

CaixaForum Barcelona presents a dialogue between Surrealism and design

- A total of 285 artworks and objects are brought together to create a dialogue in the exhibition *Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design, 1924-2020*, which explores the relationship between the two disciplines over the last century.
- Jointly organised by "la Caixa" and the Vitra Design Museum, and featuring pieces from collections and museums from around the world, the exhibition at CaixaForum Barcelona features works by artists such as Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, Lee Miller, Giorgio de Chirico, René Magritte, Joan Miró, Marcel Duchamp and Meret Oppenheim, and designers and architects like Gae Aulenti, Le Corbusier, Antoni Gaudí, Ray Eames and Achille Castiglioni.
- The subconscious, dream, eroticism, obsession, chance and the irrational were all elements that the Surrealist artists fused into their works, which were often everyday objects whose forms they altered and subverted. At a point where the discipline was most critical of rationalism, design also appropriated these elements.
- The exhibition is a multidisciplinary exploration that invites the visitor to discover formal and conceptual allusions to Surrealism in paintings, sculptures, drawings, objects, posters, magazines, books, photographs, historic films and furniture.

Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design, 1924-2020. Dates: From 28 February to 7 June 2020. Produced and organised by: "la Caixa" and Vitra Design Museum. Curated by: Mateo Kries, Director of the Vitra Design Museum, and Tanja Cunz, Assistant Curator. Place: CaixaForum Barcelona (Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8). Sponsored by BOSS. With the support of ART MENTOR FOUNDATION LUCERNE

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Barcelona, 27 February 2020. At CaixaForum Barcelona today, Elisa Durán, Deputy General Director of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, Lluís Noguera, Director of CaixaForum Barcelona, and Mateo Kries, Director of the Vitra Design Museum and the exhibition curator, presented *Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design, 1924-2020*, a show featuring 285 works aimed at exploring the fertile relationship between Surrealism and design over the last century.

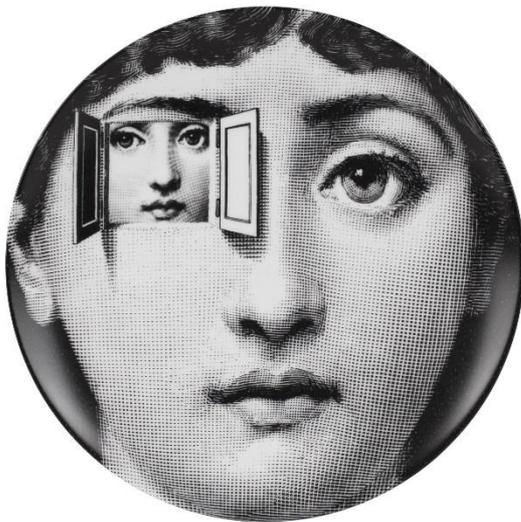
Objects of Desire forms part of a well-established line of exhibitions produced by "la Caixa" to focus on architecture and design, but going beyond mere consideration of particular styles and historical periods. The shows presented to date include, particularly, those devoted to such great figures as Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Richard Rogers and Alvar Aalto. Indeed, in 2015 a wide-ranging retrospective on Aalto's work was presented at CaixaForum Barcelona in cooperation with the Vitra Design Museum.

The exhibition, jointly organised by "la Caixa" and the Vitra Design Museum, establishes a dialogue between design objects and works of art, highlighting the rich parallels and connections between them. This relationship is one of mutual enrichment, because while Surrealism often took inspiration from everyday objects and design, the artistic movement also influenced design from the first, in a clear critique of rationalism helping to release the discipline from the functionalist dogma which decreed that "form follows function". This influence, which began in the 1930s and intensified particularly after World War II, continues to make itself felt even today in certain areas of contemporary design.

After its official introduction in 1924 with the publication of André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, Surrealism quickly became an international intellectual and political movement, its members coming from different backgrounds and disciplines, including writing, film and the fine arts. Surrealist artists used the subconscious, dreams, obsessions, chance and the irrational in their creations, and members of the movement were fascinated by everyday objects, altering them to create fantastical, dreamlike, ironic, disturbing and emotional works.

