

*Magritte*

*The Treachery of Images*

This exhibition is being held under the joint high patronage of  
German Federal President Joachim Gauck and His Majesty The King of the Belgians.

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# *Magritte*

*The Treachery of Images*

*Edited by Didier Ottinger*

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*Magritte. La trahison des images/The Treachery of Images*

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Back of flyleaf

*La Lampe philosophique* [The Philosopher's Lamp], 1936  
(detail), **REPR. P. 24**

Front cover

*La Trahison des images (Ceci n'est pas une pipe)*  
[The Treachery of Images (This is not a pipe)], 1929, **REPR. P. 67**

Back cover

*Ceci continue de ne pas être une pipe*  
[This continues to not be a pipe], 1952, **REPR. P. 198**

Flyleaves

"Les mots et les images" [Words and Images], 1929  
(details), **REPR. P. 19**

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### Australia

*Kerry Stokes Collection*

### Belgium

*Collection Charly Herscovici*

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## Foreword

Bank of America Merrill Lynch is pleased to sponsor *Magritte. The Treachery of Images* at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

At Bank of America Merrill Lynch, we believe the arts are a powerful tool to help economies thrive and to foster connections across cultures. This is why we are one of the leading corporate supporters of the arts in the world, and why we have supported several exhibitions at the Schirn Kunsthalle and its counterpart museums over the past decade.

This comprehensive presentation of René Magritte works at the Schirn is the first of its kind in Germany for more than twenty years. We are pleased to be partners with an institution that plays such an important role in the German, and indeed global, cultural sector and in the economic well-being of the communities it serves.

*Magritte. The Treachery of Images* promises to be yet another successful exhibition for the Schirn Kunsthalle. It is an important presentation of works by this artist that will inspire and delight.

*Armin von Falkenhayn*

Country Executive Germany

Head of Corporate & Investment Banking Germany, Austria & Switzerland





## Preface

René Magritte ranks among the key figures of twentieth-century painting. He very much went his own way with his conceptual brand of Surrealism. Nowadays, his images seem omnipresent in visual culture, yet major surveys of his work are rare events. In Germany, it has been twenty years since the last such survey was on view, at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. In this sense our Frankfurt exhibition, which was organised in cooperation with the Centre Pompidou, is a rare event bringing together not just assembled top-class loans from all corners of the world, but also lesser-known works from Magritte's oeuvre. Magritte has been a guest at the Schirn once before, in a 2008-09 presentation of a small group of works from his "vache" period, consisting of a total of thirty uncharacteristic paintings from the year 1948 - a secondary strand in the work of this master of classic modernism painted for his first solo exhibition in Paris, which, at the time, was intended as a polemic attack, a deliberate provocation directed at the dogmatic ideas of the Paris group of Surrealists surrounding André Breton. In a way, *Magritte. The Treachery of Images* follows that precursor exhibition. It is not a classic retrospective; instead, it interrogates the work of the Belgian Surrealist from a specific angle and, as a result, presents it in a new light.

Magritte married the cool precision of his painting with the idea, and yet his painting, rather than being an expression of thought, is to be viewed as thought itself. As René Magritte himself put it, he was not an artist - a designation he rejected - but a thinking human being who expressed his thoughts through painting. Hence his surreal image constructions uniquely become an instrument of poetic insight. The exhibition shows Magritte as an artist of "Surrealism in the blazing sun" who is less subject to the expectable methods of Surrealism such as dream and chance. It insists on an intellectual Surrealism that has less recourse to rendering visible what is buried in the recesses of the psyche.

*Magritte. The Treachery of Images* aims to show the work of the Belgian Surrealist in its relation to the philosophy of his time. He worked all his life to give painting the same importance as words. For his extraordinary artistic strategies, Magritte sought a proximity to philosophy, which supplied him with arguments for the complex character of his paintings. The artist thus maintained a close dialogue with figures such as Chaïm Perelman, the philosopher of law, and Alphonse De Waelhens, the Belgian phenomenologist and Heidegger expert, and, finally, with none other than Michel Foucault, the great French post-structuralist. Following a correspondence with Magritte, Foucault wrote his essay *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (*This Is Not a Pipe*).

