

MAGRITTE IN 400 IMAGES



Magritte in 400 images

Magritte

in 400 images

LUDION

xx	Introduction
xx	Abstract and Pre-Surrealist Experiments 1919–1925
xx	The Dark Period 1925–1930
xx	Words and Images 1927–1930
xx	Elective Affinities 1933–1940
xx	Sunlit Surrealism 1943–1947
xx	The Cow Period 1948
xx	Poetics of the Everyday 1948–1967
xx	Illustrated Biography

ciel

*corps humain
(ou forêt)*

rideau

*façade de
maison*

Words and Images

1927-1930

During the three years Magritte lived in Paris, he did not actually join the Paris Surrealist group led by André Breton (1896–1966). He was not invited to take part in the big exhibitions that introduced Surrealism to Paris. Nor does Breton refer to him in his book *Surrealism and Painting*, published in 1928. That year, however, he purchased four of Magritte's paintings, which denotes an interest in his work.



La Révolution surréaliste, no. 12, 15 December 1929.

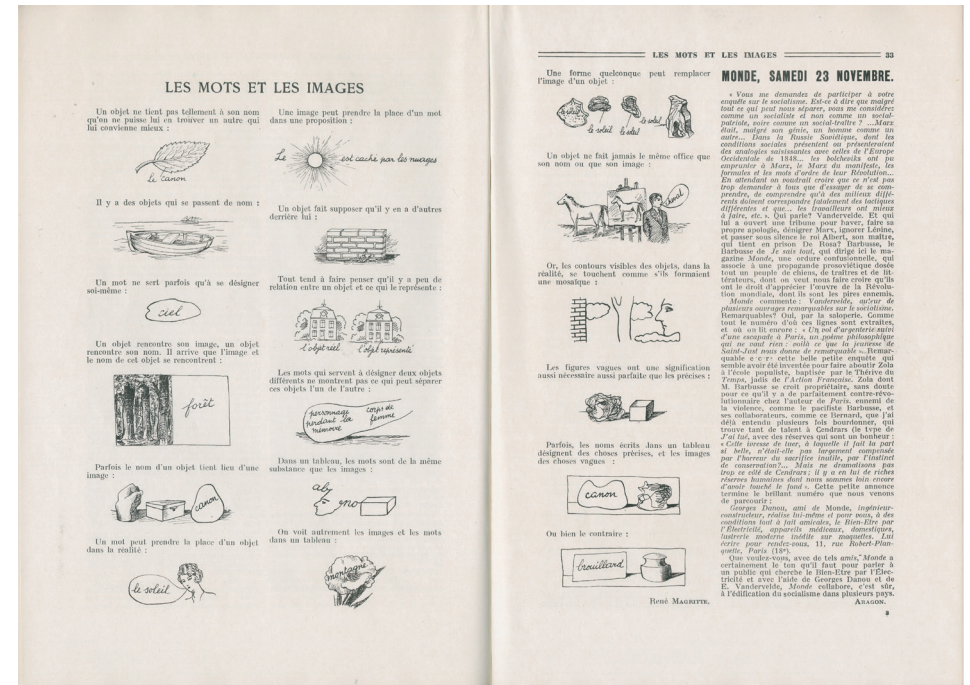
Magritte was invited to take part in the twelfth and last issue of the Paris review *La Révolution surréaliste*, in December 1929. Of greatest note among his submissions is a text of major importance entitled 'Les mots et les images' (Words and Images), one of Magritte's most influential contributions to art in the twentieth century.

When Magritte gave his lecture in Antwerp ten years later, among the ways he named of making objects sensational were 'the combination of words with images' and 'the false identification of an image'.¹⁴ He was referring to the results of research he had been carrying out since 1927 into the possible relationships between a real object, a represented object

and the words used to name it. While the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) were also interested in this question, Magritte was the first to apply these concepts to painting.

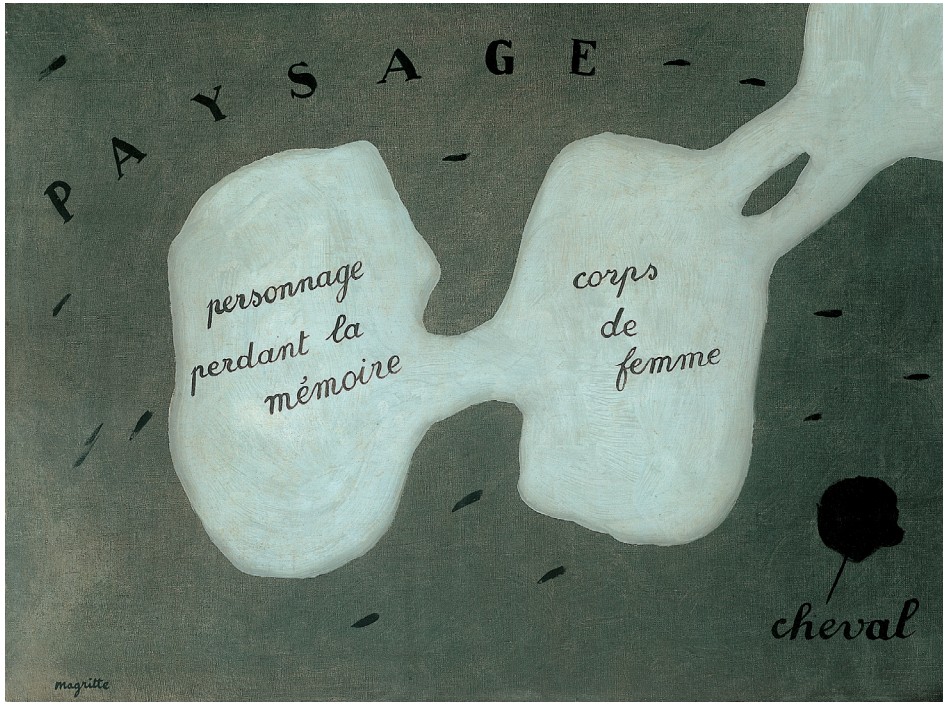
In 'Les mots et les images', Magritte listed eighteen possible relationships between an object, its representation and its name:

