surrealist brussels
thematic kit

visit.brussels
SIZED FOR SURREALISM
BRUSSELS IS REVELLING MORE THAN EVER IN ITS REPUTATION AS A SURREALIST CITY. IT HAS SUCCEEDED IN EMBODYING THE INFLUENCE OF ONE OF THE MOST ASTONISHING ARTISTIC MOVEMENTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY: SURREALISM. THIS MOVEMENT WAS CARRIED BY ICONIC FIGURES SUCH AS RENÉ MAGRITTE, LOUIS SCUTENAIRE, MARCEL MARIËN OR AGAIN THE MUSICIAN ANDRÉ SOURIS. DISCOVER THE BRUSSELS OF YOUR WILDEST DREAMS!

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WWW.VISIT.BRUSSELS
1. A BIT OF HISTORY

BETWEEN ART AND POLITICS

Surrealism is an artistic movement born in the concrete context of the aftermath of the First World War. The war symbolised the failure of two ideals that had marked the societal debate before 1914: internationalism and positivism. Due to the commitment of the various socialist parties to a war of nations, the hope that the international workers’ movement would defeat nationalism evaporated. The use of scientific knowledge for the purposes of the most atrocious war in history also dispelled the hope that a better world would emerge from the victory of knowledge over obscurantism (enlightenment over darkness, knowledge over superstition).

Surrealism was born at the point where these two failures converged. Several Belgian protagonists of the movement joined various revolutionary socialist tendencies that arose in response to the «betrayal of social democracy» (Communists, Trotskyists, Maoists). Paul Nougé was one of the founders of the Belgian Communist Party. Rene Magritte joined this party three times, but also left it. Edouard Léon Théodore Mesens joined the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art, founded by Leon Trotsky, André Breton and Diego Rivera. Marcel Mariën worked in Peking for the magazine «China under Construction».

But the artistic commitment of the surrealists was the antithesis of the socialist realism that Andrei Zhdanov was championing in the Soviet Union. What they were looking for was the union of the real and the imaginary (dream and reality). This paradox can be explained only by the quest for a response to the failure of positivism.

The Belgian surrealist movement was the second-largest after the French movement. Its two main centres were Brussels and the province of Hainaut. Its principal representative was Brussels painter René Magritte. But Brussels surrealism was much more than just the works of Magritte. Mesens was a writer and collagist, Nougé was a poet, like Mariën and many others (including Camille Goemans, Marcel Lecomte, Paul Colinete, Louis Scutenaire and André Souris). The only woman member of the group was the author Irène Hamoir, Scutenaire’s wife. Gerard van Bruaene, who ran the café «La Fleur en Papier Doré», was a highly-appreciated companion of the Surrealists, whom he made welcome to his establishment. Although Paul Delvaux is also regarded as a surrealist, he was never part of the group.

After 1945, the success of Magritte and the insistence of his wife made him opt for a career as an internationally-renowned painter. Mariën saw this as a betrayal and turned against him, unlike Scutenaire and Hamoir, who remained his best friends.
2017 is the year we put an extra spotlight on René Magritte. This is the year in which Brussels commemorates the 50th anniversary of the death of this great Belgian artist. Magritte moved to Brussels in 1930, where he was to paint his most iconic paintings, while his home in Jette rapidly became one of the meeting spots for like-minded artists. Brussels has always been a creative and cultural hotspot, where artistic movements, such as surrealism, have thrived.

RENÉ MAGRITTE, A BELGIAN SYMBOL WHO HAS CAPTIVATED THE FOREIGN IMAGINATION

When it comes to choosing an undeniably Belgian figure, René Magritte is without a doubt one of the best known by people from all walks of life.

He is seen as the leader of Surrealism in Belgium. The term, which appeared in 1917, denotes a literary and art movement that followed Dadaism, from which it borrowed heavily. Briefly, surrealism rejects the logical constructions of the mind and sees itself as “dictation of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, beyond any aesthetic or moral concern”.

Of Walloon origin, Magritte was a multi-skilled artist. He was first and foremost a painter but also a commercial artist, engraver, sculptor, author, photographer, film-maker, poster artist, and so on. He lived mainly in Brussels but travelled around Europe and the world many times. Born in 1898 in Hainaut, he died of an illness on 15 August 1967 in Schaerbeek, on the outskirts of Brussels, where he was buried. 15 August 2017 is therefore the fiftieth anniversary of his death, the starting point for a series of events in the Brussels Capital Region.

