

The Vernacular as Vanguard
Alfred Barr, Salvador Dalí, and the U.S. Reception of Surrealism in the 1930s

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Because of Surrealism's dynamic but problematic relationship to popular culture, the movement's significance within art history has in large part not been easily defined. Indeed, the historiography of Surrealism in the United States shows it to be an under-evaluated alternative to the critical dominance of abstraction and Cubism, and one that we have not come to understand with the same level of complexity. Instead, Surrealism is often presented in American university surveys as a bridge between European and American art during World War II, at the time of the Surrealist exile in the United States and just prior to the genesis of Abstract Expressionism.¹ But, as I want to show in this paper, Surrealism's influence on the development of an American artistic culture not only begins earlier—it also lasts far beyond the post-World War II period. The complex permutations of Surrealism's American reception in the 1930s reflect a struggle with the interpretation of avant-garde art, since Surrealism's own contentious stance toward high art eventually undermined its ability to be a subversive alternative as it was taken up by all manner of capitalist enterprise.

Since its introduction to American mass audiences in the 1930s, Surrealism has continued to be embroiled in contemporary culture, long after its practitioners have ceased to be involved in the movement. Seemingly resistant to art historical classification, Surrealism's malleability offers a way to question the narratives of modern art that it traversed. Particularly interesting is the disjunction between Surrealism's declared subversive position and its widespread visual impact outside of high art. Why has it proven so difficult to position Surrealism into an account of modern art? Is it possible that Surrealism was almost too accessible to a mainstream audience to allow it to maintain avant-garde status? If so, why shouldn't avant-garde art speak to the masses? How was it that by the 1940s Surrealism had become a foil

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for a developing, Americanized notion of the avant-garde, one that was autonomous, devoted to abstraction, and carefully distanced from politics?

In one of the earliest assessments of Surrealism in America, in response to the *Surréalisme* exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in January 1932, The New York Times asked: “How much of the material now on view shall we esteem ‘art,’ and how much should be enjoyed as laboratory roughage?”² The question encompassed the problem Surrealism was to pose for art history for the next decade, in part because it essentially went unanswered. Four years later, Surrealism’s critical reception was still up for grabs. At the Museum of Modern Art’s mammoth 700-object show, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* in December 1936, Alfred Barr, the founding director of MoMA, presented Surrealism as a leading movement in avant-garde art, although by displaying Surrealist works alongside cartoons by Walt Disney Productions and drawings by insane asylum patients, he already suggested that the movement resonated beyond the scope of traditional aesthetics alone.

Barr’s ambivalence about the movement was evident in the introduction he wrote to the catalogue, in which he stated that once Surrealism was “no longer a cockpit of controversy, it will doubtless be seen as having produced a mass of mediocre and capricious pictures...a fair number of excellent and enduring works of art, and even a few masterpieces.”³ The inclusiveness of the show might seem surprising today, considering the later history of the Museum of Modern Art. But as this paper argues, in the 1930s Surrealism was a site where high and low existed in a collaborative rather than oppositional dialogue, and where avant-garde production mixed readily, if uneasily, with kitsch. As such, it was actively absorbed into American mass culture.

Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism marked the introduction of Surrealism to a wide audience, twelve years after André Breton published the first Surrealist manifesto in Paris.⁴ In the Manifesto, Breton had defined Surrealism as:

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought.⁵

From the beginning, Surrealism's aims were broadly defined and its scope even more so. But because Barr wanted to include fantastic and anti-rational art historical antecedents of Surrealism ranging from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, Breton and Paul Eluard, a leading poet in the group, felt that the exhibition would not be an accurate manifestation of Surrealism. Ostensibly to protect the integrity as well as the specificity of the group, Eluard wrote to Barr and asked that he formally agree not to include the works of other movements and to change the title of the upcoming exhibition simply to *Surrealism Exhibition*.⁶ When Barr rejected these requests, noting that it was presumptuous of Eluard and Breton to assume they could dictate to the Museum, they withdrew their support for the show, at first refusing to lend important works from their own collections and insisting that other Surrealists do the same.⁷ One of the reasons Barr refused to comply with the Surrealists' demands was that in his mind a Surrealism exhibition needed to inform the public; that was best done by establishing and legitimizing Surrealism through an art historical pedigree and extra-aesthetic dissemination. Thus, Barr's exhibition was, from the start, far broader in approach and appeal than even the Surrealists themselves intended. In the end, it displayed objects that covered the entire range of visual culture: from oil paintings to film and fur-covered teacups, and finally to an "object made from a Sears-Roebuck catalog" (1936)—with the latter as something Dadaists like Duchamp or Ernst would have approved of.⁸

Fantastic Art was billed as the second in a series of exhibitions designed to highlight important movements in modern art to the American public. The first in the series was *Cubism and Abstract Art*, also mounted in 1936, in which Barr unveiled his influential and now well-known chart, tracing the development of modern art. As Barr set about conceptualizing the trajectory of recent art history, he conceived of interrelated strands of artistic production that led to two divergent aesthetic tendencies—labeling them non-geometrical abstract art on the one hand, and geometrical abstract art on the other. The chart leaves no place for the figurative tradition of modern art. Nevertheless it is important to remember that Barr conceived the diagram specifically for the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition, as a way to describe the evolution of the abstract tendency in modern art, divorced, for the purposes of didactic coherence, from other artistic, historical and social traditions or contexts. Barr was hardly unaware of these conditions, however, and his aim seems to have been both to justify the importance of abstract art and to protect abstract artists from political persecution, writing: "This essay and exhibition might well be dedicated to those painters of squares and circles (and the architects who influenced them) who have suffered at the hands of philistines in political power."⁹

The language of instruction is built into the dedication, where Barr simplified abstract paintings to “squares and circles” in order to communicate more directly. While abstract Surrealism makes an appearance in this schematized parade of styles, it is clear from Barr’s introduction to the *Fantastic Art* catalogue that he construed Surrealism as the irrational alternative to his *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition. He described the latter as “diametrically opposed in both spirit and esthetic principles to the present [Dada and Surrealism] exhibition.”¹⁰ He did this despite the fact that several of the same artists were represented in both shows.

Barr’s chart has been read to privilege the march of modern art toward abstraction, but his series of exhibitions on important modern art movements subsequent to *Cubism and Abstract Art* could hardly be understood as such. Following *Fantastic Art*, the museum displayed paintings by self-taught artists called *Masters of Popular Painting* in 1938, followed in 1943 by *American Realists and Magic Realists*.¹¹ The latter exhibition seems to have insisted on a comparison between American realistic painting and Magic Realism, which Barr described in stylistic (if not theoretical or political) terms that could just as easily have applied to illusionistic or figurative Surrealism. Magic realism, Barr wrote, was “the work of painters who, by means of an exact realistic technique, try to make plausible and convincing their improbably dreamlike or fantastic vision.”¹² Art historian Ingrid Schaffner describes Neo-Romanticism and Magic Realism as “two of Surrealism’s cousins”¹³ and James Thrall Soby discussed the two movements together, contrasting them with Cubism: “Surrealism, as well as Neo-Romanticism, is entirely a romantic movement, and in order to appraise its art we must abandon the criteria...which were applicable to Cubism.”¹⁴ Gallery owner Julien Levy (who gave Dalí his first one-man show in America), also supported this type of American painting—the only New York dealer to do so at the time.¹⁵ Of the next exhibition in the series, *Romantic Painting in America*, Barr wrote: “[...this tradition] now seems to have been at least as strong as the much advertised American love of fact and detailed local color.”¹⁶ Surrealist painting—particularly Surrealist figurative painting—fit quite readily into this alternative “homegrown” artistic milieu. Indeed, it seems doubtful that Barr ever intended to privilege abstraction over figuration, especially considering his commitment in the show’s catalogue to showing that Realists and Magic Realists were pitted against abstraction.

