A Surrealist Wunderkammer
A Surrealist Wunderkammer is an idiosyncratic and culturally heterogeneous display of objects identified with brass number tags. The exhibition opened in 1999 with the title Witnesses—A Surrealist Wunderkammer, which changed to Witnesses to a Surrealist Vision with a revised display in 2001. Anthropologist Edmund S. Carpenter (1922–2011) originally conceived both of these installations in relation to the exceptional collection of Surrealism assembled by John and Dominique de Menil, his in-laws. The single-gallery installation presents more than 300 works from the museum’s collection or on long-term loan from the de Menil family and Rock Foundation.

Carpenter envisioned the exhibition as a way to highlight the disparate visual cultures that informed the thought of artists affiliated with Surrealism, an international art and literary movement started by André Breton, Paul Éluard, and others in France during the 1920s. Wunderkammern (“wonder rooms”), also known as cabinets of curiosities, developed in Europe during the 16th century as royal treasuries and storehouses for collections of art, curiosities, and natural marvels. They were the precursors to 19th-century museums of natural history and ethnography, which became central repositories for objects collected by European and American missionaries, colonial administrators, and ethnologists in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Even though their politics were anti-colonial, Surrealists regularly visited these museums and were active in the burgeoning market for “Primitive Art” fueled by colonialism, military conflict, and looting in these regions.

A Surrealist Wunderkammer provides an interpretive matrix for understanding the nature and psychology of humanity from the perspective of Surrealism. Artists associated with the movement collected ethnographic objects, natural ephemera, and other items that demonstrated visual puns, raw sensuality, and conceptual dualisms such as silent music and static dance. Inspired by the writings of Henri Bergson,
Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Claude Lévi-Strauss on the subconscious, mythology, and so-called Primitives, Surrealists expropriated and invented new meanings for the objects they collected, sometimes with limited understanding of their original use or cultural history.

This display purposefully emulates those of the Surrealists, who were fascinated by unexpected juxtapositions and chance encounters, as seen in the photograph of André Breton’s home with densely packed Yup’ik masks, Pacific Island objects, and other wonders. Carpenter placed ritual and ordinary objects—primarily from the Pacific Islands and the Americas—in conversation with works by Surrealists and their artistic predecessors, such as Giorgio De Chirico and Giuseppe Arcimboldi. A stone Marquesan-style figure (no. 19) on view belonged to Breton, and masks of the Baining, Sulka, and Elema peoples of New Britain and New Guinea (nos. 4, 5, and 7) closely resemble those collected by him and other Surrealists. Sent by the art dealer Pierre Loeb to Papua New Guinea, the Surrealist Jacques Viot collected the maro, or painted bark cloth (no. 38), and figural sculptures from the Lake Sentani and Humboldt Bay region of New Guinea to take back to Paris to sell. Found objects, tourist curios, and fakes, along with 19th-century European astrolabes, anamorphoscopes, and other visual technologies, are included in the exhibition to underscore the multitude of sources Surrealists used to pursue their interests in accessing the authenticity of dreams, the power of the unconscious, and a universal structure of mythology.

**FIG. 2** View of André Breton’s home studio, 1956. Photograph by Sabine Weiss
Works in the Exhibition

Numbers correspond to those on brass tags adjacent to objects in the exhibition. Because of changes to the display, numbers may not be numerically sequential and some objects may not be currently on view.

Recording of a chime sound box plays every 30 minutes (3 min 55 sec)

3. **Mask (Tumbuan)**  
   Mid 20th century  
   Possibly Iatmul peoples  
   Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik, reportedly from Marap village  
   Rattan

4. **Night Dance Mask Representing Spirit of a Leaf (Kavat)**  
   Early 20th century  
   Baining peoples  
   Papua New Guinea, New Britain, Gazelle Peninsula  
   Bamboo, bark cloth, and paint

5. **Mask (Susu or Sisiu)**  
   19th–20th century  
   Sulka peoples  
   Papua New Guinea, New Britain, Gazelle Peninsula  
   Plant fiber and pigment

6. **Body Mask (Jipae)**  
   20th century  
   Asmat peoples  
   New Guinea, Papua  
   Plant fiber, pigment, shells, feathers, and wood

