

Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations (MIT Press)

By Lewis Kachur



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Surrealism in its late phase often abandoned neutral exhibition spaces in favor of environments that embodied subjective ideologies. These exhibitions offered startled viewers an early version of installation art before the form existed as such. In Displaying the Marvelous, Lewis Kachur explores this development by analyzing three elaborate Surrealist installations created between 1938 and 1942. The first two, the "Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme" (1938) and the "Dream of Venus" at the New York World's Fair (1939), dealt with the fetishization of the female body. The third, "First Papers of Surrealism" (1942), focused not on the figure but on the entire expanse of the exhibition space, thus contributing to the development of nonfigurative art in New York. Kachur presents a full visual and verbal reconstruction of each of the exhibitions, evoking the sequence that the contemporary viewer would have encountered.

The book considers Marcel Duchamp and Salvador Dali, two artists who are not usually compared, within a common framework. Duchamp specialized in frustrating the spectator, using his ironic wit to call into question the definition of the work of art. Dali was a master at disorienting the senses by establishing and then undermining everyday spatial and object properties. The Surrealist challenge, as voiced by Andre Breton, was to evoke the marvelous. Duchamp and Dali extended that challenge to the physical and commercial realm of the exhibition installation.



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Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations (MIT Press) By Lewis Kachur Bibliography

Sales Rank: #2193648 in BooksPublished on: 2003-02-28Original language: English

• Number of items: 1

• Dimensions: 9.00" h x .50" w x 7.00" l, 1.35 pounds

• Binding: Paperback

• 288 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Lewis Kachur hands us a free time-travel ticket, with himself as marvelous pilot. Transporting us into the thick inventions of late Surrealist exhibitions, he gives us the ravishing gift of *being there*, present at the birthing and, as well, the seeding of so much installation and site-specific art to come decades later. For artists now who feel tied to Grandfather Marcel without having known him, Kachur's work vividly opens up the real moves of Duchamp's reinvention of what it is to be an artist. Revealing secret interior paths of communication among artists that flow synaptically across generations, this sumptuous work points to a new holistic way to understand art.

(Mierle Laderman Ukeles, artist)

A splendid analysis of the late Surrealist exhibitions. Anyone interested in Surrealist art would want this book; anyone interested in the consideration of display in twentieth-century art must have this book.

(Richard Martin (1945-1999), former curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

A compulsive and beautifully presented read.

(David Gove Surman Leonardo)

Unique and perceptive research... an exacting and truly exciting visual and verbal coverage of the exhibitions.

(Petra Rigby Watson Parachute)

Perceptive, fascinating, and written with pleasure and delight. The reciprocal exchange between art work and its context is presented with a steady, at times inspired, sense of inquiry.

(Brian O'Doherty, writer)

About the Author

Lewis Kachur is Associate Professor of Art History at Kean University, New Jersey. Recently, Lewis Kachur has had two Marcel Duchamp-related conference proposals accepted for presentation at national venues in the coming academic year: Naming and Embodying the Rose, Modern Language Association, Los Angeles, January 7, 2011. Dirtying the Corner: Duchamp, Rauschenberg and Surrealist Exhibition Interiors, Surrealism and the Americas Conference, Rice University, Houston, forthcoming Nov. 6, 2010.

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