

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

22 Cortlandt Alley,
New York, NY 10013

Tue–Sat, 10 am–6 pm
andrewkreps.com

Tel. (212)741-8849
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Eileen Agar

Flowering of A Wing

Works: 1936-1989

22 Cortlandt Alley
January 12th - February 10th
Opening Reception:
Friday, January 12th, 6 – 8 pm

'I have spent my whole life in revolt against convention, trying to bring colour and light and a sense of the mysterious to daily existence. One must have a hunger for new colour, new shapes, and new possibilities of discovery.'

Andrew Kreps Gallery is thrilled to announce the first major US presentation of the work of Eileen Agar (1899-1991), on view at the gallery's 22 Cortlandt Alley location from January 12 through February 10. Celebrating the central role that Agar played within the evolution of cultural languages in Europe in the twentieth century, the exhibition will include painting, collage, assemblage and photography, spanning fifty years of the artist's remarkable career.

Agar's abiding interest was in the synthesis of two of the twentieth century's most significant artistic tendencies: Cubism and Surrealism. Through bringing together these two sources of inspiration she developed a unique style that offered a moving commentary on society over a period of tremendous social change. Having lived and worked through two world wars, the rise of global industrialization, the civil rights and post-colonial movements, and a 'cold war', Agar channelled the anxieties and tensions that such events engendered into her work – and yet she always sought a positive outlook, ever on the quest for joy. She was fascinated by classical art, ancient mythologies, the natural world and sexual pleasure, and she mined these subjects for the forms and content that filled her works, combining order and chaos and fusing vivid abstraction with figurative references.

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1899, Agar, a rebellious child, was sent to boarding school in England at the age of six. She made Europe her home, remaining on the continent until her death in London in 1991. Europe afforded Agar new freedoms and her artistic talents quickly brought her to the fore of the artistic avant-garde in London where she worked and shared ideas with Paul Nash, Gertrude Hermes and Henry Moore. And in Paris where she became associated with Surrealists such as André Breton, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Lee Miller, and Paul and Nusch Éluard, while simultaneously undertaking painting lessons with Cubist

František Foltýn and famously refusing to become Pablo Picasso's muse – instead taking him for her muse in a feminist role reversal that inspired a number of her most fêted works.

One of the few women to be included in the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition held in London, Agar was a determined believer in artistic freedom, her own self-image and in forging her own path. In so doing she rejected canonical ideas of proportion and beauty and instead rejoiced organic forms, natural disorder and the joy of color. Coinciding with the 2024 centenary of the first Surrealist Manifesto, written by André Breton in 1924, this exhibition will highlight Agar's distinct and spirited style, revealing her as one of the most dynamic, bold and prolific artists of her generation.

Throughout the exhibition, works from every decade of Agar's career are presented, from her early interests in Surrealism and photography, to the impact of the Second World War, and her late blossoming with acrylic paint.

Works from two of Agar's most significant series of work straddle the exhibition's chronology, spanning 1936 to 1985. In 1936, following her inclusion in the International Surrealist Exhibition and wanting to escape its surrounding commotion, Agar travelled to Brittany, France landing by chance in Ploumanach after choosing to disembark from the train there when she saw 'the fantastic rocks ... like enormous prehistoric monsters sleeping on the turf above the sea: a great buttock ending in a huge thumb, or a gigantic head tuned with organ pipes, a crowd, or a foot rearing up like a dolmen, all sculpted by the sea, that master-worker of time.' Keen to explore her belief that the surreal is formed by nature, Agar quickly realised a camera would be an artistic necessity so the following day she travelled to the nearest town and purchased a Rolliflex that would become her trusted companion for years to come. The photographs she took in Brittany of the Ploumanach rocks were to become an enduring source of influence – first as photographic works in their own right and then, years later in 1985, they influenced a series of hallucinatory rock paintings 'based on photographs I took fifty years ago in Brittany... images so strong they imprinted themselves on my unconscious, to surface decades later as urgent themes.' These late paintings, with their bold, dreamlike sunset pinks and blues and their post-impressionist style brushstrokes almost anthropomorphise the rocks as if she is 'reading' them anew. They are thus a striking expression of Agar's unique aesthetic sensibility, looking back to past lives while demonstrating a self-conscious reflection on the force of imagination.

