

# Fantastic Art Revisited:

## Exhibiting Old Masters & Contemporary Art

A symposium presented by Nicholas Hall and Yuan Fang  
in conjunction with the exhibition at David Zwirner  
*Endless Enigma: Eight Centuries of Fantastic Art*

Saturday Afternoon  
October 27, 2018

The Kitchen  
512 W 19<sup>th</sup> Street, New York

*RSVP required for entry. Please email  
sara@nicholashjhall.com or telephone +1 212-772-9100  
Please arrive promptly as no one shall be seated once the presentation begins*

*Fantastic Art Revisited: Exhibiting Old Masters and Contemporary Art* is a symposium organized by Nicholas Hall and Yuan Fang, to take place on the closing day of the accompanying exhibition *Endless Enigma: Eight Centuries of Fantastic Art* at David Zwirner.

The symposium brings into focus the legacy of Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s 1936 MoMA exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. A key point of reference for *Endless Enigma*, Barr's exhibition brought art by Dada and Surrealist artists into the context of what he called 'fantastic art' by European Old Masters, whose works displayed unexpected thematic and formal relationships with those of the avant-garde. It was, in fact, one of the earliest modern museum exhibitions to explore the continuous conversation between art of the past and art of the present – a dialogue that has enjoyed increasing popularity in recent years across the museum and commercial art world.

The half-day event will consist of presentations by curators and academics from leading European and American institutions. Divided into two sessions, the presentations will cover a diverse range of topics referencing a single work, subject or concept touched upon in *Endless Enigma*; the first session explores the earlier history of fantastic art, while the following session presents topics pertaining to museology and display. Subsequently, presenters will participate in a roundtable discussion about thematic exhibitions that involve the juxtaposition of Old Masters with Contemporary art, offering a critical assessment of the practice and its conceptual basis. At a time when the notion of the universal museum has been called into question and new kinds of art history have been written to provide alternatives to the grand narrative of Modernism, how do thematic shows as such challenge the way we understand art of the past? Do temporary museum exhibitions like the 1936 *Fantastic Art* show at MoMA and *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body (1300–Now)* at the Met Breuer (2018) have an effect on the way curators and collectors think about their permanent collections? How can contemporary exhibition practices and methodology influence traditional fields of collecting, which are typically rooted in connoisseurship? What can be extracted from *Endless Enigma* that could be informative for the future of Old Masters? Concluding the day will be a chance to view *Endless Enigma* before the exhibition closes, followed by a private cocktail reception in the exhibition space.

# Session I

## Lingering Fantasies: Fantastic Art Across Centuries

12:30

Doors open for registration

1:00

*Welcome*

Nicholas Hall and Yuan Fang

*Introduction*

Emma Capron

2016–18 Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow, The Frick Collection

1:15

“Bosch and his Fantastic Past”

Till-Holger Borchert

Director, Musea Brugge, Bruges

1:45

“*Seicento* Witches: Between Magic and Melancholy”

Hannah Segrave

Andrew W. Mellon Pre-doctoral Fellow in European Painting, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

2:15

“Monstrous Bodies, Monstrous Fruit: Bosch, Bruegel and Galileo in the Genealogy of Surrealism”

David Freedberg

Pierre Matisse Professor of the History of Art and Director of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, Columbia University

*Coffee break*

## Session II

# Fantastic Displays: Old and New in Dialogue

### *Introduction*

Olivier Berggruen

Independent curator and art historian

3:00

“Surrealism and the Old Masters: Counterweights or Amplifiers? The Wadsworth Atheneum as a Laboratory of the Arts”

Oliver Tostmann

Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

3:30

“Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism: ‘A Serious Affair’”

Anne Umland

The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art

4:00

“Like with Like: Life, Art and Time at Met Breuer”

Luke Syson

Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Chairman of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

### *Intermission*

4:40

*Roundtable Discussion*

Moderated by Olivier Berggruen, with selected earlier participants and J. Patrice Marandel, independent art historian and curator

