

# RGR

## Playing with closed eyes, 100 years of surrealism

Karina Aguilera Skvirsky, Mercedes Azpilicueta, Guillermina Baigorri, Juan Batlle Planas, El Techo de la Ballena (Daniel González), Leonora Carrington, Marcelo Cidade, Hilma's Ghost, Magdalena Fernández, Vicente Forte, Gunther Gerzso, Elsa Gramcko, Oliverio Gironde, Patrick Hamilton, Kati Horna, José Horna, Magali Lara, Francisco Muñoz, Jose Manuel Moraña, José Planas Casas, Diego Pérez, Alice Rahon, Xul Solar, Remedios Varo and Oswaldo Vigas

**RGR galería** presents on February 6, 2024 *Playing with closed eyes, 100 years of surrealism*, a group exhibition with historical and contemporary works and documents commemorating one hundred years of surrealism and the use of the game in Modern art.

The exhibition, curated by Gabriela Rangel with guest curator Verónica Rossi, aims to recover the exquisite corpse as an idea of playful creation and practice of surreal automatism, which is particularly productive for thinking of it in relation to current debates on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Artificial intelligence shows transmuted realities and creates an imaginary that disrupts classical representation, as surrealism imagined the region that divides dreams from waking, altering forms and changing the perception and experience of the world.

The display presents a broad, non-historic and non-linear narrative made of artifacts, paintings, sculptures, drawings, documents, and photographs that invite us to look at this century-old avant-garde as a way of introspection into the future of reality, human faculties, and their infinite capacity to expand the boundaries of the possible.

Why surrealism? In addition to the mythical effects generated by the trips of Antonin Artaud and André Breton to Mexico, the country (and Latin America) had an important nucleus of artists, activists and writers who were founders of the movement and who arrived from Europe after fleeing World War II. The exhibition highlights the work of creative couple José and Kati Horna and their network of friends, indispensable figures in understanding the scope of the development of surrealism. During his visit to the country in 1938, Bretón declared: "Mexico tends to be the surrealist place par excellence. I find Mexico surreal in its relief, in its flora, in the dynamism that the mixture of its races gives it, as well as in its higher aspirations."

Curiously, there is no historical avant-garde movement that successfully reinvented itself throughout the 20th century and part of the 21st century in as many different cultural contexts as surrealism did. Its radius of action covered the streets of Paris, Prague, Milano, Brussels, Lima, Barcelona, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Havana, Martinique, Santiago, Sao Paulo, and Tokyo. The neologism that named the ism prefigured by the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire appeared prior to the creation of the aforementioned artistic group, formally created in December 1924 in Paris by young intellectuals and writers.

Surrealism proposed to review the very definition of reality that at that time required an expanded or problematized notion of its confines due to the leading role of technology in life (and war) and the aspirations for change of the social movements that proposed the search of a new political spectrum. The members of the founding group sought to renew the culture in ruins after the political and economic catastrophe caused by the Great War and the terrible demographic consequences left by the Spanish flu, as well as the appearance of fascism in Europe.

The ism *itself* emerged as a crystallization of the playful pessimism of Dada with a kind of Gothic unfolding of romanticism. But while the members of the Cabaret Voltaire, anarchists, artists and writers, lit the spark of sympathizers simultaneously with their appearance in countries such as Germany, Spain, Italy, Romania, France, and the United States and later wanted to merge with the anti-art program offered by the first surrealism, it instead managed to quickly adopt its own identity and separated from Dada as a radical aesthetic-political postulate in the post-war period.

Surrealism's primary organ of dissemination was publications, the first of which was *La Révolution Surréaliste*, a magazine under the care of editors Pierre Naville and Benjamin Péret (who lived through the war years in Mexico), as well as books of poetry and poetic prose produced by its founders. Simultaneously with the emergence of the founding magazine of the movement, André Breton, who early on assumed leadership of the group, published the first Surrealist Manifesto as a prologue to his book *Poisson Soluble* (Soluble Fish) which was written using the automatic writing method:

*Surrealism does not allow those dedicated to it to abandon it when they please. Everything leads one to believe that surrealism acts on spirits just as narcotics do; Like them, it creates a certain state of need and can induce man to tremendous rebellions. We can also say that surrealism is a very artificial paradise, and the love for this paradise derives from the study of Baudelaire, as does the love for other artificial paradises. The analysis of the mysterious effects and the special pleasures that surrealism can give cannot be missed in the present study, and it is to be noted that, in many aspects, surrealism seems to be a new vice that is not the exclusive privilege of a few individuals but rather, like hash, can satisfy all those with refined tastes.*

From its inception, surrealism was an internationalist and militant group, subject to constant ideological purges and programmatic revisions by its founders, in particular by Breton and Louis Aragon. However, its members favored theoretical collaborations and contributions from non-European philosophers, writers, and artists who were an inspiration or close to their ethos during a century of longevity, such as the poet Count of Lautremont (Isadore Ducasse) and the radical Peruvian poet living in Mexico, César Moro, who together with Austrian Wolfgang Paalen and Inés Amor organized the International Surrealist exhibition at GAM in Mexico City in 1940. Despite the dogmatism that characterized the surrealists, they denied in successive editorials any static definition or doctrinal intention to establish an open program based on “*automatic writing and the telling of dreams.*”

This exhibition invites us to ask ourselves from the game and the archive if the combination between neural networks, computer games and linguistic models present in AI could acquire a productive dimension when contrasted with the aspiration of creating a new reality unfolded by the ludic sense given the need to explore the material of dreams, as well as the human imagination and psyche. Do machines play the same as humans? Can you feel or dream like in science fiction? Or in the words of ChatGPT artificial intelligence creator Sam Altman, are [these machines] a tool or a creature?