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26 September 2019, 2 p.m.
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OPENING TALK

Wieki Somers and Ronan Bouroullec in
conversation with Mateo Kries
27 September 2019, 6 p.m.
Fire Station

Objects of Desire Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today

28.09.2019 – 19.01.2020, Vitra Design Museum

Surrealism was one of the most influential art movements of the twentieth century. Everyday objects played a central role in its dreamlike imagery: they were alienated, ironized, or combined to create curious hybrids. This led to the creation of numerous key works of modern art, from Marcel Duchamp's »Bicycle Wheel« (1913) to Salvador Dalí's »Lobster Telephone« (1936). In reverse, Surrealism also exerted a decisive influence on the evolution of design. On 28 September 2019 the Vitra Design Museum will open a major exhibition that offers a comprehensive look at the dialogue between Surrealism and design. For the first time, it will unveil the extent to which Surrealism has influenced design of the past 100 years – from furniture and interiors to graphic design, fashion, and photography. The exhibition will include works by Gae Aulenti, BLESS, Achille Castiglioni, Giorgio de Chirico, Le Corbusier, Salvador Dalí, Dunne & Raby, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Ray Eames, Front, Frederick Kiesler, Shiro Kuramata, René Magritte, Carlo Mollino, Isamu Noguchi, Meret Oppenheim, Man Ray, Iris van Herpen, and many others.

Surrealism was founded by André Breton with the first Surrealist manifesto of 1924 and quickly became an international movement that included writers, artists, and filmmakers. The subconscious, dreams, obsessions, chance, and the irrational were just a few of the sources the Surrealists used to create a new artistic reality. In the 1930s Surrealism began to influence design as well, and by the 1940s, it had become a trend that shaped fashion, furniture, and photography, making it onto the covers of »Harper's Bazaar« and »Vogue«. To this day Surrealism is providing designers with manifold inspirations, whether motifs drawn from its fantastic imagery, its subversive approach, or its interest in the human psyche.

The exhibition »Objects of Desire« juxtaposes Surrealist artworks and design objects to reveal fascinating parallels and cross-references. Among the high-profile loans from the field of fine art are the paintings »The Red Model« (1947 or 1948) by René Magritte, Salvador Dalí's »Giant Flying Mocha Cup with an Inexplicable Five Metre Appendage« (1944/45), and »Forest, Birds and Sun« (1927) by Max Ernst as well as such Readymades as Marcel Duchamp's »Bottle Dryer« (1914) or »Gift« (1921) by Man Ray. The representatives of design range from works of the 1930s – such as Meret Oppenheim's table »Traccia« (1939) – to the contemporary, including fashion designs by Iris van Herpen, objects by Front, Konstantin Grcic, or Odd Matter as well as critical design projects that question new technologies or gender roles in subversive ways. These works demonstrate that design is not just about function and technology but also about objects' hidden realities, about our inherently secret dreams, obsessions, and myths – that is, the sur-real.

The exhibition begins with an examination of Surrealism from the 1920s to the 1950s in which the crucial role that design played in the movement's evolution becomes apparent. Inspired by Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, artists such as René Magritte and Salvador Dalí sought to capture the aura and the mysterious side of everyday things. At the same time – and strongly influenced by Marcel Duchamp's Readymades – artists like Meret Oppenheim or Man Ray experimented with an entirely new form of sculpture by creating absurd objects from found materials and objects. From the 1930s onwards, the search for objects' narrative potential had a growing influence on designers and architects such as Le Corbusier, as evidenced in, for example, the Parisian penthouse he designed for Carlos de Beistegui (1929 – 31), one of the most prominent collectors of Surrealist art. When many protagonists of Surrealism were forced to emigrate to the United States due to the rise of National Socialism in Germany and the occupation of France, the movement also began to influence designers on the other side of the Atlantic, including Ray Eames and Isamu Noguchi. In 1942 Frederick Kiesler demonstrated Surrealist spatial concepts in his interior design for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in Manhattan, New York. The biomorphic forms Kiesler developed for the gallery's furniture were emblematic for the emergence of the organic language of American post-war design.

The second section of the exhibition shows the ways in which Surrealists explored the archetypes of everyday objects and undermined the codes of meaning of a world we thought we knew. After 1945 many designers adopted similar strategies, among them Achille Castiglioni, whose surprising designs are often based on the idea of the Readymade that had already decisively inspired the Surrealists. Many designs by the Italian Radical Design movement – such as Piero Gilardi's »I Sassi« (1967/68) or Studio65's seating object »Capitello« (1971) – resemble the puzzling, decontextualized object fragments of Salvador Dalí or Giorgio de Chirico. Even Surrealist artists like Man Ray or Roberto Matta exploited the possibilities of new plastics in the 1960s and 1970s to transform Surrealist motifs into sculptural sitting objects. The decontextualization and alienation of the seemingly ordinary remain a driving force in more recent designs included in this exhibition section, such as Front's »Horse Lamp« (2006) or »Coathangerbrush« (1992) by Konstantin Grcic, who sees Marcel Duchamp as an important source of inspiration for his work.

