to find true reality, that plane of consciousness wherein all are sensual perceptions are stored, wherein the mind actually exists.

Magritte was, however, something of a pragmatist and his works also reflect his aspect of the man. They are



stunningly clear and precise, bold and elegant. He uses perspective in order to provide an orderly backdrop for his disordered images contained in the works.

These images are recognisably those of the real world, external to the artist. Men , women, cars horses, houses, all these have their place on Magritte's canvas. However, these images are, of course, tempered within the artist's mind. and must take on several different meanings. For this reason, as in a dream, two images may become fused in order to illustrate their corellation in the artist's mind. A woman's face may be seen in terms of her body, the painting of a landscape may become fused with the landscape itself.

The work of Magritte and others of the Surrealist school are important for one other reason : no other philosophy of art was so attuned to the raison d'etre of the artistic impulse itself. Art was not merely their medium, their craft, it was their leaping -off place into the realm of philosophy, wherein they sought to explain the concept of creative thought (or, more properly, the creative impulse) in terms of thought itself. For this reason the works are necessarily introverted and introspective. Threrein lies the paradox - one may only explain what a thought is by way of the precess of thinking, and it is impossible to divorce the concept from its method of illustration.

For Magritte, it was similarly impossible to divorce his works from the artistic impulse which led to their creation, even though his intellectual aim was to look at this paradoxical concept objectively, and explain the one in terms of the other.

In the work entitled " The Voice of Silence" we have one of the most succinct illustrations of the artistic essence Magritte's work. Heavily influenced by De Chirico, we see the balance between light and shade causing a tension in the work, 'light' and 'shade' in the works of Magritte taking on







121 *The Explanation* L'explication 1952



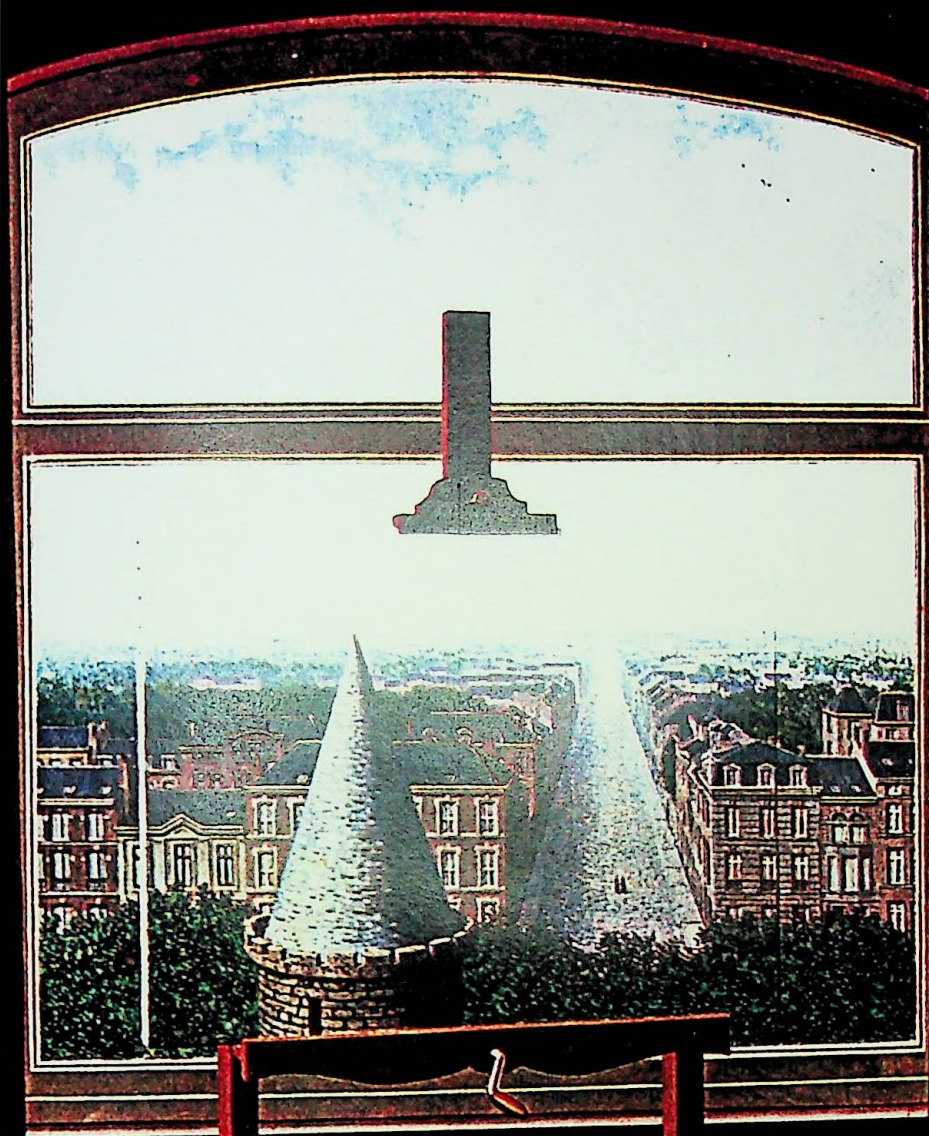
an allegorical significance not found in the works of De Chirico.