Through Barr and various other academic and popular assessments, the introduction of Surrealism to America in the mid-1930s downplayed its literary, theoretical, and political engagements and focused on its techniques of automatic processes and on the fashionable psychological content of its paintings. Even while

29,000 people saw the now-more-famous *Cubism and Abstract Art* show, more than 50,000 visitors attended *Fantastic Art* while it was at MoMA and it garnered extensive attention in the media; Universal Pictures and Paramount Pictures even issued newsreels featuring the show.¹⁷ Despite a concern among some critics of the period that “much has yet to be explained ere the *layman* can comprehend the ideals and endeavors of the Surrealist painters,”¹⁸ the public response to Surrealism was very accommodating. For the most part divorced, in the public eye, from its engagement with Marxism, its numerous manifestos, and its European intellectualism, Surrealism was typically portrayed as psychological play made visible without reference to its politics. As art historian Keith Eggner has pointed out, when Marx was mentioned in conjunction with Surrealism, the reference, in the popular mind, was not to Karl, but to Groucho and Harpo.¹⁹

It seems probable that the lack of context that became the norm in the reception of Surrealism in America was introduced by Barr’s first edition of the *Fantastic Art* catalogue, with only his brief “Preface” serving to explain the extremely broad body of work presented, thus leaving the 227 plates virtually to speak for themselves. Barr had originally asked Breton to write a short piece for the catalogue, but it seems the poet ignored the request.²⁰ While the catalogue’s succinct chronology of the two movements does briefly concede Surrealism’s formal adherence to Communism in conjunction with the 1930 founding of the Surrealist journal *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, the lengthy exhibition pamphlet that supplemented the catalogue made no mention of Surrealism’s political aims.

Nor were Georges Hugnet’s commissioned essays on Dada and Surrealism ready in time for the catalogue publication. They were instead distributed to MoMA members in the Museum’s bulletin and only published in a later edition of the catalogue. But they also steered clear of rhetoric and politics, stressing Surrealism as an investigative process rather than an aesthetic undertaking, and insisting that “Surrealist painting must not be judged by artistic *quality*.”²¹ Discussing *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, Hugnet dismissively writes that “the Surrealist painters refuse to bow to the exigencies of politics...,”²² failing to acknowledge the complicated relationship that existed between the Surrealists in Paris and the Communist Party.

Responses to Surrealism came from all quarters. Typical of its popular reception, *Life* magazine assured its readers that Surrealism was universal and even personal: “Surrealism is no stranger than a normal person’s dream...When you scribble idly on a telephone pad you are setting down your irrational subconscious.”²³ In the *New Yorker*, critic Lewis Mumford concluded that “it would be absurd to

dismiss Surrealism as crazy. Maybe it is our civilization that is crazy. Has it not used all the powers of rational intellect...to universalize the empire of meaningless war and to turn whole states into Fascist madhouses?"²⁴ An unsigned article in *The New York Times* expresses a related, but much less generous opinion: "A view of what's going on under the name of surrealism in the Museum of Modern Art suggests the thought that the artists of the lunatic fringe, however they rank in their own field, are better than the political commentators at describing what's going on in other spheres. Outside the galleries...the contemporary eye must rest on objects and images much more grotesque..."²⁵

It was not a given that Surrealism was art, but it did not seem to matter, since it so often was taken up as a social phenomenon. Even in an artistic context, Surrealism was treated as a reflection of the social landscape. Comparing Dalí to Hieronymus Bosch, critic Henry McBride, wrote: "I have always suspected that he [Bosch] lived in a jittery time, something like ours, with all sorts of uncertainties about his finances, the state of his soul, &c., &c., and consequently had a perfect right to have nightmares. ... But anyway, Mr. Dalí goes him miles better."²⁶ By 1936, Surrealism had been absorbed into the cultural fabric. It had almost entirely lost its French spelling—widely used in the American press in 1932—and was actively framed as both an escape from and an antidote to the anxieties of the Great Depression, the state of world politics, and even modern life in general. So while the movement lost its association with Marxism and revolution, it nevertheless maintained a secondary, popular social resonance.

Another part of its reception was determined by its appropriation by advertising. This took place with the exhibition's opening, and put the seal of approval on things Surreal in the service of taste and marketing. As the journal *The Commonwealth* reported, not only was Surrealism in fashion, it had passed "from radicalism to this final stage of modishness."²⁷ At the Advertising and Marketing Forum in New York in January 1937, the art director for Condé Nast publications tellingly revealed Surrealism's internal weakness for fetishism in declaring that it "deals primarily in the basic appeals so dear to the advertiser's heart."²⁸ Six weeks later, a set of three photo-paintings by Surrealist artists Dalí, Chirico and Tchelitchev appeared in *Vogue* advertising evening dresses. Described by the magazine as an "experiment," the photo-paintings "tried to eliminate the Subject and the Technique, and to present the artist's Conception in a pure and isolated form."²⁹ Titled *I Dream about an Evening Dress*, Dalí's collaboration with the *Vogue* editors is accompanied by the language of a fashion spread, picturing a "chiffon dress from Bonwit Teller (and I. Magnin, California) and jewels from Olga Tritt."³⁰ In addition to such collaborative

efforts, advertising companies openly availed themselves of images that appeared in the *Fantastic Art* exhibition, and in at least one instance, without the knowledge of the artist himself. The Henry Sell Advertising Agency plagiarized the cover artwork of Herbert Bayer's *Wunder des Lebens* (1934) for a campaign on behalf of its client U.S. Vitamin Corporation. Upon discovering that versions of his work were hanging in American pharmacies, Bayer requested a copy of the advertisement. Barr, in turn, procured one from the agency with the explanation that the Museum needed for its files "any material that might indicate the influence it has had upon the American commercial design."³¹ Barr presents the Museum as eager to document and effect instances of the union of high art and commercial culture.

A distinction should be made however between images used for advertising that were designed by Surrealists themselves (with or without their knowledge), and those that appropriated Surrealist strategies. A company named Gunther Furs claimed to be the first to use Surrealism in commercial copy for advertisements that debuted at the end of February 1937.³² The ad, which uses a Chirico-esque landscape as its setting, depicts a woman dripping in furs, casting a perpendicular shadow in a barren landscape. Stylized clouds hover in the sky, evoking Man Rays' floating lips in *L'Heure de l'Observation* (1932), which had been prominently displayed at the entrance to the *Fantastic Art* exhibition.³³ An advertisement by the high-end furniture company W & J Sloane also utilized Chirico's exaggerated perspective in a scene à la Chirico that depicted a fallen Dionysian bust, a disembodied plaster hand at a café table, and a leafless tree on which wine glasses were hung. A clock—not melting—is stamped over the clouds in the sky. Ignoring its sources and poetic politics, the company nonetheless mined Surrealism's visual style and psychological allure, while equivocating about its universal appeal: "Your taste in decoration may not run to Surrealism... But if you wanted a room done in the manner of exaggerated reality, Sloan *could do it for you*."³⁴ The message seems to be that no matter how bizarre a client's taste, the company would accommodate.