The third part of the exhibition is devoted to the themes of love, eroticism, and sexuality, which played a central role in Surrealism. In the post-war period, these topics found their way into interior design, which is evident in the sensual interiors and furniture pieces of Italian designer Carlo Mollino

or in Salvador Dalí's »Mae West Lips Sofa« (1938), which was later adapted by Studio65 in their famous lip-shaped sofa »Bocca« (1970). The cross-pollinations between Surrealism and design are especially evident in fashion, fostered once again by Salvador Dalí. He collaborated with fashion legend Elsa Schiaparelli as early as the 1930s and designed various covers for fashion magazines as well as fashion advertisements and prints for textile companies. While the work of many male Surrealists is often interspersed with gender stereotypes, the work of many female Surrealists is characterized by more subtle exploration of these themes, making them an important reference for today's designers. This is conveyed by such exhibition pieces as Lee Miller's subversive fashion photographs, Claude Cahun's androgynous self-portraits, and Mimi Parent's assemblage »César« (n.d.). The dark side of sexuality also played an important role in Surrealism, not least inspired by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, which viewed love and eroticism as closely linked to counter-forces like violence, oppression, and destruction. In the exhibition these topics are visualized by works of Hans Bellmer and Wolfgang Paalen, and also found their way into design, as exemplified through objects by Gaetano Pesce, Maarten Baas, and Studio Wieki Somers. Somers's »High Tea Pot« (2003) bears the shape of a pig's skull and is covered by muskrat fur, thus undermining our notion of cosiness in a way similar to several works by Meret Oppenheim, one of the leading female Surrealists.

The exhibition's final section looks at what the French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called the »savage mind«: an interest in the archaic, in chance, and in the irrational which was as evident in the Surrealists' enthusiasm for non-Western tribal art as in their experiments with materials and techniques like »automatic painting«. In terms of art, this approach led to a visual vocabulary with its own formal logic, often characterized by rampant or melting forms as in the paintings of Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy. Comparable motifs have arisen in design since the 1980s, when experimental approaches gained traction and designers began to deconstruct the forms and typologies of objects. A striking example of this is Robert Stadler's seating object »Pools & Pouf« (2004), in which a classic Chesterfield sofa appears to melt like the objects in Salvador Dalí's paintings. Ingo Maurer's lamp »Porca Miseria!« (1994), which appears to explode, and Nacho Carbonell's »Cocoon 8« (2015), a hybrid of table and lamp, reveal similar approaches. Direct references to Surrealist imagery can be found in the video for Björk's song »Hidden Place« (2010) in which a tear trickles down the singer's face – a reference to Man Ray's famous photograph »The Tears« (c. 1932). Projects from the field of Critical Design, in particular, find decisive inspiration in Surrealism's subversive, socio-critical agenda. One example is Dunne & Raby's »Designs for an overpopulated planet: The Foragers« (2009) consisting of fictitious objects for a dystopian future that are situated between art and design, reality and fiction.

These examples demonstrate the enduring vitality of the dialogue between Surrealism and design. Surrealism has encouraged designers to examine the reality beneath what is visible and to design objects that offer resistance, undermine routine, and disrupt the quotidian. It has liberated post-war design from the corset of functionalism and led our gaze away from the shape of objects to their hidden, unconscious messages. The exhibition »Objects of Desire« examines this phenomenon for the first time and thus directs our attention to one of the most significant dialogues between art and design of the past century.

