

San Diego Surreal

by Susan M. Anderson

Surrealism emerged amidst the destruction in Europe following World War I. Living in a world of economic uncertainty, shifting social mores, and the new reality of war on a global scale, artists, among others, sought insights for forging a better future. Surrealism's ultimate goal was nothing less than human liberation. Poet Andre Breton, founder of the Surrealist movement in Paris in 1924, was particularly interested in Sigmund Freud's idea that tapping the unconscious could achieve such liberation. European Surrealist poets and artists used automatism, a practice utilizing free association and stream of consciousness, to liberate thought, language, and human experience

from the oppressive boundaries of rationalism and social convention in order to tap into *the marvelous*. A devoted Marxist, Breton also defined Surrealism as a revolt against the old social order.

A rich legacy of Surrealism in the visual arts pervades California. In 1934, Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg formulated Post-Surrealism in Los Angeles, one of the earliest responses to Surrealism in the United States. Later, several members of Breton's original Surrealist group resided in California, many as refugees during World War II, including Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Stanley William Hayter, Charles Howard, Gordon Onslow Ford, Wolfgang Paalen, and Man Ray.

The exhibition *San Diego Surreal* includes a selection of works that show the

San Diego Surreal is on view through June 16, 2019, at the Oceanside Museum of Art, 704 Pier View Way, Oceanside, California, 92054, 760-435-3720, www.oma-online.org. The exhibition is organized by guest curator Susan M. Anderson and accompanied by a 40-page catalogue.

impact Surrealism has had on artists in San Diego County over the past several decades. Working in a variety of media, regional artists have melded surrealist impulses with local and global concerns to create personal visual mythologies utilizing narrative, metaphor, inner visions, dreams, and illusion. Because of San Diego's location on the border with Mexico, many of the younger artists who draw upon Surrealism are concerned with local issues of social





ABOVE: Lynn Schuette, *Apparicion* (from the *Desierto Pintado* series), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 40, Ellen Speert and Paul Henry.

ABOVE RIGHT: Dorr Bothwell, *Translation from the Maya*, 1940, o//Celotex, 23 x 19, Laguna Art Museum, Museum purchase with funds provided through prior gift of Lois Outerbridge.

RIGHT: Ethel Greene, *Waterbed*, c. 1970, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40, private collection.

LEFT: Cliff McReynolds, *Valley of Peace*, 1997, o//board, 27 x 40, collection of the artist.

justice, immigration, and biculturalism, as well as with global warming and issues related to the exploitation of the planet. Although works by some of the original Surrealists and Post-Surrealists are included in the exhibition for context, *San Diego Surreal* attempts to go beyond overt comparisons to explore the more idiosyncratic and subtle connections of visual, thematic, and philosophical references.

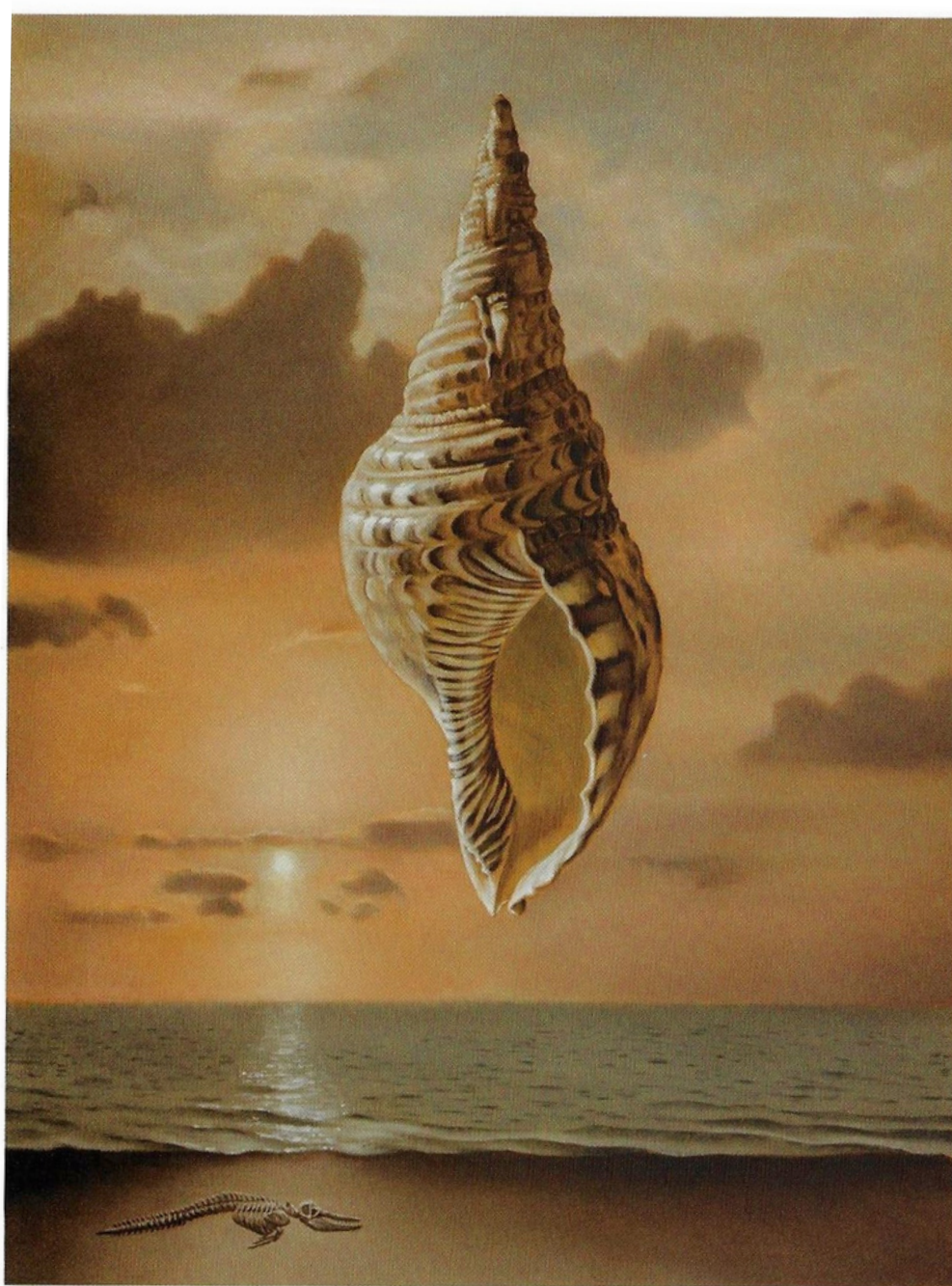
Dorr Bothwell (1902-2000) was closely allied to the Post-Surrealists Helen Lundberg and Lorser Feitelson, as she was a muralist on the California Federal Art Projects (WPA) under the supervision of Feit-