To celebrate his presence in Brussels, there are two museums devoted to him in the city: one in the Jette district, in the house that would become his main residence in the capital, the other in the Place Royale. Although his Jette home is the best known, he moved around a lot and lived at 10 different addresses, in the centre of Brussels and in Shaerbeek, Saint-Josse, Laeken and, of course, Jette.

While still very young, at the age of 13 he had to cope with his mother’s suicide. She threw herself into the Sambre, an event that would forever mark his career and his works.

Between 1916 and 1918 he trained at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. His time in Brussels and his involvement in the art world brought him into contact with the different movements of the time (impressionism, symbolism, futurism, Dadaism, etc.), a sort of journey towards surrealism that would characterise most of his work.

In 1922, in Saint-Josse, a district in the Brussels urban area, Georgette Berger, whom he had known for some time, became his wife. According to his own account, the painter was almost poverty-stricken, until he signed, at the age of 27, a not very lucrative contract with the owner of the “Le Centaure” gallery in the Avenue Louise in Brussels. Nevertheless, as a whole, his work seems only to have become profitable in his last years. The artist was forced to take various bread-and-butter jobs: as a commercial artist in a wallpaper factory, a poster artist and an advertising artist — jobs for idiots, in his own words!

He had a clearly defined concept of painting. “For me, the concept of a painting is an idea about a thing or several things that can become visible through my painting,” Magritte started with an idea in text form before transferring it to the canvas. He made poetry in the form of word paintings.

At the end of the Second World War he joined the Communist Party for a time. His tone was often subversive, audacious or even salacious… Also, all the testimonials, including his own account, underline the “fundamental pessimism” of this “child of boredom”, this “uneasy” man who considers “existence disappointing”.

2. 2017: 50 YEARS RENÉ MAGRITTE (1898 – 1967)
He had a very independent mind, which doubtless prevented him from becoming famous more quickly. As Paris was slow to acknowledge him, to take his revenge, in 1948, when he was invited to put on an exhibition in a gallery, he invented his cow style, with slapdash work and grotesque motifs. The gallery did not sell anything!

TEMPORARY EVENTS
Join us in exploring Brussels and experience the surrealistic world of Magritte.

ROYAL MUSEUMS OF FINE ARTS OF BELGIUM

Magritte is alive! Magritte and contemporary art
13/10/2017 > 18/02/2018
In 2017, it has been fifty years since the death of René Magritte, Belgium's greatest surrealist artist. Many projects have been planned, including an exhibition which shows how much of René Magritte still lives on in contemporary art. His influence and legacy can be found in the works of Gavin Turk, George Condo, Sean Landers, Raymond Pettibon, Robert Longo ...

Marcel Lecomte. His friendship with René Magritte
13/10/2017 > 18/02/2018
Marcel Lecomte was a writer, art critic and collaborator of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts. Thanks to him Magritte discovers the work of Giorgio de Chirico, an artist who will have a major impact on his vision on painting. The exhibition will not only document the relation between the two artists but will also present unpublished texts written by Lecomte on Magritte and the correspondence between these two friends and accomplices.

rue de la Régence 3, 1000 - Brussels
www.fine-arts-museum.be

ATOMIUM

Magritte, Atomium meets surrealism.
21/09/2017 > 16/09/2018
In honour of the 50th anniversary of the death of René Magritte, the internationally renowned icon of Belgian surrealism, the Atomium will give a unique homage to Magritte. From 21 September 2017 the Atomium invites visitors to this unique exhibition. A few of his most prominent and acclaimed works are brought to life. These works, made into sets and unravelled, allow the visitor visually to enter the surrealist world of René Magritte. Experience, interpret and undergo the surreal world of Belgium's greatest artist. Find the hidden message behind the artwork, discover extraordinary decors and enjoy the masterpieces by René Magritte. René Magritte and the Atomium, the combination of two icons of Belgian heritage.
A must for young and old and definitely not to be missed!

