Surrealism

In his 1924 Manifesto, Andre Breton defined the aim of the movement as “pure psychic automatism” and claimed they intended to express the “real process of thought, free from control by reason or morals”. In the visual arts, Surrealism had roots in the metaphysical painting of de Chirico and Chagall’s “illogicality of dream imagery”. It shared too the experimentalism, elements of surprise and random juxtapositions as well as the international character of Dada. Indeed, many of its founding members (Arp, Ernst & Eluard) joined Breton in his revolutionary, activist mission to “distil and unify the essential principles of modernism”. The psychoanalytical work of Freud provided the catalyst for freedom as well as the dream subject matter that characterises many Surrealist works. Some artists (eg Miro & Ernst) showed an interest in intuition or automatism. Through the 1930s and 40s, the Surrealist movement spread widely and today its most recognisable proponents include Dali, Magritte and Delvaux although not all of these shared Breton’s revolutionary vision. According to Herbert Read, it was an “emancipation of the visual imagination from the bonds of reason and convention.”