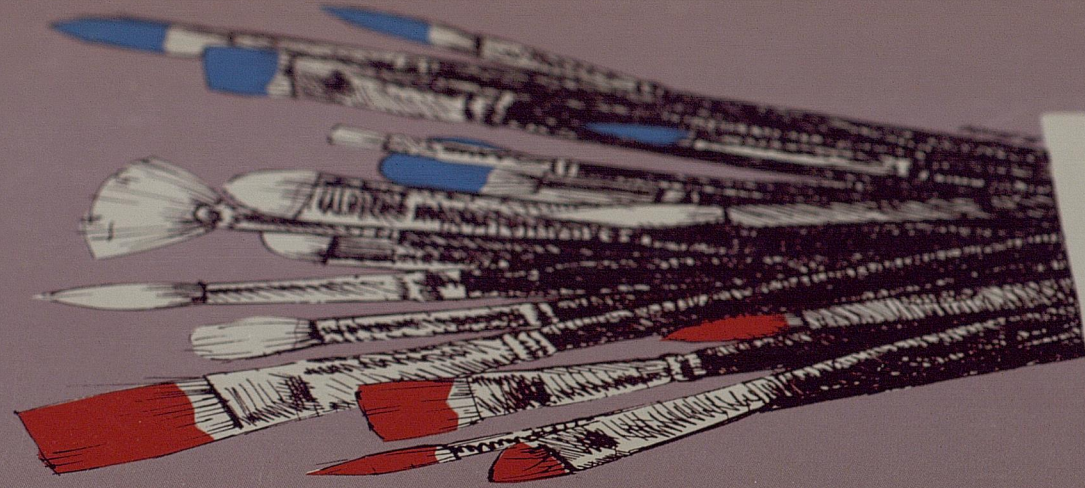


*The  
Aesthetic Theories  
of French Artists*



*From Realism to Surrealism*

by

*Charles Edward Gauss*

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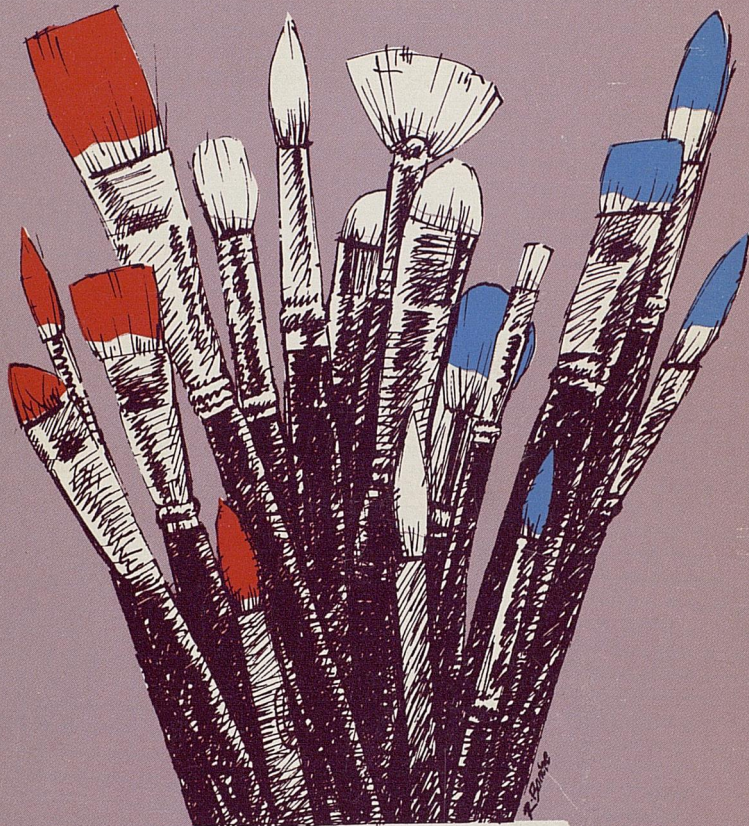
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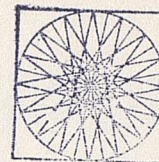
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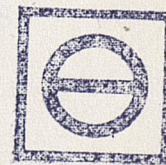
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Museo de Arte Abstracto Español  
Cuenca

