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Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars (Modern Art Practices and Debates)

David Batchelor, Paul Wood, Briony Fer

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This is the third in a series of four books about art and its interpretation from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. The books seek to explain the most important issues confronting any study of modern art, without attempting exhaustive coverage. They present a range of approaches characteristic of current art-historical debates. The authors of the present book address debates in, and about, the avant-garde in the years between the two world wars. The first chapter, '"This liberty and this order": art in France after the First World War', considers responses by artists, primarily in France, to the First World War. The emergence of a 'School of Paris', and the competing avant-gardes of Purism, Dada and early Surrealism, is related to the wider social conditions existing in the wake of both devastation and victory. However, there is also a concern to indicate ways in which art can achieve independence from its framing conditions. Chapter 2, 'The language of construction', looks at the emergence of a concept of construction art. The focus is the post-revolutionary Soviet Union, though work in France and Weimar Germany is also considered. There is an examination of why construction proved so powerful a metaphor for artists at this time, and this leads to a consideration of ideas of utility and decoration in art and design. Chapter 3, 'Surrealism, myth and psychoanalysis', considers aspects of Surrealism, with an emphasis on questions of sexual difference. It looks at Surrealism's use of the legacy of Freud, and studies a wide range of textual and photographic sources in addition to paintings. In particular, there is a review of Surrealist magazines and the contributionof Georges Bataille. The final chapter, 'Realisms and realities', addresses the widespread debate over the question of Realism in art. For many, Realism represented an alternative to what was seen as the isolation or even elitism of the avant-garde, a viewpoint that gained support

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