

## Exhibition Guide



**Histoire de ne pas rire.  
Surrealism in Belgium**

**21 Feb. » → 16 June '24 at Bozar**



**BNP PARIBAS**  
**FORTIS**

#WeLoveCulture

As a loyal partner of Bozar for more than 20 years, BNP Paribas Fortis is proud to support the exhibition *Histoire de ne pas rire. Surrealism in Belgium*.

It offers a unique opportunity to celebrate the audacity and openness that are hallmarks of our country.

The Belgian Surrealists dared to combine objects, landscapes and characters that were, on the face of it, impossible.

But impossible is not Belgian! By transcending convention, they created new worlds. René Magritte said: "To be surreal is to banish the déjà vu from your mind and seek out the never-before-seen."

At BNP Paribas Fortis, we love audacity and creativity. And we're ready for your world, especially if it's out of the ordinary, "never-before-seen."

Michael Anseeuw, CEO BNP Paribas Fortis

2024 marks the centenary of Surrealism, born with the publication in November 1924 of André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*. In Belgium, the first manifestations of Surrealist activity appeared simultaneously and continued over nearly sixty years.

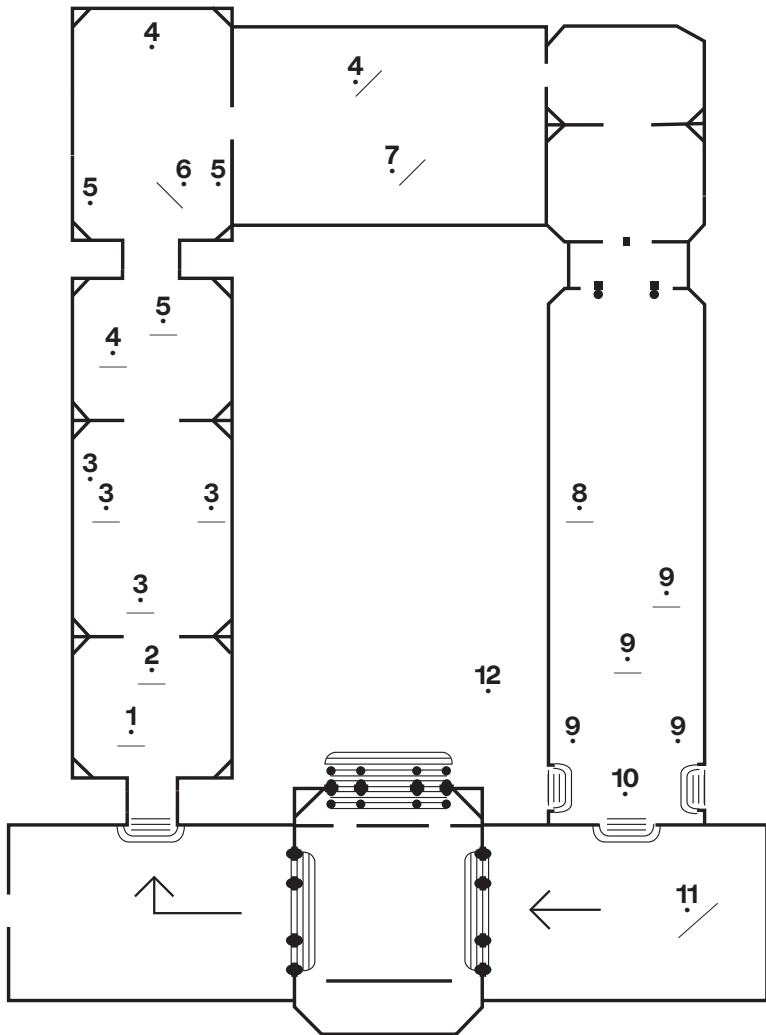
This exceptional longevity for an avant-garde movement testifies to the desire of its prime movers to go beyond purely aesthetic concerns. Instead, they sought a transformation of the world through language and representation, a transformation that was inseparable from their political commitment to the Communist Party.

Another feature typifying Surrealism in Belgium was the use of humour as a subversive strategy. It is evoked by the exhibition's title *Histoire de ne pas rire*, which is also the title of the collected theoretical writings of Paul Nougé.

A secretive personality, preferring anonymity where possible, the poet Nougé (1895-1967) was the 'brains' of the Brussels Surrealist group. From 1924, he gathered around him writers and visual artists like Camille Goemans, Marcel Lecomte, Louis Scutenaire, E.L.T. Mesens and, of course, René Magritte.

Nougé provides the common thread of this exhibition, his words guiding us through a history spanning more than three generations.

