Surrealism

During the early 1920’s-30’s, Europe was recovering from WWI (1914-18). One group of artists who lived through the war felt that traditional ways of looking at the world were no longer valid. (Growing from the Dada Movement - nonsense art, from a nonsense world exuberated by the nonsense killing of war). Wanting to make meaningful art, they turned inward to their own private realities, based on dreams, memories and feelings.

Surrealist – means a higher degree of reality, turning inward to paint dreams, memories and feelings.

“Beneath the realistic surface of life.”
Presented recognizable subject matter in illogical situations

Began as a literary movement fostered by poet, Andre` Breton, it grew out of the philosophy of Sigmund Feud

- Free association (without conscious control)
- Dream analysis

2 Forms of Surrealism:

1.) Improvised Art – distancing them as much as possible from conscious control.

Joan Miro – The Joy of Painting

- Painted squiggles in a trancelike state; working spontaneously. “What really counts is to strip the soul naked.” Prudence thrown to the wind, nothing held back”
- Invented unique biomorphic signs for natural objects (sun, moon, and animals); simplified into shorthand pictograms of geometric shapes and amoeba-like blobs – a mixture of fact and fantasy.
- Famous painting – Dutch Interior II, Carnival of Harlequin

Max Ernst – Mother of Madness

- Experienced hallucinations as a child with a fever from measles. He found he could induce similar near-psychotic episodes (and adapt them in art) by staring fixedly until his mind wandered into some psychic netherworld.
- Invented “frottage”, a new method for generating surprising imager. This is rubbings from textured surfaces and embellished to produce fantastic, sometimes monstrous imagery.
- Famous painting – La Mer, 1925, 1, 2, 3
2.) **Realistic techniques with dream-like scenes**

**Salvador Dali** – (1904-89) Painting Paranoia
- Based his technique on “critical paranoia” and explored his own neuroses. He was terrified of insects, of crossing streets, of trains, boats and airplanes, of taking the Metro – even of buying shoes because he couldn’t bear to expose his feet in public. He laughed hysterically and uncontrollably and carried a piece of driftwood at all times to ward off evil spirits.
- With so rich a lode of irrational fears fueling his art, Dali placed a canvas at his bed and recorded what he called “hand-painted dream photographs” when he awoke.
- Instead of inventing new forms to symbolize the unconscious, he represented his hallucinations with meticulous realism.
- His recurrent nightmare of a rotting corps often appeared in his work.
- Famous painting - “The Persistence of Memory,” shows limp watches and a strange lump of indefinable flesh. Although metallic, the watches appear to be decomposing. A fly and cluster of jewel-like ants swarm over them.
- Breton said, “With the coming of Dali, it is perhaps the first time that the mental windows have been opened really wide so that one can feel oneself gliding up toward the wild sky’s trap.”

**Renee’ Magritte** – (1898-1967) Dream Visions
- Pronounced – Mah GREET
- Famous painting - The False Mirror
- Painted disturbing, illogical images with startling clarity.
- Began as a commercial artist – he used this mastery of realism to defy logic
- He placed everyday objects in incongruous settings and transformed them into electric shocks. Juxtaposed familiar sights in unnatural contexts.

**De Chirico** – (1888-1978)
- Pronounced - KEY ree coh
- Famous painting – The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street”
- Hailed by the Surrealists as their precursor, Italian painter, was painting nightmare fantasies fifteen years before Surrealism existed.
- Drawing on irrational childhood fears, De Chirico is known for his eerie cityscapes with empty arcades, raking light, and ominous shadows. The skewed perspective and nearly deserted squares inhabited by tiny, depersonalized figures project menace. In fact, with these paintings as his best evidence, De Chirico was exempted from
military service as mentally unstable. On an early self-portrait he inscribed, “What shall I love if not the enigma?”

Women Surrealistic Artist:

**Meret Oppenheim** – Object (fur lined teacup)

**Frida Kahlo** - Mexican Artist

- Pronounced – FREE-da KAH –lo
- In constant pain due to an earlier accident while riding a bus it collided with a trolley – resulting in 32 operations in 26 years on her back and leg – her leg was later amputated and she
- The bulk of her 200 paintings were fantasized self-portraits, dealing with subjects seldom tested in Western art: childbirth, miscarriage, abortion.
- She delighted in role-playing and wore colorful Mexican costumes, basing her painting style on indigenous folk art and Roman Catholic devotional images.
- Twice she married Diego Rivers (dee-A-go Riv-ERR-a) a famous Mexican Muralist. She had a constant obsession with him.
- Because of her injuries and her husband’s many affairs, Kahlo’s paintings tell the story of her physical and emotional pain.
- At her first one woman show, Kahlo’s doctor said she was too ill to attend, so she had herself carried in on a stretcher as part of the exhibit. Kahlo died soon after. When they pushed her body into the oven to be cremated, the intense heat snapped her corpse up to a sitting position. Her hair blazed in a ring of fire around her head. She looked painter David Siqueiros said, as if she were smiling in the center of a sunflower.
- Frida disagreed with being labeled a surrealist because she said, “I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.”
- **Nahum Zenil** – Mexican artists (male version of Frida Kahlo) painted many surrealist self portraits.
- Famous paintings – Self-Portrait, Roots,