

The Museum of Modern Art

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ANNOUNCES AN EXHIBITION OF SURREALIST ARTISTS' BOOKS AND THEIR CRUCIAL ROLE WITHIN THE MOVEMENT

The Surrealist Book Will Feature Extraordinary Highlights from the Recently Acquired Helen and Sam Zell Collection

NEW YORK, June 1, 2026 — The Museum of Modern Art will present *The Surrealist Book*, an exhibition showcasing the propulsive impact of artists' books within the Surrealist movement. For the artists and writers associated with Surrealism, the book was an ideal vehicle for subversive experimentation and the promotion of their revolutionary tenets. Working collaboratively to unlock the unconscious, they transformed the bound volume into a provocative new art form, an enchanted portal to the unexpected, the irrational, or what they called the "marvelous." On view at MoMA from October 4, 2026, through January 23, 2027, *The Surrealist Book* features a selection of rare volumes produced by Surrealism's most imaginative artists and writers, including André Breton, Claude Cahun, Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, Max Ernst, and Toyen. The exhibition is organized by Jodi Hauptman, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints, and Starr Figura, Curator, with Kolleen Ku, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints.

The exhibition presents—for the first time at MoMA—a transformative gift of artists' books from the Helen and Sam Zell Collection, which came to the Museum in 2022. The Zell Collection is one of the most significant collections of artists' books formerly in private hands. Comprising approximately 100 works, it spans the period from 1857 to 2014, with an extensive and unparalleled concentration of editions and unique book works made in the context of Surrealism and its legacy. What unites these volumes is a sensibility that extends from the Surrealists' profound sensitivity to all facets of the book, from the intellectual and poetic to the formal and tactile, from the intimate and personal to the subversive and revolutionary.

Anchored by this singular collection, the exhibition will display special first editions printed on unusual papers or enhanced with supplementary materials, unique maquettes and singular sketchbooks filled with collages and fantastical drawings, sculptural bindings that turn books into hybrid, interactive artworks, and much more. Among the extraordinary rarities in the Zell Collection are original manuscripts for some of Surrealism's iconic texts, including Breton's *Manifeste du surréalisme*; *Poisson soluble* (Surrealist Manifesto; Soluble Fish) (1924); outstanding book works by such women artists as Unica Zürn, who filled a private notebook with intricate drawings of hybrid animal-human creatures; and one-of-a-

kind bindings by Georges Hugnet that incorporate unexpected materials like liquid mercury or shattered glass.

The Surrealist Book foregrounds intimate partnerships between artists and poets, such as that of Dalí, Breton, and Éluard in *L'Immaculée conception* (The Immaculate Conception) (1930); radical explorations of materiality, including the *frottage* rubbings Ernst made for *Mr. Knife, Miss Fork* (1931) and *Je Sublime* (I Sublime) (1936); photographic experiments, such as the kaleidoscopic photomontages in Cahun and Marcel Moore's *Aveux non Avenus* (Cancelled Confessions) (1930) and the solarized nudes by Man Ray that merge with Éluard's love poems in *Facile* (Easy) (1935); and dynamic typography, as exemplified by Hugnet and Marcel Duchamp's *La septième face du dé: Poèmes-découpages* (The Seventh Face of the Die: Collage Poems) (1936). Through these and other works, the exhibition demonstrates the centrality of bookmaking within Surrealism and the artist's book's place among the most compelling achievements of avant-garde art in the 20th century.

The exhibition begins in the 1920s, when collaborations between writers and artists became a driving force in Surrealist practice and the Surrealist book emerged as one of the movement's most prevalent, expressive, and significant art forms. Works made in the 1930s capture the expansive ambition of the movement's members, as Surrealist artists and poets lavished attention on the book's aesthetic and material possibilities and sought to spread their ideas across the globe. Ever more intricately conceived and elaborately housed, with texts and images increasingly transgressive and unfettered—and distribution networks expanding internationally—the book evolved into a quintessential Surrealist object of desire and a key emissary in the field.

With the rise of fascism and war in the late 1930s and '40s, books became stealth agents of resistance, as publishers searched for covert ways to distribute their antiwar books and private homes served as clandestine printshops for volumes such as Toyen and Jindřich Heisler's *Z kasemat spánku: Realisované básně* (From the Strongholds of Sleep: Realized Poems) (1940). Well into the postwar period, the Surrealists continued to deploy published editions and unique volumes to explore and communicate their ideas. In the landmark *A Toute Épreuve* (Proof Against All) (1958), for example, Joan Miró's colorful biomorphic woodcuts float playfully around Éluard's lyrical poems. Meanwhile, a new generation of artists and writers, including Charles Henri Ford, William S. Burroughs, and Brion Gysin, took up Surrealist strategies of collaboration, collage, and chance within the pages of their own inventive books, using them to create new ways to bypass the conscious mind.

“A sense of the marvelous, the pursuit of new forms of expression via collaborative means, an invitation to expand consciousness; these aspects of Surrealism are fully activated in the Surrealist book,” says Hauptman. “At its most quintessential and exquisite, the Surrealist book combined the literary, artistic, and political in a way that no other object could, and enabled the spread of Surrealist thought in a way that no other vehicle would.”

Figura adds, “For the Surrealists, a book was like a door, a portal to a higher realm, where untold surprises and liberatory revelations await. *The Surrealist Book* demonstrates how and why books were so meaningful, evocative, and inspiring for the Surrealists, and it offers a rare opportunity to see their experiments with this medium at their most dazzling and creative.”

The Surrealist Book will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue exploring the Zell Collection’s rare and unique artists’ books, highlighting experimentation with unconventional materials and innovative formats, and discussing the contexts in which these special volumes were created. The catalogue is edited by Jodi Hauptman and Starr Figura, with contributions by leading scholars, curators, and conservators, including Barbora Bartunkova, Chang Yuchen, Lee Ann Daffner, Leah Dickerman, Hal Foster, Hannah Freed-Thall, Samantha Friedman, Johanna Gosse, Kolleen Ku, Alyce Mahon, Sean O’Hanlan, Caitlin Richeson, Abigail Susik, Whitney Trettien, Anne Umland, and Annie Wilker with Sonya Barron. Hardcover, \$75. ISBN: 978-1-63345-181-0. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

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