This dialogue reflects Magritte's continuous preoccupation with issues of resemblance and realism. The exhibition examines Magritte's central pictorial formulas, which deal with the mythology of the invention and definition of painting. His intellectual curiosity led the painter to create a remarkable oeuvre, to defamiliarise the world, uniquely combining precise, magisterial painting with conceptual thought. Magritte developed a quasi-scientific methodology for this kind of painting that worked through the "issues" identified by him. All this attests to Magritte's distrust of simple answers and a simple realism.



We are very pleased to be able to realise this exhibition in cooperation with the Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the director, Bernard Blistène, and the entire team of the Centre Pompidou for their dedication and entirely professional collaboration. I am grateful for their continuous support and for accommodating us in many respects. Our thanks go in particular to the curator, Didier Ottinger, for his prudence and knowledgeability in developing the concept, as well as to Cathy Gicquel for her dedicated and confident support during the organisation of the exhibition.

I would like to extend special thanks to the numerous lenders who generously agreed to temporarily part with important works and, in doing so, contributed significantly to the exhibition's success. Such an ambitious exhibition project could not have been realised without the support of public and private lenders in Germany and abroad, and we are especially grateful for their generous cooperation.

I would like to thank the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; the Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris; the Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Kunstmuseum Bern; the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; The Menil Collection, Houston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, Brussels; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the Norfolk Museums Service, Norwich; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Tate, London; and the Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve.

Furthermore, let me thank the following collections and private lenders: Collection Diane SA, Geneva; Collection Charly Herscovici, Brussels; the Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth; and a number of other private lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

For their invaluable support of this exhibition, I would also like to thank the following private institutions: Ageas Belgium, Brussels; Brachot Gallery, Brussels; Simon Studer Art, Geneva; Sotheby's, Paris; along with those who prefer to remain anonymous.

No less crucial for this project is the commitment of our partners and sponsors. We are very pleased to have Bank of America Merrill Lynch supporting us in this project as main sponsor and thus continuing its long-standing association with the Schirn Kunsthalle. I am especially grateful in this context to the management of Bank of America Merrill Lynch, represented in Germany by Armin von Falkenhayn, Country Executive for Germany and Head of Corporate & Investment Banking for Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and to our long-time dialogue partners Linda Federici, Director Global Sponsorship, and the London-based team. With Bank of America Merrill Lynch at our side, we have a steadfast partner helping to make this exhibition project financially viable.

The work of the Schirn and, consequently, the realisation of such a complex exhibition project would not be possible without the support of the City of Frankfurt. I would therefore like



to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the mayor, Peter Feldmann, the head of the cultural department, Ina Hartwig, and, along with them, all the policymakers.

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Finally, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the highly motivated team at the Schirn. My thanks go first and foremost to Martina Weinhart, the curator who brought this ambitious project to fruition with great sensitivity and extraordinary dedication. Special thanks are due also to Maria Sitte, who supported her as a research assistant. In addition, I am grateful to Inka Drögemüller as our deputy director; to Esther Schlicht for the exhibition management and tour; to Karin Grüning, Catharina Brust and Elke Walter for arranging the loans and coordinating the mounting and dismounting; to the conservators, Stefanie Gundermann and Stephanie Wagner; to Ronald Kammer and Christian Teltz for their technical support of the exhibition; and to the installation crew team led by Andreas Gundermann. I would also like to thank Luise Bachmann, Isabel Stamm, Lilli Christoph-Homberg and Owig DasGupta for the innovative marketing, as well as Heike Stumpf for her dedicated commitment in the promotional campaign; Julia Lange and Miriam Werner for the sponsoring and the assistance they provided to our partners; Pamela Rohde along with Johanna Pulz and Timo Weißberg for the public relations; Fabian Famulok for editing the online magazine; Chantal Eschenfelder along with Laura Heeg, Simone Boscheinen, Irmir Rauber and Olga Shmakova from the education department; Heike Berndt and Tanja Stahl in administration; my assistant, Daniela Schmidt, and the team assistant, Tanja Trabes; Ute Seiffert for developing and coordinating the accompanying events; our courier, Ralf Stoßmeister; Rosaria La Tona and the cleaning team; Josef Härig and Vilizara Antalavicheva at reception; Rolf Brauckhoff and his supervision and safety team; as well as all other colleagues who were involved in realising this project.