5:10

*Closing Remarks*

Richard Rand

Associate Director for Collections, J. Paul Getty Museum

5:15

Chance to view the exhibition *Endless Enigma: Eight Centuries of Fantastic Art* at David Zwirner, 537 W 20<sup>th</sup> Street, New York

6:00

*Cocktail Reception*

David Zwirner, 537 W 20<sup>th</sup> Street, New York

## Presentation Synopsis

Till-Holger Borchert

Director, Musea Brugge, Bruges

“Bosch and his Fantastic Past”

Drawing on the medieval traditions of fantastic images, this presentation will address the significant transformation of the fantastic and the bizarre in the pictorial universe of Hieronymus Bosch. It examines earlier medieval sources of Bosch’s imagery and looks into the artist’s methodology of changing their meaning in his work in order to satisfy the tastes of his audiences. To conclude, the significance of this process will be discussed from the perspective of cultural history.

Hannah Segrave

Andrew W. Mellon Pre-doctoral Fellow in European Painting, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

“*Seicento* Witches: Between Magic and Melancholy”

Focusing on the first half of seventeenth-century Italy, this talk will explore the visual culture of witchcraft as the “witch craze” swept across Europe. Several detailed examples of witches created by Italian artists will be given, culminating in an in-depth discussion of Salvator Rosa’s novel imagery, which departed from both Northern and Italian traditions.

David Freedberg

Pierre Matisse Professor of the History of Art and Director of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, Columbia University

“Monstrous Bodies, Monstrous Fruit: Bosch, Bruegel and Galileo in the Genealogy of Surrealism”

The historical issue to be addressed and illustrated in this presentation is how monstrosity and anomaly made space for the interpretation of nature by poetry and art as well as by what we now call science. It could also be called *Galileo’s Mistake and the history of Surrealism*, because of Galileo’s exclusion of subjectivity in the understanding of nature itself.

Oliver Tostmann

Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

“Surrealism and the Old Masters: Counterweights or Amplifiers? The Wadsworth Atheneum as a Laboratory of the Arts”

In October 1931, five years before MoMA held its *Fantastic Art* exhibition in 1936, the Wadsworth Atheneum presented the first Surrealist exhibition in America. Concurrently, *The Finding of Vulcan*, a seminal painting by Renaissance artist Piero di Cosimo, arrived at the museum. Was this moment a simple happenstance or part of a wider museum strategy? This talk discusses how the museum continued to explore the relationship between Old Masters and Surrealists during the 1930s.

Anne Umland

The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art

“Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism: ‘A Serious Affair’”

Alfred H. Barr, Jr.’s *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1936-37) has achieved landmark status as an exhibition that contributed fundamentally to the historicization and canonization of Surrealism in the United States. Yet the specifics of Barr’s display strategies, which were distinctively and deliberately different from those used by the Surrealists themselves, are far less well known. Working from installation photographs, contemporary reviews, and Barr’s correspondence with various living artists included in his exhibition, this talk addresses Barr’s installation and the larger arguments it broached.

Luke Syson

Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Chairman of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

“Like with Like: Life, Art and Time at Met Breuer”

The decision to abandon chronology for the exhibition *Like Life: Sculpture, Color and the Body (1300-Now)* was a relatively easy one for the speaker, Sheena Wagstaff and their team. But when the decision was made, they were not prepared for the scale of the challenge or the consequences of the juxtapositions. They were able to predict certain categories of connection - the direct citation by an artist working now of an unexpected source for example, where some form of artistic lineage could be traced. It was sometimes less easy to see why similarities of material or formal choice had been made over time. Were they deliberate or instinctive? But most complicated and

troubling were the moments, sometimes established after the show was installed, which suggested some fundamental continuities of experience and imagination over time. How then were they supposed to unpick art from life?

NICHOLAS HALL

*For further details regarding the  
symposium or Endless Enigma,  
please visit [nicholashjhall.com](http://nicholashjhall.com)*