

Magritte

27 SEPTEMBER
24 OCTOBER 1961

GROSVENOR
GALLERY

Magritte



A SELF-APPOINTED MISSION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

After the first world war, the then practically unknown Piet Mondrian with his Dutch "Neo-plasticism" occupied the most advanced position in the *plastic arts* in Paris, obviously influencing Fernand Léger, Le Corbusier, Herbin and others. His colleague, Theo Van Doesburg, was preaching along the same lines in Berlin and in Dessau (Bauhaus). The same influences spread among young painters in Belgium. They had a rather common tendency towards a certain constructivism (a weak display, compared with that of the Dutch "De Stijl" group) pretending to put painting at the service of architecture. In the face of this stream of cheap theorising, Magritte discreetly appeared, standing for the "poetic" opposed to the "rational"—just as Giorgio de Chirico had countered the cubist flow in 1911. Magritte was happily supported by a few poets whose intelligence and awareness could easily confound the "second-rate democrat-materialism" of the self-styled "Constructivists".

It is true that, at the same time, in Paris, some painters and sculptors like Max Ernst, Man Ray, Hans Arp had been switching from Dada to the effective surrealist Revolution and its experiments in psychic automatism. They were soon joined by men like André Masson, by the fanciful genius Joan Miró and later by the visionary Yves Tanguy. However, Magritte remained unique in his quest: he alone tested the images of reality in order to endow them with poetical power without putting paintely artifice in the foreground.

This self-ascribed mission has been acknowledged in the most precise and brilliant wording by Andre Breton in 'Genèse et Perspective artistiques du Surréalisme': "*Entirely deliberately and therefore in the reverse sense of automatism, Magritte's procedure contributed support at this point to Surrealism from another angle. The only one to pursue this tendency, he approached painting in the spirit of 'object-lessons', and from this point of view put the visual image*

“systematically on trial, stressing its weaknesses and demonstrating the subordinate character of figures of speech and thought. Unique and harsh enterprise, at the confines of the physical and the ‘mental’, bringing into play all the resources of a mind so exacting as to conceive each picture “as the point of resolution of a new problem”.

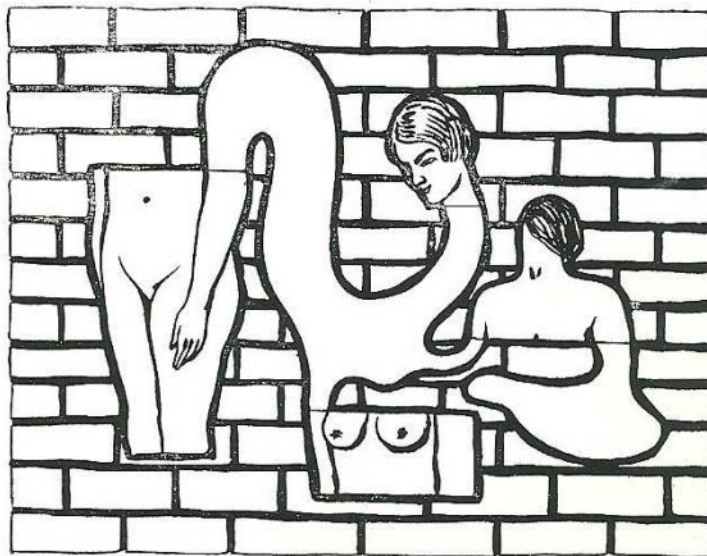
Chirico’s contribution of genius, in his work painted between 1911 and 1917, was to create a “frisson” of fatality through each of his paintings in placing a secular mystery in front of the onlooker. The word ENIGMA appears in more than one title.

From 1928, Magritte overshot Chirico’s aim in leading “mystery” to its dialectical conclusion: the *non-mystery* or POETICAL EVIDENCE. One has noticed that Magritte, unlike most modern artists of “*temperament*” who have used all sorts of simplified, abridged, hasty or allusive techniques to further their expressive ends, carries out the elements in his paintings with a conventional realistic care. But it is obvious also that this kind of technique is not his AIM; that it is not what matters to the painter *essentially*! He *needs* to use such a technique in order to give to each element its full play which allows the interplay with other elements and makes the total image (the picture) effective.

Magritte’s methods of representation are intimately linked with his major aim. It may be that these methods and this aim are equally unpalatable to an Academician or to an Action painter.