*Philipp Demandt*  
Director



# Ut pictura philosophia

## Portrait of Magritte as a philosopher

Didier Ottinger

“[...] some have feigned to recognise the theoretical expression of a purely *experimental* thought in pretentious, incoherent, wild imaginings in which sordid superstitions

and milky mystiques get entangled.” — Paul NOUGÉ, “Les points sur les signes”<sup>1</sup>

“One cannot praise Magritte enough for having clearly understood Karl Marx’s pathetic appeal, the old prophet’s essential watchword: ‘More awareness’” — Paul NOUGÉ, “René Magritte ou la révélation objective”<sup>2</sup>

### The stupidity of painters

“As stupid as a painter!” To give his crusade against the “retinian” restriction of modern painting (against a formalism that considered only a work’s “optical” dimension) a common-sense basis, Marcel Duchamp had us believe that this expression existed in current late nineteenth-century vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> This supposed “stupidity” had its uses for him. It typified a hierarchy stultified by centuries of philosophy that ranked composers and poets above painters and words far above images. From Plato to Hegel, philosophy dismissed all figurative representation as confusion of the senses, considering poetry to be the most accomplished vector of the Spirit. Despite Leonardo da Vinci’s efforts to assert that his art was a “mental thing”, the idea of “intellectual” painting was for a long time regarded as an aberration.

Magritte never put up with the “stupidity of painters”, relentlessly asserting the intellectual dignity of his art, first against poets and later against philosophers. This claim had its roots in the specificity of Belgian Surrealism, which owed everything to the personality and convictions of its founder, Paul Nougé **FIG. P. 16**, a biochemist<sup>4</sup> and a committed Marxist<sup>5</sup> who in 1926 formed the group comprising Louis Scutenaire, Camille Goemans, René Magritte, E. L. T. Mesens and André Souris **FIG. RIGHT**.

Foreseeing Parisian Surrealism’s conversion to Marxism,<sup>6</sup> Nougé and his friends claimed to adhere to a dialectical method, to a scientific thinking that led them to denounce the automatism established by André Breton as the exclusive poetic model of early Surrealism. In the lecture he gave at Charleroi in 1929,<sup>7</sup> Nougé stigmatised this automatism, in which he saw the “formula for a new quietism”.<sup>8</sup> He vilified abandonment to “games of chance and destiny”, in which we remain “immobile, leaning over ourselves, as if over an immense, dark abyss, waiting for the hatching of miracles, the ascension of wonders”.



**Joseph Rentmeesters**

*Le Rendez-vous de chasse*  
[The Hunting Party], 1934  
(standing: E. L. T. Mesens,  
René Magritte, Louis Scutenaire,  
André Souris, Paul Nougé;  
seated: Irène Hamoir, Marthe Nougé,  
Georgette Magritte)  
Private collection



Portrait of Paul Nougé, 1927  
Oil on canvas, 95 × 65 cm  
Musées royaux des beaux-arts  
de Belgique, Brussels

Nougé believed more in “searching” than “finding”. When he was formulating the declarations in his “Charleroi Lecture” they were no longer polemical towards Parisian Surrealism.

## A “reasoning” Surrealism

In 1927, André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard and Pierre Unik joined the ranks of the French Communist Party. The publication of the *Second Manifesto* two years later confirmed the movement’s militant about-turn, dedication to revolution and adoption of Marxism’s philosophical presuppositions. Now that, as Breton himself termed it, Surrealism was entering its “reasoning” phase, Belgians and Parisians could at last share a communal vision. Consistency with Communism demanded taking reality (summarily rejected in the founding manifesto) into consideration, and there remained the invention of a formula capable of rendering it compatible with the exploration of the subconscious with which Surrealism continued to identify itself. The *deus ex machina* that resolved this theoretical aporia came when Salvador Dalí moved to Paris in 1929. The name of his magic formula was the paranoia-critical method.<sup>9</sup> The *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* [Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism], written by André Breton and Paul Éluard in 1938, defines it as a “spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectivity of the associations and interpretations of delirious phenomena”.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, the *Anthologie de l’humour noir* [Anthology of Black Humour] would stress the dialectical principle inherent in the Dalian method, defined as seeking the equilibrium of “a lyrical state based on pure intuition [...] and a speculative state based on reflection”.<sup>11</sup>

