

# The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

1: Cubism

**2.: Surrealism**

3: Abstract Expressionism

## **Surrealism**

**Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. precursors—Charles Meryon, Rodolphe Bresdin,  
Odilon Redon and the Symbolists (Fernand Khnopff)**

**Surrealists (members of the club)—Giorgio De Chirico, Rene  
Magritte, Salvadore Dali, Max Ernst, Juan Miro**



**Late 19<sup>th</sup> c. pre-cursors**

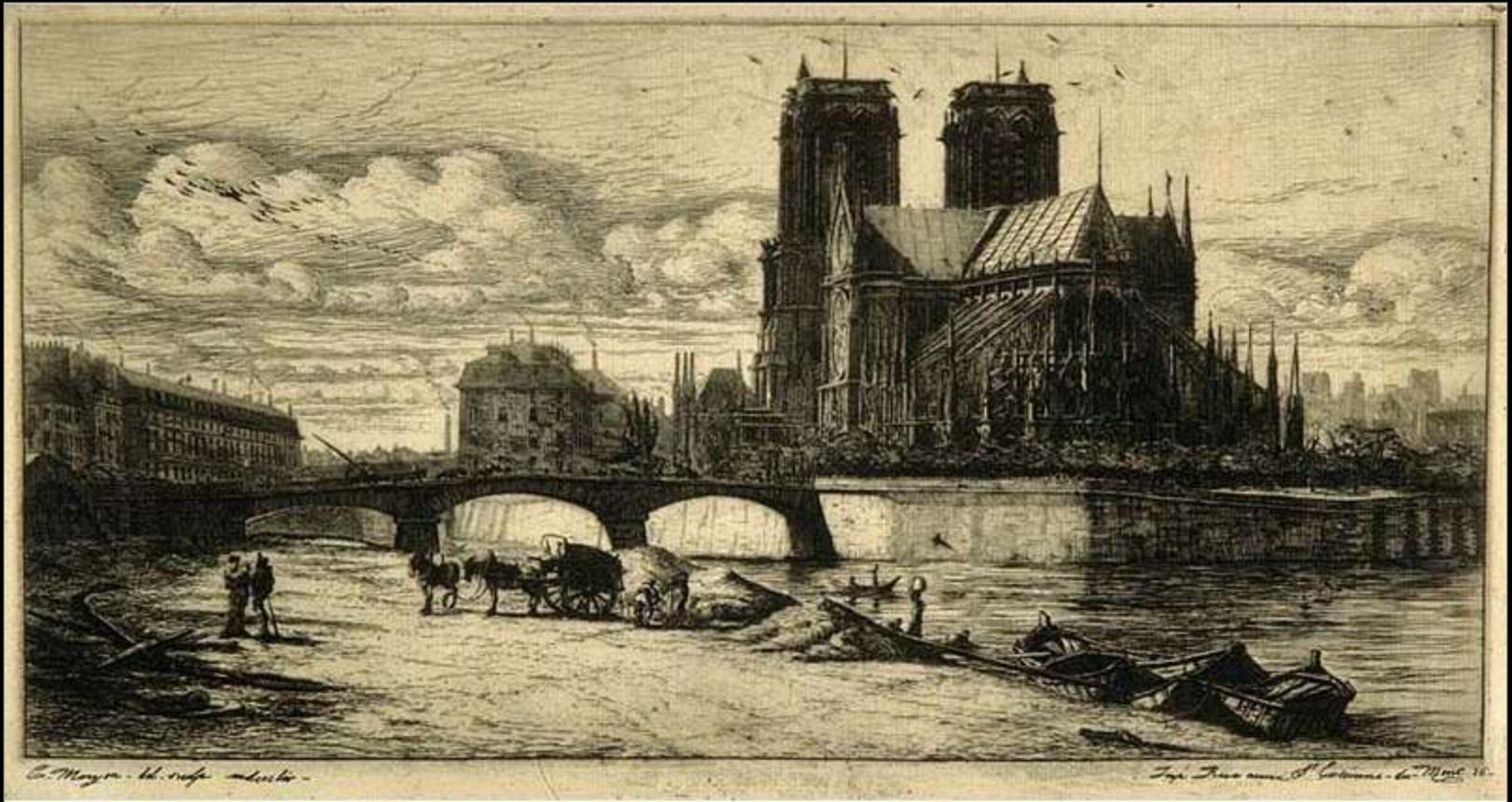
**Charles Meryon (1821-68), Rodolphe Bresdin (1825-85),  
Odilon Redon (1840-1916)  
and the Symbolists—Fernand Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921)**



Charles Meryon, a portrait by another artist, 1870's  
"Perhaps I will become miserable,  
but if I do not do this [become an artist] I will regret it for the rest of my life."



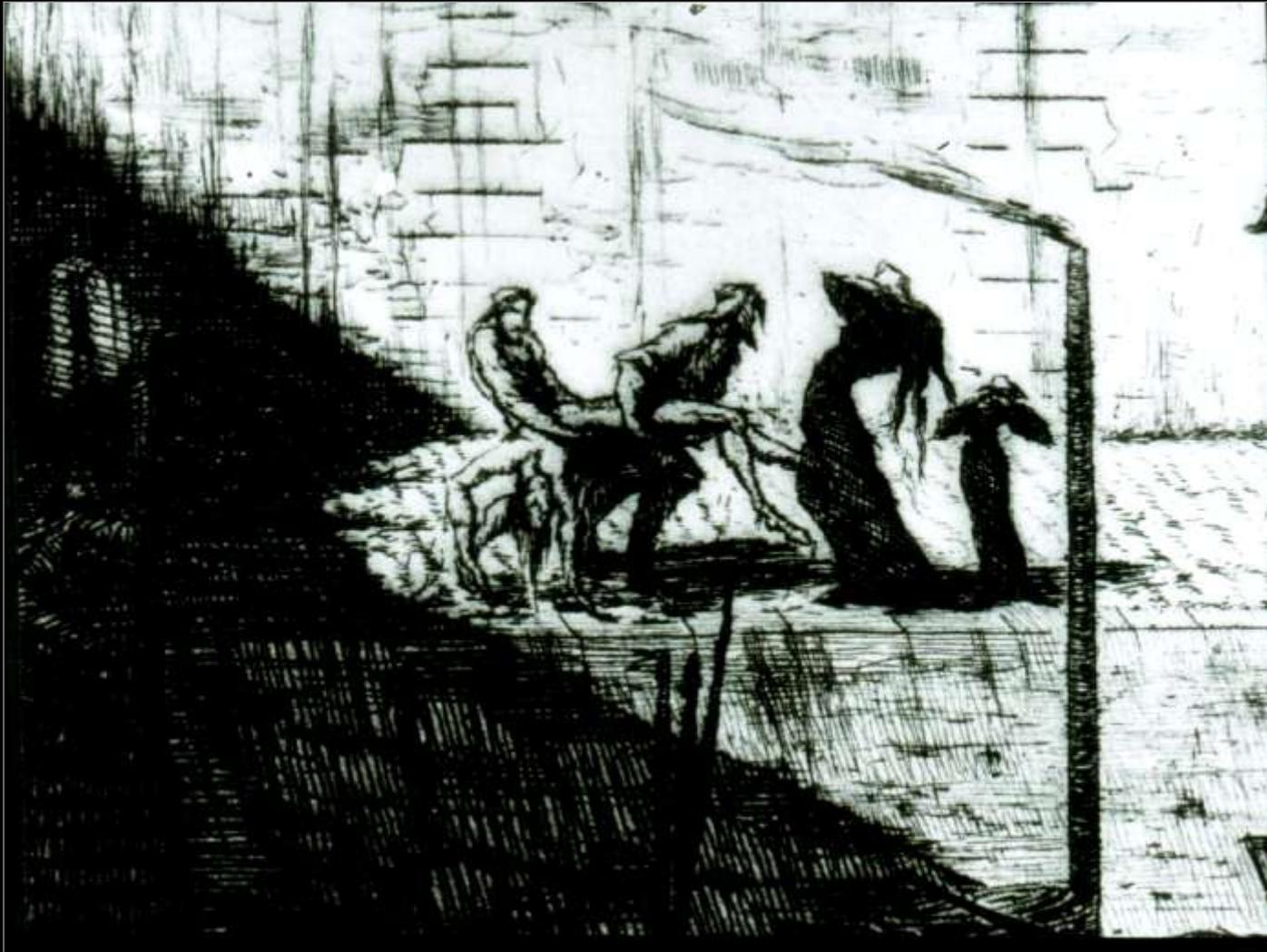
Charles Meryon, *Arch of Notre Dame Bridge*, 1853



