

## PREFACE

Although Guillaume Apollinaire invented the word, André Breton provided the most historically significant definition of the noun "surrealism" in 1924. He meant to signify by this word the creative processes he and others were exploring at the time, activities which he defined as the pursuit of "pure, psychic automatism." Surrealism's objective was to express verbally, in writing and by other means, the real process of thought which in Breton's opinion was "thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all moral preoccupations."<sup>1</sup>

André Breton, Max Ernst, Luis Buñuel, Paul Eluard, Salvador Dalí are, perhaps, the most familiar figures in the movement that peaked in the late 30's. It is principally remembered for having supported the production of imagery that accorded with a Freudian view of the unconscious where thought and desire were pure, uninhibited by the censorship of the Super Ego. To fashion this unfettered, often dream-like imagery the Surrealists found useful techniques involving free association, automatic writing, collage and frottage.

During the 30's, Surrealism dominated poetry and painting in Europe and exerted influence upon the work of "virtually every major artist everywhere. . . . Most of the Surrealists took refuge in New York during World War II. . . ." <sup>2</sup> According to Vancouver writer Michael Bullock, "With the outbreak of war and Breton's flight to America Surrealist activity became limited to isolated manifestations and publications in various countries. A partial resurgence of organized activity took place after the war, only to fade again with Breton's death in 1966." However, Bullock observed, the 70's saw "a dramatic revival of Surrealist activity in all artistic fields and in almost every country. . . . accompanied by the formation of new groups and the linking of these groups by international publications and exhibitions and by manifold contacts." He thought that these manifestations would reach a climax of sorts at the "Festival of Surrealism," planned for Spring, 1978.<sup>3</sup>

As early as the late 60's and during the early 70's here, a combined interest in eastern mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs led many British Columbian artists to produce dream-like imagery of a Surrealist nature. The catalogue to the Canadian Westcoast Hermetics exhibition, a show curated by Alvin Balkind at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery (1973), offers an excellent survey of these materials. One of the artists who participated in that show, Ed Varney, is associated with the group of artists and writers who now call themselves the Melmoth Vancouver Group, which is the current locus of Surrealist activities here.<sup>4</sup> In their magazine, *Melmoth*, Michael Bullock has written of their espousal of a shared sensibility:

Members of the . . . Group all adhere to the principles of Surrealism as enunciated in Breton's First and Second Manifestos: essentially the aim of breaking down the barriers between the inner and outer worlds, the world of reality and the world of dream. . . . All the works of the Group, whether verbal or visual, are directed to this end: the attainment of that state of being described as surreality, in which the dichotomies of inner and outer, dream and reality, are resolved in a higher synthesis that subsumes them both.<sup>5</sup>

The group currently includes a melange of artists and writers. They are listed here in the order they appear in John Baturin's photograph, beginning at the left of the top row:

Andrej Somov, Hosea Hirata, Lad. Guderna, Ed Varney & Alexandre Faster; Martin Guderna, Ted Kingan, W. D. McKinley, Michael Bullock & Ron Falcioni; Rose-marie Tremblay and Tannia May.

Recently two others — Grace Fong and Donna Tanchuk — have joined Melmoth Vancouver.





Visiting French scholar José Pierre described the activities of the Westcoast Surrealist Group which preceded but overlaps with Melmoth in a lengthy article entitled "Le Surréalisme et Le Canada."<sup>6</sup> Pierre noted that in addition to these admitted Vancouver Surrealists there were other local contemporary artists like Gathie Falk (*TCR* Issues 24/25) in whose works can be detected qualities akin to surrealist traits.

In the community of artists here there are dozens who consciously or unconsciously continue aspects of Surrealist tradition in their visual or written works. Toni Onley describes his semi-representational landscape as "surreal." Jack Shadbolt uses many collage and painting techniques with the expressed desire of liberating his associative powers. Many of Gathie Falk's works actualize the figments of her imagination that invade her daydreams. Al McWilliams' *Ruminations on a Set of Circumstances* contains a chair with legs licked by flame, a fantasy object a Surrealist would applaud (*TCR* Issue 27).