Xavier Canonne  
Curator of the exhibition



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# 1. Disorienting Order

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Within the Ravenstein circuit of galleries designed by architect Victor Horta, the new scenography by URA Yves Malysse Kiki Verbeeck provides a dualistic support for the artworks in the exhibition. Ordered but with variety, it works systematically yet disrupts the spaces. It physically distances itself from the surrounding architecture, but paradoxically also occupies it. Through the succession of exhibition galleries, you are invited to wander randomly around the elements, tracing an instinctive slalom. Due to the multiplicity of elements, predefined visual links alternate with fortuitous discoveries, offering each of you a unique experience.

URA were inspired in their design by the Surrealists' desire to disorientate and disturb established patterns of thinking and seeing. They also considered Magritte's exploration of the interaction and tension between words and images and proposed to the curators to present all the artworks on the temporary walls, using the permanent, surrounding walls only for text.

The scenography is constructed as a kit of wooden walls and panels. In times of conscious use of materials, these elements will be integrally dismantled after the exhibition, and incorporated into one or more construction projects in the Brussels Region.

## 2. Manifestos and magazines

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Both manifestos and magazines were essential communication tools for avant-garde artists at the beginning of the 20th century. In many cases, they worked collectively on concepts and theories that they then disseminated through manifestos, that is: official declarations that describe and disseminate a movement's goals, principles, and philosophy.

Just like the manifestos, the numerous magazines served as platforms for the dissemination of Surrealist thought. The Surrealists published not only reproductions of artworks, but also poetry, prose and theoretical texts, thereby making them accessible to a wider audience.

Unlike the *Manifesto of Surrealism* that André Breton published in France in 1924, in Belgium there was no manifesto attesting to the beginning of the movement. However, there are the pamphlets *Correspondance*, 1924 and the magazines *Oesophage*, 1925 and *Marie*, 1926 which launched the movement in this country.

In their manifestos, the Surrealists called for artistic and social revolution, as in the 1925 publication *La Révolution d'abord et toujours*. They took artistic positions, as in the tract *Avis*, 1928 against Giorgio de Chirico's new style of painting. They defended political positions as in *La Poésie transfigurée*, 1932. And they communicated new artistic ideas as in *Le Surréalisme en plein soleil*, 1946. The Belgians also translated humorous ideas into leaflets like *Grande Baisse*, 1962 in which Mariën offered works by Magritte at knock-down prices. The Surrealists continued to communicate through manifestos until the 1960s.

### 3. Words and images

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“It’s important that painting serve something other than painting.  
The titles of the paintings are not explanations,  
and the paintings are not illustrations of the titles.”

René Magritte

During his stay in Paris, Magritte met Spanish painter Joan Miró. The latter was very interested in poetry. Since the first half of the 1920s, he had been introducing words into his paintings, which he named “Tableaux-poèmes” [painting-poems], of which *Smoker’s Head (Tête de fumeur)*, painted in 1924 is an example. This encounter, and perhaps also the fact that he was often surrounded by poets, encouraged Magritte to combine words and images in his paintings. Starting in 1927, he produced his first word-paintings and, a few years later, he collected his ideas in the text “Les Mots et les Images”, 1929.

Magritte created tension between words and images by introducing language as an autonomous entity. The words go against what we see, at times destabilizing the image or even taking on a life of their own in the painting. In *The Tree of Knowledge (L’Arbre de la science)*, 1929 for example, the words “sabre” and “cheval” are autonomous from the image, they challenge our imagination, just like the titles which are not necessarily linked to what is represented. The titles Magritte selected for his works often add an extra layer of meaning and mystery.

The contrast between what we see and what we read raises many questions as to the nature of representation and meaning. Through his unique use of language and image, Magritte created a conceptual painting that challenged ways of seeing, disrupted the conventional meaning of images and contained a philosophical dimension.



The  
inside of your head  
is not this  
GREY- WHITE  
MASS  
they told you about  
it's a  
LANDSCAPE  
of SPRINGS and BRANCHES  
a  
HOUSE of FIRE  
or better  
the  
MIRACULOUS CITY  
which you will be pleased  
to  
INVENT

Paul Nougé, excerpt from *La Publicité transfigurée*

## 4. New media: collage and photomontage

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Collage and photomontage were much appreciated by the Surrealists, as they enabled them to create unusual images full of new meanings. A radically new technique, collage went beyond traditional painting, combining different media and also involving language and chance.

