The Phallic Woman: A Reexamination of the Problematics of Women and Surrealism

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The Phallic Woman:
A Reexamination of the Problematics of Women and Surrealism

Senior Project submitted to
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of Bard College

by
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The hunter is not always the one holding the rifle.
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Preface

You have just entered the Museum of Modern Art on 53rd Street in Midtown Manhattan of New York City. While waiting for the elevator to begin your visit with the fifth floor galleries that showcase the museum’s collection of painting and sculpture from as early as the 1880s, you leaf through and take a quick glance at the floor plan that you instinctually grabbed while purchasing your ticket. Under the heading of “5 - Painting and Sculpture I: 1880s-1940s” included in the pamphlet, you read to yourself the names of popular artists, giving yourself a clue of what masterpieces await your arrival. In this order, the list presents: Paul Cézanne, Frida Kahlo, Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Vincent van Gogh, and others*. You are probably wondering, as a twenty-first century museum visitor, why is there only one woman sandwiched in the middle of male artist geniuses. In the highlights of the Painting and Sculpture Collection is a list of the museum’s most popular works, none of which are by women. You are standing in the elevator amongst fellow visitors waiting for the familiar noise that alerts you that you have reached your floor; a wave of curiosity strokes your brain as you try to guess what other artists you are about to meet.

You pass by crowds of people huddling around van Gogh’s *Starry Night* and Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, works of art that you have previously only witnessed through reproduced images. You find yourself in the gallery dedicated to Surrealism and Dada. You get a sense of the dynamism and energy of the respective movements vis à vis the way in which the museum has incorporated painting, sculpture, readymades, and film. Amongst all the works, however, you notice that there are only two objects by women: *Le Déjeuner en fourrure (The Luncheon in Fur)* by Meret Oppenheim and *Dada Head* by Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Both are
remarkably striking as sculptures in the round when positioned in contrast with the flat-surfaced paintings that surround them; they are so good you would not know they were done by women.¹

¹ Artist-instructor Hans Hoffman once gave Lee Krasner a backhanded compliment saying, “This is so good you wouldn’t know it was done by a woman.”
Introduction

The canon of Western art history, as accounted for by survey textbooks, academic literature, and exhibitions, is traditionally rooted in the celebration of man’s artistic achievements. H. W. Janson’s *History of Art*, a survey that was first published in 1962, came under harsh criticism by feminist art historians like Mary Garrard and Norma Broude for its exclusion of women. Until the 1980s, the textbook contained neither the name nor work of a single female artist; even so, only twenty-seven women are represented in the current edition of Janson’s survey, made up of 1,184 pages. Art production of women artists also lack proper representation in museums. Work by women artists comprises solely 3-5% of major permanent collections in the United States and Europe.²

Scholarly texts and exhibitions of surrealist work, which essentially attempt to consolidate and contain surrealist principles into an airtight box, fail to mention the artistic production of surrealist women except in a perfunctory way; Meret Oppenheim’s *Le Dejeuner en fourrure* of 1936 is usually the only work of a female surrealist to be included in art historical survey textbooks. Maurice Nadeau, in particular, falls short in his portrayal of surrealism by rationally breaking down and defining what the movement was as if it were a simple mathematical equation formulated by the new artistic generation of young men.³ That is to say, surrealism was not a movement that can be neatly compartmentalized and explicated without effectively duplicating the patriarchal and bourgeois tyranny, of which active poets and artists were trying to dismantle. A membership role within the surrealist movement was conceived and

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devised as exclusively male; historical accounts of the movement, in turn, reinforce the exclusionary process of its critical approach, effectively denying proper acknowledgement of the major productions of female surrealists.

The principles of surrealism were concerned with the construction and deconstruction of ideological hierarchies, specifically those in an exclusively masculine world. As a consequence of limiting the scope of the movement to dealing solely with heteronormative constructs, surrealist men only rearticulate the patriarchal structure and its binary formation that they were attempting to confront and dispel. Surrealist art and poetry were addressed by and to men, while women were ostensibly the means, medium, and muse through which male surrealists could transform human consciousness. It is precisely in this light that the surrealists perceived woman only as a projection or object of their own fantasies of femininity, rather than as a subject in her own right. Male sensibilities are characterized as objective and rational, thus ‘hard.’ Female thought, in contrast, is sentimental and emotional, thereby ‘soft.’ The surrealists seem to be contradicting themselves in their exclusionary approach to understanding the human unconscious. On the one hand, it makes sense that the surrealist man would choose the figure of woman to discover and explore his erotic desires, which then gave way to his underlying fantasies and dreams. But, if woman herself is a corporeal manifestation of emotional turbulence, why should she be excluded from a practice intended to unravel and dig up repressed, emotionally-charged realms of the mind? Simply, why is woman forced to renounce her own emotive and artistic capacities for the pleasures and desires of man?

The discourse and practices of surrealism challenged the conception and construction of reality; where they were deficient, however, as an effect of the preoccupation of male thought,
was in their absence of rethinking the reality of modern woman. For the surrealist man, to represent the figure of woman was his attempt to simultaneously protect his own ego and reassert control over woman’s agency, operations, and identity. This is not to say that the men of the movement completely ignored the works of women; however, when works by female surrealists were recognized and celebrated, they were never seen autonomously, as if their success was dependent on the presence and influence of man. Some of the female surrealists, like Oppenheim and Gisèle Prassinos, were discovered by the male members. Others became involved in the movement by having close ties and personal relationships with the men in the group. In order to maneuver around the social and artistic limitations imposed on their gender, surrealist women had to invent their own transmutable position, in which they could easily and respectfully transgress the boundaries of femininity and masculinity, moving fluidly between the positions of muse-model-mistress and artist.

The trope of the artist-muse relationship is one that has existed since classical antiquity. Traditionally female, muses have been the source of inspiration for a plethora of masterpieces, warranted by their beauty, personality, or some other curious feature. The relationship between artist and muse, which became particularly commonplace during the nineteenth century onwards, is intimate, visceral, and complex. It is often romantic, sometimes dramatic, and occasionally obsessive. In some cases, as well, the muse-model-mistress proved to have more to offer than mere inspiration for man. The cliché that is the artist-muse relationship is founded upon any number of ‘celebrated’ relationships, such as Berthe Morisot and Édouard Manet, Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, Kiki de Montparnasse and Man Ray, Elizabeth Siddal and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin, to name a few. These unique women
appear in some of the most famous works in the history of art and also produced a substantial body of work of their own, effectively going against the grain of only being an object of man’s desire by installing themselves in the subject position. As we shall come to see, however, this was not at all an easy feat. Whether we are recalling the marble statues of ancient Greek goddesses or thinking of the sensuous portraits of female nudes that adorn the walls of renowned art institutions worldwide, the relationship between muse-model-mistress and male artist genius is a received idea, specifically about modern artists.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, it became common for the female positions of model and artist to overlap. For many models, personal or professional—at times, both—relationships with a recognized artist genius or affiliation with artistic circles provided opportunities for training, especially given that established means of becoming a professional artist were restricted and expensive. For example, from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, women were barred from studying the nude model, which formed the foundation of academic training and representation. To the woman’s detriment, nevertheless, her reputation as a muse-model overshadows her work and artistic achievement. To be known as the muse-model-mistress of a big-name male artist, woman does not gain an artistic identity without inherently being eclipsed by the perennial intrigue of the private, romantic relationship and its intimate details. This calls attention to woman’s lack of independence in her courageous strides towards a professional career in the arts, as if it would be nearly impossible for a woman to achieve a creative status—albeit a lesser one—without the guidance of her male partner.

The traditional notion of the artist-muse relationship is problematic, as it gives the impression of being a paradigm of the male artist on top. The mythos of the female muse is
debunked the instant the woman artist sets foot on stage. When we think of artists and muses, however, it is difficult for us to not assume that the artist is male and the muse is female. The conception of the female artist subverts this instinctual presumption. At the same time, however, there is a predisposition to accredit a woman’s expressive skill to the teaching and guidance of man. We cannot talk about Gentileschi without referencing Caravaggio; there is no Frida without Diego. The very notion of the term ‘female artist’ is suggestive of the belittling and isolation of women’s contribution to art, as if their productions were completely separate or categorically different than that of man. What is significant about such segregation is that it was installed by men, who wanted to protect their hierarchically higher status as innovators of the arts and keep women in their place for propriety’s sake; in short, a woman’s respectability was determined by a dominating system based on a patriarchal system. As a result, woman is denied the possibility of being perceived as a social equal. How ironic that the rules of ladylikeness are not constructed by ladies themselves but by men, who lack the experience and empathy to even fathom what it is to be a woman! This prejudice is what Linda Nochlin identifies as the “woman problem” in her essay titled “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists.”

The misconception of the “woman problem” fundamentally stems from the inherent oppression of those who are not fortunate enough to have been born a white man. The so-called woman problem, then, is not simply a problem with woman; in fact, the issue has to do with the position of the viewing subject, a singularly masculine activity that has traditionally been reserved for man. Like so many other twentieth-century avant-garde movements—Dada,
Futurism, Expressionism—Surrealism was primarily a men’s club. Two images, in particular, make this notion explicitly known. The first is an image (fig. 1) that was published in the movement’s journal *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1929 that combines a painting of a nude woman by René Magritte with sixteen photographs of male surrealists, all captured with their eyes closed and surrounding the painting. Magritte’s rendering of the female figure is paired with text, which is meant to be read as “Je ne vois pas [la femme] cachée dans la forêt” (I do not see the woman hidden in the forest). This image suggests that surrealism was a masculine movement, a world in which men kept their eyes closed as to conjure and construct their male fantasies of the feminine. The second image is a 1924 photograph by Man Ray entitled *Waking Dream Séance* (fig. 2), which depicts a group of surrealist men huddled around a woman seated at a typewriter. The woman, Simone Breton, becomes the medium through which surrealist dreams are recorded onto paper. She embodies the typewriter, the recording machine that she utilizes. She herself does not have dreams of her own (of course), but obediently serves as a transcriber of male fantasies.

To see a work by a female surrealist is, perhaps, to see surrealistically. In other words, if the canonical, Western accounts of surrealism are what we are accustomed to, then the act of seeing a work of a woman completely disorients our trained familiarity with the movement, which up until the 1970s was left undisturbed.⁵ No women had been named as official members of the original movement, nor had they signed the manifestoes. The French review, *Obliques*, dedicated a special issue in 1977 to “La Femme surréaliste” and gathered a record of thirty-six

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women considered to be surrealists. The principles of the movement, founded on the personal investigation of one’s psyche, lent themselves as an opportunity for the surrealist woman to explore the interior sources of her creative imagination. Visual expression of their self-discovery provided a different perspective of modern woman’s world and her inner struggle. The nature of this project is a reexamination of our conception of surrealism, its principles, and its artistic works beyond the scope of canonical art history. It is, more specifically, an attempt to resuscitate, resurrect, and reinsert the perspectives of and images by women, who have been overlooked, unheard, or forgotten, into the discourse of surrealism.

The first chapter deals with the question of surrealist photography, as an reconciliatory and intervening force in two areas of concern: (1) the ambivalence towards the very idea of automatism and automatist practices; and (2) the construction and deconstruction of gender, as a significant facet of woman’s reality during the early 20th century. The camera, in a surrealist context, facilitated the disorientation and defamiliarization of the real, thereby allowing the female surrealist to complicate established notions of experience and expression. Surrealist photography opened the door for the phallic woman to make her entrance. At heart and in essence, she is female; but to be one of the boys within the men’s club that was surrealism, she, in a way, had to embody the castrative menace of which the surrealists were afraid.

In the second and third chapters, I present an interpretive visual methodology that brings into focus the photographic production of two female surrealists, Dora Maar and Lee Miller. Maar and Miller are striking examples of women who actively sought a route into the surrealist circle by initially functioning as muses; it is through modeling that they each were able to get

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6 Ibid.
their foot in the surrealist door and reestablish themselves in the subject position. The stories of these women are told through their photographs, as to suggest that their works were extensions of themselves, as threads of their biographical fabric. The images produced by Maar and Miller function as visual testaments of their respective artistic styles as well as photographic ripostes to the ways in which they were each represented by their male master-lover-partner. The camera, for the surrealist woman, becomes her weapon of choice in her defense against the misogynistic treatment of male surrealists in their representations of the female form. Here, the metaphor of camera-as-gun is reconfigured to properly arm the phallic woman. The shots fired from her camera are ejaculatory, procreative and in control.
fig. 1 Portraits of Surrealists around a painting by René Magritte. Published in La Révolution surréaliste, 1929.

Photography in the Service of Surrealist Women

In the large and prolific scheme of the surrealist movement, photography is the unknown, overlooked, and undervalued phenomenon of surrealist production. This is in part due to the marginalization of the medium as the disprivileged minority in relation to major art practices as well as to the scope of the modernist canon. The figure of the photographer was frowned upon with disdain by major art producers; to be one was to be defiant. Picasso, for example, believed that photography was an art mineur in comparison to painting and sculpture. And though Man Ray was a master of surrealist photography, he himself frequently referred to himself as a painter, perhaps to legitimize his artistic operations. Since its development and genesis, the power of the photographic image derives from its function as a document, thus positing itself as a realist medium.

There is a constant skepticism towards photography as an art form, as demonstrated by Walter Benjamin in his essay regarding artistic expression in the age of mechanical reproduction, because of the very proximity to the real on which it depends and thrives. In his critical analysis, Benjamin confronts the notion of original aura, authority, authenticity, authorship of the photographic image. However, what is being argued here is that this very truncation of distance between photographic production and reality is essentially what imbues surrealist images with their potency. It is approximately the truthful capacities of the medium—its ability to directly transfer the real onto film—that photography should be perceived as the absolute, unquestionable truth in regards to the conception and construction of reality.