The rapprochement of the Surrealism of the 1930s and scientific thought echoed Gaston Bachelard’s epistemological studies of science during the same period. In 1935, Bachelard’s interpretation of Tristan Tzara’s *Grains et issues* produced the concept of “surrationalism”:

“When this surnaturalism has found its doctrine, it could be connected with Surrealism, because together both sensibility and reason will be given back their fluidity.”<sup>12</sup>

*Le Nouvel Esprit scientifique* [The New Scientific Spirit] (1934), which Bachelard dedicated to Breton, analyses the “epistemological break” that helps make contemporary science an “open rationalism”. He attributes this scientific mutation to the principles of relativist physics and non-Euclidian mathematics, which integrate intuition and chance.<sup>13</sup> To the conclusions of the philosopher, who wonders, “Which poet will give us the metaphors of this new language?”<sup>14</sup> Breton replies by declaring that “Modern scientific thought and artistic thought have much the same structure in this respect [...] reason today proposes nothing but the continuous assimilation of the irrational [...]”<sup>15</sup>

Surrealism’s denigrators focused their critiques on his opposition to a fossilised Reason, conveniently ignoring that Breton had undertaken this combat only against academic rationalism, against science that had sunk into formalism. The same applies to the Surrealist interest in esotericism and the occult sciences, insistently jeered by those wanting to ignore that they merely had a use value.

Surrealism’s scientific tropism, exemplified by the dialectical materialism consubstantial with its Belgian component, constituted the breeding ground on which René Magritte’s work and his insistent combat against the “stupidity of painters” developed.

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## Elective affinities

In the lecture that René Magritte gave at the Koninklijk Museum van Schoone Kunsten in Antwerp in 1938, entitled “La ligne de vie” [Lifeline], he shows his attachment to this “dialectic” then shared by Belgian and Parisian Surrealists. He divided his work into two clearly distinct periods, declaring that “The pictures painted [...] from 1925 to 1936, were also the result of a systematic search for a disturbing poetic effect [...]”<sup>16</sup>

His discovery of Giorgio De Chirico’s *Chant d’amour* [The Song of Love] (1914) **FIG. P. 167** in 1922 was a revelation for him. It produced a “disturbing poetic effect”. In his *Esquisse autobiographique* [Autobiographical Sketch] (1954), he recounts:

“Lecomte shows Magritte a photograph of a picture by De Chirico, *Le Chant d’amour*, and the painter cannot not hold back his tears.”<sup>17</sup>

And to Carl Waï, who interviewed him in 1967, he says:

“When I saw the reproduction of De Chirico’s picture *Le Chant d’amour* for the first time, it was one of the most moving moments of my life: my eyes saw thought for the first time.”<sup>18</sup>

Bringing together a cast of an antique head of Apollo and a rubber glove, *Le Chant d’amour* takes to its apogee the Surrealist definition of beauty borrowed from Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the beauty created by “the chance meeting on a dissection table of a sewing machine and an umbrella”.<sup>19</sup>

Magritte’s conversion to Surrealism took place under the auspices of this beauty created by chance and the arbitrary. Although he momentarily conformed to the “disturbing effects” formula, notably in his pictures in 1926 and 1927, he rapidly began exploring hiatuses in the picture space and the aporias of realism, exploiting the hiatuses between different forms of representation, and in doing so subjecting his painting to a critical reflexivity, a scientific method of inspiration.<sup>20</sup>

