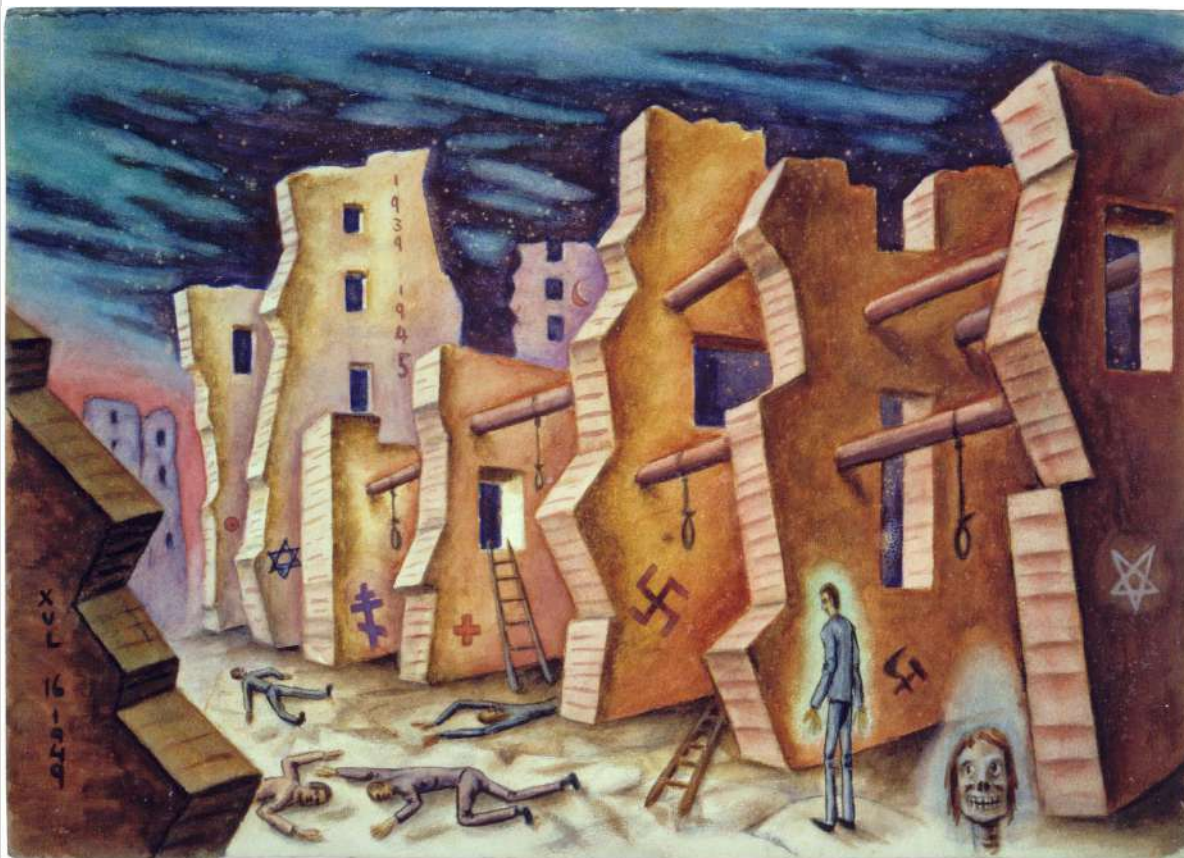


WERELD MUSEUM ROTTERDAM

LIVE THE SURREAL: DREAMING OF ANOTHER WORLD

Wereldmuseum Rotterdam shows that surrealism is much more than an art movement

Surrealism is much more than an art movement. It is an attitude to life. This idea lies at the heart of Wereldmuseum Rotterdam's exhibition *Live the Surreal*, opening September 18. Bringing together 90 works by 44 artists from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, and Oceania, the exhibition shows how artists around the world, independently of one another, have repeatedly adopted the same artistic stance: a refusal to accept reality as it presents itself.



