

WHITNEY

Press Release

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THE WHITNEY PRESENTS *REAL/SURREAL*, EXPLORING TWO OF THE STRONGEST CURRENTS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN ART

October 6, 2011-February 12, 2012



George Tooker, 1920 – 2011, *The Subway*, 1950. Egg tempera on composition board, Sight: 18 1/8 x 36 1/8 in. (46.04 x 91.76 cm), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Juliana Force Purchase Award 50.23, Photography by Sheldon Collins

NEW YORK, October 5, 2011 -- The permeable boundary between the real and the imagined is the subject of *Real/Surreal*, opening this fall at the Whitney Museum of American Art. A close look at the interconnection between two of the strongest currents in twentieth-century American art, the exhibition includes eighty paintings, drawings, photographs, and prints made in the years

before, during, and immediately after the Second World War by such artists as Paul Cadmus, Federico Castellón, Ralston Crawford, Mabel Dwight, Jared French, Louis Guglielmi, Edward Hopper, Man Ray, Kay Sage, George Tooker, Grant Wood, and Andrew Wyeth. Organized by Whitney curator Carter Foster, it opens on October 6.

An international movement in art and literature, Surrealism originated in Europe in the 1920s. Its practitioners tapped the subconscious mind to create fantastic, non-rational worlds. While some explored abstraction and used the subconscious to directly influence the formal structure of their work, others developed imagery with strong roots in traditional painting. This vein of Surrealism flourished most famously in the work of Salvador Dalí and René Magritte, and influenced a host of artists in the United States. As the movement spread internationally and some of the major figures moved to this country in the upheavals of the War, its ideas became more diffuse and permeated both art and popular culture.

This exhibition, the second in a series of shows reexamining the Museum's collection chronologically from its earliest days to the present, focuses on the tension and overlap between realism and Surrealism. Although the term "realism" has many facets, a basic connection to the observable world underlies all of them; the subversion of reality through the imagination and the subconscious lies at the heart of Surrealism. Surrealism was a liberating force which allowed for all manner of fantastic, unreal imagery, but it also greatly influenced how artists perceived and represented reality. Those who absorbed its ideas learned to invest objects and spaces with symbolic power, making them representative of psychic states, moods, and subconscious impulses. They favored narrative ambiguity over explicitness, intentionally allowing viewers to project their own subjectivity onto the work, so that the viewer's imagination, and the artist's, could intertwine.

Yet there are convergences in these different and even oppositional approaches to experience, and they encourage new ways of looking at the art of the twenties, thirties, and forties in America. For example, Edward Hopper, the artist most closely identified with the Whitney, is a painter whose own subjectivity and imagination are integral to his work. Many artists who developed imagery based on new and very specific, concrete conditions of industrial America were essentially interested in artificial worlds and presented these as distillations of reality. Even

totally abstract painters such as Yves Tanguy depended on techniques developed from traditional realist art to render other worlds. By willfully distorting such techniques, Helen Lundeborg and Mabel Dwight could quietly undercut our sense of stability, while showing us recognizable and even mundane objects and settings.

Most of the artists on view were academically trained and had a full command of traditional painting and drawing techniques. Those directly connected to European Surrealism or strongly influenced by it used these techniques to subvert and alter the observable world. Harder to categorize are those whose work has certain qualities in common with Surrealism but who tinkered subtly with reality rather than dramatically changing it to expressive ends. Like the Surrealists, their strategies make the familiar unfamiliar, unsettling, or uncanny, and often involve manipulating the tools of representational art. Some, for example, distort spatial perspective by compressing or exaggerating it. They may crop or fragment what they depict, create strange juxtapositions of objects, or unusual shifts in scale; they may distill or accentuate normal qualities in their surroundings—light, shadow, materials, textures—so that these appear abnormal or weird.

Sigmund Freud, whose theories were seminal for Surrealism, described how the uncanny happens when “the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced,” a fitting description of much of the work in this exhibition.

Exhibition Support

Ongoing support for the permanent collection and major support for *Real/Surreal* is provided by Bank of America.



Additional support for *Real/Surreal* is provided by the Selz Foundation.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world’s leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum’s signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of

contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground will be broken on the new building in May 2011, and it is projected to open to the public in 2015.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Xavier Cha: Body Drama	Through October 9, 2011
Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World	Through October 16, 2011
David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy	October 6, 2011–January 8, 2012
Real/Surreal	October 6, 2011–February 12, 2012
Three Landscapes: A Film Installation by Roy Lichtenstein	October 6, 2011–February 12, 2012
Aleksandra Mir: The Seduction of Galileo Galilei	October 20, 2011–February 19, 2012
Sherrie Levine: Mayhem	November 10, 2011–January 29, 2012
Singular Visions	Through April 2012
Whitney Biennial	March 1–May 27, 2012
Designing the Whitney of the Future	On Continuous View

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only: \$6. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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