- No object is so tied to its name that we cannot find another one that suits it better.
- Some objects do without a name.
- Sometimes a word merely serves to designate itself.
- An object encounters its image, an object encounters its



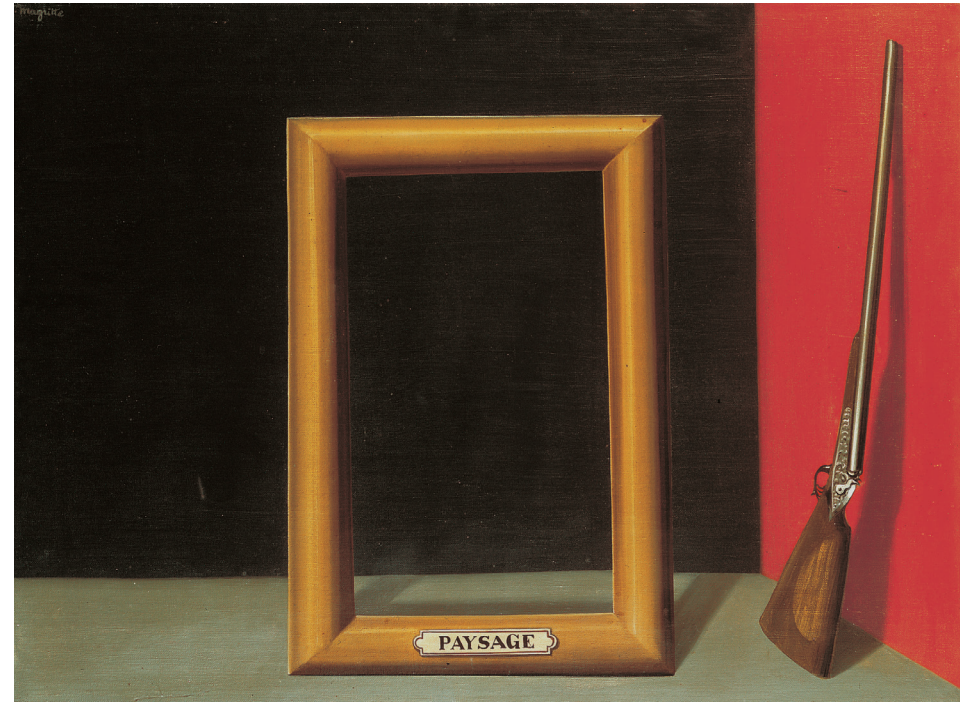
René Magritte, "Les Mots et les images" from *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 12, December 1929

- name. The object's image and name happen to meet.
- At times the name of an object stands in for an image.
- A word can take the place of an object in reality.
- An image can take the place of a word in a statement.
- An object hints at other objects behind it.
- Everything tends to suggest that there is little connection between an object and what represents it.
- The words referring to two different objects do not show what can separate these objects from each other.
- In a picture words have the same substance as images.
- Images and words are seen differently in a picture.



