

Losing Sight to Gain Vision: The Eye in European Surrealist Painting

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A thesis

in the Department of Art History

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts (Art History)

at Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2021

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

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Founded in 1924, European Surrealism intended to resist and evade the core values of modern society and bourgeois thought. While aiming to surpass the rational and to reach inspired vision, the Surrealists sought ways of challenging bodily capacities and sensory perception. They quickly targeted eyesight, a sense historically linked to reason and masculinity, and central to the Western worldview. Extensive publications cover the history of the senses across eras and cultures, the shifting conception of the senses in twentieth-century Europe, psychoanalytic readings of Surrealist art and literature, and feminist interpretations of the Surrealist treatment of the body. Yet few studies flesh out the effects of the modern rethinking of sight on its attributed connotations, or on the art historical approach to the cultural productions of the modern avant-garde, particularly Surrealism. This thesis addresses these gaps by offering a contemporary reading of Surrealist art, its antiocular imagery, and its multilayered implications. I examine, through three selected paintings, how Surrealist artists Joan Miró, Victor Brauner, and René Magritte used the representation of the eye as a symbol to question and redefine the meanings of sight. All three artists undermined the prevalent meanings of eyesight as oppressive, rational, and mechanical by highlighting affect, subjectivity, and inspiration in their oeuvre. Whether through symbolic abstraction, physical mutilation, or a combination of both, they fundamentally challenged sensory perception and empirical reality in an effort to achieve metaphysical revelation.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my extraordinary supervisor, Dr. Nicola Pezolet, whose continuous support and encouraging advice has guided me since the very beginning. I am grateful to have benefited from his honest academic and professional expertise, from the moment I considered applying to this program all the way to its completion. Thank you for trusting me and my work. Special thanks also go out to the incredible Dr. May Chew, who accepted to take on my project as a second reader. I am so thankful for her enriching knowledge, touching empathy, and enthusiasm in my absurdly specific topic, itself partly inspired by Dr. Chew's graduate seminar.

Evidently, I owe this degree to Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts and the Department of Art History, its professors, staff, and fellow resilient students, who ensured our experiences in the program would be as seamless and rewarding as possible. Thank you for welcoming us into Concordia's art history family and for making the Department feel like home. I am equally appreciative of the Interlibrary Loans angels who worked tirelessly through a global pandemic to assist panicked students, such as myself, worldwide. Most of my research would not have been feasible if not for the dedication of these librarians and technicians.

Last in the list but certainly first in my heart, I dedicate this thesis to my family and support system to whom I owe everything, particularly Maman, Papa, Marie-Joe, Joe, and George. Thank you for putting up with years of passionate outbursts about art and academia, for unconditionally nurturing my ambitions, and for patiently fuelling me with love, potato chips, and bubble tea. You have turned these surreal years into cherished lifelong memories. *Merci de tout cœur.*

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Introduction

The end of the First World War (1914–1918) triggered a crucial call for renewal across the European continent, as manifested by the birth of numerous avant-garde artistic movements. Surrealism, founded in the aftermath of Dada in 1924, advocated for radical change on all levels, be it artistic, literary, philosophical, social, and political. Bodily capacities and sensory perception did not escape from these reconsiderations, but were rather brought to the foreground by the collective trauma of the war and developing technological inventions. Members of the Surrealist circle resorted to various emerging theories as well as experimental methods to probe the limits of artistic and cultural conventions. While aiming to surpass the rational and to reach a transcendental vision, the Surrealists sought ways of challenging the predominance of eyesight, a sense historically linked to reason and masculinity, and central to the Western worldview.¹ By targeting the eye, Surrealism intended to fundamentally resist and evade the core values of modern society and bourgeois thought.

My reflections stemmed from finding an intriguing photomontage in the 1929 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, in which French Surrealists appear with their eyes shut ([Fig. 1](#)). The portraits of these sixteen men seemed to deliberately deny the importance of the eyes in traditional portraiture and human identification. The image then set me on a path to uncover the depth of this puzzling antiocular trend in Surrealist visual productions, one that rejected the hegemony of sight, ultimately leading me to my topic and selected artworks. My thesis will examine how Surrealist

¹ André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, ed. Jean-Jacques Pauvert (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1972); Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Constance Classen, “The Senses,” in *Encyclopedia of European Social History from 1350 to 2000*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, vol. 4, 6 vols. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001), 355–64.

artists Joan Miró, Victor Brauner, and René Magritte used the representation of the eye as a symbol to question and redefine the meanings of sight, specifically in their respective paintings *Chiffres et constellations amoureux d'une femme* (*Ciphers and Constellations, in Love with a Woman*) (1941), *Le Dernier voyage* (*The Last Trip*) (1937), and *Le Monde poétique II* (*The Poetic World II*) (1937). This selection of late Surrealist artworks, spanning across Catalan, Romanian, and Belgian art, exposes the ways in which the medium of painting served in conveying each artist's antiocular perspective, in spite of its inherently visual nature. Miró's unique representational strategy, consisting of childlike abstraction and oneiric landscapes, contrasts with Brauner's morphing mechanical bodies and Magritte's detailed, unsettling illusions. Yet, despite these divergences, the three paintings still engage with the physical mutilation of the eye and the Surrealists' shift beyond the merely visual. The aim of my thesis is thus to uncover how this artistic antiocular tendency revises the dominating Western connotations of sight while also embodying Surrealist aesthetics and principles.

For this purpose, I strove for diversity in my research by picking primary as well as secondary sources from both Anglophone and Francophone literature. Along with the mentioned paintings, I turned to Surrealist publications, journals, tracts, artist writings, correspondence, and interviews. Secondary sources further drew from the fields of art history and theory, social history, philosophy, sensory studies, psychoanalysis, and gender studies. I purposely sought out texts dating from, and dealing with, the late 1930s and early 1940s, in order to explore more complex and nuanced positions,² as a complement to more traditional sources that commonly focus on the

² Albert Skira and E. Tériade, eds., *Minotaure : revue artistique et littéraire*, 1933–1939; Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski, eds., *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Alain Jouffroy, *Une révolution du regard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*.

1920s as well as the early theories and practices of Surrealism.³ I am cautious, nonetheless, not to frame my research on Surrealism solely through a Bretonian lens. While André Breton's foundational writings provide valuable insight into the Surrealist stance at different points in time, the French poet eventually gained a reputation as too dogmatic and quite radical among a few of his contemporaries. Consequently, my analyses incorporate the discourse of peripheral figures, such as French philosopher and writer Georges Bataille, considered as a dissident by some members of the movement.⁴ The artists I highlight in my thesis further accentuate this desired diversity of voices; while essential to the development of French Surrealism, they remained anchored in their respective cultures and personal lived realities. Before diving into the three selected paintings, the following introductory sections will succinctly outline the contexts pertaining to the different spheres of my multidisciplinary topic, covering the histories of sight, modernism, and Surrealist theory.

a. The cultural hegemony of sight

The hierarchy of the senses has proved central to many aspects of Western culture, influencing fields as diverse as philosophy, sociology, and architecture. The separation of the senses into five categories, matching the number of natural elements, has been credited to Aristotle, whose ranking of the senses already placed sight ahead of hearing, smell, taste, and touch.⁵ In regard to the arts, the principles of aesthetics visibly followed suit; the predominant scholarly discourse oftentimes

³ Pierre Naville and Benjamin Péret, eds., *La Révolution surréaliste*, 1924–1929; André Breton, *Le surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979); José Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture* (Lausanne: Éditions l'Âge d'Homme, 1987); Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du surréalisme*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1945); J. H. Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1977).

⁴ Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (London; Cambridge, MA: Hayward Gallery; MIT Press, 2006); Martin Jay, "The Disenchantment of the Eye: Surrealism and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism," *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 15–38.

⁵ Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 2–3.

pertained to sight, a sense whose complex philosophical evolution, much like most Western histories, dates back to Pre-Socratic times.

In his anthology *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, David Michael Levin refers to writings by philosophers Parmenides and Heraclitus as early instances in which Western thought was drawn to the authority of sight. Simultaneously, Levin argued that these same works warned against the human mind's natural dependence on eyesight, underlining "all the dangers in placing too much trust in vision and its objects."⁶ Likewise, according to critical theorist Martin Jay, succeeding Greek philosopher Plato expressed his doubts as to "the reliability of the two eyes of normal perception" as opposed to "the inner eye of the mind."⁷ The clear dichotomy between the sensible and the conceptual, the practical and the theoretical,⁸ was further established by Plato's theory of Ideas, developed in various philosophical dialogues, which distinguished the pure essence of all things from their physical manifestation.⁹ The human eye, per its ability to perceive light and forms, anchored itself in the physical, tangible realm. However, through the Platonic association of light with truth, the eye also reached the intellectual, abstract realm of Ideas.¹⁰ Thus, sight gained its status as the noblest of the senses, effectively tying truth to light and knowledge to clear vision.¹¹

⁶ David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 1.

⁷ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 27.

⁸ Hans Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses," in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 146.

⁹ Plato, "Book VII," in *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 224–35; William David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951); William A. Welton, ed., *Plato's Forms: Varieties of Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).

¹⁰ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 26.

¹¹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 15; Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11; Classen, "The Senses," 355.

Medieval Europe persisted in privileging sight, in accordance with Aristotle's hierarchy of the senses,¹² even adding a religious dimension to the characteristics attributed to sight. Immediate visual perception was considered inferior to Ideal vision, which now referred to "the higher light of God in which the pious man would ultimately stand bathed."¹³ Traditionally, sight was exclusively regarded as a masculine sense, believed to be a powerful, divine gift bestowed upon men "to see and oversee the world."¹⁴ Even after the gradual secularization of the symbolism of sight along with that of Western societies, philosophers still favoured a moral, rational order.¹⁵ From there, the Renaissance introduced linear perspective, a visual system that irrevocably placed the monocular point of view at the centre "of the perceptual world as well as of the concept of the self."¹⁶ Vision continued to be endorsed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century figures such as René Descartes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for whom sight was at the basis of mental activity, science, and technology.¹⁷

Indeed, Western ocularcentrism, the resolute prioritization of sight, peaked once more in the nineteenth century, with the advent of technological contraptions like the photographic camera. Modern technologies introduced new visual paradigms, complicating the role of the human eye while reinforcing the dominance of sight. As Martin Jay affirms: "the dawn of the modern era was accompanied by the vigorous privileging of vision."¹⁸ These new inventions "produced a frozen,

¹² Classen, *Worlds of Sense*, 3.

¹³ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 37.

¹⁴ Constance Classen, "The Witch's Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity," in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford; New York, NY: Berg, 2005), 70.

¹⁵ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 54.

¹⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 16.

¹⁷ Classen, *Worlds of Sense*, 27; Classen, "The Senses," 361; Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 10; Jonathan David Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

¹⁸ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 69.

disincarnated gaze,”¹⁹ through which the eye became mechanical, static, and objective.²⁰ Manifestly, modernism was then constructed on similar ocularcentric principles, affecting the movement’s formal as well as moral values.²¹ For instance, the rational, dominating, and masculine connotations historically assigned to sight²² were successfully relayed to modernist practices. Nevertheless, by prompting critique and questioning preconceived notions, the twentieth-century avant-garde attempted to shift the general conception of the senses by deconstructing Western ocularcentrism through visual abstraction and symbolic subversion.²³ In order to fully understand the aesthetic implications of modernism and the avant-garde movements, the following section will provide an abridged overview of the social and political situation of the early twentieth-century.

b. The intricacies of modernism

For many scholars, such as philosopher Sara Danius, modernism cannot be considered without first acknowledging “the relations of technology and aesthetics,”²⁴ both of which proved constitutive to twentieth-century movements. These connections were notably reinforced by both World Wars and their aftershocks. Unprecedented warfare technologies introduced new perspectives that, in turn, reflected onto aesthetics. For example, military aircrafts allowed for more frequent aerial views, namely of ravaged lands and maze-like trenches, which, translated into artistic imagery, gradually produced abstracted landscapes, broken up by shapes and colours.²⁵ A

¹⁹ Jay, 127.

²⁰ Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 20; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (London; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 47.

²¹ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 160.

²² Classen, “The Witch’s Senses,” 70, 75.

²³ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 159.

²⁴ Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*, 40.

²⁵ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 213.

clear parallel can be drawn between those visuals and Cubism's typical decomposition of space as well as inclusion of geometric pattern.²⁶

Another feature of the modern era was the centrality of machinery and speed, as observed in artistic movements such as Dada and Futurism, tying once again aesthetics to technological innovation.²⁷ For instance, the hybrid figure of the cyborg, part-human, part-machine, dominated contemporary visual culture.²⁸ Incidentally, as observed by architect Juhani Pallasmaa: "The only sense that is fast enough to keep pace with the astounding increase of speed in the technological world is sight."²⁹ Even the many attempts at decomposing movement, whether through photography or painting, were visual in nature, rather than kinetic.³⁰ Moreover, the image took part in modern processes of technological reproduction and mass consumption, rapidly becoming a mere capitalist commodity.³¹ This intersection of the artistic and industrial spheres further alienated the eye "from emotional involvement and identification," turning the image "into a mesmerising flow without focus or participation."³² The modernist period fundamentally reinvented the observer whose sensory experience was now anchored in the material quotidian rather than a philosophical ideal.³³

Many more binaries arose in modernist practices as well. Modernism instituted a dualistic split between the social and aesthetic realms of its time, rejecting lowly mass culture, the avant-

²⁶ Jay, 213–14.

²⁷ Jay, 159; Clara Elizabeth Orban, *The Culture of Fragments: Word and Images in Futurism and Surrealism* (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997), 56.

²⁸ Orban, *The Culture of Fragments*; Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Cornelius Borck, "Sound Work and Visionary Prosthetics: Artistic Experiments in Raoul Hausmann," *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 1–25.

²⁹ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 21.

³⁰ Classic examples include Eadweard Muybridge's photographic series, *The Horse in Motion* (1878), as well as Marcel Duchamp's painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912).

³¹ Pallasmaa, 21.

³² Pallasmaa, 22.

³³ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 4–5; Danisus, *The Senses of Modernism*, 55, 63–64.

garde, and inauthentic art, while proudly favouring high culture, the bourgeoisie, and classical art.³⁴ Indeed, as proven by these openly biased dichotomies, the twentieth century saw a strong revival of nationalist classicism in mainstream art, endorsing a somber *retour à l'ordre* in all disciplines. Modernists sought “radical aesthetic purism,”³⁵ particularly in art, design, and architecture, in an effort to move away from futile ornament and celebrate instead “the concepts of objectivity, collectivity, universality and utility.”³⁶ Regrettably, modernism’s ideological priorities, focusing mainly on purity, productivity, and the public sphere,³⁷ coincided with the concurrent rise of fascism across Europe. Modernist ideals, now imbued with undercurrents of surveillance and racial hygiene, became backed by fascist intentions, including population control and the liberation of “human society from the parochialism of local culture.”³⁸ French fascists effectively appropriated avant-garde aesthetics and contemporary urban plans in their utopic vision of a technocratic society from which a new fascist order would arise.³⁹ The historical context of modernism thereby demonstrates how all spheres of society were intrinsically linked to politics, from the consequence of certain technologies on aesthetics to the radical ideological narratives formed under fascist regimes.⁴⁰ Evidently, wherever mainstream practices embody official principles, subversive movements emerge. Thus developed the intellectual and artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century, from which Surrealism was conceived.

³⁴ Danius, 28–29.

³⁵ Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908),” in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 19.

³⁶ Penny Sparke, “Modernism and Design,” in *An Introduction to Design and Culture: 1900 to the Present*, 3rd ed. (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 72.