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Photography, as a surrealist practice, should be seen as a fundamental aspect of the poetic movement because of its role as an intervening force between the real and the extraordinary. Surrealist photographers were in constant search of new techniques and processes that were closely associated with automatist practices and games of chance. The photographic medium in a surrealist context removed itself from the straight, rationalist origins of its discovery and development. It was as close to the real as one could get and be able to manipulate the final outcome of the image. Moreover, photography should be regarded as in service to surrealism, as a reconciliation of the ambivalence and ambiguity of what a surrealist image even was. André Breton might have delineated exactly what he and company wished to accomplish through surrealist principles; however, we are left wondering how exactly one could switch off their everyday cognizance of reality in order to access the uncanny episodes both of the quotidian and of the subconscious mind. As Rosalind Krauss makes clear in the introduction of L’Amour fou: Surrealism and Photography, images—whether in the form of drawings, paintings, photographs, or writing—are most certainly surrealist, but not necessarily their expression. Krauss promulgates the relevance of surrealism to our own times by reviving the movement through the perspective of the camera lens. Moreover, photographic production lines itself up with the ulteriorly renegade principles of the surrealist Georges Bataille and his concept of the informe, the unformed or formless.

Although surrealism as defined by Breton clearly links the movement with the imperative of automatic writing, one is never truly letting go of their conscious thoughts and decision-
making when putting their pen onto paper; the same goes for drawings and paintings. In other words, the art forms that were so highly praised above the practice of photography were unavoidably subjective. In the movement’s journal, La Révolution surréaliste, the poet and revolutionary Pierre Naville once stressed that “Everyone knows there is no surrealist painting, Neither the marks of a pencil abandoned to the accidents of gesture, nor the image retracing the forms of the dream…”10 Surrealist art and in particular surrealist photography attempted to hone Breton’s concept of “psychic automatism in its pure state,” based on the belief that the irrational could be harnessed as a weapon against the prevailing culture and social conditions in Paris.11 In short, surrealist art production was effectively in service of a broad social rebellion. Surrealists frequently turned to journals, and magazines to distribute and disseminate their manifestos, poetry, drawings, and photographs. In turn, the circulation of publications facilitated the transportation of surrealist production, both to the public masses and beyond the boundaries of canonized art forms and mediums.12 Moreover, magazines and journals allowed surrealism to liberate its creative production from the elite confines of the museum and gallery walls. In this way, photography presented itself as an intervening power throughout the 1920s in surrealist journals that made manifest the concept of the surreal.13

Surrealist photography jostles with the game of semiotics. That is to say, through specific images made by surrealist photographers, we are able to recognize its realness, its representation of the real; at the same time, we are immediately taken aback by its manipulation, displacement, displacement,

10 Ibid. 19.


13 Ibid. 19.
or reorganization of the real: “If we look at certain of these photographs, we see with a shock of recognition the simultaneous effect of displacement and condensation, the very operations of symbol formation, hard at work on the flesh of the real.”\footnote{14} Because of the essentially documentary quality of the photographic medium, images that were considered to be surrealist were perceived to be the most honest and objective. In a sense, we can interpret surrealist photographs as readymades of sorts. Surrealist principles were a demonstration of a ‘found’ aesthetic based on involuntary states of mind. This aesthetic that is stumbled upon by chance was based on memory, the pleasures of the eye, and the everyday experience and the perception of it. Photographs were created instinctively, while the product effectively transcended the very thing being captured. The surrealist mind works through the machine in an attempt to expediently possess the constituents of the everyday with abandon; the unconscious underpinnings of the surrealist mentality reveal themselves only after the photograph is taken.

Breton’s essay “Le Surrealisme et la peinture” begins with a declaration of the triumphant value of vision above the other senses, as vision has an implication of a certain immediacy that is immune to the urges of the conscious mind. In his own words, he argues that “Vision, defined as primitive or natural, is good; it is reason, calculating, premeditated, controlling that is bad.”\footnote{15} Breton’s declaration can be dissected and understood as a prioritization of perception over representation. Perception, in this way, is truer and thus better than representation because of its immediate, direct relationship with experience. In contrast, representation is a literal copy and recreation of individual perception.\footnote{16} It is its duplicative function that distances representation

\footnotetext{14}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{15}{Ibid. 20.}
\footnotetext{16}{Ibid.}
from the real. Representations of the real are then images of deception. Photography, as a realist and ‘straight-forward’ medium, lended itself to surrealists as less susceptible, vulnerable, or available to powers of trickery.

_Automatism or automatic writing_ was thereby conceptualized as a means of reconciling with the potential fraudulence of representation. The involuntary act and processes of writing or drawing was seen by Breton and his colleagues as a manifestation of the unconscious achieved by means of automatism. The very idea, nevertheless, is a slippery slope because one can never completely divorce writing or drawing from the conscious activity of the everyday. Automatic writing or drawing was less a re-creation of something than it was an honest and organic act of recording of perceived experience, a documentation of convulsive beauty. Krauss deals with this point of contention by comparing the outcomes of automatism to that of a heart monitor, as if automatic writing or drawing was a mechanized recording of one’s existence: “What this cursive web makes present by making visible is a direct connection to buried mines of experience.” 17 In this sense, functions of automatism allowed for an immediate manifestation of experience and emotion, un tarnished by one’s self-consciousness. We are left wondering, then, where exactly does photography fit into the surrealist principle of automatism?

In response to this necessary yet neglected question, photography can be interpreted as a form of pictorial language, a pictorial automatism. Surrealism was distinctly a movement concerned with the development of new and innovative techniques, demonstrated by Breton’s conceptualization of automatic writing and drawing. Surrealist photographers were constantly finding ways of enriching the realist medium with an artistic vision, distancing the tradition of

17 Ibid.
photography from its straight, documentary properties. Photography was a way of seeing, which necessitated the ability to capture what the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson has named the “decisive moment,” the instant in which the envisioned composition and its significance are recognized before the shutter is released.\(^{18}\) The notion of the decisive moment calls attention to the formal, visual climax of an image, rather than the moment of the peak of action. This instantaneous recognition, made possible by the capacities of the camera, is additionally revealed by what Walter Benjamin identifies as the “optical unconscious.”\(^{19}\) The works of Eugène Atget, the photographer who successively imbued a mysterious, alienated quality in his photographs of late nineteenth-century Parisian streets, exemplify both Cartier-Bresson’s and Benjamin’s testament to photography; Benjamin even recognizes Atget as the forerunner of surrealism, whose artistic vision and expressive style were adopted by the surrealists themselves.

The Parisian surrealists used the medium in ways that were distinct and unique to their time, though we would consider their techniques ordinary today; they acted as mediators in the photographic process during development and afterward, deliberately assembling and arranging their compositions before the camera lens. Their innovative approaches to photography distinguished their style from that of ‘straight’ modernist practitioners of the medium, such as

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\(^{18}\) Cartier-Bresson, Henri. The Decisive Moment (Göttingen: Steidel, 2015). “Photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organisation of forms which give that event its proper expression.”

\(^{19}\) Benjamin, Walter. “A Short History of Photography” (Berlin: Die Literarische Welt, 1931), 7. “It is possible, for example, however roughly, to describe the way somebody walks, but it is impossible to say anything about that fraction of a second when a person starts to walk. Photography with its various aids (lenses, enlargements) can reveal this moment. Photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.”
Cartier-Bresson and Brassaï. Similarly to surrealist painting, surrealist photography playfully juggled both representational and ‘automatic’ abstractionist styles. Man Ray, in particular, epitomized the potentials of surrealist photography and exhibited these opposing directions present in the images he produced. Surrealist photography was elevated by the invention of diverse techniques and processes. What was appealing about the photographic medium for surrealists was its non-Academic quality, as surrealists were concerned with distancing themselves from the traditional and accepted notions of art-making. In turn, surrealist photographers utilized the medium and their singular methods to elucidate the surreal.

If photography was a way of seeing reality, then the surrealist photograph was a way of seeing above and beyond the real, the surreal. The photographer has control insofar that he or she has authority over what immediate image is instantaneously imprinted onto film; the subsequent reading of the photograph as a surrealist image is accomplished through simple means of manipulation that allow the uncanny to seep through. Photography, in this vein, was a direct transfer of surreality; the camera does not lie. Surrealist photographers admired the divine power of their medium, as it made ephemeral, transient moments of life permanent. Space is represented as a pure, untainted existence without being tampered by movement and people. Despite the reproducibility of photographs, they are literal snapshots of momentary fragments of life and its experiences, which themselves cannot be perfectly duplicated. The fabricated image itself can be reproduced; however, the moment captured cannot be reexperienced the exact same way as in its spatio-temporal context.

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20 Krauss. Bachelors. 8 “With this almost hallucinatory transparency by means of which reality—unmanipulated and unretouched—would transport itself into the image, the aesthetics of so-called straight photography were promulgated, an aesthetic based on what Edward Weston termed that ‘quality of authenticity in the photograph’ from which it derives its unimpeachable authority.”
Photography was a natural process yet embodied a mystical capacity. The techniques that surrealist photographers explored and practiced facilitated the seamlessness between the real and the represented, the past (or the moment in which the shutter was released) and the present, the here and the there. Through various means of photographic manipulation, the final image produced emphatically iterates the very fact that the photograph is in actuality one derived from real life. The constructed or fabricated qualities of the manipulated photograph—as a consequence of double exposure, montage, brûlage, solarization—draw attention to its power as a form of documentation as well as its character as a transfer of reality. In this way, surrealist photography pays reality its due diligence and faithfully re-presents it, re-creating it as if it were a secondary dimension or a duplicate world. In order to present life’s momentums in static images, surrealist photographers abide by their compulsive instincts and visually produce an accurate trace of reality: “Photography is an imprint or transfer of the real: it is a photochemically processed trace causally connected to that thing in the world to which it refers in a way parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints or the rings of water that cold glasses leave on tables.” Photograph undoubtly re-presents the real but in a singular way as to leave a

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21 Krauss. “Photography in the Service of Surrealism.” L’Amour fou. 28. “For these techniques could preserve the seamless surface of the final print and thus reenforce the sense that this image, being a photograph, documents the reality from which it is a transfer.

22 Ibid. 31. “Given photography’s special status with regard to the real—that is, being a kind of deposit of the real itself—the manipulations wrought by the surrealist photographers, the spacings and doublings, are intended to register the spacings and doublings of that very reality of which this photography is merely the faithful trace.”


mark or impression of it. In this way, the medium presents itself as the tool specifically made for capturing what Breton calls ‘convulsive beauty,’ a central component of surrealist aesthetics.25

Convulsive beauty is defined as a detachment from the natural flow, function and processes of life. In regards to visual expression, the concept of convulsive beauty is one that reducibly transforms an experience and perception of the real into its represented form. The capacities of the photographic medium, in turn, gained a privileged bond with reality and Breton’s conception of convulsive beauty. As Krauss suggests, “The manipulations then available to photography—what we have been calling doubling and spacing as well as a technique of representational reduplication, or structure en abyme—appear to document these convulsions.”26 Photographs are thereby not simply interpretations of what reality is, but rather presentations of that very reality as an exterior world of signs and hidden codes. Photography clearly delineates where the real begins and ends, with the help of the frame. The picture frame, in a photographic context, elucidates the world as a forest of signs, a constant production of erotic symbols and codes. By cutting into the flesh of the world, splicing it with the artifice, photography exposes the automatic writing of the world.

The trick effects that surrealists employed in their photographs synthesized their production with painterly or cinematic qualities, thereby obscuring the categories between the separate art forms. By facile means of rotation and thus disorientation, surrealist photographers visually enacted Bataille’s concept of the informe. The camera functions as the mechanical facilitator of such disorientation of reality. It is precisely in these moments of dissolution and

25 Breton, André. Nadja. Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1999), 160. “Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.”

consequent disillusion that the poetic mind, as if by chance, finds the strange, the bizarre, the *uncanny* qualities of his unconscious desires miraculously muddled in his everyday reality.

Krauss figuratively describes the momentary experience and perception of an *as if* in the chapter of *L’Amour fou* titled “Corpus Delicti”: “For the surrealist poetics of metaphor—beauty seen as the strange yoking of the umbrella and the sewing machine—is an *as if* specifically produced by chance. It comes automatically, descending on the passive, expectant poet, who waits for his dreams, his doodles, his fantasies to bring him the outlandish similes of his unconscious desires.”

The results of such disorientation were perceived by straight and documentary-style photographers as a nullification of the masculine values of ‘straightness’ attributed to the medium. By removing the authority of the photographic medium—made manifest through clarity, resolution, and purpose—surrealistic photographers effectively feminized the medium.

To digress from Cartier-Bresson’s “decisive moment” was seen as a passive, or feminized, approach to photographic practices.

Surrealist principles were devoted to complicating the binary oppositions of mind/body, rational/irrational, and art/nature, the latter of which were attributed as the qualities of woman. The aims of the movement, that is to access and take hold of man’s unconscious and irrational desires, required a corporeal apparatus through which they could be achieved; for surrealist men, their weapon of choice was woman. The act of loving and representing woman was a way for surrealist men to activate and stimulate underlying erotic fantasies that, in turn, released unique

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28 Krauss. *Bachelors.* 13. “As a blurring of the distinction between photograph and painting, or photograph and film, they constituted a perverse feminization if you will of the masculinist values of “straightness” itself: clarity, decisiveness, and visual mastery—all of them the source for the photograph’s “authority.”
imaginative capacities. The figure of woman to the surrealist man was a fountain of inspiration and creativity because she herself is emotional and irrational. In *Surrealism and Women*, Rudolf E. Kuenzli lays out the misogynistic problematics of women and surrealism in his chapter of the book: “Women are to the male Surrealists, as in the longstanding traditions of patriarchy, servants, helpers in the forms of child muse, virgin, *femme-enfant*, angel, celestial creature who is their salvation, or erotic object, model, doll—or she may be the threat of castration in the forms of the ubiquitous praying mantis and other devouring female animals.” In this light, the value of woman as an individual being is quickly diminished into a valorized object, a mascot, an ethereal tool, an apparatus through which man can selfishly reach his own aims, desires, fantasies. That is to say, surrealist men made it impossible for woman to be seen as a subject, since she was too necessary as a projection of their own phantasms of femininity and women. Woman was perceived by surrealist men only in regards of what she could do for them.