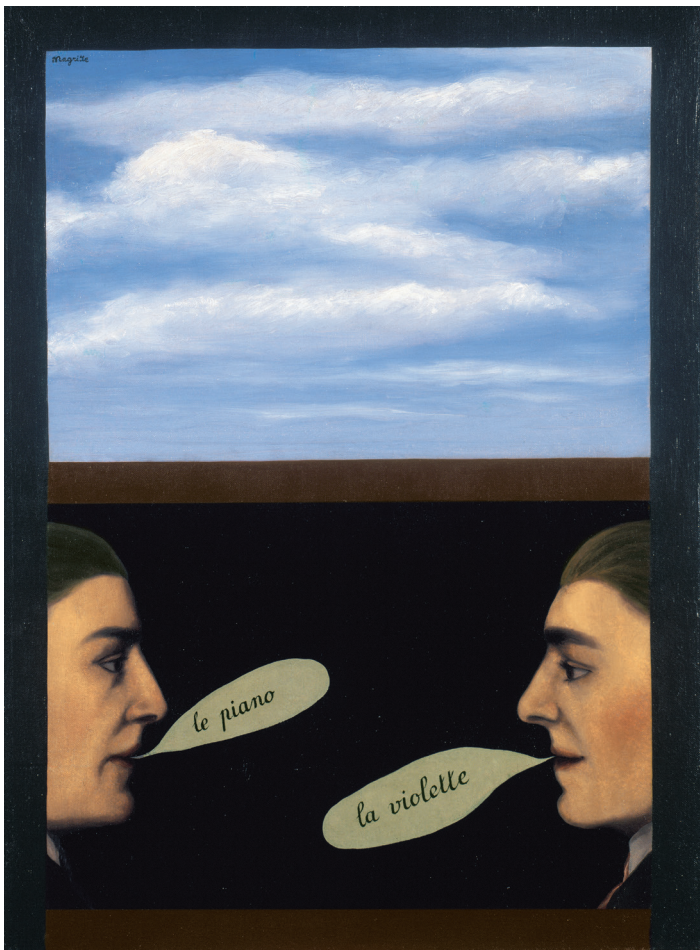
Le monde perdu · The lost world

1928
oil on canvas, 54 × 73 cm



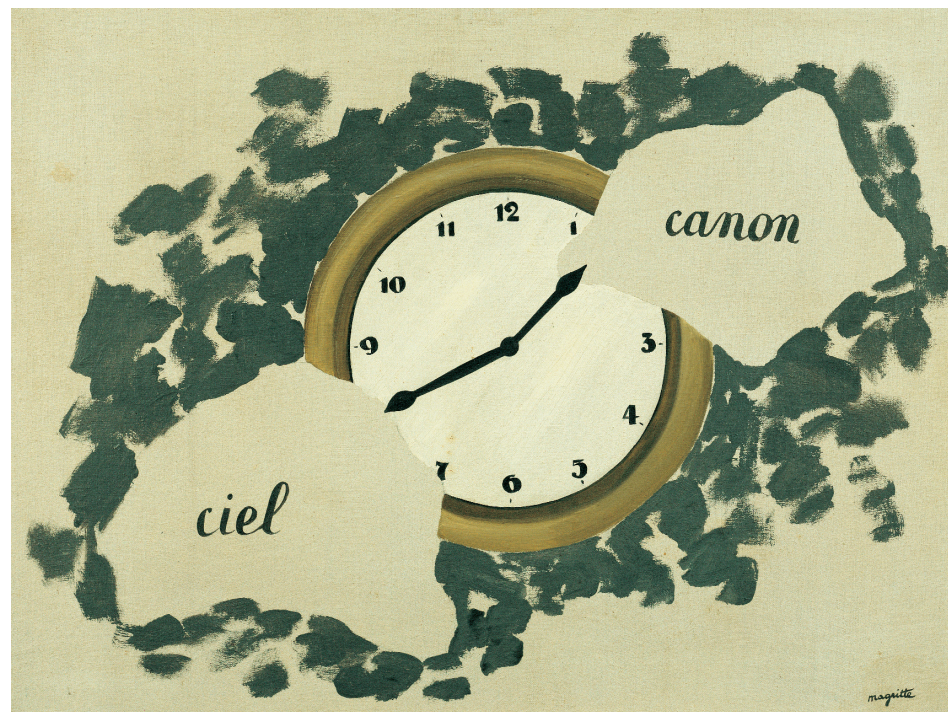
Les charmes du paysage · The delights of landscape

1928
oil on canvas, 54 × 73 cm



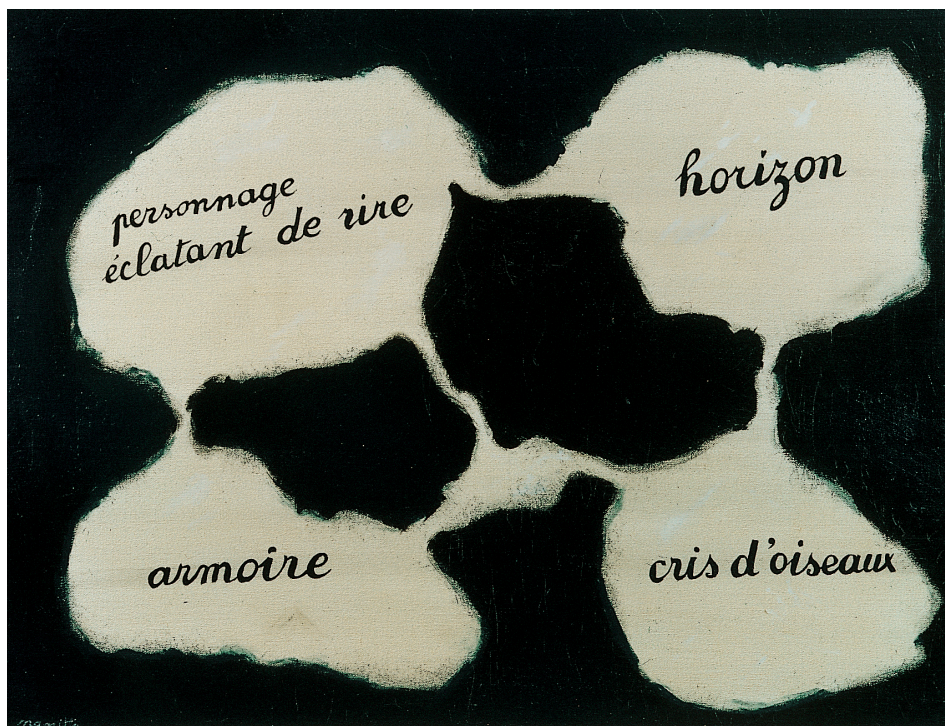
L'usage de la parole · The use of speech

1928
oil on canvas, 73 × 54 cm



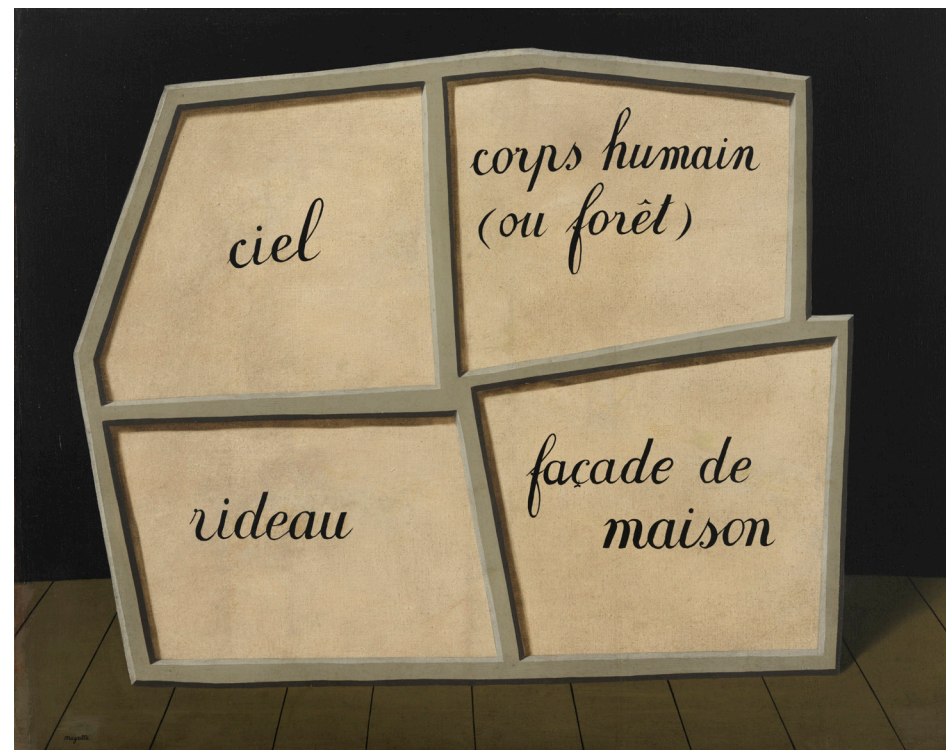
Les reflets du temps · Reflections of time

1928
oil on canvas, 54 × 73 cm



Le miroir vivant · The living mirror

1928
oil on canvas, 54 × 73 cm



Le masque vide · The empty mask

1928
oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm



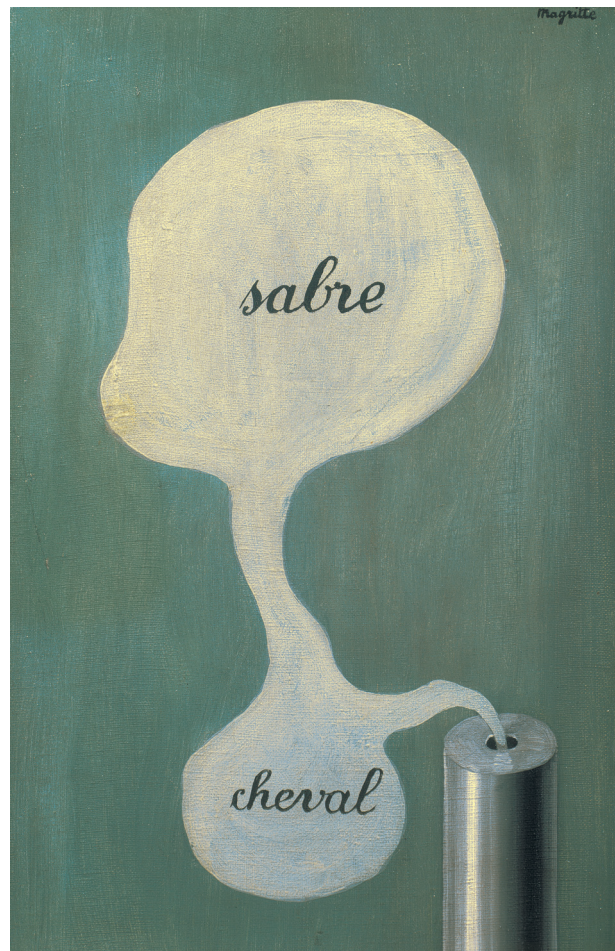
La trahison des images · The treachery of images

1929
oil on canvas, 60 × 81 cm



Le palais de rideaux · The palace of curtains

1929
oil on canvas, 81 × 116 cm



L'arbre de la science · The tree of knowledge

1929
oil on canvas, 41 × 27 cm



La clef des songes · The interpretation of dreams

1930
oil on canvas, 81 × 60 cm



Poetics of the Everyday

1948–1967

After the liberating interlude of the 'Cow Period', Magritte returned once and for all to the smooth, academic style of his paintings from before 1943. The postwar context encouraged him to do so. In 1946, Magritte came in contact with Alexander Iolas, a Greek-born art dealer who lived in New York. Iolas was enthusiastic about Surrealism and expressed his desire to promote Magritte's work in the United States. He corresponded regularly with the painter and eventually became his official dealer, greatly contributing to his international fame. During their first exchanges, Iolas insisted on the fact that wanted to show absolutely no paintings from the Renoir Period in New York, as this style would not be a success in America. This market-dictated imperative, combined with the art milieu's general rejection of Sunlit Surrealism, encouraged Magritte to return to his former style.