Xul Solar; Rúa ruini, 1949 _ loan from Fundación Pan Klub, Museo Xul Solar

The desire for another world can be expressed through resistance to existing reality, but also by imagining an alternative one. From the Haitian Revolution and the Second World War to post-war Japan and Brazil, we see artists questioning the realities of their time and making room for alternatives.

Live the Surreal explores how artists respond to war, colonialism, oppression, and social change. Dreams, myth, spirituality, and the unconscious become tools for seeing and imagining the world differently.

Wereldmuseum looks beyond surrealism as the European avant-garde movement defined in 1920s Paris to

focus on a broader surrealist attitude: a way of seeing and creating that also developed beyond the movement and beyond Europe, in different periods and contexts.

“Surrealism is not a closed chapter in art history,” says Wouter Welling, curator of contemporary art at Wereldmuseum. “Across the world and at different points in history, artists have asked the same fundamental question: is this really all there is? When the reality we know falls short, space opens up for resistance and imagination. Not as a means of escape, but as a way of making new possibilities visible.”



Left: Pascale Monnin, *Double Debt*, 2023 ©Rick Mandoeng
Right: Pascale Monnin, *Double Debt*, 2023, close-up ©Rick Mandoeng

AN INTERNATIONAL STORY

Live the Surreal brings together well-known figures of surrealism such as Yves Tanguy, Hans Arp, and Wifredo Lam with artists rarely included in its history, including Julio Galán, Tessa Mars, Renée Stout, Xul Solar, and Sandra Vásquez de la Horra.

Seen together, their work offers a different perspective on surrealism. Rather than tracing geographical or historical connections, the exhibition focuses on what these artists share: a shared desire for a world in which the invisible, spiritual, mythical, and unconscious are as real as the visible world. In doing so, *Live the Surreal* broadens the familiar story of surrealism and shows how artists in different places and periods have imagined other possible worlds. What emerges is not a single surrealism, but a range of practices and perspectives that developed independently and at times intersect.

THE INNER WORLD AS A SOURCE OF CHANGE

War, colonialism, revolution, and political oppression have repeatedly prompted artists to challenge the world around them. Salvador Dalí depicted the horrors of war, while Heri Dono critiques Indonesia's rulers, and Tessa Mars and Pascale Monnin explore the legacy of the Haitian Revolution today. Their work shows how violence and social pressures enter the inner world and generate new images. Imagination, here, is not an escape from reality but a way of bringing it into sharper focus.

The exhibition then moves from the external world to the inner one, taking visitors through dreams, archetypes, rituals, and the collective unconscious. Works by Peter Birkhäuser, Xul Solar, Murni, Renée Stout, and Trevor Nickolls, alongside those of Rotterdam-based artists such as Arie van Geest, Olphaert den Otter, Ewoud van Rijn, and Juul Kraijer, show how artists from different cultures draw on dreams, memories, fantasy, and imagination to access hidden knowledge and other ways of seeing.



Left: Renée Stout, *House of Obeah*, 2005, Collection Wereldmuseum AM-670-1
Right: Trevor Nickolls, *Big Boss Hat*, 1987, Collection Wereldmuseum WM-73851

ANOTHER WORLD

In the final section of the exhibition, spirituality and the occult take centre stage, from Afro-Cuban religions and Vodou to West African traditions and Amazonian cosmologies. Across these different contexts, surrealism emerges when people refuse to regard the visible world as the only possible reality.

Cypher Studio's interactive installation *Trionfi* invites visitors to take part in the surrealist process themselves. Through irrational associations and archetypal images, each visitor receives a unique self-portrait and, with it, a new personal world.

The exhibition design also breaks with the conventional museum ‘white cube’. As visitors move through the exhibition, familiar museum conventions gradually fall away, and the design becomes increasingly unconventional. In the final gallery, the arrangement of walls, floor, and ceiling creates a kaleidoscopic environment that encourages visitors to see their surroundings in new ways.

SURREALISM LIVES ON

Against a backdrop of war, climate crises, and social polarisation, *Live the Surreal* shows artists continuing to imagine worlds different from the one they inhabit. This makes surrealism strikingly relevant today: not as nostalgia for a historical avant-garde, but as a standing invitation to see, think, and act differently.