If Picasso has influenced scores of artists and has been aped all over the world, it is not on account of his genius but simply because of his traditionalism and eclecticism. Magritte is inimitable, except by himself.

E. L. T. MESENS.



CATALOGUE

1922

1 Nu debout, oil on board. H. 27" × W. 15". Signed. Exhibited: Cabinet Maldoror, Brussels (1923?).

1923

2 Georgette, oil on board. H. 16½" × W. 12½". Signed. Has never been exhibited in an individual show.

3 L'homme blanc, oil on canvas. H. 21⅝" × W. 15¾". Signed top right. This picture was dubbed by the painter's friends "Portrait du poète Marcel Lecomte". Former collections: Marcel Lecomte, Brussels; Geert Van Bruaene, Brussels; Prof. André de Ridder, Antwerp.
Collection E. L. T. Mesens, London.

1924

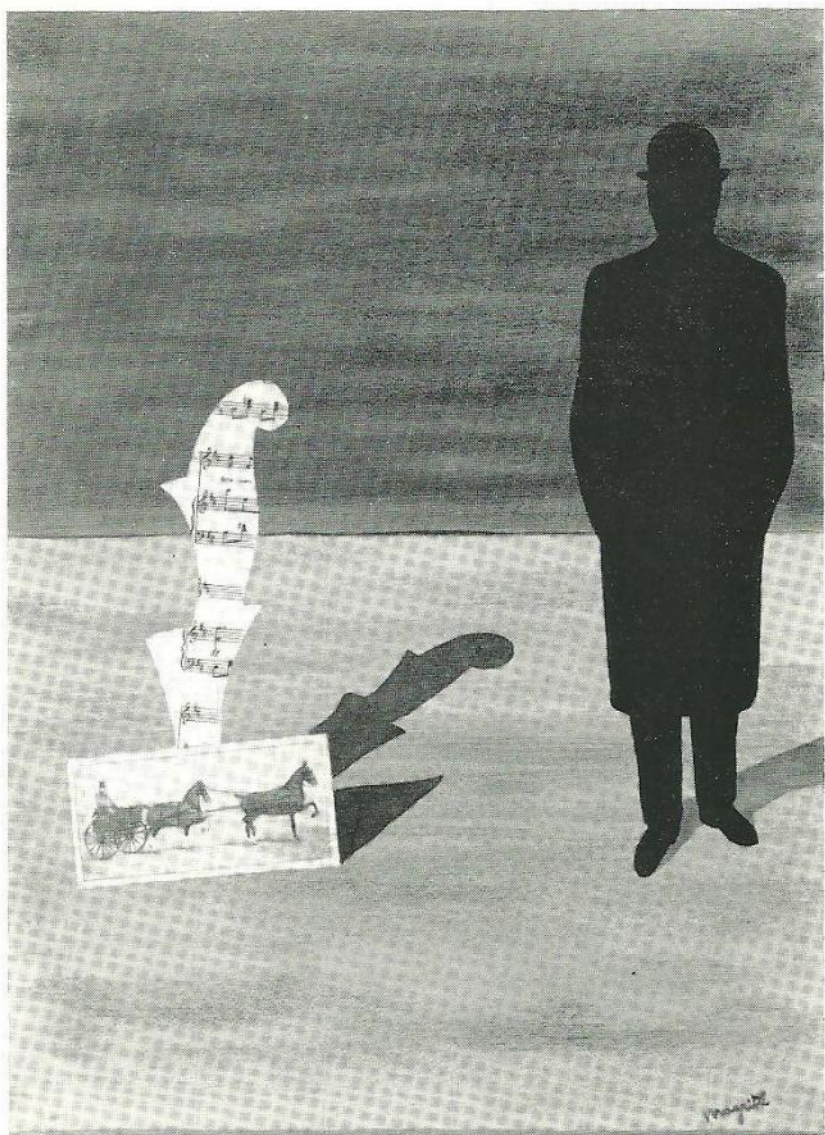
4 Rêve d'étudiant, oil and Ripolin on canvas. H. 31½" × W. 27½". Signed bottom left. Former collections: P. G. Van Hecke, Brussels; Galerie Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (Cat. No. 8), Brussels 1927; Palais de la Bourse, Charleroi 1929.