³⁷ Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909–1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 60; Tag Gronberg, “Décoration: Modernism’s ‘Other,’” *Art History* 15, no. 4 (December 1992): 547, 550; Sparke, “Modernism and Design,” 67, 77.

³⁸ Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, 50.

³⁹ Antliff, 2, 114; Simone Brott, “The Le Corbusier Scandal, or, Was Le Corbusier a Fascist?,” *Fascism* 6, no. 2 (2017): 203, 206.

⁴⁰ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, “Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde,” in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxx.

c. The advent of Surrealism and Surrealist theory

The circumstances surrounding the birth of Surrealism, much like those of other interwar movements, were deeply influenced by the First World War and its resounding impact on the human experience.⁴¹ As defined in Breton's first "Manifeste du Surréalisme," published in France in 1924, Surrealism was developed as a psychic mechanism through which thought could be expressed, free from rational, aesthetic, and moral limitations.⁴² The first wave of Surrealism, ending approximately in 1929, has indeed been qualified as "more anarchic and effervescent,"⁴³ primarily positioning itself in fierce opposition and denial.⁴⁴ The Surrealist movement sought to solve "all the principal problems of life"⁴⁵ by breaking away from the governing rules of art and society, especially those imposed by modernist contemporaries and their bourgeois predecessors.⁴⁶ Inversely, the Surrealists took it upon themselves to honour and invest in the trivial, the dismissed, and the scorned.⁴⁷ This attitude first infiltrated the literary world, from experimental writing exercises to published essays and poetry. Next came longstanding artistic norms and aesthetic conventions which the Surrealists vehemently wished to dismantle and redefine.

The tradition of Surrealist painting certainly encountered reservations and oppositions from critics, even within Surrealist groups themselves.⁴⁸ The possibility of such a genre ignited debates as to whether visual arts genuinely contributed to the Surrealist revolution and properly embodied

⁴¹ Richardson and Fijałkowski, *Surrealism against the Current*, 3.

⁴² André Breton, "Manifeste du Surréalisme (1924)," in *Manifestes du surréalisme*, ed. Jean-Jacques Pauvert (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1972), 35; Roger Cardinal and Robert Stuart Short, *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), 90; Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 66.

⁴³ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 2.

⁴⁴ Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, xxii.

⁴⁵ André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

⁴⁶ Gronberg, "Décoration: Modernism's 'Other,'" 547; Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.

⁴⁷ Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, 318.

⁴⁸ Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 39.

the movement's values. Nonetheless, the Spring of 1925 marked the first Surrealist painting exhibition in Paris,⁴⁹ asserting "that such a form existed already"⁵⁰ and that "modern painting had become poetry's equal."⁵¹ In order to dispel any persisting controversies, Breton published an essay entitled "Le surréalisme et la peinture" (1928), in which he dismissed conventional artistic formulas to establish new Surrealist rules and principles. The poet advocated for the 'inner model' to become the Surrealist artist's sole source of inspiration, particularly during untrustworthy times such as the contemporary rise of fascism, neo-academicism, and modernism.⁵² Indeed, Breton even declared: "L'œuvre plastique, pour répondre à la nécessité de révision absolue des valeurs réelles sur laquelle aujourd'hui tous les esprits s'accordent, se référera donc à un *modèle purement intérieur*, ou ne sera pas."⁵³ The inner model symbolized the ultimate liberation of painting from the outside world, still under the reign of logic and aesthetic pleasure, in addition to the emancipation of the artist's imagination, creativity, and unconscious.⁵⁴ Chance (*hasard*), spontaneity, and the absence of an external model now constituted the pillars of modern painting, as understood and practised by the Surrealists.⁵⁵

The 1930s corresponded to the second wave of Surrealism, during which the movement's attitude shifted "from a confidence in the self-sufficiency and superiority of the autonomous, unconscious thought process (...), to an acknowledgment of the interdependence of thought and the phenomenal world."⁵⁶ Coincidentally, that same decade also saw a rise in conservatism within

⁴⁹ Didier Ottinger, *Surréalisme* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2011), 21.

⁵⁰ Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 39.

⁵¹ Kim Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts: Theory and Reception* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 348.

⁵² André Breton, "Le surréalisme et la peinture (1928)," in *Le surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 4; Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 47.

⁵³ Breton, "Le surréalisme et la peinture (1928)," 4.

⁵⁴ Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 105; Breton, "Manifeste du Surréalisme (1924)," 20–21; Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 56, 348.

⁵⁵ E. Tériade, "Émancipation de la peinture," *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (December 1933): 10.

⁵⁶ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 2.

the mainstream art world. In fact, Breton's 1935 lecture, "Situation surréaliste de l'objet, Situation de l'objet surréaliste," was delivered at a time when the position of Surrealist art felt jeopardized amid other avant-garde movements and modernism. Breton even declared the current climate "une *crise fondamentale de l'objet*."⁵⁷ In an attempt to smooth over lingering debates in relation to the status of the object in avant-garde art, Breton called for a stamp of authenticity to distinguish amateur imitation art from genuine Surrealist productions. According to the poet, "Surrealism was being subjected to a widespread confusion in which it had become difficult to discern the products and issues proper to the movement."⁵⁸

These artistic interrogations coincided with the Surrealist groups' involvement in the radical politics of their time. Despite some Surrealist members gradually joining political parties such as the Parti Communiste Français, others swiftly realized that the Surrealist revolution was incompatible with communist priorities.⁵⁹ Breton argued for the independence of art from any ideology or social cause in fear of tying the artwork down to a delimited time, place, and political affiliation. Surrealism thus defined art "neither as propaganda, nor as expression, nor as autonomy of form, nor as the mirror of nature, but as form of research into the workings of thought, which would make a contribution to knowledge."⁶⁰ By favouring artistic reflection over political values, Surrealism established itself as an autonomous intellectual and cultural movement, whose core objectives lay in expression, freedom, and invention.⁶¹

⁵⁷ André Breton, "Situation surréaliste de l'objet, Situation de l'objet surréaliste (1935)," in *Manifestes du surréalisme*, ed. Jean-Jacques Pauvert (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1972), 271.

⁵⁸ Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 348.

⁵⁹ André Breton et al., "When the Surrealists Were Right (1935)," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 106–11; Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 187–88.

⁶⁰ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 3.

⁶¹ Harris, 69; Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 188; Richardson and Fijałkowski, *Surrealism against the Current*, 93.

This complex evolution of thought, reflective of the philosophical developments of the twentieth century, is the reason why I intentionally chose late Surrealist paintings as my objects of study. After exploring the differing opinions on painting as a vehicle for the movement's principles as well as the political weight of the Surrealist object as per contemporary artistic and cultural debates, the next step of this contextualization is looking at the Surrealists' stance vis-à-vis ocularcentrism and their particular approach to the denigration of sight. As established, visual arts are undeniably related to their sociopolitical circumstances. As part of the twentieth-century avant-garde, Surrealism is a prime example of a movement that owed its evolution to contemporary historical events and technological innovation. New, modern experiences were admired by many artists, as expressed by Miró himself: "In the visual climate of today, I like factories, night lights, the world seen from an airplane. (...) Seen at night from an airplane, a city is a marvelous thing."⁶² Inspired by neurologist Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories and the possibilities with both photography and cinema, Surrealist artists experimented with the deconstruction of the image, delving into the unconscious gaze, the realm of dreams, and the expression of uninhibited desires.⁶³

Unfortunately, the repercussions of the twentieth century did not prove to be solely positive. The First and Second World Wars were experienced as cataclysms by the entire population, calling into question the very values of Western culture, altering its social and moral order.⁶⁴ For instance, as outlined by art historian Amy Lyford, the post-war French government immediately erected strict social structures in views to rebuild the country and its economy, while

⁶² Joan Miró, "Interview by Yvon Taillandier (1959)," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 247.

⁶³ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010); Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 2; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 253; Cardinal and Short, *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*, 17.

⁶⁴ Ottinger, *Surréalisme*, 6.

simultaneously promoting traditional gender roles and family models.⁶⁵ Yet, the discrepancy between the state's nationalist objectives and its scarred people's lived realities was never discussed nor accounted for in post-war France's official rhetoric.⁶⁶ The consequences of the wars brought about disillusionment with inaccessible contemporary ideals as well as the collapse of a shared collective.

The Surrealists, on the other hand, strove for an embodied practice, anchored in physical symbols and experiences. They experimented with sensory perception via object-making,⁶⁷ fashion,⁶⁸ architecture,⁶⁹ interior design,⁷⁰ and exhibition design.⁷¹ By aligning themselves with notions of desire, the subconscious, and a fetishized understanding of primitivism, the Surrealists leaned toward the senses of touch, taste, and smell in their formation of immersive atmospheres. Their treatment of sight, however, differed greatly. They sought to challenge normative political claims and destabilize the ideological discourse of the time, namely through unsettling images of violently deformed bodies, dismemberment, gender inversion, and sexual deviance.⁷² Consequently, many Surrealist artists “developed a rich ocular iconography. In most cases, the

⁶⁵ Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 4.

⁶⁶ Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, 1.

⁶⁷ Elisabeth Mansén, “Fingertip Knowledge: Meret Oppenheim on the Sense of Touch,” *The Senses and Society* 9, no. 1 (March 2014): 5–15; Julia Kelly, “‘Prière de frôler’: The Touch in Surrealism,” in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 79–99.

⁶⁸ Tristan Tzara, “D’un certain Automatisme du Goût,” *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (December 1933): 81–84.

⁶⁹ Salvador Dalí, “De la beauté terrifiante et comestible, de l’architecture Modern’ style,” *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (December 1933): 69–76; Matta Echaurren, “Mathématique sensible – Architecture du temps,” *Minotaure*, no. 11 (Spring 1938): 43.

⁷⁰ Krzysztof Fijałkowski, “‘Un salon au fond d’un lac’: The Domestic Spaces of Surrealism,” in *Surrealism and Architecture*, ed. Thomas Mical (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 11–30; Jane Alison, “The Surreal House,” in *The Surreal House*, ed. Jane Alison (London; New Haven, CT: Barbican Art Gallery; Yale University Press, 2010), 14–33.

⁷¹ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Dialectics of Design and Destruction: The *Degenerate Art* Exhibition (1937) and the *Exhibition internationale du Surréalisme* (1938),” *October* 150 (Fall 2014): 49–62; Alyce Mahon, “Staging Desire,” in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 277–97; Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁷² Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 2, 6.

eyes (or often the single eye) were enucleated, blinded, mutilated, or transfigured.”⁷³ Iconic examples include Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel’s Surrealist short film *Un chien andalou* (1929), in which a woman’s eye appears to be slit with a straight razor within the first two minutes. Under Surrealism, the eye was no longer a celebrated symbol of nobility and purity, but rather “a target of mutilation and scorn,”⁷⁴ a vehicle of violence. The properties of sight, along with the eyeball itself, came to embody the oppression of rationalism, the radicalism of modernism, and the trauma induced by both regimes. This will become abundantly clear with the study of Miró, Brauner, and Magritte’s representational strategies and each artwork’s context of production.

⁷³ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 259.

⁷⁴ Jay, 260.

Joan Miró: Sight in the service of spiritual transcendence

Catalan artist Joan Miró was born in Barcelona in 1893. Yielding to his father's insistence, Miró reluctantly pursued a career in business, securing a job as a bookkeeper. Miró's frustrated artistic ambitions eventually led to a nervous breakdown and a bout of typhoid fever in 1911. The following year, the aspiring painter enrolled in fine art classes which culminated in his first solo exhibition in 1918. Starting 1920, Miró divided his time between Paris and Montroig, in the Catalan countryside, a system he adhered to for decades and credited for his productivity. During his time in Paris, Miró gradually became acquainted with the French Surrealists, even participating in group exhibitions as early as 1925. Throughout his impressive career, Miró produced paintings, drawings, collages, etchings, sculptures, ceramics, poems, stage sets, and ballet costumes, working in countries across Western Europe, North America, and East Asia.⁷⁵

a. Formal analysis

Chiffres et constellations amoureux d'une femme, translated as *Ciphers and Constellations*, in *Love with a Woman* ([Fig. 2](#)), was completed in 1941 as part of Miró's *Constellations* series, comprised of twenty-three same-sized gouaches on paper. The work, hereafter abbreviated as *Ciphers and Constellations*, depicts seemingly floating shapes, some of which are connected by thin black lines. These forms, predominantly coloured in black and red, consist mostly of small circles, triangles, and eight-point stars. In the centre of the composition, one can make out the deconstructed body of a woman, with two large eyes surrounding the head, two breasts from which

⁷⁵ Joan Miró, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986); James Thrall Soby, *Joan Miró* (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959); Anne Bauvais, ed., *Joan Miró, peintre-poète* (Brussels: ING Belgique; Fonds Mercator, 2011).

protrude pointed nipples, a vulva encircled by six pubic hairs, two raised arms, and two spread legs. The eyes are the only components painted in green and yellow while blue is reserved for two five-point stars as well as a crescent moon. The background of this gouache juxtaposes watercolour patches of crimson, brown, yellow, orange, and cyan on pale, off-white paper. Despite the two-dimensional rendering of the shapes, the unrealistic scale of the individual elements, and the simplicity of the background, a certain dynamism emanates from the work's gestural quality, imparting the gouache with a sense of depth and movement in space. It is worth noting my analysis of certain shapes is approximated; both their nature and meaning can be interpreted differently by each viewer. Much like a starry sky, the more time spent observing this artwork, the more details and connections seem to emerge.

b. Miró's *Constellations*, a subjective reflection of a collapsing reality

Miró's intent with the *Constellations* series can be uncovered by examining the context preceding its production. The 1930s represented a tumultuous decade for Miró and his fellow Catalans, for whom the rise of fascism and communism morphed into a local struggle between Spanish Nationalists and Republicans. The onset of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 forced Miró to relocate first to Paris, then to Varengeville-sur-Mer in Normandy,⁷⁶ yet, the move did not deter the artist from expressing his unwavering support for the Catalan people. In 1937, Miró unveiled an impressive mural painted for the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World Fair, exhibited alongside Pablo Picasso's renowned masterpiece, *Guernica*.⁷⁷ Miró's now-lost mural, titled *The Reaper*, depicted a defiant Catalan peasant defending his land and freedom. The figure's attributes were

⁷⁶ Anne Bauvais, ed., "Biographie," in *Joan Miró, peintre-poète* (Brussels: ING Belgique; Fonds Mercator, 2011), 222.

⁷⁷ Robin Adèle Greeley, "Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting: Joan Miró and Political Agency in the Pictorial Realm," in *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 15.

reminiscent of contemporary war posters dedicated to the Republican struggle, some of which were designed by Miró himself.⁷⁸ The artist's intense nationalist passion and Catalan pride continued marking his oeuvre, both aesthetically and conceptually,⁷⁹ as exemplified by the ensuing *Constellations* series.

General Francisco Franco's victory in Spain and the start of the Second World War further exacerbated Miró's situation. Following the Nazi invasion of France, the artist moved to Palma de Majorca, and again to Montroig, in an effort to protect himself and his family.⁸⁰ During these years, 1940 to 1941, Miró worked incessantly on the *Constellations*,⁸¹ a series he perceived as his clandestine escape from the war. Decades later, the artist confessed:

I was very pessimistic. I felt that everything was lost. (...) I was sure they wouldn't let me go on painting, that I would only be able to go to the beach and draw in the sand or draw figures with the smoke from my cigarette. When I was painting the *Constellations* I had the genuine feeling that I was working in secret, but it was a liberation for me in that I ceased thinking about the tragedy all around me. While I was working, my suffering stopped.⁸²

This admission reveals valuable information as to Miró's state of mind while working on the series. Conceived and executed in exile, the *Constellations* naturally embodied Miró's subjective response to an external world collapsing around him.⁸³ The pictorial language used across the twenty-three gouaches suddenly gains existential meaning. The spiralling lines, overlapping circles, and inconsistent proportions come to symbolize "the cycles of life and war; the isolation of (...) exile and the tumult of disease; and, more than anything, the human need for conversation."⁸⁴ Indeed, above all, Miró's overt objective was to transcend the unpreventable

⁷⁸ Greeley, 15; Soby, *Joan Miró*, 91.