German artist Max Ernst, who started experimenting with this technique in 1919, was one of the pioneers of collage, composing unexpected and often provocative images from fragments of images taken from magazines, books and engravings. His work had a great impact on E.L.T. Mesens, among others, who was one of the first to practice collage in Belgium. Max Servais too experimented with different techniques, combining text and image. His collages are characterized by a critical touch, humour and their subversive character.

In photography, E.L.T. Mesens practised photomontage, inspired by the innovative techniques of American artist Man Ray, who, in his “rayograms”, placed objects directly on photo paper, exposing them without using a camera. Using the same technique, Mesens created the cover of his *Original frontispiece for Deaf-Blind Alphabet (Frontispice original pour Alphabet sourd aveugle)*, 1928. But the most innovative approach in photography was manifested by Raoul Ubac. A pioneer in the field of photomontage, he, like Man Ray, experimented with different techniques such as double exposure, photograms and other techniques, to create new visual effects. We see this in his *Fights of Penthesilea*, 1937–39, in which he creates multiple new images from a single negative.

## 5. The transformative power of poetry

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Many Surrealists were first and foremost writers or poets, particularly in Belgium: Paul Nougé, Marcel Lecomte, Camille Goemans, Louis Scutenaire, Irène Hamoir... In their writings, Nougé and his circle regularly employed the strategy of questioning other writers' literary texts by rewriting them in a critical, systematic manner. Writing with other people's words, in order to change their meaning, became the definition of *Nougéan* subversion.

Nougé was firmly convinced of the transformative power of language and poetry. For example, he defended the radical 1931 poem *Front rouge*, published in the magazine *Littérature de la Révolution mondiale*, in which French writer Louis Aragon calls for the assassination of the régime's leaders. Nougé supported this poem as a provocative gesture, going as far as to express delight that the bourgeoisie felt threatened by poetry.

With the Surrealists, poetry took on another status, no longer just aesthetic, but connected to life itself, and with the power to shake up the established order and change the way we look at reality. In *La Publicité transfigurée*, 1925, Nougé experimented with poetry in the form of commercial advertising slogans in public places. Poetry took the form of slogans, in principle intended to sell, but here, with no commercial intention, condemned to make sense. *Calligram (Calligramme)* 1925 here bears witness to some of these experiments.

When did I see you the famous  
FIRST TIME?  
I no longer see the whole of you  
only your lower lip which was trembling  
the astonishing whiteness of your forehead  
that yellow coat by Poiret  
and the smell of Jiky, this male perfume  
this scent of vanilla

Where was I?  
And on what prey shall  
I now fall?  
On you  
Marthe  
of course.

Give me your hand  
Give me your hand  
We shall move on silent feet  
through my youth  
Don't weep

Paul Nougé, excerpt from  
*Esquisse d'un hymne à Marthe Beauvoisin*

*For what can we use*

a hand,  
a mouth,  
an eye,  
a foot,  
skin,  
man,  
woman,  
a mirror,  
a chair,  
a rope,  
scissors,  
etc.?

It's all about giving a function to beings, to objects, a different use than usual.

Paul Nougé, excerpt from *Subversion des images*

## 6. The Surrealists and music

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“I see André Souris trying to impose on the world a music of which we have no need to be ashamed.”

Paul Nougé

Brussels was an important centre of musical modernism from the late 1920s and into the 1930s. Unlike André Breton, who found music too confusing and favoured painting and poetry for accessing unconscious representations and dreams, the Belgian Surrealists were interested in and inspired by musical expression. “I am a musician” said artist and exhibition organizer E.L.T. Mesens, who wanted to become a composer and was also influenced by composer Éric Satie. His collages often refer to music featuring, for example, shapes of violins or sheet music.

Composer and music theorist André Souris came closer to the Surrealist group after meeting with Paul Nougé in 1925. The former experimented with innovative approaches to musical composition, often emphasizing the relationship between music and poetry. Scutenaire wrote of him: “The most beautiful piece of so-called concrete music I have ever heard is the recital of coffee grinders that Souris gives every morning in his house in the fields of l’Isle-Adam.” Paul Nougé also wrote *Trois chansons pour Souris*, 1927 testifying to the permeability between poetry and music.

In 1929, the Belgian Surrealists organized the *Charleroi Conference*, an interdisciplinary evening with a concert by Souris and an exhibition by Magritte. It was on this occasion that Nougé wrote one of his most important texts on music, or rather, on the impact of music on man: “Music is mystery, music is danger, but above all, music remains possibility. It is not a spectacle received passively, just for the sake of entertainment. On the contrary, it always goes beyond the scope of listening to create new passions in listeners, able to change the direction of their lives.”

