
TWILIGHT VISIONS

SURREALISM AND PARIS

THERESE LICHTENSTEIN

WITH ADDITIONAL ESSAYS BY

JULIA KELLY

BOLIN JONES

AND

WHITNEY CHADWICK

 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON
FRIST CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS NASHVILLE



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T W I L I G H T

THERESE LICHTENSTEIN



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S U R R E A L I S M A N D P A R I S

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Dedicated to my mother, Sylvia Feiertag,
and the loving memory of my father, Hy Feiertag

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FOREWORD

For generations, Paris *after-hours* has captured the imagination of the city's inhabitants and its visitors in equal measure. Whether prompted by the reflection of lights along the Seine, the nonchalance of café life, the atmosphere of romance, its reputation for sensual and carnal pleasures, its intellectual and creative citizenry, or some combination of all these things, we tend to anthropomorphize the city as a mysterious and inspirational source. The period between the two world wars was an especially fertile time in Paris, which became a crucible for the emergence of Surrealism. Intense interpretations of inner worlds came together with challenges to distinctions between high and low culture as Parisian writers, critics, and artists spawned the creative effulgence of the Surrealist movement, whose influence would endure throughout the twentieth century.

This book accompanies *Twilight Visions: Surrealism, Photography, and Paris*, the first exhibition to examine the intersection of documentary photography, manipulated photography, and film within the broader social, political, philosophical, and cultural contexts that defined Paris during the interwar years. The exhibition and publication illuminate for scholars and the general public the connections between Surrealist avant-garde practice and popular culture. Although much has been written about Surrealism, Dr. Therese Lichtenstein, the curator of the exhibition and the editor of and prin-

cipal contributor to this volume, offers a fresh perspective, drawing new connections by examining the role of the city as muse and the burgeoning popularity of photography as a democratizing factor in the dissemination of culture.

During the formative stages of this project, Dr. Lichtenstein realized that the city of Paris was more than a backdrop for a literary and artistic movement: its streets, flea markets, café life, and demimonde were at the core of the chance encounters that served for the Surrealists as snapshots of unconscious thought and motivation. To broaden our understanding of Surrealist activity and its contexts, she enlisted Whitney Chadwick, Colin Jones, and Julia Kelly as contributors to this publication. The intelligent and thought-provoking essays by these distinguished scholars enrich this catalogue, and we gratefully acknowledge their contributions.

On behalf of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the exhibition lenders. We appreciate the attention to detail that processing loan requests requires and the efforts of countless people in assuring the availability of important loans for the tour of the exhibition to three venues. Our thanks go to the directors, curators, registrars, librarians, administrators, and art handlers involved in securing and processing these loans. We offer our sincere

gratitude also to private lenders and gallery professionals for their assistance in locating and arranging loans of key pictures and ephemera. We acknowledge that these generous lenders, public and private, are living without important works to make this tour possible, and we thank them.

The film series that is presented as part of this exhibition involves colleagues at each venue who deserve grateful recognition. In Nashville, we extend our appreciation to colleagues at the Belcourt Theatre and Vanderbilt University, who helped to identify and locate films for this series and assisted with bringing these works of art to the public.

After closing at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, *Twilight Visions: Surrealism, Photography, and Paris* travels to the International Center of Photography in New York and to the Telfair Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia. We are most grateful to these institutions for participating in the tour and extend our sincere appreciation to Willis Hartshorn, director of the International Center of Photography, and Steven High, director of the Telfair Museum of Art.

We are grateful to our colleagues at University of California Press for their professionalism, good humor, and attention to detail. It has been a pleasure to work with their team in bringing this publication to fruition. Special thanks go to Deborah Kirshman, who responded enthusiastically to the idea of this project in its embryonic stages, for her sage advice and unflappable equilibrium.