7. **Mythic Figure Mask**  
   19th–20th century  
   Hopi peoples  
   United States  
   Painted wood and leather with feathers

10. **Attributed to Willie Seaweed, Kwakwagwak’wakw peoples**  
    Headdress with Body Representing a Wolf  
    ca. 1930  
    Wood, paint, cloth, and cord

11. **Suit and Helmet with Spikes**  
    18th–19th century  
    Leather, iron alloy, and cord

12. **Initiation Mask (Didagur)**  
    Mid 20th century  
    Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik, Korosameri River or Blackwater River, reportedly Sangrima village  
    Rattan, fiber, earth, and cassowary feathers

15. **Fly Whisk Handle (Tahiri Ra’a)**  
    19th–20th century  
    Austral Islands  
    Wood

16. **Fly Whisk Handle (Tahiri Ra’a)**  
    Possibly 19th–20th century  
    Austral Islands  
    Wood and sennit  
    *Gift from the Adelaide de Menil and Edmund Carpenter Collection*

17. **War and Hunting Figure (Yipwon) with Sacred Bundle Containing Ritual Offerings and Medicinal Objects**  
    20th century  
    Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik, Wagupmeri  
    Wood, amulets, bones, and feathers in fabric bags  
    *Gift of J. J. Klejman*
18. **War and Hunting Figure (Yipwon)**
   Late 19th–20th century
   Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik
   Wood

19. **Figure (Ti’i)**
   Formerly in the collection of André Breton
   19th–early 20th century
   Marquesas Islands
   Stone

20. **Cape (Teik) or Blanket (X’óow) Representing a Mythic Orca**
    18th–19th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Elk or deer hide and paint

21. **Mask for Funerary Ceremony (Malagan)**
    19th–20th century
    Papua New Guinea, New Ireland Island
    Wood, paint, sea snail shells, and string

22. **Spoon Representing Mythic Animal Creatures**
    Possibly 19th–20th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Horn with abalone shell

23. **Headdress Frontlet Representing a Thunderbird**
    ca. 1875–80
    Heiltsuk peoples
    British Columbia, Central Coast region
    Wood, paint, abalone shell, and metal inlay

24. **Pipe Depicting a Sculpin Fish**
    ca. 1840
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Alder wood, metal, and abalone shell

25. **Pipe Representing a Bird**
    ca. 1880
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood and metal

26. **Lizard Man (Moko Miro)**
    19th–20th century
    Rapa Nui peoples
    Rapa Nui (Easter Island)
    Wood and glass

27. **Frontlet Representing a Raven**
    Possibly 18th–19th century
    Nisga’a peoples
    British Columbia, Nass River
    Wood and paint

28. **Pipe Representing a Bear and Human**
    Possibly 19th–20th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood and metal

29. **Beggar False Face in the Likeness of Charlie Chaplin**
    Early 20th century
    Iroquois peoples
    United States
    Wood and paint

30. **Bowler Hat, designed by Lock & Co. Hatters**
    20th century
    Felt, silk, and leather

31. **Mickey Mouse Katsina**
    Formerly in the collection of William Copley
    ca. 1950
    Hopi peoples
    United States
    Wood, paint, and feathers
32. **Mutt and Jeff Figurines**  
ca. 1940s  
Inuit peoples  
Alaska, St. Lawrence Island  
Ivory

**Maggie Figurine, from Bringing Up Father**  
ca. 1920s  
Inuit peoples  
Alaska  
Ivory

**Aztec- or Mayan-style Carving Resembling Bat God (Camazotz)**  
Probably 20th century  
Stone  
Estate of William J. Hill

**Jiggs Figurine, from Bringing Up Father**  
ca. 1920s  
Inuit peoples  
Alaska, St. Lawrence Island  
Ivory and copper alloy

36. **Ornithology Display with Red-legged Honeycreeper (Central America), Pale-headed Rosella (Australia), and King Parrot (Australia)**  
20th century

37. **Body Ornament**  
19th–20th century  
Jívaro-speaking peoples  
Ecuador and Peru  
Cotton and birds