## 7. Bewildering objects

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In 1936, the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* was held at the Galerie Ratton in Paris. Organized by André Breton, this exhibition was dedicated in its entirety to Surrealist objects and included works by René Magritte, E.L.T. Mesens and Max Servais from Belgium.

A year later, Magritte created *The Future of Statues (L'Avenir des statues)*, 1937, a death mask of Napoleon decorated with clouds, a painted readymade of sorts. The title was suggested to him by Paul Nougé who, in his eponymous text, describes Magritte as a true pioneer of the Surrealist object. In this text, Nougé develops the concept of the “bewildering object” (l’objet bouleversant), that is, an object which takes the spectator out of their habitual, comfortable perception of reality. The Surrealists above all sought to transform everyday objects by taking them out of their everyday contexts or by associating them with other objects in assemblages. The results can be provocative, poetic or playful, intended to make the viewer see reality differently. Marcel Mariën also applied this strategy in his very first objects from the late 1930s and continued to create numerous objects and assemblages until his death in 1993.

## 8. *L'imitation du cinéma* and Surrealist film in Belgium

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"We find in the film *L'imitation du cinéma* various innovations, as well as a trade in crosses sold by weight, silver crosses which end up in a blind man's begging bowl."

Marcel Mariën

Marcel Mariën made his first film in 16 mm in 1959. This was *L'imitation du cinéma* (The Imitation of Cinema), an absurd and blasphemous story of a young man who wants to resemble Christ and be crucified. In 1960, its first screening at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels immediately caused a scandal. The film was censored and distributed illegally in France.

It is one of the only films in Belgium considered to be truly Surrealist. The Surrealists made few films, with only Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (An Andalusian Dog), 1929 and *L'Âge d'or* (The Golden Age), 1930 being explicitly described as Surrealist by André Breton. In Belgium, however, Surrealism undeniably influenced several short films from the interwar period. Henri Storck, in collaboration with Félix Labisse, directed the experimental short film *Pour vos beaux yeux* (For your beautiful eyes), 1929, which tells the story of a young man who buys a glass eye and sends it by post. Other echoes of Surrealism are found in *La Perle* (The Pearl), 1929 by Henri d'Ursel and Georges Hugnet and *Monsieur Fantômas*, 1937 by Ernst Moerman. In this film, the masked Fantômas character experiences a series of adventures in search of his beloved Elvira. Along the way, he commits crimes and attacks morality. Magritte was fascinated by this evil hero/anti-hero, whom he went on to portray in several works.

Watch at home!



*L'imitation du cinéma*, Marcel Mariën, 1959, 36'

Offered to you by Bozar and Avila, a Brussels based, filmmaker driven distributor and VOD-platform focussing on Belgian cinema.

# Avila

[www.avilafilm.be](http://www.avilafilm.be)



## 9. The Experience Continues

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In France, the end of Surrealism was officially declared in 1969. In Belgium, however, the movement continued after the deaths of René Magritte and Paul Nougé in 1967.

The sixties saw the birth of a new group in Brussels, constituting the third generation of Surrealism which perpetuated the legacy of Nougé until the beginning of the 2000s. Led by Tom Gutt, the group opposed the non-figurative Surrealist trend embodied by Jacques Lacomblez's magazine *Edda*.

In 1963, *Vendonah* appeared, a monthly sheet published by Gutt and Jean Wallenborn, in a format reminiscent of *Correspondance* and with regular references to the work of Nougé. In February 1964, the brochure *Vous voyez avec votre nombril* (You see with your navel) marked the rebirth of a "Surrealist group in Belgium". In 1972, Gutt founded the magazine *Le Vocatif* along with the gallery La Marée in 1974. There he presented and published the works of a new group of artists, including Roger Van de Wouwer, André Stas, Claude Galand and Gilles Brenta.

Back from Maoist China, Marcel Mariën had his first personal exhibition in 1967 and relaunched the publishing activity of the *Lèvres nues* (Bare Lips).

In this way, as the title of the 1966 publication of Paul Nougé's poetic work announced, *L'Expérience continue* (The Experience Continues).

## 10. Epilogue

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It was the Surrealists' ambition to change not only aesthetics but to alter society and our view of it. In Belgium, we can say that they succeeded. With its subversion of language and image, with its sense of humour, Surrealism remains to this day an important source of inspiration for many artists in this country. It grew beyond an art historical movement into a fundamental characteristic of Belgian culture.

## 11. Jelena Vanoverbeek

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### **VIOLINS**

Invited by Bozar to present a work in dialogue with the historical exhibition, *Histoire de ne pas rire. Surrealism in Belgium*, Jelena Vanoverbeek (1990, Leuven) has created a new installation: *VIOLINS*.

