

Art Masterpiece: *The Return* (1940) by Rene Magritte



Pronounced: MA-GREET

Keywords: Surrealism, Texture, Replacement, Juxtaposition

Activity: Surreal Sun-print with Juxtaposed Foam Shapes

Surrealism: "Sur" means beyond, so surrealism means "beyond reality." Surrealism is a major artistic movement where artists attempted to represent the world as seen by the unconscious mind. Their artwork was inspired by dreams and imagination and usually contained scenes that were very fantasy-like and unreal. Surrealism depicts bizarre images of objects that may be based in reality, but are altered so they look more dream-like.

Texture: An element of art; the way an object looks as though it feels (rough or smooth).

Replacement: Replacing an expected object with an unexpected one.

Juxtaposition: Joining two images in an impossible combination.

Meet The Artist:

- Rene Magritte was born in Lessines, Belgium. He was the eldest son of Léopold Magritte, a tailor and textile merchant and Régina, a hat maker. He began lessons in drawing in 1910.
- His early work (1915) was largely influenced by the Impressionist movement. From 1916-1918, he studied art at a prestigious school in Belgium but found the instruction dull. His paintings produced from 1918-1924 were influenced by *Futurism* and *Cubism*.
- Magritte's principal source of income during these years was working as an industrial designer for a wallpaper factory and an advertising designer until he was awarded a contract with the *Galerie le Centaure* in Brussels that made it possible for him to paint full-time.
- In 1926, Magritte produced his first surreal painting, *The Lost Jockey*. He held his first exhibition at the Brussels' *Galerie*, which was not well received by critics. Depressed by the failure of his show, he moved to Paris, France where he became friends with other surrealist artists. He stayed in France until his contract with the *Galerie* ended in 1929, then moved back to Brussels and resumed an advertising job.
- During the German occupation of Belgium in WWII, Magritte remained in Brussels and experimented with various art styles, including creating falsified replicas of other artists' artwork. For him, this was a way of coping with his feelings of isolation due to the war. At the end of 1948, he returned to the true style of his pre-war surrealist art.
- Magritte was a very reserved person. Despite the fame that his work eventually brought him, he and his wife, Georgette, lived a private, middle-class life.
- Like other surrealist painters (Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, etc.), his work combined real objects in an unusual or nonsensical way in order to stir up ideas and feelings in the viewer. However, unlike other surreal artists, he painted these objects in a very realistic way, combining them with incredible imagination. This made his work very different.
- Magritte's work became popular again in the 1960's before he died of cancer in 1967.

Discussion:

- How would you describe this scene? What are some of the items you see and what do you think they mean?
- Is this a realistic painting? Which images are realistic? What makes it look surreal? (dreamlike imagery)
- Where do you see examples of texture?
- Where do you see examples of replacement and juxtaposition?
- Why do you think the artist titled it *The Return*?
- How does this painting make you feel? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Activity: Surreal Sun-print with Juxtaposed Foam Shapes

- 1) Prior to the start of class, set up 7-8 small tubs in the classroom with about 2 inches water. (Use the jug to carry water to the classroom.) The water will be used to develop the sun-prints after exposure.
- 2) Explain to the students that they will be creating a sun-print using *Natureprint* paper and various small objects (flowers, stencils, buttons, coins, etc.). Then, when the sun-print is dry, they will choose some interesting foam stickers to *juxtapose* with the sun-print images.
- 3) Hand out the bags with the sun-print objects and have each student choose 3-8 objects to use. If the objects are small, they can fit more on the page. They should be fairly flat objects for best results. Objects can be carried outside on a paper plate, if desired.
- 4) Pass out one piece of cardboard (with 2 pins) per student. Give one piece of sun-print paper to each student; pin it to the cardboard.
- 5) In an orderly manner, direct students outside to a location with full sun and protected from wind. Have them place their sun-print paper (attached to the cardboard) on the ground and then **quickly** arrange their chosen objects on top. If necessary, the objects can be pinned in place with additional pins so they don't move around.
- 6) Expose the sun-print paper to **full sun** until the paper turns a very pale blue, about 2 minutes. Do not underexpose or overexpose.

- 7) Take sun-print paper and objects inside and put objects back in bags. Remove paper from cardboard and push pins back into the cardboard to save them. Soak paper in a tub of plain water for about 1 minute, then remove excess water by laying the sun-print paper on a paper towel. Transfer sun-print paper to a dry paper plate to dry inside the classroom, away from the sun. Image will sharpen during drying time.
- 8) Make certain all sun-printing objects, pins and cardboard rectangles have been collected. Nothing should be discarded unless ripped or torn.
- 9) After sun-printing is complete, hand out colored cardstock, and have the students fold their sheet of cardstock in half. Students should write their name in small letters on the back of the card. If there is time, the students can write a message inside the card (for Mother's Day, Graduation, Father's Day, a birthday, a teacher, etc.).
- 10) Pass out bags of foam stickers, and have the students choose 2-3 foam stickers to use for their composition. **They will need to wait to apply the stickers until the sun-print is completely dry.**
- 11) Once sun-prints are dry, attach the sun-print paper to the cardstock (using a stapler or a glue stick). Apply the foam stickers to the composition. Students have now completed a surrealistic composition using sun-print paper and foam shapes. **Collect the paper plates if they are in usable condition.**

Materials Needed:

- 7-8 small plastic tubs and a water source
- Water jug to transport water
- *Natureprint* paper, 5 x 7-inches, 1 sheet per student
- Pins and cardboard to serve as a base for sun-print paper
- Objects for sun-printing in bags, 1 bag per 2 students (to select from)
- Paper towels, 1 per student
- Paper plates, 1 per student (please keep after drying is complete)
- Colored cardstock (folded in half to make a card)
- Stapler or glue sticks
- Interesting foam stickers in bags, 1 bag per 2 students (to select from)

Artwork Examples:

