

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art – Blake to Breton

✘ SURREAL ROOTS: FROM WILLIAM BLAKE TO ANDRÉ BRETON

Rare copies of publications by revolutionary writers and artists William Blake, Lewis Carroll and the Marquis de Sade will go on show at Modern Two this spring, as part of a new display exploring the roots of the ground-breaking Surrealist movement. *Surreal Roots: From William Blake to André Breton* will combine 18th and 19th century publications, rarely shown to the public, with 20th century publications by key Surrealist figures such as Salvador Dalí.

The Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), Blake (1757-1827) and Carroll (1832-1898) were controversial figures whose writings challenged the religious and sexual taboos of their time. Some of the Marquis de Sade's most controversial texts, including *120 Days of Sodom* (1785) and *Justine* (1791), will be on display as part of the selection of boundary-pushing works that inspired the Surrealists.

Surrealism started in the 1920s in Paris, led by the French writer André Breton. The movement included artists Salvador Dalí and Rene Magritte, and was partly characterised by the scepticism of the generation that experienced the First World War. Surrealists drew on Freud's work with psychoanalysis, specifically his theory that our memories and most basic instincts are stored in a layer of the human mind he called the unconscious, and looked to explore these through writing and art.

The poet and printmaker William Blake is another key figure whose visionary imagination appealed to the Surrealists. *Surreal Roots* will feature a rare 1797 copy of fellow poet Edward Young's *The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life,*

Death, & Immortality, for which Blake produced striking engravings based on his delicate watercolours. Blake produced a series of 537 watercolours, of which only 43 were selected for publication; the Surrealist poet André Breton described Young's *Night-Thoughts* as 'surrealist from end to end'. Two additional works on paper by Blake, on loan from the Scottish National Gallery collection, will compliment this rare first edition.

Other rare works included in the display will be Lewis Carroll's original publications from the 1870s, such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Carroll helped popularise the genre of literary nonsense with his use of other-worldly situations, and riddles which defy logic and language conventions. His writing appealed to a number of writers and artists in the Surrealist group, and these books will be shown alongside writing and illustrations by André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Hans Bellmer and Max Ernst.

The works on show draw primarily from the library of Roland Penrose (1900–1984), artist and patron closely involved in the Surrealist movement. Penrose forged friendships with writers and artists including Max Ernst, Paul Eluard and Joan Miró. Coming from a wealthy Quaker banking family, he inherited a number of antiquarian books from his grandfather, Baron Peckover, including works by William Blake, Milton, Dante and Oscar Wilde. Penrose built upon this literary foundation, adding to the library works by those writers and artists who inspired the Surrealists, as well as publications by the Surrealists themselves.

Simon Groom, Director of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, said: "*Surreal Roots* will showcase some of the highlights of our special books collection, with publications by subversive writers such as William Blake, the Marquis de Sade and Lewis Carroll, shown alongside the revolutionary texts and illustrations by the Surrealists which they

inspired.”

Clara Govier, Head of Charities at People’s Postcode Lottery, commented: “We’re delighted that support from players of People’s Postcode Lottery has been used to enable the National Galleries of Scotland to bring so many exhibitions and activities to life, and we’re particularly looking forward to *Surreal Roots* – a very rare treat. The special books collection at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art is a world-class resource, and we are thrilled that players’ support is helping the Galleries showcase some of these truly enchanting works.”

SURREAL ROOTS: FROM WILLIAM BLAKE TO ANDRÉ BRETON

28 March – 5 July 2015

SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART (Modern Two)

73 Belford Road, Edinburgh EH4 3DS

Admission free | 0131 624 6200