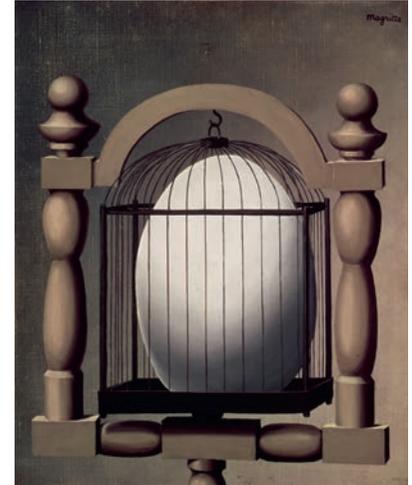
As legend would have it and with characteristic drama, Magritte gives his own, fabulous account of this surpassing of an art of the arbitrary:<sup>21</sup>

“One night in 1936, I woke up in a room where someone had put a cage with a bird asleep inside it. A wonderful mistake caused me to see the bird in the cage replaced by an egg. I had there an astonishing new poetic secret, because the shock that I felt had been caused precisely by the affinity of the two objects, the cage and the egg, whereas previously this shock had been caused by the encounter of objects foreign to one another.”<sup>22</sup>

Magritte’s chronology, however, is extremely problematic. *Les Affinités électives* [Elective Affinities] (showing the egg imprisoned in the cage) **REPR. ABOVE** was not painted in 1936 but in 1932 – the year 1936 was highly emblematic for Surrealism, a year that witnessed the reconciliation of art and the new science celebrated by the exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton, which Breton endowed with a meaning drawn from Bachelard’s *Le Nouvel Esprit scientifique*. Magritte would have had this important moment in the intellectual history of Surrealism in mind when he gave his lecture in 1938. Did this memory prompt him to synchronise his scientific about-turn with that of Surrealism?

## Painting equated

The dating of *Les Affinités électives* shows that it was indeed in the political and “dialectical” context of Belgian Surrealism, in that of the paranoiac-critical, that Magritte’s surpassing of the poiesis of shock and arbitrariness took place. It marked the beginning



*Les Affinités électives*  
[Elective Affinities], 1932  
Oil on canvas, 41 × 33 cm  
Private collection



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

of a new chapter in his work, in which the task of each of his pictures was to solve a “problem”:

“[...] my investigations were like the pursuit of solutions to problems for which I had three particulars: the object, the thing attached to it in the depths of my mind and the light into which that thing had to be brought.”<sup>23</sup>

The term “problem”, which Magritte systematically used from then on, sheds light on the cognitive ambition motivating his painting from 1932 onwards. It was to solve that “problem” that he wanted to produce pictures with universal meaning, to conceive apodictic images: “[...] these searches could give only a single right answer for each object [...]”<sup>24</sup> The visual solutions he found for each of these “problems” all fulfil a strict dialectical principle. *La Condition humaine* [The Human Condition] **REPR. PP. 115, 119, 125, 135**, linked to the “problem” of the window, associates inside and outside, the seen and the hidden, nature and culture and, in the case in point, picture and landscape. *L’Invention collective* [Collective Invention] **FIG. P. 185**, a response to the “problem” of the sea, juxtaposes the containing (the ocean) and the contained (the fish), the real (the sea creature) and the imaginary (the figure, albeit inverted, of the mermaid). *Le Modèle rouge* [The Red Model] **REPR. P. 46**, addressing the “problem” of the shoe, confronts the dialectic of nature (the bare foot) and culture (the shoe), civilisation and barbarism and the seen and the hidden ... From one “problem” to another the dialectical couples structuring Magritte’s imagination become clear: natural and artificial, interior and exterior, the impulsive and the rational.

## A painter among poets

Study of Magritte’s work with his biography taken into consideration leads one to back-date the moment he distanced himself from the “shock” aesthetic characteristic of early Surrealism. 1927 was the year he produced his first word pictures **FIG. P. 19**, and also the year he moved to Perreux-sur-Marne and drew closer to the Parisian Surrealists – a rapprochement rather than an assimilation given his slow and tedious integration into the group. In 1927, Magritte was not asked to sign the tract *Permettez!*, is not mentioned in *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* (1928), which Breton had begun writing, and his work was not included in the exhibition at Galerie Au sacre du printemps in spring 1928.