The figure of woman played a dual role by being a symbol of erotic desire and feared impotence; she was the stimulator of erotic desire that spurred man’s creative processes. Surrealist men were certainly aware of the power behind the image of woman. Faced with the female figure, surrealist man was confronted by his own fears of castration and thereby the dismantling of his ego. Man Ray’s *Minotaur* of 1934 (fig. 1-1) exemplifies the frightening implications associated with the female form. In the photograph, the torso of a nude woman’s body is construed as the head of a monster with her nipples as the eyes and her arms as its horns. In order to guard himself from such anxieties existent in the threatening image of woman, the male surrealist fetishizes her body, manipulates her, disfigures and refigures her, literally

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manhandling her in order to reinstate his own ego.\textsuperscript{30} Through a variety of artistic and poetic means, surrealist man tries his best to contain the possible rise of woman’s natural vivacity. In Magritte’s \textit{Femme-bouteille} of 1940-1941 (fig. 1-2), for example, the silhouette of the claret bottle is morphed into the figure of woman; at the same time, woman is shown safely kept and contained within the bottle, unable to be free. In this sense, surrealism posits itself as a reestablishment of the patriarchal fetishization of women, a reinforcement of patriarchal power relations, a rearticulation of patriarchy’s misogyny.

The pictorial attempt to subdue and control the potential threat of the female figure makes itself most clear in Hans Bellmer’s series of violated dolls from the 1930s, each entitled \textit{La Poupée}. Bellmer’s \textit{Poupées} (fig. 1-3 and 1-4) functioned as a form of personal psychotherapy, each an exploration of his own fantasies, a projection of his desire for women and objects, as well as a reflection of the trauma he endured living in Nazi Germany. The conception of Bellmer’s dolls derive from concepts of psychoanalytic theory: desire, drive, fetish, ambivalence, sadism. The artist positioned his dolls in contorted fashions, curiously omitting or combining various parts, as if by randomization. He presented his dolls as artificial and grotesque reconstructions of a girl’s body, which could then create authentic desire and obsession. Bellmer violently objectifies the female figure, as a possession of the male erotic gaze, in order to defend himself from the shattering of his ego.\textsuperscript{31} By playing with the female figure as informe, surrealist men like Bellmer removed the subjectivity and personal identity of woman, blurring her position

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\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 24.
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\textsuperscript{31} Foster, Hal. “Armour Fou.” \textit{October 56: Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics (Spring 1991)}. By David James, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Jonathan Crary, and Molly Nesbit (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1991), 96. “…this fear of the destructive and the diffusive is made manifest and reflexive, as is the attempt to overcome it in violence against the feminine other—that is a scandal but also a lesson of the dolls.”
\end{flushright}
with that of a distorted toy-object. To mistakenly disregard the obvious misogyny imbued in male surrealists’ projection of woman would be to align oneself with and to be blinded by the dominant male gaze.  

Although surrealist thought sought to challenge ideological hierarchies, it failed to consider its own gender power dynamics. Locking itself in a predominantly heterosexual and patriarchal position, the movement placed and constructed women (and never men) as artists’ muses, objects of erotic desire, servants to the discourse. To male surrealists, the call for social emancipation of French women in 1924 was merely a bourgeois demand. Surrealist women, respectively, experienced a marginalization not only in their male-dominated culture, but additionally within the stratum of the avant-garde. As Gwen Raaberg emphasizes, there had been no women listed as official members of the original movement nor had any signed the manifestoes. It was not until the 1930s onward that women began to be acknowledged and included, albeit not officially.

It is their given inferiority, however, that encouraged women artists and writers to self-consciously assert their otherness in Western culture, producing works that pitted against the limitations of patriarchal, bourgeois society. Through a variety of expressive means, surrealist women were constantly responding to the political, social, and visual constraints imposed on them by their male counterparts. Moreover, the techniques of surrealist art practice offered an opportunity for these women to explore realms of the psyche that have been otherwise repressed.

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32 Kuenzli. “Surrealism and Misogyny.” *Surrealism and Women*. 19-25. At the end of his essay, Rudolf E. Kuenzli accuses Rosalind Krauss for aligning herself too closely with the sexual gaze of the male surrealists in her two essays in *L’Amour fou*, Krauss herself attempts to redeem the surrealist movement by clearing it of antifeminist charges.
as a result of designated roles for women. In order to insert themselves into surrealist male discourse, women artists and writers had to transgress the boundaries of Western patriarchal binary thought and its hierarchical regime. Surrealist woman’s desire to destabilize hierarchical oppositions and confines required her to invent her own position as subject, develop her own pictorial vocabulary, and flesh out her own body of images, one that was distinct from her male peers. One of the ways that female surrealists were able to subvert the patriarchal structure was to fluctuate between the two gender modes, embodying and exhibiting both feminine and masculine qualities.

Their gestures of passage between opposing states is made clear by Patricia Allmer, curator of *Angels and Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism*, the first major international group exhibition of works by female surrealists that took place in 2009 at the Manchester Art Gallery. She begins her catalogue essay, “Of Fallen Angels and Angels of Anarchy,” by comparing the operations of surrealist women to that of an angel: “The angelic position is a position of in-betweenness and motion. These functions and positions are the strengths of angels: they overcome and deconstruct the paths of Western binary thought, its hierarchical structure, replacing stability with flux, singularity with multiplicity, separation with transgression, and being with becoming and transformation.” Surrealist woman as angel is constantly in motion and is ever-evolving, as to escape the grips of man’s desire, gaze, and dreams. It is the flux and transformation associated with the woman-angel, however, that caused man to regard her as weak, passive, and inferior in contrast to his stability and objectivity. The function of to-and-fro,

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to be back and forth between two positions is, in fact, what Mary Ann Caws defines as the foundation of surreality itself.\(^{35}\) The very idea of woman as muse-object, as well as her operations as subject, thereby reveal themselves to be at the basis of surrealist thought. The supposedly men-only club that was surrealism, then, could not have existed without woman.

As the father of the movement, André Breton was supportive of a number of surrealist women. A few surrealist exhibitions featured some female artists, many of who also contributed and submitted to the movement’s publications. Nevertheless, even when these women were welcomed by Breton and company, acknowledgement of female surrealist conceptual and creative efforts was not fully consummated. That is to say that although the work is praised, the woman is not seen as an autonomous creative force as a consequence of the arrogant presumption that a female artist could not have been recognized as successful and talented without accrediting some influence or thanks to a man. Within this notion is the implication that woman must be dependent on the validation of man in order to make a name for herself, which therefore is not her own name at all.

Even scholarly literature often reinforced the marginalization of female artists from the history of surrealism by handling their art production as secondary or subordinate to that man.\(^{36}\) Even today, the permanent surrealist and dada collection on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York only showcases two works by female artists: Meret Oppenheim’s fur-lined teacup

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Ibid. 13. “However, subsequent scholarly work often reinforced the exclusion of women artists from the history of surrealism, by treating their art as marginal to the movement. Popular historical summaries of surrealism, for example, only mention a few of the women artists and often only briefly in comparison to discussions lavished on male artists, whilst the landmark exhibition of Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage at the Museum of Modern Art in 1966 included only one artwork by a woman—Meret Oppenheim’s fur-lined teacup.”
and Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s _Dada Head_. The very fact that, even a century later, there are fewer works in collections by women artists than there are by men is very telling, as it continues to reiterate the exclusion of female surrealists. This is indubitably reason enough to revive and revisit the history of surrealism, so that the movement can be properly understood as a universal club whose members radically challenged the hierarchical structure of Western civilization as Breton had set out to do. More specifically, it was the female surrealist practitioners who disarmed the ideological positions and beliefs of art-making that traditionally conceived the “myth of the ‘artist’ as an ‘empowered white man.’”

For surrealist women, their creative efforts served as a testament to their independence and autonomous capacities distinct from the unobstructed, privileged lives of their male peers. The works of surrealist women virtually explored the experience of boundaries and their construction; they powerfully denaturalized the masculine stability of binary and hierarchical categorization by perverting tradition that was in a constant state of metamorphosis like the women who deconstructed it. Women surrealists worked from within the status quo of generic and gender categories, as well as the traditions of art, in order to dispel its hierarchical structure. Surrealist photography, as an art form that perceptibly removed the masculine attributes assigned to the medium, promoted the fluidity and transmutability of feminine identity. Man Ray’s photograph of _Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy_ from 1920-1921 displays the facility with which one could obscure the gender binary by virtue of the photographic image. Through the power of the medium, women reconciled with the internal struggle shared amongst _les garçonnes_, young women of the 1920s who transgressed the boundaries of femininity and exhibited masculine

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37 Ibid. 14.
qualities. These women actively rebelled and pushed back against conventional notions of ladylike decorum and function. The women in question successfully overcame obstacles of patriarchal tradition by inventing unique identities of both masculine and feminine charm, earning identities such as *la femme fatale*, *la femme rebelle*, *la garçonne*, *la flâneuse*.

Various women gained entrance into the male surrealist milieu by initially being celebrated muses of the twentieth century, the best examples of which are Dora Maar and Lee Miller. Dora Maar was the subject of Picasso’s numerous paintings, arguably some of the most emotional and energetic pieces of his oeuvre; moreover, out of the several companions that Picasso serially embraced, Maar was effortlessly the most fierce and intellectual. Lee Miller made her first appearance as a fashion model for *Vogue* before becoming the apprentice, muse, and lover of Man Ray. She was the model for some of the male photographer’s most erotic photographs. Refusing to be subsumed as man’s object—to be desired, to be possessed, to be consumed, to be destroyed—Maar and Miller singularly positioned themselves within the trajectory of surrealist principles and actively inserted themselves into the predominantly masculine movement as surrealist photographers of, certainly, genius. These women surrealis
t participated in the visual and psychological tropes employed by their male colleagues; they disrupted the traditional subject-object dynamic, not by carelessly assuming the position of subject but by inventing her position as subject-artist. Whether it was because of her beauty, wit, talent, or general mystery, each of these women was cognizant of her seductive powers and used them to her advantage in order to insert herself into the surrealist male discourse.

In the respective works of Dora Maar and Lee Miller, the passivizing representations of the female form are recovered and reinstated with power, agency, and authority. Furthermore, the
women of the movement productively inscribe the *female* artist into the genre of surrealism. If the representation of woman as apparatus for surrealist men was a means of protecting the male ego, then the reclamation of the female figure according to female surrealists was perhaps to guard herself from the consequent preying upon of her very existence and identity by men. In other words, female surrealists, such as Maar and Miller, rescued the potent image of woman from the self-serving hands of men. Though Krauss uses the following words to describe man’s attempt to quell his anxieties through expressive methods, they can easily be applied to woman’s fear of being consumed and possessed as an object: “To produce the image of what one fears in order to protect oneself from what one fears is the strategic achievement of anxiety, which arms the subject in advance against the onslaught of trauma, the blow that takes one by surprise.” In this sense, by taking back control of the image of woman, female surrealists overcame the anxiety of being diminished into the status of mere object or thing before man even has the chance to own and use her body for his egocentric desires and fantasies. Literal or figurative representations of the female form created by woman herself, then, emphatically iterate the presence of the onlooker, thus underlining her own self-consciousness of being recognized and gazed upon by another. Through this double-consciousness, woman confronts her destiny, one that has been predetermined by man in accordance to patriarchal convention; simultaneously, she deliberately chooses to depict a female image insofar that she can reestablish control and ownership of her body and personage. Representation of women, for the female surrealist, exists only for her, no longer solely for man and his obsessions.

Within the discernible parameters of surrealist art production, women surrealists recognized the potential within the movement to subvert, challenge, and extinguish essentialist gender binaries to confront the restrictions imposed by Western bourgeois values at large. Through the power and mystery of their photographs, Maar and Miller singularly question their realities, their construction and deconstruction.

fig. 1-3 Hans Bellmer, *Untitled from La Poupée (The Doll)*, ca. 1936. Gelatin silver print, 4 3/4 x 3 3/5 in.

fig. 1-4 Hans Bellmer, *Untitled from La Poupée (The Doll)*, 1936. Gelatin silver print. 4 5/8 x 3 1/16 in.
Dora Maar: La femme fatale

The two photographs of legs by Dora Maar from 1936 (fig. 2-1 and 2-2) exude a shockingly high degree of power, especially as examples of surrealist women production. We are confronted by two pairs of legs that are rigid, erectile, strong, empowered. The deliberate decision to capture the back of the legs forbids our familiar indulgence of gazing upon supple, fleshy legs of Renaissance female nudes. They physically and literally turn away from the male erotic gaze. Dora Maar effectively disturbs the subject-object dynamic by assuming the position of subject-photographer, the role of an artist traditionally attributed to men. In addition, she chooses to photograph fragments of a woman’s body, the object of male desire and the object through which man could access and activate his creative sensibilities in liaison with the surreal, the marvelous, the uncanny. By putting herself in man’s shoes and accessing the perspective of a male artist, she confuses the binary opposition of male artist-genius, female muse-model-mistress. Moreover, though identifying as a woman who successfully photographs the female body by denying men’s position as the sole arbiter of meaning in representations of women, Maar continues to embody the conventionally masculine role of artist and hyper-sexualizes, fetishizes, and dismembers the female form yet again.

This particular pair of both legs and photographs are made up of multiple possible interpretations, warranted by its demonstration of Bataille’s concept of the uncanny. George Bataille was a friend and lover of Maar’s for a brief period. Like many surrealist photographers, Dora Maar was a master of the informe. By means of simple rotation, cropping, and subsequent disorientation, photographers were able to produce and visually make manifest the so-called

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informe. Meaning ‘unformed’ in English, Bataille’s terminology is suggestive of a playful distortion of reality. In her book Bachelors, a compilation of essays about women artists, Krauss describes the informe as a blurring of categories that is most importantly relative to self-identity:

The categorical blurring initiated by the continual alteration of identity within this work is precisely what Bataille means by formless. It is not just some kind of haze or vagueness in the field of definition, but the impossibility of definition itself due to a strategy of slippage within the very logic of categories, a logic that works according to self-identity—male, say, or female—stabilized by the opposition between self and other: male versus female, hard versus soft, inside versus outside, life versus death, vertical versus horizontal.

Informe relates to the process of seeing as if...; it is founded upon the seeing or depicting of material objects in such a particular fashion as to see it as if it were something completely different. In short, and despite Bataille’s apprehension towards straight definitions, the informe can be defined as a defamiliarization of what we are familiar to, whether that be our selves, others, or things of the material world: “Allergic to the notion of definitions, then, Bataille does not give informe, a meaning; rather, he posits for it a job: to undo formal categories, to deny that each thing has its ‘proper’ form, to imagine meaning as gone shapeless, as though it were a spider or an earthworm crushed underfoot.”40 In the creation of the informe, the camera automates the mechanical process of disorientation.

