

René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967) – Artist Resources

[Fondation Magritte, Brussels, Belgium](#)

[MoMA](#) organized the 2013-14 traveling retrospective, *The Mystery of the Ordinary*, in partnership with [The Menil Collection, Houston](#) as well as [The Art Institute of Chicago](#). The exhibition was the first to focus on Magritte's formative breakthrough years, from 1926 to 1938, when the Belgian Surrealist sought to "challenge to world" through image. Visit the links to explore each museum's exhibition resources.

[Profile and review of *The Treason of Images*, 2016 retrospective at the Centre Pompidou, Paris](#)

The Treachery of Images, 2017 retrospective at [Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt](#). The first major retrospective of Magritte's work in Germany.

Recent scholarship:

In [Rene Magritte and the Art of Thinking \(2019\)](#), Magritte specialist, Lisa Lipinski (George Washington University) employs post-structuralist theory and a keen art historical eye in a rigorous discussion of the Surrealist's unique blend of the ordinary and illusion as he sought to the challenge expectations and perceptions of his viewers.

[Watch Lipinski's talk at JSMA, "The Man in the Bowler Hat," December 2019](#)



Magritte, 1967

Photograph: Lothar Wolleh (German, 1930-79)



Magritte, photobooth, 1929



René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967)
La nuit de Pise (Night in Pisa), 1953
Oil on canvas

Private Collection L2024:31.5

Born and raised in Belgium, René Magritte studied at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels before spending time in Paris, where he became an integral figure in the Surrealist group. His widely reproduced paintings make the familiar unfamiliar, depicting dreamlike paradoxes and thought experiments that blur perceptions of reality. **La nuit de Pise (Night in Pisa)** is one of the earliest examples of Magritte's fascination with the "leaning" tower. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the artist began to paint the iconic bell tower supported by everyday objects that challenge the laws of physics. In this work, an oversized silver spoon gleams in the moonlight while propping up the building, which was leaning over five degrees in 1953.

On view June 12 – September 15, 2024

René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967)

Le miroir universel, 1938-1939

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:140.1

René Magritte was one of the most influential Surrealist artists active in 20th century Europe. His paintings often create intriguing paradoxes or question the nature of perception by placing familiar subjects in new, thought-provoking contexts. **Le miroir universel** is one in a series of works Magritte made in the 1930s and 1940s that feature a classical nude woman resting her hand on a block of stone. The model for the painting was his wife, Georgette Berger, who is depicted looking out to the sea while her upper body melds with the blue color of the sky. Magritte often added an alternative title to these works, *magie noir* (black magic), saying: “It is an act of black magic to turn woman’s flesh into sky.”

On view January 31 – May 5, 2024





René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967)

Nu allongé, 1923

Oil on canvas

Private Collection L2022:139.4

Belgian artist René Magritte began his career with explorations of Cubism and Futurism but felt uninspired by this approach. In 1922, he saw a reproduction of Giorgio de Chirico's *Le chant d'amour* (*The Song of Love*), to which he responded: "I saw thought... It was a new vision through which the spectator recognizes his own isolation and hears the silence of the world." The following year, the artist painted **Nu allongé (Reclining Nude)** as a portrait of his wife, Georgette. Magritte's reclining female nude continues a long tradition of this pose in academic painting. However, his combination of vibrant blocks of color, flattened painting surface, and Georgette's twisted, elongated torso marks the beginning of Magritte's iconic shift towards Surrealism.



Giorgio de Chirico

Le chant d'amour (*The Song of Love*), 1914

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

On view May 17 – August 20, 2023

René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967)
Souvenir de Voyage, 1958
Oil on canvas

Collection of Gary and Kathie Heidenreich; L2020:125.1

On view December 16, 2020 – March 21, 2021





René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967)

Le Cicerone, 1948

Oil on canvas

Private Collection L2019:145.3

Belgian artist René Magritte was a pivotal member of the international Surrealist movement, celebrated for an oeuvre that intentionally defies interpretation as it questions knowledge, language, and reality. His visually stunning and conceptually complex paintings subvert the ordinary and familiar with unexpected juxtapositions that challenge preconceptions. In **Le Cicerone**, Magritte brings viewers into closer proximity with the subject of an earlier painting, *Les Droits de l'homme* (1945, "The Rights of Man"). Atop the baluster-like chess piece of a



Les Droits de l'homme , 1945

body sits a *bilboquet*, a simple toy comprised of a wooden cup with a ball attached by a string, which in Magritte's rendition bears an uncanny resemblance to the head of a cannon. The title (referencing the ancient Roman orator, Cicero) is an antiquated term for an educated guide who gives tours of historical and cultural sites. Placed on an outdoor balcony overlooking a moonlit ocean and gazing at a leaf held by a human hand, the anthropomorphized object appears lost in thought. As is typical for Magritte, the scene is a collection of motifs repeated throughout his career; it serves as a reminder that although knowledge may seem within our grasp, there is little we can truly know with certainty.

On view January 29 – May 3, 2020