He regarded the hierarchy that Surrealism established between words and images as symptomatic of the haughtiness with which Parisian Surrealists – primarily poets – regarded makers of images. In the first number of *La Révolution surréaliste*, Max Morise had expressed doubts as to the very existence of a “plastique surréaliste”.<sup>25</sup> Automatic writing could record a “flux of thought” incompatible with the fixity of images. In the third number, Pierre Naville expressed the sentiment shared by the group as a whole that “we are all aware that there is no Surrealist painting.”<sup>26</sup> Despite this anathema and confirming his addiction to the “stupefying image”, Breton published the chapters of *Surrealism and Painting* in instalments, from the fourth number (15 July 1925) of *La Révolution surréaliste* onwards.

In spite of this recognition, a cloud of suspicion still hung over “la plastique surréaliste”. André Breton’s conversion to Hegelianism in the late 1920s merely reinforced his hierarchical conception of the arts. In Hegel’s narration of the historical development of the arts, the leader of the Surrealist movement found confirmation of the pre-eminence of poetry as the most accomplished form of manifestation of the mind throughout history.



=====

light is not seen in the sun but that one can see it only as a ‘reality’ more shining (than the other ‘realities’ lit by the sun)?”<sup>32</sup>

This initial exchange falls into the hair-splitting induced by the complexity of a definition of “light” comprising its physical dimension, its philosophical use (light confused with the mind itself) and its multiple metaphoric meanings. De Waelhens is forced to “reframe” the debate:

“[...] you ask me if the use (or rather the metaphor) of physical light implies that we should consider the flame of a candle or the sun - which we see - as ‘realities’ similar to the things that they illuminate. Most certainly not.”<sup>33</sup>

Magritte comes over to this more philosophical than physical conception of “light”: “I had to discover ‘by myself’ that thought is the only light.”<sup>34</sup>

The first paintings dealing with light and its role in our representations appear in the early 1930s. *L’Oracle* [The Oracle] (1931) is a reflection on the two types light constituted by solar light and that cast by a flame. The idea becomes clearer in *La Lumière des coïncidences* [The Light of Coincidence] (1933, REPR. P. 112), which explicitly equates “physical” light (that of a candle) and that pertaining to “thought”, illustrated in this case by his painting a picture within the picture. These philosophical puzzles achieve their fulfilment in *La Condition humaine* (1935, REPR. P. 135), which brings together all the elements of the Platonic allegory of the cave. This picture confirms that Magritte’s painting really is a systematic exploration of an “empire of light”.

Magritte the painter does not confine himself to this equivalence of method that puts his art on the same level as philosophy. In his letter dated 5 February 1954, he takes to task Heidegger, who “is talking about the peasants’ shoes represented in a picture by Van Gogh, and not any old depiction of shoes painted by some lesser painter, which would illustrate, as an object of meditation, what he says about pictorial representation”.<sup>35</sup> Magritte is inferring here that it is Van Gogh’s genius, his singular subjectivity that enabled Heidegger to attain the truth, the “essence” of the shoes.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *L’Œil et l’Esprit* [Eye and Mind] is one of the analyses that De Waelhens recommended to Magritte. Although its title could *a priori* appeal to Magritte in that it could appear to be a possible translation of the “paranoiac-critical” that he more or less advocated, he was indignant at seeing Cézanne’s eye transformed by the philosopher into an “optical instrument”, into a “cinema camera”, that is, into an objective, passive receiver negating Cézanne’s artistic genius. Having conceded that *L’Œil et l’Esprit* is a “very brilliant discourse”, Magritte concludes that it “hardly makes one think about painting - which it is apparently dealing with”.<sup>36</sup>

From his first exchanges with the painter, De Waelhens had surmised that Magritte was claiming for the artist a rank equal, if not superior, to that of the philosopher in the process of representation and objectification of the world.<sup>37</sup> To nip this crazy claim in the bud, De Waelhens unleashes a philosophical thunderbolt:

“[...] one has to reply with Hegel [...], that our time has ceased to accept art as a valid expression of itself. If the Parthenon and the cathedrals of the Middle Ages are to be taken as expressions of the meaning that these eras gave themselves, this is no longer true of any modern art.”

