

A Surrealist
Wunderkammer



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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.

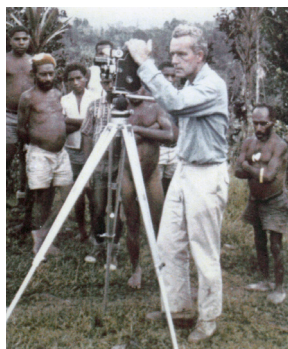


FIG. 1 Edmund S. Carpenter
filming in Papua New Guinea, 1969.
Photograph by Herbert Loebel

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,



FIG. 2 View of André Breton's home studio, 1956. Photograph by Sabine Weiss

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.

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
- 7. Mask (*Ehara*)**
Late 19th or early 20th century
Elema peoples
Papua New Guinea, Gulf of Papua,
possibly Orokolov Village
Bark cloth, pigment, and cane
- 8. Body Mask (*Jipae*)**
20th century
Asmat peoples
New Guinea, Papua
Plant fiber, pigment, shells,
feathers, and wood
- 9. Mythic Figure Mask**
19th–20th century
Hopi peoples
United States
Painted wood and leather
with feathers
- 10. Attributed to Willie Seaweed, Kwakwaka'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

**21. 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

**22. Mask for Funerary
Ceremony (*Malagan*)**

19th–20th century
Papua New Guinea,
New Ireland Island
Wood, paint, sea snail shells,
and string

**23. Spoon Representing Mythic
Animal Creatures**

Possibly 19th–20th century
Tlingit peoples
Alaska and British Columbia
Horn with abalone shell

**24. Headdress Frontlet
Representing a Thunderbird**

ca. 1875–80
Heiltsuk peoples
British Columbia,
Central Coast region
Wood, paint, abalone shell,
and metal inlay
*Gift of the Heye Foundation,
Museum of the American Indian*

25. Pipe Depicting a Bear and Human

Possibly 19th–20th century
Tlingit peoples
Alaska and British Columbia
Wood and metal

26. Pipe Representing a Sculpin Fish

ca. 1840
Tlingit peoples
Alaska and British Columbia
Alder wood, metal,
and abalone shell

27. Pipe Representing a Bird

ca. 1880
Tlingit peoples
Alaska and British Columbia
Wood and metal

28. Lizard Man (*Moko Miro*)

19th–20th century
Rapa Nui peoples
Rapa Nui (Easter Island)
Wood and glass

29. Frontlet Representing a Raven

Possibly 18th–19th century
Nisga'a peoples
British Columbia, Nass River
Wood and paint

**30. Beggar False Face in the
Likeness of Charlie Chaplin**

Early 20th century
Iroquois peoples
United States
Paint and wood

**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 Jermaine 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
- 80. Body Mask (Táwü) 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
whiskers, 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

**Exhibition copy by Steven C. Brown
of a Tlingit-style Mosquito Mask**
Wood, paint, abalone shell, brown
bear fur, and elk rawhide
- 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
- 102. Camera Obscura**
19th century
Paint, tin, brass, and optical lens

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. **Thaumatrope (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 verdure)
*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'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
Henrya-Tlingit people
Alaska, reportedly Tuxekan village
Wood

THE MENIL COLLECTION

October 2023

COVER

Mickey Mouse Katsina, formerly in the collection of William Copley, ca. 1950. Hopi peoples, United States. Wood, paint, and feathers, $12\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{5}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$ in. ($31.8 \times 14.2 \times 13.3$ cm). Rock Foundation Collection at the Menil Collection, Houston.