Like that of the Surrealists, Vanoverbeek's work takes many forms: from printed matter and books to film and installations. Language often plays a central role and she is interested – as were many Surrealists – in the subversive and performative potential of words, in the ambiguity of language and its pretense at direct communication.

*Violins* is a text-based video, in which there is a disjunction between what we read and what we hear. The voiceover is taken from the introductory speech of a 1965 sexploitation film. The words that appear on the screen are Vanoverbeek's subjective and subtle transformation of this speech. Relying on the homophonous qualities of the spoken text, she creates a surrogate transcript, based on associations and contradictions. The title, pronounced "violins" but originally meaning "violence," sets the tone and establishes the rules of her subversion. The accumulated layers of meaning compete for our attention: the concurrent use of visual text, audio and fast edits work against the logic of how we usually consume or process language. This results in unexpected associations that challenge the sexual and sexist fantasies imposed on the female persona in the original film and – by extension – by the social mores of the 1960s.

## 12. *Ceci n'est pas une exposition*

### An Augmented Reality Exhibition

**Featuring: Annabelle Binnerts, Valérie Mréjen, Laure Prouvost, Ghita Skali & Salim Bayri**

*Ceci n'est pas une exposition* is an augmented reality (AR) project that extends some of the ideas explored in the concurrent exhibition at Bozar; *Histoire de ne pas rire. Surrealism in Belgium*. Its title plays with the sentence 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' from Magritte's seminal painting *The Treachery of Images (La Trahison des Images)*, 1929. A key work of Surrealism, it uses the juxtaposition of text and image to shake up the conventions of representation.

Writing and distributing texts in the form of tracts and manifestos were essential aspects of Belgian Surrealism, as were aphorisms, poetry and experiments in rewriting existing texts by other authors in order to change their meaning. Bozar has invited five contemporary artists to explore the legacy of surrealist language today, not through printed words, but through digital words. Based in Belgium, France and the Netherlands, the invited artists all work with language as a central element of their practice. However, with the exception of one, this is the first time they have explored augmented reality.

Text-based works of art can be viewed in and around Bozar using the BozAR Surrealism application. This exhibition opens a portal to another world, one that goes beyond the physical limits of the exhibition space and the limits of reality (for example defying gravity). Augmented reality can challenge our perception and transform the urban landscape into an unexpected canvas for artistic expression. The five artists have seized this opportunity, imbuing the space with interventions that are subversive, playful, poignant or poetic, in the spirit of surrealism, but with a clear focus on the present.



Scan the QR code to download the app and start your surreal adventure! The map will guide you through the works of art. The first work is right behind you!



Do you need Wi-Fi?  
Scan this QR code to join the Free-Bozar-Wi-Fi network.

This project is part of the Digital Bozar project, funded by the European Union –NextGenerationEU.

Ready to go off the beaten track and decipher the riddles? BNP Paribas Fortis is thrilled to support this new exhibition format in Augmented Reality.

## More activities around surrealism

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### Tours & Special evenings

**20 Mar:'24** Literary nocturne: Surrealism

**28 Mar:'24** Bozar all over the P(a)lace

**13 Apr:'24** Slow Art Tour

Lunch Tours on Friday

Weekend Tours on Saturday

Guided tours in sign languages (LSFB + VGT)

Interactive tours for schools and organisations

### With Kids & Teens

**16 »→ 17 Mar:'24** Family Weekend

**13 Apr:'24** Slow Art Tour

We also offer a tailored visitor's guide for children, filled with tips and tricks. Stay tuned to our website for the most updated list of activities designed for the little ones!

A Family Guide aimed at children and accompanying adults is also available.

### Concerts & Films

**27 Jan:'24** *Return to Reason* – Man Ray

**26 Feb:'24** *Histoires de détective* – Charles de Keukeleire, accompanied on piano by Seppe Gebreudt

**19 May'24** 'Cine-concert: *Un chien andalou & L'âge d'or* with Brussels Philharmonic

More info : [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## IMAGINE! 100 Years of International Surrealism

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Discover at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium,  
parallel to the exhibition at Bozar:

## Catalogue

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Under direction of Xavier Canonne

Texts by Patricia Allmer, Paul Aron, Xavier Canonne, Kurt De Boodt,  
Virginie Devillez, Philippe Dewolf, Genevieve Michel, An Paenhuysen,  
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## Histoire de ne pas rire. Surrealism in Belgium

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all Bozar staff members, art handlers,  
technicians, guides & hosts

## Exhibition Guide

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## Bozar

In the context of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union



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des Beaux-Arts  
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Cover: Jane Graverol, *The New Melancholy*, 1956, Belfius Art Collection.