Most ads that used Surrealism emphasized its outlandishness, but presented it not as an option but as the only choice. A Bonwit Teller advertisement promoted "Fashion Fantasy for New Year's Eve" with fashion sketches of women in dramatic gowns overlaid with text that promised a "finishing touch" of "fresh flowers, touched with the zany cloud-cuckoo mood that has set the world talking about the Surrealist art exhibitions and our current Surrealist windows."³⁵ Post-exhibition Surreal pilfering included lifted motifs from Dalí's *Persistence of Memory* and Magritte's *The False Mirror*: drawings of a melted timepiece and a floating eye with a clock face. The Macy's Men's Store declared that "Surrealism makes sense in these full-silk lined

foulards! The designs are startling, gay and forthright—but sensibly so.”³⁶ When marketed to men, Surrealism’s bizarre and irrational predilections were reversed and made palatable and rational.

Surrealism’s appropriation by advertising, coming at a time when the artworks themselves had not yet been securely dealt with in the realm of art, could only cause more confusion. Analyzing this trend in 1938, a writer for *Scribner’s* disdainfully but perceptively noted that while Surrealism was used to promote luxury goods, it, like all things assimilated by the capricious world of fashion and capital, would land in the trash bin of culture: “come a few more years, and we may be examining Surrealism in Macy’s bargain basement.”³⁷ Paralleling Surrealism’s status in art history, in the realm of advertising, the more common the use of Surrealism as a conceptual device became, the more its ability to speak to and for high culture was threatened.

While the highly mediated public response to Surrealism was very positive, the notion that Surrealism was worthwhile artistically was very much contested. The reviewer for the *Art Digest* wrote of Barr’s show, “If you’ve misplaced anything around the house, trot into the Modern: chances are you’ll find it there.”³⁸ Critic Emily Genauer declared that “the real value of this show...rests on the good pictures in it. And there are probably only a few dozen such out of the 700 items in the whole exhibition.”³⁹ It was just such a reaction that led the collector Katherine Dreier, an important advocate for Dada art, to write to Alfred Barr and complain that his inclusion of the art of the insane was deleterious to Surrealism’s reception:

The fact that you claim that from the Surrealist point of view a person’s insanity only adds greater interest—shows how confused they are as to what *is* art. Personally I considered it very dangerous for our American public who are not art-conscious to present such a fare. Most people left your exhibition feeling wuzzy!!⁴⁰

To reinforce her protest, Dreier withdrew the objects she had lent to the exhibition when it traveled to several more museums across the country in the following year.⁴¹ Indeed, Dreier’s fears may have been confirmed by a *New York Times* article on art education for the masses. Describing a Works-Progress-Administration-sponsored tour of *Fantastic Art*, *The Times* reported that “everybody seemed relieved when Miss Richardson [a WPA lecturer], asked anxiously to relate what some of the works meant to her, had to

confess that they meant nothing.”⁴² On the whole, Barr’s attempt to make Surrealism accessible to the general public backfired; it instead diluted its critical reception and advanced distorted and condescending interpretations of the movement.

A larger part of the confusion over Surrealism’s status was undoubtedly due to Dalí’s co-option of the movement. Neither the founder André Breton nor the universally respected Joan Miró was at the center of the movement in America; instead Dalí and his limp watches were heavily advertised. Breton’s low profile in the United States was due in part to the fact that he was a poet, and moreover, that his literary output was in French.⁴³ Though lauded by critics, Miró was easily overshadowed by the flair with which Dalí caught the attention of the popular press in assuming the role of an idiosyncratic *artiste*, a dandy-ish personality, quick to charm with his broken English. Of course Dalí’s persona—and his refusal to learn grammatical English—was quite carefully cultivated, and his relationship to the press was mutually beneficial.⁴⁴ Complimenting the reporters who met him upon his 1936 New York disembarkation, Dalí wrote: “These reporters...had an acute sense of ‘non-sense’.... They had a merciless flair for the sensational which made them pounce immediately.”⁴⁵ Dalí literally became the face of Surrealism on a cover of *Time* that coincided with the MoMA exhibition’s opening. The photograph, taken a few years earlier by Man Ray, shows Dalí’s face emerging from darkness. His eyes appear black, highlighted by dark shadows (or was it eyeliner?) that rhyme with a thinner version of his trademark moustache, rendering Dalí’s gaze all the more entrancing in an image that resembles a Hollywood glamour photo.⁴⁶ Not only was Dalí a frequent subject of articles, he both wrote and illustrated his own. In 1935, Dalí illustrated a series of full-page *American Weekly* articles with such titles as “New York as Seen by the ‘Super-Realist’ Artist, M. Dalí,” “The American City Night and Day—By Dalí,” and “American Country Life Interpreted by M. Dalí”—all despite the fact that at this point he had only visited the United States once. In 1936, *Newsweek* attributed the “worldwide notoriety of the group...to a single past master of publicity, Salvador Dalí.”⁴⁷ *Time* called Dalí’s work “a headliner” and noted that as an artist he “has a faculty for publicity which should turn any circus press agent green with envy. ...He was taken up by swank New York socialites and in his honor was held a fancy dress ball that is still the talk of the West Fifties.”⁴⁸

Though later in life he would hawk such products as Alka-Seltzer and, posthumously, Gap khakis, in 1936 Dalí was still making headlines with his art. His most iconic work, *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), had been shown in nine American exhibitions by 1936, including the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair, and had been

reproduced in countless American newspapers and magazines. Julien Levy brought the painting to America in 1931, after purchasing it the year before from Pierre Colle's gallery for \$250—"more than I had ever spent on a painting," as he wrote in his memoirs.⁴⁹ As a testament to its status as an icon, an agreement for the painting's purchase for MoMA was apparently arranged before the buyer, Mrs. Stanley Resor, had even seen the painting in person.⁵⁰ Acquired by MoMA for \$350 in 1934, *The Persistence of Memory* became the first Dalí painting to enter an American museum collection.⁵¹

While it looms larger than life in the cultural imagination, *The Persistence of Memory* is a very small painting, 9 ½ x 13 inches, only slightly bigger than a standard sheet of paper. The original is arresting today in part because it is tiny, and it hangs in MoMA in a brown velvet frame that allows it to occupy more surface area, which is also framed, marking the velvet itself as part of the viewing experience. Since the time of its creation, the image has been well known to contemporary viewers, but it is worth looking at again, to understand why it so resonated with an American audience in 1931 and continues to do so today.