Although painting technique was important to Magritte, it was nevertheless secondary. He regularly showed signs of the boredom he experienced at work when striving to represent things in precise detail, the necessary condition for his paintings to produce their effect. According to him, the main thing was to find the image. The rest was mere execution. In 1966, he returned to this original concept: 'In the end, the manner of painting is of little interest. There are after all so many. Instead of looking for a manner of painting that is more or less original, I preferred to get to the bottom of things, make painting a tool for deepening our knowledge of the world, but a knowledge that is inseparable from its mystery. My way of painting is completely ordinary, academic. What is important in my painting is what it shows. I consider it essential to discover how the world can interest us deeply. Now, the world interests us deeply in its mystery. By mystery I mean what cannot be known, what science cannot reduce to knowledge that can be expressed.'³⁰

The 'mystery of the world' that Magritte intended to evoke in each of his images was marvellously embodied in 1949 in the first version of *The Dominion of Light*, a picture that represents a city scene shrouded in the darkness of night under a daytime sky. The composition is so harmonious that at first sight, everything seems normal. However, in looking at it more carefully, it becomes obvious: day and night merge in a single image according to a principle of time distortion that defies any attempt at scientific explanation. 'This reference to night and day seems to me endowed with the power to surprise us and to delight us. I call this power: poetry,' Magritte declared.³¹ By reconciling opposites within a single composition, by contradicting all logic, Magritte forces viewers to accept



Magritte and Alexandre Iolas, December 16, 1965 (photographed by Steve Shapiro for *Life*)

In his interviews, Magritte was regularly asked to reveal his pictures' inside story. *Speaking of The Heartstring* (1960), which solves the problem of the cloud, Magritte reconfirmed his method: 'I keep a sketchbook of drawings at hand. Inspiration gives me an image: I feel like painting a cloud. So I draw clouds, perhaps a hundred. And I surround each of them with forms whose meaning I do not know until inspiration visits me again and I know what would be suitable under this cloud: a crystal glass.'³³

At this time, Magritte broadened his repertoire of objects to include heavenly bodies, the Sun and the Moon being summoned several times to appear in some signal works. In *The Masterpiece or The Mysteries of the Horizon* (1955), Magritte raises the paradoxical question of individual perception of the Moon. Although there is only one Moon, everyone forms their own idea of it, its oneness being divided into as many different perceptions as there are human beings. This is why Magritte says he gave each of the three men represented his own moon.³⁴

These heavenly bodies also appear in several works entitled *The Banquet* (1958) and *The Sixteenth of September* (1956). Each of the variants Magritte painted follows the same principle: the *Sun* or the *Moon* in the foreground is superimposed over the leaves of vegetation that should be covering it. These images are important because they convey a principle that regulates the conditions of the appearance of the objects in our environment: 'These paintings owe their interest to the existence – which we suddenly become aware of – of the apparent visible and the hidden visible, which are never separate in nature. Something visible always hides something else visible. But these paintings immediately show this state of things, and in an unexpected way. Something happens between the visible shown us by the world and what this visible hides, but that is visible.'³⁵

These thoughts about the hidden visible and the apparent visible are at the centre of several paintings from the 1960s. One of the most famous is *The Son of Man* (1964) and its close variant *The Great War* (1964). They depict a man seen from the front wearing a suit. His face is masked by an apple. Despite seeming like another failed portrait, it is an altogether different matter. Magritte clarified his intentions in an interview in 1964: 'I hope to rid the things that I show of all symbols. For example, take this painting entitled *The Great War*, where we see a person in a bowler hat whose face is hidden by a large apple.



René Magritte, Houston, 1965.

There is no need to tell you that I was not thinking of war while I painted it. The apple is the apparent visible hiding the hidden visible (the man's face). In the world, everything always happens like that. So it is a sort of tension or war: our mind seeks to see what we cannot see. I would also like for the viewer of my painting to be in a poetical state; as if disturbed by poetry.'³⁶

Although reason cannot provide the viewer with any hint to understanding the works, poetry on the other hand is revealing. In a picture like *The Battle of the Argonne* (1959), no explanation presents itself. Above a barely inhabited country landscape, a huge boulder floats in the sky next

