What is unusual about the art shown here? The subjects are familiar—portraits, a landscape, and a still life. But are the images ordinary? The tearful, masklike face on the cover is almost overwhelmed by the white lace surrounding it. Wires or roots seem to grow from the woman's head in the portrait (above, right), and the image of a man's face appears on her forehead. Mysterious, changing forms fill the landscape (above). And the cup, saucer, and spoon (center) are covered in fur. Who did these startling works of art, how do they make you feel, and why do you think they were created?

During the early 1920s, Europe was recovering from World War I (1914-1918). One group of artists who had lived through the war felt that traditional ways of looking at the world were no longer valid. Wanting to make meaningful art, they turned inward to their own private realities, based on dreams, memories, and feelings. These Surrealists (the word means a higher degree of reality) wanted to create fantastical worlds depicted in real-looking ways. From the beginning of the movement, works by women artists appeared regularly in Surrealist exhibitions. Many female Surrealists created works of art equal in quality to those done by their male colleagues. But, unfortunately, only a few of these artists' images are recognized today.

In constant pain due to an early accident, Kahlo married a famous Mexican artist Diego Rivera (Dee-A-go Riv-ERR-a). Because of her injuries and her husband's many affairs, Kahlo's paintings tell the story of her physical and emotional pain. Wearing her wedding dress, vines binding her, Kahlo stares out of the work (above). The tiny transparent head that has been reduced in scale to fit inside her forehead, reveals the artist's constant obsession with Diego.

Surrealist artists also worked in the U. S. The bizarre and imaginative landscape (above, left) was created by New York painter Dorothea Tanning. Like many Surrealists, Tanning did her paintings spontaneously, letting accidents and dream images guide her brush. This work is called Guardian Angels. In it, small figures are being swirled away by the angels, depicted as huge birdlike creatures. The theme of the entire work is metamorphosis. Every form seems to be dissolving and transforming itself into another.
The three works shown here are surreal self-portraits. Are there any in which the figure actually seems to have an outward resemblance to the artist who created it? There is probably only one, but even that one is filled with strange animals and impossible situations.

The image (above), made by British artist Leonora Carrington, may look a little frightening at first. But its basic message is hopeful and optimistic. Painted in 1938, a year before World War II began, the artist sits in a living room-like space surrounded by magical beasts. Among the images from Carrington's childhood, a strange small doglike creature sits by her side. The artist has used transparency to give a ghostly quality to the rocking horse juxtaposed (placed next to) with her self-portrait. The horse floats—or levitates—above her. These animal guides lead the way out of a geometric, man-made world into the safe, intuitive world of nature.

Carrington's interest in Surrealism began when she went to Paris and developed a friendship with well-known German Surrealist Max Ernst (see page 10). The Nazi invasion of Paris forced her to leave France and settle in Mexico. There Carrington met another Surrealist named Remedios Varo, a Spanish painter who had also recently fled from Europe. In Varo's Creation of the Birds (above, right), the artist sits at her drawing table bringing birds to life, using starlight directed through a glass. Varo uses paints mixed in a science-fiction-like device sitting beside her desk. With her eyes replaced by those of an owl and a feather-covered body, the artist creating birds seems to have transformed herself into one.
American Surrealist Kay Sage was living in Europe when she met Surrealist painter Yves Tanguy (Eve Tahn-GEE) (see page 11), whom she married in 1940. After returning to the U.S., Sage painted her best-known works, including Portrait (right). Unlike other Surrealists, Sage’s mysterious, haunting images were not based on a realistic representation of the world. She did not paint dreams, living creatures, or complex stories. She created a totally alien, abstract, but completely believable world of her own. Her subjects are recognizable. But they are made up of inanimate objects—sharp geometric shapes and billowing fabrics—set on a flat plane in the middle of nowhere. In Sage’s compositions, large, hard-edged forms placed close to the viewer emphasize distance and suggest a desolate wasteland. The long cast shadows found in her paintings create a feeling of ominous stillness, adding to the works’ overall sense of isolation.

Sage’s dramatic compositions and bold, simple, angular shapes were well received by the male-dominated Surrealist world of the 1930s and 40s. One well-known surrealist gave her work what he considered high praise, “the strong imagery expressed in Kay Sage’s work could have been done by a man.”
Mexican artist Frida Kahlo said, “I never knew I was a Surrealist till André Breton (a well-known French Surrealist) came to Mexico and told me I was.” European Surrealists were inspired by the new science of psychology, especially its concept that the mind was made up of conscious and subconscious parts. Without benefit of psychology, Frida Kahlo’s emotional work explores the buried images, memories, and symbols of her own subconscious mind.

