

Mélusine À belles mains. Livre Surréaliste - livre d'artiste
Cahiers du Centre de recherche sur le Surréalisme n.XXXII

Andrea Oberhuber (edt.)

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The special issue of the journal *Mélusine n.XXXII* titled *À belles mains. Livre Surréaliste - livre d'artiste*, edited by Andrea Oberhuber, is the final product and result of the interest and in-depth analysis on Surrealism, which the *Centre de recherche sur le Surréalisme* of the Université Paris III has undertaken over the past 30 years.

The book presents in a homogeneous and integrated fashion the theoretical contributions and insights on particular cases, providing a valuable and sophisticated work and research tool to those involved in Surrealism, in typographical and visual culture, as well as in literature and the publishing market.

As such, the book deserves thoughtful consideration for at least two reasons: firstly, it can be considered a complete theoretical contribution to the broader debate on the extensive and complex relationships between text and image; secondly, it contains an anthology of essays that present different cases of artist books and the surrealist books, considering also the chronological path (from 1918 with the *Livre sur les peintres* to 2009 with *Eros mélancolique*), and the evolution of its languages.

Now, if we were to single out one minor consideration with the special issue of the magazine, it would be the relatively poor set of illustrations for a book dedicated to these matters and supposedly intended to highlight the significance of their visual dimension.

Beyond that, the book is well organized and allows moving from a section devoted to in-depth essays (*Dossier*), to a second part dedicated to the *Documents*, like the unpublished correspondence of René Crevel (edited by Stephen Steele), as well as that held between André Breton and Maurice Fourré (1949 - 1955) (edited by Bruno Duval), to finally close with an appendix of *Variété*.

The essay deals with the surrealist book and the artist book, understood both as a hybrid genre

of excellence and as a space for innovation and experimentation. Both of them, accepting text and image at the same time, establish a dialogue of two representation modes via collision or collusion. Indeed, these two book types assume a new type of reading, that is, reading-research. On the other hand, the book-object is perceived as a research and interest source from various perspectives, as it places itself between the writer and artist, between words and images.

The essays follow various research lines. In essence, there are methodological-theoretical approaches such as that of Elza Adamowicz, who questioned the ways whereby surrealist artist books could be analyzed. To that end, she offered multiple procedures, ranging from comparative to poetic reading, the idea of divergence-convergence, dialogue and exchange between text and image, deviance and difference.

As for the historical-editorial approach, we find Sophie Leîmatre's contribution, devoted to the history of the 1918 book -conceived and designed yet unpublished- by Aragon, Breton and Soupault; the contribution of Eddi Breuil, in charge of the GLM edition of *Œvres Complètes* of Lautréamont; Julien Schuh's contribution, which examines the penetration of the Surrealist book in the bibliophiles market, highlighting how Surrealist works of art have managed to impose their own codes and value systems to luxury book publishing. Finally, Sergio Lima's contribution describes the path from the book-object birth in 1936 to these days.

The collection further pursues the examination of the rich and dynamic relationships between text and images. In particular, the mutual independence in the creative moment is further analyzed, as in the work *Chants de Maldoror* (1934) of Lautréamant, illustrated with 42 etchings by Dalí (studied by Marcella Biserni) or *Les Variations citadines* by Bona and Mandiargues (studied by Georgiana Colvile and Marc Kober), characterized by the distance of the artists upon their creative act.

Biserni presents the idea of the book as an independent creative object, where images and texts may result from entirely different creative instances and the creation of images is not subservient to the textual mandate. Indeed, the reader should decide whether to set out on a research journey to uncover the integration of texts and images. This research dimension of the reader is also covered by Virginie Pouzet - Duzer, who analyzes the works of Ivsic - Toyen - Le Brun (1967), indicating that the Surrealist book entails a dialogue between what appears in plain sight -images- and what appears as reading material -text, creating thus a particular enigma for the reader to unravel by reconstructing the semantics of the whole.

Fritzsich, who analyzes the collaboration between the poet Paul Eluard and the painter Max

Ernst, considers that the book itself becomes a large collage, the result of a media mix including texts and images, impelling the reader / viewer to play an increasingly active role.

For her part, Annie Richard stresses the importance of artistic dialogue upon creation and of the exchange between painting and writing, as in the work of Gisèle Prassinos, Brelin le Frou (1975).

Alexander Streitberger, starting from the work of Marcel Broodthaers, explores the relationships between different media and studies the book as a "prohibited object" because of certain social and artistic practices. Caroline Lebrec also investigates the relationship between different languages and media through an analysis of the contemporary novel *Eros mélancolique*, produced with the collaboration of the mathematician and poet Roubaud and the writer Garretà.

Another research line in the book examines the role played by photography in the Surrealist book. Marc Aufraïse, taking into consideration the cover designed by Dalí for *La Femme visible* (1930), reconstructs the photo as if it had been a conscious choice, or as a weapon used to expunge any human trace of the creative process, and as the possibility of a mechanical reproduction of reality. Daniël Méaux studies the role of photography in the work *Facile* (1935) by Paul Eluard and Man Ray, a collaboration between three artists: a poet, a photographer, but also a typographer. It constitutes a masterful work in its depiction of the potential alliances between photography and books. Specifically, it highlights the aesthetic qualities of the pictures shown and the aesthetic relationship that can be established with the book. The appearance / disappearance of the images and words arising from the manual gesture of the reader / viewer who turns the pages.

The issue of interpretation and mediation between written and iconic text (even through the filter of translation) is treated by Jacques Leenhardt, which takes into account the collaboration between André Breton and Wilfredo Lam to produce *Fata Morgana* (1941). The transition from one language to another in the art book and the surrealist book, or the true and real coexistence of different languages is also covered in an essay by Doris G. Eibl, who examines the case of *Dons des féminines* by Valentina Penrose (1951). This is a bilingual Surrealist book (English and French), which combines poetry and collage. Establishing interactions between the French and English text, words and collages, and left page and right page, Valentine Penrose creates a dynamic that pushes the reader-viewer to the limits of his/her powers of perception and understanding. Moreover, her artistic gesture calls for a reading-regard and therefore, requires the adoption of a new reading position.

Regarding the study of the book-object, Emmanuelle Pelard makes a key contribution with her

analysis of the publishing house Erta in Montreal (1949), whose books call for a so-called iconic-reading ability, that is, the enjoyment of the book as a space developed for textual and iconic aesthetics, combined with what we might refer to as tactile-reading. The books made by Guiguère require a synesthetic reading ability to extract the aesthetic value embedded in words. Furthermore, the book encourages experimentation with text, namely to unlearn the systematic reading process -designed to narrow intellectual knowledge- as a way to see, feel and develop an unconsciousness of reading.

Raluca Lupu-Onet provides further reflections on the relationship between texts and images through the work *Logbook*, a collection of logos of the Belgian surrealist Dotremont (1974). In this case, it is interesting to consider the materiality significance of language. The language and the written text become something not intended for publication (hence neither for reading) but for a painting exhibition (hence for viewing).

For the rest, a thread that characterizes all contributions and that, in my view, ties them together very effectively, is the tendency to provide a new and more comprehensive definition of the reader, who is also and above all, the viewer and dynamic and active subject involved in the reading process.

In this context, the art book and the Surrealist book seem to open the way for a contemporary and multimedia concept of knowledge and enjoyment, in which all perception, tactile, and synaesthetic elements acquire increasing significance.

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