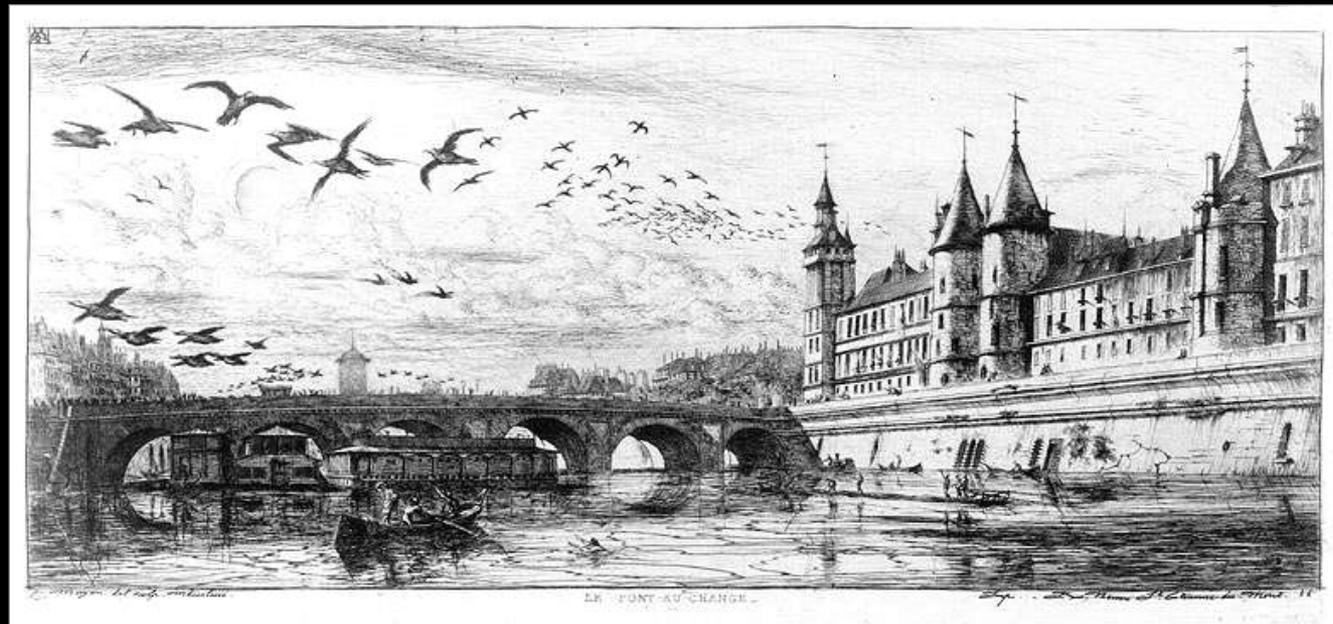
Charles Meryon, *Le Pont Neuf*, 1850's



Charles Meryon, *Paris Morgue*, 1850's



Charles Meryon, *Paris Morgue*, detail,

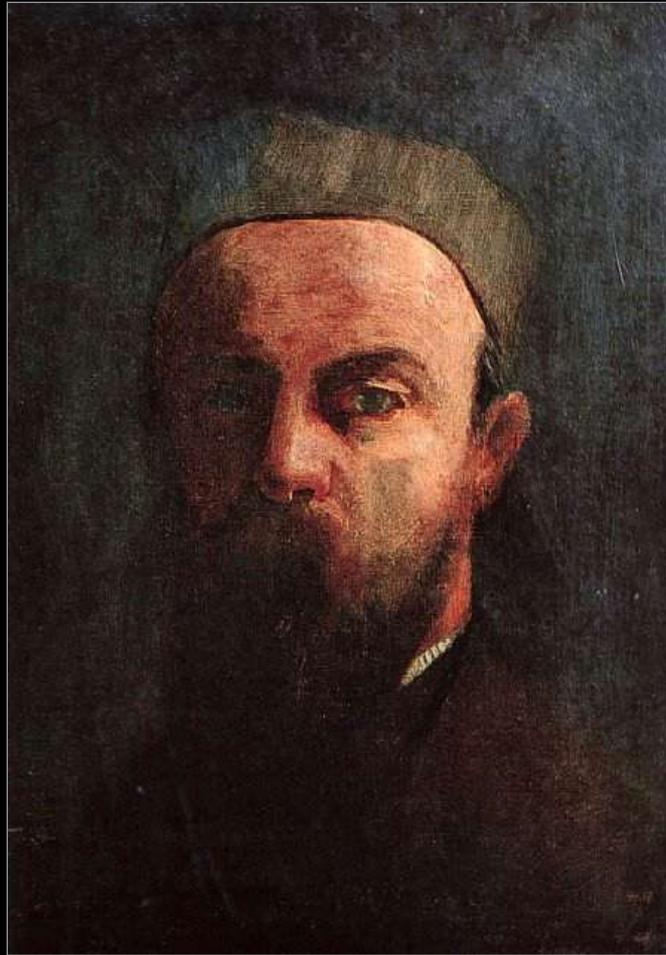


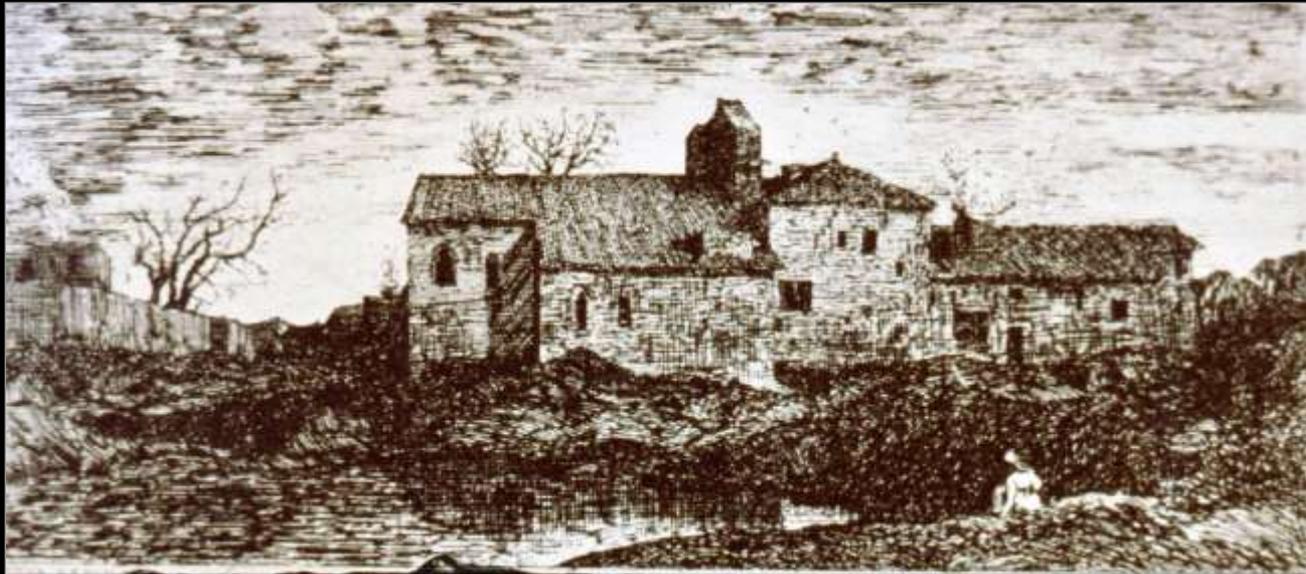
Charles Meryon, *Le Point au Change*, 1854, States 1 and 2



BANK OF ENGLAND

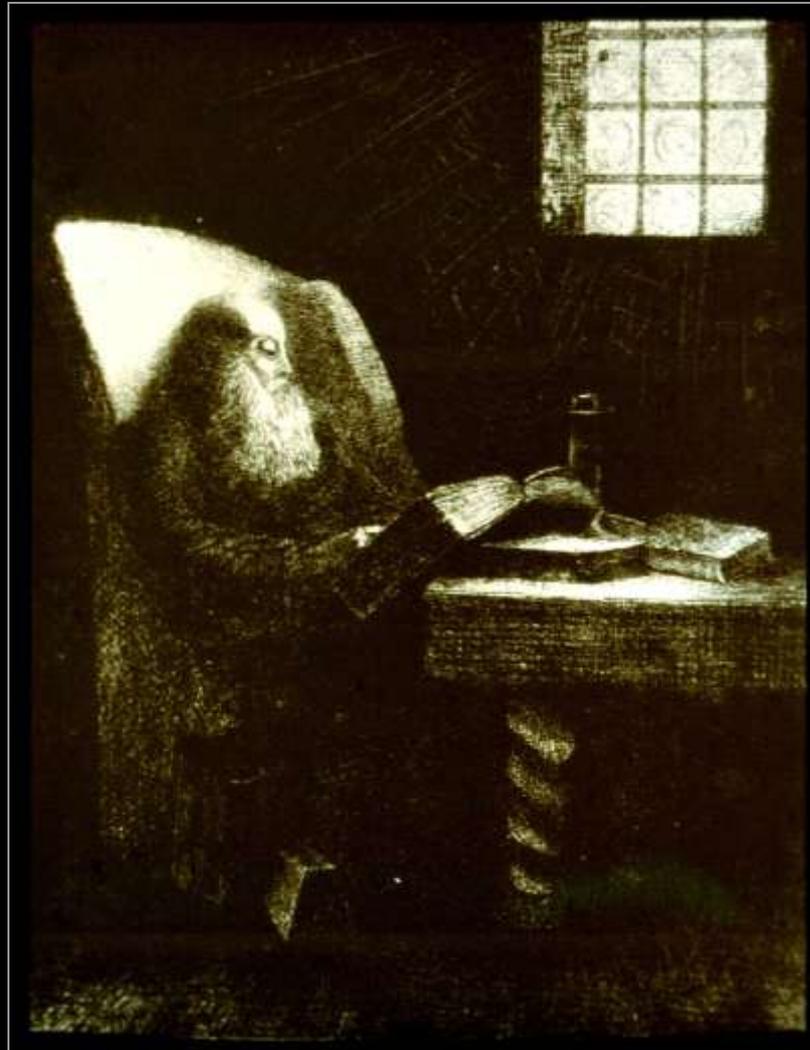
Engraved by G. Kneller after the original by G. Kneller





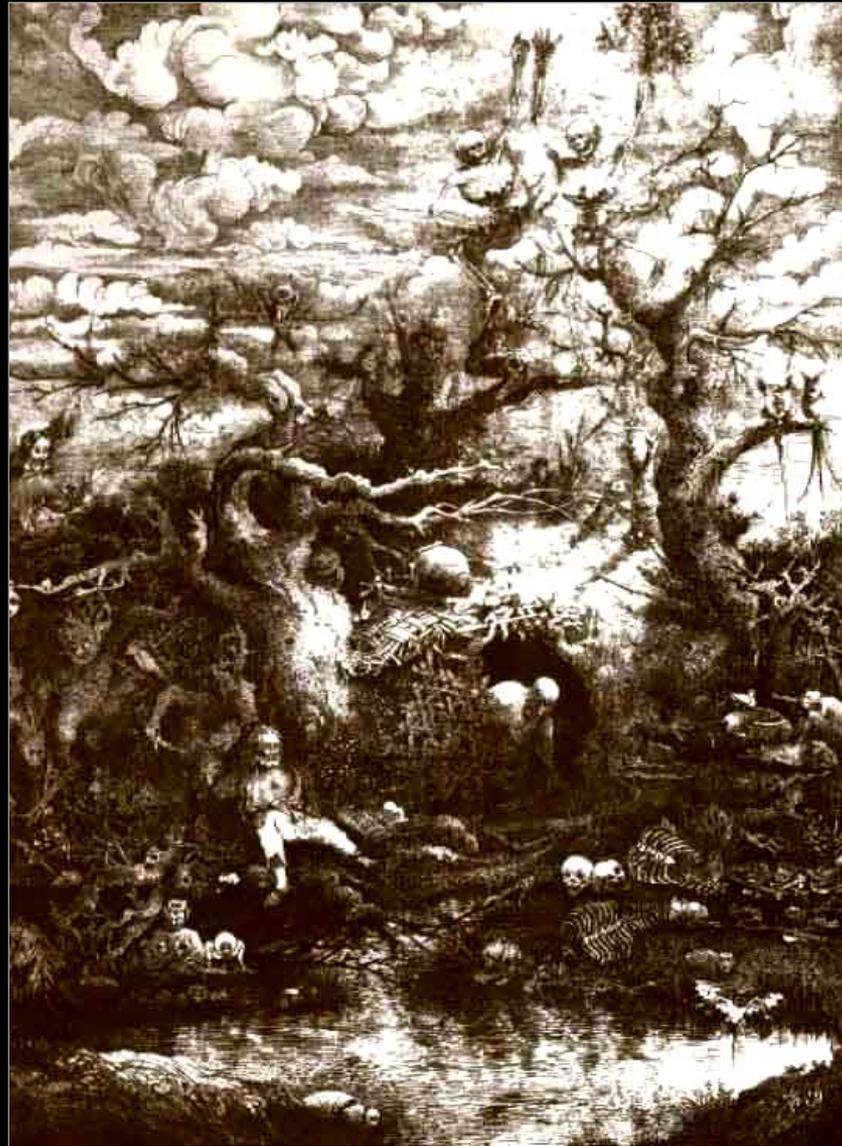
"Peyrelebad... was a large, somewhat desolate and isolated vineyard and winery where I grew through childhood, silent, sickly—then an adolescent, gentle, shy, living with an old uncle in a big 300 year old house surrounded by an abandoned park...

Odilon Redon, *Old house in the Pyrenees*



Odilon Redon, a portrait of his teacher Rodolphe Bresdin

"Bresdin showed me the power of imagination alone. He never conceived of anything beforehand. He improvised with joy, completing with tenacity the entanglements of the barely perceptible gestation he dreamt up... I signed one of my first etchings, 'O. Redon, pupil of Bresdin.'



Rodolphe Bresdin, *Comedy of Death*, 1854

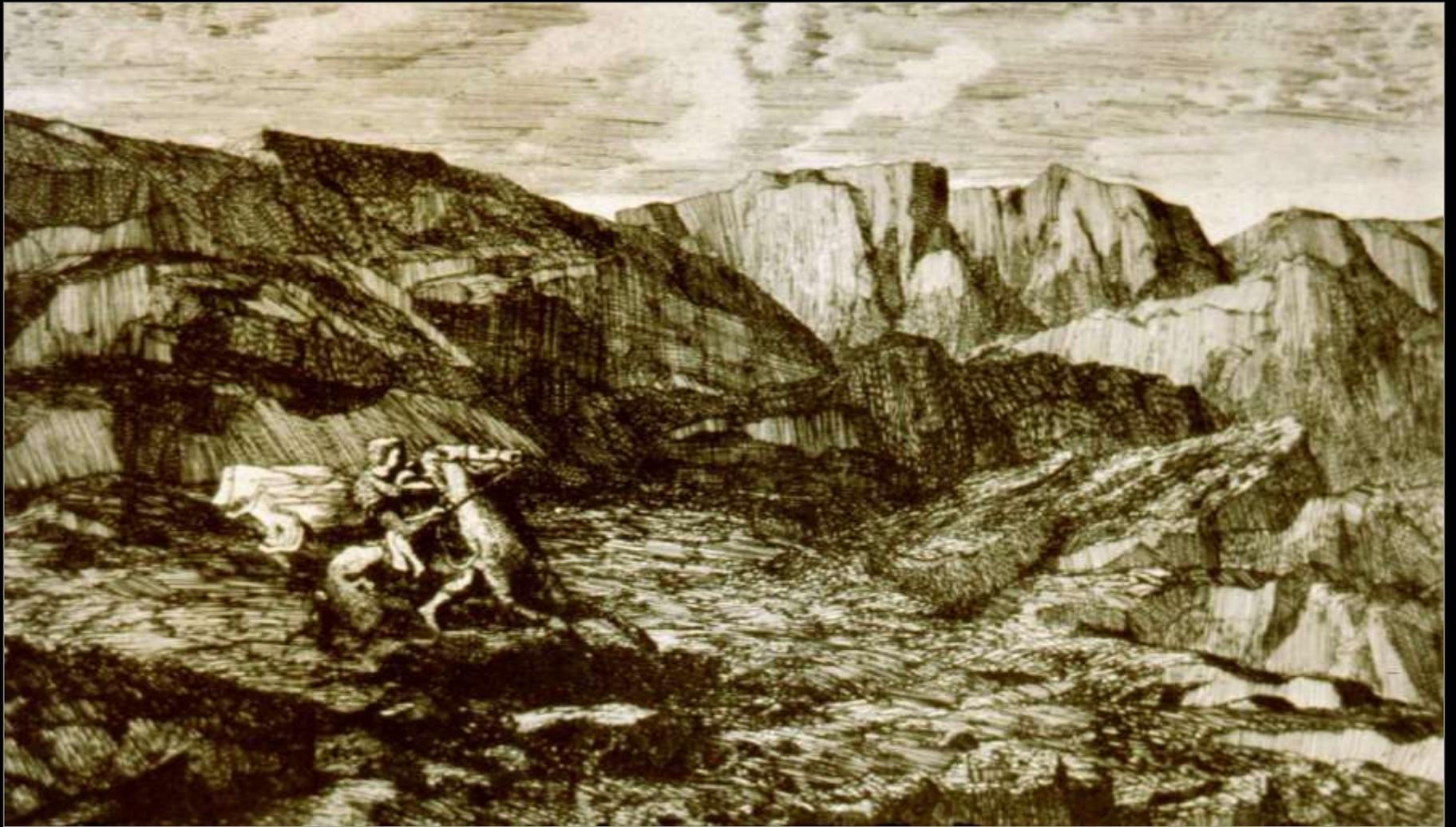


Odilon Redon, notebook page

"A botanist friend opened to me the confines of the imperceptible, that intermediate state between animal and plant life, of flower or being, that mysterious element which is animal for a few hours each day but only under the action of light.

