



Leonora Carrington, *En el barco (for Edward James)*, 1954.



Mary Wykeham, *Dream-Desert*, 1979.

The Reality of Surrealism

There is little in this world more surreal than war.

During World War I, as a young medical student, André Breton was sent to the frontlines at Verdun, France, as a stretcher-bearer, where he witnessed the mental torment of the bloodied soldiers. Later, while working in hospital psychiatric wards, caring for shell-shock victims, he encountered the writings of Sigmund Freud, who theorized that people are divided between their conscious minds, dominated by reason and social constraints, and the unconscious, where a reservoir of instincts, desires, and raw experiences lie repressed, awaiting the opportunity to break through and have their voice. Breton noted the connection between Freud and the psychiatric patients' more visceral way of expressing their world.

These sensibilities took root with Breton. He was already immersed in the riotous wave of Dadaism and the current of postwar feelings of defeat-

The Hepworth Wakefield in England mounts an exhibition exploring the significance of Surrealist landscape from the early practitioners to today's rising stars.

By Patti Zielinski

YAN DU COLLECTION. © ESTATE OF LEONORA CARRINGTON/ARS, NY AND DACS, LONDON.

© JUDITH WYKEHAM PERMANENT ART COLLECTION (THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD)



Salvador Dalí, *Mountain Lake*, 1938.

ism and disgust from the aftermath of the absurdity of the political and military might and the resulting carnage that mankind wrought on one another.

It was through this lens that Breton gradually developed the tenets espoused in his *Manifeste du surréalisme* (*Manifesto of Surrealism*). Its publication in 1924 spurred an international movement that broke down the boundaries between dreams and reality, rejected reason, called for a reimagining of ourselves, and turned art into a revolution to overthrow oppressive structures.

A century later, everything—and yet nothing—has changed. “Forbidden Territories: 100 Years of Surreal Landscapes” (November 23, 2024 to April 27, 2025), exclusively at The Hepworth Wakefield in West Yorkshire, England, commemorates the centennial of Breton’s *Manifesto*, which gave rise to the Surrealism movement.

The show adapts its title from Breton’s description of the Surrealist project as “the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbid-

den territories,” pushing for automatism: art created by thought in the absence of reason, beyond esthetic or moral considerations.

This is the first UK survey to explore the role of landscape in one of the most influential artistic, intellectual, and literary movements of the 20th century. “Forbidden Territories” features 100 Surrealist works that showcase artists across mediums—from Breton’s circle in the 1920s to contemporary artists who have assumed the legacy of the Surrealist mantle.

“This unique survey will take visitors on a fantastical journey through an array of surrealist landscapes, some well-known and some rarely seen,” says Eleanor Clayton, head of collection and exhibitions at The Hepworth Wakefield. “Bringing exceptional Modern art in dialogue with the best of contemporary practice is at the heart of our program at The Hepworth Wakefield. We are delighted to be showing long-established masterpieces in Wakefield for the first time, alongside newly commissioned artwork, showing that the influence of Surrealism—one of the most dynamic



Nicolas Party, *Landscape*, 2022.

and wide-reaching art movements of the twentieth century—is still alive to this day.”

The exhibition features the likes of Salvador Dalí, Eileen Agar, Lee Miller, and Max Ernst, alongside later Surrealists such as Leonora Carrington, Edith Rimmington, Marion Adnams, Conroy Maddox, Desmond Morris, and contemporary artists Shuvinai Ashoona, Stefanie Heinze, Helen Marten, Nicolas Party, and Wael Shawky.

The show is presented in transhistorical groupings and explores how landscape, when seen through the Surrealist lens, becomes a metaphor for the unconscious, fuses the bodily with the botanical, and is a conduit to express political anxieties, gender constraints, and freedoms.

When Breton published his *Manifesto*, landscapes were already a popular subject, with artists pushing the boundaries of the representational by experimenting with non-natural colors and paint applications. The Surrealists took this approach to another level, employing dream imagery, resulting in fantastical, otherworldly landscapes reflecting the complexities of inner life often juxtaposed

with enough familiar geography—mountains, bodies of water, trees and foliage—to challenge the viewer’s concept of the natural world as something only “outside” of their physicality. This notion of “the uncanny”—a Freudian concept of encountering something that is simultaneously familiar but yet alien—leads to strange and often frightening combinations that provide a pathway to unlocking repressed thoughts.

The Surrealists used central elements from Breton’s *Manifesto*, including automatism and psychoanalysis of childhood memories, as a lens to view landscapes anew. One such example in the exhibition is the pairing of *La dernière forêt* (*The last forest*) by Max Ernst with *Merveilles Des Mers* (*Wonders of the Seas*) by Yves Tanguy — paintings that draw on the artists’ formative memories of the forests of Bavaria and seashores of Brittany respectively, alongside the first UK site-specific mural by Swiss artist Nicolas Party, who is known for his monumental, immersive murals made with soft pastel.