1925

5 Le conquérant, oil on canvas. H. 25½" × W. 29½". Signed top right. Former collections: E. L. T. Mesens, Brussels; Tristan Tzara, Paris; Private Collection, Brussels. Exhibited: Galerie Beyeler, Bale 1959.

1925-1926

6 Collage without title, gouache, indian ink and stuck paper. H. 15⅛" × 21½". Signed bottom right. Former collections: Galerie Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: Galerie Le Centaure (Cat. Nos. 50 to 61) Brussels 1927.



Cat. No. 7

7 Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire, collage—gouache, indian ink and stuck paper. H. 21½" × W. 15¼". Signed bottom right. Former collections: Gal. Schwarzenberg, Brussels; Private collection, Brussels. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (Cat. Nos. 50 to 61) Brussels 1927; Lefevre Gallery, London 1953; XXVIIth Biennale of Venice, 1954. Reproduced in James Thrall Soby "Giorgio de Chirico" (p. 151) (Publ. The Museum of Modern Art—New York). Private collection, London.

8 Collage without title, gouache, watercolour, charcoal and stuck paper. H. 15½" × W. 21½". Signed bottom right. Former collections: Galerie Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (Cat. Nos. 50 to 61) Brussels 1927; International Surrealist Exhibition, London 1936.

1926

9 Racines délicieuses, collage—gouache, indian ink and stuck paper. H. 15¼" × W. 21½". Signed bottom right. Former collections: P. G. Van Hecke, Brussels; Private collection, Brussels. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (Nos. 50 to 61) Brussels 1927; International Surrealist Exhibition, London 1936; Lefevre Gallery, London 1953.

Collection Judge and Mrs. Henry Epstein, New York.

10 Collage without title, indian ink and stuck paper. H. 16¾" × W. 22¾". Signed bottom left. Former collections: Galerie l'Epoque, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Has never been exhibited before.

11 Le buste impassable, oil on canvas. H. 47¼" × W. 31½". Signed bottom left. Former collections: Gal. Le Centaure, Brussels. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (No. 42) 1927; Palais de la Bourse, Charleroi 1929.

12 La chambre du devin, oil on canvas. H. 29¼" × W. 25½". Signed bottom right. Former collections: P. G. Van Hecke, Brussels. Private collection Brussels. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (Cat. No. 35) Brussels 1927. Reproduced in "Selection", Antwerp 1927.

Collection Judge and Mrs. Henry Epstein, New York.

13 La femme du fantôme, oil on canvas. H. 45" × W. 64". Signed bottom left. Former collections: P. G. Van Hecke, Brussels; Galerie Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Has never been exhibited.