38. **Bark Cloth (Maro)**  
Late 1920s  
Papua New Guinea, Humboldt Bay, possibly Tobati village  
Bark cloth and paint

39. **Headdress**  
20th century  
Jívaro-speaking peoples  
Ecuador and Peru  
Feathers, fabric, beetle wings, hair, and string

40. **Headdress**  
20th century  
Jívaro-speaking peoples  
Ecuador and Peru  
Feathers, fabric, and string

41. **Headdress**  
20th century  
Jívaro-speaking peoples  
Ecuador and Peru  
Feathers, fabric, and string

43. **Panoramic Landscape**  
Possibly 18th century  
Marble with natural mineral formations

44. **Sacred Bundle with Stone**  
18th–20th century  
Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik  
Plant fiber, feathers, wood and stone

45. **Double Coconut Seed**  
Seychelles Islands

47. **Stone Resembling a Human Skull**  
Reportedly found in Alaska  
Basalt

48. **Sacred Bundles (2) Containing Ritual Offerings and Medicinal Objects**  
Early–mid 20th century  
Papua New Guinea, Karawari River  
Wood, amulets, bones, and feathers in fabric bag

49. **War and Hunting Amulet (Yipwon)**  
20th century  
Possibly Alamblak peoples  
Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik  
Wood

50. **Tjurungas (4)**  
20th century  
Possibly Arrernte peoples  
Australia  
Stone and pigment  
*One from the Bequest of Jermayne MacAgy*
51. Shaman's Rattle in the Form of an Oystercatcher
   Early 19th century
   Tlingit peoples
   Alaska
   Wood, paint, metal, and sinew
   *Gift of the Heye Foundation, Museum of the American Indian*

52. Shaman's Amulets (3)
    ca. 1820–50
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Sperm whale tooth

53. Shaman's Staff or Spear Thrower
    Late 18th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood

54. Shaman's Bent-Corner Box
    18th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood

55. Shaman's Box with Amulets, Beads, Dolls, Masks, and Other Ritual Objects
    Late 19th century
    Yup'ik peoples
    Alaska
    Wood, ivory, glass beads, rodent skeleton, duck skulls, string, leather, and cord

56. Shaman's Crown
    ca. 1840–60
    Tsimshian or Nisga’a peoples
    British Columbia, reportedly Laxgalts’ap
    Mountain goat horn, beaver incisors, wood, abalone shell, leather, sinew, and cord

57. Shaman's Rattle
    Possibly 18th–19th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood and paint

58. Shaman's Amulet
    ca. 1800–50
    Tsimshian or Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Animal tooth

59. Narwhal Tusk
    13th–15th century
    Greenland
    Ivory

60. Exhibition copy of Roberto Matta's Inside Outside
    ca. 1960s
    Photographic reproduction of original assembled cube with pastel, crayon, and pencil on twelve sheets of paper mounted on inside of cardboard

61. Spindle Whorl
    Late 18th or early 19th century
    Salish peoples
    British Columbia
    Wood

62. Katsina
    Late 19th–early 20th century
    Hopi peoples
    United States
    Wood with string and traces of paint

63. Snake Dancer Katsina
    ca. 1850
    Hopi peoples
    United States
    Wood, paint, feathers, leather, cloth, hair, turquoise, and rattlesnake rattle

65. Sea Otter Mask with Spirit Face
    Late 19th century
    Yup'ik peoples
    Alaska, Kuskokwim River
    Painted wood, feathers, cane, and baleen
66. **Mask Representing an Orca**
    20th century
    Kwakwaka’wakw or Tsimshian peoples
    British Columbia
    Wood, paint, and leather

67. **Portrait Mask**
    Early 20th century
    Haida peoples
    British Columbia, Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands)
    Wood, paint, and cord

68. **After Salvador Dalí**
    *Venus de Milo with Drawers* (*Venus de Milo aux Tiroirs*)
    1979 (original 1936)
    Cast plaster

69. **Attributed to Giuseppe Arcimboldi**
    *Winter (L’inverno)*
    ca. 1572
    Oil on canvas

70. **Dance Ornament Representing a Hunter in a Boat Shaped like a Whale**
    Late 19th century
    Yup’ik peoples
    Alaska, Kuskokwim River
    Painted wood with cloth, feathers, and fiber

71. **Reproduction of a drawing depicting the ambiguous image of a rabbit or duck**
    Psychologist Jasper Jastrow and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein used the image, originally published by *Harper's Weekly* and *Fliegende Blätter* in 1892, to illustrate the influence of the brain and social conditioning in visual perception.

