

Exhibition of the week Surrealism: the Poetry of Dreams

Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (136 246) until 2 October

This highly intelligent exhibition is “difficult to fault”, said Sasha Grishin in *The Canberra Times*. “Huge without becoming tedious, well documented without being bookish, and visually powerful without being overwhelming”, it combines painting, sculpture and graphics with photography, film and installation. Covering the period 1916 to 1966, the show “sparkles” with key works drawn from the Musée National d’Art Moderne in Paris. From the early surrealist works by American artists including Pollock, Gorky and Motherwell, as well as major European artists such as Ernst, Delvaux, Duchamp and Miró, all the key surrealists are represented. René Magritte’s *Le Modèle Rouge* (1935) “competes for attention” with Giorgio de Chirico’s *Melancholy of an Afternoon* (1913), which “never fails to startle in the flesh”. Surrealist female artists are well represented with strong works from Dora Maar, who was always “somewhat marginalised as the mistress and muse of Picasso”. This show “is about as good as it gets”.

“One might wish for a higher percentage of paintings”, but this exhibition does manage to convey “a vivid overview of the surrealist adventure”, said John McDonald in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. From its almost imperceptible beginnings in Dadaism – the anti-art movement that arose from World War I and under the direction of “surrealist commander-in-chief” André Breton – surrealism developed an ambitious manifesto influenced by Freudian dream analysis and leftist revolutionary theory. But it was “basically a literary” movement that aimed to



Loup-table (Wolf-table) 1939, 1947 (foreground) by Victor Brauner

shatter the bourgeois complacency that dominated the cultural life of early 20th century Europe. The show includes many important works: Max Ernst’s *Ubu Imperator* (1923) – an homage to Dada playwright Alfred Jarry; Salvador Dalí’s classic *Partial Hallucination: Six Apparitions of Lenin on a Piano*; Miró’s “quasi-abstractions”; as well as *Femme Couchée* (1932), Picasso’s ode to his young mistress, Marie-Thérèse Walter. There are iconic images from “surrealist crowd-pleaser Magritte, whose paintings have transcended fine art and entered the realm of popular culture”, including *The Murderous Sky* (1927) and *The Rape* (1945).

“The surrealists sought to reach into the alternate psychic reality – the dark underworld below the level of consciousness and reason” to explain and explore the First World War’s “catastrophic failure of rationality”, said Christopher Allen in *The Australian*. One way to tap into the unconscious was automatic writing and, by extension, automatic drawings – as we see in the works of André Masson and Max Ernst; the opposite of automatism is represented by Dalí in his vivid renditions of dream imagery. Surrealism emphasised the importance of the marvellous, the mythic and, that much-abused term, desire. “But desire is not quite the same as pleasure”, as the sinister dolls of Hans Bellmer and Giacometti’s “grim vision of sexuality” reveals. What really interested the surrealists was the subconscious desire that breaks through surface appearances in accidents, slips and hysteria to reveal the irrational reality within.

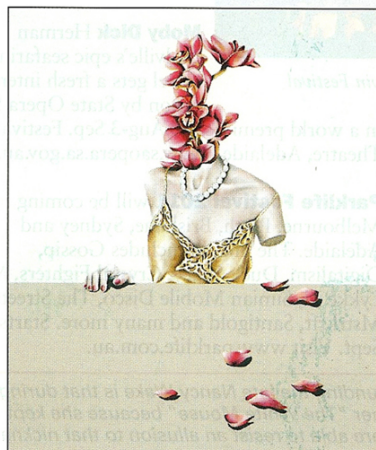
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The Week visits an exhibition in a private gallery

Silke Raetze: Elegant Surrender

at Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney

“At first glance, Silke Raetze’s cross-stitches are a fine example of the domestic arts,” says Andrew Taylor in *The Sun-Herald*. But Raetze’s needlepoint works may not appeal to the average nana. On each, she has stitched tickboxes with options for cosmetic enhancement such as “acid peel, Botox, facelift” under the ironic caption “free to choose”. These works form part of eleven creations by Raetze commenting on the “impossible standards of beauty” set by modern society. “The option to be yourself, as nature intended, is absent from the list and generally from our society,” says Raetze. Her manner of exploring this question is unique, according to gallery owner Michael Reid. The show also features Raetze’s paintings of female



Love me love me not – orchids ii
(77cm x 66cm, \$3,000)

figures with their limbs severed in a Venus de Milo fashion, with their heads replaced by feathers and flowers. There is ugliness, Raetze says, in this relentless futile fight for engineered, “age-defying perfection”.

44 Roslyn Gardens, Elizabeth Bay, NSW (02 8353 3500) until 2 September.

Capon bows out

After more than three decades, Edmund Capon is leaving the Art Gallery of NSW. “I thought I’d be here for a couple of years,” the 71-year-old told Sallie Don in *The Australian*. “I didn’t know they only bought you one-way tickets in those days.” Capon (below) is credited with making the gallery “accessible and popular”, compared with the “boring, staid” institution it once was. “Capon’s departure has been a long time in the making,” said *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Since 2008, “the bloggers have been baying for regime change”. While some have criticised the length of stay, others saw it as a strength that enabled him to guide the gallery along a particular path. His survival, in one of “the most political posts in NSW”, comes down to his ability to read “the nuances” of the rich and powerful. Capon “has achieved much”, said Christopher Allen in *The Australian*. As well as the exhibitions – blockbusters, surveys and focus shows – Capon was ideally suited to the social world of Sydney, with a familiarity that “went down well with the new money of Sydney society”.