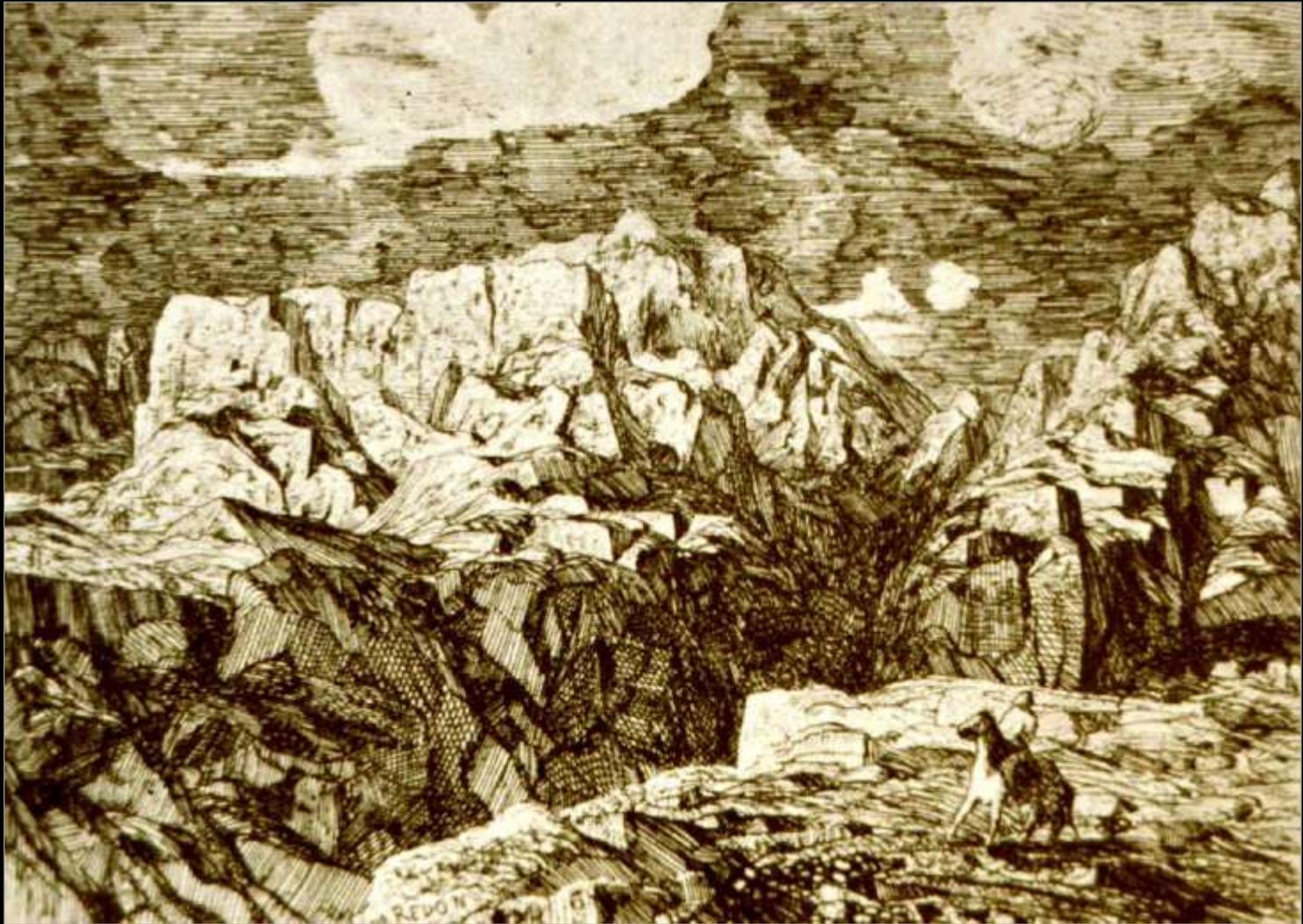


Odilon Redon, a rock



Odilon Redon, *Fear*

"Later, I began the representation of the imaginary things which haunted me... landscapes, battle scenes, evocations of scattered figures in rocky plains, an entire world of despair..."



Odilon Redon, *Horseman in a Rocky Landscape*



Odilon Redon, *Cactus Man*

“Each summer I would go back to Peyrelebad, where in the complete isolation of the country I labored each day in the fields until physical effort brought about a certain ebullition in my brain...”



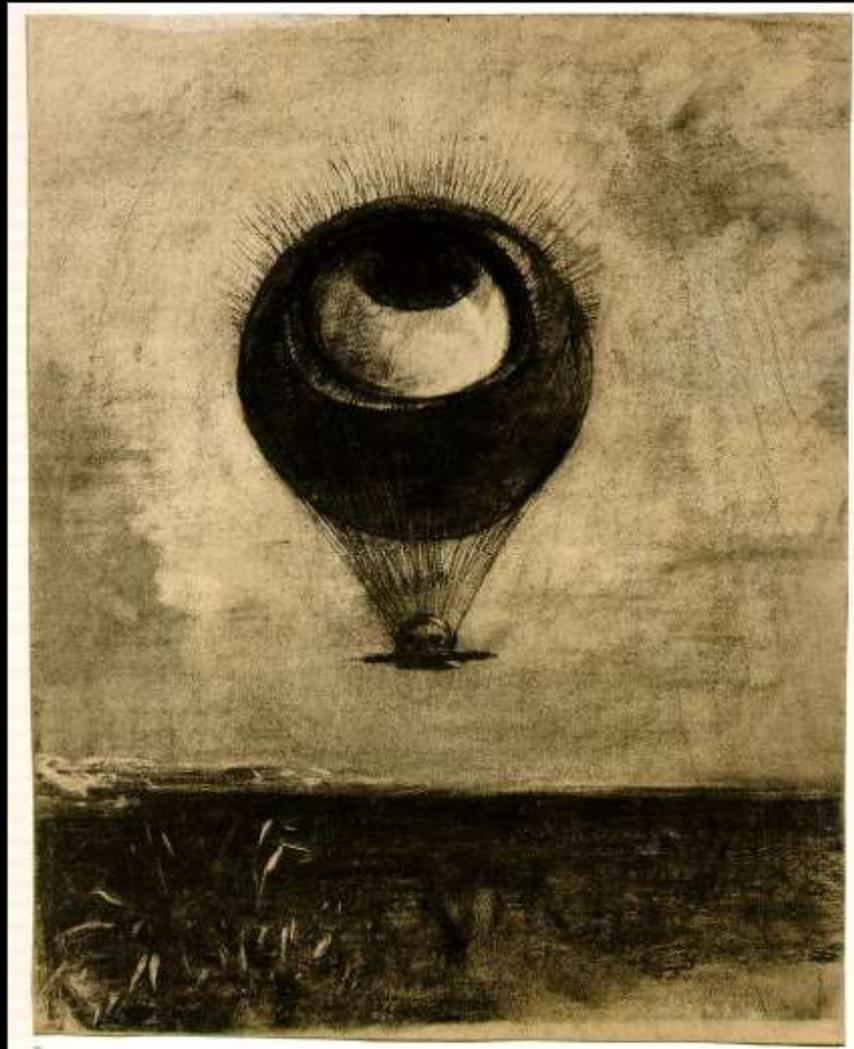
Odilon Redon, *Crying Spider*

“How many times have I taken the charcoal in my hands that were soiled with earth and drawn docilely, easily the images so rapidly gestating in my brain... images which inspire yet cannot be defined.”

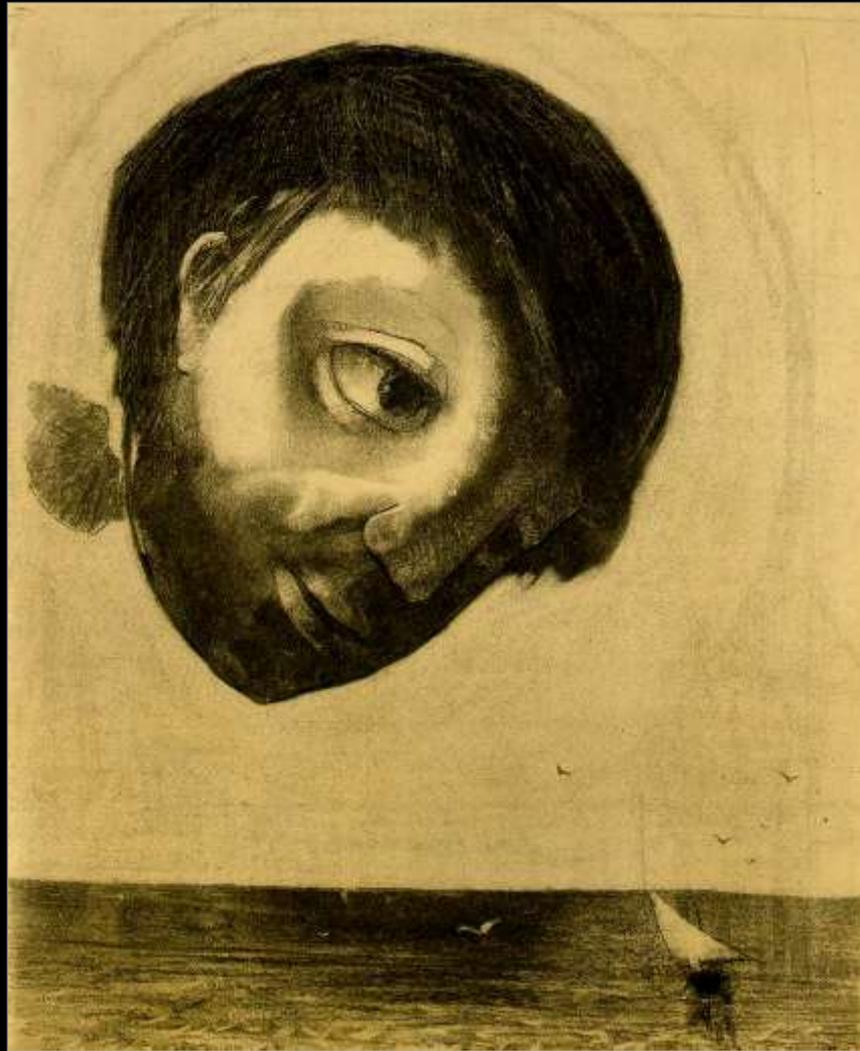


Odilon Redon, *Laughing Spider*

They do not determine anything. Like music, they transport us into the ambiguous world of the undetermined.



Odilon Redon, *The Eye, A Strange Balloon*



Odilon Redon, *The Guardian Spirit of the Waters*

“In the 1880's and 1890's Symbolism became an important art movement, and I was often invoked as a founder. But there was a profound difference. The Symbolists worked, like most of the artists in every other art movement, from the imitation of one another's ideas, or, in the case especially of the Symbolists, from a profound avoidance of reality. Their dreams all came from other people's books. Whereas I have worked always from the utmost attention to the external object until eternal nature, assimilated and measured, becomes my ferment. To the moment following such exercises I owe my best work.”



"Dreams are but lies," says an old maxim; but when our last hour is at hand, and but a few brief minutes are left to what was "I," pale lights that are fast growing dim, who can tell by what mark to distinguish you, O memories of the actual life, from you, O mirages from the dream life."

Fernand Khnopff, *I lock my door upon myself*, 1891



Fernand Khnopff, *Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1890's



## Surrealism

Surrealism as a movement was organizational, with a leader—Andre Breton—and followers: the artists and writers whom he approved. Surrealism rejected the pre-war *avant gardes* as being already old, and enforced a retreat from abstraction because, as Breton wrote,

“It is impossible for me to consider a picture as anything but a window, in which my first interest is to know what it looks out on.”

Thus, in the name of Surrealism, Breton returned painting to the Renaissance goal of art as the imitation of nature—but a very different view of nature than the Renaissance had pictured. Rather, the “nature,” the “real” of Surrealism was *sur*—beyond—nature, beyond surface reality in order to penetrate to the contents of the subconscious.

