British Museum Ethnographic Photography at the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition

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**Introduction**

As part of the 1936 *International Surrealist Exhibition* held at the New Burlington Galleries in London, ethnographic photographs of non-western objects were taken at the British Museum and interspersed amongst surrealist artwork. In this colonial context, whilst the terminology of ‘non-western’ initiates a somewhat uncomfortable binary opposition, it is used merely as a reflection of how the Surrealists themselves distinguished between art of a European lineage and that of elsewhere.[[1]](#endnote-1)Over the course of the exhibition, ten photographs in total were displayed, spanning Solomon Island Fish Coffins to Congolese Nail Fetishes. The entries for the exhibited photographs are accessible in the accompanying surrealist exhibition catalogue.[[2]](#endnote-2) Moreover, photographs of objects used in the surrealist exhibition are equally available via the British Museum photographic repository and its *Handbook to the Ethnographic Collections* (1910).[[3]](#endnote-3) At the archives of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (SNGMA), the minutes of the International Surrealist Exhibition’s organising committee are held as well as related correspondence and press cuttings, several of which detail the inclusion of non-western art in the exhibition display.[[4]](#endnote-4) Archival research reveals that Paul Nash and Hugh Sykes Davies were responsible for the selection of the non-western objects to be photographed.[[5]](#endnote-5) Despite these numerous archival sources, unfortunately, the exhibition installation photographs are not sufficient to give a repertoire of all the works curatorial positions.

Hence, conceiving the inclusion of African and Oceanic objects as a holistic gesture beyond juxtapositions, this article will postulate that the Surrealists intended to propagate a cosmopolitan method of curation through a transcendence of taxonomic display mechanisms, delineated by tribe and nation, common to ethnographic museum environments, such as the very one the photographs were taken in.

The inclusion of ethnographic objects in surrealist exhibitions marks a significant turn in the Surrealists’ ideological trajectory. Surrealism gradually attenuates its penchant for Freudian psychoanalysis in favour of an ethnographic remit. Indeed, Katherine Conley notes: ‘By the 1930s, Breton and the Surrealists shifted their scientific focus from psychoanalysis to ethnography, as their creation of the journal *Minotaure* shows [[6]](#endnote-6).’ Freudian psychoanalysis was undoubtedly most influential at the inception of Surrealism, where the *Bureau de Recherche Surréaliste* (1924-1925) became an empirical testing ground for their theory regarding the dream, inviting members of the public to share their innermost thoughts. After its closure, the Surrealists focused on curatorial practice as means of interfacing with the public. Concurrently, Surrealism gradually expands from a Paris-based movement to a cosmopolitan, international entity that eschews the hegemony of the nation-state.[[7]](#endnote-7) What occurs in the interim is an insatiable interest in the so-called ‘primitive’ with several Surrealist exhibitions incorporating African and Oceanic sculpture, typifying ten years of Surrealist curatorial practice[[8]](#endnote-8). Indeed, the influential 1929 Surrealist map of the world published in Belgian journal *Variétés* sizes both Africa and Oceania as gigantic in terms of their cultural prowess, subverting traditional cartographic alignments.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Copious authors have positioned Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913) as a key influence on Surrealism’s predilection for the ‘primitive’. [[10]](#endnote-10) Indeed, writing in William Rubin’s controversial exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art,* an exhibition in which only the formal characteristics of African and Oceanic objects were interrogated, Maurer states ‘Freud’s "Totem and Taboo" of 1913 also had a major effect on many of the Surrealists and their interest in and understanding of the Primitive.’ He continues ‘the book tried to establish a relationship between the primitive mind and certain psychological elements still present in western society in order to better understand them.[[11]](#endnote-11) Whilst the Surrealists are certainly fellow travellers of Freud in terms of the dream and the Uncanny, surrealist curatorial practice surely counters Freud’s ethnographic thesis due to Surrealism’s philosophical imperative of freedom instead of the inherent restraint of taboo.[[12]](#endnote-12) Furthermore, the surrealist exhibitions render ‘primitive’ art a fine art, endowed with genius, creative faculties and a spiritual emancipation that Freud denies. Breton’s foreword to the 1948 Océanie exhibition, is perhaps the most poetic example thereof:

First of all, there is the stupefying disparity of the art of the islands, a function of their scattered nature, or their turning back on themselves like a palm fan […] a fleeting view of things other than what we know- has never in the plastic arts, known the triumphs that it marks with very high quality Oceanic objects[[13]](#endnote-13)

