

THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT DEDICATES A FIRST-TIME MAJOR SURVEY TO THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ARTISTS TO SURREALISM

FANTASTIC WOMEN SURREAL WORLDS FROM MERET OPPENHEIM TO FRIDA KAHLO

FEBRUARY 13 – JULY 5, 2020

PRESS PREVIEW: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2020, 11 A.M.

From February 13 to July 5, 2020, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt presents “Fantastic Women: Surreal Worlds from Meret Oppenheim to Frida Kahlo,” a major survey devoted to the women artists of Surrealism. Goddess, she-devil, doll, fetish, child-woman or wonderful dream creature – in various guises, women were the central subject of male Surrealist fantasies. Women artists initially found their way into the circle surrounding André Breton, the founder of the Surrealist group, as companions or models. Yet they quickly broke out of those traditional roles and confidently created independent work. For the first time, the exhibition at the Schirn examines the female contribution to Surrealism and reveals that the participation of women artists in the movement was considerably larger than generally known or previously portrayed. The unconscious, dreams and chance, myths and metamorphoses, literature and contemporary political events as well as material experiments and staged photography – many of these familiar themes of Surrealism are also characteristic of the work done by women. Female artists differed from their male colleagues above all in their reversal of perspective: they questioned their own reflection or took on different roles in search for a (new) model of female and artistic identity.

The exhibition focuses on women artists who were directly associated with the Surrealist movement founded in Paris in the early 1920s, though sometimes only for a short period. They knew Breton personally, exhibited with the group, contributed to publications, or considered Surrealist ideas from a theoretical point of view. Featuring about 260 remarkable paintings, works on paper, sculptures, photographs, and films by 34 artists from 11 countries, the exhibition covers a wide range of styles and subjects. Besides well-known figures like Louise Bourgeois, Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington, Frida Kahlo, Meret Oppenheim, and Dorothea Tanning, numerous as yet lesser-known artists from more than three decades of Surrealist art, such as Toyen, Alice Rahon, and Kay Sage, also await discovery. The exhibition features representative selections of works by each of the artists, while at the same time reflecting networks and friendships among the women artists in Europe, the US, and Mexico. The Schirn has been able to obtain important loans for the exhibition in Frankfurt from a large number of museums in Germany and abroad and both public and private collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tate London; the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris; Musée national Picasso, Paris; Kunstmuseum Bern; Kunstmuseum Basel; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; and the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City.

The exhibition “Fantastic Women: Surreal Worlds from Meret Oppenheim to Frida Kahlo” could not have been realized without the support of the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain and the Dr. Marschner Stiftung. Additional support has been provided by the Bank of America as partner of the Schirn 2020.

Dr. Philipp Demandt, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, explains: “With ‘Fantastic Women,’ the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting a premiere: with some 260 works by 34 women artists we will give our visitors a whole new perspective on Surrealist art. The exhibition is a comprehensive and unprecedented overview of the decidedly female side of Surrealism. And the research underlying it aims to finally and conclusively complement the account of this crucial movement in art.”

Dr. Ingrid Pfeiffer, curator of the exhibition, points out: “In no other artistic movement of Modernism women played such a central role and were involved in such large numbers as in Surrealism. And yet to this day, many of their names and works are missing in publications and survey exhibitions. The women artists presented at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt adopted the ideas of the Surrealist group in unique ways and pursued them further in highly individual works. Seeing them together, we gain better insight into the international network, the incredible diversity and the impressive independence of both the better and lesser-known women artists of Surrealism. After all, Surrealism was a state of mind rather than a style.”

THEMES AND ARTISTS OF THE EXHIBITION

The large-scale survey spreads across the entire length of both galleries of the Schirn. The women artists of Surrealism are presented with representative selections of works and in topographic regions, as many of them formed networks in the various centers of Surrealism: France, England, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Scandinavia and, later on, the US and Mexico.