Aware that this call to order would more than likely irritate Magritte, he adds a post-scriptum:

“I hope that you are under no misapprehension regarding the thesis that denies that art can validly express the meaning of our times. [...] Hegel, Nietzsche [...] and Heidegger successively repeated that ‘great art’ died with the Renaissance.”<sup>38</sup>

Magritte was quick to retaliate to this diagnosis of obsolescence:

“[...] the idea of ‘Great Art’ [...] gives art a precise aim [...]. What the philosopher takes for the ‘means of achieving this aim’, genius, for example, is ‘the place’ where ‘light’ takes place and which ‘brings to’ light, which one betrays if one talks about it in terms of historic time and geographic space.”<sup>39</sup>

Denouncing these ends assigned to art which justify its philosophical subjugation, Magritte writes:

“As for the question of ‘art’, and the impression I must give you of talking about philosophical questions in an ‘exterior manner’, I confess to feeling this when philosophers consider this question. Art is always ‘pedantically’ understood, as if in this domain freedom of mind could not turn the ‘organised’ aesthetic upside down, due to the necessity to free itself and make artistic means serve less derisory ends than those that we know.”<sup>40</sup>

The painter was not going to be taken in. When Alphonse De Waelhens sent him his most recent article, “Merleau-Ponty, philosophe de la peinture”,<sup>41</sup> Magritte’s claws came out again: “I regret somewhat that your work and that of Merleau-Ponty concern only the generalities of painting [...]” Expressing his increasing irritation, he cites passages of the essay that seem to him to be “mystification”, even “delirious fiction”. He describes as “silliness” the likening of Cézanne’s landscapes to a “pre-world where there were no men”, and the passage devoted to Michaux’s “stains”, which “show how things become things and the world the world!”<sup>42</sup>

In autumn 1962, another philosopher, Chaïm Perelman, lecturer in logic at the Université libre de Bruxelles,<sup>43</sup> came into contact with Magritte.<sup>44</sup> He met Magritte at his home, to buy a picture (*La Recherche de la vérité* [The Search for Truth], 1962), and not in his “studio”, the painter having never had such a workplace. As if to stress the “mental”, speculative component of his art, Magritte rejected anything that could liken his painting to a technical, manual activity. His “studio” consisted of a small carpet on which he set up his easel in a corner of his living room. And the clothes he wore to paint his pictures were more those of a solicitor than a painter ...

In March 1965, Chaïm Perelman advised Magritte to read *L’Image fascinante et le surréel* by Maurice-Jean Lefebvre.<sup>45</sup> Magritte’s verdict was irrevocable:

“I read this brilliant analysis of the image with the pleasure afforded by some ‘science-fiction’ literature, without being able to find an idea in which the imaginary, the surreal, the unreal are treated as they deserve.”<sup>46</sup>

While he never missed an opportunity to treat them harshly, Magritte cultivated his contacts with philosophers. His exchanges with them enabled him to test and go further into his ideas. De Waelhens and Perelman became privileged interlocutors, to whom he submitted his texts and whom he consulted for his interviews.

Although always friendly, Magritte’s relations with philosophers were essentially a dialogue of the deaf. Magritte did not receive from De Waelhens or Perelman the philosophical seal of approval he sought. Yet in his first letter to De Waelhens he maintains that “a link exists between philosophers and artists: they defend the cause of the mind”.<sup>47</sup>

Magritte had to wait until very late in life and his meeting with Michel Foucault for a philosopher to at last acknowledge this

To demonstrate his art’s philosophical dignity, Magritte wanted to establish a relationship of equivalence between vision and thought, which he defined as follows:

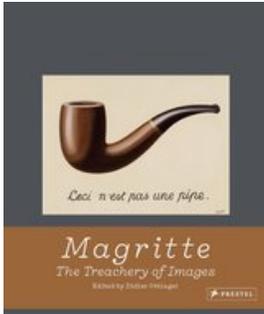


*Le Stropiat* [The Maimed], 1948  
Gouache, pencil and paint on paper,  
32.5 × 41 cm  
Private collection



**Georges Thiry**  
René Magritte and *The Schoolmaster*,  
c.1955

UNVERKÄUFLICHE LESEPROBE



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