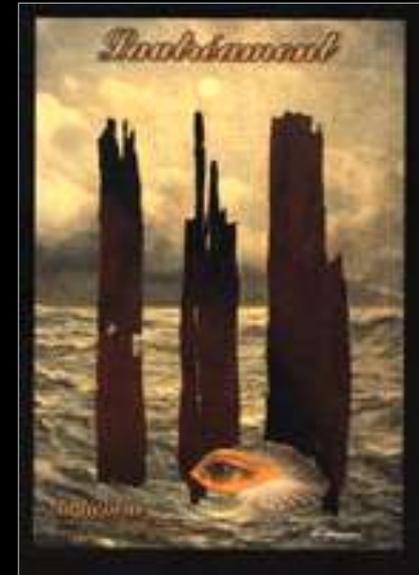
Breton wrote, “I believe in the future transmutation of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of surreality, so to speak. I am looking forward to its consummation... death would matter little to me could I but taste the joy it will yield ultimately.”



Isidore Ducasse,  
Comte de Lautréamont



To who opens the door  
of my funeral chamber,  
I have said to that person,  
do not enter, remove yourself



Breton and his group said their purpose was to make a revolution in human society, a revolution one of whose ancestors was le Comte de Lautréamont, the pseudonym of Isidore Ducasse, the French 19c Romantic author whose novel *Maldoror* of the irrational, the violent and the absurd provided the Surrealists with an aesthetic type.

Breton wrote that *Maldoror* is “the expression of a revelation so complete it seems to exceed human potential.” Or, as the novel said it was to be “...as beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella!” *Maldoror*’s shocked first publisher refused to bind the sheets of the original edition... and perhaps no better invitation exists to this book which warns the reader, “Only the few may relish this bitter fruit without danger.”

“Lautréamont’s style is hallucinatory, visionary...  
this new fluent translation makes clear its poetic texture  
and what may be termed its subversive attraction.”

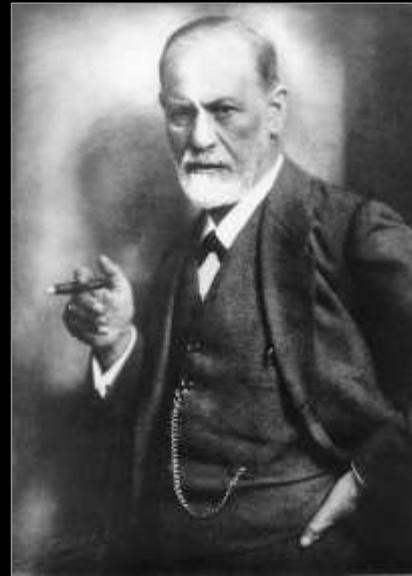
— New York Times



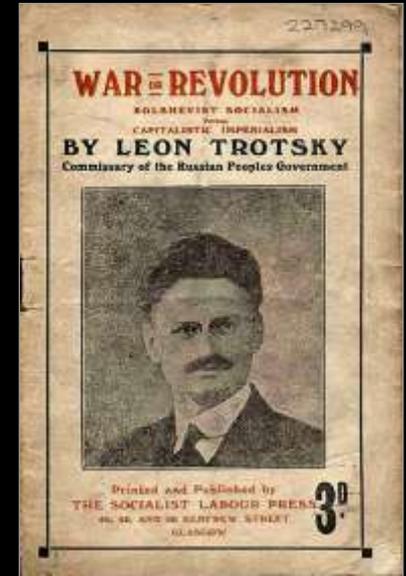
Andre Breton  
(1896-1966)



Isidore Ducasse (Lautreamont)  
(1846-1870)



Sigmund Freud  
(1856-1939)



Leon Trotsky  
(1879-1940)

Breton wrote, “I believe in the future transmutation of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of surreality, so to speak. I am looking forward to its consummation... death would matter little to me could I but taste the joy it will yield ultimately.”

Breton and his group said their purpose was to make a revolution in human society, a revolution whose ancestors were le Comte de Lautreamont provided the Surrealists with an aesthetic type,

Sigmund Freud, whose theory of sexuality, repression and the subconscious provided the intellectual base for the source and significance of the new imagery for art, and

Leon Trotsky, whose work in the Russian Revolution indicated to Breton the political action necessary to revolutionize society.