Magritte's works are full of ideas and their exploration. He was less influenced by the concept of abstract thinking, being more preoccupied with the intellectual aim of finding the initial source of artistic inspiration within the mind. Thus the objects on his canvas appear to be irrational and of abstract origin, but are not indeed so. Following a process of stream of consciousness, Magritte works his way towards a central idea which slowly begins to be clarified as the work takes shape.

In "The Voice of Silence", we see a typical interior, full of banal objects from everyday life. On the left of the picture, however, there is "another" room, in darkness, leading off into a void. Here, Magritte is stating how the unknown is all around us, as close as in the "next room", and a small leap of the imagination will lead us through the "doorway" (implicit in the work) from reality to super-reality.. This realm of super-reality towards which Magritte was aiming in his works, does exist, but is silent and unknown. Since it is unknown, Magritte illustrates it as being primordially dark. Visual reality is illustrated in terms of the ordinary objects in the room, a familiar reality common to all, but banal and uninteresting.

Magritte, however, also questioned the familiar, and with it our intellectual reaction to everyday reality. In harmony with Surrealist thinking, Magritte's imaginings led him to transpose everyday objects from their normal settings, thereby investing them with new significance. He modulated objects, fusing them to create new objects. He reversed the laws of gravity, made concrete to intangible, all in an effort to find his ultimate super-reality.

In "The Exploration" Magritte gives us simply his illustration of this form of lateral thinking. The bottle and





the carrot become fused in order to create a new object. This work is also in itself an illustration of how Magritte was not simply an artist for art's sake, but rather an intellectual whose vehicle for explanation of his understanding of the meaning of reality happened to be visual art..

A similar idea is found in "The Red Model". In this work, two objects of similar usage so as to become the same object. The object begins as a foot, but as it travels upward along its length, it become transformed into a boot. This work is very much illusionist, it is difficult to define exactly where the transformation begins . Primarily, the work is about Magritte's intellectual ponderings on the subject of everyday reality.

In the work from 1955 entitled "Euclidean Walks", we have a clear vision of Magritte's ideas on the concept of art itself, and the way in which the world is represented on canvas. In the work, there is a picture within a picture of "reality". Magritte blends his canvas in with the "picture " outside his window so carefully as to be almost, but not quite, imperceptibly joined. Magritte is here demonstrating the impossibility of fully representing Nature as it really is, due to the fact that it must first be filtered through the mind of the artist in order to allow him to create to work in the first place.. This is a paradox which he explains objectively in terms of a paradox.

The work is executed effortlessly, as were the works of De Chirico. It is composed of clean lines and delicately constructed perspectives, the colours being bright and clear and pleasing, and in their regularity do not distract from the central thought behind the work.

This theme is carried though into the 1961 work, "The Waterfall". Here he shows us his representation of the Forest as a completed work against its original background.