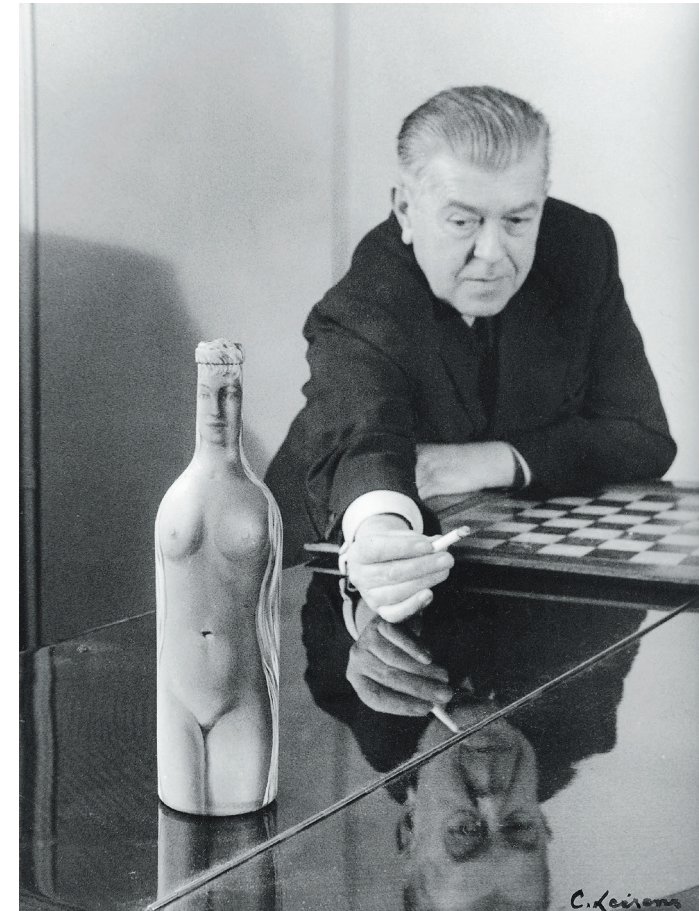
to a cloud. Magritte attributes this miracle to poetry: 'Now if for example weight can play a role in poetry, it is evoked by a boulder (as in *The Battle of the Argonne*). It is weight that is evoked and not the laws of gravity – it is evoked without physics. The sensation, the feeling or the idea of weight is enough for poetry, the laws would be superfluous and there would be an excess as soon as physics entered into it.'³⁷

In art, Magritte recognized no boundaries. There is nothing he would not subject to upheaval. However, his life was just the opposite. After the War, he began to live comfortably with his wife, Georgette, benefiting from the success of his work in the United States. He continued to paint at home, wearing a suit and house slippers. He never had a studio. Nothing protected the floor when he was painting, so carefully did he proceed. His painting activity was regular, almost routine, interspersed with a game of chess or walking the dog. Saturday evenings, he was in the habit of gathering his friends at his home to discuss his new paintings, for which they gleefully came up with poetical titles that defied all explanation. The life of a middle-class homebody set in his

ways seems a thousand leagues away from the artist who systematically endeavoured to undermine all certainties. His friend and Surrealist colleague Marcel Mariën said in this regard, 'I don't think that in Magritte's case the everyday aspect of his life can be considered important or be criticized, as is commonly done, as a bourgeois thing. It was not that at all. In order to paint, he did not necessarily have to dress as if he were poor and loiter in the cafés of Paris until midnight, like some artists. As if it were almost perverse to have a regular, well-ordered life. It's like Kant, who lived a very regular life.'³⁸

Magritte died on 15 August 1967 from cancer of the pancreas. His unique oeuvre remains one of the most mysterious in all of art history.

- 30 P. Du Bois, Interview with René Magritte, *Gazette littéraire* [Lausanne], 1966, quoted in Magritte, *Écrits complets*, op. cit., p. 652.
- 31 René Magritte, 'L'empire des lumières', unpublished manuscript, AACB, inv. 342.
- 32 René Magritte, Letter to Gaston Puel, 13 November 1953, quoted in Magritte, *Écrits complets*, op. cit., p. 327.
- 33 Pierre Descargues, 'René Magritte, le plus célèbre des surréalistes belges parle du mystère', *Feuille d'avis de Lausanne-Magazine*, 1 November 1961, quoted in Magritte, *Écrits complets*, op. cit., p. 544.
- 34 Anonymous, 'The Enigmatic Visions of René Magritte', *Life*, vol. 60, no. 16 (22 April 1966).
- 35 Patrick Waldberg, *René Magritte* (Brussels: André De Rache, 1965), pp. 247–248.
- 36 Pierre Mazars, 'Magritte et l'objet', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 19 November 1964, quoted in René Magritte, *Écrits complets*, op. cit., p. 599.
- 37 René Magritte, Letter to André Bosmans, 24 July 1961, quoted in René Magritte, *Lettres à André Bosmans, 1958–1967* (Brussels: Éditions Seghers-Brachot, 1990), p. 181.
- 38 Interview with Marcel Mariën, 9 March 1981, Brussels, in Levy, op. cit., p. 216.



