

What Is Surrealism

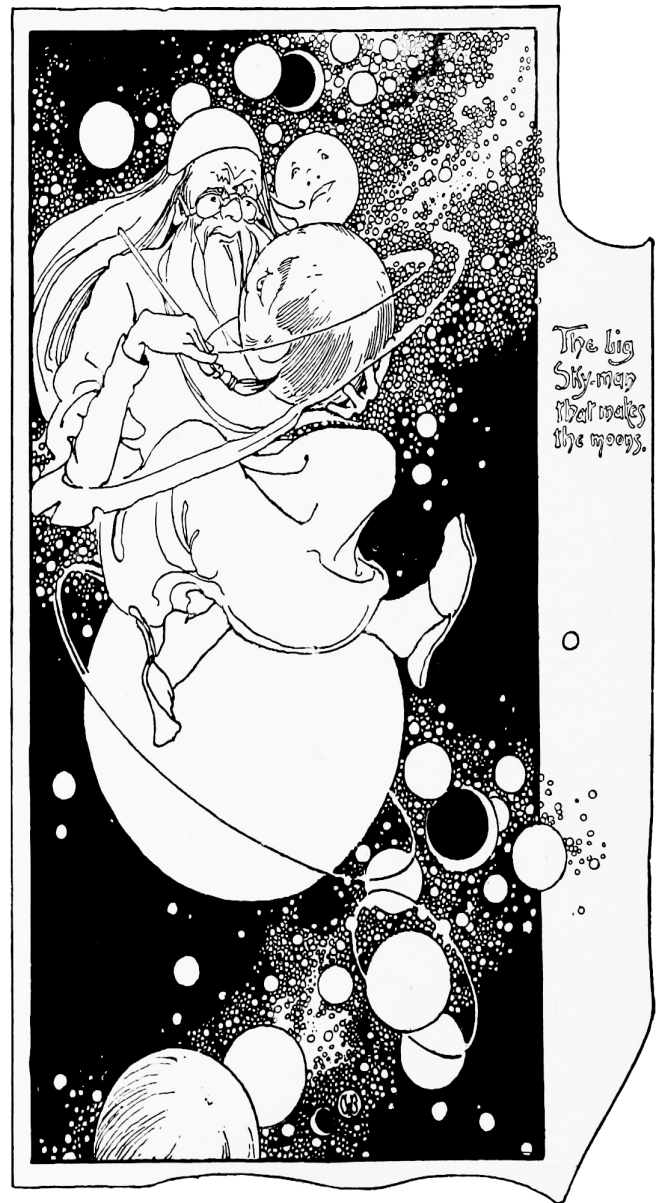
The word "surreal" is used in two ways. The first is classical and technical, the other is subjective and common. To understand the difference, it's useful to make a distinction between the words "Surrealism" and "Surrealistic".

Surrealism is a radical artistic philosophy with a continually-developing body of technique for the production of unconscious meaning; in this sense, the word "surreal" describes works which utilize unconscious elements as they arise, or else in some arranged fashion. The word **Surrealistic**, on the other hand, can be used to describe anything "weird" - from the nonsensical or ridiculous to the uncanny or symbolic - usually involving the juxtaposition of elements that aren't usually seen together.

"Weirdness" is not hard to define: we know it the moment we see it. Surrealism, on the other hand, may require a little more unpacking.

You see, strange and jarring as their writings and images might have been, the original Surrealists - including André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Roberta Matta, Man Ray and Salvadore Dali, among many others - were not simply being weird for the sake of being weird (except perhaps for Dali). There was a method to their madness. They were fueled by a critique of modern capitalist society and its rigid sense of "order" and "reason", which they blamed for the struggle of the lower classes and the incalculable misery of the first World War. They opposed this rigid logical dynamic with a Hegelian Dialectic of uncanny or nonsensical structures and ambiguous statements, and explored techniques by which they aimed to create work that was "BEYOND real" (*SUR-real*). The path they chose was that of the subconscious mind.

Inspired by the recently-published work of Sigmund Freud on the nature of the subconscious and the psychological interpretation of dreams, the Surrealists wanted to directly access the ephemeral contents of the subconscious mind in the creation of their work. To this end, they devised a wide variety of literary and artistic



techniques involving stochastic strategies and chaotic contrivances designed to jam or bypass normal waking consciousness. Although they differed in opinion on whether that work should or shouldn't be subjected to any editing or re-arrangement once laid down, they shared the belief that art created by the use of these techniques could reach "beyond consensus reality" into the realm of pure concept. Such art would be free from the limitations of logic, reason and pragmatism, and immune to the forces of self-censorship, social entropy, and moral judgment. Such work could change the world, and create a whole new world to take its place.