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ARTISTS

Selected works from the Wereldmuseum collection are presented alongside international loans, contemporary works by Rotterdam-based artists, and major works on loan from institutions including Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

Artists featured in the exhibition: Hans Arp, Dalia Al Kury, Silvia B., José Bedia, Peter Birkhäuser, Breyten Breytenbach, Winfred Dania, Maya Deren, Heri Dono, Édouard Duval-Carrié, Marie Louise Elshout, Otto Egberts, Arie van Geest, Julio Galán, Wim de Haan, Wout van Heusden, Tja Ling Hu, Carl G. Jung, I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih (Murni), Juul Kraijer, Wifredo Lam, Tessa Mars, Pascale Monnin, Eko Nugroho, Trevor Nickolls, Olphaert den Otter, Piet Ouborg, Mimi Parent, Gérard Quenum, Charly van Rest, Ewoud van Rijn, Santiago Rodríguez Olazábal, Eneida Sanches, Twins Seven Seven, Xul Solar, Austin Osman Spare, Renée Stout, Roberta Stoddart, Yves Tanguy, Sandra Vásquez de la Horra, Edin Velez, Co Westerik, and Santiago Yahuarcani.

Live the Surreal is on view at Wereldmuseum Rotterdam from 18 September 2026 to 28 August 2027.

On 24 September, artist Roberta Stoddart will give an artist talk about her work [*Sleepwalkers \(2017\)*](#), exploring themes of awakening, identity, historical trauma, and the search for an authentic self.



Roberta Stoddart, Sleepwalkers, 2009-2017, Collection Wereldmuseum 7397-1

Press kit: images and text

PRESS VIEWINGS

We are delighted to invite you to visit the exhibition. We have arranged a number of special opportunities for an exclusive preview. A visit at another time is, of course, also possible by appointment.

- Thursday, 10 September, 12:00–13:30: guided tour of the exhibition, currently in progress, led by one of the curators, followed by lunch.
- Thursday, 17 September, 16:00–18:00*: press preview of the exhibition with the curators and three artists.
*There is also the possibility of attending the exhibition opening from 19:30, including dinner in between.
- Thursday, 24 September, 14:30–16:00/17:30: guided tour of the exhibition with the curators and artist Roberta Stoddart, from 14:30–16:00, followed by the option to attend Roberta Stoddart's artist talk from 16:30–17:30.
- By appointment at another time.
- Free visit upon registration or by showing your press card at the entrance.

Note: During the exhibition, Wereldmuseum will publish a richly illustrated publication exploring the international history of Surrealism from a global perspective.

RSVP for press event or another moment

[Website Wereldmuseum](#)

For information and/or interview requests, please contact the press department through:
Zdenka Fieggen T: 0031 6 26765393 E: pers@wereldmuseum.nl

WERELDMUSEUM

1 museum, 4 locations

We believe the world has no center, but is instead one vast network in which everything influences everything else. We explore the world around us and seek to better understand it through our collection, exhibitions, and programming. At all Wereldmuseum locations – in Amsterdam, Leiden, Nijmegen, and Rotterdam – we focus on themes that affect our daily lives.

CLOSER THAN EXPECTED

Discover how people around the world live and how they are shaped by the world around them – both past and present. By understanding the connection between past and present, you gain new insights into today's world. Wereldmuseum inspires you to reflect on what it means to be human. How do we do that? By opening up new perspectives on cultures and histories, sparking wonder at the beauty of the world, and contributing to a more just society.

WERELDMUSEUM ROTTERDAM

As a major port city, Rotterdam played an important role in the infrastructure of global flows of people, products and ideas. This city history is reflected in Wereldmuseum in themes such as migration, mobility and globalisation. The connecting and timeless theme is creation: as decoration, as cultural expression, as a document of a story, as an expression of group identity and individual identity. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam showcases traditional creative cultures and demonstrates how contemporary artists build on these, re-evaluate art and (re)interpret collections. Their creations give rise to new meanings and connections between the collection and the city, the people and their world.

Geen berichten meer ontvangen van ons? Klik [hier](#)