72. **Reproduction of the drawing**
    *All is Vanity*, 1892, by Charles Allan Gilbert
    The ambiguous image depicts a woman looking into a vanity mirror or skull.

73. **Reproduction of the painting**
    *Paranoiac Face (Visage paranoïaque)*, 1935,
    by Salvador Dalí
    Viewed horizontally, the image is a domestic scene derived from an original photograph of Zulu women in front of a homestead and cattle enclosure (*isibaya*); vertically, it is a profile of a woman’s face.

74. **Attributed to Ishi, Yahi peoples**
    Group of Arrowheads
    1912–16
    Cut glass medicine bottles

75. **Flexible Rocks (3)**
    Brazil
    Itacolumite

76. **Petrified Wood**
    Arizona

77. **Ceremonial Dance Paddle (Rapa)**
    18th–20th century
    Rapa Nui peoples
    Rapa Nui (Easter Island)
    Wood

78. **Body Mask (Tāwū) for Mourning Ceremonies (Ōnye)**
    19th–20th century
    Tucano peoples
    Brazil and Colombia
    Paint, cloth, bark, and fiber

82. **Rattle in the Form of a Mythic Raven**
    19th century
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood, paint, and string

83. **Rattle in the Form of a Mythic Raven**
    ca. 1800
    Tlingit peoples
    Alaska and British Columbia
    Wood, paint, string, and fabric
84. Hunter’s Helmet
   Mid 19th–early 20th century
   Unangax peoples (Aleut)
   Alaska, Aleutian Islands
   Wood, paint, ivory, sea lion
   whickers, feathers, and glass beads

85. Bird Figure
   19th–20th century
   Possibly Elema peoples
   Papua New Guinea, reportedly
   Purari River region
   Paint, bamboo, bark, palm leaves,
   fiber, and feathers

86. Dominique de Menil’s writing desk
   containing items she would give
   to young visitors at her home
   Beechwood
   Gift of Susan and Francois de Menil

87. Spectacle Case
   Possibly early 19th century
   Paint and leather
   Gift of William J. Hill

88. Plate with Image of Giraffe
   ca. 1830
   Glazed ceramic

89. Reproduction of the painting
   Giraffe Crossing, 1827, by
   Jacques Raymond Brascassat

90. Punishment Mask
   Possibly 17th century
   Possibly Germany
   Metal
   Gift of Rock Foundation

91. Lady’s Hat in the Shape of a Hand,
   designed by Madame Paulette
   Late 1940s
   Velvet and grosgrain

92. Child’s Death Mask with
   Collar Mask
   Late 19th–20th century
   Metal crosses and crucifixes on fabric

93. Architectural Model of
   a Double Spiral Staircase
   Late 18th–early 19th century
   Wood

94. Astrolabe
   ca. 1855
   Wood, printed paper, and paint

95. Celestial Globe (Globe céleste)
   Possibly 19th century
   Wood, printed paper, and paint

96. Artist’s Mannequin
   Late 19th or early 20th century
   Wood and metal

97. Chest or Bowl Representing
   a Raven
   19th century
   Haida peoples
   British Columbia, Haida Gwaii
   (Queen Charlotte Islands)
   Wood and paint

98. Chest Representing a Bear,
   with Cover
   Late 18th or early 19th century
   Tlingit peoples
   Alaska and British Columbia
   Wood and opercula inlays

99. Chest in the Form of
   a Bear, with Cover
   ca. 1800
   Heiltsuk peoples
   British Columbia
   Wood, paint, and opercula inlays

101. Phenakistoscope
   19th century
   Brass, wood, and paper
103. Slide Lantern or Phantasmagoria with Glass Slide
   Late 19th century
   Paint, metal, glass, brass, and lens

104. Reproduction of the Louis Poyet print depicting Charles-Émile Reynaud projecting *Pauvre Pierrot* at the Musée Grévin, Paris, 1892