⁷⁹ Greeley, "Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting," 19.

⁸⁰ Bauvais, "Biographie," 222; Ottinger, *Surréalisme*, 68.

⁸¹ Paul Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2000), 1–3.

⁸² Joan Miró, "Interview by Lluís Permanyer (1978)," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 294–95.

⁸³ Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton*, 29; Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 202.

⁸⁴ Sara Howard and Peter Daszak, "Joan Miró's Call and Response," *EcoHealth* 7, no. 4 (December 2010): 555.

influence of his social and political circumstances on contemporary artistic practice.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the painter's yearning to evade reality remained affected by current events, as proven by Miró's custom of dating his gouaches and other works of the period, permanently linking his productions to their context.⁸⁶ For reference, Miró inscribed the date "12 juin 1941" on the back of *Ciphers and Constellations*, which makes it the last gouache of the Majorca batch, before the move back to Catalonia.⁸⁷ The artist even took special care in providing instructions for a projected exhibition of the series, expressing his wish to highlight the chronology of the works as a testament to the evolution of his state of mind.⁸⁸ On a more pragmatic and logistical level, the precarity of materials during the war, along with the constant fear of censorship, also dictated Miró's art-making.⁸⁹ The lack of canvas and the necessity to make portable works steered Miró in the direction of small-format gouaches on paper. However, despite their modest formal properties, the artist still referred to the *Constellations* as "paintings," "frescoes," and "canvases," admitting to their visual power and immediate importance within his oeuvre.⁹⁰

Thankfully, the complete series survived the perils of the war and effectively elevated Miró's standing in the eyes of his contemporaries. What distinguished the artist was his remarkable awareness of his own artistic evolution as well as of the core function of painting during this time.

⁸⁵ Georges Duthuit, "Enquête," *Cahiers d'art* 14, no. 1–4 (1939): 73.

⁸⁶ Lesley Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror: Joan Miró and Georges Bataille, 1930–1939" (PhD, Glasgow, University of Glasgow, 2016), 23.

⁸⁷ Claude Goormans, "Les *Constellations* : Signes d'un drame sublimé," in *Joan Miró, peintre-poète*, ed. Anne Bauvais (Brussels: ING Belgique; Fonds Mercator, 2011), 163.

⁸⁸ Miró's instructions, written in 1944, read: "1. These paintings must be shown together; on no account are they to be separated from each other; 2. I think they should be shown in strictly chronological order, which will explain my evolution and my state of mind; 3. They are to be framed with double (plate) glass, so that one can see the title; [written on the back of the works] 4. They are to be framed in a very simple manner, hung on a plain white background and widely spaced."

Lilian Tone, "The Journey of Miró's *Constellations*," *MoMA*, no. 15 (Fall 1993): 3.

⁸⁹ Joan Miró, "Interview by Santiago Amón (1978)," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 299.

⁹⁰ Joan Miró, "Letter to Pierre Matisse (1940)," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 167–68; Goormans, "Les *Constellations*," 153.

For Miró, a worthy painting must go beyond its own surface to invite reflections on the very concepts and narratives embedded in it.⁹¹ It was this very principle that initially attracted Miró to Surrealism. As he expressed himself: “I like Surrealism because the Surrealists did not consider the painting as an end in itself. One must not worry about whether a painting will last, but whether it has planted seeds that give birth to other things. A painting must be fertile. It must give birth to a world.”⁹² And indeed, from Miró’s *Constellations* arose new artistic movements led by a younger generation of painters. Exhibited for the first time in 1945 in New York, Miró’s gouaches were the first European artworks to reach North America since the start of the war.⁹³ Their impact became formative to the development of artists like Jackson Pollock and of movements such as Abstract Expressionism.⁹⁴ Even beyond the visual arts, the *Constellations* and their respective titles inspired a literary response from Breton, whose prose poems were published as an introductory text to Miró’s 1959 exhibition in Paris.⁹⁵ Ironically, Miró never seemed to identify with Bretonian Surrealism, even though he agreed with a number of artistic and intellectual ideals.⁹⁶ His early works demonstrate a passion and curiosity toward automatism, dreams, and hallucination.⁹⁷ For instance, the unconventional aesthetics of *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* (1923–24; [Fig. 3](#)) and *Carnival of Harlequin* (1924–25; [Fig. 4](#)) epitomize the free, uninhibited expression of the subconscious. Coincidentally, both paintings represent some of the earliest examples of antiocular iconography in Miró’s oeuvre, appearing as disembodied eyeballs pierced by arrows.⁹⁸ Still, despite the Surrealist elements present in these productions, the Catalan artist repeatedly voiced

⁹¹ Soby, *Joan Miró*, 10.

⁹² Miró, “Interview by Yvon Taillandier (1959),” 251.

⁹³ Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton*, 193.

⁹⁴ Tone, “The Journey of Miró’s *Constellations*,” 6; Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton*, 56.

⁹⁵ Hammond, 81.

⁹⁶ Greeley, “Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting,” 19; Elza Adamowicz, “Joan Miró: The Assassination of Painting?,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 18, no. 1 (April 2012): 9.

⁹⁷ Miró, “Interview by Lluís Permanyer (1978),” 290–91; Greeley, “Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting,” 23.

⁹⁸ Thornton-Cronin, “Boundaries of Horror,” 120.

his wishes to maintain his independence, to focus on his art, and to experiment with the possibilities of a creative profession.⁹⁹

c. *Ciphers and Constellations, in Love with a Woman: Refuge in pictorial deconstruction and emotional introspection*

The context outlined above elucidated Miró's intentions with the *Constellations* series and his painting practice at large. Simultaneously, this information introduced the environment and mindset that led to the creation of *Ciphers and Constellations*, which will now be considered in more depth. Upon first impression, the gouache seems quite abstract, perhaps even disorienting. As with the majority of non-realistic works, the artist's aesthetic choices challenge the conventional role of sight as objective, truthful, and rational. Abstracted stars and suggestive body parts propose instead an alternate tableau of the referential world, one that might approach reality through a poetic and affective lens. Early in his career, Miró struggled to draw objectively, favouring a more spontaneous technique which later morphed into his unique signature style.¹⁰⁰ The artist encouraged a subjective reaction, an emotional connection proper to each individual viewer, rather than a rational understanding of the artwork.¹⁰¹ Paradoxically, to reach this goal, Miró's complex technique still maintained visible ties to the external world. The artist drew inspiration from concrete encounters, authentic experiences as well as figurative motifs. By responding to a feeling, emotion, or visual, Miró and his contemporaries could go beyond reality's "manifest content toward what Breton termed its latent content."¹⁰² In other words, artists

⁹⁹ Joan Miró, "Interview by Francisco Melgar (1931)," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 116; Adamowicz, "Joan Miró," 9.

¹⁰⁰ Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye*, 140.

¹⁰¹ Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 103.

¹⁰² Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 21.

processed external moments or objects in their minds before illustrating them as grasped by their inner model.¹⁰³ This delicate balance recalls the statement that Surrealist art “is the dialectical resolution of perception and representation,”¹⁰⁴ a bridge between the external and internal realms.

An evident creative prompt for twentieth-century artists was, as expected, the effects of fascism and war trauma. The horrific current events drove Miró to a pictorial deconstruction of space and a dismantlement of traditional painting conventions.¹⁰⁵ His works no longer relied on visual techniques such as shading, perspective, and meticulous realism, but strove for representational freedom in both form and content.¹⁰⁶ They engaged with increasingly violent themes and incorporated more visual metaphors,¹⁰⁷ which disclosed Miró’s disrupted view of humanity and shaken experience of reality. The repeated spirals, the alternating black and red colours, the patches of tinted paper seen in *Ciphers and Constellations*, all unite in recreating an exploded vision of the world. Miró’s thin black lines could represent the artist’s attempt at keeping the disparate items linked amid the visual and emotional chaos. A similar mood permeates two of Miró’s self-portraits, painted respectively in 1937–38 and 1938. The earlier painting ([Fig. 5](#)) represents Miró as a translucent bust, swarmed by suns and stars which closely resemble the artist’s hypnotic, wide-open eyes. His eyelashes, much like the sunrays, turn into menacing flames,¹⁰⁸ emphasizing the work’s smoky colours. Curator and art historian Anne Umland describes the viewer’s interaction with the portrait as “looking into the eyes of someone who was watching the

¹⁰³ Breton, “Situation surréaliste de l’objet (1935),” 275; Soby, *Joan Miró*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 349.

¹⁰⁵ Georges Bataille, “Joan Miró : Peintures récentes,” *Documents* 2, no. 7 (1930): 399; Robert S. Lubar, “Miró en 1924 : « Je briserai leur guitare »,” in *Joan Miró, 1917–1934 : La naissance du monde*, ed. Agnès de La Beaumelle, trans. Jean-François Allain (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2004), 52.

¹⁰⁶ Miró, “Interview by Yvon Taillandier (1959),” 251; Margit Rowell, “Introduction,” in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 10.

¹⁰⁷ Thornton-Cronin, “Boundaries of Horror,” 23.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas A. Messer, “Miró Twice Removed,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 51, no. 4 (1972): 107–8.

world as he knew it collapse before his eyes.”¹⁰⁹ She compares Miró’s transparency to the dissolve of boundaries of the self amid a gradually self-destructing world. While the second self-portrait (Fig. 6) takes a significant stylistic turn, abandoning most figuration and employing vibrant primary colours, the painting still interchanges the shining suns with Miró’s entrancing eyes, utilizing the eyes as a portal into the artist’s subconscious.¹¹⁰ Thus, Miró’s “constant actualization of lived experience into art”¹¹¹ lends a genuine, vulnerable quality to his oeuvre, especially when considering the circumstances in which it was produced.

While the *Constellations* served to externalize Miró’s existential dread, the gouaches also acted as a refuge for their author, a sort of creative oasis amid news of destruction and persecution.¹¹² Miró’s geographical locations, first in Normandy then in Majorca, proved fertile in alternative, non-ocular sources of inspiration. Miró cited nature and music as having played a major role during his time in Varengeville-sur-Mer.¹¹³ The starry night sky invited introspection and soothing melodies encouraged meditation. The works’ reduced colour palette even carries the constellations metaphor forward, by scattering specific tones in small areas across the surface of the paper, weaving implicit links between the clustered elements.¹¹⁴ In 1940, the artist wrote: “I am now doing very elaborate paintings and feel I have reached a high degree of poetry—a product of the concentration made possible by the life we are living here.”¹¹⁵ Poetry was no overstatement; Miró invented a complex pictorial language for the *Constellations* which, in turn, gave rise to

¹⁰⁹ The Museum of Modern Art, *A Haunting Self-Portrait of a Man Watching the World Collapse* | Joan Miró | UNIQLO ArtSpeaks, 2020, <https://youtu.be/baNYs4e2v94>.

¹¹⁰ Messer, “Miró Twice Removed,” 106.

¹¹¹ Rowell, “Introduction,” 1.

¹¹² Jacques Dupin, “The Paintings of Varengeville and the *Constellations* (1939–1941),” in *Joan Miró: Life and Work*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1962), 352.

¹¹³ Joan Miró, “Interview by James Johnson Sweeney (1948),” in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 209; Soby, *Joan Miró*, 100; Janis Mink, “New Constellations,” in *Joan Miró: 1893–1983* (Cologne: Taschen, 2000), 67.

¹¹⁴ Dupin, “The Paintings of Varengeville,” 358.

¹¹⁵ Miró, “Letter to Pierre Matisse (1940),” 168.

lyrical titles during the completion of each gouache.¹¹⁶ Miró's interest in poetry and his desire to honour its impact during these times translated into a rich visual vocabulary consisting of symbolic motifs such as birds, ladders, stars, female figures, and eyes.¹¹⁷ Incidentally, the last three symbols abound in *Ciphers and Constellations*, in both the gouache and its title. Manifestly, a recurrent theme of refuge, escape, and ascendancy emerges, indicative of Miró's psychological state throughout the war.

In addition to these influences, Miró further liberated himself from formal conventions by opting to experiment with haptic techniques as well as textures, using any available materials.¹¹⁸ He explained: "In watercolors I would roughen the surface of the paper by rubbing it. Painting over this roughened surface produced curious chance shapes."¹¹⁹ These unusual exercises were reminiscent of Miró's years as a fine art student, during which he favoured drawing from touch rather than sight.¹²⁰ They also honoured Surrealist practices centered around chance and happenstance.¹²¹ Most importantly, they reveal Miró's yearning to create a multisensory, immersive world that blurs pre-set artistic boundaries, namely of the ocularcentric kind. Instead of worrying about fitting neatly into canonical genres, Miró's works aim for integral balance, harmony, and raw emotion.¹²² *Ciphers and Constellations* lures the viewer into an oneiric universe, a realm that rids our minds of illusionism, rigid structure, and even gravity.¹²³ While the work might appear disorienting at first, it does exude a strangely comforting and captivating aura that

¹¹⁶ Joan Miró, "Poem-Titles, 1939–41," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 169; Miró, "Interview by Yvon Taillandier (1959)," 249; Miró, "Interview by Lluís Permanyer (1978)," 295.

¹¹⁷ Dupin, "The Paintings of Vareneville," 355; Anne Bauvais, "Joan Miró : Peintre-poète," in *Joan Miró, peintre-poète*, ed. Anne Bauvais (Brussels: ING Belgique; Fonds Mercator, 2011), 44.

¹¹⁸ Tone, "The Journey of Miró's *Constellations*," 3.

¹¹⁹ Miró, "Interview by James Johnson Sweeney (1948)," 209.

¹²⁰ Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye*, 140.

¹²¹ Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 120.

¹²² Dupin, "The Paintings of Vareneville," 348.

¹²³ Greeley, "Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting," 27.

temporarily suspends time and space. The contrast between opaque gouache shapes and transparent background washes, between smooth solid surfaces and roughened patchy areas, accentuates the feeling of floating from one plane to another, establishing spontaneous connections between the depicted elements. By liberating the artwork from traditional expectations, Miró simultaneously frees the viewer in our reception of and relation with the gouache.

Moreover, in its attempt to surpass creative limitations, *Ciphers and Constellations* further draws on childlike phantasmagoria. The simplicity of Miró's schematic shapes as well as the purity of his selected colours recall Breton's famous phrase: "L'œil existe à l'état sauvage."¹²⁴ This dominant Surrealist and modernist belief advocated that in order to truly see and perceive, artists must first revert back to their primitive nature, to their prehistoric humanity.¹²⁵ They must retrain their senses and release their instinctive impulses, voluntarily breaking down the barriers erected by civilization yet ignored by children.¹²⁶ The "transformative power of the arational mind"¹²⁷ was indeed venerated by the Surrealists and systematically called upon during the creative process. Miró's claim to want to assassinate painting and "destroy everything that exists in painting"¹²⁸ can thus be understood as an endeavour to reinvent the medium, to shift its point of focus toward the spirit itself rather than a rational truth. Breton praised Miró for this connection to his primeval drive as well as his all-consuming passion for painting.¹²⁹ The artist introduced this childlike innocence into his productions in which he abstracted the depicted images into schematic symbols comparable to those found in children's art.¹³⁰ Interestingly, Miró's personal art collection

¹²⁴ Breton, "Le surréalisme et la peinture (1928)," 1.