The exhibition opens with **Meret Oppenheim** (1913 Berlin – 1985 Basel), one of the first women artists of Surrealism to gain early fame. She already moved in Surrealist circles in Paris at a young age. The group met regularly, discussing political developments as well as the then new insights of psychoanalysis, which they used as impulses to change society through art. As early as 1936, the Museum of Modern Art of New York acquired Oppenheim’s iconic “fur cup” for its collection – to this day, it is considered the quintessential Surrealist object. The Schirn presents works of the artists from the 1930s to the 1970s, including sculptures like *Primeval Venus* (1933/62) and paintings such as *Mona Lisa’s Eye* (1967). The official members of the Surrealist group around André Breton were initially men but, starting in the 1930s, numerous women artists joined and participated in the international exhibitions of Surrealism, including those in New York (1936), Paris (1936 and 1938), Tokyo (1937), Amsterdam (1938), and Mexico City (1940). It is possible to identify different generations of Surrealism: the women artists were usually younger and, as a result, many of their major works were created in the 1940s and 1950s. Even though the group continued to organize exhibitions until the 1960s and disbanded only in 1969, many chroniclers have felt that Surrealism ended with the Second World War. It is also owing to this narrative that too little attention has been paid to the works of the women artists.

Le désir (erotic desire) is a central theme of Surrealism and the female body a recurring motif in its works. On the whole, the attitude of the male Surrealists toward their female fellow artists may be described as ambivalent. In many ways, the movement rejected traditional bourgeois ideas of family, sexual morals, and married life. Yet in the works of the male artists, woman is often objectified as passive child-woman, fetish, or muse and presented as fragmented or decapitated. The perspective of the women artists is a different one: numerous self-portraits and depictions of women are characterized by a playful, self-confident approach to their body image and female sexuality. Among the works presented in the exhibition is *Autoportrait, à l'auberge du Cheval d'Aube* (1937/38) by **Leonora Carrington** (1917 Clayton Green – 2011 Mexico City), in which the artist depicted herself in the garb of a young man from the eighteenth century, wearing pants; she is accompanied by a horse, her recurring alter ego, and a hyena as a symbol of her desire for freedom. **Ithell Colquhoun** (1906 Assam – 1988 Lamorna) created a humorous reinterpretation of a vulva in her painting *Tree Anatomy* (1942). The artist **Claude Cahun** (1894 Nantes – 1954 Saint Helier) produced her most important work as early as the 1920s: a series of impressive and highly topical photographic self-portraits and photomontages addressing androgyny and the play with gender roles, as in the 1927 *Self-portrait (I am in Training ... Don't Kiss Me)*. The work of **Leonor Fini** (1907 Buenos Aires – 1996 Paris) includes a disproportionate number of male nudes with strong female figures showing them the way, as in *Dans la tour (In the Tower, 1952)*, or protecting them, as in *Chtonian Deity Watching over the Sleep of a Young Man, 1946*. The women artists

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

rebel against gender-specific role behavior and present themselves with markedly androgynous looks (Oppenheim, Cahun, Toyen) or in different roles and guises (Fini).

The Surrealists used games and techniques such as *écriture automatique* (automatic writing), dream protocols, and collages to open up access to the unconscious and leave room for chance. These methods played a central role in the works of **Jacqueline Lamba** (1910 Saint-Mandé – 1993 La Rochecorbon), **Emmy Bridgwater** (1906 Birmingham – 1999 Solihull) and **Unica Zürn** (1916 Berlin – 1970 Paris). The exhibition devotes a separate section to the *cadavres exquis*. These drawings or collages were the product of a collective activity: on a folded piece of paper, each of the consecutive participants continued where their predecessors had left off without seeing the previously created image. Such collective artworks were also intended to strengthen the group's cohesion. In addition to members of the group like André Breton, Paul Éluard, **Valentine Hugo** (1887 Boulogne-sur-Mer – 1968 Paris), **Jacqueline Lamba**, and Yves Tanguy, amateurs and autodidacts like **Nusch Éluard** (1906 Mulhouse – 1946 Paris) also participated in these games.