Most importantly, Freud uses his text to denounce religion as neuroses viewing the totem as a precursor to religious belief. Assuredly, this is not a viewpoint the Surrealists subscribed to, awed , as they were, by the mystical and metaphysical nature of indigenous objects. Indeed, African and Oceanic belief systems had the metaphysical complexity to parallel western conceptions of religion, whereby a superhuman power is embodied in the form of an omnipresent God or gods. The related artistic output can be considered spiritual manifestations thereof. This is a viewpoint bolstered by Michel Löwy’s assertion that ‘the early surrealist interest in primitive civilizations was not limited to their ways of life, but was also, and more significantly, focused on the spiritual quality of their artistic works’. [[14]](#endnote-14) The commingling of Surrealism and so-called ‘primitive’ art was, of course, multifarious, from appropriations of formal characteristics, anti-colonial symbols, to an untrammelled affront to western civilisation. Notwithstanding, it is within the spiritual realm that these objects were endowed with an ontological complexity comparable to works of the Surrealists themselves.

In stark contrast to Freud’s rendering of non-western religious beliefs as childlike, this article will posit that the aforementioned British Museum photographs thematically instigate a dialogue of border-crossing Cosmopolitanism that has been previously unexplored. I understand Cosmopolitanism to signify the Surrealist disregard for the sovereignty of the nation-state, which is more radical than notions of transnationalism and internationalism that are often used to describe the global expanse of the Surrealist movement. For example, one of the first texts to group together texts on Surrealism from diverse countries, *André Breton et Le Surréalisme International* was written with this cartographic approach in mind . However, all the photographed objects suggest an embodied form of a global spiritual consciousness permeating the 1936 exhibition.

**Selection and Reception of the British Museum objects**

In the minutes of a meeting of the International Surrealist Exhibition organising committee held on April 22nd, 1936, secretary Diana Briton Lee states ‘Mr. Nash reported that he has visited the British Museum with Mr. Sykes Davis and had selected certain objects, which could not be removed from the Museum but could be photographed. He suggested that 3’ x 2’ enlargements should be hung’.[[15]](#endnote-15) It is subsequently noted at a later, undated meeting that ‘Mr. Nash reported a letter from photographers offering to do half a dozen 3’ by 2’ enlargements at 10/ each, of objects in the British Museum’. [[16]](#endnote-16) Another comment recorded from an earlier committee meeting of 6 April 1936 also emphasises the importance the Surrealists placed upon the object in the exhibition: ‘It was agreed that Messrs Nash, Davies, and Moore should make an objects sub-committee’. [[17]](#endnote-17) As such, the inclusion of photographs of non-western objects at the 1936 exhibition was a key priority for the exhibition organisers.

Besides the British Museum photography, fifteen New Guinean Sepik sculptures were lent to the Surrealists from the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge. Whilst the use of the Sepik objects in the 1936 Surrealist exhibition merits its own in-depth analysis, the ten photographs from the British Museum record objects from a multitude of non-western cultures, from Micronesia to West Africa, and testify to a syncretic belief system of worship, commingling with surrealist artworks. Hence, these will be my focal point. Furthermore, the loaned photographs demonstrate that this reproducible medium is deemed to be as ‘auratic’ as the object proper if we draw from Walter Benjamin’s 1935 text ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’. Indeed, the capacity for photography to supersede the aura surrounding the original object further denotes photography’s cosmopolitan credentials for widespread cultural dissemination.

Interestingly, certain newspapers viewed the inclusion of African and Oceanic objects as one of the more admirable elements of the exhibition. An exhibition review from the *Daily Mail* dated 12 June 1936 states, ‘One turns with relief to a few objects made by African and Polynesian savages. Several genuine negro masks have plastic and decorative qualities absent from the majority of what has been gathered around them’.[[18]](#endnote-18) The utilisation of the word ‘savage’ clearly instigates a colonial nomenclature alien to surrealist vocabulary. Despite this, the reviewer evidently appreciated the formalistic qualities of the non-western art on display, an ironic testament to the Surrealist’s popularisation of these once maligned artefacts. A more academically-inclined review from Dr. Hector St Luke of *ISIS Oxford* on the 17 June 1936 , relates the presence of African and Oceanic art to internationalism, which certainly reinforces this article’s cosmopolitan stance apropos the inclusion of these works. He states:

Here and around the walls, standing out as Oases of intelligibility, are some fine examples of native Oceanic and African Art, included here because they are held to share, according to the surrealist programme, in the repudiation of art for art’s sake. This native art is another instance, with ancient Egyptian and Medieval art, of the artist being employed by authority to effect an adjustment to environment. Behold then, the nihilist position in art, cunningly devised with a corpus of its own shibboleths to proclaim an international state and level down the old traditional frontiers. As the manifesto puts it ‘The artists have hitherto only interpreted the world; the point, however, is to transform it.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Indeed, during the exhibition vernissage in London, André Breton gave a transformative lecture entitled ‘Limites Non-Frontières du Surréalisme’ [Non-national boundaries of Surrealism], subsequently published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (1937). The title of Breton’s speech clearly invokes a cosmopolitan worldview which transcends the sovereignty of the nation-state. Breton comments ‘The future, including Surrealism’s status as the only intellectual effort currently focussed on the international realm, can remain committed to the hope of liberating the human spirit’.[[20]](#endnote-20) Here, Breton conjoins the notions of Cosmopolitanism and spirituality, ostensibly the overarching tenets of the 1936 exhibition. Perhaps most importantly, Breton does not view Cosmopolitanism in terms of stylistic unity across nations but as an ontological process stating, ‘Under the banner of Surrealism, the aspirations of innovative writers and artists from all countries hope to be unified. This unification, far from being a unification of style, responds to a new common consciousness of life itself’. [[21]](#endnote-21) This speech firmly cements Breton’s intent for Surrealism to ’s intent to be a global art movement and the inclusion of the British Museum photographs was clearly intended to aesthetically mirror the content of Breton’s speech, indeed the photographs represent the work of nations that surrealist artists themselves could not.

Hence, the commingling of Surrealist artwork and the British Museum photographs thematically instigate a dialogue of Cosmopolitanism that has been previously unexplored. Moreover, the British Museum photographs chosen by the Surrealists all have spiritual connotations whilst the Surrealists are often considered to be an atheistic movement.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Of course, religious and spiritual manifestations are a particular brand of border-crossing that should also be considered an element of a burgeoning discourse surrounding international surrealism. These ten photographs (which have so far escaped academic attention) will each be analysed in terms of their significance to the 1936 exhibition display and their wider impact upon the surrealist movement.

**Congolese Nail Fetish**

The Congolese Nkondi Nail Fetish of the Yombé tribe is designed to ward off evil spirits. According to Tythacott, these nail fetishes were a predilection of Apollinaire who guided Breton’s early purchases of African and Oceanic art. [[23]](#endnote-23) The statue is imbued with the metaphysical power for hunting down witches and wrongdoers. According to Berzock, the nails ‘represent the many problems that have been addressed through the figure's auspices’. [[24]](#endnote-24) Evidently, the copious protrusion of nails mirrors the iconography of the crucifixion in tandem with the homologous good/evil dichotomy inherent in Christian thought. Given the colonial epoch’s presence of Christian missionaries, the Nkondi could well be a syncretic statue aligning an imposed Christian religion with autochthonous tribal beliefs. This is a view recently supported by Kristoffer Noheden who notes the figure’s protruding nails demonstrate that ‘Christ is transformed into a fetish’. [[25]](#endnote-25) Noheden relates this to a form of colonial dissent, but whether the Nkondi was fabricated as a subversive statue or transcultural homage would need greater historical interrogation to arrive at such a decisive statement. Nonetheless, all of the non-western artworks chosen by the Surrealists should not be homogenously viewed as free of western influence. Cosmopolitanism is a two-way street of transnational transference.

Missionary activities were of course something that the Surrealists ardently condemned. A prime example of this was the Surrealist’s anticolonial exhibition in 1931, which, by ‘equating Christianity with the “primitive” religions it hoped to subsume’, was ‘pointing at the financial motivations behind the dissemination of religious beliefs’. [[26]](#endnote-26) Furthermore, Mileaf points to the Surrealists’ ‘First Report on the Colonial Exhibition’ [Premier Bilan de L’Exposition Colonial] in which they make a joint statement after a fire destroyed indigenous objects at the Dutch Pavilion:

The missionaries, whose Pavilions weren't burnt, understand this all too well when they habitually mutilate fetishes and train native people in their schools to reproduce the features of their Christ according to the basest formulas of European art[[27]](#endnote-27)