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Literary intervention:  
Five writers respond  
to Surrealist art



**A skin of slime**





## **A skin of slime**

### **Writers respond to Surrealist art**

Bozar invited five contemporary writers to draw inspiration from surrealist art. They wrote a poem or short prose piece related to an artwork from the exhibition *Histoire de ne pas rire*. These texts not only fuel our imagination but also prompt us to perceive the dream world of the surrealists in a different light. The cross-pollination between literature and visual art is indeed one of the focal points of the surrealists.

On March 20, the five writers will also be featured guests during a literary nocturne within the exhibition. They will guide the audience through their favorite painting, reciting their texts. This presents a unique opportunity to visit the exhibition in a serene atmosphere, accompanied by the authors.

Sulaiman Addonia	_____	3
Elke de Rijcke	_____	5
Astrid Haerens	_____	9
Lisette Lombé	_____	11
Peter Verhelst	_____	13



Marcel Mariën, *The Untraceable*, 1937–2013, Retelet Collection.  
© Marcel Mariën Foundation – Surrealist Activity in Belgium.

# Sulaiman Addonia

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## L'Introuvable

*I'm one-half of an identical twin. The other half died in the womb of my creator's imagination in 1937. 87 years after my birth, I still refer to myself in the plural. I like to be called glasses. But this is lost on my visitors in this museum:*

It's a glass for a Minion.

*(This is the most common observation I hear about me. And today is no different.)*

As a matter of fact, it's for the narrow-minded in our midst.

*(They could just ask what I am instead of speculating.)*

*The theories for my existence become wilder as more visitors stream through the door:*

It is meant as a political allegory to suggest that those who seek refuge in our societies must put this on to see the tiniest of details of our values.

*(This took me by surprise – the stretch of it.)*

It's to help us see reality in a new way.

*(My very creation, though, is the antonym of realism. I will let you in secret: when my maker put me on, he saw his life like a Neruda's moon in the lining of his lover's skin. Reality died for him that day.)*

This glass is needed to rediscover piety.

*(If God exists, it is not his fault.)*

It showcases the spirit of our young generation who chose to see beyond facts, beyond history and seek the comfort of the now.

*(Well, I was made in 1937, but then again, art is timeless.)*

Honey, I wish I could snatch it from the wall and wear it to watch the sunset in your eyes.

*(That's a new one for me. But hey, Love is blind.)*

I think it symbolises that our societies are regressing, and this glass is meant for the cyclops – and haven't we all become cyclops?

*(speak for yourself.)*

Isn't this what Louis Paul Boon wore when he composed *Het Brilletje van Oma* and later noted down the verse, "een leesbrilletje van niks?"

*(Nothingness is the soul of poetry, the kind I inspire.)*

Attention, everyone. The artist created this object to intend it as something to wear when conversing with the unseen, the unfelt, the unheard, the untraceable. This single glass is for writers to see into the minds of their characters, for artists to dive under their canvas, and for dancers to see into the pores of air into which they glide.

*(This guide pretends to be my voice.)*

This is not art. It's a waste of material and a lack of talent and vision by its creator, Monsieur Marcel Mariën.

*(I live imprisoned in a frame hung on a wall of this museum with a tag beneath me that says: "See but don't touch." But some visitors, like this one, touch me with their thoughts:*

L'Introuvable is for The Seers, for those who put it on their penises and strap-ons to see inside the anatomy of their lovers.

*(I am a magnifier of the erotic, the extreme, the beauty and disgust.)*

\*

Ha ha. It's a glass for a Minion.  
*(And so begins another day in my life....)*

Inspired by Marcel Mariën's *L'Introuvable*

## Elke de Rijcke

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### Of Life and the Place of My Poetry

They say / there is a rift in the human soul / which was not constructed to belong / entirely to life. Earth / asks us to deny this rift, a threat (...)  
My soul / shattered with the strain / of trying to belong to earth  
(Louise Glück, *Averno*)