The Second World War had enormous impact on Agar's artistic activity, as it did for many artists of her generation, inhibiting her imagination and emotional

explorations, and limiting her, and her works' travel. Though a pacifist, she remained in London and enlisted in the war effort, volunteering in a canteen and also serving as a Fire Watcher. While remaining in London allowed Agar to keep her studio, she was little able to paint: 'I felt it impossible to concentrate on painting when you could turn to look out of the window and see a Messerschmitt flying low over the tree tops.' As such she turned to collage with its more political foundations. Over the next ten years Agar, still 'aware of a sense of despondency... and threatened by morbidity' sought to blur the divisions between collage, drawing and painting and she began to experiment with several key Surrealist techniques such as frottage, automatism, and decalomania to pull herself out of her gloom. Some of Agar's most striking uses of automatism, or spontaneous painting, can be found in a small selection of poured paintings from the 1940s. Here she uses oil and enamel paints to create portraits in loose outlines, fluid and liquescent drips, and swirling backgrounds. Agar enjoyed this process and the use of a new paint: 'I like working with enamel paint because it is so free.' Portrait, c.1949, is one of the most expressive of these 'poured paintings' – its twisting drips and trails are thick and tangled, marbled and puddled, with hectic overdrawing. The central figure – which could likely be Agar herself – somehow resembles an ancient Greek Tanagra ceramic. Tanagra figures were appreciated for their naturalistic and expressive features, they depicted mortal women – rather than goddesses – lightly wrapped in cloaks and silks often holding wreaths. Through this reference, Agar presents herself as earthly and human, her eyes, simple spirals, looking out of the painting with bright intent to a more hopeful future.

Other works presented reveal Agar's ongoing acuity when combining painting, drawing and collage, for example Landscape, c.1950s and Ondine, 1972. Agar's early collage experiments with layering, the juxtaposition of disparate forms, and the application of varying transparencies had greatly influenced her artistic style. In these two works, elements of pattern and geometrical planes are combined with deconstructed figurative features. The geometric forms in both works also grant the content clarity while Agar's recurrent use of black balances the works. Ondine, also known as Undine, Undin or Undina, derives from the Latin word unda (wave), and is used to describe a whole host of mythological female creatures including nymphs, nereids and mermaids. The Greek myth of Ondine, actually refers to one such water spirit who became human after falling in love with a man, marrying him, and having a baby. The tale likely inspired Hans Christian Andersen's The Little Mermaid as well as Agar's own morphing face and fish-tail shown here.

In 1958, Agar moved into a house in West London with a large studio, here, for the first time she could paint at a scale she had never really been able to before. Another painterly discovery happened soon after when, in 1965 she was introduced to acrylic paint. She found acrylic to be 'very versatile, it can be used as impasto, with a palette knife, or a thin wash, and gives wonderful glazes, in acrylic I had found what I considered to be an ideal medium, and I wanted to both master and stretch it.' The large scale, acrylic paintings that she made during the 1960s and 70s are tightly composed, layered works that emulate collage but are created

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entirely in paint. The now characteristic Agar motifs appear – shells, birds, fossils, flowers, hands, silhouetted forms and foliage - skilfully woven into her carefully arranged canvases. Several works presented here reveal this skill but perhaps one of the most striking is the work that grants the exhibition its title. *Flowering of a Wing*, 1966, deftly demonstrates Agar's skill and dexterity with the medium of acrylic. Within the tight but harmonious composition passages of bright gradient meet blocks of opaque blacks, reds and greens, as well as geometric stripes, cross-hatching and zigzags. The large central figure – with its owl-like, heart-shaped face – seems to both peep through, and become the flower, revealing the enduring joy that Agar found in the natural world and its continual influence on her.