Outwardly, Kahlo’s life was exciting and glamorous. Married to famous muralist Diego Rivera (see page 10), she knew all the important people in Mexico and later the U.S. She was recognized as an important painter when few women artists were taken seriously. But under the surface, Kahlo’s life was far from happy. It was this conflicted inner world that she depicted in her dreamlike self-portraits.

Born in Mexico City in 1907, at 18 Kahlo was seriously hurt in a bus accident. This left her in constant pain for the rest of her life. The accident also changed her life in another way. As she was recovering, she painted her first self-portrait, beginning a series in which she documented the events in her life and her reactions to them.

When she was better, a friend introduced Kahlo to Diego Rivera; the two married in 1929. The next year the couple left for San Francisco, New York, and Detroit. At this point, Kahlo was seen mainly as the charming wife of a famous husband. In 1932, while recovering from surgery, she painted Self Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the U.S. (above). Kahlo presents herself as Mrs. Diego Rivera, standing on a pedestal in a pink dress holding a Mexican flag. Animal-like machines, smokestacks, and skyscrapers symbolize America. Mexico is filled with ruins, skulls, and dead flowers.

When she painted The Two Fridas (above, right), Kahlo and Rivera had just divorced (they later remarried). The hearts of the two Fridas are literally superimposed on their bodies; they are inseparably linked by the blood vessel running between them. The woman on the right, dressed in the Mexican style, is loved by Diego and holds his picture to prove it. The woman on the left, who wears a traditional European wedding dress, is not loved by Diego. She is shown attempting to repair her broken heart.

The Little Deer (right), was done a few years before the artist’s death in 1954 at the age of 47. In this work, she sums up her anger and hurt over her stormy marriage and her constant physical suffering. Her transformation into a gentle deer, wounded by arrows and floating in a menacing forest creates a dreamlike and surreal image. The juxtaposition of Kahlo’s head and the animal’s body stresses the connection she felt with animals and nature.
“My painting carries with it the message of pain.” — Frida Kahlo


“I am not sick. I am broken. But I am happy as long as I can paint.” — Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo, *The Little Deer*, 1946. Oil on canvas. 9” x 12”. Private Collection.
Surreal Connection

Many women Surrealists gained recognition because they worked Surrealist men. Here are works by some of these important male Surrealists:

**ACCIDENTAL FLOWERS**

Max Ernst, a leading German Surrealist painter, was married to Leonora Carrington, then Dorothea Tanning. But unlike both of those artists, Ernst did not create his fantastic scenes using highly realistic painting techniques.

Works like *Shellfish Flowers* (left) are Surrealist, but they are also abstract—that is simplified, stylized versions of natural objects. Many Surrealists like Ernst were interested in the new field of psychotherapy. Ernst wanted to create his works spontaneously by using psychotherapy's technique of "free association." He felt that by getting rid of conscious control, he would be able to free his unconscious mind. To do this he invented new and unusual techniques he called "controlled accidents."

The flowers in this piece were made by using a method the artist called *decalcomania* ([de-kal-ko-MANE-e-ah]. Blobs of paint were dropped on the canvas and partially absorbed with a blotter. Twisting the blotter formed intricate circular blossoms. Other textures were created by using *frottage* [fro-TAH-ge], which involves placing paper on a raised surface and rubbing it with a pencil.

**A MEXICAN GIANT**

Diego Rivera, husband of Frida Kahlo, is considered the greatest Mexican painter of the 20th century. Rivera was not a Surrealist. He wanted his art to be part of the movement for social justice taking place during the 1920s and 30s in Mexico and the United States. But many of the vast public murals he created in these countries have a number of Surrealist elements.

In a series of visits he made to America, Rivera painted many complex works such as *Allegory of California* (right). By borrowing several devices from the Surrealists, the artist condensed a complex historical subject—the history of the state of California—to its essential parts. The scale of the people in this painting is very unrealistic. A large, protective female figure gathers the tiny farmers, workers, and scientists in her huge hands. These people are not standing in a real space, but have been dislocated so they float in various segments of the composition. By sometimes using techniques associated with Surrealism, Rivera was able to use figures and objects symbolically in order to present his political views to the public.