By taking the concept of the informe, we can better understand and dive into Maar’s photographic portfolio. Her most powerful and resonant works contain the mystery of surrealism. Returning to her two photographs of legs, it should come to us as a surprise that these were taken by a woman; these photographs are often mistakenly attributed to Man Ray. Both photographs display the backside of a pair of muscular legs, perhaps of Nusch Éluard or of Assia, that are

40 Krauss. “Corpus Delicti.” L’Amour fou. 64.
positioned spread apart. The categorical slippage here is generated by the masculine stance
assumed by the pair of woman’s legs, effectively giving birth to the oxymoronic figure of the
phallic woman. The legs themselves are of a phallic nature as they stand firmly on the ground.
The composition and arrangement of the legs against the starkly white background emphasize
the inversion of the conventional pubic triangle, implying an undoing of familiar notions of
female genitalia. The sexual identity of the legs reveals itself through the implications of a split
present in both photographs.

The two photographs seem as if they were meant to be maintained as a pair, intended to
be seen together, although they seldom are; perhaps the divergence from the traditional
presentation as diptych feeds into the confounding quality of them. In one, there is a strong sense
of homoeroticism. The gap between the two legs is made known by a small stream of what could
arguably be ejaculate-like hair, smoke, or even urine, which combined with the powerful stance
gives rise to our reading of the image as male. Whether woman is being implicitly portrayed as
an animal-man-hybrid or a machine emitting fumes, she is shown here as notably non-human or
‘the other.’ In the second photograph, the cleft is suggested by women’s underpants. The
particular splitting of the legs conforms visually with surrealist men’s construction and
deconstruction of the female form; it even recalls the grotesque dismemberment and
manipulation of girl dolls demonstrated by Hans Bellmer in his *Poupées*. In both cases,
nonetheless, there is an ambivalence regarding gender.

More than being a categorical blurring of sexuality and gender roles, the two photographs
productively link themselves to the movement by mimicking the bodily condition of the praying
mantis, a loaded symbol visited and rendered time and time again by surrealist men. The insect,
named for and identified by its prominent legs, is notorious for marrying sex with death in view of the fact that the female mantis is known to decapitate and devour her male mates after and while they mate. For surrealist men, the sexual practices of the female mantis made the insect “the perfect symbol of the phallic mother, fascinating, petrifying, castrating.” By photographing these pair of legs in this mantis-like fashion, Maar poses them as threatening forces, assuming that we as onlookers are the male gaze manifested. Moreover, the image of the female praying mantis is a metaphor for male’s anxiety of castration, a complete shattering of the male ego. Krauss identifies this singular symbol as “the very image of the Medusa in all its castrative menace.” Maar reverses the role that she was subjected to by male artists and with pride assumes their privileged position. While her male colleagues chose to represent the woman-as-mantis in order to control it by dictating its image, Dora Maar powerfully takes the image back into her own hands, demonstrating her authority over her self-representation. Maar disrupts the binary opposition of self and other, objecting to be naturally categorized as the infamous Other.

What made Dora Maar such a singular personage was her keen intelligence, personal pride, and passionate attitude towards her art. What made the artist a seductive and appealing subject for surrealist men was the indescribability of her voice, her sultry eyes, her famously manicured hands, her very elusive character. She must have been aware of this, as evidenced by her control of her own life and her work as a photographer and artist. Maar was an emotional, sympathetic, social, yet also mysterious and reclusive figure. She was known for having lengthy

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41 Ibid. 70.
conversations over the phone with her many friends—Jacqueline Lamba, Paul and Nusch Éluard, André Breton, Man Ray—but would refuse to see them when they appeared. For this reason, the biography of Maar has been unexplored territory in the discourse of surrealism. We lack details and facts of her life that we attempt to fill in and make sense of through her artistic production and poetry. In this way, Maar was a mythic female character within the surrealist narrative.

More than anything, Dora Maar has been misrepresented and misunderstood under the guise of Picasso’s *La Femme qui pleure*, or the *Weeping Woman*. She was the principal model for many of his portraits of weeping women in the late 1930s and early 1940s. That is to say, she was rarely seen or read apart from her association with her Spanish lover of seven years. During their tumultuous affair, she was featured in a plethora of some of his most emotional paintings. She is additionally portrayed as the woman holding a lamp in his infamous *Guernica*; it was she alone who documented the process of the celebrated work. Brassaï, who was previously responsible for photographing the works by Picasso since 1932, was quickly banished from the artist’s studio, as per Maar’s unwavering command. As a result, Maar came to play a unique role in documenting the process of the impressive twentieth-century masterpiece; the photographs appeared in international art magazines. She was mistakenly seen as the tragic muse, a woman forever damaged by Picasso, the artist genius. Despite being a muse-model-

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43 Baring, Louise. *Dora Maar: Paris in the Time of Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, and Picasso* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2017), 178. Brassaï: “Dora was in a better position than anyone else to photograph both Picasso and his work. And, at the beginning of their life together, she kept a jealous watch over this role that she considered as a prerogative and assumed moreover with diligence and talent… Dora was inclined to sudden outbursts of anger and, in order not to provoke this, I was extremely careful not to trespass on what was now her domain.”

44 Ibid.
mistress, her acute intellectuality, paired with her talent in surrealist photography gained her access and entrance into the male milieu, specifically Picasso’s milieu.

Dora Maar, born as Henriette Theodora Markovitch, was born in Tours, France in 1907 and grew up in Argentina. She arrived in Paris in 1925 with a passionate curiosity for photography. Before receiving proper training herself, she served as a model for Man Ray. It is during the 1930s that she befriended the father of surrealism, André Breton, and the renegade surrealist, Georges Bataille, both of whom encouraged her to join the movement and pursue a career in the visual arts. Maar studied photography at the Académie Julian, where women were allowed to receive the same training as their male peers at the École des Beaux-Arts. Her photographs and her enigmatic qualities acted as Maar’s passport for surrealist ventures. Even her early photographs from the early 1930s suggest that she possessed the appropriate techniques and sensibilities of a surrealist mind. Her double profile of herself (fig. 2-3), for example, demonstrates a mastery over double exposure, a technique frequently used by surrealist photographers. The superimposition of the two negatives resembles how Picasso would later represent Maar in his own works, as if Maar’s early double profile foreshadowed how she would be perceived and painted by her lover, exemplified by his Dora Maar Seated of 1937 (fig. 2-4). In this colorful work, Picasso renders his lover’s eyes in a peculiar manner: the two eyes—one is red, the other blue—are shown on the same side of the face, which is drawn in profile. This choice of composition generates a similar effect to her self-portrait, in which it seems as if two faces are layered and conflated into one visage.

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It was through fashion photography and advertising that Maar first experimented with surrealistic photomontage. In describing Maar as a photographer genius even from early on, Jacques Guenne wrote in 1934, “To understand the passion that Dora Markovitch brings to her art, you need to have her seen in her long white coat, walking around her model to establish which gestures look the most natural, playing with the lights, checking there are not ugly shadows.” In this vein, one can imagine the natural habitat of the female photographer at work, especially in the Portraits of Assia from 1933-1934 (fig. 2-5). The sitter of these photographs, Assia Granatouroff, was a twenty-two-year-old Ukrainian whose toned body is emphatically rendered as larger-than-life shadow in one image in particular. In the full-body portrait of Assia, Maar positions her perfectly proportioned and athletic body standing in a shaft of light. Her upturned nipples, slim waist, and muscular legs cast a looming shadow behind the model. The shadow, one conspicuously belonging to a nude woman, poses as a menacing force not to be tampered with. Moreover, the photograph’s play of doubles in form and scale generates a commandingly erotic effect. Maar’s Portrait of Assia is an example of the private and commercial commissions that provided the photographer time to pursue her artistic career. It was not until Maar began exploring the depths of the unconscious that she was fully capable of experiencing absolute freedom of imagination that typified the surrealist ethos.

As she quickly became familiar with the surrealist milieu, Dora Maar photographed the surrealists themselves, many of them being her close friends. Léonor Fini, a friend of Éluard, Ernst, and Magritte, posed for a series of provocative pictures taken by Maar. Fini herself was an Argentinian surrealist painter, recognized for her depictions of feline imagery. She showed her

46 Baring, Dora Maar. 56.
paintings in some of the movement’s exhibitions, but like other surrealist women, was never a formal member. Self-representation, eroticism, and theatricality were main components of her work, which rendered the image of woman as self-reliant, beautiful, and powerful. In Maar’s portrait of Léonor Fini of 1936 (fig. 2-6), the Argentinian painter is shown in a black low-cut gown, her legs spread around the black cat’s inconspicuous head, and framed by the spectacular, lush texture of the velvet curtain to her right. In what appears to be the interior of a theater, Fini is portrayed with her shoulders bare, her almost-exposed breasts spilling out of her dress, and wearing nylons that have an indeterminate run in them. While Fini stares straight at the camera and at us, the black cat is gingerly nestled in her lap, a reference to the common motif in Fini’s own works; it is also an indication of Maar’s witty playfulness in relation to the connotations of the pussycat.

The word ‘pussy’ is, in fact, a double-entendre, as it is commonly associated with cats, weaklings or cowards, and female genitalia. The simultaneity of both innocent and vulgar connotations of the word are visually made manifest in the photograph. Mary Ann Caws identifies Maar’s tongue-in-cheek portrait as a modern Olympia.47 In this light, Maar seems to be taking on the privileged position of the flâneur, holding an erotic gaze that traditionally belonged to men. She disturbs the subject-object relationship, as she does in her two photographs of legs, and feminizes a rather masculine portrayal of a beautiful woman. Maar effectively pays homage to both friendship and to the talent of a gifted artist by merging aspects of eroticism and drama, friendship and intimacy.48

47 Caws, Dora Maar. 62.

Maar’s most resonant works are infused with the mystery of surrealism. Although she produced a number of the movement’s most representative photographs, she was never an official member of the group. Maar’s Portrait of Ubu of 1936 (fig. 2-7), in particular, was an icon and mascot of the surrealist movement. It was exhibited that year at the Charles Ratton Gallery, widely circulated, and featured in a series of postcards. Like the photographs of legs, Maar’s Portrait of Ubu represents George Bataille’s conception of the informe. We are presented with an overwhelming, amorphous, indescribable creature that slouches in our direction with its hands kept close to itself. The photograph appears to be of a fetus of an actual animal, probably an armadillo, though Maar herself never confirmed; even at the end of her life, she refused to say. Her intentional omission of the truth is her attempt to retain the mystery of her photograph that was congruent with surrealist ideals.

Dora Maar named the photograph after Alfred Jarry’s play Ubu from 1895. Jarry’s character Ubu is a physics instructor, a man that curiously resembles some type of animal or beast. The strange personage in Jarry’s Ubu spurred a certain fascination for Maar, perfectly rendered in her own work. According to Caws, the mystique and hallucinatory power that it holds exemplify the concepts of both Breton and Bataille. Maar’s interest in the grotesque and the bizarre is demonstrative of one of the aspirations of surrealism as presented by Breton in the First Manifesto: “the systematic illumination of hidden places and progressive darkening of other places, the perceptual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory.”49 Here, Breton aligns himself with the transgressive nature of the unconscious, the realm where one can truly see. It is only through seeking through the darkest corners of our minds that we can reach our suppressed

49 Caws. Dora Maar. 79.
unchnscious. Additionally, it represents George Bataille’s conception of the informe. The fetus-monster represented is nondescript, formless, and unformed, which transgresses all categories and obscures the conception of reality. For Maar, the photographic medium lended itself to iterate Breton and Bataille’s sensibilities. With its capacities, followed by subsequent tweaking, photography enables Maar to crop and highlight the image thereby blurring what was actually photographed. The end result is a complete disorientation and intrigue imposed on the viewer.

In the same year, Maar created a series of photomontages, in which she cut and pasted figures from her street photographs into the inverted cloisters of the Orangerie in Versailles; curving chambers constitute the winding tunnel of the structure. Her manipulation of the negative generated a dizzying effect enhanced by the architectural environment. The backdrop of the vault emanates a sensation of gothic and ominous terror that heightens the peculiarity of the perspective. One in particular, titled Le Simulateur (The Faker) (fig. 2-8), is a cryptic, almost nightmarish photomontage of a boy’s body hanging down from the upturned vaulted ceiling. In our view, as a result of the 180° rotation administered by Maar, the boy’s body is positioned in the foreground. The photomontage calls attention to the surrealist tradition of skewing the real. Or as Caws puts it, “The image invokes a whole tradition of misrepresentation, of the tricks used by us and others against ourselves in a universe we do not choose.”

The arch of the boy’s body eerily echoes and conforms to the twisted nature of the ceiling, effectively creating a feeling of movement and dynamism that reels the viewer in. As a result of the strangeness of the background and the unnatural bend of the boy’s body, both dramatized by the growing shadows of the composition, there is a reverberation of a pervasive silence that leaves the viewer with a

50 Ibid. 72.
disturbed and inexplicable feeling. *Le Simulateur*, along with *Père Ubu*, was shown in the International Surrealist Exhibition in June of 1936 at the New Burlington Galleries in London.

*Sans titre (Main-coquillage), Untitled (Hand-shell)*, by Maar from 1933-34 (fig. 2-9) is an early materialization of the artist’s surrealist sensibilities. There is something unexplained, irrational, ambiguous, and erotic about the composition. This photomontage eerily depicts a hand emerging out of a nautilus shell. The chimerical *main-coquillage* is positioned on a bed of sand under the radiating light being filtered through ominous clouds. The setting of this particular stage creates a strange sense of time being slowed down or momentarily at a standstill as a result of our gaze. Furthermore, Maar successfully combines the powerful works of nature with the artifice of man. At the same time, the photograph implicitly reveals a certain level of self-consciousness and awareness of how men—Picasso and Man Ray—perceived her and fetishized her signature features. The hand, whose thumb exposes a lick of nail polish, functions as an icon of sorts, a exterior sign of Dora Maar. Her appearance was always described as striking and flamboyant. She was dressed in fashionable clothing and elaborate hats, and painted her nails different colors depending on her mood.