Square Atomium, 1020 Brussels
www.atomium.be

Municipality of Jette

In 2017, Jette will honour its most famous citizen, René Magritte, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death. Magritte was not only a great surrealist painter, but he also lived in Jette for 24 years. Between 1930 and 1954, he lived on the Esseghemstraat in Jette. During this period, he painted half of his entire oeuvre - including many of his most remarkable works, which have been engraved into our collective memory and in which it is even possible to recognise parts of Jette or elements of the house he lived in. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death, various associations will join forces to give free rein to their creativity inspired by surrealism and the life and times of Magritte. As from March all events can be found at www.jette.be or via the facebook page ‘renejette17’.

1090 Brussels (Jette)
3. CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

MUSÉE MAGRITTE MUSEUM
In the building of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, visitors can explore the 2,500 m² of the Musée Magritte Museum. This museum stands right in the centre of Brussels, on Place Royale, and exhibits for public viewing the surrealist artist's creations belonging to Belgium's Royal Museums of Fine Arts and originating mainly from purchases and from the Irène Hamoir-Scutenaire and Georgette Magritte bequests. This multidisciplinary collection is the richest in the world. It comprises more than 200 works consisting of oils on canvas, gouaches, drawings, sculptures and painted objects as well as advertising posters, music scores, vintage photographs and films directed by Magritte himself.

Place Royale 1 (entrance on rue de la Régence 3)
1000 Brussels
Tel. : +32 (0)2 508 32 11
www.musee-magritte-museum.be

THE RENÉ MAGRITTE HOUSE-MUSEUM
The René Magritte House-Museum is installed in the house where the famous surrealist painter lived for twenty-four years. This living environment, recreated with authentic furniture, inspired Magritte in his work. In the dining room of this rented apartment, the artist painted nearly half of his body of work. This quiet spot was where his most creative period developed, resulting in awe-inspiring paintings.

135 Rue Esseghem also became the headquarters of the Belgian surrealists. The artist's friends used to gather there every week and organise all kinds of happenings. Their meetings resulted in many subversive activities, books, journals and pamphlets.

These activities are clearly illustrated on the two upper floors of the museum through original works, photographs, objects of interest, letters and personal documents.

This dwelling was restored and turned into a museum from 1993 to 1999. It is designed as a permanent tribute to one of the most brilliant artists of all time.

Rue Esseghem 135
1090 Brussels (Jette)
Tel. : +32 (0) 2 428 26 26
E-mail: info@magrittemuseum.be
www.magrittemuseum.be
**IXELLES MUSEUM**

The reputation of this museum, which houses more than 13,000 pieces, is mainly built on the collections of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, providing almost a complete overview of the various painting schools of the time. Surrealism naturally features prominently and the great names of this movement, such as René Magritte, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst and Joan Miró, take pride of place. In addition, the Museum is the repository of a large private collection of works by Delvaux, intended to serve as a basis for various exhibitions, including “Paul Delvaux. The Paths of creation”. Ixelles Museum is a must on any Surrealism tour of Brussels.

Rue Jean Van Volsem 71  
1050 Brussels (Ixelles)  
Tel.: +32 (0)2 515 64 21  
E-mail: musee@ixelles.be  
www.museedixelles.be

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**LA FLEUR EN PAPIER DORÉ**

It was in the mid-forties that Gérard (Geert) van Bruaene, Brussels’ anarchist poet, bought this artistic little café. He then named it “La Fleur en Papier Doré - Het Goudblommeke in Papier”. Geert van Bruaene was close to the surrealist group in Brussels and liked to welcome his friends Louis Scutenaire, Marcel Mariën, E.L.T Mesens, Irène Hamoir and Camille Goemans there. René Magritte used to drop in from time to time. It was also the favourite bistro of Pierre Alechinsky, Jacques Brel and Hergé. This traditional little café-bar, where a giant portrait of the surrealist group still hangs in pride of place, has retained its charm of yesteryear. People go there to experience the particularly unusual and eclectic ambience, imbued with history. Opposite the café, you’ll notice, here and there, the thoughts of a few surrealists decorating the street furniture of the little public garden of Place de Dinant. The most noteworthy is, without a doubt, the one taken from Gérard (Geert) van Bruaene’s “Visitors’ book of la Fleur en Papier Doré”, which says, “Etre vivant, c’est là une excellente raison de vivre” (Being alive is an excellent reason to live).