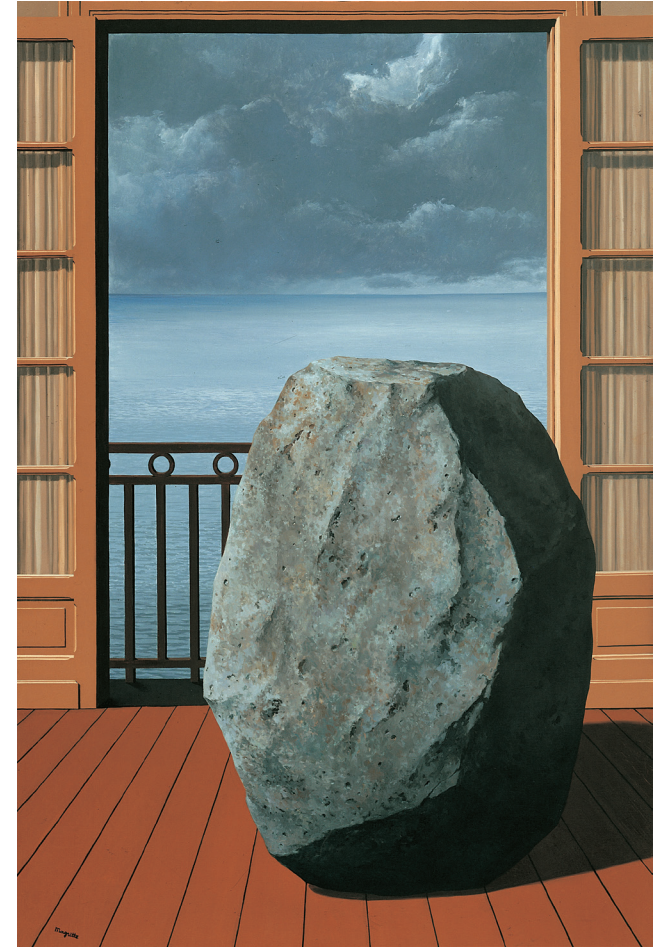
Charles Leirens (photographer), René Magritte, c.1959.