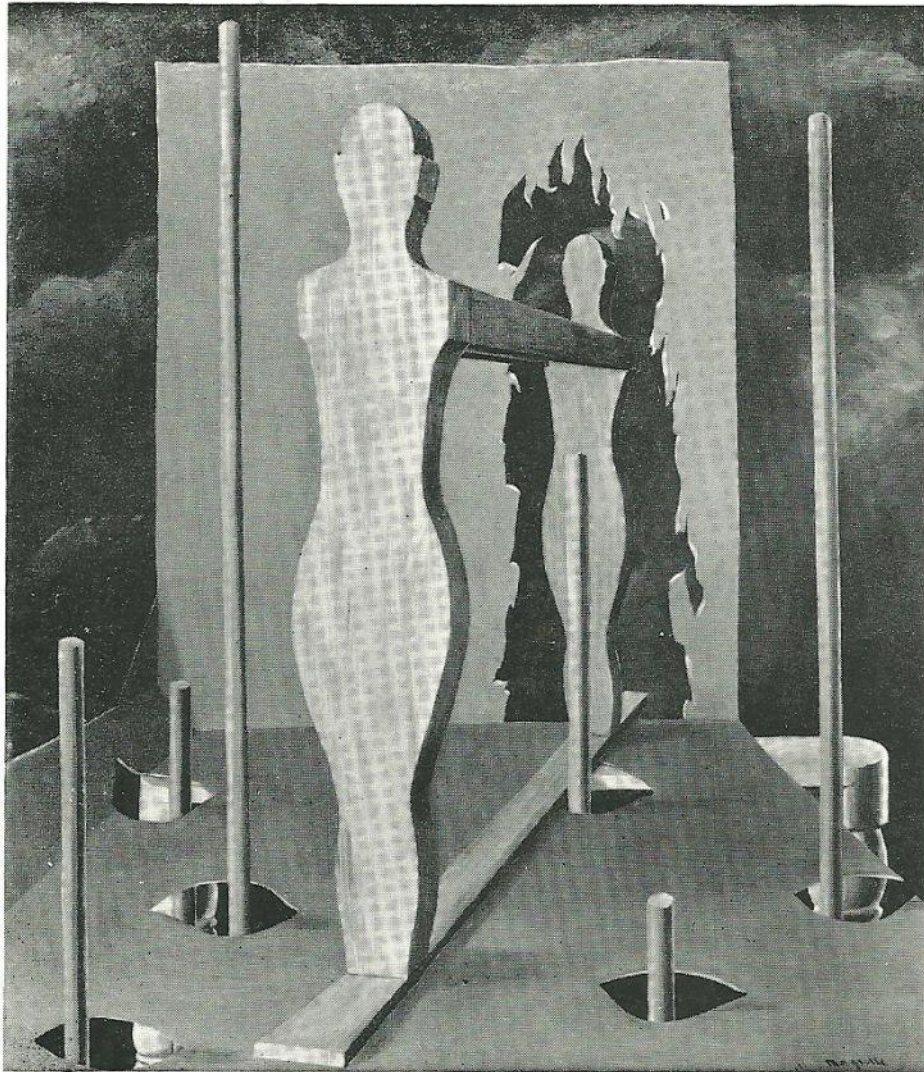
14 Le chevalier du couchant, oil on canvas. H. 51½" × W. 41". Signed top right. Former collections: P. G. Van Hecke, Brussels; Galerie Schwarzenberg, Brussels. Exhibited: Gal. Le Centaure (Cat. No. 16) Brussels 1927.

1927

15 L'Atlantide, oil on canvas. This work was first entitled 'Le Reflet'. H. 39½" × W. 28⅞". Signed top right. Former collections: Galerie l'Epoque, Brussels; Gal. Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: Galerie l'Epoque, Brussels 1928; Palais de la Bourse, Charleroi 1929; Socialistische Studiekring, Ghent 1935; Casino, Knokke-Le Zoute 1952; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1954 (Reprod. in cat. p. 23). Reproduced in: Louis Scutenaire "René Magritte" (Publ. Librairie Selection, Brussels 1947).

16 L'avenir des statues, object. A plaster cast of Napoleon's head on his death bed; Magritte has painted a clouded sky over it.

Collection E. L. T. Mesens, London.