A prime example of this was the Surrealist’s anticolonial exhibition in 1931, which, by ‘equating Christianity with the “primitive” religions it hoped to subsume’, was ‘pointing at the financial motivations behind the dissemination of religious beliefs’. [[28]](#endnote-28). In this context, it seems that by including the Yombé figure, a surrealist reconciliation with non-western iterations of Christianity becomes apparent given the content of the exhibition as a whole. Indeed, one of the object selectors, Paul Nash, practised Christian Science and other exhibitors at the 1936 exhibition, such as Cecil Collins were also devout Christians. Interestingly, Tessel Bauduin notes that during the carnage of World War Two, André Breton himself sought solace in the more occulted aspects of Christianity:

In the dark days of the early part of the war, Breton had turned to Hegel and Novalis and then to their sources. Faced with a harsh political reality, he found succour in historical radicalism and dissent, with a distinctly mystical and remarkably Christian bent. It is clear that the outbreak of war led him to take up heterodox thinkers whose works combine a unique view of terrestrial matters with transpersonal transcendent experiences[[29]](#endnote-29)

In 1936, the exhibition was undoubtedly mounted amidst the incessant rise of Fascism, as such the inclusion of Christian-inflected works and artists may indeed have foreshadowed a return to religion as a means of liberation from a cataclysmic political context.

The Parisian Surrealists would doubtless be aware of the iconography of this Congolese sculpture. The Charles Ratton gallery, which hosted the 1936 exhibition of surrealist objects, had sold several Nkisi Nkondi statues. Hopkins even claims that the nail protrusions of Man Ray’s *The Gift* were inspired by this self-same statue. [[30]](#endnote-30) It is however, the status of the statue as a god which encapsulates a hybrid, spiritual, border-crossing entity rather than its formal qualities, however captivating. Moreover, amongst the ten items selected to be photographed at the British Museum, the Nkondi is the only African piece. Whilst André Breton did not have the same curatorial agency in decision making for this exhibition as the British Surrealists, his predilection for Oceanic art would have been well-known by the British organisers. André Breton famously described African sculpture as being too close to the human form which ostensibly explains the exhibition’s overarching preference for Oceanic art.[[31]](#endnote-31) The Nkondi statue, whilst replicating the human form, transgresses a sense of telluric realism in the same way as the Oceanic works Breton venerated.

The fact that the Nkondi figure is transmitted through a photograph perhaps reduces the sense of immediacy reified by a usable yet sacred artefact. Given the Surrealists display of photographs of non-western sculptures as counterparts to their paintings, this manifests a staunch reverence for non-western works, to the extent that a reproduced replica will suffice. Grossman aptly notes ‘Photographic reproductions played a unique role among all the graphic arts in the process through which non-western curios were transformed in western eyes into recognised works of art’.[[32]](#endnote-32) Indeed, the photograph extrapolated a non-western artwork from a taxonomised, ethnographic museum environment enabling it to be viewed as a stand-alone work of art. Because of the comparisons engendered between other artworks and sculptures in an exhibition environment, the photographs of sculptures do not lose a sense of ‘aura’ as they are engaged in a curatorial dialogue with works by the Surrealists. Indeed, André Malraux’s seminal idea of the *Musée Imaginaire* (1947) posits that, ‘reproduction has disclosed the whole world’s sculpture. It has multiplied accepted masterpieces, promoted other works to their due rank’[[33]](#endnote-33). This demonstrates that photographic reproductions can retain their aura in original curatorial circumstances.

Figure 1 *Photograph of Nail Fetish* © Museum der Kulturen Basel / The Trustees of the British Museum

**Maori Kite**

The Surrealists also photograph a ‘Birdman’ Maori kite from the British Museum collection. On an anthropomorphic level, a ‘Birdman’ could be considered a cosmopolitan symbol *par excellence*, hybrid and borderless, imbued with itinerant freedom. According to Newell (2006), the Maori Birdman was ‘important for enacting connections between the realm of the living and realm of the dead’ [[34]](#endnote-34) in its ability to ascend towards the heavens. Despite, the freedom of the birdman, Freud indicts Maori culture with a formidable taboo surrounding death. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913) he comments ‘Among the Maori, anyone who had touched a corpse or who had taken part in its interment, became extremely unclean and was almost cut off from intercourse with his fellow beings; he was, as we say, boycotted. He could not enter a house, or approach persons or objects without infecting them with the same properties’ [[35]](#endnote-35). However, it would appear that the birdman kite acts as a totem to override the taboo Freud outlines, as a means of communication with the departed.