The influence of Surrealism has spread to all areas of design over the last century: from furniture and interior design to graphic design, fashion, film and photography. Even today, the movement continues to make its mark on design. The Surrealists' subversive approach, fantastical imagery and fascination with the human psyche continue to inspire contemporary designers.

The exhibition, multidisciplinary in nature and divided into four thematic sections, explores this fascinating, continuous creative dialogue. The works on show include paintings, sculptures, objects, posters, magazines, books and photographs, as well as historic films and video. The artists and designers featured include **Marcel Duchamp**, **René Magritte**, **Shiro Kuramata**, **Ray Eames**, **Carlo Mollino**, **Gae Aulenti**, **Claude Cahun**, **Achille Castiglioni**, **Man Ray**, **Giorgio de Chirico**, **Joan Miró**, **Le Corbusier**, **Salvador Dalí**, **Roberto Matta**, **Isamu Noguchi** and **Meret Oppenheim**.



Wall plate from the series *Tema e Variazioni*. Piero Fornasetti. After 1950.
Courtesy of Fornasetti

The works are from many collections, foundations and galleries from around the world, such as Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, the Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation, the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum, the Mollino House-Museum, Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, the Eames Collection LLC, the Design Museum Den Bosch and the Vitra Design Museum itself, where the exhibition has already been presented. After closing in Barcelona, *Objects of Desire* will also travel to CaixaForum Madrid, CaixaForum Seville and CaixaForum Palma.

[Exhibition sections](#)

[Dreams of Modernity](#)

The first of the four sections explores Surrealism from the 1920s to the 1950s. **André Breton** and his fellows applied the Surrealism principles to painting from the first, but the approach also extended subsequently to objects in a trend that, in a general way, embraced furniture, interior design, fashion and film. Becoming critical of rationalism, many designers took inspiration in Surrealism, incorporating human emotions, organic forms and the irrational world into their everyday objects.

Marcel Duchamp's *readymades* provided a source of inspiration for such artists as **Meret Oppenheim** and **Salvador Dalí**, who created a completely new type of sculpture, fashioning absurd objects from found materials and objects. The organic shapes that **Antoni Gaudí** created in his architecture and furniture (such

as his chair for Casa Calvet) were precursors of this style. The ideal of beauty in these objects is expressed through metaphors like the one suggested by the French poet Lautréamont: "As beautiful as the chance meeting, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella".

The architect **Le Corbusier** became one of the first to establish direct links between Surrealism and design when he built a penthouse for the collector Carlos de Beistegui. His design was like a Surrealist collage, with flamboyant furniture, brightly-coloured upholstery and even a ventilation shaft shaped like a periscope. **Dalí** also incorporated similar elements into his house in Portlligat. In the 1930s, he designed even more daring interiors, installing objects like the Mae West Lip Sofa and the Lobster Telephone. The importance of objects in the Surrealist universe was highlighted in the movement's art exhibitions in the 1930s, events that are very well documented in this exhibition and feature forms that also appear in **Dalí's** Surrealist paintings.

When many Surrealist artist were forced to emigrate to the United States to flee the Nazis and the war, the movement's style also began to inspire designers on the other side of the Atlantic. These included **Ray Eames**, **Isamu Noguchi** and **Frederick Kiesler**, this last the designer of the patron of the arts Peggy Guggenheim's The Art of this Century gallery. Dalí himself designed the shop windows for the Bonwit Teller department store in New York, as well as creating costumes, posters and sets for Alfred Hitchcock's film *Spellbound*.

Image and Archetype

Surrealism introduced subversion into day-to-day life: Is what we see always real? Must one thing always be what seems? In the second section, the exhibition focuses on how the Surrealists studied archetypes of everyday objects and subverted the established significance of things by their use of the absurd, confusion and chance. **René Magritte**, for example, installed a small oil painting of a piece of cheese under a glass cheese dome.

Among the many designers that adopted similar strategies was **Achille Castiglione**, who created objects based on the idea of found art, similar to **Duchamp's readymades**: a stool with a bicycle saddle, and a hat shaped like a cake mould and so on. The architect **Gae Aulenti**



Gae Aulenti, *Tour*, 1993
© Vitra Design Museum. Photo: Jürgen Hans

also tipped her cap to Duchamp's famous bicycle wheel (1913) with her table mounted on four bike wheels.