The Board of Trustees of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts provides generous support for our mission and vision. We appreciate their endorsement of original scholarship and their ongoing commitment to bringing the best of the world's art to Nashville. Members of our staff have worked countless hours on this publication and exhibition. We thank them for their tenacity and good manners throughout. Our greatest debt goes, of course, to Therese Lichtenstein for orchestrating everything.

Susan H. Edwards, PhD
Executive Director and CEO
Frist Center for the Visual Arts
Nashville, Tennessee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been developed in conjunction with the exhibition *Twilight Visions: Surrealism, Photography, and Paris*, organized by the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee. I first want to thank Susan H. Edwards, director of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, who invited me to curate the exhibition and encouraged me throughout the process. I would also like to thank the other members of the team at the Frist Center: Mark Scala, chief curator; Katie Delmez, curator; Amie Geremia, registrar; Tabitha Griffith, curatorial assistant; Michael Brechner, design director; and Angela Butler, executive assistant.

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At the International Center of Photography in New York, I would like to thank Willis Hartshorn, Ehrenkranz director, and Brian Wallis, chief curator and director of exhibitions, for their support. At the Telfair

Museum of Art, I thank director Steven High for his immediate and unqualified enthusiasm for the exhibition and book.

I am greatly indebted to Adam Boxer, of Ubu Gallery in New York, for providing generous assistance. In addition, I would like to thank Joseph Vasta for sharing his collection of popular-culture magazines and postcards and for his generous support; and lenders Kathryn Abbe, Timothy Baum, Victoria Combalía, Stephen Daiter, Daniel Filipacchi, David and Marcel Fleiss of Galerie 1900–2000, Galerie Karsten Greve, Edwynn Houk Gallery, Peter C. Jones, Mark Kelman, Dr. Jeffrey Libin, Michael P. Mattis and Judith Hochberg, Barry Singer Gallery, Rick Wester, and Virginia Zabriskie.

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INTRODUCTION

Therese Lichtenstein

Twilight is that moment of the day that foreshadows the night of forgetting, but that seems to slow time itself, an in-between state in which the last light of the day may still play out its ultimate marvels. It is memory's privileged time.

Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*

Twilight is a transitional time between day and night, when people, objects, and places appear indefinite and mysterious. It is a metaphor for the indeterminate boundary between wakefulness and sleep, clarity and ambiguity, the public and the private, consciousness and the unconscious, subject and object, passive and active, movement and stasis, the mundane and the fantastic.

Through an examination of Surrealist photographs, objects, exhibitions, activities, and writings, the essays in *Twilight Visions: Surrealism and Paris* portray the French capital as a city in the process of metamorphosis—in a kind of twilight state. The Bureau of Surrealist Research (active only six months, from October 1924 to April 1925), the major Surrealist exhibitions, and the photographs of Paris by Brassai, André Kertész, Ilse Bing, Germaine Krull, and Man Ray, among others, all reflect the tumultuous social and cultural transformations occurring in Paris in the 1920s. Juxtaposing the strange with the familiar, they seek to break down repressive hierarchies. At the same time, they

represent a desire to change the world through experimental activities.

This book provides a close-up view of a complex period, when modernity quickly became a new tradition alongside the rapid technological developments of the 1920s and '30s. The Surrealists' photographs and exhibitions reveal an ambivalence toward modernity in their excitement for the new combined with their nostalgia for the disappearing maze of old Paris. As the city continued to undergo the modernization initiated by Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann in the late nineteenth century, its narrow streets and labyrinthine arcades were replaced with carefully ordered social spaces consisting of wide boulevards and expansive vistas. Working-class people were displaced to the periphery of the city, and old neighborhoods became tourist attractions, simulacra of what they had once been. The Surrealists disturbed Haussmann's clarity of vision by exposing the fragmentation of modern life and the emergence of heterogeneous, multifaceted

identities. They sought outmoded objects and places on the verge of extinction, capturing them in photographs before they were lost to memory. The tension between increased industrialization and historical continuity created a physical, social, and psychological rupture, producing a sense of loss—not a Romantic reverie, but rather a kind of homesickness.