L'empire des lumières · The dominion of light

1954

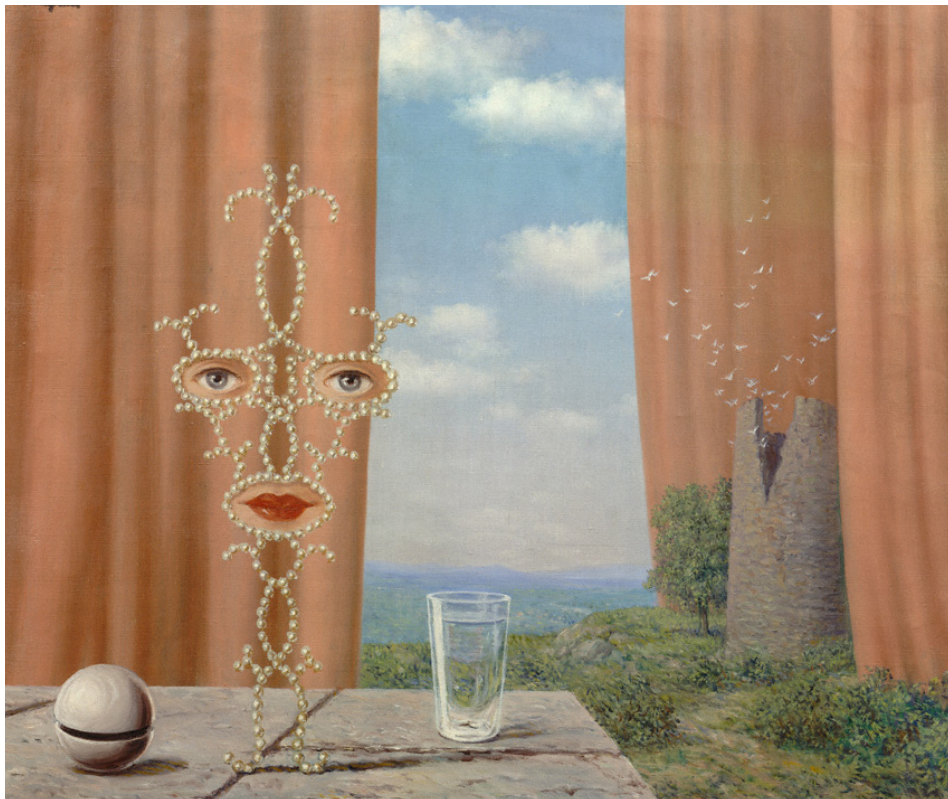
oil on canvas, 146 × 114 cm



Le monde invisible · The invisible world

1954

oil on canvas, 195 × 130 cm



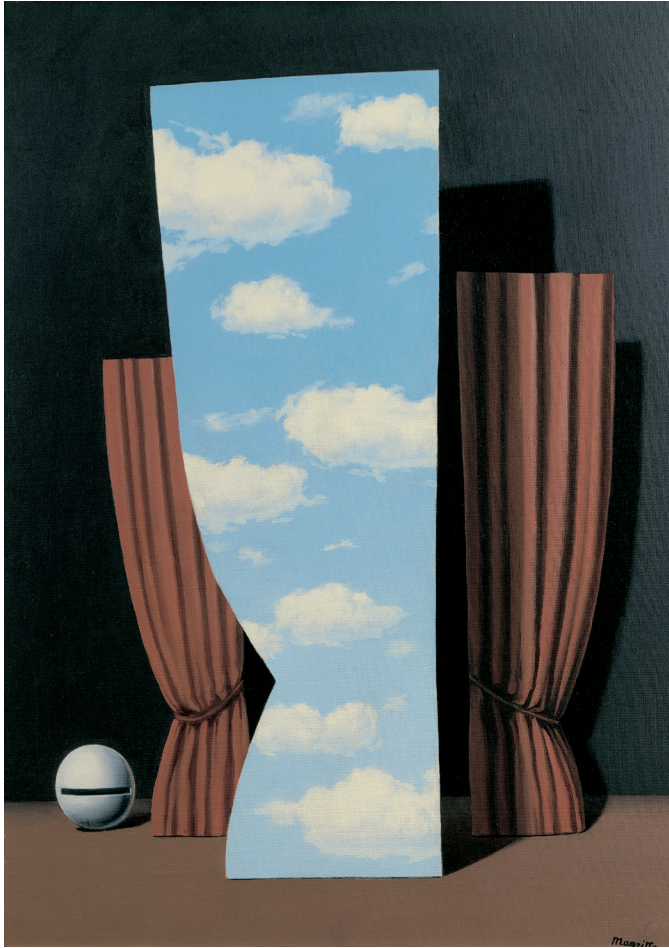
Shéhérazade · Sheherazade

1948
oil on canvas, 50 × 60 cm



La grande guerre · The great war

1964
oil on canvas, 81 × 60 cm



La Joconde · Mona Lisa
1960
oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm



La mémoire · Memory
1948
oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm



Le philtre · The philtre

1951
oil on canvas, 46 × 38 cm



Souvenir de voyage · Memory of a journey

1951
oil on canvas, 80 × 65 cm



La cascade · The waterfall

1961

oil on canvas, 81 × 100 cm



Perspective: Le balcon de Manet · Perspective: Manet's Balcony

1950

oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm



Le seize septembre · The sixteenth of September

1956
oil on canvas, 116 × 89 cm



La voix du sang · Blood will tell

1959
oil on canvas, 116 × 89 cm



Les pas perdus · The wasted footsteps

1950
oil on canvas, 55 × 46 cm



Le domaine d'Arnheim · The domain of Arnheim

1962
oil on canvas, 146 × 114 cm

Magritte in 400 images

JULIE WASEIGE

DE MAGRITTE-BIJBEL

Magritte in 400 images vat het oeuvre van de wereldberoemde surrealist samen in niet minder dan vierhonderd beelden. Magritte-specialiste Julie Waseige maakte hiervoor een keuze uit een oeuvre van duizenden werken. Het boek toont Magrittes belangrijkste en beroemdste schilderijen, maar bevat ook een aantal minder gekende werken, zoals zijn gouaches, tekeningen, sculpturen en beschilderde flessen. Een verrassende selectie die zowel amateurs als Magritte-kenners zal bekoren.

Magritte in 400 images is opgedeeld in 7 hoofdstukken en volgt een chronologische volgorde. Van Magrittes reclameaffiches en abstracte experimenten in de jaren 1920, zijn bonte Renoir-werken ('le surréalisme en plein soleil') en uitdagende 'période vache', belanden we uiteindelijk bij zijn wereldberoemde meesterwerken van de jaren 1950 en 1960.

Het boek geeft een overzicht van Magrittes leven en werk, op een behapbare en aantrekkelijke manier. De inleidende teksten zijn uitvoerig geïllustreerd met archiefphoto's. Deze compacte publicatie bevat een schat aan informatie en beeldmateriaal en is een *must-have* voor al wie van Magritte en moderne kunst houdt.



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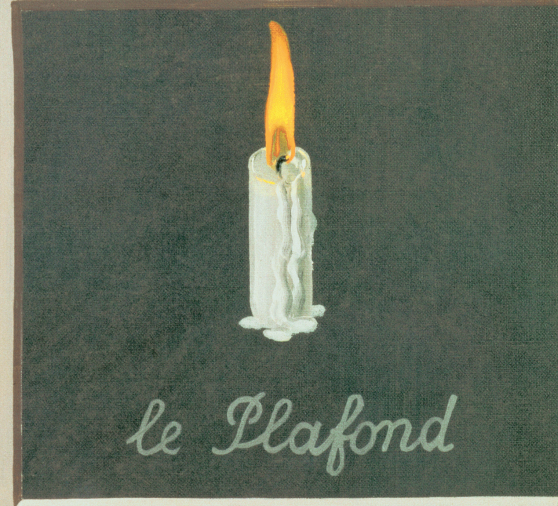
l'Acacia



la Lune



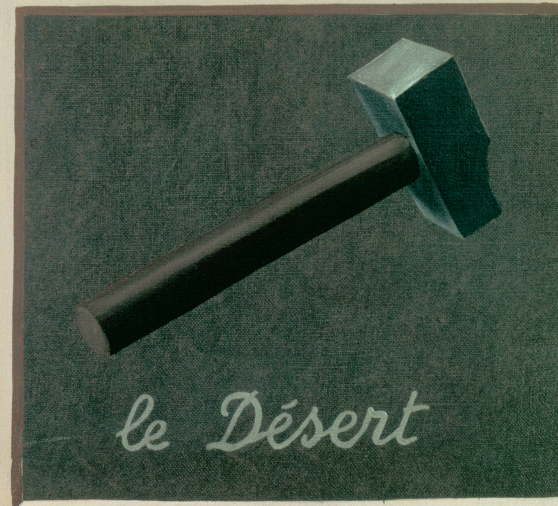
la Neige



le Plafond



l'Orage



le Désert

magritte