"An artist is above all a human being, profoundly human to the core."
—Diego Rivera
Twentieth-century, French-born American painter Yves Tanguy [Eve Tan-GE] was also an important member of the Surrealist movement. Married to Kay Sage (see page 5), Tanguy created worlds just as impossible and fantastic as those painted by his wife.

Sage's landscapes are filled with geometric forms. But Tanguy, in works like *Imaginary Numbers* (above), used mainly biomorphic shapes (organic or curved forms that appear to be alive). His monochromatic (one color) dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish images may have been inspired by the rocky, forbidding French coast where he grew up.

Tanguy's painting technique is highly realistic. His perspective is accurate. Objects in the foreground are larger in scale than those in the background. His shapes are carefully modeled. And his use of cast shadows gives the landscape a three-dimensional sense of reality. But the incongruity of the nameless objects that seem to march in diagonal lines across this half-marine, half-lunar landscape suggest the sense of unreality found in all Surrealist art.
When Kenneth Mohr moved from Hong Kong his freshman year at Nova High School in Hollywood, Florida, two things happened that would change the course of his budding artistic life. First, he discovered a computer program that gave him the freedom to create Surrealist images like the award-winning work above. Then, he saw the movie Shrek, a film animated by an artist from Hong Kong. “I realized that there are so many things you can do in art,” Ken says. “I want to create my own special effects someday—effects like those I saw in Shrek.”

Today Ken is in his first year at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, studying computer animation.

How did you first get involved with art?
I took it as a requirement in high school in my sophomore year—and, I didn’t like it. But as I started to draw more and more, I started to appreciate art. Now, it’s a part of me. With art, I feel I can express myself better than with words. Sometimes a person will understand my idea just by looking at my picture. I feel excited when someone understands me that way. It makes me very happy.

Why do you enjoy creating with computers?
Because I can do so much with a computer. With other media, you can only do one thing. For example, you can only use a pen or brush to do pointillism [a way to reproduce effects of light by placing together small dots of various colors]. But with the computer, I can create all the techniques using one medium. I can change a picture instantly from pencil to pointillism to cross-hatching. I love that freedom.
How did you come to create this award-winning piece?
It was an assignment in senior year. We were supposed to do a project involving shoes. I went home, sat down, and looked at my shoes, hands, and feet. That’s when I got my first idea—to create a video about a person coming out from their shoes. Then I thought, “Why don’t I do hands and feet coming out from shoes?” A movie would be too long for this idea, so I sat at the computer and made this picture instead.

Why did you choose the elements that you did?
I have a portfolio of work and most of it is surreal, using body parts—hands and feet. I did this piece to add to my portfolio and my collection. I put these signature elements in my work so when people see it they know it is mine right away. I even put my portfolio on a website: http://devoted.to/surreality

Why do you like working in a Surrealist style?
Surrealism gives the viewer a twist. You can’t capture this kind of image with a camera, it just doesn’t exist. Surrealism is something beyond reality; it’s in your imagination. I believe there’s no limit to your imagination. That’s why Surrealism is a good fit for me. It allows me to create what I want.

What techniques did you use to make this piece surreal?
I used key elements of Surrealism—like dislocation, transformation, dramatic scale change, replacement, levitation, and incongruity. I used these techniques to give the viewer a feeling of being outside of reality. By combining these techniques, the viewer gets a sense that these things wouldn’t normally happen in the real world.

What were you hoping the viewer would take away from your work?
I wanted them to say to themselves: “Wow! I never thought I would see something like that!” From the response people have had to this piece, I think I was successful.

What’s the work’s title?
It’s called Heaven’s Limbs, Devil’s Souls. A friend helped me with the title. It expresses perfectly the image of some hands trying to reach up toward heaven, and others trying to reach down toward hell.

How did you put this piece together?
First, I used a digital camera to take pictures of my shoes, then my hands and feet. I used my computer program to take out all the backgrounds. Next, I arranged the images. When everything was positioned the way I wanted it, I added the new background—a beach. Finally, I worked on color and contrast. I desaturated the color so my limbs looked faded. Then I created a drop shadow, so the image looked more 3-D and not like it was floating. By working on tones and shadows, I was able to make the elements in the picture look unified, like they were all photographed together.

Were you satisfied after you were done?
Actually, no. This is the second version. When I first created the image, the drop shadow didn’t look real. I also didn’t desaturate the colors, so the first version was too bright. So I blurred the shadow and worked on the colors. That’s another great thing about computers. I can see my work and go back and work on it. It’s not difficult to redo something.