The visual and literary works, the statements that follow allude to a complex situation that can merely be encapsulated in this issue. Ted Kingan and Ladislav Guderna are Melmoth Vancouver Group members who validly represent the presence of historic Surrealism in B.C. John Baturin, who has contributed to *Melmoth* magazine, is a photographer who sometimes produces works that have strong Surrealist affinities. Neil Dalrymple is a ceramic sculptor who lives in Victoria, B.C. He acknowledges Surrealism as a peripheral influence on his art, but his art does not fit into any major past or current trend. Barrie Jones has been dealing for years with dislocation imagery that is reminiscent of the principle of the unexpected conjunction of everyday objects that is central to Surrealist thought. This fact, however, does not deny Jones' works a place in the Conceptual Art Category.

The poems of Zoran Jungić that ensue are included to remind the reader that Surrealism is also literary. In visualizing the lines of this poetry, we enter into the realm of the fantastic where the borders between what is real and imagined blur.

ANN ROSENBERG

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Herschel B. Chipp, Peter Selz, and Joshua Taylor, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>3</sup> This information is taken from a typescript of Michael Bullock's "Surrealism Then and Now." The exhibition referred to was Surrealism Unlimited, an international show that took place at the Camden Art Centre, London, England, 1978. This exhibit had a Canadian section that included the work of Ted Kingan, Michael Bullock, Robert Davidson and Gregg Simpson. It ran concurrently with another major Surrealist show at the Hayward Gallery in London and in the same year as Other Realities, a survey of Canadian Surrealism produced at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston. The latter exhibition travelled to Canada House, London, England and to *Centre culturel canadien*, Paris, France in Spring 1979.

The generality cited concerning the increase of Surrealist activities around the world also applies to Vancouver. The Move Gallery of North Vancouver hosted Westcoast Surrealist Group shows from 1976 to 1979. In 1980 the Move Gallery relocated to 170 Powell Street and its opening exhibition in Fall 1980 included works by Ted Kingan, David Mayrs, Edwin Varney, Ladislav Guderna and his son Martin, Dave Roberts, Gregg Simpson, Robert Davidson, Frances Thenard and David UU. The Move Gallery is now closed.

<sup>4</sup> In Spring 1982 the Melmoth Group opened its own Melmoth Gallery at #16-1101 Nicola Street, an exhibition space which, unfortunately, Melmoth no longer retains. The participants in its first show were: Michael Bullock, Ronald Falcioni, Ladislav and Martin Guderna, Ted Kingan, Andrej Somov, Frances Thenard, Edwin Varney and Gregg Simpson.

*Melmoth*, the publication, first appeared in England. A different but similar magazine *Melmoth Vancouver* was published here for the first time in 1980. A third Scandinavian *Melmoth* called *Melmoth in Norden* came next. *Melmoth Vancouver* is published at the University of British Columbia's Creative Writing Department. Its editor-in-chief is Hosea Hirata.

This chain of *Melmoth* publications suggests the international contacts of the local Surrealist group. At an informal meeting with Michael Bullock, Ted Kingan, Ladislav and Martin Guderna this August, I was assured of the friendly co-operation that exists among local members and of their contacts with other groups outside this country, notably with: Phases (Paris); Ellebore (Paris); Dunganon (Sweden); Medusa (Iceland). The English Surrealist group is headed by Conroy Maddox from London.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bullock, "The Melmoth Group," *Melmoth Vancouver*, 2, No. 3 (1983), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Centre de la Recherche Scientifique, *Revue et tracts Surréalistes et de l'horizon Surréaliste en France et dans le monde, 1980* (Tours, France: 1980), pp. 24-28.

A copy of this document is retained by the Melmoth Vancouver group. This article formed the basis for the Canadian section of Pierre's book, *L'univers Surréaliste* that will be released in Paris, September 1983. Pierre was present at the opening of the Move Gallery's first Powell Street exhibition.