105. *Dance Lesson from the Good Old Days*, published by Shackman (New York)
   ca. 1940s

106. Stereoscope with Stereoscopic Image Cards (4)
   Late 19th century
   Wood, glass, paper, and photographic prints

107. *After Johann Michael Burucker*
   Anamorphoscope with Skull
   19th century
   Brass and paper

108. *After Charles-Émile Reynaud*
   Praxinoscope with Image Strips (10)
   19th century
   Cardboard, paper, brass, metal, mirrors, and candle

109. Cinematograph Déposé with Still Image Reels (4) and Marble Weight
   19th century
   Cardboard, metal, and paper

110. Thaumatropes (3), manufactured by Alphonse Giroux
   19th century
   Printed paper and string

111. Zoetrope with Still Image Reels (35)
   19th century
   Wood, metal, paper box, and lithographs

112. Drawing by an unidentified psychiatric patient
   ca. 1880
   Ink on paper

113. Announcement for lecture by Edmund Carpenter with a reproduction of a drawing by an unidentified psychiatric patient
   1965
   Ink on paper

114. *Standing Figures (Pou Whakairo), One Holding a Child*
   Late 19th–20th century
   Maori peoples
   New Zealand
   Wood

115. Group of Souvenirs and Fake Ethnographic Objects
   19th–20th century

116. Noise Maker
   Possibly 19th–20th century
   Thailand
   Metal with unidentified object inside

117. Friction Drum (*Livika*)
   19th–20th century
   Papua New Guinea, New Ireland Island
   Wood and operculum

119. Trumpet (*Tutue*)
   Late 19th–20th century
   Papua New Guinea, possibly Gulf of Papua
   Conch shell
   *Gift of Francesco Pellizzi*

120. Bullroarer
   19th–20th century
   Asmat peoples
   New Guinea, Papua
   Wood and paint
121. **Yam Mask**  
Early–mid 20th century  
Possibly Abelam peoples  
Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik  
Fiber and paint  

122. **Finial for a Ceremonial House**  
Late 19th or early 20th century  
Possibly Iatmul peoples  
Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik  
Wood  
*Gift of Francesco Pellizzi*  

123. **Attributed to John Savage**  
Prince Giolo, son of King of Moangis, known as the Painted Prince  
18th–mid 19th century  
Engraving  

126. **Giorgio de Chirico**  
*Metaphysical Composition [Symbols of War] (Composizione metafisica [Simboli di Guerra])*  
ca. 1916  
Oil on canvas  

127. **Max Ernst**  
*Colorado*  
*Cruel Greenery (De cruelles verdures)*  
*Seen through a Disposition (Vue à travers un tempérament)*  
*Ten Thousand Lucid Redskins Get Ready to Make the Rain Laugh (Dix mille peaux-rouges et lucides s'apprêtent à faire rire la pluie)*  
ca. 1949  
Oil on paperboard  
*Gift of Alexander Iolas*  

129. **Funerary Post Finial Depicting Couple**  
Early–mid 20th century  
Sakalava peoples  
Madagascar, possibly Antalitoka-Anabon’l_charsc;llanga or Ambato-Andranolava  
Wood  

131. **Pestle in the Form of a Phallus**  
ca. 3000 BCE  
Laurentian culture  
Pennsylvania, Dingman Ferry  
Stone  

132. **Rattle in the Form of a Raven**  
Possibly 18th–19th century  
Tlingit peoples  
Alaska and British Columbia  
Wood and paint  

135. **Fragment from Figure or Architectural Element**  
20th century  
Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik  
Wood  

136. **Headdress Representing the Head of a Fish**  
19th–20th century  
Haida peoples  
British Columbia, Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands)  
Paint, wood, brass, and leather  

137. **Drum (Kundu)**  
Early 20th century  
Sawos peoples  
Papua New Guinea, Middle Sepik  
Wood, reptile skin, and pigment  
*Gift of Francesco Pellizzi*  

138. **Club**  
19th century  
Henary-Tlingit people  
Alaska, reportedly Tuxekan village  
Wood
THE MENIL COLLECTION
October 2023

COVER