Underneath a bright blue and yellow sky, the jagged cliffs of the Catalan coastal town of Port Lligat contrast with the nondescript architectural elements in the foreground. Several mundane elements in the landscape buffer the shock of the central motif. The blue plinth seems to be a geometric recasting of the ocean it partially occludes, and the rectangular block in the foreground seems cast from the same brown matter as the barren landscape from which it rises. From this block grows a leafless, perhaps also lifeless, tree, which extends a long and thin branch that barely supports the limp watch draped across it. Besides another relatively intact timepiece covered in ants, there are three wilted watches in the painting. Another watch has attracted a fly, and, as Michael R. Taylor points out, was "soon to become the butt of a thousand jokes about 'time flies' that the artist could not have foreseen."⁵² A strange slug-like creature in the middle of the painting has been understood as a stand-in for Dalí. Despite its position as the central element of the work, this figure was rarely if ever mentioned in reviews of Levy's 1932 exhibition, where the painting made its New York debut. Invented and imagined aspects of the painting seemed to have more of an impact on viewers. As one critic described the painting, it was "edged with queer little sparkling icicles of terror."⁵³

While the subject matter of the painting was very modern, expressing the era's sense of the irrationality of life by decomposing time, the most methodical enforcer of daily routine, Dalí's distinctly un-modern academic manner of painting also caught reviewers' attention. More often than not, mention was made of Dalí's

painterly skill. As Edward Allen Jewell succinctly put it, “subject put entirely to one side...the color is extremely beautiful; the craftsmanship superb,”⁵⁴ and, he added in another article, “how the man can draw!”⁵⁵ The *New York Post*, after the requisite praising of Dalí’s craftsmanship, also reported that “Dalí’s flair for effective artistic expression gives [the surrealist tenets] esthetic congruity at least.”⁵⁶ Because Dalí came to personify Surrealism and in the eyes of the *Post* critic gave the movement its aesthetic cohesiveness, the fact that Dalí’s own work branched out into so many commercial areas became all the more problematic for Surrealism’s artistic status. Even as his reputation as an artist declined at the end of the 1930s and 1940s—he first was criticized for his publicity seeking, and later for his persistence in churning out pictures on the same Dalínian themes— Dalí was still hailed, perhaps somewhat begrudgingly, as a master technician. Paradoxically this also marked him as part of an increasingly retrograde academic tradition.

Dalí’s debut in America could hardly have been more fortuitous, but by 1939 he began to represent a challenge to the notion of high art, as he actively combined art and commerce at the moment when the burgeoning American art world began to insist that a division be made between them. It was not that art and commerce could not co-exist. In fact, the Museum of Modern Art had shown industrial objects as early as 1934 in the exhibition *Machine Art* and regularly displayed objects in its galleries that were for sale, often for prices as low as \$5. Dalí was therefore not unique in uniting modern art with commodity culture, but he may have been the most prominent and profitable example of it at the time. In 1939 Dalí was the talk of the town not for his art, but for his antics at the Bonwit Teller department store, where he either fell or hurled himself through the glass window he had been designing once he saw the alterations the store had made to it.⁵⁷ According to Dalí the management at Bonwit Teller had altered his display on the theme of night and day because it was “too successful; ...there had been a constant crowd gathered around them which blocked the traffic.”⁵⁸ What was problematic for Dalí’s aesthetic reputation was not that he had been designing a window for a Fifth Avenue department store—a job he had undertaken once before without criticism, in 1936—but that the incident appeared to be a publicity stunt.⁵⁹ Indeed, when a show of Dalí’s paintings opened less than a week later at the Julien Levy gallery, the exhibition almost sold out, with sales somewhere between \$15,000 and \$25,000 and with lines of interested viewers waiting to get in.⁶⁰ Even before Dalí and Levy opened the “Dalí’s Dream of Venus” pavilion in the Amusements section of the 1939 New York World’s Fair, the two were described as a publicity team; Levy was labeled not as Dalí’s dealer, but rather as his manager. Not coincidentally, Levy bailed Dalí out of

jail following the Bonwit Teller incident.

Just as the Bonwit's incident garnered more attention for Dalí's exhibition at Levy's gallery, the gallery show was in turn offered as a tie-in to what was to be Dalí's next project, the New York World's Fair. The cover of the *Dalí* exhibition catalogue featured a play on the Fair's icons—and central construction—the Trylon and Perisphere. Though the Fair's organizers intended the colossal structures to represent architecture of the future, their oversized geometric simplicity also clearly evokes the monuments of the past. Dalí's drawing undoes the Fair officials' hope for a "perfectly ordered mechanical civilization" by rendering the Fair's symbols organically so that the phallic trylon, illustrated with two breast-like formations, is penetrated by the elastic arms of the helicine, which also wrap around and through the feminine perisphere.⁶¹ In the center of the gallery was another re-casting of the Trylon and Perisphere, now in plaster, and covered with Dalinian motifs. The plaster trylon, which nearly grazed the gallery's ceiling, is painted with keys and ants, and the perisphere is remade into a pedestal for Dalí's *Venus de Milo with Drawers*. Dalí had not officially signed on to do the Surrealist Pavilion at the Fair, but he had already made his mark on the World of Tomorrow.

It was Levy who first proposed the Surrealist Pavilion to the World's Fair Committee, and Ian Woodner drew up the initial plans in early 1938.⁶² In addition to the usual funhouse effects, Levy's original vision included "a small art gallery of Surrealist paintings" and "peep shows of Surrealist films,"⁶³ elements that, because they would have displayed original Surrealist works, might have mitigated the blatant theatricality of the pavilion. However Levy's language in the proposal was deliberately designed to do anything but. In his proposal Levy focused unequivocally on the widespread popularity of Surrealism:

The public potential and drawing power of surrealism has been proven beyond doubt, by its appeal to millions of readers of the Hearst syndicate of newspapers for which Dalí has made weekly surrealist cartoons, by 'Harpers Bazaar' and 'Vogue,' by the extraordinary attendance at exhibitions such as the one held at the New York Museum of Modern Art last year and the current surrealist exhibition in Paris, by the statistics on sales results from a Show Window dressed by Dalí for Bonwit Teller, etc. Surrealist House for the World's Fair should far excel in quality the present surrealist exhibition in Paris, and should be adopted and modified to satisfy American taste.⁶⁴

In a memo from the Fair's Director of Exhibits and Concessions to the General Manager, the project was recommended on the basis of Surrealism having "great mass as well as class attractions. It is one of the very few amusement projects which will interest the *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* set and it is essential that the Fair in New York should have some of this type of appeal."⁶⁵ For a mass cultural extravaganza such as the World's Fair, an association with Surrealism was considered a boon in attracting the highly cultivated. Surrealism's dual position as both a high and low cultural phenomenon would then be put to the test.

Mentioned twice by Levy as part of the public appeal of Surrealism, Dalí was not brought onto the project until May 1939, at the suggestion of the talent agent William Morris.⁶⁶ Though the project was a constant headache for Dalí, his display, including a tank of half-naked women swimming in rubber fish tails at the Surrealist Pavilion, attracted even more American attention to his styling of the movement.⁶⁷ *The New Yorker* reported that Dalí instructed those in charge of the logistics of his World's Fair exhibition to lower Morris's proposed forty-cent admission. "No," said Dalí, 'you will charge a quarter. I paint,' he said warmly, 'for the masses, for the great common man, for the people.'⁶⁸ Despite such overtures, "Dalí's Dream of Venus" proved to be a financial failure. In practice, Levy's original conception was overtaken by financial and creative constraints, and even Dalí himself recognized that in the end "the pavilion turned out to be a lamentable caricature of my ideas and my projects."⁶⁹ Not only was the pavilion taken over by corporate enterprise, but once "Dalí's Dream of Venus" developed into a "girlie show," as art historian Lewis Kachur has pointed out, it was in direct competition with most other shows in the Amusement Area, from *Crystal Lassies* to the *Ice Girls*, which also pandered to sexual themes. As Dalí recognized, "what [DWF Corporation] wanted of me was my name, which had become dazzling from the publicity point of view."⁷⁰ The events of 1939 and Dalí's inability to control his creative contributions to commercial projects ensured that he would be best known for publicity.