My essay, “The City in Twilight,” attempts to define the Surrealists’ conception of twilight, as seen in photographs of Paris in the 1920s and ’30s. Brassai, Bing, Krull, Kertész, Man Ray, Roger Parry, Maurice Tabard, Raoul Ubac, Jindřich Štyrský, and others transformed iconic views of the city and its monuments by shooting at strange, disorienting angles, focusing on unexpected details, and playing with doubling and montage and the hazy effects of crepuscular light. Everyday streets, signs, and cafés become unfamiliar and evocative; the ordinary is seen as extraordinary. The work of these photographers was both exhibited in high-art venues and reproduced in new mass-culture magazines featuring radical layouts and fragmented structures that broke down conventional ways of seeing.

A different kind of twilight vision emerges in Julia Kelly’s exploration of the ambiguities in the private/public space of the short-lived Bureau of Surrealist Research. This organization was designed to foster a broader engagement with Surrealist activities and principles. Deploying an extensive publicity campaign, it invited members of the public to record their dreams, ideas for inventions, and any “striking coincidences” they might have experienced. Here the banal mixed

with the extraordinary, and conventional hierarchies broke down as viewers actively participated in completing artworks. Though it operated for only six months, the bureau had a lasting influence on subsequent Surrealist practice. Through collecting, collating, displaying, and disseminating information, its members proposed new ways of organizing and presenting a vast array of personal and cultural artifacts to a public that participated in the process. This engagement with culture, people, and objects contributed to the communal aspects of the group, which Kelly identifies as a precursor to conceptual art. In addition, she claims, the invention of the Surrealist object (part poetic and part scientific) challenged the conventions of the artwork itself.

Colin Jones examines the shadows cast by Surrealist exhibitions on the city’s tradition of international expositions, established in the late nineteenth century. He traces the history of the international expositions and their role in defining Paris as a *ville lumière*—city of light—as a backdrop to the antagonistic concept of the city put forth by the Surrealists. Focusing primarily on the dark and confusing *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in 1938, Jones explores the ways in which the Surrealists’ exhibitions functioned as creative spaces of social, cultural, and political critique that countered the celebration of “progress” at the center of the international exposition.

Whitney Chadwick investigates the role of women—both real and mythic—in Surrealism. Examining photographs, paintings, and objects created by female

artists associated with the movement and the ways in which these works helped mediate Surrealist constructions of gender, she also describes the difficulties women artists faced in asserting their creative agency in relation to the (male) Surrealist imaginary. She focuses on various Surrealist partnerships and relationships, such as that between Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington, in discussing the struggles of women artists to move beyond the male imaginary in search of a female subjectivity within the structure of heterosexual love and desire. She examines the creative exchanges between artist couples and the importance of the concept of hybridity in the Surrealists' oeuvre.

NOTE

The epigraph is from Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

The essays in this collection offer four distinct views of the ways in which the Surrealists' various outputs and activities interrupted traditional hierarchies and conventional views of Paris. All reflect on the striking psychological, cultural, and social ambivalence evident in Paris during this time of transition to modernity. As the essays describe, this in-between period was marked by struggle and dialogue between the colonial and the anti-colonial, the bourgeois and the anti-bourgeois, order and disorder, and male and female gender roles. A heightening of the enigmatic, fragmented, and disorienting helped to signify the twilight of the old order.

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Brassaï

Pont Neuf at Night, Paris, 1929

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Brassaï

Pont des Arts, 1934

© The Brassaï Estate—L

Brassaï

Avenue de l'Observatoire, 1934

© The Brassaï Estate—RMN

Brassaï

Saint-Jacques Tower, Paris, 1932–33

© The Brassaï Estate—RMN

Germaine Krull

Le Cinéma Paramount, Paris, ca. 1930

© Estate Germaine Krull, Museum Folkwang, Essen

Ilse Bing

Fountain, Place de la Concorde, 1933

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