For the final years of her life, Agar continued to paint and draw every day and the exhibition includes a selection of her late and rarely seen felt-tip-pen-drawings in which we can still see her persistent curiosity: 'life's meaning is lost without the spirit of play. In play all that is lovely and soaring in the human spirit strives to find expression. To play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic. In play the mind is prepared to accept the unimagined and incredible, to enter a world where different laws apply, to be free, unfettered and divine.' Despite her mercurial approach to making, the fundamental elements of a work by Agar endured throughout her career; the natural world, foliage, seeds, shells and watery transparencies are layered with abstracted classical figures, faces in profile and mythical symbols. All the while following the two parallel paths of abstraction and Surrealism: 'the two movements that interested me most [...] I see nothing incompatible in that, indeed we walk on two legs, and for me, one is abstract, the other Surreal – it is point and counterpoint.' - Laura Smith

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ENTRANCE

MAIN GALLERY



EILEEN AGAR
Chess Head, 1970

Oil and graphite on canvas
18 x 15 inches (45.7 x 38.2
cm.); 19 1/8 x 16 1/4 x 1 5/8
inches (48.6 x 41.3 x 4.1 cm.)
framed
(EA23-003)



EILEEN AGAR
Musical Figure, 1983

Acrylic on canvas
30 x 24 inches (76.2 x 61 cm.);
31 x 24 7/8 x 1 5/8 inches
(78.7 x 63.2 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-013)



EILEEN AGAR
Sun Flower, 1953

Oil on canvas
39 1/2 x 29 inches (100.3 x
73.7 cm.); 40 3/4 x 30 1/4 x 1
5/8 inches (103.5 x 76.8 x 4.1
cm.) framed
(EA23-017)



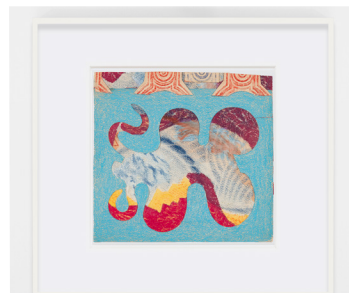
EILEEN AGAR
Untitled, 1939

Ink and pastel on paper
16 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches (41.9
x 29.2 cm.); 24 x 19 x 1 1/2
inches (61 x 48.3 x 3.8 cm.)
framed
(EA23-026)



EILEEN AGAR
Untitled (Bird/Fish), c. 1980

Acrylic, gouache and ink on
paper, mounted on cardstock
9 3/4 x 13 1/4 inches (24.8 x
33.7 cm.); 13 1/2 x 16 1/4 x 1
1/2 inches (34.3 x 41.3 x 3.8
cm.) framed
(EA23-024)



EILEEN AGAR
Untitled

Pastel and collage on paper
8 3/4 x 9 1/2 inches (22.2 x
24.1 cm.); 16 1/4 x 16 3/4 x 1
1/2 inches (41.3 x 42.5 x 3.8
cm.) framed
(EA23-034)



EILEEN AGAR
Ondine, 1972

Acrylic and collage on canvas
15 x 22 inches (38.1 x 55.9
cm.); 16 x 23 1/8 x 1 1/2
inches (40.6 x 58.7 x 3.8 cm.)
framed
(EA23-021)



EILEEN AGAR
Flowering of a Wing, 1966

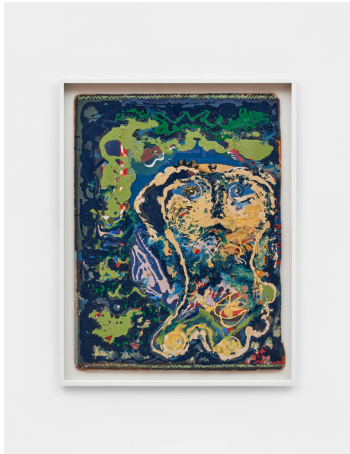
Oil and acrylic on canvas
22 x 15 inches (55.9 x 38.1
cm.); 23 x 16 x 1 5/8 inches
(58.4 x 40.6 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-023)