¹²⁵ Hammond, *Constellations of Miró*, Breton, 50–52; Cardinal and Short, *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*, 56.

¹²⁶ Breton, "Situation surréaliste de l'objet (1935)," 289.

¹²⁷ Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 120.

¹²⁸ Miró, "Interview by Francisco Melgar (1931)," 116.

¹²⁹ Breton, "Le surréalisme et la peinture (1928)," 36.

¹³⁰ Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye*, 138.

included many works of children's art, some of which were produced by his own daughter Dolores.¹³¹ According to his contemporaries, Miró was easily amazed by the wonders of the world;¹³² he walked around, wide-eyed, overwhelmed by natural sights like the sky, with its infinite stars, crescent moon, and bright sun.¹³³ The repeated eight-point stars, the caricatured eyelashes, and the gestural quality of the connecting lines make of *Ciphers and Constellations* a perfect example of childlike imagery and art-making.

Even so, Miró's ambiguous bodies and hybrid characters also honoured more mature, ancient traditions. Throughout his practice, Miró established relationships with diverse artistic movements, ranging from the modern avant-garde to folk art and prehistoric art. The artist combined inspirations from Cubism, Fauvism, and Futurism, with local Catalan craft as well as Southern European cave paintings.¹³⁴ Miró admired the revolutionary spirit of his contemporaries, the collective identity founded on Catalan mythology, and the simplicity but immediacy of cave art.¹³⁵ A common symbol that linked this multicultural heritage was, of course, the eye. Its origin amid Miró's visual repertoire dates back to the artist's childhood, to his first encounters with everyday representations of the eye such as "the bull's-eye of a target or the insignia on an aircraft wing," or even "the eyes traditionally painted on the prow of Mediterranean fishing boats."¹³⁶ While the former uses served a practical purpose, the latter denoted superstitious practices and a belief in magical safeguarding properties. From a young age, Miró was also exposed to traditional Catalan iconography through wall paintings and religious sculptures.¹³⁷ In fact, the artist recalled

¹³¹ Fineberg, 14, 138.

¹³² Michel Leiris, "Joan Miró," *Documents* 1, no. 5 (October 1929): 266.

¹³³ Miró, "Interview by Yvon Taillandier (1959)," 247.

¹³⁴ Howard and Daszak, "Joan Miró's Call and Response," 555; Lubar, "Je briserai leur guitare," 53; Joan M. Minguet Batllori, "Sur les rives de la Méditerranée : Joan Miró, la métamorphose de la tradition," in *Joan Miró, peintre-poète*, ed. Anne Bauvais (Brussels: ING Belgique; Fonds Mercator, 2011), 113.

¹³⁵ Rowell, "Introduction," 3.

¹³⁶ Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton*, 36.

¹³⁷ Rowell, "Introduction," 3; Soby, *Joan Miró*, 7.

seeing, as a toddler, statues of angels in a Romanesque chapel in Barcelona, decorated with a multitude of eyes, either in lieu of their feathers or in the palms of their hands.¹³⁸ *The Morning Star* (Fig. 7), a 1940 gouache belonging to the *Constellations* series, clearly illustrates this repeated eye motif reminiscent of both folk art figures and prehistoric cave paintings.

Furthermore, Miró went on to admit: “L’œil, c’est, pour moi, de la mythologie (...) quelque chose qui est doté d’un caractère sacré comme une civilisation antique.”¹³⁹ Undeniably, Miró’s paintings project a mystical quality, a spiritual aspiration to transcend simple empiricism. In *Ciphers and Constellations*, the large eyes placed near the center of the composition evoke Western depictions of God as an omniscient entity residing in the heavens.¹⁴⁰ Both of Miró’s eyes are remarkably large in scale and represent the only green and yellow components of the foreground. The colours could be interpreted as denoting material life and vital energy, respectively,¹⁴¹ perhaps encompassing the human spirit of the beloved female figure who takes shape under the eyes. The eyes are also positioned at the apex of a triangle formed by a trinity of blue astral forms—two stars and a moon. With blue symbolizing aspiration to the spiritual, to the unconscious, and to the realm of dreams,¹⁴² the eyes could very well be completing a Surrealist portrait similar to a religious icon. Amid the contradictory yet complimentary pulls rises the woman as a sensual being turned into a sacred deity.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, in spite of her divine

¹³⁸ Yvon Taillandier, “Miró : Maintenant je travaille par terre...,” *XXe siècle*, no. 43 (December 1974): 15.

¹³⁹ Taillandier, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Visual examples of the Eye of Providence can be found on church gates and facades, stained glass windows, painted ceilings and domes as well as adorning religious icons (Jacopo da Pontormo, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1525), political documents (Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, 1789) and national symbols (reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States, 1782).

Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 96; Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 11; Albert M. Potts, “The Eye of Providence,” in *The World’s Eye* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 68–78; David Baker, “Optical Connections: The All-Seeing Eye,” *Optician*, February 2020, <https://www.opticianonline.net/features/optical-connections-the-all-seeing-eye>; Matthew Wilson, “The Eye of Providence: The Symbol with a Secret Meaning?,” BBC Culture, November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20201112-the-eye-of-providence-the-symbol-with-a-secret-meaning>.

¹⁴¹ Bauvais, “Joan Miró : Peintre-poète,” 83.

¹⁴² Bauvais, 83.

¹⁴³ Goormans, “Les *Constellations*,” 163.

associations, Miró's emphasis on her sexuality offers a more nuanced reading of this cherished muse.

What distinguishes *Ciphers and Constellations* from the other twenty-two gouaches in the series is precisely its unapologetic focus on the female figure, primarily composed of a pair of eyes and exposed genitalia.¹⁴⁴ Countless authors have explored the deconstruction of the female body as a recurrent motif in Surrealist imagery, highlighting the dominating male gaze and its violent treatment of women's bodies.¹⁴⁵ Oftentimes, male Surrealists used the female body as an expression of their innermost fantasies and desires. Yet, despite her presence at the heart of Miró's work and in the title, the woman is rarely mentioned in typical reviews of the gouache, nor is her relationship with the detached eyes ever questioned. Scholars usually provide a caption for *Ciphers and Constellations* along the lines of: "A host of stars, suns, and moons covers the surface linked by a network of lines."¹⁴⁶ However, the link between female sexuality and sight can be studied through a psychoanalytic lens, especially when considered in relation to contemporary writer Bataille's works. Bataille's oeuvre was known to be subversive and defiant among his colleagues, dealing heavily with violent, erotic, and satirical subjects.¹⁴⁷ His dissident influence reached Miró's artworks which led to notable thematic similarities between both corpuses,¹⁴⁸ one of which being the use and significance of the eye. As in the cases of *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* and

¹⁴⁴ Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror," 276.

¹⁴⁵ Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité*, ed. Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Mary Ann Caws, "Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem," in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 11–16; Robert James Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995); Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1998), 2–35; Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Hampshire; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007); Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*.

¹⁴⁶ Mink, "New Constellations," 55.

¹⁴⁷ Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror," 2; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 220.

¹⁴⁸ Rosalind Krauss, "Michel, Bataille et moi," *October* 68 (Spring 1994): 3–20; Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror," 2; Bauvais, "Joan Miró : Peintre-poète," 35.

Carnival of Harlequin, mentioned above, Miró's treatment of the eye sometimes tended toward desecration.¹⁴⁹ Eyes were either pierced or converted into sexual metaphors, equating the eye with both male and female genitalia.¹⁵⁰ For instance, Miró's 1926 *Female Nude* (Fig. 8) illustrates this ambivalent correlation between eyes, breasts, and eggs. These visual parallels invoke the metonymic associations later compiled in Bataille's highly controversial 1928 pornographic novella, titled *Story of the Eye* (*Histoire de l'œil*).¹⁵¹

Famously, Bataille also joined the eye to the vulva, as represented in Miró's *Ciphers and Constellations*. Indeed, if the woman's eyes were to be upturned vertically, their shape as well as the deliberately wispy eyelashes would closely resemble the female figure's vulva and the pubic hairs surrounding it.¹⁵² This insistence on sexualized female iconography linked to sight gains even more relevance when examined alongside past artworks of Miró's in which the central character, whether a peasant, hunter, or rebellion leader, was systematically gendered as a virile male.¹⁵³ Miró's ode to female sexuality could thus be offering yet another escape from modern conventions, both socially and artistically.¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, the complexity of Miró's oeuvre, as demonstrated, in part, by *Ciphers and Constellations*, lies in the artist's calculated attacks on painting principles, Western rationalism, and modernist prohibitions, all of which point back to the traditional functions of sight.¹⁵⁵ In this way, Miró's pictorial revolution can be deemed "an act of liberation

¹⁴⁹ Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror," 12.

¹⁵⁰ Thornton-Cronin, 85; Bauvais, "Joan Miró : Peintre-poète," 28; Charles Pickstone, "Joan Miró: The *Constellations* Series," *Critical Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (October 2013): 61.

¹⁵¹ Georges Bataille, alias Lord Auch, *Histoire de l'œil* (Paris: René Bonnel, 1928); Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror," 85–86.

¹⁵² Thornton-Cronin, 90.

¹⁵³ Greeley, "Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting," 41.

¹⁵⁴ Anne Umland, "La peinture au défi : Miró et le collage dans les années vingt," in *Joan Miró, 1917–1934 : La naissance du monde*, ed. Agnès de La Beaumelle, trans. Jean-François Allain (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2004), 63; Joan Miró, "Letter to Michel Leiris (1924)," in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Mathews (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986), 86.

¹⁵⁵ Greeley, "Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting," 30; Thornton-Cronin, "Boundaries of Horror," 8.

of unconscious impulses, as well as an act of social protest”¹⁵⁶ during a time of total chaos and inhumanity,¹⁵⁷ a reminder of the transcendental power of subjectivity and creativity.

¹⁵⁶ Adamowicz, “Joan Miró,” 2.

¹⁵⁷ Pickstone, “Joan Miró: The *Constellations* Series,” 60.

Victor Brauner: Vision as a site for morphing bodies and identities

Romanian artist Victor Brauner was born in 1903 in Piatra Neamț, a few years before the 1907 Romanian Peasant Revolt. The violent protests and political instability of the times led the Brauner family to move first to Hamburg, then to Vienna, before settling back in Romania in 1914. Throughout his childhood, Brauner's interest in the occult grew as a result of his father hosting séances with mediums as well as painting secretly in cemeteries. In 1919, Brauner eventually enrolled in fine art studies in Bucharest. His subsequent stays in Paris in 1925 and 1930 allowed the already practicing artist to meet and befriend members of the French Surrealist group, securing his official inclusion in 1933. Brauner was then able to exhibit works in the French capital as well as contribute to Surrealist publications, enabling his definitive move to Paris in 1938. Aside from paintings, Brauner produced drawings, photographs, sculptures, ceramics, journals, and projects for ballets, all in his distinctive experimental style.¹⁵⁸

a. Formal analysis

The small-format oil on oak entitled *Le Dernier voyage*, or *The Last Trip*, was part of Brauner's last series of paintings produced in Romania, in 1937 (Fig. 9).¹⁵⁹ The work depicts an olive-green barren landscape divided by a simple grey road which disappears into a rose-tinted horizon. In the distance, set against low clouds, rise two industrial chimneys whose pillars of smoke fade into the overcast sky. Brauner also portrays three characters, each occupying a distinct spatial plane of their

¹⁵⁸ Victor Brauner, *Victor Brauner, écrits et correspondances, 1938–1948 : Les archives de Victor Brauner au Musée national d'art moderne*, ed. Camille Morando and Sylvie Patry (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2005); Sarane Alexandrian, *Victor Brauner* (Paris: Oxus, 2004); Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux; Filipacchi, 1990).

¹⁵⁹ Footnote 25 in Victor Brauner, “« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944),” in *Victor Brauner, écrits et correspondances, 1938–1948 : Les archives de Victor Brauner au Musée national d'art moderne*, ed. Camille Morando and Sylvie Patry (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2005), 35.

own. From back to front, the figures represent a crouched man with a backpack sitting on a distorted eyeball on the side of the road, a pair of upright legs covered in shreds of fabric on which rests a single egg-shaped eye, and a rust-coloured mechanical humanoid pinching an eyeball with its silver metal hand while two bull horns emerge from the eye sockets of the otherwise featureless face. As per Brauner's own description of the painting, the distressed traveller corresponds to an emigrant or a refugee while the walking legs are clad in rags of a military uniform.¹⁶⁰ The linearity and dull colours of both the landscape and the road, combined with the absurdity of the characters, endow the painting with an unsettling and heavy atmosphere. Even the title of the artwork, *The Last Trip*, alludes to an ominous, final voyage from which one does not return. The nature of the journey, whether imaginary, physical, or introspective, is left to the viewer's interpretation.¹⁶¹

b. The origins of Brauner's (anti)ocularcentrism

Brauner's artistic practice had always revolved around sight, on a technical as well as thematic level. From a methodological perspective, Brauner was known to execute "drawings with his eyes closed, (...) demonstrating his conviction that the outer world can inspire only mimetism of the most unproductive kind."¹⁶² Brauner's philosophy of the inner model and the occasional self-hypnosis took the Surrealist experimental methods of automatism to an extreme, questioning the very necessity of sight and empirical perception in art-making.¹⁶³ Ironically, eyesight also occupied a significant place in Brauner's personal life, becoming an important trope throughout the artist's career. Indeed, Brauner admitted to having been deeply marked by two critical events

¹⁶⁰ Brauner, 35.

¹⁶¹ Mucem, *Parcours sonore—La planète affolée, section 3 de l'exposition*, 2020, https://youtu.be/2rB0_Vn2uno.

¹⁶² Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 268–69.

¹⁶³ Alexandrian, *Victor Brauner*, 157; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 248.

in his lifetime, the first of which was the loss of his left eye in August 1938, shortly after his move to France.¹⁶⁴ The particularity of this incident, the result of a drunken brawl between fellow artists Óscar Domínguez and Esteban Francés, was emphasized by Brauner's pre-existing fixation with eyes and enucleation.¹⁶⁵ Brauner's early figurative drawings depicted stylized portraits of various characters, often exaggerating the size of facial features such as the eyes. In the artist's own words: "Pendant des années dans tous mes tableaux il y avait çà et là des yeux, changés, [déformés] (...), pendant toute une période dans tous mes tableaux cette attaque aux yeux prédominante, était devenue obsession."¹⁶⁶ For instance, select antiocular artistic precedents include *Self-Portrait with Enucleated Eye* (1931; [Fig. 10](#)), *Paysage méditerranéen* (1932; [Fig. 11](#)), *Légèrement chaude or Adrianopole* (1937; [Fig. 12](#)), and various other drawings ([Fig. 13](#)),¹⁶⁷ all of which revolve around gruesome depictions of missing or mutilated eyes. From these ocularcentric works, the uncanny *Self-Portrait with Enucleated Eye* stands out the most. The painting shows the imagined loss of an eye, in a way that perfectly mirrored Brauner's fateful accident seven years later. Since that very night, the artist proclaimed: "Je porte la marque ineffaçable de ma peinture au visage."¹⁶⁸ Brauner felt that his physical mutilation was nonetheless compensated by the opening of his spiritual eye,¹⁶⁹ granting him an occult, prophetic aura among his peers, such as Surrealist writer Pierre Mabille.¹⁷⁰

As illustrated by *The Last Trip* and the examples above, violence and body mutilation persisted in Brauner's artworks, "specifically focused on the eye, blindness or the brutal absence

¹⁶⁴ Brauner, "« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944)," 35.

¹⁶⁵ Brauner, 35; Semin, *Victor Brauner*, 81–85; Alexandrian, *Victor Brauner*, 158–59.

