**Surrealism: Key Fact sheet:**

**Surrealism** is a cultural movement that began in the early 1920s, and is best known for the visual artworks and writings of the group members.

Surrealist works feature the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions and non sequitur; however, many Surrealist artists and writers regard their work as an expression of the philosophical movement first and foremost, with the works being an artifact. Leader, André Breton, was explicit in his assertion that Surrealism was above all a revolutionary movement.

Cover of the first issue of [*La Révolution surréaliste*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_R%C3%A9volution_surr%C3%A9aliste), December 1924.

Surrealism developed out of the Dada activities of World War I and the most important center of the movement was Paris. From the 1920s on, the movement spread around the globe, eventually affecting the visual arts, literature, film, and music of many countries and languages, as well as political thought and practice, philosophy and social theory.

During the war André Breton, (who had trained in medicine and psychiatry), served in a neurological hospital where he used the psychoanalytic methods of Sigmund Freud.

Back in Paris, Breton joined in the Dada activities and also started the literary journal *Littérature* along with [Louis Aragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Aragon) and [Philippe Soupault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Soupault). In this, they began experimenting with [automatic writing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrealist_automatism)—spontaneously writing without censoring their thoughts—and published "automatic" writings, as well as accounts of dreams. They gathered more artists and writers into the group, and came to believe that automatism was a better tactic for societal change than the Dada attack on prevailing values.

Breton wrote the Manifesto in 1924 and in it he outlined the aims of the movement, the influences and examples of Surrealist works. Other original Surrealists included [Max Ernst](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Ernst), [Salvador Dalí](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvador_Dal%C3%AD), [Man Ray](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_Ray), [Hans Arp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Arp), [André Masson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9_Masson), [Joan Miró](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Mir%C3%B3), [Marcel Duchamp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Duchamp), [Jacques Prévert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Pr%C3%A9vert) and [Yves Tanguy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yves_Tanguy). Though Breton admired Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp and courted them to join the movement, they remained peripheral. More writers also joined, including former Dadaist Tristan Tzara.

As they developed their philosophy they felt that while Dada rejected categories and labels, Surrealism would advocate the idea that ordinary and depictive expressions are vital and important, but that the sense of their arrangement must be open to the full range of imagination according to the [Hegelian Dialectic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#Hegelian_dialectic). They also looked to the [Marxist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist) dialectic and the work of such theorists as [Walter Benjamin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Benjamin) and [Herbert Marcuse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Marcuse).

[Freud's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud) work with free association, dream analysis and the hidden unconscious was of the utmost importance to the Surrealists in developing methods to liberate imagination. However, they embraced [idiosyncrasy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idiosyncrasy), while rejecting the idea of an underlying madness or darkness of the mind. (Later the idiosyncratic [Salvador Dalí](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvador_Dal%C3%AD) explained it as: "There is only one difference between a madman and me. I am not mad.”

The group aimed to revolutionize human experience, including its personal, cultural, social, and political aspects, by freeing people from what they saw as false rationality, and restrictive customs and structures. Breton proclaimed, the true aim of Surrealism is "long live the social revolution, and it alone!" As part of this goal, many Surrealists aligned with communist or anarchist ideas.