We are able to get a sense of how men gazed at and perceived Dora Maar by the way they, in turn, represented her. In Man Ray’s photograph of Maar from 1936 (fig. 2-10), the famous surrealist photographer captures and displays his female subject as an exotic, sphinx-like creature. Dora Maar’s strong features forcibly direct our focus and attention to be solely on her. The placement of her hand, as an extension of her facial structure, additionally guides our eyes to be drawn to hers, as she stares directly back at us with a gaze tinged with a seductive quality. Her hand and manicured fingers, ornamented with an intricate ring, form a delicate gesture as they
sensitively direct our eyes to make eye contact. Her portrait is curiously juxtaposed with a miniature set of hands that lay at the bottom-right quartile of her face, effectively mirroring the dainty disposition of her real hand. The pair of artificial hands, too, feature painted nails and are decorated with bands of jewelry. Man Ray’s portrait of Maar exhibits a fetishization of her elegant hands. The conflation of Maar’s actual hand with a pair of fabricated hands emphatically make us aware of the constructed quality of the photograph itself. Through the technique of solarization and the playful pairing of both Maar’s hand and the plastic one, Man Ray calls attention to the fusion and distortion of the real and the artificial.

The manipulation and deliberate cropping of the image disorients our comprehension of the depicted environment. With the exception of her visage, the composition of the solarized photograph is incoherent. The sleeves of her chemise, for example, are of an obscure nature because of the consequences of solarization. The unusual organization of the photograph makes it seem as if Maar’s face is emerging out of sculpted stone, as if peeking out of a head-in-the-hole placeholder. In this particular fashion, Dora Maar is represented here as a mystic figure, an enigmatic persona. We have no other choice but to look into the alluring eyes of the sultry femme fatale presented before us. It is in this vein that we can go so far as to interpret Man Ray’s portrait of Dora Maar as an indication of the role she would adopt in real life in addition to the impression she would leave as Picasso’s lover and muse in the same year the photograph was taken.

According to Caws, it is this very sphinx-like sophistication of this surrealist woman, as represented by Man Ray, that seduced Picasso.51 When she first met Picasso at Café des Deux

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51 Ibid. 83.
The Phallic Woman

Magots in Saint-Germain-des-Prés in early 1936, she was already a recognized photographer and a well-known personage in surrealist circles. The dramatic, the erotic, and the spectacle are all self-evident in the accounts of Maar’s initial meeting with Picasso, instigated by their mutual friend Paul Éluard. From Jean-Paul Crespelle’s point of view, the tale unfolds as such:

the young woman’s serious face, lit up by pale blue eyes which looked all the paler because of her thick eyebrows; a sensitive uneasy face, with light and shade passing alternately over it. She kept driving a small pointed pen-knife between her fingers into the wood of the table. Sometimes she missed and a drop of blood appeared between the roses embroidered on her black gloves… Picasso would ask Dora to give him the gloves and would lock them up in the show case he kept for his mementos.\textsuperscript{52}

Crespelle’s particular account of the story is suggestive of the trajectory of which the two surrealists’ relationship would embark. Maar’s physiognomy is succinctly dissected by Crespelle, in such a fashion that it seems as if her face was meant to be represented and rendered. Her beauty is notably unconventional but maintains a high degree of elegance; we can picture the light and shadow, which dance upon Maar’s facial landscape, translated into shapes and forms that would subsequently make up the features of a cubist painting.

The three key components of their rendezvous—her fingers, her knife, and her gloves—are like the elements of a de Chirico still-life. They additionally have a fetishistic quality and a sense of masochistic drama.\textsuperscript{53} Picasso was enthralled by this mysterious, beautiful woman’s unwarranted act of self-mutilation. It is this sense of exaggeration and eroticism that would provide Picasso the inspiration, the emotion, and the drama for his many images of Maar. Picasso was as haunted and intrigued by death as she was by the sacred and mystical aspects of religion and rituals. As Caws explains, “They each had what Bernard Minoret calls a Spanish soul,

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 81.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. 83.
excessive, dramatic and given to extremes, like Saint Teresa; ‘mourir de ne pas mourir,’ to die of not dying, an expression that might have been tailor-made for Dora Maar.”54 She was brilliant and colorful not only in Picasso’s representations but in her own self-portrayal and her personality.

Maar’s style and sophistication are made visible in her *Self-Portrait in Color* of 1935 (fig. 2-11) that is today in the collection of the Centre Pompidou in Paris. In the photograph, Maar presents herself in the midst of contemplation, resting her face in one hand and looking off into the distance. On her lap appears to be the corner of an out-of-focus book, which suggests that Maar, as the sitter, has taken a break from reading. The book itself signifies a literary destination, a productive escape from reality. She is smartly dressed in a blazer and patterned scarf with a watch adorning her exposed wrist. The most resolute part of the image is her visage which has been made up with rouge on her lips and liner that accentuates her brow. The fashion in which she has pulled back her hair gives her an androgynous impression. The very fact that this is a self-portrait indicates that Maar, with deliberation and purpose, styled and presented herself in a rather masculine way. Her premeditation in regards to her self-representation emanates refinement, vibrancy, and power.

After meeting Picasso, Maar helped him situate his studio at 7 rue des Grands-Augustins, the very space in which he would paint *Guernica* (fig. 2-12), a process that Maar enjoyed the privilege of recording through photographs. Her presence and operations as a photographer were very much a part of its inspiration. The painting itself was immensely influenced by the photographic medium: the grey tones are reminiscent of the photographs that accompanied

54 Ibid.
newspaper reports. He includes Dora Maar’s features in the woman holding up a lamp. She was also responsible for exercising significant political influence over Picasso, later convincing him to join the French Communist Party in October 1944.\textsuperscript{55} His renowned mural was made as a reactionary manifestation of the artist’s devastation towards the Spanish civil war in July 1936. Picasso, in turn, found a great deal of consolation in Maar as his companion and lover. Dora Maar indubitably left an impression and impact on Picasso; she was well-aware of the effect the women in Picasso’s lives had on his demeanor and visual expression:

\begin{quote}
According to Picasso’s biographer John Richardson, a close friend of Dora’s until she died, Dora perceived that when the woman in his life changed, virtually everything else changed too: ‘the style that epitomized the new companion, the house or apartment they shared, the poet who served as a supplementary muse, the tertulia (group of friends) that provided the understanding and support he craved, and the dog that rarely left his side.’ Richardson called this ‘Dora’s law.’\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

This biographical tidbit reveals a heightened awareness and cautiousness in Maar; she was evidently conscious of the many women in Picasso’s life, the way that they individually swayed him, and the way that she achieved the same.

More than companionship and romance, their relationship was one of collaborative qualities; Picasso was constantly urging Maar to pick up and pursue painting. While some argue that his guidance was warranted by his belief of photography as \textit{un art mineur}, writers like Louise Baring—the author of the most recent anthology about Dora Maar—attest to the notion that the male artist genius refused to withstand the possibility of his muse being better than him in any creative sphere.\textsuperscript{57} In either scenario, nonetheless, we are able to gain insight into the idea

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\textsuperscript{56} Caws. \textit{Dora Maar}. 84.
\textsuperscript{57} Baring. \textit{Dora Maar}. 40.
\end{flushright}
that Picasso was cognizant of Maar’s expressive capacities and keen to the potential behind their collaboration. They were constantly exchanging and sharing their respective skills and talents with one another: “These drew on their combined talents: Picasso’s artistry and Dora Maar’s expertise in the darkroom. Picasso also returned to the ‘photo-etchings’ or cliché-films, engravings on photographic plates, that he had made five years earlier. And it was in his studio, found for him by Dora, that Picasso painted so many portraits of her.” 58 The various paintings and drawings Picasso made of Maar during their relationship show her constantly in transformation; her ability to adopt different guises nourished his obsessive portrayals of her. On the one hand, this reflects the artist’s perception of his companion and lover as an elegant chimera of sorts, a figure that could be anything he wanted. On the other hand, this is suggestive of the artist’s inability to render her in one specific way, to capture and to own her as if she was his possession.

In a Portrait of Pablo Picasso from 1936 (fig. 2-13), Dora Maar seems to adopt the advice of her sitter by superimposing painterly qualities onto her gelatin silver negative. The photograph itself is a headshot of Picasso, one of the twenty-five portraits of the male artist that Maar captured. While the others are displays of respect towards her companion, the one in question provides a feeling of aggression and penetration. In this particular photograph from the series, Maar intentionally and forcefully scraped right onto the surface of the negative, creating a forbidding nest of marks around Picasso’s face. As a consequence, he becomes inaccessible to everyone but Maar, as if only she holds the privilege and authority of understanding, capturing, and destroying his physiognomy.

58 Caws. Dora Maar. 96.
Throughout the course of their affair, Picasso maintained his relationship with Marie-Thérèse Walter, with whom he had a child. To the artist, Marie-Thérèse was a gentle, passive soul who did anything to satisfy the artist genius; Maar, in contrast, gained his respect with her intelligence and intensity. Picasso often insinuated that Maar was unladylike, the antithesis of Marie-Thérèse Walter’s maternal and voluptuous gentility. Of women, generally speaking, Picasso set impossible and unrealistic expectations. To François Gilot, the young woman for whom Picasso would leave Maar, he expressed that “for [him] there are only two kinds of women—goddesses and doormats.”

In the artist’s eyes, a woman was only either ethereal or an object. To Picasso, Maar was not a goddess; however, she certainly proved herself to be immensely more significant than a doormat to be stepped on and walked over. She was not the docile nymph that was Marie-Thérèse, but a volatile and perplexing woman that Picasso, no matter how hard he tried through his representations, tried to capture and control. The two women, at times, lived together, posed together, and even wrestled each other, as commanded by Picasso. Despite such points of conflict, Picasso and Dora Maar were united in an extraordinary bond as lovers, painters, and photographers. Maar’s talent and skill in the darkroom presented themselves as indispensable and invaluable to Picasso.

For Picasso, Dora Maar embodied the mirada fuerte, that bold look, that impenetrable stare, which he obsessively tried to capture. In a photograph of Picasso in his studio by Brassaï from 1939 (fig. 2-14), the artist is shown in the act of stacking several portraits of Maar, which clearly expresses the compulsive hold Maar’s image had over him. Seen in this light, Maar was a

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59 Ibid. 169.

60 Ibid. 120.
character within the surrealist narrative, whose life story was one that elicited much intrigue, mystery, and curiosity. It was unnecessary for her to go out of her way to seduce a man like Picasso, to insert herself into his world; more so, it was he who was naturally drawn to her reclusive world. The magnitude of her strong personality violently radiates from the tormented features of Picasso’s portraits of her as the Weeping Woman, a figure he was constantly revisiting during and after the process of Guernica.

In Weeping Woman of 1937 (fig. 2-15), Dora Maar is visually described by thick, dense lines of opaque colors. Here again, an icon belonging to Maar, in this case, the flamboyant hat, appears in her representation by Picasso. The accessory, along with the rendering of her physiognomy and couture, are deconstructed into sharp geometric shapes, accompanied by the stream of hair that falls upon her left shoulder that are oppositely defined by organic contours. The juxtaposition of angle and curve can be understood as Picasso’s pictorial references to the apparatus of photography. There is a heightened sense of anguish captured in Maar’s teary and distressed eyes, accentuated by the extreme furrowing of her brows. Her hand, in contrast to their typical portrayal as a fetishized and groomed object, is uncannily large and ape-like. The lines and forms that make up the hand and the handkerchief it holds seem to merge into those of her face, ultimately creating an indecipherable portrait of an equally unattainable woman.

It is a common misconception of Dora Maar that she was simply a tragic muse-mistress-artist living in the shadow of both her master and the image he had created for her. It is easy to assume that as their stormy relationship deteriorated, Picasso increasingly portrayed Maar in a cruel and anguished light. According to Françoise Gilot, who was twenty years younger than Maar and forty years younger than the male artist, Picasso attested to the fact that his violent
renderings of his lover were inevitable. His presentation of Dora Maar as a conglomeration of tormented shapes was not a result of sadism nor of his own desire and pleasure; rather, he depicted her in this way because he was, as he claimed, “obeying a profound vision that had imposed itself on [him]. A profound reality.”  

It is precisely through his particular rendering of Maar as a tortured soul that the Spanish artist was able to express his uncontainable lament against the horrors of war. In Dora Maar, Picasso discovered not only an acquisition but also an accomplice within the chaotic atmosphere of wartime and civil dispute, as evidenced by Guernica and his many portraits of her. Friendship, collaboration, and trust were more imperative than ever. According to Caws, we should refuse to diminish and confuse Dora Maar’s identity to Picasso’s image of her as the Weeping Woman. She adamantly took her own image back by re-representing herself, drawing upon her lover’s imagery in her own representations of his oeuvre. By doing so, however, that is not to say that she was simply imitating and copying Picasso, as has been argued. In each revisitation of the Weeping Woman series, Maar reappropriates her image, reestablishes her control over her own portrayal (fig. 2-16).

Picasso’s painting and poetry throughout the course of their affair, between the years of 1936 and 1943, were enriched by Dora Maar’s personality, temperament, and intelligence. His mysticism and attitude, admired by Maar, equally nourished her works as well. Dora Maar’s poetry from the 1930s and 1940s were lyrical manifestations of her emotional life. The intense relationship between these two Spanish souls was often described as a romance ‘à l’Espagnol,’ characterized by its drama and turbulence. They continued to see each other until 1946, but by

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61 Ibid. 116.
then the relationship had completely come to an inevitable collapse. The split caused Maar much pain and grief, but she slowly recovered a peace of mind with the help of the psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, Picasso’s personal doctor. Lacan’s own concepts, specifically that of the ‘mirror stage’ of self-development and self-consciousness, were appealing to the surrealists. Dora Maar gradually regained her poise and composure, as a born-again Catholic recluse.

The sudden death of Maar’s close friend, Nusch Éluard, on November 28th of 1946 marked a final severance from the circle of friends she had cultivated during her affair with Picasso. The title Maar designated to her photograph of Nusch—*The Years Lie in Wait for You* (fig. 2-17), onto which she overlaid a spider’s web, retains a painful poignancy in relation to the delicate Nusch’s passing, which took place more than a decade after the photograph was taken. Maar used lyrical language to come to terms with the loss.