**Among the  
Surrealist Artists**



**Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978)**



**Max Ernst (1891-1976)**



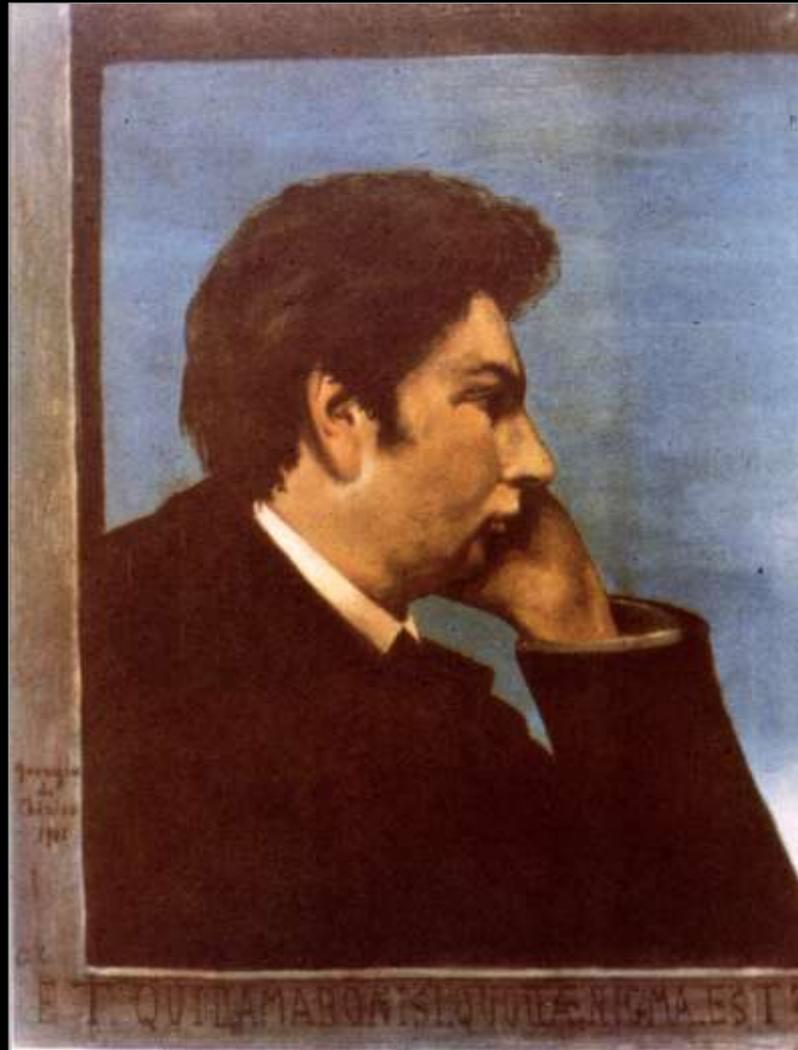
**Joan Miro (1893-1983)**



**Rene Magritte (1898-1967)**



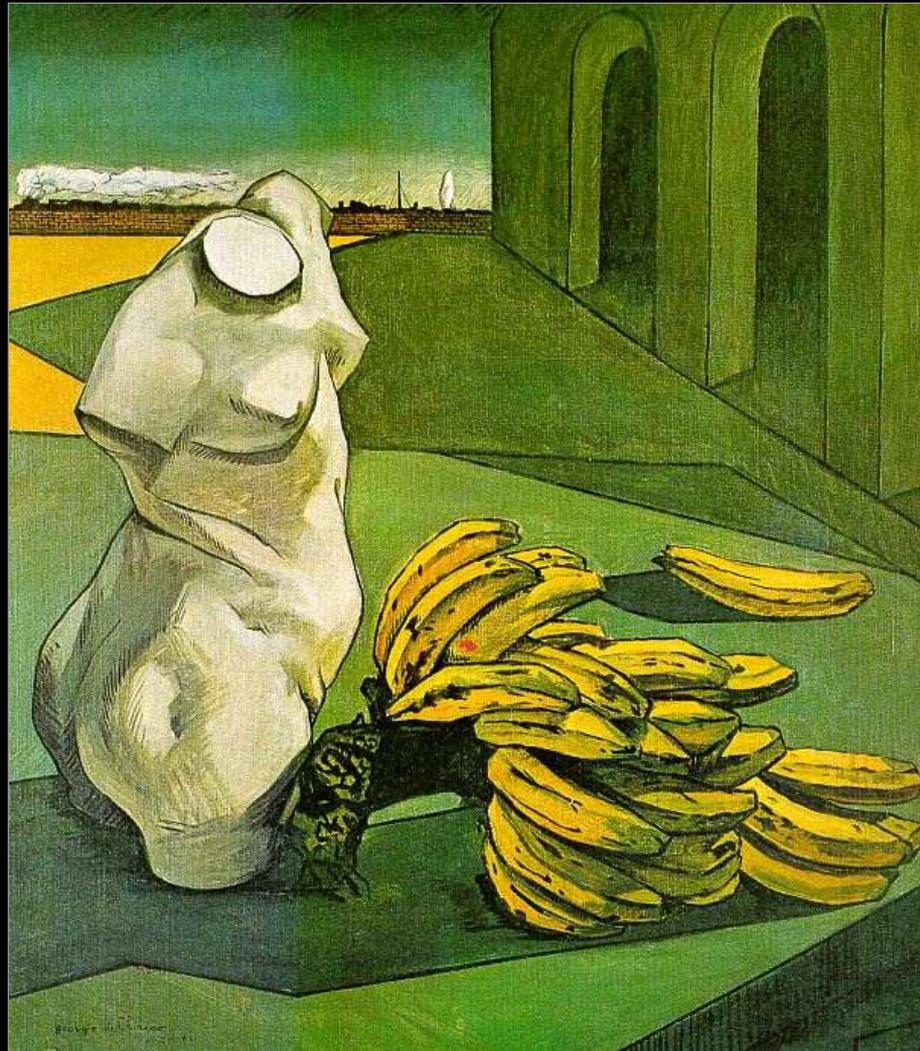
**Salvador Dali (1904-1989)**



Giorgio De Chirico, *“What shall I love if it be not the enigma?”* 1908



Giorgio De Chirico, *The Nostalgia of the Infinite*, 1913



Giorgio De Chirico, *The Uncertainty of the Poet*, 1913



Giorgio De Chirico, *The Melancholy of Departure*, 1914



Giorgio De Chirico, *The Conquest of the Philosopher*, 1914



Giorgio De Chirico, *The Great Metaphysician*, 1917



Rene Magritte, *This is not a pipe.* 1917



Rene Magritte



Rene Magritte



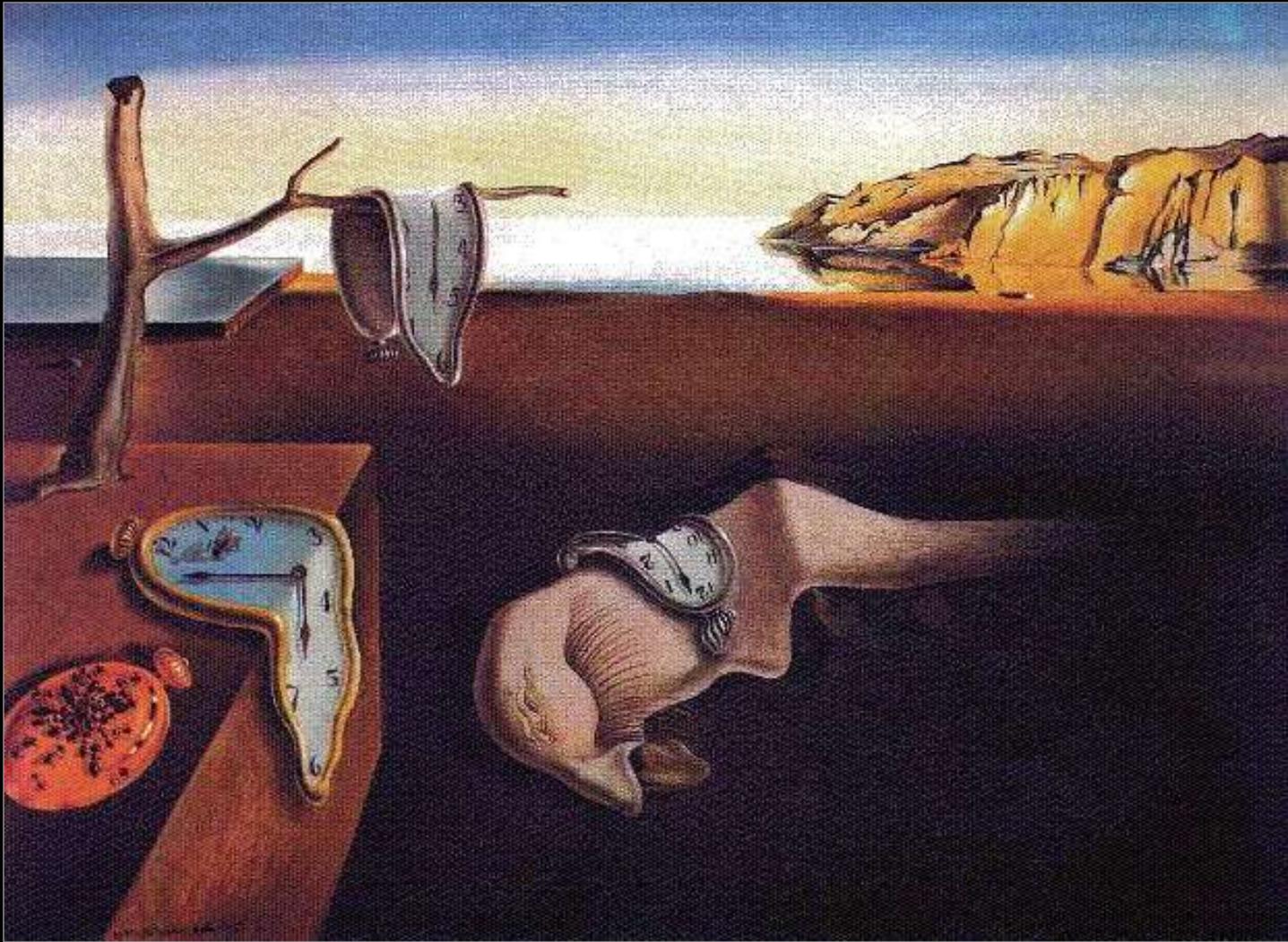
Rene Magritte



Rene Magritte



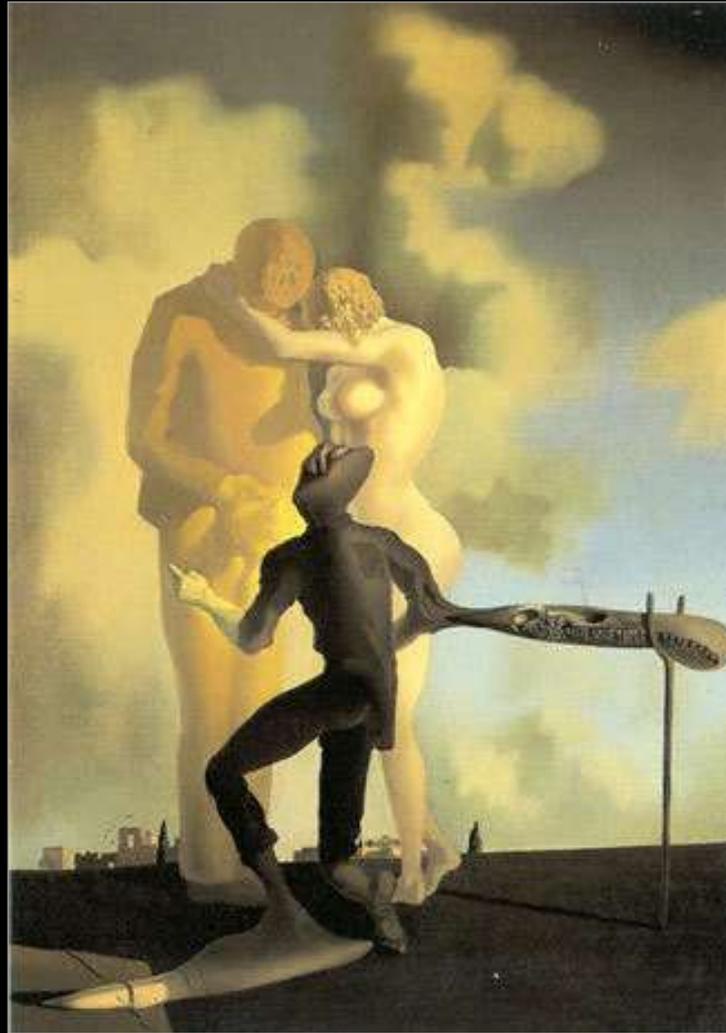
Salvador Dali



Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1917



Salvador Dalí, *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War*, 1936

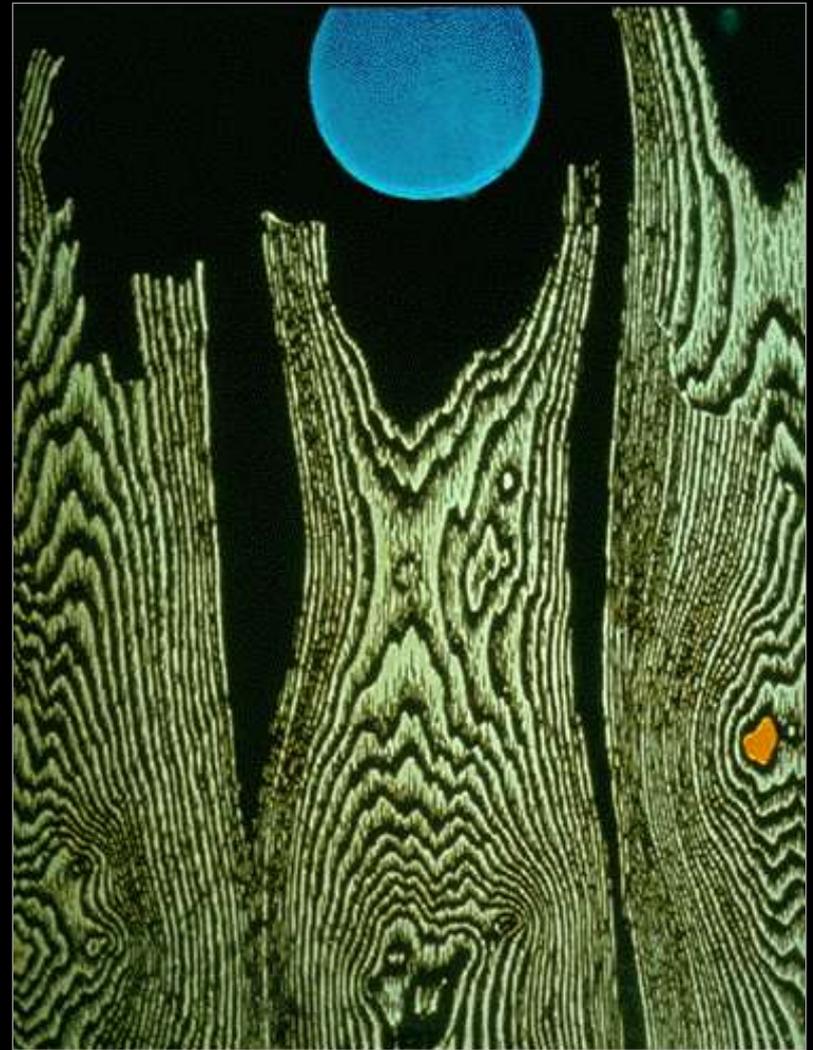


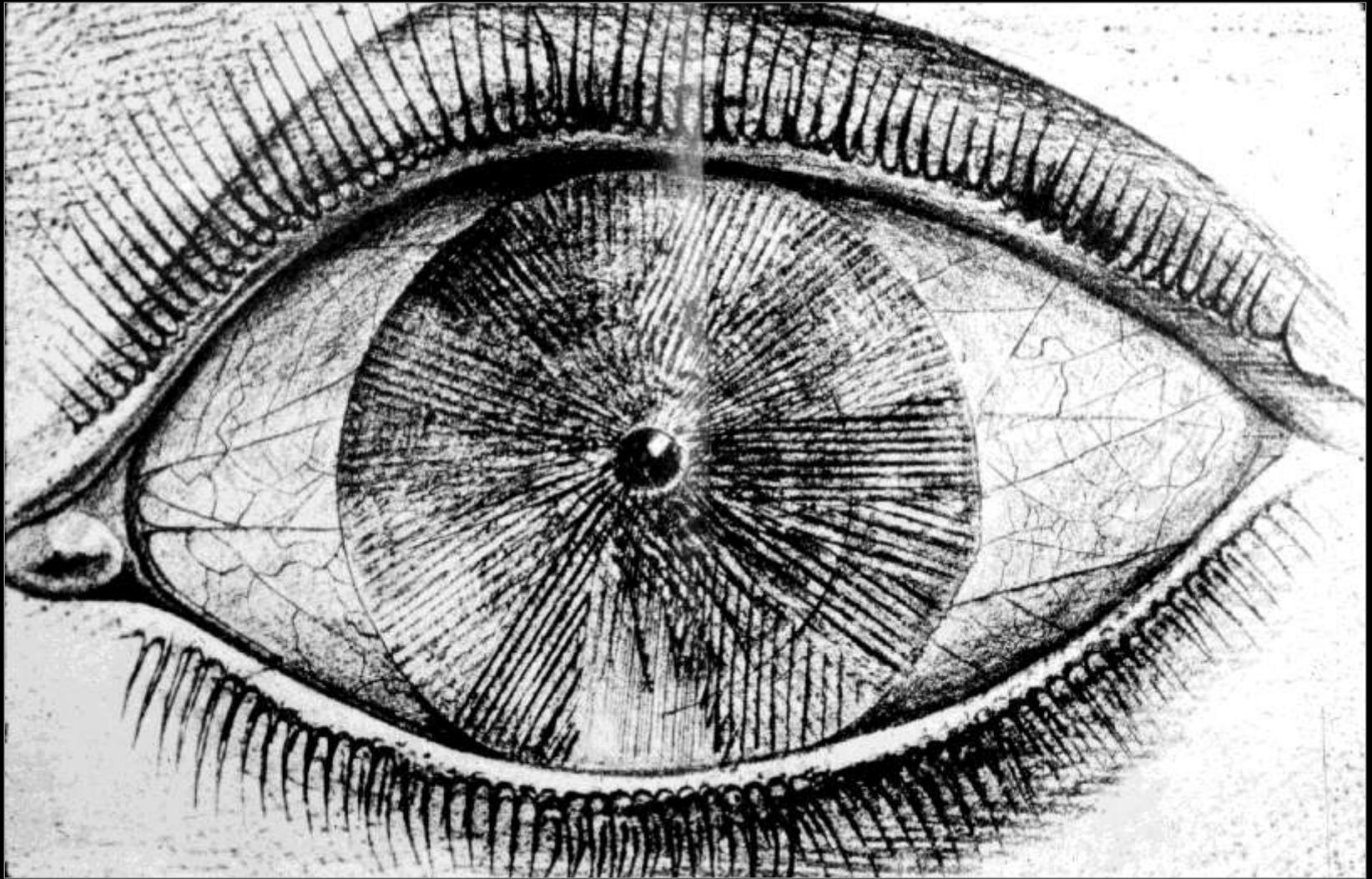
Salvador Dali

Max Ernst, “frottage” technique, early 1930’s

“Finding myself one rainy evening in a seaside inn, I was struck by the obsession that showed to my excited gaze the floor-boards upon which a thousand scubbings had deepened the grooves. I decided then to investigate the symbolism of this obsession and, in order to aid my meditative and hallucinatory faculties, I made from the boards a series of drawings by placing on them, at random, sheets of paper which I undertook to rub with black lead. In gazing attentively at the drawings thus obtained, I was surprised by the sudden intensification of my visionary capacities and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory images superimposed one upon the other with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories...