In the 1960s, the introduction of different types of plastics made it possible to design furniture in all ways imaginable. Much of the furniture created by the so-called Italian radical design movement, with its absurd proportions and fantastic shapes, is directly inspired by the work of the Surrealists. Moreover, the Surrealist artists continued to design objects, as we can see in **Roberto Matta's** MAgriTTA chair (1970), which pays homage to Magritte, and Man Ray's *The Witness* (1971), whose huge eye alludes to the role of furniture as the mute observer of domestic life. More contemporary designs suggest the decontextualization and alienation of the seemingly ordinary: for instance, the horse-shaped floor lamp presented by the **Front** design studio in 2006.

Surrealism and eroticism

Love, eroticism and sexuality all played a key role in Surrealism, and artists and designers inspired by the movement created both artworks and interior designs and furniture with a high erotic charge. In his 1934-35 collage *The Face of Mae West*, embodying a Surrealist apartment, Salvador Dalí created an interior design whose individual parts reproduce the actress's face. The Italian designer, photographer and architect **Carlo Mollino** took inspiration from the Catalan genius in his creations, which include a lip-shaped sofa and a table inspired by Dalí's painting *Woman with a Head of Rose* (1935).

This third section includes a space devoted to women. Unlike their male counterparts, these women take motifs considered to express female eroticism – mouth, breasts, hair, high-heeled shoes and so on – to critique the oppression of women and gender stereotypes. We see this, for example, in the subversive photos of **Lee Miller** and **Dora Maar** and the androgynous portraits of **Claude Cahun**. We also find examples of this critique in contemporary design: for instance, *Hairbrush* (1999), by **BLESS**, in which the hair makes the object unusable.

Fashion has also been influenced by Surrealism. Artists like **Man Ray** and **Lee Miller** were once fashion photographers. **Dalí** and the fashion designer **Elsa Schiaparelli** collaborated on such designs as the *Skeleton Dress* (1938) and the *Lobster Dress* (1937), as well as her famous *Shoe Hat* (1937-38). The influence of Surrealism on fashion has never waned, and is evident in the pieces that **Rei Kawakubo** designed for the *Comme des Garçons* 2007-2008 autumn-winter fashion collection.

In counterpoint to erotic power, the death drive and violence, elements that interested the Surrealists, especially in Hans Bellmer's representations of the body, altered or fragmented, are also present in design. **Gaetano Pesce** also designed a chair, *La Mamma* (1969), in the form of a voluptuous woman who invites us to sit on her lap, conjuring up ideas of both sensuality and captivity. Finally, the designer **Wieki Somers** created a teapot on the shape of a pig's skull, subverting the cosiness of domestic objects, just as the artist **Meret Oppenheim** had done before.

The Savage Mind

The fourth and final section in the exhibition is devoted to what the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called "The Savage Mind", that is, to the interest in the primitive, coincidence and the irrational. In this sense, the Surrealists often found inspiration in ethnographic objects from African, Oceanic and Native American art, and employed techniques aimed at opening the doors of the unconscious and chance. We see all this in **Max Ernst** with his frottage technique, and in the practices of automatic writing and free association. In one of his most iconic images, *Black and White* (1926), **Man Ray** photographed a model's head beside an African mask. This section also includes the painting *The Lion* (1925), by Joan Miró, from the "la Caixa" Collection.

Non-Western art, fused with Surrealist ideas, continues to inspire contemporary designers. The Brazilian brothers **Fernando** and **Humberto Campana** create sculptural objects from materials found by chance, while the French designers **Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec**, also siblings, adopt the technique of free consciousness in their drawings, generating a new imagery of objects. Today, new technologies such as 3D digital printing enable the factor of chance to be revived in design through algorithms. An example of this is the vase created by **Audrey Large**.

Surrealism continues to be very much alive in many contemporary works, especially pieces that employ experimental and speculative approaches to subvert new technologies and social issues, especially in critical design. *Designs for an Overcrowded Planet: Foragers* (2009), a work by **Dunne & Raby**, brings together a series of smart objects from the twenty-first century in a dystopian future infused with an irrational element. Moreover, the visual language typical of Surrealism has been introduced directly into media such as the music video. The Icelandic singer **Björk** uses motifs from Surrealist painting in many of her videos,

such as *Hidden Place* (2010), in which the tear trickling down the singer's face is a direct reference to **Man Ray's** photograph *Tears* (1932). All this clearly illustrates just how far the visual language of Surrealism has penetrated the collective consciousness.