¹⁶⁶ Brauner, "« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944)," 32–33.

¹⁶⁷ Irina Cărăbaș, "Representing Bodies. Victor Brauner's Hybrids, Fragments and Mechanisms," *Nordlit* 11, no. 1 (2007): 232.

¹⁶⁸ Brauner, "« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944)," 33.

¹⁶⁹ Alexandrian, *Victor Brauner*, 160.

¹⁷⁰ Pierre Mabille, "L'Œil du peintre," *Minotaure*, no. 12–13 (May 1939): 53–56.

of the eyes.”¹⁷¹ Whether the eye was deformed, mutated, or substituted for horns,¹⁷² Brauner’s obsession with ocular violence raised many questions as to its origins and inspirations. One explanation turns to notable contemporary examples such as Bataille’s aforementioned *Story of the Eye*, with which Brauner was most likely familiar, and *Un chien andalou*.¹⁷³ The novella as well as the short film deal explicitly with the aggressive mutilation of the eye and the subversion of both sight and its cultural connotations. However, a deeper explanation points to the political climate surrounding Brauner’s life. The artist, a Jewish Romanian, had been “deeply affected by the economic crisis and anti-Semitism in Romanian society of the time,”¹⁷⁴ to the point of posing existential questions regarding contemporary sociopolitical events and human equality through his oeuvre. For Brauner, the historic repercussions of the World Wars, specifically on the Jewish Romanian population, constituted the second set of formative events for his craft.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Brauner’s recourse to violence was only intensified during the interwar period, as a result of internalized trauma and witnessed tragedies.¹⁷⁶ The artist himself declared: “Tous ces tableaux de cette époque d’avant 1939, portent une marque quelconque de guerre.”¹⁷⁷ As explored earlier with Miró, few artists could escape the mark left by the numerous wars of the twentieth century. Brauner’s experience during the Second World War was equally as stressful; the artist and his wife stayed behind in France during the country’s Nazi occupation while most contemporary Surrealists took refuge in nearby countries or fled to the Americas.¹⁷⁸ The subsequent communist expansion

¹⁷¹ Valentina Iancu, “Political versus Occult: ‘The Story of Victor Brauner’s Eye,’” *Brukenenthal. Acta Musei* 7, no. 2 (2012): 387.

¹⁷² Brauner, “« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944),” 32–33; Mabile, “L’Œil du peintre,” 54.

¹⁷³ Semin, *Victor Brauner*, 85; Cărăbaș, “Representing Bodies,” 238; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 258.

¹⁷⁴ Iancu, “Political versus Occult,” 388.

¹⁷⁵ Brauner, “« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944),” 39.

¹⁷⁶ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 209.

¹⁷⁷ Brauner, “« Le cas » Victor Brauner (1944),” 35.

¹⁷⁸ Didier Semin, “Victor Brauner et le mouvement surréaliste,” in *La piste du hérisson* (Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 2004), 64.

into Eastern Europe also affected Brauner personally. A 1948 oil on canvas, titled *Tableau autobiographique—Ultratableau biosensible* ([Fig. 14](#)), alludes heavily to current political events such as the invasion of Romania by the Soviet Union as well as its effect on local populations. A section of the painting, designated as *Portrait du père lié au lieu natal*, is dedicated to Brauner's hometown of Piatra Neamț as it yields to Joseph Stalin's rule.¹⁷⁹ These poignant vignettes truly showcase Brauner's remarkable grasp of reality, along with his unequaled imagination and impactful representational strategies.¹⁸⁰ My interest in Brauner's oeuvre, and particularly in *The Last Trip*, thus lies in the artist's rendering of his lived experiences and contemporary surroundings.

c. *The Last Trip: Violent desires and fragmented identities*

Brauner's professional beginnings as part of the Romanian avant-garde were profoundly inspired by contemporary European movements, including Cubism, Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism.¹⁸¹ Artists such as Giorgio de Chirico, Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Picasso were of great influence, especially during Brauner's experimentation with early Surrealist aesthetics.¹⁸² These artistic roots explain the prevalence of certain themes and motifs present in Brauner's work, such as imaginary landscapes, hybrid bodies, and metamorphic creatures, all of which drew from the use of mannequins, collages, and ready-mades in twentieth-century avant-garde tradition.¹⁸³ The undeniably industrial and mechanical origins of these elements reveal a direct engagement

¹⁷⁹ Luce Hochtin, "Propos sur Victor Brauner," *Quadrum* 15 (October 1963): 58.

¹⁸⁰ André Breton, "Genèse et perspective artistiques du surréalisme (1941)," in *Le surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 76.

¹⁸¹ Cărbăș, "Representing Bodies," 229; Iancu, "Political versus Occult," 387.

¹⁸² Irina Cărbăș, "Victor Brauner et les métamorphoses du corps," *Ligeia* 1, no. 65–68 (2006): 24; Gerald Eager, "The Missing and the Mutilated Eye in Contemporary Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 1 (Fall 1961): 50.

¹⁸³ Cărbăș, "Victor Brauner et les métamorphoses du corps," 25–26; Cărbăș, "Representing Bodies," 229.

between avant-garde artists and modern innovations. For instance, twentieth-century aesthetics meant the body was now being represented “like the pieces of a mechanism, its parts (...) dismantled, rotated or replaced.”¹⁸⁴ The technological progress of the time, combined with the advent of modernism and violent conflicts, also brought about psychological considerations, namely around binaries such as animate-inanimate, biological-artificial, and conscious-unconscious.¹⁸⁵ In fact, not only does *The Last Trip* depict isolated body parts as inanimate objects—singular eyeballs, truncated legs, menacing bull horns—but the painting also illustrates, from background to foreground, a transformative journey from a fully human, sentient character to a part-animal, part-mechanical hybrid. This mutation reinforces the stark contrast between organic lifeforms and industrial developments. The intermediate military rags further recall modern technologies and warfare, as do the bareness of the landscape, the looming smokestacks, and the grim clouds. All of these factors combined contribute to the critical discourse found in both Surrealist art and Brauner’s works vis-à-vis the morphing modern body and psyche.

Simultaneously, Brauner’s intentional substitution of the eyes for horns promotes extreme antiocularcentrism while also referencing the overtly sexual symbolism of the eye. On the one hand, portrayals of the eye as a metaphor for female genitalia, like in Miró’s *Ciphers and Constellations*, evoke more traditional connections between vision and themes of fertility, potency, and sexuality.¹⁸⁶ In avant-garde literature, the attribution of such connotations to the eye peaked with Bataille’s *Story of the Eye* which unveiled a dual fascination with the fetishization as well as destruction of sight.¹⁸⁷ Surrealist writings and artworks confirmed that the eye had indeed become,

¹⁸⁴ Cărbăș, “Representing Bodies,” 235.

¹⁸⁵ Cărbăș, 236; Borck, “Sound Work and Visionary Prosthetics,” 6.

¹⁸⁶ Rudolf Reitler, “Zur Augensymbolik [On Eye Symbolism],” *Internationaler Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse* 1, no. 2 (March 1913): 159–64; Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, 216–20.

¹⁸⁷ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 220.

both literally and figuratively, “le siège du désir.”¹⁸⁸ Brauner’s own drawing, *Le Monde paisible* (1927; [Fig. 15](#)), aligns itself with such beliefs, unabashedly replacing the vulva with an eye.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, these associations with female sexuality present an interesting contrast with the notion of masculine power being attributed to the alienating mechanical gaze, especially during modernism.¹⁹⁰ In accordance with this paradox, not only was sight related to reason and superiority, but the eye itself was “identified with the phallus,”¹⁹¹ the very emblem of male supremacy. For his part, contemporary writer Mabille interpreted Brauner’s chimeric part-bull, part-machine creature in *The Last Trip* as a representation of hyper-masculinity. Referencing symbolist writer Alfred Jarry’s notion of the ‘supermale,’¹⁹² Mabille stated in the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure*:

A n’en pas douter, l’œil est dans le visage une partie de nature féminine. (...) L’obsession qui, au début, tendait à la destruction simple de l’œil, se complique d’années en années. L’équivalent de l’organe sexuel femelle doit être remplacé par un attribut masculin — la corne — signe d’érection, de puissance, d’autorité et même de brutalité animale. L’être ainsi transformé sera devenu un surmâle.¹⁹³

By following this analogy, ocular mutilation therefore signified symbolic castration or, at the very least, decapitation.¹⁹⁴ This psychoanalytic interpretation, evocative of the mythical Greek king Oedipus, effectively tied the loss of sight to emasculation and the total loss of power.¹⁹⁵ Thus, through a Freudian lens, Surrealist artworks that portrayed missing or mutilated eyes were understood as seeking “to deny or destroy [the] power”¹⁹⁶ inherent to sight. By means of physical

¹⁸⁸ Cărbăș, “Victor Brauner et les métamorphoses du corps,” 28.

¹⁸⁹ Mabille, “L’Œil du peintre,” 54.

¹⁹⁰ Danus, *The Senses of Modernism*, 160.

¹⁹¹ Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 164.

¹⁹² Alfred Jarry, *Le Surmâle, roman moderne* (Paris: Éditions de La Revue Blanche, 1902).

¹⁹³ Mabille, “L’Œil du peintre,” 54.

¹⁹⁴ Reitler, “On Eye Symbolism,” 161; Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 164; Semin, *Victor Brauner*, 87; Thornton-Cronin, “Boundaries of Horror,” 99.

¹⁹⁵ Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012); Eager, “The Missing and the Mutilated Eye in Contemporary Art,” 58.

¹⁹⁶ Eager, 50.

mutilation of sensory organs, Surrealism contested empiricism in an act of rebellion against limited physical capacities as well as imposed intellectual conventions. In *The Last Trip*, substituting the eyes for such violent, beastly alternatives as the horns turns erotic, sensual seduction into sheer, visceral horror.¹⁹⁷ The corresponding imagery is then, inevitably, one of violence.

Brauner produced *The Last Trip* during the interwar period, in 1937, at a time when anti-Semitic laws in Romania and the persecution of Jews across Europe jeopardized hundreds of communities and their livelihoods. As mentioned previously, these contemporary political events deeply marked Brauner, to the point of coinciding with the artist's rising interest "in mutilation, blindness and sacrifice,"¹⁹⁸ as demonstrated by his works of the time. Indisputably, vision was often the victim of such violations, since sight remained a constitutive part of Brauner's identity. The way Brauner treated this subject typically dealt with the notions of absence and presence and their dialectical relationship. In other words, by emphasizing the absence of the eyes, meaning the impossibility for sight, Brauner's works shatter and decompose the human experience, itself based on presence and sensory perception.¹⁹⁹ Such is the case in *The Last Trip*, in which the three depicted eyeballs embody the gradual loss of humanity. The role of the eye evolves from being the support on which the migrant relies, albeit bruised and rather deformed, to the last remaining human element in the final mechanical form. The bestial figure seems to brandish the eyeball like an object of curiosity, presenting it to the viewer like a disposable item. Brauner might be referring to the reifying and dehumanizing nature of modernism, based on rationalism and idealism. These radical philosophies committed atrocities on the body and the psyche, sacrificing subjectivity, sexuality, and sensory experiences above all else. Brauner might also be paying homage to a lost

¹⁹⁷ Georges Bataille, "L'Œil : Friandise cannibale," *Documents* 1, no. 4 (1929): 216; Cărbăș, "Representing Bodies," 233.

¹⁹⁸ Iancu, "Political versus Occult," 387.

¹⁹⁹ Cărbăș, "Representing Bodies," 233.

youth, an entire generation of veterans who carried both the psychological and physical effects of the war in the form of grief, trauma, and mutilated bodies.²⁰⁰ The post-war individual had to be rebuilt, both anatomically and spiritually, in an effort to reassemble a scarred society.²⁰¹

Indeed, opposing the dominant national discourse of their time, the Surrealists actively engaged with post-war horror and trauma.²⁰² As argued by Lyford, the worryingly ubiquitous depictions of violated and fragmented bodies in Surrealism's visual and material culture "reflect a chilling combination of mass-market eroticism and wartime bodily trauma."²⁰³ With this premise in mind, reconsiderations of Surrealist claims and aesthetics shifted the common understanding of the dismembered and fragmented body.²⁰⁴ The trope of the mutilated human figure no longer solely belonged with the categories of senseless violence and unconscious sadism. Instead, intentional mutilation and dismemberment in Surrealist art bore witness to post-war aspirations for identity reconstruction and a redefinition of modern masculinities.²⁰⁵ Brauner's characters in *The Last Trip* could very well be shedding facets of their identities along their voyage. Their characteristics are gradually erased, pulled apart, and replaced, only to be left with an inhuman, hybrid creature, composed of juxtaposed fragments. In this way, the direct causal link established between the effects of the war and Surrealist imagery, both verbal and pictorial,²⁰⁶ points to the displacement of trauma onto a set object, "thereby enabling the beholder to master the trauma through visual

²⁰⁰ Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 48; Borck, "Sound Work and Visionary Prosthetics," 7.

²⁰¹ Alexandrian, *Victor Brauner*, 159.

²⁰² Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 54; Alison, "The Surreal House," 14.

²⁰³ Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 15.

²⁰⁴ Cărăbaș, "Representing Bodies," 234.

²⁰⁵ Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 9–10, 68.

²⁰⁶ Lyford, 64.

experience.”²⁰⁷ Brauner himself admitted that painting had always played a therapeutic role in his life, acting as a cathartic activity and his *raison d’être*.²⁰⁸

Appropriately, the visual motif of the fragment also explored the delicate balance between absence and presence. Oftentimes, the body parts that Brauner incorporated in his works, such as the walking legs in *The Last Trip*, gained autonomy, “emphasizing the rupture [with their former state] and the impossibility of regaining an integral form.”²⁰⁹ Conceptually, the fragment also came to represent broken up identities and shattered realities. Considering Brauner’s autobiographical allusions in his oeuvre, fragmented bodies became allegories of the hardships of emigration and self-discovery. Such could be the case with the mutating eyeballs and their corresponding corporeal fragments, set on an undisclosed path to an unknown destination. The characters in *The Last Trip* may be inspired by the victims of forced displacement whose voyage was ultimately imposed.²¹⁰ In a sense, Brauner projected aspects of his own journey, both geographical and introspective, onto the characters, landscapes, and situations he depicted.²¹¹ Contemporary writer and art critic Alain Jouffroy praised Brauner’s autobiographical tendencies, claiming such artworks act as a catalyst for dialogue with one’s self: “C’est en fréquentant des hommes comme Victor Brauner (...) que je crois m’être initié à l’opération du dialogue avec l’œuvre d’art et son auteur.”²¹² Translating lived experiences into his artistic practice allowed the artist to deepen his self-awareness, preserve his identity amid the countless uncertainties as well as externalize his struggles and memories through art-making.

²⁰⁷ Lyford, 68.

²⁰⁸ Victor Brauner, “Letter to André Breton (1948),” in *Victor Brauner, écrits et correspondances, 1938–1948 : Les archives de Victor Brauner au Musée national d’art moderne*, ed. Camille Morando and Sylvie Patry (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2005), 161.

²⁰⁹ Cărbăș, “Representing Bodies,” 236.

²¹⁰ Mucem, *La planète affolée*.

²¹¹ Cărbăș, “Representing Bodies,” 238–39.

²¹² Jouffroy, *Une révolution du regard*, 10.