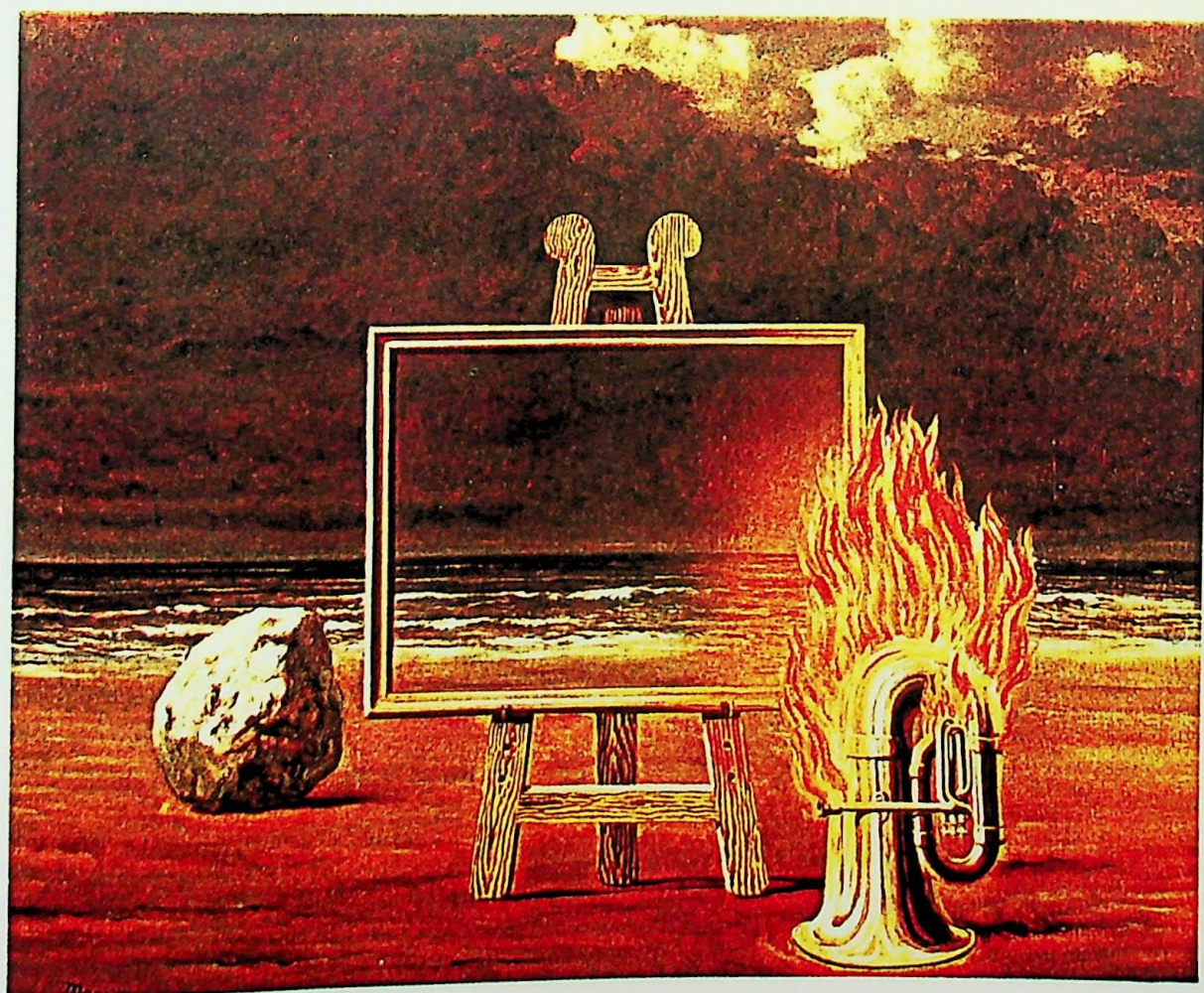
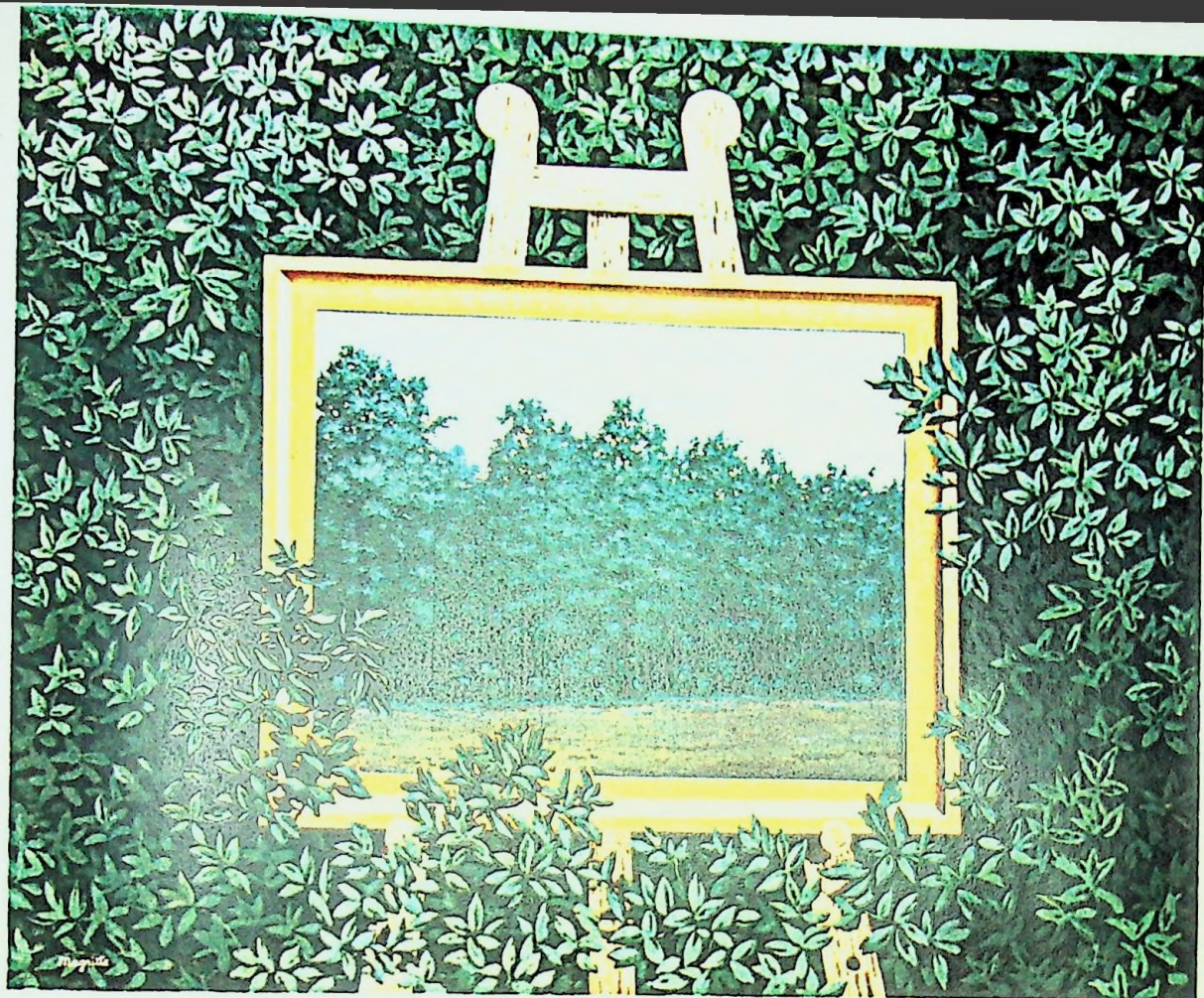
Once again we have the paradox - the "trees " are the "forest" in the framed picture. However, we are looking at the original "trees", but from a different angle. Which then are the real trees?, How can they both be the same object if they look so different?(i.e. in close up). Has the artist really represented the objects as they really are, or is it after all merely the mind's representation of that which it has perceived to have been a forest?