“My curiosity awakened and astonished, I began to experiment indifferently [at random and by chance] and to question, utilizing the same means, all sorts of materials to be found in my visual field: leaves and their veins, the ragged edges of a bit of line, the brushstrokes of a ‘modern’ painting, the unwound thread from a spool, etc. There my eyes discovered human heads, animals, a battle that ended with a kiss...





“I insist on the fact that the drawings thus obtained lost more and more... the character of the material interrogated (the wood, for example) and took on the aspect of images [of the surreal] of an unhopd for precision.”

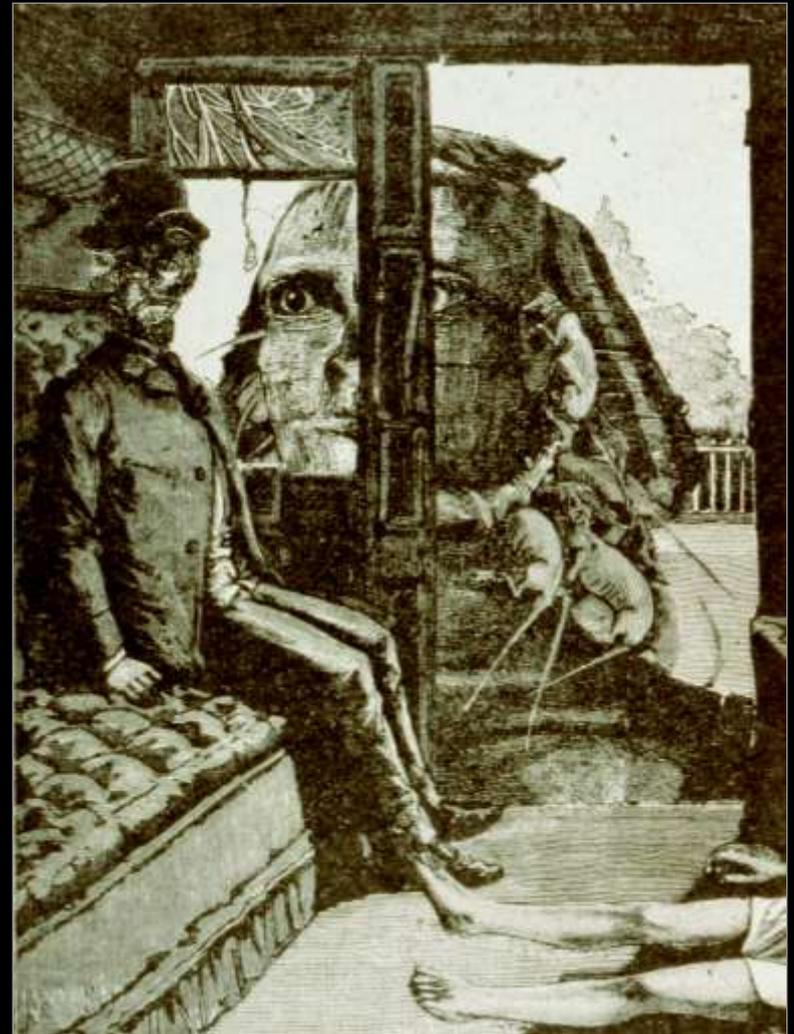
Ernst demonstrated the beyond the real to be everywhere, not only in the chance images found in rubbings from the floor, but also in the collision of the banal (images from magazines) collaged with the trite (images from magazines): when ordinary trash hits ordinary garbage, the extraordinary, the "surreal" may be revealed.

“I brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of their collision provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me and brought forth an illusive succession of contradictory images, double, triple, and multiple images, piling up on each other with the persistence and rapidity which are peculiar to love memories and visions of half-sleep... thus I obtained a faithful fixed image of my hallucination and transformed into revealing dramas my most secret desires -- from what had been before only some banal pages of advertising.”