> Twenty-eighth of November, nineteen hundred and forty-six

> Dead seen Nusch unseen
> harsher than thirst
> Than hunger to my worn body
> Mask of snow on the earth and under
> Source of tears in the night blindman’s mask
> My past dissolves I give way to silence

> We shall not grow old together.
> This is the day
> Too many: time spills over. 

In addition to being a commemorative piece for her dear friend, the poem serves clearly as an evaluation of the dissolution of her past with Picasso as ties in their circle dissolved as well. She

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62 Interestingly enough, however, they continued to exchange talismans and presents for years to come. Thoughtful, perverse, plain-out weird, these gifts, being as they were things from Picasso, Maar treasured and kept without hesitation to the end of her life.

was experiencing a separation from her past with a looming ambivalence about the future to come.

A year after her separation from Picasso, Maar scribbled on a scrap of paper, “Yes, I believe it…my fate is a magnificent one, however, it seems,” which is currently in the Picasso Archives. Her spontaneous and rather enigmatic jotting reminds us of the notion of the informe; the way in which her words and punctuation reads is as if she broke off in the middle of thought. Both in her language and photographic style, she inconspicuously reveals to us a deeper reality, in regards to herself and her world, by unraveling and altering that with which we are familiar. In her new apartment-studio at 6, rue de Savoie in Paris, Maar returned to her lively, playful self, revitalizing her creative endeavors. In a photograph by Michel Sima from 1946 of Maar in her studio (fig. 2-18), Maar is depicted in her natural element as the ultimate example of la garçonne. She stands with much poise adjacent to her portrait of Alice B. Toklas, Gertrude Stein’s partner. Maar is dressed in a relaxed fashion, wearing what appears to be a men’s shirt tucked into a pair of slouchy corduroy pants. She embodies both masculine and feminine qualities. Her hair is tautly pulled back, her face is serious and unshakable. Yet, she leans onto one hip, subtly showing the natural curve of her figure. Her hand, whose fingers are once again painted, is decorated with a noticeable ring and is delicately placed on the frame of her painting. The painting itself is vaguely reminiscent of Picasso’s portrait of Stein from 1905 but is admittedly more sensitive and naturalistic. As her relationship with her Spanish lover continued to disappear into the past, Maar’s energy, being, and artistic style distanced themselves from him as well. It is as if her severance with Picasso fully allowed Maar to mature on her own without...
the need of anybody, certainly not a man. She would take up temporary lovers after her relationship with Picasso, but she never married, nor had children.

Maar was not the weeping woman, the identity for her that Picasso conceived and cultivated; she was only a weeping woman in the eyes of her master. In her own words, Maar made it clear that she was indeed outwardly depressed as a result of their breakup, but not to such an extent that her life was not worth living: “Everyone expected me to commit suicide after he left me. Even Picasso expected it, and the main reason I didn’t kill myself was not to give him the pleasure.” By the late 1950s, Maar was living part-time in her apartment in Paris and her house in Ménerbes, the residence that Picasso left her. She was determined to pursue painting and poetry, and took up photography again. This is the life Maar would continue to lead until her death decades later.

Her resolution makes itself manifest in Lee Miller’s profile portrait of Maar taken in 1956—*Dora Maar at home, 6, rue de Savoie, Paris* (fig. 2-19). The photograph captures the sombre sitter, with a cat in her lap, seated in an armchair by an empty fireplace. Above the mantelpiece is the portrait of *Dora Maar aux Ongles Verts (Dora Maar with Green Nails)* painted by Picasso in the early days of their relationship. She gazes straight ahead, almost in mirrored symmetry with the secondary profile drawing of her that hangs directly above. In this way, Maar can be deciphered here as an external sign of her physically and literally looking away from both the viewer and Picasso’s representation of her. Her perseverance explicitly demonstrates Maar’s refusal against being a tragic, weeping mistress that was seemingly claimed and destroyed by

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65 Ibid. 35. Dora Maar: “All [Picasso’s] portraits of me are lies. They’re all Picassos. Not one is Dora Maar.”

66 Ibid. 212.
Picasso. Perhaps being a religious recluse, turning her back on the world and her past, during her final years saved her. She outlived Picasso by almost a quarter of a century; she was the one that fled and got away.

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67 Dora Maar famously declared, “After Picasso, only God.”
fig. 2-1 Dora Maar, *Legs I*, ca. 1935. Gelatin silver print, 11 1/4 x 9 in.
fig. 2-2 Dora Maar, *Legs II*, ca. 1935. Gelatin silver print, 11 1/4 x 9 in.
fig. 2-3 Dora Maar, *Double Profile*, ca. 1930-1939. Gelatin silver print, 11 3/4 x 9 2/5 in.
fig. 2-4 Pablo Picasso, *Dora Maar Seated*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 36 1/5 x 25 3/5 in.
fig. 2-5 Dora Maar, *Portrait of Assia*, ca. 1933-1934. Gelatin silver print, 5 2/5 x 3 4/5 in.
fig. 2-7 Dora Maar, *Père Ubu*, 1936. Gelatin silver print, 15 1/2 x 11 in.
fig. 2-8 Dora Maar, *Le Simulateur (The Faker)*, 1936. Gelatin silver print, 10 3/5 x 8 in.
fig. 2-9 Dora Maar, *Sans titre (Main-coquillage) (Untitled (Hand-shell))*, ca. 1933-1934. Gelatin silver print, 15 4/5 x 11 2/5 in.
fig. 2-10 Man Ray, *Portrait of Dora Maar*, 1936. Solarized photograph, 9 1/2 x 11 4/5 in.
fig. 2-12 Dora Maar, *Guernica, state I*, 1937. Photographic positive, 8 x 11 7/10 in.
fig. 2-14 Brassai, *Picasso Stacking up Portraits of Dora Maar*, 1939.
fig. 2-15 Pablo Picasso, *La femme qui pleure (The Weeping Woman)*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 23 3/5 x 19 3/10 in.
fig. 2-16 Dora Maar, *Weeping Woman in a Red Hat*, ca. 1937. Oil on canvas.
fig. 2-19 Lee Miller, *Dora Maar at home, 6, rue de Savoie, Paris*, 1956. Gelatin silver print.
Lee Miller: La garçonne

Women surrealists were well-aware of the utilization and consequent exploitation of the female body as a symbol rooted in history for a range of things, from domesticity and motherhood to beauty and justice. In response, female artists fully embraced this visual and cultural trope by reshaping the significance of the powerful, feminine icon to fit their needs rather than those of surrealist men. Lee Miller, in particular, was conscious of the fact that she had the desired look of the modern woman, a style pioneered by fashion designer Coco Chanel. From her tomboyish, cropped hairstyle to the often androgynous way she dressed, her effortless grace and beauty facilitated her chance discovery by the founder of *Vogue*, launching her career as a fashion model. Jean Cocteau was responsible for recognizing Miller’s embodiment of the quintessentially modern look, identifying her as a libidinal statue, a surreal goddess. What made her one of the most distinctive women within the surrealist milieu, however, was that she was a modern icon and ubiquitous image of feminine beauty who turned the camera the other way.

Lee Miller’s *Self-portrait with Sphinxes in a Vogue studio* of 1940 (fig. 3-1) reveals the artist’s cognizance and active rebellion against the male surrealist sensibility regarding the representation of women. In the photograph, Miller positions her impeccably dignified self in juxtaposition with a statue of a sphinx. She is looking off to the side, though not passively, deliberately in avoidance of being possessed by the male gaze. Meanwhile, the sphinx in front of her looks directly at us, with a familiar smile of antique statuary that resonates vividly in our minds. Although the sphinx engages the viewer with direct eye-contact, it is out of focus,

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68 Miller appeared as the statue in Jean Cocteau’s film *Le Sang d’un poète (The Blood of a Poet)* of 1930.
emphatically drawing attention to the lively Miller. She is evidently posing for the photograph, but maintains a sense of energy. As she looks to the side, the studio light dances on the top of her head, her forehead, her cheek, her chin, and her hand, which grazes her chest. Her hand, which is perfectly manicured and painted, emerges from the fur-lined sleeve of a dark jacket, which dramatically contrasts the brightness of the rest of the composition. Behind her seems to be another sphinx-figure, whose one discernible eye is half-closed and also looking at us, in a rather disparaging manner. By including and subverting a well-known symbol from antiquity, it is as if Miller is literally and figuratively turning away from tradition.

The figure of the sphinx here can be interpreted as either the mythological creature of Thebes—composed of the body of a lion, the head and breast of a woman, and eagle’s wings—or more generally, an enigmatic personage. On the one hand, as a reference to Greek mythology, Miller’s image presents itself as a riddle; it is a strange combination of nature and artifice, legend and reality. The tale of the sphinx aptly consisted of a riddle as well. According to Greek mythology, the female monster, who was sent by the gods to plague the town of Thebes, confronted every passersby with a riddle and executed those who failed to answer. Returning to Miller’s photograph, the figure of the sphinx—one before her and one behind—seems to be protecting the artist from the viewer, assumedly a man; it is as if the onlooker must correctly answer the riddle of the image before even daring to engage with the untouchable Miller.

To read broadly the statue of the sphinx in Miller’s self-portrait as a symbol of enigmatic or inscrutable qualities is to interpret a part of her unique identity and character. She, herself, was recognized as a surrealist puzzle, especially during her most prolific years as a mature photographer; “a formidable paradox,” in Jane Livingston’s view, “she was at once a willing
object of others’ aesthetic desire, and a passionate, disciplined and self-abnegating creator of subjectively true images. Like any artist, she sought, sometimes ruthlessly, to engage a reality outside herself through her own work.” Lee Miller was born in Poughkeepsie, New York on April 23rd of 1907. Starting from an early age, she was constantly being photographed by her father, Theodore Miller, a keen amateur enthusiast of the medium. Theodore’s pictures of his daughter, many of which are nudes, are made all the more uncomfortable and shocking by the fact that Lee Miller was raped at the age of seven, by the son of a family friend, and consequently infected with gonorrhoea. Her father’s photography, despite its questionable incestuousness, was arguably prescribed as a remedy for Miller, enabling her to rediscover her self-confidence by learning how to pose in front of a camera. In spite of the male characters that peopled her various worlds, it was her father who shaped the core of her personality. Perhaps these experiences of childhood trauma shaped the fearless, valiant attitude Miller would later adopt as a woman, specifically towards men. It would be the same intrepid mentality that equipped Miller with the necessary resilience and courage to photograph combat in Europe during the Second World War. Her friend and collaborator during her years of war coverage, David E. Scherman, once attested: “Lee Miller was never afraid of the evil that men can do.”

Lee Miller’s name is contemporarily associated with her position in a variety of roles and careers. Born Elizabeth Miller, she was called Li Li as a child, prompting her to transmute her name to Lee. Taking on a rather androgynous, almost masculine name was only the beginning of her continuous transgression of traditional boundaries. Throughout the course of her personal life

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and career, she did not perfectly fit into any particular category, as she was constantly evolving and refusing to look back. Regardless of her perpetual metamorphosis, she succeeded in maintaining a strong sense of self. It is in this regard that Miller exemplifies Patricia Allmer’s angelic disposition of the female surrealist, by deconstructing and reconstructing the confines of Western binary thought and its hierarchical structure. Miller’s main talent was what she did with her life: “Lee Miller, fashion model. Lee Miller, photographer. Lee Miller, war correspondent. Lee Miller, writer. Lee Miller, aficionado of classical music. Lee Miller haute cuisine cook. Lee Miller, traveller. In all her different worlds she moved with freedom. In all her roles she was her own bold self.”

In each and every one of her roles and careers, she went proactively against the grain and against traditional notions of femininity. Miller effectively defied the stereotypes imposed on women and escaped the clutches of man by being her own invention.

The surrealist mind was constantly drawn towards the enigmatic, the exotic, the grotesque, and the bizarre. Miller was frequently attributed with having a perverse sense of humor that was congruent with surrealist sensibility, which makes itself clear in her photographed still-life of a severed breast of a woman. The still-life is a violent materialization that is reminiscent of the strange qualities in paintings by Magritte, though her style is more subtle. In Severed breasts from radical surgery in a place setting of 1929 (fig. 3-2), Lee Miller serves up a genuine amputated breast on a plate from two different perspectives. The severed breast is laid out on a white dinner plate accompanied by a fork, knife, and spoon. From one point of view, the sliced breast is presented as if it were a fillet of chicken; from the other, the breast appears to be a slice of pie. Miller effectively satirizes the familial, maternal, domestic

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72 Penrose. The Lives of Lee Miller. 8.
responsibilities traditionally attributed to women by alarmingly serving a sliced woman’s breast, awaiting to be devoured by man. The breast, a physical and sexual feature of woman, is here painfully sacrificed in order to satisfy man’s needs.

*Severed breasts from radical surgery in a place setting* is disturbingly morbid in its presentation of a female part. The work calls attention to male surrealists’ objectification of woman by displaying a slice of female anatomy upon a plate, ready to be consumed; the photograph functions as an explicit commentary on the staging of women’s bodies in surrealist art, whereby they are frequently presented as eroticized, fragmented, and reconfigured fetish objects. Its unsightly quality is precisely what makes it quintessentially surrealist in its sadistic nature. In this way, the female surrealist explicitly comments and mediates on what it is to be looked at as a woman. The title itself is additionally suggestive of the unrealistic expectations of women to conform to a certain standard of beauty, thereby necessitating radical surgery in order to accomplish just that. Miller dramatically exposes her own self-consciousness of being a woman, and therefore a sexual object and sexual subject; even further, she makes reference to her own role as fashion model, muse, and artist. Lee Miller confronts her reality as a woman who was constantly in the public eye. Through her photographed still-life, we are presented with a different way of looking at a woman’s world.

