

Press Release

Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain

31 October 2018 – 20 January 2019

Curated by Eleanor Clayton, The Hepworth Wakefield, with support from Martina Millà, Teresa Montaner and Sònia Villegas at the Fundació Joan Miró

Sponsored exclusively by the BBVA Foundation

The Fundació Joan Miró presents *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain*, the first exhibition that examines the American photographer's role in the development of the surrealist movement.

The exhibition, sponsored by the BBVA Foundation and curated by Eleanor Clayton, was originally produced by The Hepworth Wakefield in collaboration with the Fundació Joan Miró, which now offers an expanded version of the show in its galleries with contributions from Martina Millà, Teresa Montaner and Sònia Villegas, the Fundació's Programming Director, Collections Director and Conservator, respectively.

Through Miller's eye, the exhibition reconstructs one of the least known moments of Surrealism, revealing the connections that existed between the British artists of the 1930s and 40s and the international surrealist network.

The nine sections of the exhibition are built around Miller's compelling biography. First a model and muse, she then achieved a successful career in photography, pioneering across the fields of art, fashion and journalism.

Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain gathers close to 200 pieces, including photographs, drawings, paintings and sculptures, for the first time creating a dialogue between an extensive representation of her photographic work and masterpieces by some of the most prominent surrealist artists, such as Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington, Man Ray, Yves Tanguy, Eileen Agar, Roland Penrose, Paul Nash, Salvador Dalí, Giorgio de Chirico, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Maruja Mallo, Francis Picabia, Àngel Planells and Dora Maar.

The project highlights the fact that Lee Miller, despite being a unique artist, also played a key role and was deeply involved in shaping one of the most vibrant art scenes of the twentieth century.

Barcelona, 30 October 2018. The *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain* exhibition reconstructs one of the most important hubs in the complex surrealist network. Through the privileged lens of the American photographer Lee Miller (1907-1977) – ambassador for the movement in London jointly with her partner, the artist Roland Penrose – the show reveals the creative connections and productive collisions that emerged between British artists in the 1930s and 40s and the international surrealist network as a whole.

The project is produced by The Hepworth Wakefield in collaboration with the Fundació Joan Miró, and curated by Eleanor Clayton, from the British institution. The version presented in Barcelona has been expanded with contributions from Martina Millà, Teresa Montaner and Sònia Villegas, the Fundació's Programming Director, Collections Director and Conservator, respectively.

Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain explores the introduction of the movement in the British scene during the years preceding the Second World War and up to the early 1950s. This was a period when a group of European artists sought refuge in London, echoing the situation in Barcelona during the First World War - a period which the Fundació Joan Miró addressed in 2014 with the exhibition *Barcelona, Neutral Zone, 1914-18*.

The show is the first to specifically explore the role of photographer Lee Miller in this process. With her figure as its central axis, the exhibition unfolds in chronological chapters that offer a broad selection of works and artists, enabling the viewer to acquire a deeper understanding of the impact of Surrealism in Britain and, in turn, of the significance of the British group within the international movement's evolution and history. The nine sections in the show are shaped around the compelling biography of Lee Miller, who, first a model and muse, later achieved a successful career in photography, establishing pioneering connections between art, fashion and journalism with an unmistakably surrealist eye.

Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain gathers close to 200 pieces, linking an extensive representation of Miller's photographic work with drawings, paintings, objects and sculptures by some of the key figures in the international surrealist circle, such as Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington, Man Ray, Yves Tanguy, Henry Moore, Eileen Agar, Roland Penrose, Salvador Dalí, Paul Nash, Giorgio de Chirico and Joan Miró. It was not in vain that Miró, highly regarded in the British scene at the time, kept in constant contact with this circle and developed a close relationship with Penrose and Miller, which eventually culminated in a major monographic exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1964.

For its presentation at the Fundació Joan Miró, the show has been expanded with drawings, paintings and photographs by artists such as Pablo Picasso, Maruja Mallo, Francis Picabia, Yves Tanguy, Àngel Planells and Dora Maar, who were present at the foremost surrealist exhibitions in London, especially the first International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936. The project also provides extensive documentation of the main surrealist exhibitions in Britain and of the journals and other channels through which the movement was promoted.

The exhibition opens with Lee Miller's early years in Paris. After starting out as a model in New York, Miller moved to France in 1929 with the aim of working as an apprentice to the surrealist photographer Man Ray, of whom she became the partner, muse, and collaborator. By 1930 Miller had her own photography studio and became a full member of the Paris surrealist scene, as is apparent from the photographs presented in this particular gallery. Her portraits of female torsos from that period are shown next to Man Ray's sculpture *Object of Destruction* (1929; reconstruction, 2004), a modified metronome in which Lee Miller's eye sets the tempo.