La dernière forêt (1960–69), one of Ernst’s final paintings before his death at 84, recalls his own surreal early memory: the

© SALVADOR DALÍ, FUNDACIÓ GALA-SALVADOR DALÍ, DACS 2024

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE MODERN INSTITUTE/TONY WEBSTER LTD., GLASGOW. PHOTO: ADAM REICH



Max Ernst, *La dernière forêt*, 1960–1970.

juxtaposition of terror and enchantment he felt upon encountering a dense forest when he was only three. Dark forests filled with mystery went on to become a favorite theme—the subject of more than 80 works in a variety of media. Rather than representational, Ernst’s depictions of the forest evoke emotion, a sense of disquiet, unease, mystery.

Tanguy’s painting from 1936 also harkens to nascent memories: blue-gray swells and a frothing sea rising to just a hint of misty horizon that form the backdrop of the familiar—his youth growing up in a maritime family, his work in the Merchant Navy, and dreamy figures of his subconscious, both futuristic and prehistoric, that populate the lower third of the canvas. The work is representative of Tanguy’s method of painting with intuitive meditation, a trance-like approach that leads to organic representations.

Similarly, Party takes an intuitive approach to his work, creating uncanny portraits, landscapes, and still lifes. In “Forbidden Territories,” he pays homage to his predecessors by selecting historic Surreal landscapes to install on the mural, offering a contempo-

rary twist on the Surrealist strategy of collage and juxtaposition.

The Surrealists do not abandon the viewer on these journeys; embedded symbolism often acts as a torchbearer, guiding the way through the unexpected imagery into the artists’ inner worlds to a deeper understanding of their reality, memory, and subconscious. Take, for example, the telephone in Salvador Dalí’s *Mountain Lake*, which was created in 1938, a time when Europe was on the precipice of war. Telephones, a frequent motif in his work, were a new invention when he was young. This painting has been thought to suggest a conversation between British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler—but the phone, supported by crutches, and the broken line hints to the feelings of instability in any connection. Alternatively, the crutch could also be read as a symbol of death, perhaps foreshadowing the cost of human lives during World War II.

Beyond showcasing works by central figures like Jean Arp, René Magritte, and Francis Picabia, “Forbidden Territories” delves into lesser-explored artists and narratives, drawing a line between

© ADAGP, PARIS AND DACS, LONDON, DEPOSIT OF THE CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE/CENTRE DE CRÉATION INDUSTRIELLE. PHOTO: CYRILLE CAUVEY/MUSEE D'ART MODERNE ET SAINT-ETIENNE METROPOLE

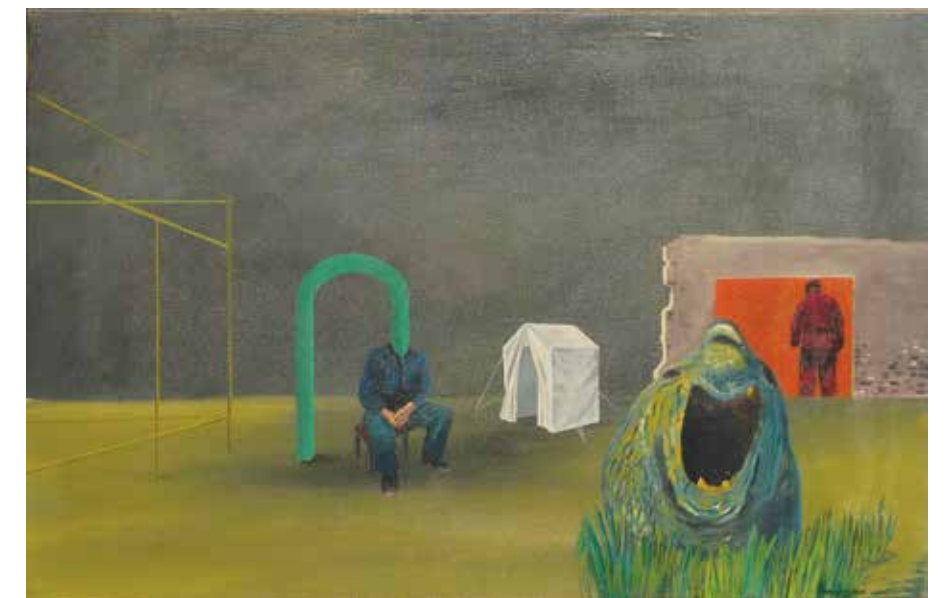
© ADAGP, PARIS AND DACS, LONDON, NORFOLK MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY (NORFOLK MUSEUM SERVICE); THE SHERWIN FAMILY COLLECTION. KIND PERMISSION FOR REPRODUCTION OF **LANDSCAPE OF THE NIGHT** IS GIVEN BY THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER



Above: René Magritte, *La Condition Humaine*, 1935. Below: Conroy Maddox, *Landscape of the Night*, 1939. Oil on canvas.