Designer and Artist List

Alvar Aalto
Jean Arp
Antonin Artaud
Gae Aulenti
Maarten Baas
Hans Bellmer
Denise Bellon
Björk
BLESS
Louise Bourgeois
Erwan & Ronan Bouroullec
Andrea Branzi
Alberto de Braud
Victor Brauner
André Breton
Luis Buñuel
Claude Cahun
Fernando & Humberto Campana
Nacho Carbonell
A. M. Cassandre
Achille Castiglioni
Pier Giacomo Castiglioni
Giorgio de Chirico
René Clair
Comme des Garçons (Rei Kawakubo)
Salvador Dalí
Maya Deren
Robert Desnos
Óscar Domínguez
Marcel Duchamp
Germaine Dulac
Dunne & Raby
Ray Eames
Aube Elléouët Breton
Paul Éluard
Max Ernst
Leonor Fini
Piero Fornasetti
Ruth Francken
Pedro Friedeberg
Front
Antoni Gaudí
Piero Gilardi
Konstantin Grcic
Iris van Herpen
Marcel Jean
Allen Jones
André Kertész
Frederic Kiesler
Shiro Kuramata
Alicja Kwade
Danny Lane
Audrey Large
Le Corbusier
Lee Bul
Dora Maar
René Magritte
Man Ray
Marcel Mariën
Roberto Sebastián Matta Echaurren
Ingo Maurer
Lee Miller
Patrick Mimouni
Carlo Mollino
Isamu Noguchi
Odd Matter
Richard Oelze
Meret Oppenheim
Wolfgang Paalen
Mimi Parent
Irving Penn
Gaetano Pesce
Viviane Sassen
Elsa Schiaparelli
Kurt Seligmann
Dan Tobin Smith
Ettore Sottsass
Philippe Soupault
Robert Stadler
Studio Wieki Somers
Studio65
Yves Tanguy
Dorothea Tanning
Aldo Tura
Raoul Ubac
Nanda Vigo
Francesca Woodman

Publication

Surrealism expanded our reality by drawing upon myths, dreams, and the subconscious as sources of artistic inspiration. Beginning in the 1930s, the movement made a crucial impact on design, and it continues to inspire designers to this day.

»Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today« is the first book to document this fascinating conversation. It includes numerous essays and a comprehensive selection of images which trace these reciprocal exchanges by juxtaposing exemplary artworks and design objects. Among the featured artists and designers are Gae Aulenti, BLESS, Achille Castiglioni, Fernando & Humberto Campana, Le Corbusier, Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Front, Iris van Herpen, Frederick Kiesler, René Magritte, Carlo Mollino, Meret Oppenheim, and many others. The book is rounded off with historical quotes as well as short statements by contemporary designers. This in-depth examination makes one thing abundantly clear: form does not always follow function – it can also follow our obsessions, our fantasies, and our hidden desires.



Objects of Desire Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today

Editors: Mateo Kries, Tanja Cunz

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TALKS | EVENTS | WORKSHOPS

Form follows Fiction?

Wieki Somers and Ronan Bouroullec in conversation with Mateo Kries

OPENING TALK (EN) | 27 September 2019

6 pm, Fire Station

Ronan Bouroullec is one of the leading designers of our time, Wieki Somers has gained international acclaim working at the interface of design and art. At the opening of the exhibition »Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design«, these two will join Mateo Kries, director of the Vitra Design Museum and curator of the exhibition, in a talk about design and the surreal. They will address fundamental design issues, inquiring into the roles that chance and the subconscious play in new designs. Does form invariably follow function? Where is the boundary between design and art – if it exists at all? Free admission, registration by 23 September 2019 under events@design-museum.de

Wednesday Matinee – Objects of Desire

CURATOR'S TOUR (DE) | 9 October 2019

10 am, Vitra Design Museum

Mateo Kries, director of the Vitra Design Museum and curator of the exhibition, takes visitors on a guided tour of »Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design«, explaining its fundamental ideas and sharing background details about its inception and development.

€ 10.00 per person

Humberto Campana – Welcome the Surreal!

TALK (EN) | 10 October 2019

6:30 pm, Vitra Schaudapot

Humberto and Fernando Campana are Latin America's leading designers whose works appear in many acclaimed interiors, including Kylie Jenner's living room. Their installations, lamps, and furniture – the »Favela Chair« (1991) is probably their best-known piece – are provocative, playful, and imaginative. Humberto Campana's talk about his design work is followed by a conversation with Mateo Kries, director of the Vitra Design Museum.

Free admission, registration: events@design-museum.de

Barbara Vinken – Fashion and Surrealism: Images of Femininity from Dalí to Dior

TALK (DE) | 7 November 2019

6:30 pm, Vitra Schaudapot

Literary scholar and fashion expert Barbara Vinken explores the role of women in fashion and art. In her talk she will address the often piquant relationships between Surrealism, fashion, and changing images of femininity. What does it mean that Salvador Dalí designed a lip-shaped sofa and Man Ray painted the f-holes of a stringed instrument onto a female nude? What impact did Surrealism have on fashion, and what is its lasting influence on such contemporary fashion designers as Rei Kawakubo from Comme des Garçons or Iris van Herpen?