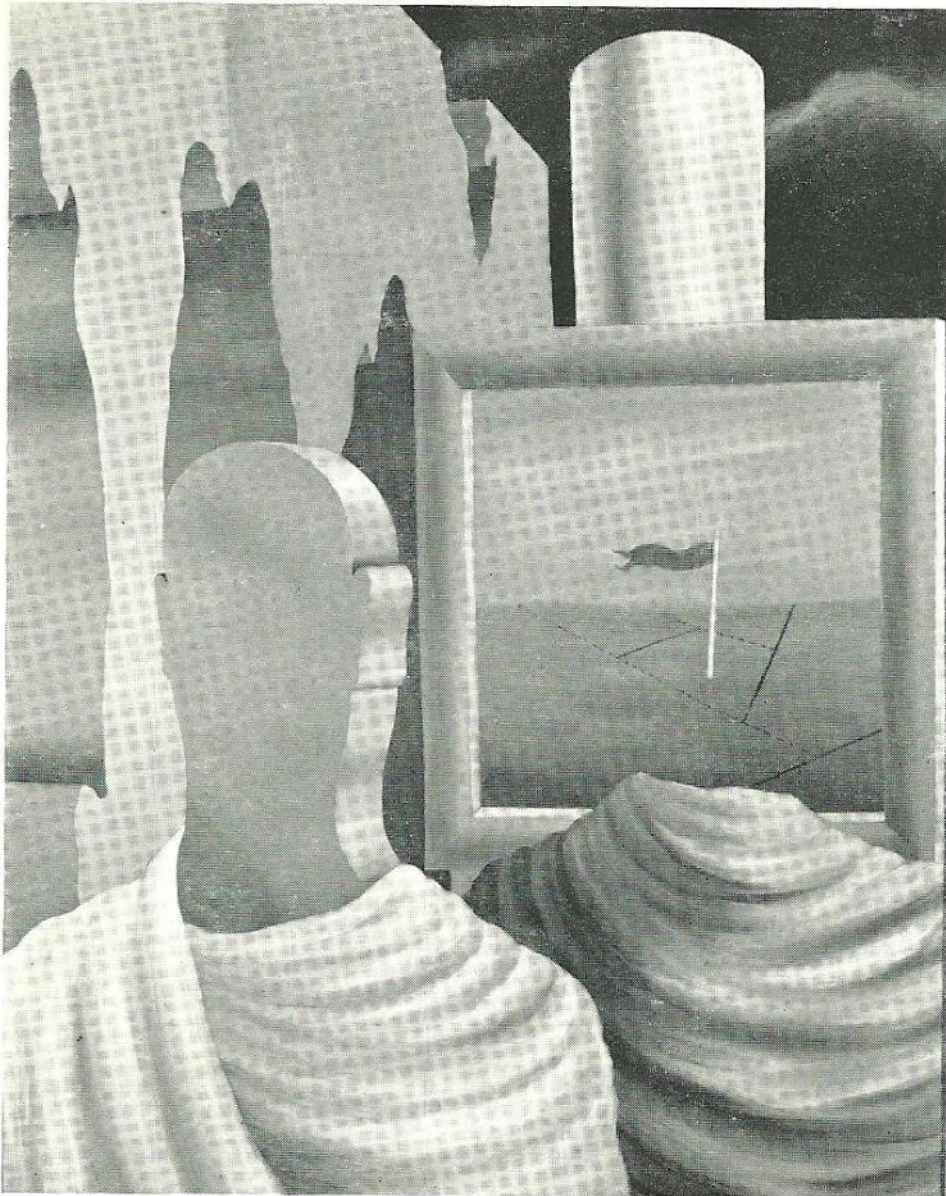
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1927-1928

17 La confiance capitale, oil on canvas. H. $31\frac{1}{2}$ " \times W. $45\frac{1}{2}$ ". Signed top right. Former collections: Galerie Le Centaure, Brussels; Private collection, Brussels. Has never been exhibited. Painted at Le Perreux sur Marne (France).

18 La promesse salutaire, oil on canvas. H. $28\frac{3}{4}$ " \times W. $21\frac{1}{4}$ ". Signed bottom left. Former collections: Gal. Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Painted at Le Perreux.

19 Le corps humain (II), oil on canvas. H. $28\frac{3}{4}$ " \times W. $21\frac{1}{4}$ ". Signed top left. Former coll.: P. G. Van Hecke, Brussels; Private collection, Brussels. Painted at Le Perreux.