From Hidrogenesse to Jordi Roca and Oscar Tusquets



As usual, the parallel activities to the exhibition will feature a lecture by its curator. Accordingly, on Friday, February 28, Mateo Kries will present a wide-ranging examination of the relations and exchanges between design and Surrealism. The parallel activities will also include a season of lectures and workshops under the

title *When Design Surpasses Reality*. Here, the highlights will include a talk by the architect and designer **Oscar Tusquets**, who will recount his long creative relationship and friendship with Salvador Dalí, while industrial designer **Andreu Carulla** and chef **Jordi Roca** will discuss the affinities and coincidences between their respective creative practices and the surprising results that these generate.

Moreover, **Sybilla Sorondo**, the driving-force behind one of the leading Spanish clothing brands over the last 40 years, will also present a talk, devoted to the theme of fiction and function in her creative pieces. The scientist **Robert D. Thompson** will also provide tools to encourage a radical new look at “forbidden” materials, showing how they can be used for hitherto unimaginable purposes. Finally, electronic pop duo **Hidrogenesse** will give a live performance of tracks from their latest album, *Joterías bobas*, a critique of over-seriousness and a form of therapy against disillusionment. Disguised as Harlequin and Pierrot in homage to André Derain's painting, the duo will present their new composition in a show that blurs the boundaries between reality and artifice.

Under the title **Good Day. What Would You Like?** the Family and Educational Space will invite families to work in a store selling Surrealist furniture where they can design and produce exclusive, custom-made items to fulfil their wildest dreams. Different forms of guided tours will also be available, and the programme will also include the activity **Desire + Dream = Design**, led by a mediator and focusing on the main exhibition theme.

ACTIVITIES PARALLEL TO THE EXHIBITION**LECTURE BY THE CURATOR****Friday, 28 February 2020 / 7 pm**

Mateo Kries, Director of the Vitra Design Museum.

DESIGN SEASON**WHEN DESIGN SURPASSES REALITY**

- **DALÍ AND TUSQUETS: PARANOIAC-CRITICAL DESIGN**
BY OSCAR TUSQUETS AND JULI CAPELLA
Thursday, April 16 / 7 pm

The long creative relationship and friendship between the designer Oscar Tusquets and the artist Salvador Dalí generated various designs for spaces, furniture and other types of objects. In conversation with the architect Juli Capella – also the designer’s biographer – Tusquets will discuss his main collaborations with the great Catalan artist.

- **FASHION, BETWEEN FUNCTION AND FICTION**
BY SYBILLA SORONDO AND CHARO MORA
Tuesday, April 21 / 7 pm

Sybilla Sorondo is the driving-force behind one of the leading Spanish clothing brands of the last 40 years, her designs cheerfully ignoring short-lived trends and market expectations. The unmistakably transgressive nature of her creations flies in the face of functionalist dogma and aesthetic convention. Sybilla's articles fuse design and art, reflecting a convergence that was also extraordinarily fertile within the context of the movement led by André Breton. Provocation, sensuality, humour and fantasy, all constants in her work, are also central elements in Surrealist imagery. How do fiction and function coexist in the creations of this fashion designer, who defies classification? Sybilla Sorondo and fashion historian Charo Mora will be with us to answer that and other questions.

- **TABOO MATERIALS FOR A NEW REALITY**
BY ROBERT D. THOMPSON (MATERFAD)
Tuesday, April 28 / 7 pm

In a world where clues to the near future are fading at a rapid pace, design needs to be bold and radical. One of the areas in which this radical approach is best illustrated is that of the new materials, although sometimes what is new is not the material itself but the uses that can be made of it. Can we imagine, for instance, that in a short time organic waste like hair, nails and blood will be used to make more sustainable and efficient objects? Hair, nails and blood are just three examples of “taboo materials”, as the scientist Robert D. Thompson calls them. This workshop will provide participants with tools to take a radical new look at “forbidden” materials and discover that they can be

used for unimaginable purposes. In the field of design – as in Surrealist art – what might at first appear to be mere provocation may turn out to be pure genius!