As the political situation became increasingly difficult in interwar continental Europe, many surrealist artists flocked to London. Miller – together with her future husband Roland Penrose – played a significant role in the British surrealist movement of the 1930s. In 1936, Penrose set up the organizing committee for the first International Surrealist Exhibition in London, held at New Burlington Galleries and attended by over 23,000 visitors. A considerable number of pieces from, or contemporary to, that historic exhibition are now shown in this gallery, including Man Ray's *Observatory Time: The Lovers*, in which Lee Miller's lips hover in the sky over an unknown landscape, as well as other dream-like landscapes signed by Yves Tanguy, Àngel Planells and local artists such as Tristram Paul Hillier and Paul Nash. The same gallery also displays surrealist drawings by Francis Picabia and Salvador Dalí, among others, as well as important pieces by other artists who were highly regarded within the British surrealist group, such as Giorgio de Chirico, Pablo Picasso, Maruja Mallo and Joan Miró, whose canvas *Composition with Figures in the Burnt Forest* (1931) is placed in dialogue with the oil painting *Aries* (1935), by the British painter John Banting.

In 1937, shortly after meeting Miller in Paris, Penrose orchestrated a gathering between artists and writers at his brother's house in Cornwall, which he caustically referred to as a "sudden surrealist invasion." Lee Miller and Man Ray's photographs capturing Penrose, Paul and Nusch Éluard, Leonora Carrington, Max Ernst and E.L.T. Mesens during this creative adventure are shown in this gallery alongside works of art that highlight their shared concerns and the creative dialogue between these artists, as we can see in the collages by Eileen Agar, Roland Penrose, Humphrey Jennings or Miller herself.

Late that same year, Penrose and Mesens organized *Surreal Objects and Poems*, a show that focused on two of the main procedures through which the surrealists challenged reality. A re-staging of the sculpture made with assembled objects which Lee Miller presented at the exhibition (original now lost) is now on display in this gallery alongside other objects such as Eileen Agar's bust *Angel of Mercy* (1934), Salvador Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* (1936) or the *Onanistic Typewriter* (1940) by Conroy Maddox.

In 1938 E.L.T. Mesens took over the management of the London Gallery and published the first issue of the *London Bulletin*. This publication, which served as a focal point for surrealist activity in Britain and also became a hub for progressive forces against increasing tensions in Europe, featured numerous photographs by Lee Miller in several issues, as shown in the following gallery.

The group's last exhibition, *Surrealism Today*, opened at London's Zwemmer Gallery in June 1940. Miller's travel photographs taken in Romania, Libya and Egypt were included, alongside photographs of Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington's decorative scheme for their farmhouse in France. The photographs were seen alongside works by Henry Moore, Edith Rimmington and Roland Penrose, as shown again here, in the sixth gallery of the exhibition.

Miller's assignments for British and American *Vogue* during the Second World War brought her surrealist eye to new terrains. Working with photographers like David E. Scherman, Miller captured thought-provoking images of Hitler's apartment and the harrowing atrocities of life during wartime. An ample selection of Miller's photographs for *Vogue* is displayed in this gallery, revealing an enduring surrealist eye that traversed the boundaries of fashion and photojournalism.

After the war, Miller moved out of London to Farley Farm in Sussex with her husband Roland Penrose and their son and continued her work in photography. From there, the couple continued to act as catalysts of the

surrealist movement. This gallery features a series of humorous photographs of artists such as Max Ernst, Henry Moore and Dorothea Tanning at Farley Farm that are part of Miller's last major photo essay for *Vogue* in 1953.

Both in her commercial and in her fine art photography, Miller frequently returned to the surrealist motif of the head. In 1953, she co-curated the exhibition *Wonder and Horror of the Human Head*, held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, from which several of her photographs are shown in this section. Drawing attention to gendered ways of looking, and finding surprising similarities and disjunctions across diverse visual material, Miller's radical approach prefigured the merging popular culture in artistic practice that was to define British pop art.

Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain is complemented by a related activities programme and a publication with a curatorial text by Eleanor Clayton and two other essays that elaborate upon specific aspects of the project. First, Hilary Floe, Assistant Curator at The Hepworth Wakefield, examines the role of surrealist publications in the promotion and development of the movement. Patricia Allmer, Senior Lecturer in History of Art at the University of Edinburgh and one of the leading scholars on Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain, analyses Lee Miller's pro-feminist perspective in her role as curator of the exhibition *Wonder and Horror of the Human Head*.

The fascination elicited by Lee Miller's life and work has only increased over time. Although she is often presented as an unusual, isolated figure, the exhibition reveals that this pioneering woman was deeply engaged in a network of artists much wider who contributed to changing the course of art history in the past century. *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain* tells the story of an exhilarating moment in the arts: for the first time, Miller's photographs and collaborations with other surrealist artists are presented alongside their works, providing both a panoramic and a kaleidoscopic view of one of the most vibrant art scenes of the twentieth century.

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