Brauner's creative abilities were frequently linked to his enucleation, believed to have gifted the artist with a wider imagination and a clearer connection to the unconscious.²¹³ Allusions to this clairvoyance can be observed in Brauner's 1937 *Painted from Nature* (Fig. 16), in which the depicted character holds the power to paint directly with brushes extending from his eyes and nose. Seemingly, Brauner's source of inspiration, his inner model, also originated from his own mutilation, itself an embodiment of the absence-presence dichotomy. Through the loss of an eye, Brauner situated himself "on the threshold between the interior of the body and its exterior."²¹⁴ Mabile interpreted the accident as a personal sacrifice, a metamorphosis of sorts, which led the artist to transcend the phenomenological world and acquire visionary powers.²¹⁵ Indeed, according to this Bretonian expression, "lucidity is the great enemy of revelation,"²¹⁶ meaning a reliance on empiricism prevents the attainment of Surrealism's ideological objectives. On a less occult level, Brauner's life-altering injury and his pre-existing ocular obsession might have triggered this profound yearning to represent authentic identities, autobiographical to a degree, whose portrayal sought to subvert society's imposed standards and redefine the cultural connotations of sight. For some, Brauner's enucleation was even considered "a critique of the contemporary society (...), a political gesture that can be interpreted by itself as a protest."²¹⁷ Interestingly, the egg-shaped eye cradled by the uniform-clad legs in *The Last Trip* is positioned as if in the womb, perhaps signifying a rebirth of vision, a reworking of sight and its meanings. In sum, Brauner's *The Last Trip* ties eyesight to the sociopolitical context of the time, deconstructing the power of the eye and converting vision from an objective, mechanical gaze to a forgiving site for morphing identities.

²¹³ Mabile, "L'Œil du peintre," 55.

²¹⁴ Cărbăș, "Representing Bodies," 231.

²¹⁵ Mabile, "L'Œil du peintre," 54; Cărbăș, "Representing Bodies," 231–32.

²¹⁶ Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 25.

²¹⁷ Iancu, "Political versus Occult," 389.

René Magritte: The illusory eye

Belgian artist René Magritte was born in 1898 to a bourgeois family residing in the Lessines countryside. His teenage years were marked by his mother's suicide and his deep interest in thriller books and films. Magritte's first painting lessons in 1910 encouraged him to enrol as a fine art and literature student in Brussels from 1916 to 1918. From there, Magritte went on to design posters, advertisements as well as wallpaper before turning to professional canvas painting. His first contract with a gallery led to a period of intense productivity, jumpstarting his career in Belgium and, later, in France. During his three-year stay near Paris, between 1927 and 1930, Magritte became acquainted with Breton and the French Surrealists, which led to valuable contributions in Surrealist exhibitions and publications. By 1967, Magritte had worked with fellow Belgian artists, French poets, American gallerists, British collectors, and even Italians sculptors.²¹⁸

a. Formal analysis

Magritte first painted *Le Monde poétique* in 1926 before reprising it in 1937 as *Le Monde poétique II*, or *The Poetic World II* ([Fig. 17](#)), at the request of British art patron and collector Edward James.²¹⁹ While slightly smaller in dimensions, the second version is more refined in its quasi-encyclopedic illustrations of an arrangement of objects. *The Poetic World II* stages two floating

²¹⁸ René Magritte, *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); Patrick Waldberg, *Magritte : Peintures* (Paris: La Différence, 1983); Daniel Abadie, ed., *Magritte* (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003).

²¹⁹ Renilde Hammacher, "Edward James and René Magritte, Magicians of the Surreal," in *Magritte*, ed. Daniel Abadie (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 247; Patricia Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting* (Manchester; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2009), 67; Stephanie D'Alessandro, "'Mirrors That Become Paintings': Magritte's Commissions for Edward James: London 1937–1938," in *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*, ed. Anne Umland (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 205; "René Magritte (1898–1967), *Le monde poétique II*," Christie's, accessed September 14, 2021, https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=6190943.

red curtains, ruched and pulled aside to reveal a light blue background representing a sky with scattered white clouds. The sky, which occupies about two-thirds of the canvas, appears to be lacerated in places and peeling like wallpaper. The surface peeking from behind the cuts is a solid, greyish-blue expanse. The curtains, of differing sizes, stand on a beige tabletop, on which a group of seven all-white square pyramids are also placed. In between these objects rests a single human eyeball, firmly attached to its optic nerve, its shining blue iris directly facing the viewer. All of the elements create uniform shadows stretching to the right, seemingly responding to a same light source. *The Poetic World II* showcases masterful details, pristine lines as well as realistic colours, all of which are typical of Magritte's craft. Yet, despite a suggested harmony as per the work's title, Magritte offers a visually disconcerting and conceptually absurd tableau, sure to intrigue its viewer.

b. Magritte's philosophical considerations on painting

Magritte's early aesthetic interests were born from the intersection of Dada and Futurism as well as a longstanding admiration for de Chirico and Ernst.²²⁰ The realism, poetry, and affect present in de Chirico's works resonated with Magritte at the very start of his career, as did Ernst's collages, at which point the Belgian painter gradually turned to Surrealism. From the beginning, Magritte's aesthetic considerations were at the forefront of his practice, even declaring in 1922: "L'œuvre d'art (...) a pour mission essentielle de déclencher AUTOMATIQUEMENT la sensation esthétique chez le spectateur."²²¹ To this end, Magritte combined traditional representational strategies, like figuration and perspectivism, with surprising juxtapositions, rendering his images

²²⁰ Harry Torczyner and René Magritte, *René Magritte, signes et images*, ed. Bella Bessard (Paris: Draeger, 1977), 64; Jean, *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, 177.

²²¹ René Magritte and Victor Servranckx, "L'art pur : Défense de l'esthétique (1922)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 13.

visually accurate yet conceptually enigmatic.²²² A cheeky sense of humour emanates from his compositions, a certain playfulness that toys with the viewer's attention—perhaps a remnant of his work as a commercial artist. Starting the 1940s, Magritte intentionally sought out this charm in an attempt to evade the hardships of the war and celebrate instead the creative, joyful human spirit.²²³ His interwar productions effectively reflected angst and distrust, as exemplified by the 1926 painting titled *The Face of Genius* (Fig. 18). The artwork centres around a death mask, identified as Napoleon Bonaparte's, whose right eye and left cheek are cut out and traversed by tree branches.²²⁴ The painting is set against a cold and threatening void, projecting feelings of dread, uncertainty, and unease. In the midst of conflict and suffering, Magritte regarded his art-making as “un combat, ou mieux une contre-offensive.”²²⁵

In order to preserve these aesthetic and creative priorities, Magritte famously rejected any symbolic interpretation of his artworks, especially from a psychoanalytic lens.²²⁶ Still, in spite of the artist's preference, select studies imposed a psychoanalytic reading on Magritte's work, mostly based on his mother's suicide and his own repressed trauma.²²⁷ The presence of some recurring motifs, such as veiled faces and the female body, explains this tendency in Magrittean scholarship. Works like *The Rape* (1934, reprised in 1945; Fig. 19), in which the portrayed woman's face is entirely substituted for her naked body, chest to thighs, are reminiscent of contemporary images like Miró's *Female Nude* (Fig. 8), associating, once again, eyes with breasts and sight with female

²²² Jean Roudaut, “A Grand Illusion,” in *Magritte*, ed. Daniel Abadie (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 23; Orban, *The Culture of Fragments*, 120.

²²³ René Magritte, “Interview by Louis Quiévreux (1947),” in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 250.

²²⁴ “*Le visage du génie*, René Magritte,” Musée d’Ixelles – Inventaire du patrimoine mobilier, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://collections.heritage.brussels/fr/objects/38417>.

²²⁵ Magritte, “Interview by Louis Quiévreux (1947),” 251.

²²⁶ Lisa Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 2.

²²⁷ Marcus M. Silverman, “René Magritte and the Denial of Meaning,” *Modern Psychoanalysis* 37, no. 2 (July 2012): 69–98.

sexuality. Additionally, Magritte's aversion to interpretation was founded on the belief that the assigned symbolic meaning would overtake the value of the artwork itself, thus commodifying the art object as per bourgeois ideology.²²⁸ In fact, Magritte defined his artistic practice as a vehement opposition to both modernism and the bourgeoisie.²²⁹

Yet, beyond hermeneutic debates and suggestive images, Magritte's relationship with his craft was primarily founded on the representation of a thought or idea.²³⁰ Indeed, each of the painter's productions presents an intellectual problem, an unlikely situation that turns painting into "an act of visual thought."²³¹ Magritte's representational system consisted of his own set of rules and conventions, meant to provoke a reaction from artists, critics, and viewers alike.²³² The absurd juxtaposition of random objects, sometimes accompanied by words or sentences, differed from Surrealist practices of automatism in the sense that Magritte's *mises en scène* were fully deliberate, offering up every artwork as a site for conceptual questioning.²³³ To a certain extent, this principle explains why, by the end of his life, Magritte had a considerable impact on American pop art and conceptual artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Jasper Johns, and Joseph Kosuth.²³⁴ What's more, by considering painting, a visual medium, as a vehicle of thought, the Belgian artist directly acknowledged the primordial role of eyesight.²³⁵ For him, the only way painting could reach its conceptual objective was through perfected ocular perception.²³⁶

²²⁸ Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting*, 11, 200.

²²⁹ René Magritte, "Sur la crise de la peinture (1935)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 85; Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 115.

²³⁰ Jean, *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, 178.

²³¹ Suzanne Guerlac, "The Useless Image: Bataille, Bergson, Magritte," *Representations* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 39.

²³² Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting*, 15.

²³³ Breton, "Genèse et perspective artistiques du surréalisme (1941)," 72; Cardinal and Short, *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*, 92; Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 2.

²³⁴ Daniel Abadie, "The Unclassifiable Painting of René Magritte," in *Magritte*, ed. Daniel Abadie (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 15–21.

²³⁵ Orban, *The Culture of Fragments*, 10.

²³⁶ René Magritte, "Le véritable art de peindre (1949)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 273.

Oftentimes, Magritte's own curiosity determined the content of his works as well as the evolution of his oeuvre. He constantly aspired to capture and elucidate the mysteries of life; the enigmatic universe fascinated Magritte, driving him and his images toward a search for meaning.²³⁷ For instance, his 1932–35 work, *Painted Object: Eye* ([Fig. 20](#)), depicts a woman's single eye on a circular panel, recalling romanticized notions of the eye as a mysterious, sensual organ, situated between the interior and exterior self, revealing the identity of an otherwise anonymous soul.²³⁸ To a young Magritte, painting seemed to possess an equally magical aura, one that could penetrate reality, granting the artist metaphysical powers that allowed him to translate the mysteries of the world through art.²³⁹ The painter posited: "Au lieu de donner un sens aux choses, l'esprit peut *voir* le sens."²⁴⁰ In other words, Magritte counted on the human mind and spirit to discover as well as process the world. His works relied on resemblance rather than mimetism, offering a two-dimensional image of an apparent reality rather than an imposed, tangible truth.²⁴¹ After all, even though the brain, the seat of the mind, is but an object among many, it is precisely this object itself that creates reality as we know it.²⁴² It is thus only through mental activity that the mysteries of the universe expose themselves to a lucid, willing spirit.²⁴³

²³⁷ René Magritte, "Interview by Pierredon (1955)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 409; Torczyner and Magritte, *René Magritte, signes et images*, 64.

²³⁸ Tara Cady Sartorius, "A (Not-So) Private Eye," *Arts & Activities* 147, no. 3 (April 2010): 27.

²³⁹ René Magritte, "La ligne de vie I (1938)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 105.

²⁴⁰ Magritte, "Interview by Pierredon (1955)," 409.

²⁴¹ Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 215; Guerlac, "The Useless Image," 39; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 399–400.

²⁴² Jean, *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, 183.

²⁴³ Torczyner and Magritte, *René Magritte, signes et images*, 200.

c. *The Poetic World II: Revelation through sensory abstraction*

Magritte's *The Poetic World II* embraces all of these concepts outlined above, from the aesthetic preoccupation, to the intellectual complexity as well as the emphasis on eyesight. Each element occupies a carefully designated place in the charming but mysterious Magrittean lexicon. To start, curtains, along with walls, mirrors, and windows, served as a framing device throughout Magritte's oeuvre, "opening up additional spaces and creating dynamics of restriction and construction,"²⁴⁴ inclusion and exclusion, interiority and exteriority on the picture plane. Historically, curtains fulfilled a triple purpose in Western art historical tradition: firstly, the hanging drapes acted as protection from light, smoke, and dust; secondly, they displayed the artist's illusionistic representational skill; and lastly, they heightened the theatrical effect of a depicted scene.²⁴⁵ As expected, Magritte drew from these precedents, namely the shift from a practical to symbolic function, while still subverting their purpose. In Magritte's paintings, curtains become synonymous with illusion. They usually part "to reveal something familiar placed in a new setting,"²⁴⁶ to introduce the viewer to a world of arbitrary associations behind which lies an implicit reality. The common pairing of curtains and a sky, as seen in *The Poetic World II*, further enhances Magritte's allusion to the simulacrum. While discussing his later work titled *The Memoirs of a Saint* (1960; [Fig. 21](#)), the artist explained: "le ciel est en forme de rideau parce qu'il nous cache quelque chose. Nous sommes entourés de rideaux."²⁴⁷ Thus, both curtains and skies play with the concept of representation and artifice, of hidden truths behind apparent surfaces.²⁴⁸ Magritte drives

²⁴⁴ Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting*, 148.

²⁴⁵ Mary Ann Caws, "How to House the Surrealist Imagination?," in *The Surreal House*, ed. Jane Alison (London; New Haven, CT: Barbican Art Gallery; Yale University Press, 2010), 42; Roudaut, "A Grand Illusion," 34.; Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 19.

²⁴⁶ Roudaut, "A Grand Illusion," 34.

²⁴⁷ René Magritte, "Interview by Pierre Mazars (1964)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 599.

²⁴⁸ "René Magritte, *Le monde poétique*, 1947," Christie's, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://christies.shorthandstories.com/Lot-120-19518/index.html>.

this even further with painted fissures, tears, and cracks, ironic reminders of the delicate balance between “reality and fiction, interior and exterior, image and imagination.”²⁴⁹ These indicators of a hidden, underlying meaning work to break sensory illusion and to expose the deception inherent to empirical recognition.²⁵⁰ Still, the solid wall appearing behind the lacerations in *The Poetic World II* insists on the physicality of the art object as well as the artifice of the image as a two-dimensional rendering of a subjective reality.

Moreover, Magritte’s philosophy on representation also recalls the extensive *trompe-l’œil* painting tradition, in which curtains and skies appear as recurrent motifs. Magritte admitted to resorting to *trompe-l’œil* to endow his paintings with lifelike depth and realism in order to properly evoke the mysteries of the visible world.²⁵¹ *Trompe-l’œil* itself was not conceived to replace or confuse the real, but to gain consciousness of the artifice of three-dimensional mimetic illusions, thus questioning the very principles of sight and reality.²⁵² Indeed, “Magritte understood the human impulse to want to see things, to penetrate them through vision.”²⁵³ The painter clearly sought to fight reason with his own weapons, to counter objective sight with illusory vision.²⁵⁴ He firmly believed that if appearances and eyesight remained unchallenged, one would never consider the possibility of alternate perceptions, nor would human curiosity and knowledge evolve.²⁵⁵ Hence the unsettling, hybrid tableaux such as the ever-famous 1928 painting, *The False Mirror* ([Fig. 22](#)), whose single, unblinking eye encloses a clouded sky within its iris. The artwork, modeled after a

²⁴⁹ Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting*, 64.

²⁵⁰ Allmer, 67; Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 5, 107.

²⁵¹ René Magritte, “Interview by Jan Walravens (1961),” in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 537; Waldberg, *Magritte: Peintures*, 8.