In his book *Boatload of Madmen*, art historian Dickran Tashjian has discussed Dalí's co-option of the Surrealist movement in America. While he explores Dalí and Surrealism's relationship to fashion and, to a lesser extent, advertising, he does not explore the movement's relationship to the changing critical landscape of art. In many ways a predecessor to Warhol, Dalí's art and persona exemplify the infiltration of market forces and mass media. The influential critic Clement Greenberg would claim that this combination contaminated the status of high art. This judgment would become central to Surrealism's critical fate. Dalí's centrality to the reception of Surrealism in the United States is difficult because his position represents a

negotiation between the concepts of high and mass culture, and between avant-garde and kitsch.⁷¹

Only weeks before Dalí's pavilion was to open at the New York World's Fair, Paul Sachs, art history professor at Harvard and former advisor to both Barr and Levy, addressed the Museum of Modern Art's trustees at the inaugural banquet for MoMA's new building. He urged the museum "to resist pressure to vulgarize and cheapen our work through the mistaken idea that in such fashion a broad public may be reached effectively. ...in serving an elite [the Museum of Modern Art] will reach, better than in any other way, the great general public by means of work done to meet the most exacting standards of an elite."⁷² To Sachs, "in unstable, troubled and disturbed times like our own"⁷³ the possibility for the preservation of high culture lay in scholarly activity that catered to an elite. Only then would the public cultivate a discriminating taste. In the shadow of the World's Fair, which had opened just a week earlier, the distinction between the roles of a museum and amusement or entertainment must have seemed imperative to the trustees. But the question of the taste of the elite, to which Sachs recommended that MoMA cater, remains somewhat ambiguous. According to Margaret Scolari Barr, it was Barr who, four days after visiting the Fair, had suggested to Sachs that "not lower[ing] the standards in order to reach a wider public" be one of Sachs' themes at the trustees' dinner.⁷⁴

However, the selection and scope of Barr's exhibitions also demonstrated a strong commitment to reaching a broad audience. Barr assured visitors in the introduction to *Art in Our Time*, the exhibition that opened to coincide with the Fair, "The Museum is keenly aware that visitors at the time of a World's Fair would be exhausted by any effort at academic completeness," all the while pointing out that the exhibition included not only painting and sculpture but graphic arts, "architecture, furniture, photography and moving pictures."⁷⁵ Despite the inclusion of these aspects of visual culture that Barr knew distinguished his MoMA displays from other modern art exhibitions, he still considered the exhibition to be highly selective. He acknowledged that critics might suggest an alternative exhibition title—"Some Aspects of the Visual Arts of Our Time and the Recent Past."⁷⁶ It may have been this necessity for exclusivity that Barr had in mind when writing Sachs, a selectivity that happened to cut broadly across the visual cultural spectrum. The more cumbersome title may have been more appropriate, but Barr's acknowledgment did little to buffer the museum from the complaints of the American Abstract Artists group who protested the museum's long view of modernism. The exhibition after all included nineteenth-century American works by Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent alongside modern European painters like Picasso and the Surrealists,

and examples of American realism and regionalism. As art historian Susan C. Larsen has pointed out, such exhibitions seemed to indicate “that the museum’s acceptance of abstract art extended itself no further than twentieth-century European abstraction.”⁷⁷ And it happened that the figurative works that the museum chose to display—works of realism, magic realism and surrealism which vastly outnumbered abstract works—held more appeal for not only the general public but for elite collectors like James Thrall Soby, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, and Nelson A. Rockefeller, who acquired such works for their private collections.

Barr’s institutional endorsement of the diverse spectrum of Surrealist art was also implicitly attacked with the 1939 publication of Clement Greenberg’s essay, “Avant-garde and Kitsch.” According to Greenberg’s highly selective view, in contrast to modern abstract artists such as Picasso, Braque or Mondrian, Surrealism was an aberration in an otherwise progressive narrative, a representative of a decadent and impure academicism. Greenberg specifically points out that “surrealism in plastic art is a reactionary tendency which is attempting to restore ‘outside’ subject matter. The chief concern of a painter like Dalí is to represent the processes and concepts of his consciousness, not the process of his medium.”⁷⁸ Greenberg does not criticize Dalí for his extra-aesthetic activities, though that critique is virtually built into the essay. Rather, Greenberg condemns him for his style—one that, though it was meant to convey an internal state of mind, relied on representations of the “outside” or that which is external to the painted surface. And it was not only on the picture plane that Surrealism reached beyond Greenberg’s new apolitical definition of the avant-garde. As Barr stated in his preface to *Fantastic Art*: “Surrealism as an art movement is a serious affair and for many it is more than an art movement: it is a philosophy, a way of life, a cause to which some of the most brilliant painters and poets of our age are giving themselves with consuming devotion.”⁷⁹ Surrealism’s complex ethos, which contributed to its stylistic diversity, made it susceptible to formalist critiques of its avant-gardism, for it lacked the self-referentiality privileged in abstract art.⁸⁰

Barr himself has often been perceived as a formalist, and he certainly was very much attuned to formal qualities in art. But Barr was also deeply committed to vernacular culture, as evidenced by his early interest in the less well-established arts at this time such as photography and film, and also by his willingness to display objects not conventionally seen in art museums.⁸¹ Barr’s double-edged gambit—that Surrealist art could be pedigreed by means of a genealogical lineage within the history of art, while being made to represent a movement that had relevance because of its associations with everyday modern life—proved to be irreconcilable for Greenberg.

His first significant piece of writing, “Avant-garde and Kitsch” establishes Greenberg’s primary polemical position.⁸² Greenberg’s aim in the essay was to disassociate the avant-garde from its political ties in order to advance culture. Art historian Francis Frascina has however noted that Greenberg’s focus on the purity of art “prevents him from making an *historical* analysis of the avant-garde’s engagement with particular subjects and images from urban leisure and ‘mass culture.’”⁸³ Instead, Greenberg’s essay pushed to doubly preserve art’s purity: first, of form, by navigating it through a murky world of illegitimate mediums and industrial commodities; second, of content, by banning not only any mass message or communication, but language altogether.

Greenberg understood that the advances of the industrial West, including universal literacy and an urbanized mass population, had fostered an environment in which kitsch could thrive. It became increasingly difficult to “distinguish an individual’s cultural inclinations, since it [literacy] was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined tastes.”⁸⁴ Again, Greenberg stresses the necessity of art’s being understood by an elite. Because for Greenberg kitsch is so deceptive, the line between avant-garde and kitsch must remain firm and steadfast. Most importantly, when Greenberg describes some characteristics of kitsch, he does so in terms that resemble Surrealist artistic practice:

Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. ... Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. ... It draws its lifeblood, so to speak, from this reservoir of accumulated experience.⁸⁵

By including in their ideology an acute awareness of the streets of Paris, particularly the flea market and its forgotten objects, the Surrealists invoked fleeting experiences and communal fantasy in their work. There is a telling parallel between Greenberg’s description of kitsch and James Thrall Soby’s description, two years later, of Dalí’s hold on the popular consciousness: “In America, where Dalí’s fame has been the greatest, large sections of the public have acquired a taste for vicariously experiencing all manner of violent sensations. The tabloids, radio, and moving pictures, have fed the taste with a cunning hand...”⁸⁶ By the time Dalí received his first and only one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art, it became impossible for the museum to avoid Dalí’s ambivalent, even fallen, status in the art world.