Miller’s *Severed breasts* should be perceived as an unapologetic riposte to Man Ray’s objectifying nude photographs of her. In his *Shadow patterns on Lee’s torso* of 1930 (fig. 3-3), her body has been cropped and fragmented to fit both the photographic frame and Man Ray’s frame of mind. In the photograph, Miller—rather, simply her torso—is positioned by a window, whose curtain’s netted fabric casts a shadow across her flesh. The notion of the torso calls
attention to its resemblance of a statuary bust from antiquity, which suggests and reinforces the unrealistic expectations of woman as a fictitious muse-figure. While the original photograph was a full-body rendering of Miller’s figure, Man Ray intentionally employed a reductive process, diminishing her function as an actual woman. Once realized that in this final image Man Ray had cut off her head, Miller immediately becomes an erotic object that he tries to control by depriving her of her own will and intelligence.

Heightened by the fact that Miller’s face is cut out of the picture frame, this anonymous torso that constitutes a majority of the composition quickly becomes less of a corporeal fragment of a breathing woman’s body than merely a flat surface on which to play trick lighting effects. The pattern, that molds itself with the contours of Miller’s silhouette, the curvatures of her shoulders and breasts, renders Miller’s flesh with a metallic quality. This single instant in which light and shadow decorate Miller’s body gives the figure an extraordinary, out-of-this-world eminence. Man Ray’s nude photograph of Miller, which is only one of many, celebrates her remarkable beauty, but also transforms her into a sexual object. In *Lee Miller: A Woman’s War*, Hilary Roberts highlights the erotic beauty that Man Ray tried to render and control through the image of Miller’s body: “For Man Ray (whose Surrealist vision of the female body was informed by the notorious Marquis de Sade), Miller’s body represented a canvas on which to experiment his exploration of female eroticism.”73 Through a reading of this photograph alone, Man Ray’s misogynistic treatment of Miller’s body is perceivably a means of investigating the feminine for fulfilling his own desires; in short, Miller’s figure involuntary lends itself as an creative instrument for the male surrealist.

73 Roberts. *A Woman’s War*. 33
This is not to say, however, that the relationship between Lee Miller and Man Ray was exclusively one of master-muse dynamics. In contrast, theirs was a collaborative and influential connection, which was initially and surprisingly pursued by Miller; their respective photographic works during the years of their relationship act as a dialogical series. Although Man Ray was to be her lover, Miller first fell in love with the city of Paris, which during the time was a den of artistic revolution. Her first visit was in 1925, when she was an eighteen-year-old student of Putnam Hall Private School. The purpose of the trip was to be exposed to French art and culture, but soon after her arrival, Miller immediately became intoxicated by the potential freedom that the city offered. For the young Miller, Paris presented itself as the most appropriate environment in which she could learn how to be an emancipated woman in command of her life and its experiences. During her stay, she was astonished to discover the artistic world of Paris, as dominated by the nihilistic dada movement, which gave way to surrealism. It was during her return to Paris in 1929 that she decided to pursue professional photography. She wanted to be freed from being categorized as an object to be picturesquely positioned and placed within the photographic frame. Miller, herself, declared, “I would rather take a picture than be one.”

Antony Penrose, the son of Lee Miller, published an illustrated biography of his mother in 1985 titled The Lives of Lee Miller. He did not share a close bond with his mother while she was alive, but grew to know her life and personality well through a discovery of boxes and

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74 Another reason for abruptly concluding her modeling career was Edward Steichen’s exploitative usage of photographs of Miller for a Kotex advertisement campaign. Public references to feminine hygiene products were considered taboo in society at the time. Thus, for a fashion model like Miller to be visually paired with the product in an advertisement created a scandalous uproar.
trunks filled with original prints, negatives, and manuscripts. In the first chapter of the biography, Penrose suggests that the cultural surroundings of Paris during the 1920s and, in particular, the principles of surrealism represented the personal and artistic liberation of which Miller was continuously in search: “Dreams, hallucinations and fantasies were the fabric of the [surrealist] movement, libertarianism was its style. Lee could not have sought her personal freedom at a more propitious moment.” Equally suited for Miller was the refreshing nature of haute couture that was established by Chanel, Lucien Lelong, and Jean Patou, which designed a style of boyish effortlessness, a radical departure from the figure-accentuating, corset culture that prevailed previously. It seemed as if the clothes that these designers created were made specifically for a woman like Miller. One can get a taste of the essence of la mode du siècle in Man Ray’s 1930 photograph of Lee Miller for the designer Patou.

As much as Miller enjoyed the uninhibited excitement of being in the public eye, of life in recognized modeling studios, and of her contact with the social and intellectual elite, she was fascinated by the experience on the other side of the camera. Photography offered Miller means of release for her personal frustration and desire to be in control. Moreover, photography was one of the few creative professions that was perceived as respectable for women. The photographic scene in Paris was dominated by the young American painter, assemblagist, and photographer Man Ray. He was notorious for developing new photographic techniques appropriate for the surrealist imagination. For example, he created camera-less photographs and called them

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75 Penrose, Antony. “Introduction.” A Woman’s War. 6. “Lee Miller was my mother; and although I hardly knew her while she was alive, I have become aware of much of her life and personality through the legacy of these images.”; in the acknowledgments of The Lives of Lee Miller. 6. “After Lee’s death we uncovered many boxes and trunks full of negative, original prints and manuscripts that were often in shreds from the censor’s razor.”

“rayographs.” The process was an old and well-known process that he simply rediscovered for himself; the original discovery was, in fact, made in 1834 by W. H. Fox Talbot, which he identified as “the art of photogenic drawing.” Man Ray’s rayographs, named after himself, consisted of positioning assemblies of objects onto photographic printing paper, exposing them to light before developing the print. As a consequence, the objects’ shadows would create peculiar patterns upon the paper, producing dreamlike compositions. In short, Man Ray was a playful genius of darkroom tricks and effects.

In Paris, Miller was able to absorb and embrace the artistic values around her. It should come as no surprise, then, that Lee Miller actively sought out the attention and guidance of Man Ray when she returned to Paris, in pursuance of a professional career in photography. According to her own account, she diligently went to Man Ray’s studio on rue Campagne-Première to find him not there but at Bateau Ivre, a nearby café:

He kind of rose up through the floor at the top of a circular staircase. He looked like a bull, with an extraordinary torso and very dark brown eyes and dark hair. I told him boldly that I was his new student. He said he didn’t take students, and anyway he was leaving Paris for holiday. I said, I know, I’m going with you—and I did. We lived together for three years. I was known as Madame Man Ray, because that’s how they do things in France.

By dissecting Miller’s words in describing her first encounter with the seemingly majestic Man Ray, we are able to discern the almost sacred admiration Miller had for the male surrealist photographer as well as her strong urge to follow his lead. It is as if she knew that in order to make a name for herself and be recognized by the finest of the surrealist milieu, she would have to make a bold and memorable introduction, both in herself and her creative efforts to come.

It is in all respects the undying determination of Miller, first as a model and later as an aspiring photographer, that caught Man Ray’s attention in the first place. Furthermore, by inverting her role as fashion model, by being behind the camera rather than in front of it, Miller was able to achieve recognition for her skill, talent, and innovation rather than simply for her looks; the camera lens mediated her internal vision and desire, effectively subduing the public’s vision of Miller herself. As Livingston stresses in *Lee Miller: Photographer*, “[Miller] combined a drive for recognition—whether through her looks, her wit, or her talent—with a periodic fierce determination to somehow get outside herself, to forget, or better, to lose herself in a vision operation through her, rather than one reflecting back from her.”†8 Man Ray, who was frequently commissioned as a photographer of fashion, perceived Miller’s familiarity and experience with the big modeling studios as advantageous. In return for her usefulness, Man Ray tutored Miller in photography.

Beyond her comprehension of the fashion market and studio lighting techniques, Miller had a naturally surrealistic eye when it came to her own photography, a practice that she so rapidly learned and mastered. Miller was occupied by her own desire, understanding it, and fulfilling it. Surrealism, then, presented to her not only as an opportunity for artistic expression, but also as a chosen way of life.†9 The surrealist lifestyle that she assimilated once she bought a Rolleiflex camera is evidenced through her pictures of ‘found images,’ comparable to the surrealist objet trouvé, around the Montparnasse district in Paris. In Miller’s photograph of *Ironwork, Paris* of 1929 (fig. 3-4), the idea of the found image makes itself clear. As the title

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suggests, her image is of ornamental ironwork captured from a strange perspective. Warranted by
the angle at which the photograph was taken, it is unclear as to whether we are looking up or
down at the architectural structure. An unknown light source coming from the top-right corner
permeates the pattern of the ironwork, casting a grid of shadows on the wall. Generally speaking,
this example of Miller’s early Paris work embodies an understated sense of the surprising
reconceptualization of the ordinary. Rather than confronting the viewer with an explicitly
disquieting image, she uses photography to reformulate the quotidian to suit her unpretentious
genre of surrealism.

Miller’s modest approach that she imbued in her photographic works is rearticulated in
Chairs, Paris (fig. 3-5), also an early Paris work from the same year. She used the power of the
photographic frame as a tool for isolating and re-creating reality. In this work, in particular, it is
obvious that both Miller and the consequent viewer are looking down at an everyday chair that
was probably situated outside of a café or bistro in Paris. However, because of the diagonal,
skewed point of view that Miller adopts, the chair and its shadow on the sidewalk recontextualize
the original environment, as if the forms that constitute the composition compose a curious yet
spectacular bird’s eye view of something that is blatantly commonplace. The camera angle, in
both Ironwork and Chairs, is intentionally canted in relation to the subject, generating a high
sense of drama in the work.

Inspired and instructed by Man Ray, Miller wholeheartedly adopted his sense of
adventure in regards to the alternative ways of being a photographer. Together, they shared a
symbiotic relationship, in which there was a continuous exchange of love, collaboration, and
inspiration. Their professional relationship in terms of photography is best summed up by their
The accidental rediscovery of the Sabattier effect, a well-known mechanism since the 1840s; the
nineteenth-century photographic scientist, John William Draper named the effect “solarization.”
By means of their rediscovery of the solarization technique, the consequent photograph achieved
a dramatic reversal of black and white values through extreme overexposure. It is an unfortunate
coincidence that Man Ray is the one to be accredited for the reinvention, seeing that Miller was
the one who catalyzed it; Man Ray was responsible for controlling and perfecting it as his own.
Nevertheless, the technique, should be regarded here as a symbol of their artistic relationship.

What was captivating about Miller, however, was that even during her time with Man
Ray—1929 to 1932—she did not subserviently absorb the expressive vocabulary and techniques
of her lover, partner, and mentor. Instead, she cultivated her own pictorial language and left a
distinctive mark in her photographic works, without great lengths of manipulation. Miller’s
modus operandi in regards to her photographic works was one that drastically differed from that
of surrealist men, who were by and large concerned with their own ego both in real life and in
their artistic production. Rather than depending on the playful juxtapositions employed by some
like Man Ray, Miller found her calling in the surrealist photograph that artfully and humbly
brought out the strangeness found in the ordinary. In her gelatin silver print from 1929 of Man
Ray Shaving (fig. 3-6), for example, Miller creates a photograph of Man Ray shown in profile,
with a thick application of shaving cream on his face. The extreme overexposure of the lower
half of the photograph bleeds into the brightness of the shaving foam, so that only the top
hemisphere of Man Ray’s head is darkened. The result of this simple tailoring on behalf of Miller
is a discreet obliteration or erasure of Man Ray’s chin and mouth, his voice and authority.

80 Livingston. Lee Miller: Photographer. 35. “For Lee Miller seemed always to have a restless, pragmatic,
and almost egoless approach to her own style.”
Moreover, the shaving cream beckons the viewer to perceive it as plaster, as if Man Ray is presented here as the muse-figure being molded into a sculpture. Through minimal means of alteration, Miller produces an image, in which the operations of the muse-master dynamic are palpably reversed.

One of the consequences of the solarization technique, since it effectively inverted the dark and light tones of the resultant image, was that it rendered the image of woman, specifically, to be perceived as a marble bust of classical antiquity. Although a few of Miller’s solarized images are reminiscent of Man Ray’s work, she instilled in her photographs her own signature. In her *Solarized Portrait of a Woman* of 1932 (fig. 3-7), Miller uses the solarization technique to visually highlight the femininity of her subject, who is believed to be Meret Oppenheim. As a surrealist, Oppenheim challenged the exploitative representation of women by producing erotically charged objects. In Miller’s solarized portrait, the woman depicted is shown here, not as a static marble statue, but as a dignified individual who is constantly in motion and transformation, with the exception of this unique captured moment in time.

Miller functioned as a foil for Man Ray’s works by nourishing him with an expressive drive both in his photographs and readymades. In addition to Miller’s presence as a muse-model, their joint achievement of solarization gave way for Man Ray to create some of his most recognized and eroticized photographs. On one occasion, in particular, Man Ray photographed Miller’s head and neck from a low-angle. The high contrast of light and dark gives the model a sculpturesque quality, as if she were an emotionally powered marble bust from the Hellenistic period. The angle at which Miller tilts her head away from the camera and viewer exposes her vulnerable neck prominently. Assisted by the softness of the image’s focus, her flesh becomes a
transmutable medium that is visually sculpted to resemble an erect penis. In his fetishistic photograph of Miller’s neck, *Lee Miller (Neck)* of 1929 (fig. 3-8), Man Ray combines male and female form to create an ambiguous phallic composition. The consequent image evidences the capacity of male desire to transform reality. In keeping with Bataille’s notion of the *informe*, Man Ray disorients and defamiliarizes Miller’s neck, obscuring its original context and transforming it into an erectile formation.

Despite the compelling and seductive nature of Man Ray’s photograph, it was not he who was in control of its printing. The sensual picture that was taken by Man Ray was not to his liking, prompting the artist to toss away the negative. It was, in fact, Miller who retrieved the plate and augmented the photograph to its final luster. The photograph is a rather revealing example of her collaboration and relationship with Man Ray, who was initially impressed by Miller’s repossession and enhancement of his original negative. However, his pride immediately got the best of him when Miller claimed the work to be of her production, not his. The turbulent feud that resulted from the ambiguity of the image’s authorship led Man Ray to throw Miller out of his studio. She was to return a few hours later to find the image tacked to the wall with a pin, with her throat slashed by a razor and red ink spilling from the laceration.\(^{81}\)

The motif of Miller’s slashed neck was revisited by Man Ray in his painting *Le Logis de l’artiste (The Artist’s Abode)*, in which the once vulnerable throat is reduced to an object of a still-life. The cut made by Man Ray on Miller’s photographed neck was a foreshadowing of their eventual severance from one another as lovers in the autumn of 1932, though they continued to be in the same circle of friends.