²⁵² Jean Baudrillard, “The Trompe-l’œil,” in *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 58.

²⁵³ Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 62.

²⁵⁴ Jean, *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, 183.

²⁵⁵ René Magritte, “Peinture « objective » et peinture « impressionniste » (n.d.),” in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 181.

Man Ray photographic enlargement of an eye,²⁵⁶ transforms the organ from the source of projected sights into “nothing more than the interior vanishing point at which the objects converge.”²⁵⁷ Instead of reflecting a person’s soul, be it the model’s or the viewer’s, the eye acts as a deceitful mirror, undermining its connotation as an organ of enlightenment.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, in the case of *The Poetic World II*, Magritte’s illusionistic style leads to an ambivalent reading of the painting, especially when considered in relation to ocularcentrism. The floating curtains, the bare tabletop, the stripped pyramids, the disembodied eyeball could simultaneously represent the actual objects themselves, or the conceptual essence of each respective item, bridging both physical and spiritual realms. The stretched shadows, also characteristic of *trompe-l’œil* works, only add to the ambiguity of the scene, functioning as anchors to a tangible dimension as well as an artificial illusion. Thus, Magritte casts doubts on the art of imitation and the assimilative process of perception, turning instead toward purely metaphysical meaning.²⁵⁹

Evidently, the dialectical relationship between an object and its essence alludes to Plato’s theory of Ideas. As discussed in the introduction, Platonic philosophy revolved around the differentiation between sensible manifestations and intelligible entities. Plato’s canonical Allegory of the cave illustrates this worldview, recounting the story of a group of humans living in a cave, chained facing the back wall. Behind them, toward the mouth of the cave, a fire projects shadows onto the opposite wall, denoting a world processed solely through empiricism.²⁶⁰ If the humans were to be unchained and emerge from the cave, their liberation would be painful, their senses overwhelmed, and their idea of truth shattered.²⁶¹ Yet, Plato deemed this humbling “ascent of the

²⁵⁶ René Magritte and Harry Torczyner, *Magritte/Torczyner: Letters between Friends*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 84.

²⁵⁷ Baudrillard, “The Trompe-l’œil,” 58.

²⁵⁸ Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting*, 125–26.

²⁵⁹ Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*, 216, 218.

²⁶⁰ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 27.

²⁶¹ Plato, “Book VII,” 214–20; Ross, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 69–76.

soul into the intellectual world”²⁶² necessary for the education of the senses and the path to enlightenment. Similarly, Magritte’s *The Poetic World II* invites the viewer into its own adaptation of the Allegory. The setting contrasts interiority, stillness, and rigidity with an unknown, enigmatic outside, much like Plato’s cave.²⁶³ The apparent simplicity of the rendered items clashes with the absurdity of the scene, just as the flickering shadows differed from their unfamiliar referents. The colourless, abstracted pyramids, similar to a Platonic Idea “which was like a visible form blanced of its color,”²⁶⁴ stand for human constructions and built structures, while the white clouds refer to spirituality and a metaphysical existence.²⁶⁵ Finally, the torn sky and the naked eyeball denounce the treachery of the tangible and sensorial, representative of relative reality, as opposed to the truthfulness of the conceptual and philosophical, or absolute reality.²⁶⁶ Magritte’s scene could then be interpreted as a vision that either pre-exists reality, a reference to primitive existence, or one that comes after its downfall, a post-apocalyptic display.

This analogy between Plato’s parable and Magritte’s painting underlines the painter’s mission to “counteract the privileged position of the gaze.”²⁶⁷ *The Poetic World II* provides a metaphor for the sense of sight as well as the formation of human knowledge. Despite the opportunity to reach a transcendental status, to peek past the curtains and under the peeling sky, the mind remains attached to a fictional reality, tricked by simulated illusions. By posing pictorial and intellectual problems through his artworks, Magritte launches an attack on Western symbolism of sight thus far, specifically on its association with reason, omniscience, and objective truth. The artist questions and subverts the functions of eyesight as the first sense to perceive the surface of

²⁶² Plato, “Book VII,” 217.

²⁶³ Allmer, *René Magritte: Beyond Painting*, 61.

²⁶⁴ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 26.

²⁶⁵ Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 103.

²⁶⁶ André Breton, “Envergure de René Magritte (1964),” in *Le surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 401.

²⁶⁷ Baudrillard, “The Trompe-l’oeil,” 58.

things, to determine our navigation of space, to create our truth and imagination. It is by confronting these beliefs that we come to recognize that visible reality “is never more than a world hierarchically *staged*,”²⁶⁸ a human construct that dictates our waking existence. For these reasons, Magritte controversially condoned impressionist painting, claiming: “En réalité, il s’agit d’une *façon plus attentive* de voir; la vue n’est pas seulement physique, elle est raisonnée.”²⁶⁹ Admitting to the affective dimension of vision pushes knowledge-making beyond the merely sensible and establishes a clear distinction between the external object and our internal perception of it.²⁷⁰ Indeed, since sight only grasps outer appearances rather than inner meaning, the hegemonic eye tends to amplify feelings of detachment and isolation from the world, hence the freestanding curtains and suspended tabletop, rather than strengthen impulses of empathy and compassion.²⁷¹ Magritte’s objective was then to encourage the viewer to appreciate the mysteries of the world and its hidden meanings while also advocating for a more personal, subjective vision.²⁷²

This desire for a human presence, an affective consciousness is communicated in *The Poetic World II* through the unblinking eyeball, the only living element in the painting. The eye, still affixed to its optic nerve, embodies a metaphor for the mind, capable of retaining knowledge and shaping memory as well as imagination.²⁷³ Indeed, once the mind processes an external image, it becomes capable of dealing “with it in complete detachment from the actual presence of the original object,”²⁷⁴ effectively freeing intellectual and creative activity from empirical, sensory perception. In this way, the imposed hierarchy of the senses no longer dictates the formation of knowledge, as all images occupy an equally important place in both pictorial compositions and the

²⁶⁸ Baudrillard, 59.

²⁶⁹ Magritte, “Peinture « objective » et peinture « impressionniste » (n.d.),” 182.

²⁷⁰ Magritte, 182–83.

²⁷¹ Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, 288; Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 19, 22, 25.

²⁷² Waldberg, *Magritte : Peintures*, 11; Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 58.

²⁷³ Christie’s, “*Le monde poétique II*.”

²⁷⁴ Jonas, “The Nobility of Sight,” 147.

human mind.²⁷⁵ This very separation of the image from its source, of the object from its essence, enables abstraction and, thus, free thought.²⁷⁶ For Magritte, rising to this transcendental, conceptual stage was an indicator of inspiration, itself synonymous with lucidity, a much sought-after Surrealist principle.²⁷⁷ The Surrealists viewed the notion of enlightenment or visionary illumination as the ultimate human goal, as the sole path toward influential writer Blaise Cendrars's mythical "third eye of Vision."²⁷⁸ In his quest to challenge appearances, trick perception, and uncover the mysteries of reality, Magritte reached inspired thought, which he placed at the crux of his art.²⁷⁹ His paintings attest to "the mind's potential to transcend the limitations of the world,"²⁸⁰ to develop beyond speculative reason and mimetic observation. In this sense, *The Poetic World II* succeeds in illustrating revelation.

In fact, even the title of the painting hints at its philosophical complexity. Magrittean titles seldom referred directly to the depicted content, nor did the image ever explain the selected title. The relationship between both was rather a poetic one, whether the title evoked a reference, a memory, or a reaction to the work.²⁸¹ The function of a title, according to Magritte, lay in prompting reflection and contributing to the wider understanding of the human mind.²⁸² In order to stimulate these thoughts, the title must mention implicit elements present in its corresponding artwork; discreet enough to form an unconscious link in the viewer's mind, but memorable enough for reason to catch up.²⁸³ In other words, Magritte's titles sought, above all else, to play with

²⁷⁵ René Magritte, "Interview by Jean Neyens (1965)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 602.

²⁷⁶ Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight," 147.

²⁷⁷ René Magritte, "Interview by Henry Lemaire (1962)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 567; Cardinal and Short, *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*, 143.

²⁷⁸ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 237.

²⁷⁹ Magritte, "La ligne de vie I (1938)," 113; Waldberg, *Magritte : Peintures*, 7.

²⁸⁰ Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 157.

²⁸¹ René Magritte, "Sur les titres (1946)," in *Écrits complets*, ed. André Blavier (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 259.

²⁸² Roudaut, "A Grand Illusion," 25.

²⁸³ Magritte, "Sur les titres (1946)," 259.

intuition as well as disorient the viewer through their poetic effect.²⁸⁴ Coincidentally, the *Poetic World* paintings insisted on this lyrically absurd impression. The staged tableau, juxtaposing a torn sky, autonomous curtains, colourless pyramids, and an unnerving eyeball, truly unveiled a poetic world in its effort to portray and attain genuine artistic revelation. *The Poetic World II* can ultimately be interpreted as an allegory of inspiration, of the artist's ideal state of mind, of the Surrealist inner model.²⁸⁵ Thus, Magritte's painting can only be described as truth-seeking and thought-provoking, pushing for creative as well as intellectual productivity.²⁸⁶ The artist's oeuvre becomes in itself "a work of revelation, of a reality unperceived but implicit in visible reality."²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Magritte, "La ligne de vie I (1938)," 110; Magritte, "Interview by Pierre Mazars (1964)," 599; Anne Egger, *Le Surréalisme : La révolution du regard* (Paris: Scala, 2002), 23.

²⁸⁵ Christie's, "Le monde poétique II."

²⁸⁶ Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking*, 115.

²⁸⁷ Roudaut, "A Grand Illusion," 34.

Conclusion

This thesis intended to explore Surrealism's antiocular impulse, as exemplified by three selected paintings: Joan Miró's *Ciphers and Constellations, in Love with a Woman* (1941), Victor Brauner's *The Last Trip* (1937), and René Magritte's *The Poetic World II* (1937). These multilayered artworks attempted to escape both modernist and bourgeois traditions while also conveying Surrealist values and imagery. Through depictions of the eye, the three artists challenged and revised the hegemony of sight as well as the fundamentals of Western society. As outlined by the thesis title, they aimed to move beyond empirical sight, the physical sense that shapes our judgement, knowledge, and reality. Instead, they advocated for a more comprehensive vision, one that could lead to enlightened inspiration and intellectual freedom. This state of metaphysical revelation was regarded as the ideal Surrealist objective.

Miró attempted to break away from Western ocularcentric tendencies via visual abstraction, formal experimentation, childlike observation, multicultural inspiration, and psychoanalytic associations. The Catalan painter shifted the emphasis from physical to spiritual perception, from objective to subjective expression, highlighting the affective properties of his craft. As for Brauner, the Romanian artist drew from his personal journey, geographical as much as psychological, to denounce the sociopolitical impact of modernism, industrialism, and fascism, all of which reflected onto the connotations of sight. Brauner used his own physical enucleation as the source of ocular questioning and reshaping of modern identities. Finally, Magritte resorted to illusionism in his effort to condemn visual perception, expose the metaphysical mysteries of the world, and reduce rational thought to its purest abstract form. The Belgian painter designated the mind as the co-creator of experience and knowledge, rather than the senses alone.

A sequential evolution can even be traced from one painting to the next, starting with Miró who reverted back to schematic modes of expression, advancing to Brauner whose denigration of the senses resulted from post-war horror and morphing humanity, and culminating with Magritte's post-apocalyptic tableau of reality stripped bare. Whether through symbolic abstraction, explicit mutilation, or a combination of both, all three artists challenged sensory perception and empirical reality. They placed affect, subjectivity, and inspiration at the forefront, which redefined the prevalent meanings of eyesight as oppressive, rational, and mechanical. In doing so, they aligned themselves with the Surrealist project, conceived to undermine "the rationalist assumptions of Western thought and civilization."²⁸⁸ Miró, Brauner, and Magritte also disrupted conventional presuppositions about art, particularly the notion that art can only be directed at the gaze.²⁸⁹ This metacommentary echoed Breton's stance vis-à-vis the role of painting as a creative liberation of the human mind and an indicator of an enlightened spirit.²⁹⁰

Yet, as argued throughout the thesis, the praised inner model, the artist's source of inspiration and imagination, still needs to be rooted in empiricism to acquire enough knowledge. In addition to psychological and emotional experiences, the mind relies on sensory perception for the process of creation. Sight, then, proves necessary for the formation of an image as well as free and abstract thought, the very basis of artistic production and Surrealism itself.²⁹¹ Rather than radically abolishing its cultural authority, this realization opens up alternate perspectives on the notion of sight and its traditional connotations. Ocular perception is therefore freed from its domineering characteristics, striving rather for a transcendence of the senses by the senses.

²⁸⁸ Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 3.

²⁸⁹ Umland, "La peinture au défi," 65.

²⁹⁰ Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*, 56.

²⁹¹ Grant, 51, 124; Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight," 147.

Figures



Figure 1: Photomontage, *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 12 (December 1929): 73.

Clockwise from upper left corner: Maxime Alexandre, Louis Aragon, André Breton, Luis Buñuel, Jean Caupenne, Paul Éluard, Marcel Fourier, René Magritte, Albert Valentin, André Thirion, Yves Tanguy, Georges Sadoul, Paul Nougé, Camille Goemans, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí.



Figure 2: Joan Miró, *Chiffres et constellations amoureux d'une femme* (*Ciphers and Constellations, in Love with a Woman*), 1941. Gouache and watercolour with graphite on paper, 45.6 × 38 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



Figure 3: Joan Miró, *Paysage catalan (Le Chasseur) (The Hunter (Catalan Landscape))*, 1923–24. Oil on canvas, 64.8 × 100.3 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 4: Joan Miró, *Carnaval d'Arlequin* (*Carnival of Harlequin*), 1924–25. Oil on canvas, 66 × 93 cm. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.



Figure 5: Joan Miró, *Autoportrait I (Self-Portrait I)*, 1937–38. Pencil, crayon, and oil on canvas, 146.1 × 97.2 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 6: Joan Miró, *Autoportrait II (Self-Portrait II)*, 1938. Oil on burlap, 129.5 × 195.6 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.



Figure 7: Joan Miró, *L'Étoile matinale* (*The Morning Star*), 1940. Gouache, oil, and pastel on paper, 38 × 46 cm. Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.



Figure 8: Joan Miró, *Female Nude*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 92.4 × 73.7 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



Figure 9: Victor Brauner, *Le Dernier voyage* (*The Last Trip*), 1937. Oil on oak panel, 13.9 × 18 cm. Centre Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 10: Victor Brauner, *Autoportrait (Self-Portrait with Enucleated Eye)*, 1931. Oil on wood, 22 × 16.2 cm. Centre Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 11: Victor Brauner, *Paysage méditerranéen*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 65 × 80.5 cm. Centre Pompidou, Paris.

