

## ***MAGRITTE: THE MYSTERY OF THE ORDINARY, 1926–1938***

**NEW EXHIBITION EXPLORES DEVELOPMENT OF ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN  
YET MOST ELUSIVE BODIES OF WORK IN MODERN ART**

**On View at the Menil February 14 – June 1, 2014**

**Rare Early Work from René Magritte's Formative Years**

**Plus, exclusively at the Menil:**

***Memories of a Voyage*, a new installation of the artist's late work,  
&  
A symposium: "Magritte: Beyond the Image, Beneath the Paint"**



**HOUSTON, TX, December 10, 2013**—Iconic in impact yet elusive in meaning and technique, the haunting body of work that René Magritte (1898–1967) created during the years leading up to the Second World War is the subject of the new exhibition ***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938***. Opening at the Menil on February 14, the exhibition is the first to focus exclusively on those breakthrough years, presenting approximately eighty paintings, collages, and objects, along with a selection of photographs, periodicals, and early commercial work.

Organized jointly by the Menil Collection, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Museum of Modern Art (where the exhibition opened in September), ***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926-1938*** incorporates a wealth of material from the holdings of all three museums, as well as significant loans from other public and private collections in the U.S. and abroad. The exhibition provides a rare opportunity to see original paintings, often complex and challenging in their execution, that have become known primarily through reproduction, while gathering the full range of materials needed to trace Magritte's development during years that were crucial both for him and for the course of modern art. By uniting works such as the three *toiles découpées* of 1930—which have not been seen together since 1931—the exhibition makes a vivid case for Magritte as both a modern painter and a Surrealist: two

identities that could be at odds with one another, with the image overshadowing its making and its maker.

“We take special pride in this once-in-a-lifetime presentation,” said Menil Director Josef Helfenstein, one of the exhibition’s three curators. “It is precisely because we have such close ties to Magritte that we appreciate the collective scholarly effort that has resulted in discoveries that change what we thought we knew about his art, just as surely as his art itself unsettles what we think we know about the world.”



Beyond the artist’s native Belgium the largest and most significant collection of Magritte works is held by the Menil (publishers of the artist’s seven-volume catalogue raisonné, edited by David Sylvester), the result of the artist’s friendship with museum founders John and Dominique de Menil.

***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary*** begins in 1926, when Magritte first formed the intention of creating paintings that would, in the artist’s words, make “everyday objects shriek aloud.” It then follows the artist through his Surrealist sojourn in Paris and back to Belgium, concluding in 1938, just before the outbreak of World War II. This was the most inventive and experimental period in Magritte’s prolific career, when the artist developed innovative tactics including displacement, doubling, metamorphosis, juxtapositions, the “misnaming” of objects, and the capturing of visions. Magritte’s is a world that defies gravity, conflates waking and dream states, and honors the mystery of the ordinary.

**Exclusively at the Menil: A pendant exhibition and a symposium:**

**Memories of a Voyage: The Late Work of René Magritte, through July 13**

Concurrently with ***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926-1938***, the Menil will also present a selection of some 15 works including rarely seen preparatory drawings, sculptures, and artifacts from the final two decades of the artist’s life, when he revisited earlier themes and developed immortal images such as the bowler-topped man in *Golconda* and the night-for-day streetscape of *The Dominion of Light*. On view exclusively at the Menil (through July 13), ***Memories of a Voyage: The Late Work of René Magritte*** provides the rare opportunity to experience the complete arc of the artist’s life and the full impact of his work.

**Symposium “Magritte: Beyond the Image, Beneath the Paint”**

**Saturday, March 1, 2014, 10:00a.m.**

A central discovery that emerged during preparations for the exhibition is that Magritte’s painting techniques and his use of materials were often as innovative and paradoxical as the images themselves. To understand Magritte’s art one needs to look beneath its most obvious feature: the clearly identifiable image. To present these findings, the Menil has organized a day-long symposium, “Magritte: Beyond the Image, Beneath the Paint.” On Saturday, March 1, Sarah Whitfield, co-author of the Magritte catalogue raisonné, as well as curators and conservators

from the three organizing museums will delve beneath the surface of some of the 20th century's most extraordinary paintings.

**Every Friday night: An extra 120 minutes to experience Magritte:**

For the first time in its 25-year history, the Menil will extend hours for an exhibition. During the run of ***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary 1926-1938***, the museum and Menil bookstore will stay open – free of charge, as always – until 9:00p.m. Extended hours are made possible through a generous donation from Bank of America.

Bank of America is the national sponsor of ***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary***. “Houston is incredibly fortunate to have a cultural treasure like the Menil Collection,” said Kim Ruth, Texas and Houston Market President, Bank of America. “For several years, we have partnered with them to preserve and present rich, culturally important works of arts because we believe the arts have a singular capability to connect people and communities. The Menil takes this exhibit a step further as it brings the heart of their passion for Magritte to life, which is without a doubt, one of the most exciting collections we’ve been a part of to date.”

***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*** is accompanied by a catalogue of the same title published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and edited by Anne Umland. The 256-page book, which has 194 color images and 58 black-and-white illustrations, features essays by Stephanie D’Alessandro, Michel Draguet and Claude Goormans, Josef Helfenstein with Clare Elliott and Anne Umland, as well as a chronology compiled by Danielle M. Johnson.

***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*** is organized for the Menil Collection by Josef Helfenstein with Assistant Curator Clare Elliott; for The Museum of Modern Art by Anne Umland, the Blanche Hooker Rockefeller Curator of Painting and Sculpture, with Curatorial Assistant Danielle Johnson; and for the Art Institute of Chicago by Stephanie D’Alessandro, the Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art. After its presentation at the Menil, ***Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938*** will be on view at the Art Institute of Chicago from June 29 through October 12, 2014.

**PUBLIC PROGRAMS (full details at [menil.org](http://menil.org) and [mysteryoftheordinary.org](http://mysteryoftheordinary.org)):**

**Surrealism and Magritte – A Musical Preview**

Saturday, February 8, 3:00 p.m.

In anticipation of the exhibition, Da Camera’s Young Artists perform an afternoon concert of music inspired by René Magritte’s paintings.

**Marion Barthelme Lecture with Sarah Whitfield: “Why Magritte Matters”**

Monday, March 3, 2014, 7:00 p.m.

Art historian, critic, and curator Sarah Whitfield, who co-authored the multi-volume catalogue raisonné of René Magritte, discusses the artist’s work.

**Bowler Hats and Tubas. Co-presented by Da Camera of Houston**

Saturday, March 22, 2014, 3:00 p.m.

Da Camera's Young Artists present a unique musical experience that leads visitors through the galleries of the Menil Collection with music inspired by the work of René Magritte.

**Surreal / Real. Co-presented with Aurora Picture Show**

Friday, March 28, 2014, 7:00 p.m.

In cooperation with Aurora Picture Show, a selection of short Surrealist films and "home movies" by René Magritte are screened on the Menil Collection lawn.



*Bank of America is the National Sponsor of Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926-1938.*

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IMAGES: René Magritte, *La condition humaine (The Human Condition)*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 x 1.6 cm (39 3/8 x 31 7/8 x 5/8 in.) National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Collector's Committee. ©Charly Herscovici — ADAGP - ARS, 2013. René Magritte, *La durée poignardée (Time Transfixed)*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 57-7/8 x 39 in. (147 x 99 cm) The Art Institute of Chicago. Joseph Winterbotham Collection. © Charly Herscovici ADAGP - ARS, 2013.