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Miller’s unforced genre of surrealism during her time in Paris was rarely of the same style that was defined by the peculiar juxtapositions generated by artists like Magritte, de Chirico, or Dali; nor was it of the the disturbing nature of photographs by surrealist photographs such as Hans Belmer or André Kertész. In contrast, her works were defined by their subtle enhancements or deracinations of conventional, perceptible reality. Miller’s photographic works from this early period seem to be inspired by the documentary Paris street scenes of Eugène Atget. Miller, in her own body of images, accentuates the concept of the *informe* and mystery of ordinary objects by removing and displacing them from their original context. Miller’s photographs exemplify her second husband Roland Penrose’s description of her creative eye, which he characterizes as a “surrealist mixture of humour and horror.” It is this singular combination of the satire and the macabre that made Miller a perceptible master of surrealist photography. She was able to distinguish her photographic style from others by using and honing Bataille’s idea of the *informe* to her advantage without having to impose darkroom tricks onto her prints. That is to say, she, as a surrealist photographer, became well-known for her unmanipulated image; there were no trick effects in her photographs per se, but the effect of the image definitely played its own tricks on the viewer’s interpretation, deciphering, reading of the image.

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82 Livingston, *Lee Miller: Photographer*. 31. As Jane Livingston illustrates in her book, *Lee Miller: Photographer*, “Miller’s best photographs form this period often seem psychologically neutral in comparison to other Surrealist photographs, and are oddly humble in subject. Instead of affronting us, she would seem to want to look at the marginal, or the apparently inconsequential, and make these things evocative. What she often loved—in this early period as later—was simply to find the arresting in the ordinary. To her, the intensity she sought was sometimes to be found in a slightly subdramatic moment.”

In her *Nude Bent Forward* of 1930 (fig. 3-9), Miller powerfully promulgates Bataille’s formlessness through her singular composition; the nude is represented without arms and legs, literally cropping and discarding the natural formation of a woman’s body. Furthermore, the backside of the nude has been upended, which visually and physically puts forward an utter reconstruction of the human form. In this sense, Miller adopts the reductive process employed by Man Ray in his portraits of her; however, she turns the female torso around, so that she becomes inaccessible and impenetrable. Like Man Ray’s *Lee Miller (Neck)*, Miller links male and female form in a similar fashion by transforming the female torso into an ivory-colored phallic obelisk, through means of rotating and cropping. In contrast to her male colleagues, who created similar works with a higher degree of eroticism, Miller renders the anatomy of a woman in a disquieting manner yet simultaneously denies any invitation of sexual titillation.

Indicated by the photographs she made during the years of their partnership, it seems as if Miller was conscious of her operations as a corporeal canvas and foil for Man Ray’s exploration of his fantasy and imagination. As a response, Miller often reinterpreted his portraits and nudes of her in her own work, reappropriating the image of woman and reestablishing agency over the interpretation of the female body. One of her photographs, *Nude wearing sabre guard* of 1930 (fig. 3-10), presents itself as a retaliation against Man Ray’s sadomasochistic handling of Miller’s body. In this photograph of her friend Tanja Ramm, Miller effectively negates the reductive treatment applied by Man Ray in his works, by including the sitter’s head in the photograph. Unlike Man Ray, Miller refutes the instinct of surrealist man to disarm and dismember woman by slicing into her flesh, thus regaining control over the representation of woman as an actual human being. Ramm is depicted here with apparent implications that she has
a voice and a brain, indicated by the inclusion of her head, a semblance of authority and intelligence. The compositional elements, as well, recall two of Man Ray’s photographs of Miller that have been previously discussed. Rather than reiterating the notion of the female body as object, Miller highlights the individuality of her sitter.

In Miller’s *Nude wearing sabre guard*, the juxtaposition of Ramm’s nude torso and the sabre guard creates a striking dynamic between the soft flesh of the model’s breasts and the rigidity of the metal shield. The comparison of the two consistencies is underscored by the soft focus and blurred edges of the photograph itself. By placing the sabre guard on top of Ramm’s body, Miller focuses on the presentation of the female body as belonging to an actual human subject. The sabre guard additionally operates as a commentary on fashion’s command over the female form: “Worn as if it were an element of haute couture, the saber guard calls attention to the ways that fashion binds and restructures the body; the wire form becomes a stiff and unyielding ‘corset’ for the bare shoulder in a composition that one again borrows from the conventions of both fashion and surrealism.”

Miller transforms a device used in the sport of fencing into a fashion accessory. The design of the metal material evokes the same pattern as the one featured in *Shadow patterns cast by a net curtain on Lee Miller’s torso* photographed by Man Ray. The model in Miller’s photograph, however, is not simply a surface upon which to cast shadows; she is a three-dimensional, living person that refuses to be defined by the manipulation of her body.

This particular image by Miller can also be interpreted as a revisitation of the photograph of her head and neck, captured by Man Ray but printed by Miller. In the photo of Ramm, Miller

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focuses attention on the dissimilarity between her photograph and that of Man Ray; that is to say, in the image taken by her, she deliberately includes a profile portrait of Ramm in her response to *Neck*. Ramm’s head tilts back the way that Miller’s did in Man Ray’s photograph, but because of the inclusion of her physiognomy, the form is no longer suggestive of a phallic structure. Instead, Miller brings to light a sense of individuality and femininity in her sitter, who is unmistakably presented as a female subject, as opposed to merely a projection of male phantasms. Whereas in Man Ray’s photograph, Miller’s neck is cropped and detached from the rest of her body, reconstructing the female form into a fragmentary object suited for male needs and thereby debilitating her from being an independent, active subject.

Guided by Man Ray, Miller was able to fully establish herself as a surrealist and a professional photographer in her own right; however, her constant desire for freedom and independence posed as a maddening threat to Man Ray, thereby undermining their creative partnership and intimate bond. The doctrine of free love was in harmony with the discourse of surrealism; partners and lovers were constantly exchanged. The tenet of free love, however, was principally a construction of male privilege. Miller was not one to suppress her sexual desires and allow her current lover to restrict her from having multiple affairs at a time. Throughout the course of her life, Miller unraveled the double-standards imposed on gender dynamics by infringing on the entitlement of men. In an interview for the *New York Evening Post* on October 24th of 1932, Miller shared, “What you mostly do is absorb the character of the man you’re working with. The personality of the photographer, his approach, is really more important than

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85 Roberts. *A Woman’s War*. 24. Lee Miller: “I want to have the utopian combination of security and freedom.”
his technical genius.” What Miller gained, then, from her creative and loving relationship with Man Ray was a confidence in her own eye, a rather masculine self-possession. As much as he, and her second husband Roland Penrose, attempted to control and contain her, Man Ray was infuriated and frustrated by the fact that he simply could not. Man Ray’s chagrin and bewilderment towards Miller’s agency and self-reliance is made manifest in his Eye of Lee Miller with inscription on reverse from October 11 of 1932 (fig. 3-11), made around the time of their separation. On the back of a photograph of Lee’s eye inscription reads, “With an eye always in reserve / maternal indestructible… / Forever being put away / Taken for a ride… / Put on the spot… / The racket must go on — / I am always in reserve. / MR.” Suggested by this particular inscription and his soul-pouring letters addressed to Miller, Man Ray suffered gravely from her capriciousness. The image of Miller’s eye that accompanies the inscription was recycled in a second version of his readymade, almost vengefully entitled Object to be Destroyed—a metronome with a photograph of an eye appended to the pendulum weight. Man Ray was able to dictate and manipulate Miller only insofar as she was captured in a photograph, as an erotic object of his possession. Miller, both in the way she led her life as an emancipated woman and in her photographic works, had her own agenda that could not be hindered by any means.

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86 Ibid. 37.

87 In Roland Penrose’s painting titled Bien visée (Good shooting) of 1939, Miller’s body is yet again reduced to a mere torso, positioned in front of a brick wall that has been damaged by gunshots. Miller’s head is replaced by a window of a landscape, while her arms are raised as if she is pinned down. Beside her is a chain. Through means of representation, Penrose tries to visually detain Miller; but it is only the image or idea of her that he is able to control. Bien visée also translates as ‘well screwed,’ which it something of a paradox as Miller’s pubic area is concealed behind what seems to be armor plating.


89 Penrose. The Lives of Lee Miller. 42. On the back of the metronome, Man Ray wrote, “Legend, Cut out the eye from a portrait of one who has been loved but is seen no more. Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well aimed, try to destroy the whole at a single blow.”
fig. 3-1 Lee Miller, *Self-portrait with Sphinxes in a Vogue Studio*, 1940. Photograph, 7 7/10 x 9 3/5 in.
fig. 3-2 Lee Miller, *Severed Breasts from radical surgery in a place setting*, 1929.
Gelatin silver print, 3 x 2 1/5 in.
fig. 3-4 Lee Miller, *Ironwork, Paris*, 1929. Gelatin silver print, 8 9/10 x 6 7/10 in.
fig. 3-5 Lee Miller, *Chairs, Paris*, 1929. Gelatin silver print, 8 2/5 x 9 in.
fig. 3-6 Lee Miller, *Man Ray Shaving*, ca. 1929. Gelatin silver print.
fig. 3-7 Lee Miller, *Solarized Portrait of a Woman*, 1932. Solarized photograph, 9 1/2 x 7 1/2 in.
fig. 3-8 Man Ray (printed by Lee Miller), *Lee Miller (Neck)*, 1929. Gelatin silver print.
fig. 3-9 Lee Miller, *Nude Bent Forward*, 1930. Photograph.
fig. 3-10 Lee Miller, *Nude wearing sabre guard*, 1930. Gelatin silver print.
fig. 3-11 Man Ray, *Eye of Lee Miller with inscription on reverse*, October 11th of 1932.
Epilogue: La flâneuse

You who, for all those who hear me must not be an entity but a woman, you who are nothing so much as a woman, despite all that has been levied upon me and upon me in you to make into a Chimera. You who do so wonderfully all that you do and whose splendid reasons, not bounded for me in unreason, dazzle and fall inexorably as thunderbolts. You, the most vital of beings, who seem to have been put in my path only so I may feel in all its riggs the strength of what is not felt in you. You who know evil only by hearsay. You, indeed, ideally beautiful. You whom everything identifies with daybreak and whom, for this very reason, I may not see again….

André Breton, *Nadja*90

The prisoner of the male gaze: the surrealist woman, so shot and painted by men, has been dismembered, severed, and disarmed. She has gone to pieces, which we are here attempting to recover and reassemble. She has been without head, without feet, without arms, without anything except an alluring body that has been tightly swaddled and safely kept under wraps. This was how she was seen, but not who she was. Surrealist woman, imprisoned and problematic, catered to the indulgence and pleasure of man’s eyes.

Give her her head; she had one. Contrary to man’s belief, surrealist women had a brain that was filled with ideas, dreams, and experiences of her own. The female surrealist explored and complicated the obstacles and contradictions of her social disposition, giving birth to her respective approaches to surrealist poetry, visual expression, methods, and principles. Through her exploration of the female psyche and consciousness, she invented a new body of images and poetic vocabulary that was different than that of her mother and that of man. She devised her own operations as a surrealist woman and invented a singular position for herself, with which she was able to transgress and transcend the limitations imposed on her gender, obscuring the

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hierarchal structure of patriarchal thought. Here, she is given back her head and her eyes, through which woman can visibly perceive and rethink her reality within a man’s world.

*Give her her hands; she has been in dire need of self-definition and free artistic expression.* Surrealist woman was equipped with artistic vision, poetry, and imagination; she knew how to write, draw, and shoot a camera. Her arms and hands have been freed from being subjected to pictorial amputation and fetishization. Her hands have been liberated from the ties of man, free to do with them as she pleases. She has armed herself with a pen, a brush, a camera, and she is not afraid to use her weapon of choice.

*Let her stand on her own two feet; she is capable.* Whether she ran after her dreams of becoming a professional artist, after a surrealist male companion, or simply away from the confines of tradition, the surrealist woman ran with determination, great strides, and with abandon.

*Give her her voice; we have been waiting too long to hear her speak.* Through poetry and creative passion, the surrealist woman has given evidence that she cannot be completely contained by male surrealists. She, in fact, had a lot to say; the problem was that she was barred from doing so, for she was man’s quiet mediator with nature and the unconscious. The works of the surrealist woman speak loud and clearly to the repression of her social and artistic needs; they often respond to man’s idealization of her as the ubiquitous other. She, herself, has ideas of her own. The ignorance of man is merely a symptom of his own insecurity, specifically towards the potential, emasculating threat of woman as a creative equal. Should he be scared, let him.
References


Afterword

To better understand any subject matter of philosophical or conceptual depth, I must write about it so that I can digest and metabolize it properly. I found myself drawn towards the topic of surrealism for my senior project for precisely this reason. The process of writing this project was not an easy task as I, myself, was caught up in my attempt at explicating the surrealist movement which, to my discovery, is nearly impossible. After much writing, scrapping, and rewriting, I found that the best way to engage with the history of surrealism was through images, by getting my hands dirty. One truly cannot speak of surrealism in black-and-white terms without contradicting the principles of the movement because it was, in fact, not an immaculate conception.

If the surrealist mind was attracted to the curiosity of contradictions, then perhaps I am in luck. I admittedly have contradicted myself in my own pursuance of the problematics of women and surrealism, as I, too, have only discussed two female surrealists out of the thirty-six women in total who are considered to be part of the discourse. For the purpose of this project, as it focuses on the fluctuation between the positions of artist and of muse, I deliberately chose Dora Maar and Lee Miller to be my exemplary surrealist women.

For me, this project is a perennial one, which I will revisit. When speaking to my psychotherapist about my project, she told me that she could not help but feel that it was a metaphor for my life, with which I cannot help but agree. Although this project was not painless, it challenged and taught me a lot about myself, both as an academic and a young woman. It is as if while I sorted through the internal struggle of surrealist women, I was able grow through my
personal struggle, as well. *The Phallic Woman* is a project that I see to be ongoing; I do not wish to end it here, but would like to give the multiple voices of the female surrealists their due.