Rue des Alexiens 53-55  
1000 Brussels  
Tel.: +32 (0)2 511 16 59  
E-mail: lepetitgerard@lafleurenpapierdore.be  
www.lafleurenpapierdore.be
4. **SURREALISM, PART OF BRUSSELS’ HERITAGE**

**MAGRITTE MURAL IN THE THÉÂTRE ROYAL DES GALERIES**
The Théâtre Royal des Galeries was built in 1847 by the architect Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar, at the same time as the magnificent Galeries royales Saint-Hubert. In 1951, the Theatre was renovated by the architect Paul Bonduelle. René Magritte painted a fresco on the ceiling of the theatre, reminiscent of the very famous Magritte skies. His initial project was for a sky filled with floating bells. This project was not chosen and replaced with clouds to create a world of dreams.

Galerie du Roi 32
1000 Brussels
Tel. : +32 (0)2 512 04 07
E-mail : infos@theatredesgaleries.be
www.theatredesgaleries.be

**MAGRITTE & DELVAUX FRESCOES IN THE SQUARE**
A majestic glass cube at the very heart of Brussels hides 3 little marvels. Vast mural paintings by the great Belgian masters: Magritte, Delvaux (41 m long and 4 m high) and Van Lint. They have been lovingly restored and integrated into the new design of the SQUARE. The SQUARE is a conference centre, only open to professionals. Individuals can only discover these frescos on request.

Mont des Arts
1000 Brussels
Tel. : +32 (0)2 515 13 00
E-mail : info@square-brussels.com

**SCHAERBEEK CEMETERY**
Although more discreet than Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, Schaerbeek cemetery can also be considered as an essential stop on any tour by visitors to our capital. It offers a peaceful setting for a walk to discover several iconic personalities that have left their mark on Brussels. Several have a connection to Surrealism, such as Magritte and his wife or the poet Marcel Mariën, who sends us this message from beyond the grave «Il n’y a aucun mérite à être quoi que ce soit» (There is no merit in being anything). Schaerbeek Cemetery is also the resting place of many other illustrious personalities such as the resistant Andrée De Jongh, the explorer Ernest Cambier or again the statesman and writer Louis Bertrand.

Rue d’Evere 4
1030 Brussels
www.schaerbeek.irisnet.be

**UNDERGROUND ART - BOURSE**
The Brussels underground is a museum in its own right. More than sixty works of art decorate its platforms and corridors. All genres are represented: paintings, sculptures, photos, screen walls, stained glass windows and a range of different materials: from canvas to bronze and from wood to glass and steel. Each station has its own personality, while keeping a sense of unity that is reassuring for the traveller. Highlights include a work by Pol Bury (1976: “Moving Ceiling”) and by Paul Delvaux (1978: Our old Brussels trams) in Bourse underground station. The work by Pol Bury came after his surrealist period (1934-1947). After the surrealist movement, Pol Bury joined the CoBrA movement and turned towards works with minimalist forms in motion. A visual art that makes him the master of a kinetic current. Serge Vandercam, whose “La fleur unique ou les oiseaux émerveillés” can be admired at the Joséphine Charlotte underground station, also flirted with surrealism, as did Wyckaert at the Jacques Brel underground station, Pierre Caille (Botanique underground station), Jan Cox at the Hermann-Debroux underground station and Vic Gentils, a Flemish surrealist painter (Thieffry underground station), not to mention Christian Dotremont who is working with Pierre Alechinsky on the great fresco of the Delta underground station. No overtly surrealist work is present in the underground but its influence is nevertheless perceptible.

www.stib.be
5. GUIDED TOURS

ITINÉRAIRES: THIS IS NOT A REALIST ITINERARY: MAGRITTE, DELVAUX AND THE OTHERS, SURREALISM IN BRUSSELS

To be or not be, that is the question... So, what did Magritte mean when he painted the famous words “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” on his canvas? In an attempt to better understand Belgian surrealism, we will explore the places that the Belgian surrealists frequented, painted, lived in... We will also tell you why our capital is considered surreal! Is it strange to be an angel?
Possibility for animations, tastings, tours of interiors or surrealistic evenings.

Tel.: +32 (0)496 38 85 94 / +32 (0)2 541 03 77
info@itineraires.be
www.itineraires.be

ARKADIA: SURREALISM IN BRUSSELS

Magritte won’t have any more secrets for you! This visit will immerse you in the painter’s artistic world. We will follow footsteps of René Magritte and those of his surrealist friends to decode our lives and we’ll be, for sure, overwhelmed by the strange: Brussels absolutely different, indeed!