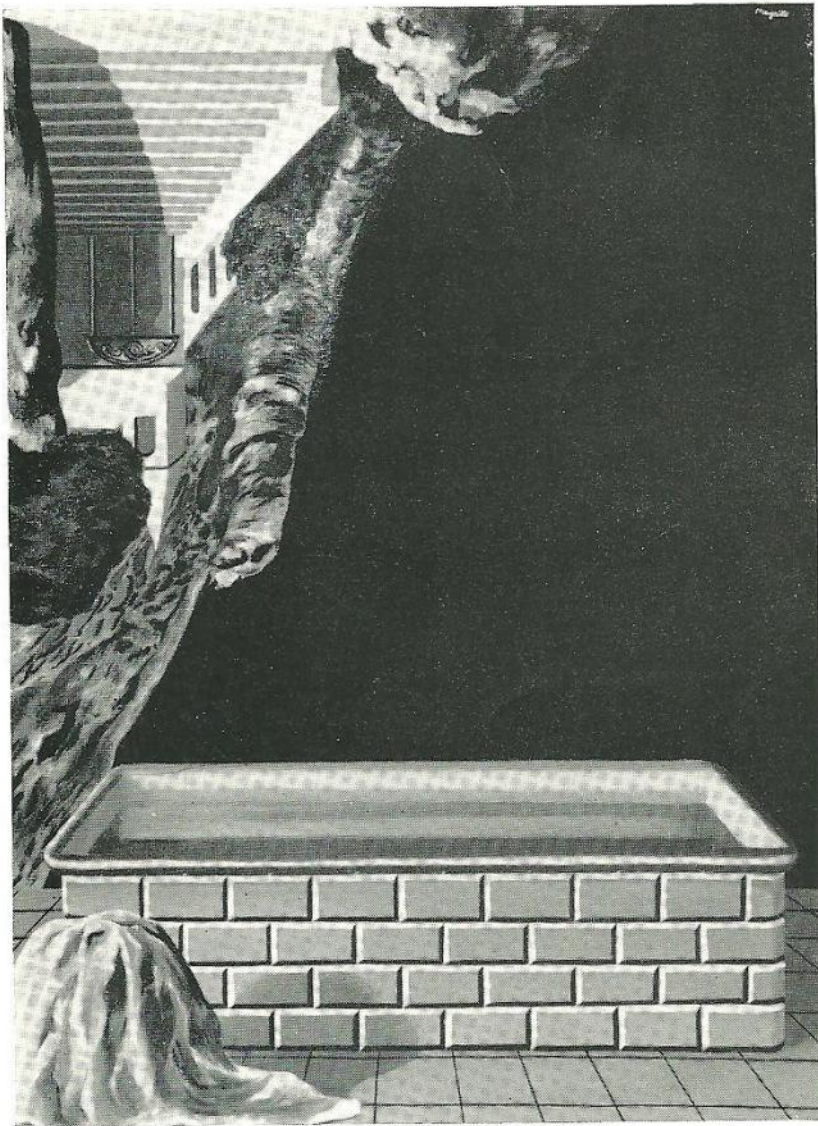


Cat. No. 14

20 Les trace vivantes, oil on canvas. H. $19\frac{3}{4}$ " \times W. $25\frac{3}{4}$ ". Signed on top right. Former coll.: Gal. Schwarzenberg, Brussels; E. L. T. Mesens, London. Painted at Le Perreux.

1929

21 La vie secrète, oil on canvas. H. $21\frac{3}{4}$ " \times W. $18\frac{1}{8}$ ". Signed in the composition on the right, towards the top. One of the last works painted at Le Perreux before the painter's return to Brussels. Exhibited: Retrospective Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1954 (Cat. No. 35).



Cat. No. 15

1931

22 Portrait of E. L. T. Mesens, oil on canvas. H. $28\frac{1}{2}$ " \times W. $21\frac{1}{4}$ ". Signed bottom right. The painting carries on top the words "A la hauteur des circonstances", and on the bottom the word "REVOLVER". Has never been exhibited before.

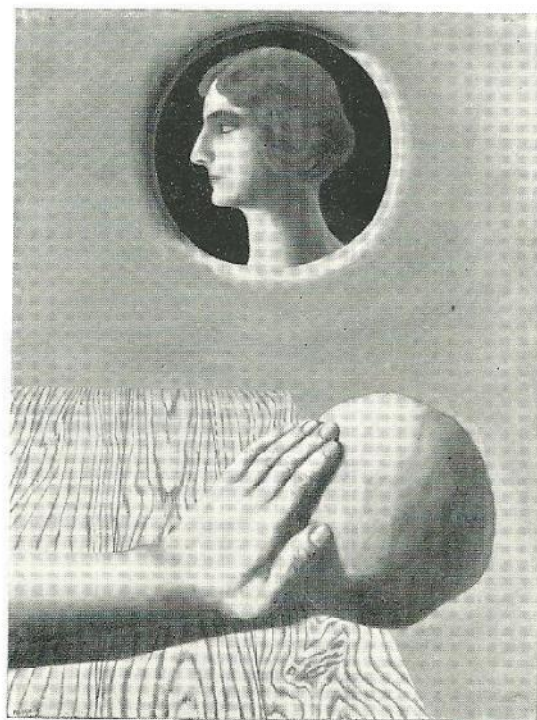
Private collection, London.