elson in San Diego and Los Angeles. She created paintings based on intuition and an occasional dream, finding their secret meaning only upon their completion. *Translation from the Maya* represents the translation of spirit into matter, and the integration of all things. It also reflects the

humanistic ideals of the Great Depression, when the work of the Mexican muralists—who were active in California and drew upon Pre-Columbian art—was popular.

Ethel Greene (1912-1999) was of the generation in San Diego that came of age in the 1940s and 1950s but didn't begin to



LEFT: Jen Trute, *Untitled*, o/c, 18 x 24, Janell Cannon.

BELOW LEFT: Marianela de la Hoz, *El Gran Respondedor*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 35, collection of the artist.

RIGHT: Althea Brimm, *Lost and Found*, c. 2010, mixed media on paper, 30 x 20, Bram and Sandra Dijkstra.

FAR RIGHT: Dorr Bothwell, *Memory's Children*, 1942, o/board, 23³/₄ x 20, Tobey C. Moss.

BELOW RIGHT: Einar and Jamex de la Torre, *Midday Devil*, 2017, lenticular print, resin castings, LED light box, and mixed media 72 x 54 x 5 (10 x 10 feet with addition of wallpaper behind), collection of the artists.

paint in a surrealist vein until 1966. Like others in Southern California, she may have been inspired by news surrounding the important René Magritte retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York that traveled to Pasadena in 1966. Her surrealist oeuvre explores perception and the arbitrary relationship between everyday objects in paintings filled with humor and angst reflecting on nature and environmental issues.

Calling his work Revelation Art, Cliff McReynolds (b. 1933) seeks to get in touch and in tune with a higher order that he senses in the universe, not unlike what the surrealists called the pursuit of *the marvelous*. Although McReynolds could be confused with a commercial artist—since 1976, Pomegranate Publications has produced and distributed his work worldwide on posters, cards, calendars, books, and puzzles—he is a painter-philosopher with a systematic and visionary turn of mind, who has long labored seriously at bringing his remarkable inner visions to the world.

Lynn Schuette's (b. 1948) vast, abstract landscapes in a limited palette of intense warm hues are pacans to Romantic painters of the sublime, such as J.M.W. Turner, who provided important antecedents for the surrealists, and to American literary giants, such as Cormac McCarthy. She was the founder in 1980 of Sushi, Inc., a performance space that helped to jumpstart the downtown San Diego art scene.

For the last twelve years of her life, Jen Trute (1960-2011) dedicated herself to creating a series of detailed works that commented on environmental degradation and animal rights issues as a way to evoke awareness of the human impact on nature.





Brothers Einar and Jamex de la Torre (Einar, b. 1963; Jamex, b. 1960) are prolific artists who have gained an international following while defying easy categorization. They introduce satire, found objects, and kitsch into extravagant blown-glass and mixed-media sculptures, and produce lenticular prints expressing incongruity and artistic freedom. In true surrealist fashion, they believe that art “must transcend to the immeasurable, to the poetic and mysterious” and operate, as they put it, outside “the fascism of good taste and good mores.”

In the decades since the founding of the movement, the surrealist spirit has revolutionized the arts and pervaded social theory. Its legacy is found in the work of the Beat poets, the Marxist-inspired Situationist International actions, the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s, and punk culture. Today Surrealism inspires a plethora of avant-garde ideas and techniques among contemporary artists. It enjoys this resurgence perhaps due to the political and social conditions of our times and the accompanying climate of disillusionment and rebellion.