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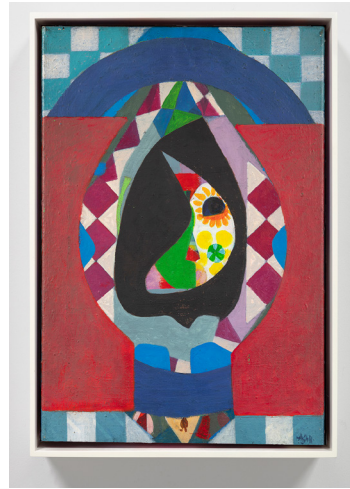
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EILEEN AGAR
Portrait, c. 1949

Oil on board
36 x 27 inches (91.4 x 68.6 cm.);
40 x 30 7/8 x 2 1/8 inches (101.6 x
78.4 x 5.4 cm.) framed
(EA23-012)



EILEEN AGAR
Ikona, 1978

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 16 inches (61 x 40.6 cm.);
25 x 17 x 1 5/8 inches (63.5 x
43.2 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-019)



EILEEN AGAR
Wings of a Child, 1983

Acrylic on canvas
16 1/4 x 24 inches (41.1 x 61
cm.); 17 x 25 x 1 5/8 inches
(43.2 x 63.5 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-007)



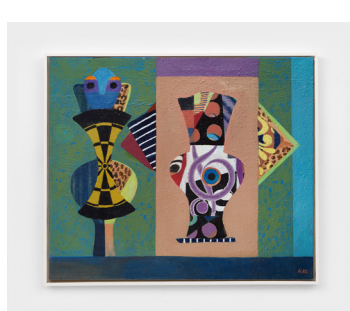
EILEEN AGAR
To a Nightingale, 1979

Oil on canvas
28 x 36 inches (71.2 x 91.3
cm.); 29 1/8 x 37 1/8 x 1 5/8
inches (74 x 94.3 x 4.1 cm.)
framed
(EA23-002)



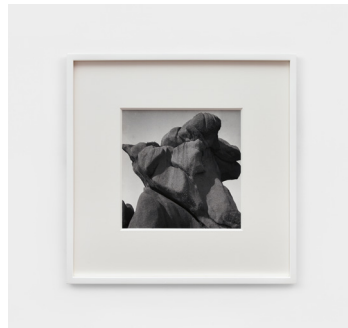
EILEEN AGAR
Magnolia, 1966

Acrylic on canvas
16 1/8 x 22 1/8 inches (41 x
56.2 cm.); 17 1/8 x 23 1/8 x 1
5/8 inches (43.5 x 58.7 x 4.1
cm.) framed
(EA23-009)



EILEEN AGAR
Urn Burial, 1989

Acrylic on canvas
25 x 30 inches (63.5 x 76.2
cm.); 26 1/8 x 31 3/4 x 1 5/8
inches (66.4 x 80.6 x 4.1 cm.)
framed
(EA23-006)



EILEEN AGAR
Rock 1, 1936

Photograph
7 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches (20 x 20
cm.); 14 3/8 x 14 3/8 x 1 1/2
inches (36.5 x 36.5 x 3.8 cm.)
framed
(EA23-041)



EILEEN AGAR
Rock 4, 1936

Photograph
7 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches (20 x 20
cm.); 14 3/8 x 14 3/8 x 1 1/2
inches (36.5 x 36.5 x 3.8 cm.)
framed
(EA23-043)

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HALLWAY

DOUBLE HEIGHT SPACE



EILEEN AGAR
Rock 3, 1936

Photograph
7 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches (20 x 20 cm.);
14 3/8 x 14 3/8 x 1 1/2 inches (36.5
x 36.5 x 3.8 cm.) framed
(EA23-042)



EILEEN AGAR
Landscape, c. 1950s

Gouache, crayon, biro on
paper
18 x 20 inches (45.7 x 50.8
cm.); 25 3/8 x 27 1/4 x 1 1/2
inches (64.5 x 69.2 x 3.8 cm.)
framed
(EA23-027)