Subjects such as ancient mythology and pre-Christian and non-European myths played an important role in the Surrealist circle. The medieval mythical figure of Melusine (woman and sea creature) and the enigmatic Egyptian Sphinx (woman and winged lion) often serve as symbols of metamorphosis and change or personify the demonic seductress and femme fatale. In search of images for a model of female identity, the women artists frequently drew on the figure of the hybrid creature. Among the works presented at the Schirn are *La venadita* (*The Little Deer*, 1946) by **Frida Kahlo** and the sculpture *La Grande Dame* (1951) by **Leonora Carrington** and José Horna. The Czech painter **Toyen** (1902 Prague – 1980 Paris) came up with a gender-neutral pseudonym derived from the French word *citoyen* (citizen). Rather than the contrasts between male and female or animal and human, she was interested in the similarities. In *Le Paravent* (1966) she put a mouth in the place of the genitals of what seems to be a female figure, creating a scene hovering between desire and dread.

During the Second World War many of the Surrealists emigrated to the US, Mexico, and elsewhere. In Mexico a vibrant Surrealist scene developed around **Frida Kahlo** (1907 Coyoacán – 1954 Mexico City). In her distinct iconography Kahlo combined imagery of Mexico's precolonial culture with Christian symbols as well as her own personal biography. She highlighted matriarchal, feminist traditions and deliberately wore the traditional dress from the Tehuantepec region, known for its female-dominated culture. The Schirn presents major works of the artist such as *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940) and *Self-portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States* (1932). The poet and painter **Alice Rahon** (1904 Chenecey-Buillon – 1987 Mexico City), the first woman to have her texts published in the *Éditions surréalistes* in 1936, also came to be a key figure in Mexico City. Other Surrealist women artists who settled in Mexico and explored the country's pre-Columbian past, lush nature, and myths included the painter and writer Leonora Carrington, the painter **Bridget Tichenor** (1917 Paris – 1990 Mexico City) and **Remedios Varo** (1908 Anglés – 1963 Mexico City), whose style of painting combines Surrealist techniques like fumage, frottage, and decalcomania with an old-masterly, detailed depiction of figures.

Photography offered women Surrealists many opportunities to distort and question the representation of reality through retouching, subsequent coloring, montages, and extreme exposures. **Jane Graverol** (1905 Ixelles – 1984 Fontainebleau) and **Lola Álvarez Bravo** (1903 Lagos de Moreno – 1993 Mexico City) additionally made use of the collage technique to combine conflicting elements. Among the women photographers in particular, quite a few came to be explicitly political. Besides Surrealist themes, as in *29, rue d'Astorg* (1936), included in the exhibition, the work of **Dora Maar** (1907 Paris – 1997 Paris) also evinces a profound interest in contemporary events. Along with Breton she signed the 1934 *Appel à la lutte* (*Call to Arms*) in the fight against the growing fascist tendencies. Claude Cahun was actively involved in the resistance in the 1940s and eventually arrested: the torment of imprisonment eventually led to her death.

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

After her Surrealist period, **Lee Miller** (1907 Poughkeepsie – 1977 Chiddingly) started working as a war correspondent in 1944.

Women artists also made significant contributions to Surrealist film: the Schirn is screening *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1927) by **Germaine Dulac** (1882 Amiens – 1942 Paris), now considered to be the first Surrealist work in the history of film. **Maya Deren** (1917 Kiev – 1961 New York) was a main protagonist of the postwar cinematic avant-garde in America. Even earlier, in works like *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), she had countered the predominant narrative structures of Hollywood films and their tendency to look at femininity from a male point of view.

Some of the women artists presented were only briefly affiliated with Surrealism. **Dorothea Tanning** (1910 Galesburg – 2012 New York) turned to Surrealism in the interwar period to find a different narrative for art, society, and herself. Like Oppenheim and Carrington, she subsequently rejected being labeled a “Surrealist” or showing her work in women-only exhibitions. The women artists of Surrealism regarded themselves as individuals and wanted to be perceived irrespective of their gender and without being pinned down to a particular style. Historically, they were nonetheless part of the Surrealist movement and played a central role in the network presented at the Schirn.