Like the works of De Chirico, the works of Magritte are enigmatic. This is because both artists saw the world in terms of a puzzle, which is not easily perceived... How do we perceive, how do we think? what is the world outside of the mind? - is it the same world outside of the mind as within the mind? - if so, then why cannot the world be represented exactly in terms of visual art? What , therefore , is reality, and wherein does it exist?

For both De Chirico and Magritte the medium best suited to their exploration of ideas was that of visual art. Whilst they also worked within the philosophy of Surrealism and its espousal of the concept of complete freedom of thought (a concept which naturally has political ramifications not dealt with here) , their work differed substantially. De Chirico, influenced as he was by the aestheticism of the ancient world, described his era in terms of aesthetics, perhaps seeing the modern world as a frightful intrusion into the reality of a perfect past. Magritte, conversely , was preoccupied totally with his own era, and his works are therefore contemporary in theme and subject matter.

However, both men are bound together philosophically by the fact that whilst their aim was to explain reality, they did so in terms of everyday life. In their works , the observer may endeavour to find the great significance of a bottle or a fish in an effort to invest the item with a totemic significance beyond the canvas. The works of De Chirico and Magritte are enigmatic purely because on their canvases a







fish is simply , a fish. A bottle means nothing more than a bottle.

In the Surrealistic world of lateral thinking, objects do not need to have a world-wide significance. The Surrealists took their inspiration from that which they say around them every day. They were moreover introverted thinkers, and described their interior worlds in terms of their everyday reality. This is all that the observer needs to be aware of, the works must be taken and viewed objectively, for as such they were executed. Surrealist works are, essentially, explanations which appear to be enigmas.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

From the study of the works of the Surrealist artists such as De Chirico and Magritte, it is obvious that there is indeed a correlation to be drawn between the Surrealistic world of the mind as evidenced in dreams and the world as we experience it every day, as illustrated in the works of these artists.