EILEEN AGAR
Stone 4, 1985

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm.);
25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 1 5/8 inches
(63.8 x 63.8 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-040)



EILEEN AGAR
Rock, 1985

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm.);
25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 1 5/8 inches
(63.8 x 63.8 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-038)



EILEEN AGAR
Rock Study VIII, 1985

Felt-tip pen, gouache, oil
pastel, pencil, biro on canvas
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm.);
25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 1 5/8 inches
(63.8 x 63.8 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-039)



EILEEN AGAR
Rock 9, 1985

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm.);
25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 1 5/8 inches
(63.8 x 63.8 x 4.1 cm.) framed
(EA23-037)

Eileen Agar

Born 1899 in Buenos Aires, Argentina
Died 1991, London, UK

EDUCATION

- 1921–1924 Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, UK
1920–1922 Studied under Leon Underwood at Brook Green School of Art,
London, UK
1919 Byam Shaw School of Art, London, UK

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *Flowering of a Wing, Works; 1936-1989*, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
2022 *Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy*, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, UK
2021 *Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy*, Mjellby Art Museum, Halmstad Sweden
Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
2018 Farley's House & Gallery, Chiddingly, UK
Redfern Gallery, London, UK
2017 *Eileen Agar: Bride of the Sea*, Jerwood Gallery, Hastings, UK
2015 Eileen Agar: Natural Ready-mades, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, UK
2009 *Eileen Agar: An Eye for Collage*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK
2000 *Centenary Exhibition*, Redfern Gallery, London, UK
1999 Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh and Leeds City Arts Gallery
1990 Birch and Conran Fine Art, London, UK (Retrospective)
1987 Birch and Conran Fine Art, London, UK (Retrospective)
1984 New Art Centre, London, UK
1975 New Art Centre, London, UK
1971 Commonwealth Art Gallery, London, UK (Retrospective)
1964 Brook Street Gallery, London, UK (Retrospective)
1963 Galleria Billico, Rome, Italy
1962 Brook Street Gallery, London, UK

- 1957 Obelisk Gallery, London, UK
1951 Hanover Gallery, London, UK
1949 Hanover Gallery, London, UK
1947 Leger Galleries, London, UK
1944 The Redfern Gallery, London, UK
1942 The Redfern Gallery, London, UK
1933 Bloomsbury Gallery, London, UK

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 *Surrealism Beyond Borders*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
A Surreal Shock: Masterpieces from Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Seoul Arts Centre, Seoul, South Korea
A Surreal Shock: Masterpieces from Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand
Seaside Modern: Art and Life on the Beach, Hastings Contemporary, Hastings, UK
- 2020 *British Surrealism: 1783-1952*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, UK
- 2018 *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain*, The Hepworth, Wakefield, UK
- 2017 *Dreamers Awake*, White Cube, Bermondsey, London, UK
Paul Nash, Tate Britain, London, UK
- 2008 *British Surrealism & Other Realities: The Sherwin Collection*, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Middlesbrough, UK
- 2007 *Surreal Things - Surrealism and Design*, V&A Museum, London, UK
- 2005 *Aspects of Modern British Art*, Austin Desmond Fine Art, London, UK
- 2004 *Collage*, Bloomberg Space, London, UK
- 2000 *Inaugural Exhibition*, Tate Modern, London, UK
- 1997 *El Objeto Surrealista*, IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Spain
- 1996 *In the Mind's Eye: Surrealist Works on Paper*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK
- 1992 *Ten Decades: Careers of Ten Women Artists Born 1897-1906*, Norwich Gallery, Norfolk Institute of Art and Design, UK
- 1990 *Collages Surréalistes*, Galerie Zabriskie, Paris, France
- 1989 *British Surrealism*, Blond Fine Art, London
- 1988 *The Surrealist Spirit in England*, Whitford and Hughes, London, UK
- 1987 *La Femme et le Surréalisme*, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 1986 *Surrealism: Objects, Photographs, Collages, Documents*, Zabriskie Gallery, New York, NY
50th Anniversary of the London 'International Surrealist Exhibition' of 1936, Canterbury, Newcastle, Leeds, Bristol, UK
Contrariwise: Surrealism and Britain 1930-1986, Swansea Festival Exhibition, Swansea, UK
British Surrealism: Fifty Years On, The Mayor Gallery, London, UK