1934

23 Le mouvement perpétuel, oil on canvas. H. $21\frac{1}{4}$ " \times W. $28\frac{1}{2}$ ". Signed bottom left. Former collection: E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: "Tendances Contemporaines", La Louvière 1935; Julien Levy Gallery, New York 1936; "Trois peinties surréaliste", Palais des Beau-Arts, Brussels 1937; Exp. Internationale du Surréalisme, Galerie "Beaux-Arts", Paris

Gros (Haley) exhibit
 Museum of Modern Art, NY
 Lefevre
 Seattle

1938; Casino, Knokke-Le Zoute 1952; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1952; The Lefevre Gallery, London 1953; Retrospective Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1954 (Reprod. in cat. p. 29); XXVIIth Biennale of Venice, 1954. Reproduced in: *Les Beaux-Arts, Brussels* (No. 203—1936); *The Star, London* 1937; Christian Zervos "*Histoire de l'Art contemporain*" (Publ. Cahiers d'Art, Paris) 1938; *XX^e Siecle, Paris* (detail) 1939; A. Cirici-Pellicer "*El Surrealismo*" (Publ. Omega, Barcelona) 1959; *The Sphere, London* (Vol. CCXV, No. 2805, 1953; Marcel Jean "*Historire de la peinture surréaliste*" (Publ. Editions du Seuil, Paris) 1959. (Also in the Italian and English editions 1960).
 Private collection, London.



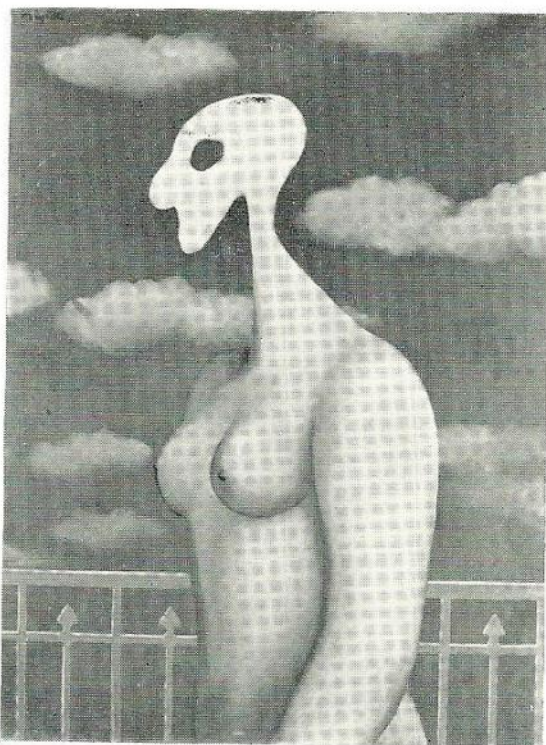
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24 L'arbre savant, oil on canvas re-mounted on panel. H. 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ " × W. 13". Signed bottom right. Former collections: E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1936; Julien Levy Gallery, New York 1937; The Lefevre Gallery, London 1953; Retrospective Palais des Beaux-Arts 1954 (Reprod. in cat. p. 16).

Collection Lt.-Commander William Heywood Melly, R.N.

25 Le viol, oil on canvas. H. 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ " × W. 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Signed bottom right. Former collections: E. L. T. Mesens, London. At the opening of the "Minotaure" exhibition, organised at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (May 1934) the director of this establishment asked that this painting, together with one Belthus, one Brauner and a few Dali's should be shown in a room behind a velvet curtain where only adults, and preferably surrealist initiates, would be allowed. In the Netherlands and in Great Britain "Le viol" has been exhibited several times without protest and the first time at the London Gallery in April 1938 (Cat. No. 23). "Le viol" (or "the Rape") is not an erotic painting but a simple biological statement aiming at a poetry of subversion. Reproduced in several papers and magazines, a.o. "Documents 35", Brussels; "Mauvais Temps", La Louvière; "Combar", Brussels; "London Bulletin" (No. 1, 1938); Marcel Jean "Histoire de la peinture surréaliste", colour reprod. (Publ. Editions du Seuil, Paris 1959 in French; Publ. Bompiani, Milano 1960 in Italian and Publ. G. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1960 in English).

Collection George Melly, London.



Cat. No. 19

1936

26 Le drapeau noir, oil on canvas. H. 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ " × W. 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Signed top left. Former collection: E. L. T. Mesens, London. Exhibited: The London Gallery, April 1938 (Cat. No. 34); Retrospective Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1954 (Reprod. in Cat. p. 32). Reproduced (in colour) in "Horizon" (Vol. VIII, No. 48—Dec. 1943).

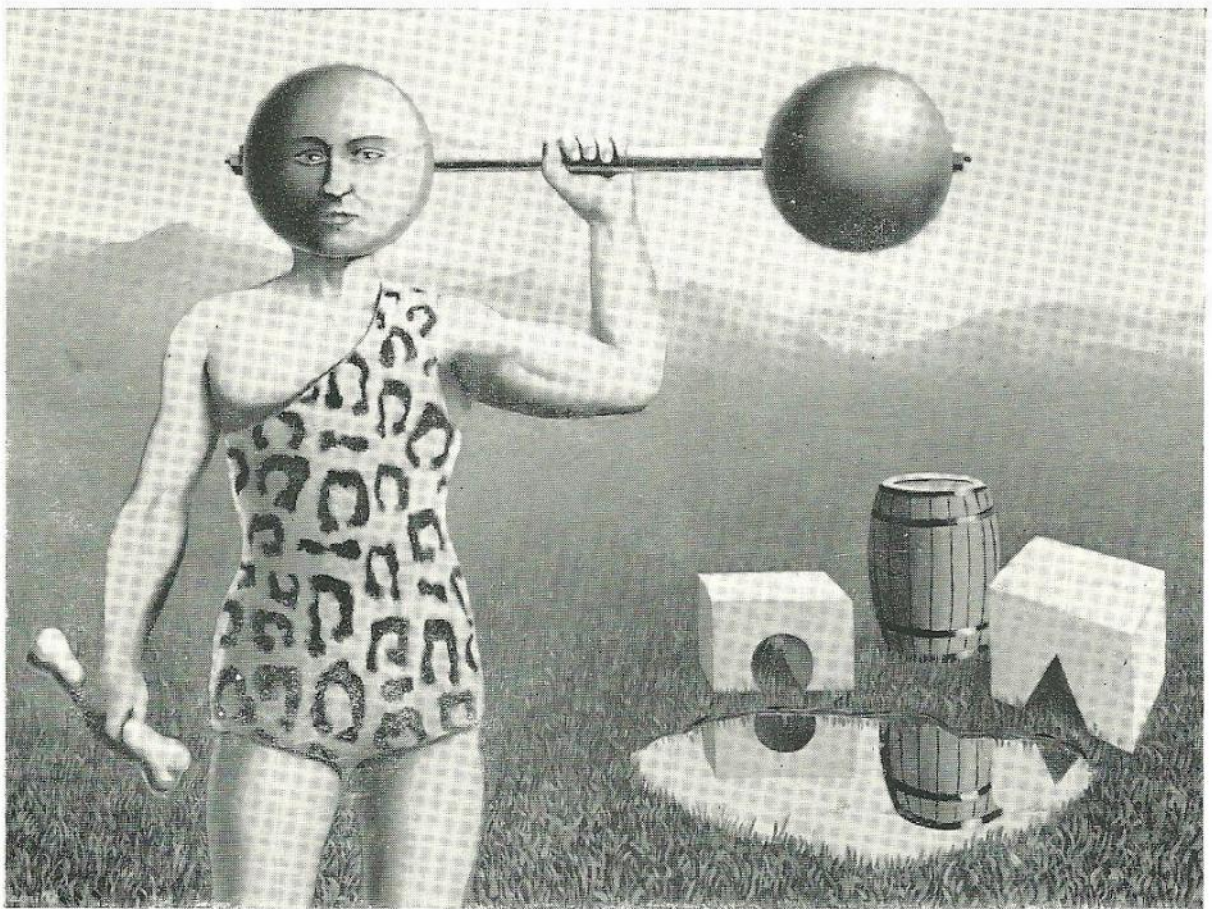
Collection George Melly, London.

1943

27 L'océan, oil on canvas. H. $19\frac{3}{4}$ " \times W. $25\frac{5}{8}$ ". Signed. Former coll.: Mme. Lou Cosyn, Brussels; Robert Lewin, London. Exhibited: Triennale of Milano (1950?). Reproduced in: Paul Nougé "René Magritte ou les Images défendues" (Publ. Les Auteurs associés, Bruxelles 1943).

1952

28 Le secret d'état, oil on canvas. Dated on back. H. $18\frac{1}{8}$ " \times W. $14\frac{7}{8}$ ". Has never been exhibited. Collection E. L. T. Mesens, London.



Cat. No. 23

Forthcoming Exhibitions

Helen Lambert: Paintings

Moscow—London—26th October—18th November

Anatoli Kaplan: Lithographs—World of Sholom Aleichem

21st November—31st December

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