- **CUISINE AND DESIGN: BEYOND THE SENSES**
BY ANDREU CARULLA AND JORDI ROCA
Tuesday, May 12 / 7 pm

Salvador Dalí confessed that his secret vocation as a child was to be a cook. In his view, cooking and painting are two wholly compatible forms of creation, and in 1973 he demonstrated this by publishing the recipe book *Les Dîners de Gala*. This cookbook is an ode to the eroticism of good food in which Dalí illustrates his conviction that it is possible to make your fantasies come true. The long collaboration between the industrial designer Andreu Carulla and the restaurant El Celler de Can Roca is based on an “augmented sensory experience” which, in some way, seems to partake of this “suprarealist” nature. What role do imagination, fantasy, sensuality or the unconscious play in the relationship between cuisine and design? At this event, Andreu Carulla and Jordi Roca will talk about the affinities and coincidences between their creative practices and the surprising results that they generate.

CONCERTS AND SHOWS

HIDROGENESSE PRESENTS *JOTERÍAS BOBAS*

Friday, March 6 / 8 pm

In a parallel activity to the exhibition *Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design*, the duo that form Hidrogenesse will discuss how they wrote the songs and what lies behind a project that embodies a critique of over-seriousness and therapy against disillusionment.

VISITS TO THE EXHIBITION

VERMOUTH AND DEBATE

April 5, 17, 19; and May 3, 31 / 12 noon

An easy-going tour focusing on the themes or aspects that most interest the group, guided by a mediator. At the end, the participants can share their impressions in a gentle chat over a glass of vermouth or similar.

COFFEE-DEBATE FOR GROUPS

CaixaForum offers easy-going tours for cultural organisations, associations, collectives and groups of friends, enabling them to explore in greater depth the themes or aspects that most interest them, with the guidance of a mediator. At the end, the participants can share their impressions of the show in a participatory discussion over a cup of coffee or similar. Times by arrangement, within CaixaForum opening hours.

GUIDED TOURS

These tours are led by a mediator who, after consulting with the visitors, will present the key themes of the exhibition, placing them in context and resolving any doubts or questions that may arise. See website for times and availability.

GUIDED TOURS FOR GROUPS

CaixaForum offers guided tours of the temporary exhibitions to cultural organisations, associations, collectives and groups of friends. With a maximum of 30 people per group, these tours last one hour and are available in various languages. Times by arrangement, within CaixaForum opening hours.

FAMiLiA**FAMILY AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE****GUIDED TOURS FOR FAMILIES: DESIRE + DREAM = DESIGN**

Recommended for families with children from 8 years of age

Sunday, March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; April 5, 12, 19, 26; May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; and June 7

A tour designed especially for children, including a visit to the show and participatory activities within the exhibition space. Led by a mediator, the activity focuses on a central theme of the exhibition which is developed around the works in the show.

GOOD DAY. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE?

Recommended for families with children from 8 years of age

Monday to Sunday, including holidays, from 10 am to 8 pm

Participants at this workshop are invited to work in a shop making and selling Surrealist furniture. They will design and make furniture as ordered by CaixaForum’s distinguished clientele – exclusive, custom-made items that give shape to the dreams and wishes of these amazing people. The workshop occupies a space in the exhibition area designed principally for families. Here, visitors can take part in activities that invite them to freely and creatively explore some of the aspects of the exhibition.

Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design, 1924-2020

From 28 February to 7 June 2020

CaixaForum Barcelona

Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8
08038 Barcelona
Tel. 934 768 600

"la Caixa" Information Service

Tel. 900 223 040
Monday to Sunday, from 9 am to
8 pm

Times

Monday to Sunday, from 10 am to
8 pm

Ticket sales

CaixaForum ticket offices and
www.CaixaForum.es

"la Caixa" Communication Department

Josué García: 934 046 151 / 638 146 330 / jgarcial@fundaciolacaixa.org

Cristina Font: 934 046 056 / 608 582 301 / cristina.font@fundaciolacaixa.org

Press Room: <http://prensa.lacaixa.es/obrasocial>

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