indeed I feel the earth in my soul day in, day out.  
and almost daily: the daggers  
and how I try to dodge them  
at times: the caste of clowns who ideologize  
at others: the trendy she-dogs with canines drooling.  
the territory of this little world reserved for private use  
i can't quite get my bearings  
and must open the doors wide, too rare the perfumed alleyways  
at 58, an arsenal of bruises amid my soul,  
in my body and through my brain  
that I've bounced back so often is little short of miraculous  
because I'm a Weeble-woman  
who rights herself until she's fit to drop  
the vocation of living is a super sport  
that requires hardening like a golf ball, and slipping away  
shifting the terrain  
as soon as you can to seek a reprieve  
like you, Giorgio  
I exit the battlefield to enter the cosmic chamber,  
just as you leave one room to enter the next one  
with this finesse that delights me:  
I press my index and middle fingers on my eyelids until everything goes  
black,  
a black that swarms with grey tending to flashes of yellow  
where ever more luminous drawings pierce the vista  
and a world emerges  
coming to light beyond my eyelids

it's there that I'm reborn  
through my eyes, in the deserted, radiant earth rising high to the horizon  
I am free and happy  
the plain is vast and I can see  
(before looking wasn't seeing)  
alive to the green sky,  
to the bursts  
I am forever at two o'clock, I am the day, the night  
in the empty, unescapably empty plain  
the surroundings are highly real but inside out like a glove  
I breathe the hot air  
it's a Mediterranean  
like in my genes  
arches and their shadows rise up, sloping black fields  
and even if it's not how things look I'm in the throes of the battle,  
but on the other side  
riveted to the sky, detached  
alone in the light  
immersed in the world  
multiple Is, fluctuating under the sun as the train passes in the distance  
the plain has my eyes  
the arches are my bodies  
white twin, black twin in the hot night at the fountain  
whose spray lands in the dark liquid  
like a starry constellation.  
like the fountain I arise  
to delve into my poet's eye  
and be reborn a starry constellation in the middle of a page

Translated from French by John Lambert  
Inspired by Giorgio de Chirico's *The Pleasures of the Poet*



Giorgio de Chirico, *The Delights of the Poet*, 1912. Esther Grether Family Collection.  
© SABAM 2024 ©Robert Bayer, Bildpunkt AG, CH-4142 Münchenstein





Jane Graverol, *The Eternal Return* (L'Éternel retour), 1955. Charleroi, collection of The Province of Hainaut - Deposit in the BPS22

## Astrid Haerens

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### **l'éternel retour**

driving through the night  
calling the motorway chest breathing  
calling the motorway a maelstrom, a morass

seeing yourself behind a reflective windscreen  
seeing smoke billowing up from under a bonnet  
seeing yourself as a silhouette  
falling silent

speaking in the theatre in runes, in the wings a sea roars and tugs  
on your skull, plexus, bones, hinges, the pubis

seems to laugh  
not needing eyes  
no sun is rising now

hand on your heart  
nails like claws, like pinions

under the motorway the sand  
stirs desire, mud shrimps, urchins

between the rampant wireweed, ragworms supply oxygen  
with siphons, a continuous sighing

wondering  
do they still sometimes dream of me at sea

wondering  
must I one day leave this burning car

hand on your crotch

feeling flesh everywhere except your own frame  
drying the seaweed grinding it to powder  
rubbing it into sockets, warming them up, making them glow

holding your breath

calling the well-fed sea a burning torch  
calling the well-fed sea a dormitory  
calling the well-fed sea an eighteen-armed goddess  
calling the sea toothless longing

staying where you are in the car, leaning back, listening

Translated from Dutch by David Colmer  
Inspired by Jane Graverol's *L'Éternel retour*



Paul Nougé, *The Juggler*, from the series *Subversion of images*, 1929–1930, Photography, Collection Archives & Museum of Literature (AML), Brussels. ©Rights reserved.

## Lisette Lombé

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### Wholesome fatigue

Beware, you who enter this room. Remember that there are not, on the one hand, those who choose, move and desire freely, and on the other those with bound wrists and fettered minds. You are part of this room. So am I. You could be this woman. So could I.

Don't be daunted by the lack of bright colours. Concentrate rather on the contrasts between the shades. See this whitish tablecloth and this palish neck. See this head of dark hair and this dress which is a little blacker in the picture than in reality. See the shadows, the dividing lines, the strands of hair, the creases and the folds. See the gleam of the nose, of the back of the chair and of the side of the hand.

If you hear no sounds, don't be suspicious. Certain rooms are like silent films. If you hear teeth grinding, floorboards creaking or your favourite song being hummed by this woman who's bent in two, tell yourself simply that this space is occupied by the living, and let this body with its curious pose touch your own.

Don't seek to understand, here, why some doors are closed while others are open. Don't ask if it's a good or a bad sign that this one is closed. And don't trouble yourself with what's behind it. You shouldn't ask questions you don't want to know the answer to. Let's say that in this room, this door will forever remain a mystery.