Max Ernst, 1933

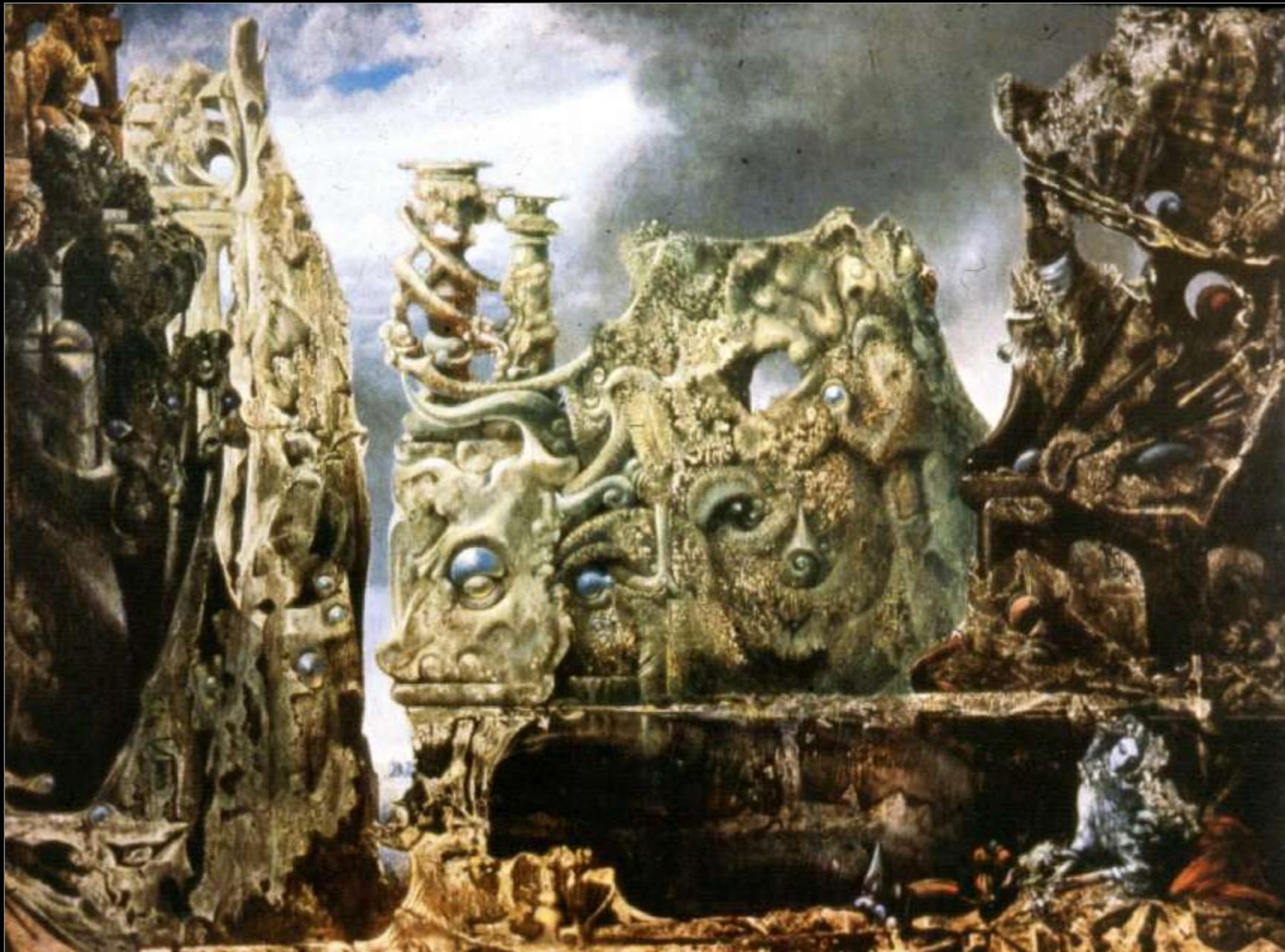
...thus I obtained a faithful fixed image of my hallucination and transformed into revealing dramas my most secret desires -- from what had been before only some banal pages of advertising."



Max Ernst, 1933



Max Ernst, *Temptation of St. Anthony*, late 1930's early 1940's



Max Ernst, *The Eyes of Silence*, late 1930's early 1940's

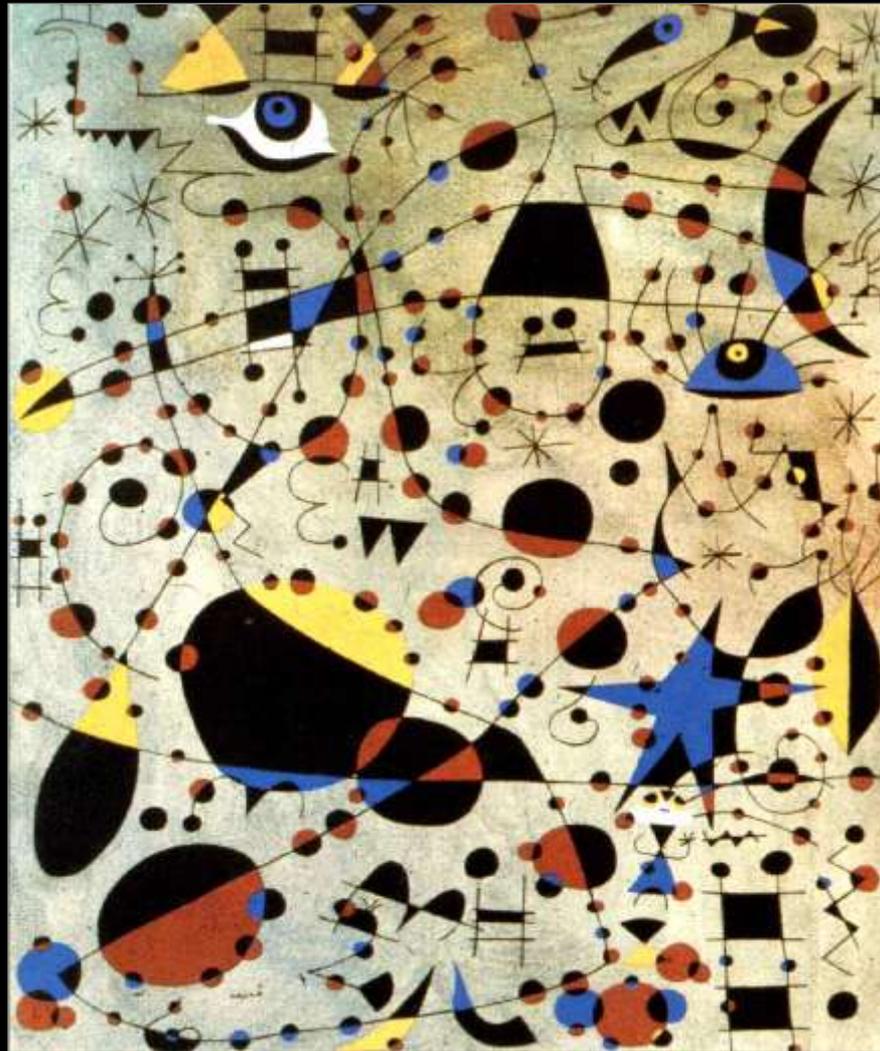


### **From Miró's Notebooks**

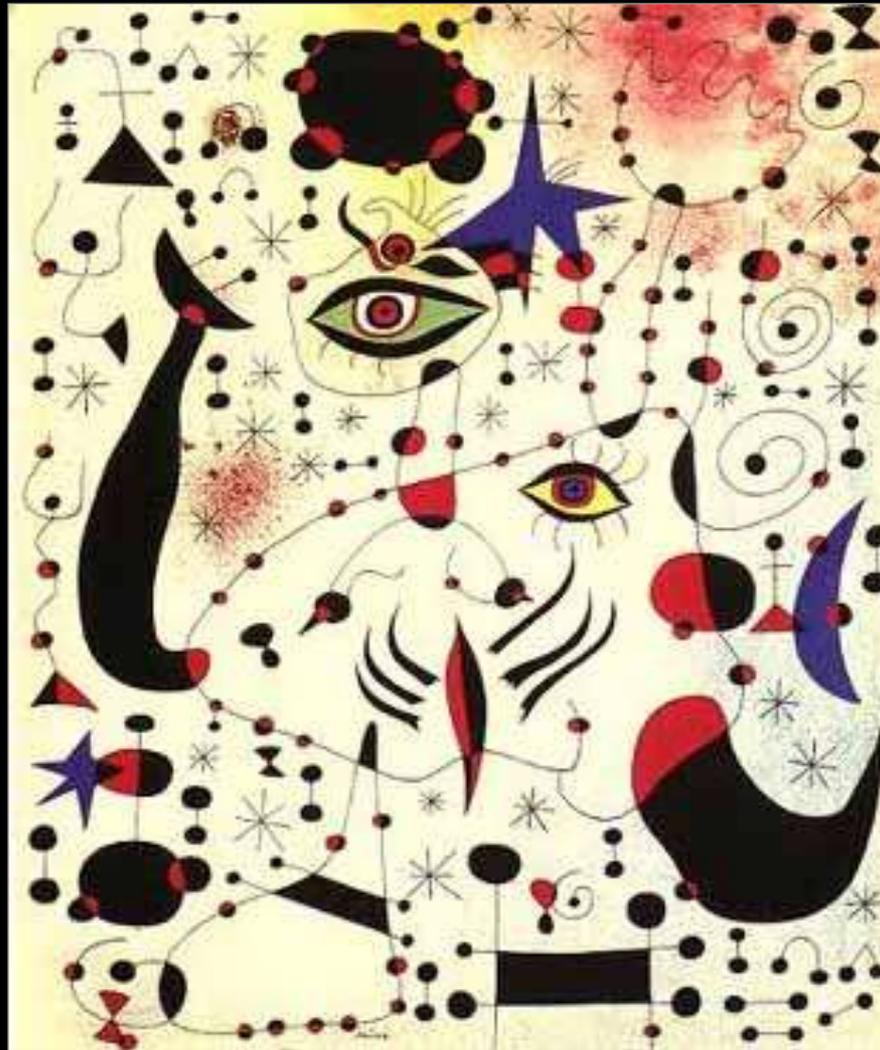
“What really counts is to strip the soul naked. Painting or poetry is made as we make love; a total embrace, prudence thrown to the wind, nothing held back...”

“For me a form is never something abstract; it is always a sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else. For me painting is never form for form's sake...”

“As a matter of fact, I am attaching more and more importance to the subject matter of my work. To me it seems vital that a rich and robust theme should be present to give the spectator an immediate blow between the eyes before a second thought can interpose...”



“It was a very long and extremely arduous work. I would set out with no preconceived idea. A few forms suggested here would call for other forms elsewhere to balance them. These in turn demanded others. It seemed interminable. It took a month at least to produce each water color, as I would take it up day after day to paint in other tiny spots, stars, washes, infinitesimal dots of color in order finally to achieve a full and complex equilibrium...”



“We Catalans believe you must always plant your feet firmly on the ground if you want to be able to jump in the air. The fact that I come down to earth from time to time makes it possible to jump all the higher.”