Free admission

Dress Up! Surrealist Seating
SPECIAL WORKSHOP (DE) | 10 November 2019
10:30 am, Vitra Schaudapot

From Meret Oppenheim's furry teacup to the »Horse Lamp« (2006) designed by the Swedish Front Design group – in Surrealism nothing is what it seems as costumes and camouflage transform the familiar world into a mysterious realm of secrets and stories. This is precisely what this workshop accompanying the exhibition »Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design« is proposing to do: Participants will use various materials and methods to dress up a chair, transforming a familiar piece of furniture into an original and playful design object to take home.

€ 65.00 per person, registration: info@design-museum.de

The Sounds of Surrealism – Air Cushion Finish
Music Performance in the Exhibition (DE/EN/FR) | 16 November 2019
8 pm, Vitra Design Museum

The Berlin-based sound art duo Air Cushion Finish, consisting of JayRope and Lippstueck, will transform the museum into a mysterious realm situated between dream and reality. Their concert in the exhibition »Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design« features a wide array of sound-producing objects as well as electronic music and filters. JayRope's instrumental performance and Lippstueck's soft vocals exert a hypnotic fascination, offering a musical interpretation of Surrealist motifs. Concertgoers are welcome to explore the exhibition as they listen.

Free admission, registration: events@design-museum.de

Man Ray to Campana: Light Sculptures
SPECIAL WORKSHOP (DE) | 24 November 2019
10:30 am, Vitra Schaudapot

Lighting is a fascinating challenge for many designers and artists – from Man Ray, who designed the Surrealist object »Lampshade« (1964), to Fernando and Huberto Campana, who find suggestive uses for recycled materials. Inspired by these and similar examples, the participants in this design workshop will use materials like wire, glass, wood, and textiles to create atmospheric light sculptures that brighten up the winter days.

€ 65.00 per person, registration: info@design-museum.de

Surrealism Tandem Tour.
A Cooperation of Kunstmuseum Basel and Vitra Design Museum
SPECIAL (DE) | 7 December 2019
2 pm, Kunstmuseum Basel
5 pm, Vitra Design Museum

This tandem tour gives participants a chance to approach Surrealism from different angles. After being introduced to selected works of Surrealist art in the collection of Kunstmuseum Basel, they continue to the Vitra Design Museum, where the exhibition »Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design« presents Surrealist furniture, lamps, and other design objects. The tour ends with an aperitif offered at Vitra Design Museum.

€ 25.00 per person, registration: events@design-museum.de

Man Ray, Buñuel, Dalí – Surrealist Cinema

SPECIAL (DE/EN) | 12 December 2019

8 pm, Business Lounge at the VitraHaus

Some of the milestones of film history were created by Surrealist artists like Man Ray, Luis Buñuel, and Salvador Dalí. Apart from the dream worlds, obsessions, and chance encounters one would expect from a Surrealist director, their cinematic works also feature path-breaking visual experiments. Following an introduction by assistant curator Tanja Cunz, we will screen Surrealism's most important films. Although cinemagoers can look forward to popcorn and comfortable lounge chairs, the evening is unlikely to get too cosy: Surrealist films were made to shock and perturb, using an entirely new approach to narration.

Free admission, registration: events@design-museum.de

Noire et Blanche: Guided Tour and Surrealist Dinner

SPECIAL (DE) | 11 January 2020

6 pm, Vitra Design Museum

The exhibition »Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design« provides the occasion for a special Surrealist evening at the Vitra Design Museum. An exclusive guided tour giving insights into the exhibition's background and ideas is followed by dinner at the Depot Deli in an ambience evoking the culinary fantasies of Man Ray and Salvador Dalí. An evening between dream and reality.

€ 65.00 per person incl. dinner, registration: events@desig-museum.de

Basel Museum Night: Surreal Dreams

SPECIAL (DE/EN/FR) | 17 January 2020

6 pm, Vitra Campus

On the occasion of Basel's Museum Night, we will transform the Vitra Campus into a dream world of light and shadow. Situated between the conscious and the subconscious, the world of dreams explored by the Surrealists emerges as a visual and physical experience as visitors enter the Fire Station's interactive light installation. A mask-building workshop and guided tours of the exhibition give visitors the opportunity to learn more about Surrealism and design.

General information:

Exhibition title: Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today

Curator: Dr. Mateo Kries

Assistant curator: Tanja Cunz

Curatorial assistant: Isabelle Schorer

Exhibition design: EMYL

Press conference: 26 September 2019, 2 p.m.

Opening: 27 September 2019, 6 p.m.

Duration: 28 September 2019 until 19 January 2020

Opening hours: daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Hashtag: #VDM Surrealism

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Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today

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