THE AESTHETIC THEORIES OF FRENCH ARTISTS

CHARLES EDWARD MALIN



THE HOGARTH PRESS  
WINDMILL - LONDON

95p

THE AESTHETIC THEORIES  
OF  
FRENCH ARTISTS  
FROM REALISM TO SURREALISM

BY  
CHARLES EDWARD GAUSS

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to those who have not yet disembarassed themselves of a philistine attitude. I hope it will suggest that creativity demands an ongoing development and that often the contributors to a constituent tradition in the arts are not the academics but the avant garde men, sometimes even when they are throwing out nonsense—at least such was the case among the French artists from Courbet to the surrealists.

And last, I hope that my book will suggest that painting is not an enterprise isolated from all other cultural endeavors, but is simply one of the ways, like all else he does, in which man philosophically reflects upon the world and his knowledge of it.

C. E. G.

Nova University,  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida  
March 8, 1966

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cannot yet describe it for it has never been explored and its borders have barely been touched at times. It is here surrealist artistic techniques enter, for they are the methods by which the poet and the painter can explore the unconscious as does the psychologist. Surrealism, the philosophic position, posits the surreal; surrealism, the method, helps to describe it. The duality is apparent in Breton's definitions:

SURREALISM, N. m. Pure psychic automatism by which it is proposed to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the real functioning of thought. A dictation of thinking, in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside of all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

ENCYCL. Philos. Surrealism rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected before its time, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the distinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin the definitiveness of all the other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in resolving the principal problems of life.<sup>7</sup>

Breton describes the first surrealist method whereby our activity is freed from rational control, psychic automatism. This is the attempt to record the stream of uninhibited verbal imagery for oneself as a psychoanalyst would that of a patient. In as passive a state as possible one writes down rapidly his flow of thought. Or one may draw at random in a kind of doodling.

The first manifesto clarifies the ideological basis of surrealism and describes one possible method for it.

In the *Second manifeste du surréalisme* of 1930, Breton declares that it is the purpose of surrealism to provoke a "crisis of consciousness" by exposing the falseness of the old antinomies which have so long prevented mankind from finding the common point of reference.<sup>8</sup> The exposure can best be made through a study of the problem of human expression for:

No one, in expressing himself, does better than to adjust himself to the possibility of the very obscure reconciliation of what he knew he had to say on a subject with that he didn't know he had to say but has said.<sup>9</sup>

The two most valuable means of expression are dream accounts and automatic texts (whether written, painted, or drawn makes no difference as their automaticity is evident in any one). They are valuable because they are the means to which one may turn when the object of artistic activity is not the production of works of art but the revealing of the psychic life. In artistic inspiration there occurs a kind of short circuit between an idea and its response.<sup>10</sup> For that reason art is valuable to the surrealist.

This gives rise to the all important question which brings us to the heart of the surrealist position. If we do have such an unconscious self as described why should we want to know about it and exercise it? The answer is found in the significance which is attached to the surreal. Down in this inner psychic life of each one of us we come to the human crucible itself, the overindividual state wherein exist the universal truth, beauty, and reality that all of us can comprehend. Here is not only the man himself but mankind. Here is the foundation upon which we must build our morals, our art and ways of thought, our life and actions:

The products of psychic activity . . . offer a key capable of opening indefinitely that box of multiple depths called man.<sup>11</sup>

In *Le surréalisme et la peinture* Breton presents the purposes and problems of surrealist activity in the plastic arts. Because mankind has felt the need of fixing his visual images, a plastic language has grown up corresponding to the various degrees of his sensations, the things we all see