Since his paintings had become a synecdoche for Surrealism, Dalí’s persona

and the flashy antics he orchestrated at the World's Fair easily and intentionally became enmeshed in a commercial articulation of the avant-garde movement. Perhaps because of Dalí's flamboyant infiltration of market forces and mass media, the press noted that he dramatized the constraints of a circumscribed art world. As a writer for the *Art Digest* pointed out:

Dalí is a bombshell in art: he can't be ignored, for all the petulant, ostrich-like attitudes of those who intensely dislike his art. ... the fellow is doing a real service and that is why it hurts. He is dramatizing, as it has not been dramatized in years, the fact that the art world is a tight little field in the habit of issuing a lot of self-satisfying little dictums and ukases that ought to be upset.⁸⁷

Indeed, Dalí's relationship to publicity constituted an open challenge to the art world, one that was especially effective as critique because it was so public. But, as the *Art Digest* critic points out, this too was a dramatization, a performative gesture that, like almost everything connected with Dalí, was susceptible to being dismissed as disingenuous.

Through the polemics of formalist proponents such as Greenberg, modernism emerges in the twentieth century and necessitates, according to Tom Crow, "inwardness, self-reflexivity, 'truth to media'."⁸⁸ A concern for the autonomous status of art eventually laid the critical groundwork for Abstract Expressionism. However, as T.J. Clark has recently suggested, there remains an unresolved transition in the dominant formalist account, namely, "that what Pollock and Miró took from the Surrealists, by some miracle of probity, was a set of techniques which they quickly cleansed and turned to higher purpose."⁸⁹ In formalist accounts, such as the one Clark critiques, Miró is often singled out since his paintings move toward abstraction; thus there is no need to reconcile the elements of figuration, academicism, or commercialism in his art that are found in other manifestations of Surrealism. At a moment when the proliferation of mass culture was seen as a threat to the sanctity of art and high culture, the general public's fluency in Surrealism detracted from the movement's aesthetic validity. Greenberg and the painters of the New York School achieved critical, institutional and market dominance in the art world by means of a formalist art history that left no place for common culture. Only abstract Surrealism—that strand of Surrealism for which Barr had claimed a space in his 1936 chart—remained of interest to the next generation of American art historians and artists, who used it as a process to convey the internal and the eternal

or, as they called it, the “sublime.” Figurative Surrealism, which mixed fluidly with everyday life, was almost completely eclipsed by a new definition of the avant-garde that could not accommodate it as art.

1 For a detailed account of this period, see Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995).

2 Edward Allen Jewell, “From Fatin-Latour to Surrealisme,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 1932.

3 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Preface,” *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 8. These words were also reproduced in Barr’s “Brief Guide to the exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism” that was available to museum visitors (NY: MoMA, 1936, n.p.)

4 The first show of Surrealism in the United States, *Newer Super-realism*, held at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut in 1931, was a much smaller show (approximately 50 objects compared with MoMA’s 700) and did not garner nearly as much attention. It was organized by A. Everett Austin and James Thrall Soby, with the cooperation of Julien Levy, whose gallery hosted a version of the show. Cf., Deborah Zlotzky, “‘Pleasant Madness’ in Hartford: The First Surrealist Exhibition in America,” *Arts Magazine* 60, no. 6 (February 1986), 55-61.

5 André Breton, “The First Surrealist Manifesto” (1924) in *Surrealists on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), 20.

6 Paul Eluard, letter to Alfred Barr, July 13, 1936, *Fantastic Art* exhibition files, MoMA archives.

7 Alfred Barr, letter to Hans (Jean) Arp, August 7, 1936, *Fantastic Art* exhibition files, MoMA archives. Eventually, a resolution with Breton and Eluard was reached, as they are listed in the *Fantastic Art* catalogue among the lenders to the exhibition.

8 Margaret Barr, Alfred Barr’s wife, recalls that Barr was committed to being “understood by everybody,” and that he spent considerable time re-writing passages of *What is Modern Painting?* (NY: MoMA, 1943) to make sure that housewives, farmers and maids would be able to understand it (Margaret Barr, interview with Paul Cummings, Spring 1974, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 17).

9 Alfred Barr, “Introduction,” *Cubism and Abstract Art* (NY: MoMA, 1936), 18. In 1928, Barr traveled to the Soviet Union where he became personally aware of the role of politics in the lives of the Russian avant-garde. Barr and his wife were also in Germany before and after the election that brought Hitler to power and witnessed the first Jewish persecutions and “became very ferociously anti-Fascist” (Margaret Barr, interview with Paul Cummings, Spring 1974, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 16). Art Historian Susan Noyes Platt proposes that the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition sprung from a sense of urgency Barr felt about the “threatened condition of the avant-garde” in the face of the extreme Soviet and fascist politics of 1936-1937 and this seems very plausible especially in light of Barr’s acknowledgement of the political capability of abstract art. Susan Noyes Platt, “Modernism, Formalism, and Politics: The ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’ Exhibition of 1936 at the Museum of Modern Art,” *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (1988): 291. Platt suggests that it was “perhaps in reaction to Hitler’s rise to power and the beginning of the oppression of the avant-garde in Germany [that] Barr now praised the ‘Abstract paintings’ including the Cubists...as ‘the most striking.’” Platt, 289.

10 Barr, “Introduction,” *Fantastic Art* (NY: MoMA, 1936), 9.

- 11 This exhibition has also gone by the title *Americans 1943: Realists and Magic Realists*.
- 12 Alfred Barr, Jr., quoted in Dorothy Miller "Foreword and Acknowledgment," *American Realists and Magic Realists*, edited by Dorothy Miller and Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (New York: MoMA, 1943), 5.
- 13 Ingrid Schaffner, "Magic Realism and Neo-Romanticism," *Julien Levy: Portrait of an Art Gallery*, Ingrid Schaffner and Lisa Jacobs, eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), 122.
- 14 James Thrall Soby, *After Picasso* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), 6.
- 15 James Thrall Soby, "The Changing Stream," (originally 1971), *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change* (New York: MoMA, 1995), 193. Soby states that Levy's gallery was one of the two galleries which he visited frequently and described Levy as being "as close to being an official Surrealist himself as one could come without signing one of André Breton's guidelines to the Surrealist faith."
- 16 Alfred Barr, Jr., "Preface," *Romantic Painting in America* (New York: MoMA, 1943), 5.
- 17 *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 4, no. 5 (April 27, 1937): 12. The shows were both up for six weeks, though *Fantastic Art* ran through Christmas and New Year, days on which the museum was closed. *Fantastic Art* was at that point the sixth largest attended show in the museum's seven-year history and the largest show of the 1936-1937 season. Additionally, 23 works were acquired by MoMA from *Fantastic Art* in comparison with three works acquired from *Cubism and Abstract Art* (*The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* (4): 6-8).
- 18 Alexander Watt, "The Art World of Paris," *Studio* cxii, no. 521 (August, 1936), 64.
- 19 See Keith L. Eggener, "An Amusing Lack of Logic": Surrealism and Popular Entertainment," *American Art* 7, no. 4 (Autumn 1993), 30-45. Specifically, the author writes that Surrealism was "drained of its political content and reconstituted as entertainment" by popular critics in the U.S., which "is also striking for its neglect or ignorance of Surrealism's sources, aims and thematic content" (32, 33). Dalí particularly admired Harpo, in part, I suspect because he did not need to know English to understand Harpo's humor and met with him about the possibility of collaborating on a project.
- 20 Alfred Barr, letter to Tristan Tzara, November 6, 1936, *Fantastic Art* exhibition files, MoMA archives. Barr reported, "Following the reconciliation with the Surrealist poets, I asked André Breton to write a short statement on the present position of the Surrealists. He has not, however, found time to do so."
- 21 Georges Hugnet, "In the Light of Surrealism," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 4, nos. 2-3 (November-December 1936): 29. Original emphasis.
- 22 Hugnet, 26.
- 23 "Surrealism on Parade," *Life* 14 (December 1936): 24. Doodling and caricature were common comparisons that journalists used to make Surrealism seem accessible. *The Milwaukee Journal* reported: The child who puts an unconscionably long nose on a man, the boy who places a moustache on a feminine portrait, may carry over the same trait into adulthood. If artists paint curious pictures out of sheer whim, as they seem to have done in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they merely create "fantastic" art. If they allow themselves to be hypnotized by the thing they themselves create, they are surrealists ("A Show of Surrealism and What Led Up to It," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 17, 1937). While making the work accessible, the author also seems to want to paint the activity of the Surrealists as self-important impulsiveness. The arbitrary aspect of Surrealist intentions taints the reception of Surrealism by the public.
- 24 Lewis Mumford, "Surrealism and Civilization," *The New Yorker* XII, no. 44 (December 19, 1936): 79.
- 25 "Surrealism," *The New York Times*, January 2, 1937. The author mentions the war in Spain and the

Chinese government as examples of “surrealism translated into politics.”