Tel.: +32 (0)2 563 61 53
info@arkadia.be
www.arkadia.be

PRO VELO: MAGRITTE AND THE SURREALISTS

Known as the capital of Surrealism, Brussels has two (!) Magritte museums: the René Magritte Museum in Jette, located in the house where he lived and worked for nearly 24 years, and the Magritte Museum, at Place Royale. The tour passes by Jette (an additional 4€ for entry) and crosses the town centre. The painter is evoked through the places he used to live and found inspiration and by a host of anecdotes about the surrealist movement. (18km)

Tel.: +32 (0)2 517 17 65
info@provelo.org
www.provelo.org
CULTURAMA: THIS IS NOT A SURREALIST ITINERARY
You have 2 possibilities:
- A walk in the centre of Jette where you will discover the René Magritte House-Museum. René Magritte lived here for 24 years with his wife Georgette and painted most of his masterpieces here.
- A walk in the centre of Brussels in the footsteps of Magritte and his friends.

Tel.: +32 (0)2 569 27 74
culturama@telenet.be
www.culturamavzw.be

BUS BAVARD/CHATTERBUS: BOWLER HATS AND RUFFLES OF RAIN...
Men of the pen or the brush, with their feet in Brussels and their head in the clouds, Magritte, Marien, Nougé and their joyful brothers in arms could be found in cafés with delicious names like “The mosquito lamb” ... Today, they still continue to haunt the city and several of its bars... let’s follow the wake of their “rafts of memory” or their flying umbrellas to discover the intrepid approach they took to reality and art...

Tel.: +32 (0)2 673 18 35
busbavard@skynet.be
www.busbavard.be

MORE GUIDED TOURS ON:
WWW.VISIT.BRUSSELS/DISCOVERTHECITY
6. **RESTAURANTS & BARS**

A FEW OF THE ESTABLISHMENTS REGULARLY FREQUENTED BY THE SURREALIST GROUP OF BRUSSELS CAN STILL BE FOUND IN THE CAPITAL. THEY HAVE PRESERVED THEIR PERIOD STYLE AND ARE PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE FOR THE GOURMET CULTURE OF BRUSSELS.

**LA FLEUR EN PAPIER DORÉ**

This artistic little café is not only a cultural place of pilgrimage, it’s also a great place to eat. Here, you can savour little dishes of Brussels in all their delicious simplicity; so, of course, stoemp and pottekeis are on the menu! Over the years, the old-style café-bar has become a real Aladdin’s cave, a treasure-trove of objects, photographs and texts collected by Gérard van Bruaene or donated by visitors, all more or less famous, to the café. You’ll find photographs of Hergé, Jean Brusselmans and Magritte as well as texts from Guido Gezelle or Jan Cox and aphorisms from Gérard van Bruaene.

*Rue des Alexiens 53-55*  
1000 Bruxelles  
*Tue-Sat: 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.*  
*Sun: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.*  
www.lafleurenpapierdore.be

**GREENWICH**

“If Magritte paints as well as he plays chess, he still has a long way to go.” According to legend, that was how René Magritte was described when he tried to sell his paintings in the Greenwich. The Greenwich, a listed café, is worth going out of your way for. Its reputation is owed mainly to the fact that it was the temple for chess players and that Magritte used to play there often with other key figures of surrealism in Brussels. Nowadays, the Greenwich is a pleasant brasserie serving very typical Belgian dishes. Its interior is bound to take you back in time to the days when Magritte and his friends used to put the world to rights over a good Gueuze.

*Rue des Chartreux 7*  
1000 Bruxelles

**LE CIRIO**

Make the most of the unique atmosphere of this 1886 brasserie, which has successfully retained its cachet of days gone by. Built in pure Art Nouveau style, le Cirio has played host to many artists over the years. E.L.T. Mesens and Marcel Lecomte, from the surrealist group of Brussels, were regulars. The speciality of the house? The “Half en Half”: half white wine, half Champagne.

*Rue de la Bourse, 18/20*  
1000 Bruxelles
7. PUBLICATION

MINI-MAP “SURREALISM IN BRUSSELS”

Brussels has successfully preserved the influence of one of the most surprising artistic movements of the 20th century: surrealism. Explore our capital city in the footsteps of Magritte and his friends of the surrealist group.

Available: EN/FR, NL/DE
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WWW.VISIT.BRUSSELS/SURREALISM

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