

Art, Anarchy, and the Enigma of Dreams

We will explore Dada and Surrealism, the two great art movements between the wars.

Dada broke boundaries, was almost anti-art, while Surrealism captured the unconscious in art. Luminary artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Magritte and Picabia are among the many whose work we will discuss. This is a story of war and peace. Dada, inaugurated in 1916 by poets and artists was a reaction to the bloodshed of WWI. Condemning idealism and traditional artistic conventions, Dada artists used provocation as art.

Surrealism began in 1924 in a time of peace in Paris. It was bound up with the psychoanalytic theories of Freud. Surrealist artists plumbed the dream world of the subliminal mind, making its secrets visual as works of art. Both movements laid the groundwork for the Contemporary Art of today. We will trace the art from the beginnings of Dada in 1916 to its transition to Surrealism in 1924:

Although Dada began independently in NY & in Zurich, it also emerged in Paris, Berlin & Cologne. The war had been a devastating psychological experience for a generation brought up with the optimistic doctrine of progress. Dadaists believed rationality had been responsible for the disaster of world war & concluded that salvation would be found through irrationality.

By attacking convention and logic Dada artists unlocked new avenues for creative invention. In its subversiveness it was liberating. For example, Marcel Duchamp painted a moustache and goatee on a reproduction of Leonardo's Mona Lisa.

Dada was an art of outward display which over a period of ten years evolved into Surrealism, an art movement of interior thoughts and fantastic dream imagery. Surrealist artists created some of the most iconic images in art history. How did this happen? And how did it influence all contemporary art seen today? These are some of the questions we will try to answer in this course.

Leader: Wendy Worth is a graduate of Pratt Institute and a well-known art historian.

Tuesdays: 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., 6 weeks: September 26 through October 31.

Location: Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville