surrealist brussels

thematic kit
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!

1. A BIT OF HISTORY 3
2. CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS 4
3. SURREALISM, PART OF BRUSSELS’ HERITAGE 6
4. GUIDED TOURS 7
5. RESTAURANTS & BARS 9
6. PUBLICATION 10
7. CONTACTS 11

WWW.VISITBRUSSELS.BE
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 surrealism 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 Colinet, 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.
2. 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

MUSEUM OF LETTERS AND MANUSCRIPTS
The Museum of Letters and Manuscripts presents, in an exclusive setting, the treasures of its collections. The space dedicated to arts in the permanent exhibition includes documents by surrealist artists such as Magritte, Dali, Max Ernst, Chagall, Bellmer, Delvaux, and many others. These documents are particularly interesting to see the dialogue nurtured between these artists but also with their contemporaries (example, a letter sent by Hans Bellmer to André Breton, etc.). We can see in particular a holograph text by Dalí entitled “The terrifying and comestible beauty of modern style architecture”, dating from 1933, and which is the most representative surrealist texts of his agreements and disagreements with André Breton.

In the Literature part of the permanent exhibition, a showcase is devoted to “Surrealism in Belgium” and includes documents by Breton, Chavée, Eluard, etc.

Galerie du Roi 3
1000 Brussels
Tel. : +32 (0)2 346 52 06
E-mail : info@mlmb.be

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, Christian Dotremont 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 Géard (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).

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1000 Brussels
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E-mail : lepetitgerard@lafleurenpapierdore.be
www.lafleurenpapierdore.be
3. 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. If 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
4. GUIDED TOURS

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

To be or not to be, that is the question... So what did Magritte really 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?

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ARKADIA:
Magritte won’t have any more secrets for you! We first will guide you through the Musée Magritte Museum before reaching the city centre for an immersion in the painter’s artistic world. We will follow his footsteps and those of his surrealist friends to decode our lives and we’ll be, for sure, overwhelmed by the strange: Brussels absolutely different, indeed!

Rue Royale 2/4
1000 Brussels
Tel.: +32 (0)2 563 61 53
E-mail: info@asbl-arkadia.be
Website: www.asbl-arkadia.be

PRO VELO: MAGRITTE AND SURREALISTS

Learn all about Surrealists in Brussels. Brussels, capital of surrealism has even two Magritte Museums. This tour includes a visit to the René Magritte House-Museum in Jette in which the Belgian surrealist painter lived and worked nearly 24 years of his life. (€4 extra entrance fee)4h-18km

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1050 Brussels
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E-mail: info@provelo.org
Website: www.provelo.org
CULTURAMA: THIS IS NOT A SURREALIST ITINERARY
You have 3 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.
- a guided tour in the Musée Magritte Museum situated at the lovely place Royale.

Baron De Vironlaan 140
1700 Dilbeek
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E-mail: culturama@telenet.be
Website: 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...

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E-mail: busbavard@skynet.be
Website: www.busbavard.be

MORE GUIDED TOURS ON:
WWW.VISITBRUSSELS.BE/GUIDES
5. 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 first 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
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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