Has creating Surrealist art posed any challenges for you?
Yes. When I first started to make this art, my teacher encouraged me to create realistic art. That’s the norm, and that’s what colleges like to see. People looked at my work and said, “this is scary.” But it didn’t matter. This was what I wanted to do. I didn’t feel that I should be limited by anyone. That attitude let my imagination go further so I could create more work. It’s helped me succeed as an artist so far. And it’s gotten my work attention it might not have gotten otherwise.

What advice do you have for aspiring artists like yourself?
I would say, don’t let anything or anyone limit your imagination. Keep yourself free to do what you want to do. Create in a way that makes you feel comfortable. You have to create for one person only—and that’s you.

“Surrealism is something beyond reality; it’s in your imagination. I believe there’s no limit to your imagination.”
As you learned earlier, the word sur-real means “a higher degree of reality.” Surrealist artists wanted to create a new reality of the imagination. To make this fantastic new universe convincing, many chose to alter familiar images taken from the real world. These artists used a number of imaginative visual techniques to combine ordinary images in surprising and unexpected ways.

In this workshop, you’ll use some of these Surrealist techniques to build your own fantasy world in the form of a three-dimensional photomontage.

**MATERIALS**

- Mat board scrap or sturdy cardboard; 6 x 6 in.
- Elmer’s Glue-All
- Straight pins
- 12-in. ruler
- School pencil
- Old art history/art books with art images that can be cut up
- Variety of photo magazines (National Geographic, Q, BMX, Details, nature, sports, horse, food, etc.)
- Thick cardboard to use as cutting surface
- X-Acto knives, single-edge razor blades, or sharp scissors
- Black/white or color family photos
- Access to a photocopy machine which enlarges/reduces (optional)
- Cutting boards (for old mat scraps)
- Hot glue gun/hot glue sticks

**STEP 1**

A week or two before the assignment, bring in magazines, old art history books, maps, family photos (to be photocopied). Look for easily recognizable, clear, visually interesting images; background, middleground, foreground imagery; images which can frame other images; textures and backgrounds. Carefully remove entire pages; file images in small, labeled portfolios.

**STEP 2**

Since a good concept is critical, spend time developing a unique and
fantastic theme. Theme should be meaningful to yourself and others; personal, family history; school-related, ideal community, Utopian world. Review images; think about visual techniques that will best represent your theme. Remember, you will be making a cube with six sides, so your six scenes should be related. Spread out pages; select images for each side.

**STEP 3**
After choosing possible images, cut them out. Try to retain outside contour detail. Do not glue until images for all six sides have been cut out and arranged within each 6 x 6 in. format. Work on one side at a time. Move images around, try different arrangements; enlarge/reduce images by photocopying. Keep compositions, focal points simple. Determine which sides will be next to one another.

**STEP 4**
When all six compositions are done and you are satisfied with relationships of sides, begin gluing down images, one side at a time. With hot glue gun or Elmer's Glue-All, use tiny dots of glue to prevent buckling of paper. Use pins to hold sides in place until glue dries. If this method is too difficult, you can tape five sides together (with tape inside), then glue final side (see flattened cube, left).

**SOME SOLUTIONS**
In the examples above, can you find cubes where the main theme is related to fishing; abstract painting; water; TV commercials? What natural laws have been reversed in many of these montages? Which of these artists has used changes of scale to make his/her scenes more incongruous? Who has replaced one body part with another? How many examples of dislocation can you find in these works? Has anyone transformed an ordinary object into something else? Are any objects or people levitating, or floating? Can you find an example of two people who are transposed, that is, each is located where the other would ordinarily be?
Surrealist artists, both female and male, wanted to visualize their inner lives in the works they created. To do this, they developed a number of highly effective techniques.

To the right are details of paintings that are featured somewhere in this issue. Beside each word, phrase or artist's name below, write the letter of the visual that seems most appropriate (some of the words or phrases may apply to more than one of the visuals).

1. Frida Kahlo
2. Geometric shapes
3. Decalcômania
4. Replacement
5. Monochrome
6. Dorothea Tanning
7. Transparency
8. Diego Rivera
9. Owl
10. Levitation
11. Hard-edged
12. Superimposition
13. Kay Sage
14. Metamorphoses
15. Abstract
16. Scale changes
17. Remedios Varo
18. Biomorphic shapes
19. Yves Tanguy
20. Max Ernst
21. Ivory tower
22. Swirling shapes
23. Incongruity
24. Transformation
25. Leonora Carrington
26. Frottage
27. Juxtaposed