26 Henry McBride, “The Battle of the Surrealists,” *New York Sun*, December 19, 1936.

27 Barry Byrne, “Surrealism Passes,” *The Commonwealth* XXVI, no. 10 (July 2, 1937): 262. This is one of the very few contemporaneous articles that specifically focuses on Surrealism’s Communism, its European-ness and the American reaction to the movement. Forecasting the American reception, the author writes, “There will be the anxious, cultured fringe who have acquired the names and the patter, who will attain the thrill of sophistication...They will be unaware that the art on display pillories them and their fragments of culture. Last, there will be that most hopeful group, fortunately a large one, who will find the whole matter a sort of art circus, and who curiously enough will have in their amusement a common ground with the artists themselves.” Byrne, 263.

28 Dr. M. F. Agha, quoted in “Links Surrealism and Ads,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 1937. In a 1936 article, M. F. Agha wrote that “The Surrealist school (or rather, Dalí, because he *is* the Surrealist school of today) has such immense capacity for propaganda...that its influence is felt everywhere. ... What is snobbish art scandal to-day, is an accepted style to-morrow, and a merchandizing style the next day.” M.F. Agha, “Surrealism or the Purple Cow,” *Vogue*, 1936.

29 “*Vogue’s* 3 Man Show,” *Vogue*, March 15, 1937, 80.

30 “*Vogue’s* 3 Man Show.”

31 Alfred Barr, letter to Henry Sell Advertising Agency, February 19, 1937, *Fantastic Art* exhibition files, MoMA archives.

32 “Fur Copy Goes Surrealist,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 1937. Though ads had already incorporated paintings and photographs by Surrealists, I believe this was among the first to use the visual language of Surrealism, or Surrealism as a concept.

33 Margaret Scolari Barr recalls that the picture shocked the trustees who felt that the painting should be displayed less prominently. Margaret Barr, “Our Campaigns,” *The New Criterion* (Summer 1987):

49. Man Ray himself had used his painting in a fashion photograph of a beach coast by Heim that appeared in *Harper’s Bazaar* in November 1936, just before the exhibition opened.

34 W & J Sloane Company, *The New Yorker* XII, no. 51 (February 6, 1937): 57.

35 Bonwit Teller, *New York Herald Tribune*, December 27, 1936. The ad plugs not only the Surrealist floral coiffures, but the exhibition at MoMA, as well as the Bonwit Teller windows that Dalí had designed.

36 Macy’s Men’s Store advertisement, *The New York Times*, May 3, 1937.

37 Frank Caspers, “Surrealism in Overalls,” *Scribner’s* 104, no. 2 (August, 1938): 20.

38 *Art Digest* XI, no. 6 (December 15, 1936), 6.

39 Emily Genauer, “Drawings by Lunatic Asylum Inmates as Good as Most of the 700 Items in Museum’s Fantastic Exhibit,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 1936. Others within the museum echoed similar sentiments. A. Conger Goodyear communicated to Abby Rockefeller that several of the objects in the show were “ridiculous and could hardly be included in any definition of art.” A. Conger Goodyear, quoted in Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr: Missionary for the Modern* (New York: Contemporary Books, 1989), 160. Goodyear had wanted Meret Oppenheim’s *Object (Fur Teacup)* (1936) removed from the traveling exhibition.

40 Katherine Dreier, letter to Alfred Barr, February 27, 1937, *Fantastic Art* files, “Folder: #55, United States A-H,” MoMA archives. Barr explained his choice to display the work of children and the insane in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, suggesting it as appropriate comparative material for the exhibition because “Surrealist artists try to achieve a comparable freedom of the creative imagination, but they differ in one fundamental way from children and the insane: they are perfectly

conscious of the difference between the world of fantasy and the world of reality, whereas children and the insane are often unable to make this distinction.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Introduction,” *Fantastic Art*. Dreier also mentions how dangerous this confusion can be at a time “when R.W. Ruckstull’s Great Works of Art—with its many illustrations is selling for \$1.99 as well as that it is being given away. You may scorn this book—but after all the general public does not. And since there are so many illustrations and since he considers us all insane and sadistic—you played it seems to me right into his hands.” Katherine Dreier, letter to Alfred Barr, February 27, 1937, *Fantastic Art* files, “Folder: #55 United States A-H,” MoMA archives. Indeed, in Ruckstull’s book, originally published in 1925, he states that, “The main purpose of “The Art World” [the magazine from which many of the entries are taken] was to strike a body-blow at the insanity, sham, and degeneracy in the Modernistic art movement” while promoting what he considered to be good American painting. R.W. Ruckstull, *Great Works of Art and What Makes Them Great* (New York: Garden Publishing Company, 1925), x.

41 *Fantastic Art* was in circulation for the better part of 1937. It traveled to the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, the Boston Institute of Modern Art, the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, the Milwaukee Art Institute, the University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and the San Francisco Museum of Art. In 1938, another incarnation of the exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Past and Present* traveled to several smaller museums: Grand Rapids Art Gallery, Michigan, Middlebury College, Duke University, Junior League of Binghamton, New York.

42 Charlotte Hughes, “Education in Art Taken to Masses,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1937, 45.

43 Art historian Dickran Tashjian suggests that Breton was excluded from American fashion magazines because of his revolutionary ideologies. Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde 1920-1950* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 75. But considering that fashion magazines were inherently visual productions and were eager to exploit the visual rather than literary dynamics of Surrealism, a painter such as Dalí seems an obvious choice to represent the movement.

44 At Dalí’s home in Port Lligat, Spain, Dalí and his wife Gala had covered the walls of her dressing room with a huge collage comprised of Dalí’s magazine appearances and their photographs with celebrities.

45 Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Dial Press, 1942), 330-331.

46 It is interesting that a photograph of Dalí (one in which he was not pictured painting), rather than a reproduction of his work, was used to represent Surrealism, conflating his persona, more than his production, with the movement.

47 “Giddy Museum Exhibit Dizzies the Public with Dada,” *Newsweek* 8, no. 25 (December 19, 1936): 25.

48 “Marvelous and Fantastic,” *Time: The Weekly Newsmagazine* xxviii, no. 24 (December 14, 1936): 62. Indeed, the organization of the article also underscores Dalí’s perceived centrality to the movement, as his name is one of the piece’s three subheadings: Dada, Surrealism, Dalí.

49 Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977), 71. Though he purchased the painting at a trade price, Levy writes that \$250 was a very high price in those days.