The exhibition ends – and looks to the future – with the work of **Louise Bourgeois** (1911 Paris – 2010 New York), who explored themes like sexuality and female identity in her paintings, such as the *Femme maison* series (1945–47), and sculptural object art. She belongs to the same generation of artists as Meret Oppenheim, but her work only came to be appreciated much later and nowadays tends to be associated with contemporary art.

An exhibition of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in cooperation with the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk.

ARTISTS INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION Eileen Agar, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Rachel Baes, Louise Bourgeois, Emmy Bridgwater, Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington, Ithell Colquhoun, Maya Deren, Germaine Dulac, Nusch Éluard, Leonor Fini, Jane Graverol, Valentine Hugo, Frida Kahlo, Greta Knutson, Jacqueline Lamba, Sheila Legge, Dora Maar, Emila Medková, Lee Miller, Suzanne Muzard, Meret Oppenheim, Valentine Penrose, Alice Rahon, Edith Rimmington, Kay Sage, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Jeannette Tanguy, Dorothea Tanning, Bridget Tichenor, Toyen, Remedios Varo, Unica Zürn

CATALOGUE FANTASTIC WOMEN: SURREAL WORLDS FROM MERET OPPENHEIM TO FRIDA KAHLO, edited by Ingrid Pfeiffer and with a preface by Philipp Demandt, SCHIRN, and Poul Erik Tøjner, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk. The volume includes essays by Patricia Allmer, Tere Arcq, Kirsten Degel, Heike Eipeldauer, Annabelle Görgen-Lammers, Rebecca Herlemann, Karoline Hille, Silvano Levy, Alyce Mahon, Christiane Meyer-Thoss, Laura Neve, Ingrid Pfeiffer, and Gabriel Weisz Carrington as well as biographies of the individual artists and color reproductions of the works. German and English editions, each ca. 420 pp., 350 illustrations, 29 x 24 cm, hardcover. Hirmer Verlag, ca. € 39.- (SCHIRN), € 49.90 (book trade)

DIGITORIAL® The SCHIRN offers a Digitalorial® in connection with the exhibition. This free-of-charge digital educational resource is available in German and English at www.schirn.de/digitalorial

VENUE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **DURATION** February 13 – July 5, 2020 **INFORMATION** www.schirn.de **EMAIL** welcome@schirn.de **TELEPHONE** +49 69 29 98 82-0 **FAX** +49 69 29 98 82-240 **ADMISSION** 14 €, reduced 10 €, free admission for children under 8 **ONLINE TICKETS** Buy time slot tickets online before visiting the exhibition: www.schirn.de/tickets **HYGIENE AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS** In order to make the exhibition visit safe, comprehensive hygiene and protection measures are implemented with the responsible authorities. Further information: www.schirn.de/en/visit/ **MEDIA PARTNER** Fraport,

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, PRESS RELEASE “FANTASTIC WOMEN: SURREAL WORLDS FROM MERET OPPENHEIM TO FRIDA KAHLO,” MAY 5, 2020, PAGE 4 OF 5

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

Arte, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, VGF **CULTURAL PARTNER** HR2 **CURATOR** Ingrid Pfeiffer, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt **CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE** Rebecca Herlemann **THE EXHIBITION IS SUPPORTED BY** Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain and Dr. Marschner Stiftung **PARTNER OF THE SCHIRN** Bank of America

HASHTAGS #FantasticWomen #Schirn **FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE, INSTAGRAM, PINTEREST, SCHIRN MAGAZIN** www.schirn.de/magazin

PRESS Johanna Pulz (Head of Press/PR), Julia Bastian (Press Officer), Isabelle Hammer (trainee) **SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT** Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **TELEPHONE** +49 69 29 98 82-148 **FAX** +49-69 29 98 82-240 **EMAIL** presse@schirn.de