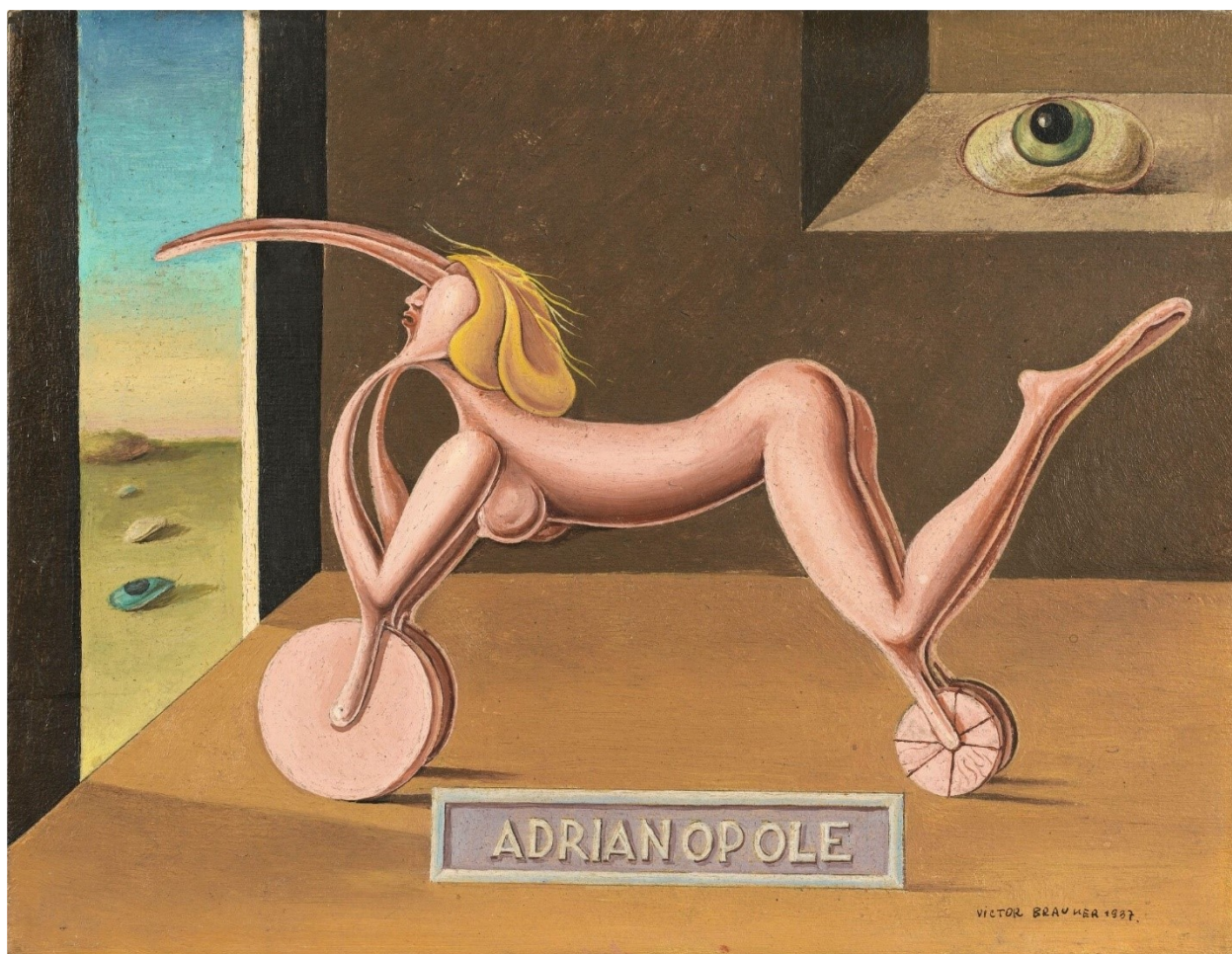


Figure 12: Victor Brauner, *Légèrement chaude ou Adrianopole* (*Légèrement chaude or Adrianopole*), 1937. Oil on oak panel, 13.9 × 18.1 cm. Private collection.

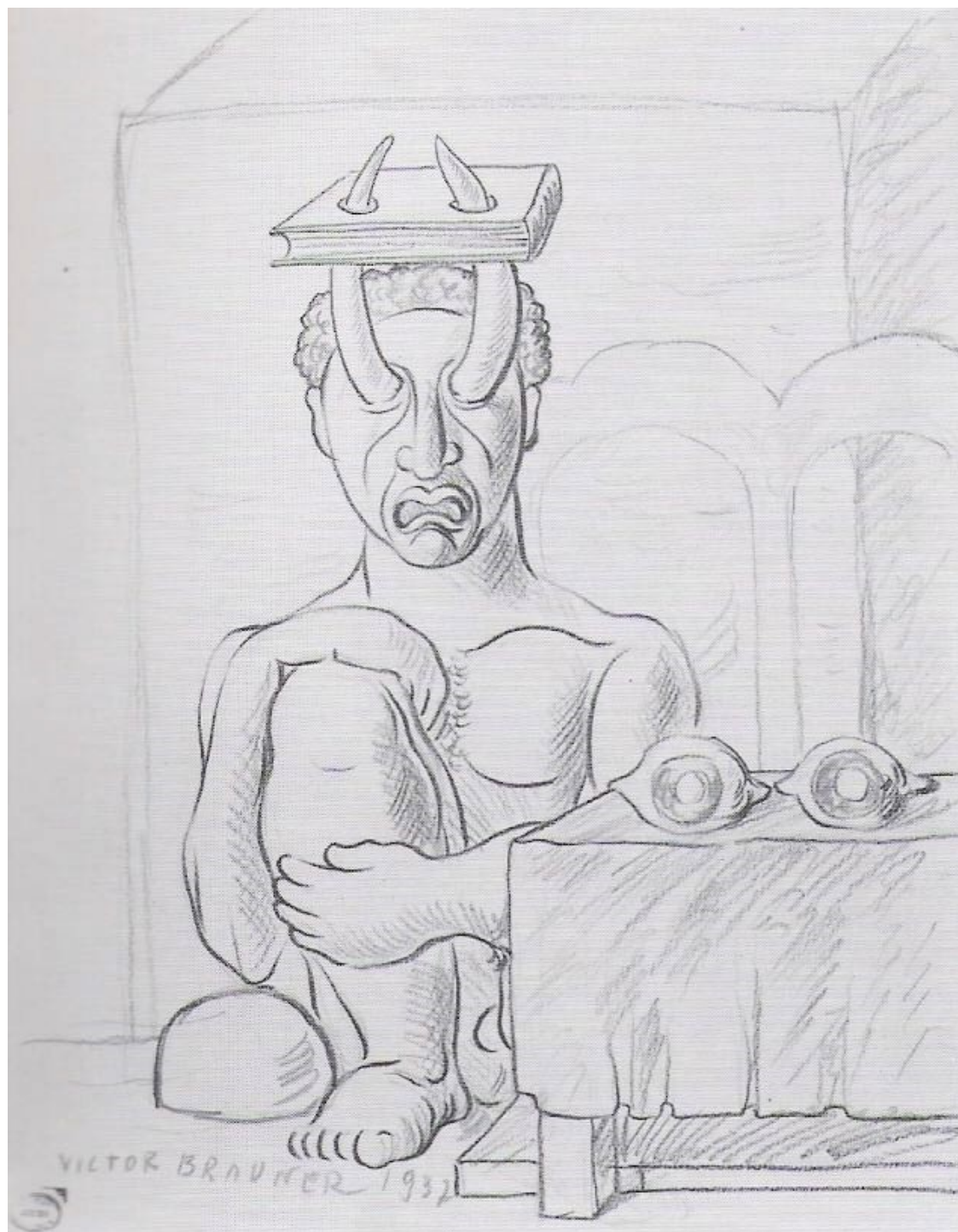


Figure 13: Victor Brauner, *Sans-titre (Untitled)*, 1937. Coloured pencil on cardboard, 32.9 × 25.5 cm. Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Saint-Étienne.



Figure 14: Victor Brauner, *Tableau autobiographique—Ultratableau biosensible*, 1948. Oil, pen, pencil, and wash on canvas, 88.7 × 116 cm. Private collection.



Figure 15: Victor Brauner, *Le Monde paisible*, 1927. Ink on watermarked paper, 17.2 × 11.5 cm. Centre Pompidou, Paris.

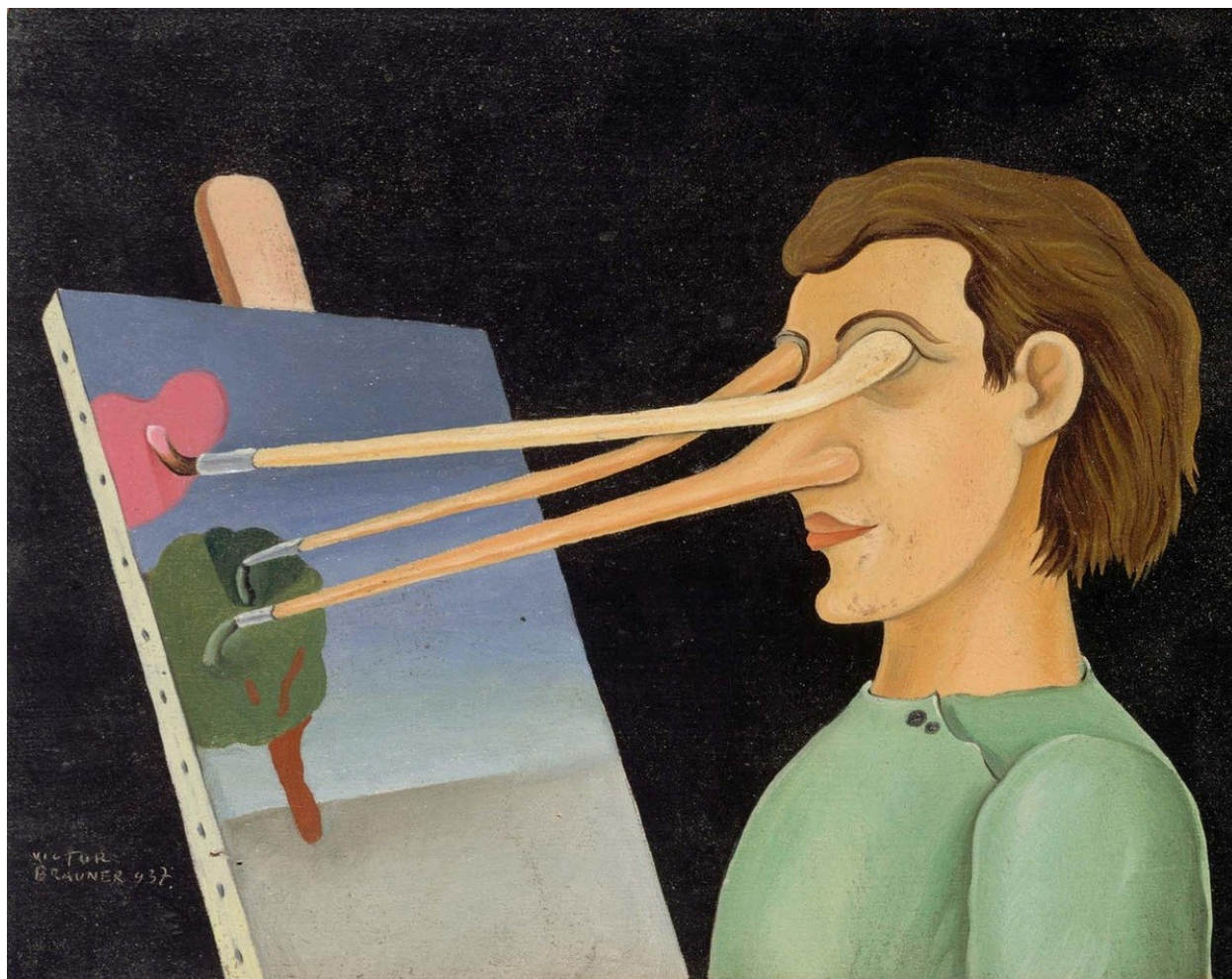


Figure 16: Victor Brauner, *Sur le motif (Painted from Nature)*, 1937. Oil on oak panel, 14 × 18 cm. Centre Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 17: René Magritte, *Le Monde poétique II* (*The Poetic World II*), 1937. Oil on canvas, 65.5 × 54 cm. Private collection.



Figure 18: René Magritte, *Le Visage du génie* (*The Face of Genius*), 1926. Oil on canvas, 75 × 65 cm. Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels.



Figure 19: René Magritte, *Le Viol (The Rape)*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 73.3 × 54.6 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.



Figure 20: René Magritte, *Objet peint : Œil* (*Painted Object: Eye*), 1932–35. Oil on panel glued to wooden base, 27 × 24.8 × 14.4 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



Figure 21: René Magritte, *Les Mémoires d'un saint* (*The Memoirs of a Saint*), 1960. Oil on canvas, 80 × 99.7 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston.

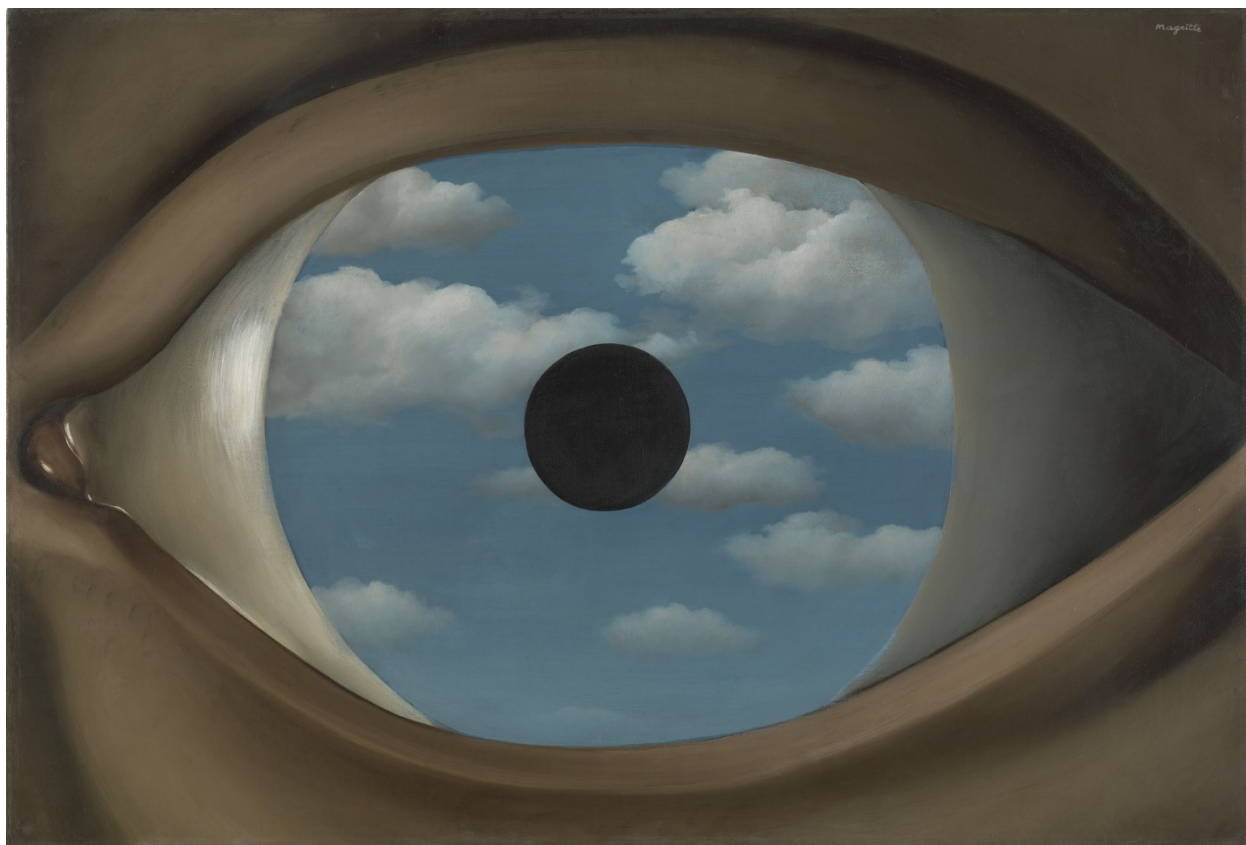


Figure 22: René Magritte, *Le Faux miroir* (*The False Mirror*), 1928. Oil on canvas, 54 × 80.9 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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