50 On July 12, 1934, Alfred Barr wrote to Julien Levy that the anonymous donor buying “the Dalí *Watches?*” would be “sending her check” and “also, incidentally, she is passing through Chicago and will see the picture there. If she likes it she tells me she may want another one for herself.” Alfred Barr, letter to Julien Levy, July 12, 1934, Julien Levy Archives.

51 “Persistence of Memory (Correspondence),” Museum Collection Files, Museum of Modern Art

Archives.

52 Michael R. Taylor, "The Persistence of Memory, 1931," in *Dalí*, Dawn Ades and Michael R. Taylor eds. (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), 148.

53 "Surrealisme," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1933.

54 Edward Allen Jewell, "Dalí Surrealisme Rampant at Show," *The New York Times*, November 22, 1934.

55 Edward Allen Jewell, quoted in "Fashionable and Very Disputed," (1934).

56 Margaret Breuning, "Surrealistic Paintings of Salvador Dalí Not Overlooked in Busy Art Week," *New York City Post*, November 29, 1933.

57 "The Talk of the Town: Surrealist Episode," *The New Yorker* XII, no. 48 (January 16, 1937): 13.

58 Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 374. Given the natural bias of the author, the veracity of Dalí's statement is unclear.

59 James Thrall Soby recalled how Dalí's actions were "widely written off as a publicity stunt" but that rumors that Dalí alerted the press before crashing through the window were unfounded. James Thrall Soby, "The Changing Stream," *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century* (New York: MoMA, 1995), 197.

60 Paul Bird, "The Fortnight in New York," *Art Digest*, 1939. Bird estimated the sales from the exhibition to be \$15,000, though according to *The New Yorker*, sales were \$25,000. In addition, Dalí was to receive an estimated \$600-700 for designing Bonwit Teller's window ("Dalí Comes Out Store Window with a Bathtub," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 17, 1939). According to Robert Lubar, the two paintings that did not sell were "*The Endless Enigma*, which was offered at the exorbitant price of three thousand dollars, and *The Enigma of Hitler*." Robert Lubar, "Salvador Dalí in America: The Rise and Fall of an Arch-Surrealist," *Surrealism USA*, ed Isabelle Dervaux (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag Publishers, 2005), 24. Dalí's show at the Julien Levy Gallery ran from March 21, 1939 to April 17, 1939, preceding his World's Fair pavilion by one month.

61 Grover Whalen, president of the Fair Corporation, quoted originally in *The New York Times*, March 16, 1937, in Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 405.

62 In addition to Levy, the pavilion was sponsored by William Morris, an agent; Edward James, an art collector; I.D. Wolf; W.M. Gardner, who owned a display company; Ian Woodner, an architect; and Philip Wittenberg, Dalí's attorney. Margaret Case Harriman, "A Dream Waking," *The New Yorker* (July 1, 1939): 22.

63 Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery*, 207.

64 Julien Levy and I. Woodner, letter to the Fair Committee, undated c.1938, New York World's Fair Archives, New York Public Library.

65 Memo from Director of Exhibition and Concessions to General Manager, March 21, 1938, Box 178, New York World's Fair Archives, New York Public Library. Indeed, *Vogue* did publish some of Dalí's drawings of the pavilion in its June 1939 issue.

66 According to art historian Lewis Kachur, "chronologies of Dalí indicate that he signed onto the project in May, rather late for a projected opening at the end of that month." Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), 233.

67 For a detailed look at the construction of the pavilion and the business aspects of its inception, see Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous*, and Félix Fanés, *Salvador Dalí: Dream of Venus* (North Miami, FL : Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002). Early on, the pavilion was described as "Dalí's Bottom of the

Sea: Real diving girls splash into a Surrealist pool and come up with the strangest things—creations of Dalí, the Surrealist painter and decorator.” “The Amusements: Right this Way!” *The New York Times*, April 30, 1939. Dalí’s listed dual occupations again recall the blending of high and low embodied in the artist.

68 Dalí, quoted by Margaret Case Harriman, “A Dream Walking,” *The New Yorker* 15 (July 1, 1939):

27. In fact, nearly all the amusements charged either a quarter or ten cents for admission, so a 40-cent admission would have been quite ill-received.

69 Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 377.

70 *The Secret Life*, 376.

71 The 2004 exhibition *Dalí and Mass Culture* addresses this link explicitly. Displayed in the United States by the Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, the exhibition highlights aspects of Dalí’s work that intersected with the world of mass culture, such as the World’s Fair pavilion mentioned above, his Hollywood collaborations, his designs for the fashion industry and his interactions with the popular press. See *Dalí: Mass Culture*, ed. Fèlix Fanés (Barcelona: Fundació «la Caixa,” 2004).

72 Paul J. Sachs, “Address to the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art,” delivered May 8, 1939, *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 6, no. 5 (July 1939): 11.

73 Sachs, 4.

74 Margaret Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns,” *The New Criterion* (Summer 1987): 54. Barr writes to Sachs on May 3, 1939 with this suggestion, after visiting the World’s Fair on April 30, 1939.

75 Alfred Barr, “The Plan of the Exhibition,” *Art in Our Time* (NY: MoMA, 1939), 13.

76 Barr, “The Plan,” 13.

77 Susan C. Larsen, “The American Abstract Artists: A Documentary History 1936-1941” *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1974), 5.

78 Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 9.

79 Barr, “Preface,” *Fantastic Art* (New York: MoMA, 1936), 8.

80 In his 1940 article “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” Greenberg specifies his conception of value in art, that is, “to restore the identity of an art, the opacity of the medium must be emphasized.”

Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” (1940), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays*, 32.

81 Barr approved exhibitions of dance, industrial design, graphic arts, and the very well-attended *Indian Art of the United States* (1941). Barr also displayed works by those who might not have traditionally been considered artists - high-school students, children and insane asylum patients.

82 See Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, “Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed,” *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Routledge, 2000), 218-219.

83 Francis Francina, “Introduction,” *Pollock and After*, 42, original emphasis. Greenberg is also guided in part by the debased treatment of art in Stalinist Russia and Fascist Germany, to which he devotes the final quarter of the essay, though he is quick to point out that kitsch is the tendency of these countries because kitsch is the culture of the masses, and therefore an easy “inexpensive way in which totalitarian regimes ingratiate themselves with their subjects.” Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 57.

84 Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Pollock and After*, 52.

85 Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” (*Collected Essays*, 1986), 12. These are, it seems, the very experiences the Surrealists wished to express in their art. The simulacrum was something to be investigated, captured, and materialized. And the insensibility of everyday objects was fodder for many a Surrealist experiment that sought to de-familiarize the so-called “reservoir of accumulated

experience.” Compare this also to the leaflet that Dalí disseminated via airplane to the streets of New York City the same year: “Man is entitled to the enigma of simulacrum that are founded on these great vital constants: the sexual instinct, the consciousness of death, the physical melancholy caused by time-space.” Dalí, quoted in Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*, 78.

86 James Thrall Soby, *Salvador Dalí* (NY: MoMA, 1941), 27. Soby writes in his memoirs that “in 1941, the memory of [Dalí’s] fracas with Bonwit Teller was still fresh in mind” (James Thrall Soby, “The Changing Stream,” 197).

87 Paul Bird, “The Fortnight in New York,” *Art Digest* (1939), 18.

88 Thomas Crow, “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,” *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 9.

89 T.J. Clark, “Arguments about Modernism,” *Pollock and After*, 104.