Surrealism and ecology to contemporary environmental issues. Note, for example, the visual discussions that emerge between the human-animal-botanical hybrids of zoologist-artist Desmond Morris and the enigmatic composite creatures of Leonora Carrington against contemporary artists Shuvinai Ashoona’s fantastical drawings depicting contemporary Inuit life and Stefanie Heinze’s animal-like figures and brightly colored compositions.

As a teenager during World War II, horrified by the carnage, Morris found a sympathetic sensibility in the essays of the Surrealists who railed against the establishment during World War I and began painting in a similar style. Later, he became captivated by the art created by apes, chronicling their





Left: Ro Robertson, works from interlude series, 2023/4.
Above: Yves Tanguy, *Merveilles des Mers (Wonders of the Seas)*, 1936.

of hierarchy to emphasize the interconnectedness of all living things.”

Notably for the museum, “Forbidden Territories” marks the debut of Jean Arp’s plaster sculptures, given to The Hepworth Wakefield’s collection by the Jean Arp Foundation. The plasters, which span several decades of the artist’s career, exemplify the Surrealist biomorphism at the heart of his oeuvre.

The show also shines a spotlight on paintings, drawings, etchings on paper, and copper printing plates by Mary Wykeham, a free-spirited artist from the Isle of Wight who, fueled by political and social awareness, became captivated by the Surrealists’ challenge to the world’s social and political order by altering consciousness—only to shrink into the shadows when she pivoted to pursue religion as a nun in 1950 at the height of her career. Like many Surrealist female artists, she has been regrettably neglected, and this exhibition gives Wykeham her due with the largest public showing of her work since her solo show at Galerie des Deux Îles, Paris in 1949. The showing of these works (preserved by her convent and donated to The Hepworth Wakefield by her family) ride the wave of posthumous recognition sparked by the publication of *Mary Wykeham: Surrealist Out of the Shadows* (2023) by Silvano Levy.

Throughout “Forbidden Territories,” the stage is set for a dialogue across generations, such as the juxtaposition of sculptures and paintings by Egyptian contemporary artist Wael Shawky against photographs of Egypt taken by Lee Miller during World

aesthetic satisfaction and the works’ compositional balance and harmony, which was akin to the scribbles of young children.

Ritual and magic are the threads linking the hybrid human-bird beings that populate Carrington’s *En el barco (for Edward James)*; c.1954), an homage to the exile of the titular patron of the arts and Carrington who escaped the war in Europe to Mexico across a vacant sea to pursue Surrealist interests.

Similar biomorphs populate the paintings and drawings of Ashoona, an Inuit who lives in the Arctic north of Canada and chronicles her daily life in Kinngait, often incorporating shape-shifting creatures drawn from Inuit culture and mythology. “*In Composition (Monster Pulling Roots)*; 2020), a human-faced seal accompanies a walruswoman hybrid—the monster of the title—who pulls up a tree while suckling a dragon-like creature,” Clayton explains in the catalogue. “Quite aside from the fantastical creatures therein, Ashoona’s composition itself is uncanny in the relational scale between man, animal and nature, and the pictorial flattening of the entities within, undermining any sense

© RO ROBERTSON. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MAXIMILIAN WILLIAM. INSTALLATION VIEW OF “MODERN THRESHOLDS: RO ROBERTSON,” TATE ST IVES, ST IVES, CORNWALL. © ARS, NY AND DACS, LONDON. NAHMAD COLLECTION

© MARÍA BERRIO. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND VICTORIA MIRO. PHOTO: BRUCE M. WHITE. WAKEFIELD COUNCIL PERMANENT ART COLLECTION (THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD). GIFT OFFERED BY THE JEAN ARP FOUNDATION, 2024. PHOTO: RÜDIGER LUBRICH, WORPSWEDE



Above: María Berrio, *Open Geometry*, 2022. Below: Jean Arp, *Landscape or a Woman*, 1962.

War I. The dual presentation creates a visual connection between these diverse surreal depictions of the landscapes of North Africa with undertones of political and societal tensions.

Though a century later wars still rage globally, contemporary artists are finding battle lines being drawn in other sectors: struggles for the health of our environment and the wrestle for control over physical bodies and gender identity. New work by contemporary artists María Berrio, whose collage *Solastalgia* (2024) explores the environmental fallout of a post-apocalyptic world, and Ro Robertson, whose oeuvre references connections between physical form and environment through a queer perspective, is brought together here alongside Surrealists Ithell Colquhoun and Dora Maar who, a generation before, traversed the landscape of the body as though it were one with the earth.

A century later, it appears, there are forbidden territories still to explore. 🗺️

