

From the World of Dreams: Melanesian Art and a small retrospective of Important Surrealist Prints curated by Timothy Baum

2 May - 3 July 2024



New York, 1 May 2024 - **Pace African and Oceanic Art** presents ***From the World of Dreams: Melanesian Art and a small retrospective of Important Surrealist Prints curated by Timothy Baum*** on view 2 May - 3 July 2024. The exhibition features over a dozen 19th century figures, masks and other objects from Papua New Guinea, New Ireland and the Solomon Islands. Presented with the Melanesian art is a retrospective of Surrealist prints curated by Timothy Baum, noted specialist in Dada and Surrealist art, which includes over 30 etchings and lithographs from the 1920s to 1960s. **A public opening will be held Thursday, 16 May 2024, 6-8 pm.**

In the idealized "Surrealist Map of the World" published in 1929, the placement of Papua New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago in the center of the map, and larger than both Europe and Asia, reveal the allure that cultures from Oceania held for the Surrealists. Searching for a new means of expression, the Surrealists found inspiration in non-Western art and objects which to them was exemplified by Malagan sculptures from Papua New Guinea. Used for rituals to celebrate the founders of clans and endowed with immense magical powers, these sculptures, fearsome but amiable, connected the ground with the powers of the other world.

On view is a large New Ireland Malagan figure formerly in the collection of Elaine Lustig and Arthur Cohen, published as early as 1900. This mighty sculpture elucidates the connection between the natural and human worlds. A bird perches atop the head while the powerful body is surrounded by a variety of fish, birds, shells and snake-like ribbons. A subtle pattern of red, black and white pigment contributes to the elegance and mystery of the figure.

Towering over the viewer at 5 feet high is a magnificent New Ireland polychrome mask formerly in the collection of the Dresden Museum. A calao or hornbill bird protrudes from the mouth, perhaps representing the totemic spirit of the clan. The large and stylized face with piercing eyes, made of *turbo petholatus* operculum, is surmounted by two vertical and very elaborate projections on top of which a humanlike figure performs a backbend.

Although we see the face of the figure upside down, its eyes peer at us like the eyes of the mask, and another calao bird pokes out of the figure's mouth. The torso of this elegant and menacing acrobat arches over the mask with its large feet dangling. Because of its size and complexity this mask perfectly characterizes the magic and mysterious appeal of Malagan art to the Surrealists.

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Rising 5 feet above a totemic figure of a fish sits a painted white figure with outstretched arms and bared teeth. Below the figure is an elaborate openwork plank with six rows of a delicately carved pattern of *turbo petholatus* operculum eyes and comb like motifs. A vertical column of black, red and white fish and birds juts out from the plank culminating in a v-shaped black mask decorated with concentric rows of white dots and penetrating eyes. This magnificent New Ireland sculpture was formerly in the Hilstrup Mission Museum, Hilstrup, Germany.

Among the works from Papua New Guinea, is a massive 7-foot tall Yipwon spirit figure from the Yimam people of the Middle Sepik river in the Sepik region. The artist has simplified the human figure into a series of hook like shapes depicting the ribs. The large head features a beard terminating in a sharp point. Above the head a tassel-like form curves forward. The figure carved from a single piece of wood is an abstract representation of a hunting spirit and formerly played a central role in hunting and warfare.

Also featured is an Elema ehara mask from the Papuan Gulf. This 41-inch-tall mask is made of bark cloth stretched over a split cane frame. A large fish, perhaps a totemic representation of a clan, floats at a 45-degree angle above the mask. Masks were usually burnt after their month-long ceremonial use and surviving examples are rare.

In the small retrospective of Important Surrealist Prints curated by Timothy Baum the dreamlike, imagined new worlds of the movement are represented. The biomorphic figures of Joan Miró's etchings: *Daphnis et Chloé*, 1933; *L'Aigle et la femme la nuit*, 1938; *La géante*, 1938; *La ligne d'horizon*, 1938; *Les trois soeurs*, 1938; vibrate and dance. Etching is also an ideal medium for Yves Tanguy's delicate, whimsical mindscape which is best captured in his largest print *Rhabdomancie*, 1947. André Masson lets his subconscious and dreams take over in his 1942 etching and drypoint *Rêve d'un future désert* creating a never-before-seen world.

Watching over the exhibition are two Man Ray vintage photographs: the first, a 1935 portrait of André Breton, whose *Manifesto of Surrealism* was published 100 years ago this year; and the second a circa 1924 double portrait of André Breton and Louis Aragon, French poet and writer. Prints by Victor Brauner, Hans Bellmer, Salvador Dalí, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Valentine Hugo, Marcel Jean, Wifredo Lam, René Magritte, Roberto Matta, Pablo Picasso, Kurt Seligmann and Dorothea Tanning are also on view.

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