Let's maintain appearances, because no one escapes convention. Let's keep the wood for its splinters. Let's keep this material, which has so much to tell about people's origins. And let's keep the flowers on the wallpaper for the scents of our youth. A petal for the first kiss. A petal for the first orgasm. A petal for each small pleasure savoured on the sheen of immortality.

And now we'll have to talk about these balls. The word *orbs* would be more ethereal, less trivial than *balls*, but there's no getting around it, these are balls arranged on the table, and not orbs. Venus balls. Uncovered. For all to see. An everyday activity among everyday activities. Neck. Tablecloth. Creases. Extending an inner caress. Gone is discretion.

The fatigue of the pleasure-seeker has replaced the fatigue of the juggler. The fatigue of extasy has replaced the fatigue of mind-numbing work. The fatigue of the storm has replaced the fatigue of age. The fatigue of damp fabric has replaced the dryness of guilt.

What more to add when everything has been laid out with utmost candour?

Translated from French by John Lambert  
Inspired by Paul Nougé's *Subversion des images*



René Magritte, *The Secret Double*, 1927, Paris, Centre Pompidou –  
Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle, inv. AM 1980-2.  
© SABAM 2024. © Photothèque R. Magritte / ADAGP Images, Paris, 2024

## Peter Verhelst

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### D.S. 26-11-23

Standing at the breakfast table, bent slightly forwards, leaning  
on your hands – a rudimentary form of contemplation.

Your body is waiting for the thought to wake up, get out of bed  
and come downstairs to the kitchen where you

are standing at the breakfast table and your face falls off  
and lands on the table (the sound of something wet on wood).

Your thought can hear the gusting of the wind.

Panting. Groaning. The gulls screeching like children. One tree  
is still standing, branches stripped bare –  
around the trunk a shrine will be raised for people  
to hang ribbons with memories, names, photos, hopes.

Your thought can enter the hole in your head. Ankle-deep in sludge,  
head back in the briny wind – tumbleweed whooshing past.

A tipped boat with a skin of slime and bubbles.

Something rises from the ooze, dragging itself to a house without feeling.

A room with pink wallpaper. A chair lying on the floor. Kitchen.

You're standing at the breakfast table and your face falls off.  
It makes a run for it. Like a hand, sideways, like a crab,

the clicking of claws, keratinised fingertips on the table,  
a jaw that bites, closes, opens, moving like that, biting,

snapping shut, opening wide, to get away as fast as it can.

Translated from Dutch by David Colmer  
Inspired by René Magritte's *Le Double secret*

## About the authors

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**Sulaiman Addonia** is an Eritrean–Ethiopian–British writer living in Brussels. His first novel, *As a Result of Love* was translated into more than 20 languages. It was followed by *Silence is my mother tongue* (2021), which was nominated for numerous awards. His latest novel *The Seer* was published in 2023. Addonia is the founder of a writing academy for refugees and of the literary Asmara–Addis festival. He is a columnist for *De Standaard*.  
Photo © Alexander Meeus



**Elke de Rijcke** is a bilingual poet (French–Dutch), essayist and translator. Her poetic work explores the connections between body, mind and soul in a dystopian landscape. In each of her books, she engages in a dialogue with art and science. She recently published *Et puis, soudain, il carillonne* (Selected, 2005–2021) (2023), an anthology of her five existing books of poetry. She translated the Dutch poet Kees Ouwens into French and published on the French poet André du Bouchet.  
Photo © DR–GR



**Astrid Haerens** lives and works in Brussels. She published the novel *Stadspanthers* (2017) and the poetry collection *Oerhert* (2022). In *Oerhert* Haerens explores the effects of oppressive systems and transgressive behaviour on female bodies. *Oerhert* won the Poetry Debut Prize 2023 and was nominated for the Herman de Coninck Prize and the C. Buddingh' Prize 2023.  
Photo © DR–GR



**Lisette Lombé** has published a short novel, *Venus Poetica*, and a poetry collection, *Brûler brûler brûler* (Grenades/ RTBF Prize). She is also co-founder of the Collectif L-SLAM and will be Belgium's next national poet in 2024. Her latest novel, *Eunice*, has been nominated for the Prix Médicis 2023.

Photo © Njaheut Gilles Valler



**Peter Verhelst** is a Flemish poet, novelist and director. He made his debut in 1987 and has since published dozens of books, for which he received numerous awards. His work has been translated into 14 languages. His most recent publication is the poetry collection *ZABRISKIE* (2023). Verhelst regularly collaborates with visual artists and previously wrote poetry for Bozar with Gerhard Richter.

Photo © Filip Naudts