They, in their search for a "higher reality" accessed in fact a reality which exists under our everyday world, a subconscious world which underlies our perception of everyday life. This subconscious contains numerous memories and incidents which have experienced become stored away as images and are reactivated when a chance incident sparks off a chain reaction. Images work by association.

When Freud opened up the area of psychological investigation into subconscious reaction to reality, it led to



the Surrealist the idea that words are more than just words, and that the logic and reasoning imposed by the conscious mind has no bearing on the subconscious.

Magritte and De Chirico both sought to explore these concepts in their art, where there is no reality at all. Each of his own way - following the lead given by psychological exploration and the seeming acceptance of the validity of the workings of the dreaming mind and its illogical sequences of thought. Magritte has been successful by showing his conscious mind a few steps and letting the subconscious flow with all the freedom of a dreaming mind.

In doing this, they were reflecting on how our personal history into a whole new way of reality. They were methods which are some of the psychoanalysts which could lead deep into the mind, in an effort to discover the inner reality which is a constant but shaped over time.

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From the study of the works of the Surrealist artists such as De Chirico and Magritte, it is obvious that there is indeed a correlation to be drawn between the subconscious world of the mind as experienced in dreams and the world as we experience it every day, as illustrated in the works of these artists.

They, in their search for a "higher reality" accessed in fact a reality which exists under our conscious minds, a subconscious world which underpins our perception of everyday life. This conceptual universe comprises memories and incidents which, once experienced become stored away as images and are remembered when a chance incident sparks off a chain reaction. Memory works by association.

When Freud opened up this area of psychological investigation into subconscious reaction to reality, it led to

the revelation the the mind itself works on more than one level, and that the logic and reasoning imposed by the conscious mind has no meaning in the subconscious.

Magritte and De Chirico both sought to explore these concepts in order to discover where true reality exists. Each in his own way, following the lead given by psychological exploration and the resulting acceptance of the validity of the workings of the dreaming mind and its illogical sequences of thought, searched his own subconscious by allowing his conscious mind a free rein and letting the memories flow with all the freedom of a dreaming mind.

In doing this, they were embarking on their own personal odyssey into a philosophical exploration of reality. They used methods similar to those of the psychoanalysts which could lead deep into the mind of the subject, in an effort to discover the inner reality which on a conscious level shaped their lives.

Each individual's experience of life is absolutely different. There may be areas of similarity, but no two persons will have a completely similar psychological make-up. It for this reason that the works of the Surrealist artists, De Chirico and Magritte amongst them, will be absolutely dissimilar., even given their acceptance of a broadly similar philosophy.

The works are hermetic precisely because of this, and the observer is constrained to accept the works purely on the level of the canvas, as it would be impossible to fully understand the workings of the mind of the artist who created them.

I feel that the Surrealist era was important in terms of both art and philosophy, as it marked the beginning of an era of a new enlightenment, which paved the way towards the



acceptance of modern art. Philosophically, it brought to light ideas and problems associated with the search for the meaning of reality, and the means of faithfully reproducing it in terms of art.

I believe that the conclusion to be drawn from such a study is that the world as it exists is fundamentally divorced from the world as it is experienced, and the reproduction of the extant exterior reality may only be achieved in terms of the individual experience of it.

## Plates

1. **"Guernica"**, 1937, oil on canvas, 11'5" x 25'5", Prado Museum, Madrid (Picasso).
2. **"Dancer Listening to the Organ in a Gothic Cathedral"**, 1945, oil on canvas, 76" x 51", private collection, (Miro).
3. **"The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon (2)"**, 1914, oil on canvas, 185 cm x 139 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
4. **"Melancholy"**, 1912, oil on canvas, 31" x 25", collection Mr & Mrs E. Estorick. (De Chirico).
5. **"Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire"**, 1914, oil on canvas, 32" x 25", Musee National D'Art Moderne. (De Chirico).
6. **"The Sacred Fish"**, 1919, oil on canvas, 29" x 24", Museum of Modern Art, New York. (De Chirico).
7. **"The Explanation"**, 1952, oil on canvas, 21" x 18", E.L.T. Mesens, Brussels. (Magritte).
8. **"Euclidean Walks"**, 1955, oil on canvas, 64" x 51", Minneapolis Institute of Arts. (Magritte).
9. **"The Waterfall"**, 1961, oil on canvas, 32" x 29", Alexandre Iolas, New York. (Magritte).
10. **"The Fair Captive"**, 1947, oil on canvas, 21" x 26", private collection (Magritte).



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