- 1984 *In the Spirit of Surrealism*, Oliver Bradbury and James Birch Fine Art, London, UK
- 1982 *The Women's Art Show 1950-1970*, Nottingham City Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham, UK
Les enfants d'Alice. La peinture surréaliste en Angleterre 1930-1960, Galerie 1900-2000, Paris, France
- 1981 *Image and Form: British Sculpture in the 20th Century, 1901-1950*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK
- 1980 *The Other Face of the Avant-Garde 1910-1940*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy
The Other Face of the Avant-Garde 1910-1940, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1979 *Thirties: British Art and Design Before the War*, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
International Exhibition of Soft Art, Kunsthaus, Zurich, Switzerland
- 1978 *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
- 1976 *British Painting 1900-1960*, Sheffield City Art Gallery, Sheffield, UK
Leon Underwood and 12 Girdler's Road, New Arts Centre, London, UK
- 1974 *British Painting 1974*, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
- 1973 *The Illustration of Reality and the Reality of Illusion*, McRobert Centre, Stirling University, UK
- 1971 *Britain's Contribution to Surrealism of the '30s and '40s*, Hamet Gallery, London, UK
- 1969 *John Moores Exhibition*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
- 1966 *Paintings by Eileen Agar, John Bolam, Rama Rao*, Ashgate Gallery, Farnham, UK
- 1965 *Art in Britain 1930-40*, Marlborough Gallery, London, UK
- 1964 *Fifty Years of British Art 1914-64*, London Group Jubilee Exhibition, Tate Gallery, London, UK
- 1961 *The Art of Assemblage*, MoMA, New York, NY
/69 John Moores' Exhibition, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
- 1956 *Modern Trends in Watercolour Painting*, Cumberland House, Museum and Art Gallery, Portsmouth, UK
- 1952 *The Mirror and The Square*, New Burlington Galleries, London, UK
- 1951 *London Group*, New Burlington Galleries, London, UK
- 1947 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Maeght, Paris, France
- 1945 *Works, by Eminent British Artists*, Russell-Cotes Gallery, Bournemouth, UK
- 1942 *New Movements in Contemporary Art. Contemporary Work in England*, London Museum, London, UK
- 1940 *Surrealism Today*, Zwemmer Gallery, London, UK
Surrealist Work: Artists International Association, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK
- 1939 *Living Art in England*, London Gallery, London, UK
British Surrealist and Abstract Paintings, Northampton Art Gallery, Northampton, UK
- 1938 *International Surrealist Exhibition*, Gallerie Robert, Amsterdam, The

Netherlands

Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France

Surrealist Objects and Poems, London Gallery, London, UK

Pictures on the Staircase, London Gallery, London, UK

1937 *Surrealist Objects and Poems*, London Gallery, London, UK

Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, Nippon Salon, Tokyo, Japan

Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism, MoMA, New York, NY

Unity of Artists for Peace, Democracy And Cultural Development,

Artists' International Association, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London,
UK

1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*, Museum of Modern Art, New
York, NY

International Surrealist Exhibition, New Burlington Galleries,
London, UK

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, New Zealand

Bradford Museums & Galleries

British Museum, London

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu, New Zealand

Courtauld Institute of Art, London

Derby Museums and Art Gallery

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull

Government Art Collection, London

The Hepworth, Wakefield

The Ingram Collection of Modern British & Contemporary Art

Imperial War Museums

Jerwood Collection

Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

National Galleries of Scotland

National Museum of Wales

National Portrait Gallery, London

National Trust

Plymouth City Council

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

Reiff Collection

Royal Academy of Arts, London

Salford Museum and Art Gallery

Southampton City Art Gallery

Tate

Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester