

But Live Here? No Thanks: Surrealism + Anti-Fascism

October 15, 2024 – March 2, 2025

“The human soul is international.”

(Bulletin international du surréalisme [Mezinárodní Buletin Surrealismu], Prague, April 1935)

“We know how things stand here in Martinique. [...] Out of the powerful bombs and other weaponry of war the modern world has placed at our disposal, our boldness has chosen Surrealism, which in our times offers the surest chance of success.”

(Suzanne Césaire, “1943: Surréalisme et nous,” Tropiques, no. 8–9, 1943)

Surrealism was a political movement of international reach and internationalist convictions. Surrealists vocally denounced European colonial policies, they organized to resist fascist movements, fought in the Spanish Civil War, called on Wehrmacht soldiers to commit sabotage, were detained in camps and persecuted, escaped Europe, died in war. They wrote poetry, honed the deconstruction of an ostensibly rational language in an ostensibly rational world, they worked on paintings and collective drawings, they took photographs, made collages, and organized exhibitions.

The fascist governments and occupation regimes in various countries in Europe and around the world as well as the World Wars and colonial wars politicized Surrealism and forced the lives of its protagonists into unforeseeable trajectories. At once, these developments resulted in surprising encounters and international movements of solidarity connecting Prague to Coyoacán in Mexico City, Cairo to Republican Spain, Marseille to Fort-de-France in Martinique. Then as now, Surrealist thinking and action was taking place in several places at once; instead of a didactic and linear narrative; accordingly the exhibition will be structured as a constellation of episodes, arranged akin to a map.

The objective is to make Surrealism visible as the combative, internationally networked, and highly politicized movement that many of its exponents considered it to be, while rejecting a functional or illustrative understanding of art. In analyzing and illustrating its political self-conception, we will be guided by an idea that was central to Surrealism: anti-fascism.

Not least due to the non-instrumental relationship between art and politics that Surrealism favors, it has been sought out by different political movements: as a stance and method for emancipatory causes, it was revisited by the Black Civil Rights Movement, the 1968 protestors, and representatives of Pan-Africanism. The exhibition at the Lenbachhaus is meant to consolidate a series of attempts to revise a Surrealist canon that is still narrowly defined and politically inconsequential to answer the question: What is Surrealism?

Curated by Stephanie Weber, Adrian Djukić, Karin Althaus

With generous support of Förderverein Lenbachhaus e.V.

ARTE is media partner of the exhibition.

Preliminary list of artists

Manuel Álvarez Bravo

Lola Álvarez Bravo

Art & Liberté

Georges Bataille

Hans Bellmer

Victor Brauner

André Breton

Claude Cahun und Marcel Moore

Leonora Carrington

Aimé Césaire

Suzanne Césaire

Óscar Domínguez

Robert Desnos

Paul Éluard

Max Ernst

Esteban Francés

Eugenio Granell

Groupe Octobre

John Heartfield

Jindřich Heisler

Jacques Hérold (b. Herold Blumer)

Ted Joans

Ida Kar

Germaine Krull

Wifredo Lam

Dyno Lowenstein

René Magritte

Dora Maar

La Main à Plume

Maruja Mallo

André Masson

Roberto Matta

China Miéville

Lee Miller

Joan Miró

Wolfgang Paalen

Pablo Picasso

Jacques Prévert

Jindřich Štyrský

Yves Tanguy

Karel Teige

Toyen

Remedios Varo

Wols