Again, the use-value of this object is fundamentally spiritual in nature, something the Surrealist’s would be fully aware of upon displaying it. Whilst Maori art did not make up a substantive proportion of Surrealist collections, Paul Eluard did sell a Maori sculpture at the famous auction of 1931 at the Hôtel Drouot. Moreover, Tristan Tzara published translations of Maori songs in 1917. As such, an extant transnational circulation of Maori artefacts must have captured the attention of the Surrealists. Iconographic ties between New Zealand born artist Len Lye, who encountered Maori art first hand, are equally palpable through three of his works shown at the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition. Certainly, many surrealists revered Oceanic culture in a wider sense. Max Ernst was a foremost collector of non-western art which informed the aesthetics of his own artistic practice. Reading the Maori kite in tandem with Max Ernst’s birdman Loplop, whose figure also appears at the 1936 exhibition, disrupts the taxonomic treatment afforded to non-western art. The Maori kite is no longer a category but is couched as a source of inspiration. Indeed, referring to Max Ernst, Evan Maurer states, ‘the bird is the most important iconographic image found in his work’. [[36]](#endnote-36) Since the surrealist exhibition juxtaposed photographs with paintings, this intrinsic interdisplinarity engendered thematic analysis as opposed to the omnipresent ethnographic cataloging of salient traits.

It is most definitely British Museum liaison Paul Nash and not André Breton to whom we should credit these resonances. In fact, referring specifically to the inclusion of Ernst’s *Bird Monument,* André Breton states in a letter to Roland Penrose on the 20th April 1936, ‘The Monument to the Birds by Max Ernst could be easily replaced with the large canvas entitled “Chimène” which I keep at my house and rigorously dates from the same era’.[[37]](#endnote-37) Despite Breton’s indifference, the piece is still selected for exhibition as the organizing committee would be undoubtedly aware of its resonances with the Maori bird kite they selected to be photographed at the British Museum. In these exhibitory circumstances, the surrealist organizing committee attempt to relieve the photographic medium from its associations with taxonomy by reifying an infiltration of both form and, importantly, meaning into surrealist works. Indeed, Max Ersnt’s Loplop is able to transgress European mores and morality, his attacking a Christian congregation is a case in point in the 1929 work *Loplop, le supérieur des oiseaux, effarouche les derniers vestiges de la dévotion en commun*’ [Loplop the most superior of birds terrifies the last vestiges of communal devotion].

Figure 2 *Photograph of Kite,* New Zealand (British Museum Photography Collection) © Trustees of the British Museum.

**Polynesian Tangaroa**

Tangaroa, a photograph of a Polynesian sea-god from the British Museum, adopts a half-human, half-metaphysical form.[[38]](#endnote-38) Miniature human beings are engraved onto the Tangaroa’s surface which Ellis comments ‘were designed to show the multitudes of gods which had proceeded from the Tangaroa, radiating its creative powers’.[[39]](#endnote-39) The Tangaroa was also dear to Roland Penrose, who was also part of the 1936 exhibition committee as well as an exhibitor.[[40]](#endnote-40) In 1947, he had a life-size replica of the British Museum Tangaroa statue made, which is now on permanent display at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art where his archive is housed (2017). The catalyst for the replica was ostensibly seeing the photograph on display at the 1936 exhibition. It seems that for Penrose in particular, a photographic copy would not suffice, drawn unashamedly to the mythology surrounding the original form of the artefact as evidenced by Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1935). Of course, unable to purchase the British Museum original, Penrose must be content with another mechanised replica.

The Tangaroa was the Maori god of the sea. For the Maori, the Tangaroa was very literally their conduit of creation from which all other forms of life were engendered. Indeed, bringing different spiritual beliefs together in the same exhibition created a sense of surrealist syncretism. This also aligns with the fundamental tenet espoused in André Breton’s second Surrealist Manifesto (1929) of reconciling opposing forces. Here, Breton states ‘ Everything leads one to believe that there exists a certain dimension of the spirit where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, cease to be perceived in a contradictory fashion’.[[41]](#endnote-41) The photographs are not designed to be oppositional either to one another or to the Surrealist artwork on display. Rather, they serve a unifying function in their transgression of terrestrial, man-made borders.

Moreover, a sea-god displaces notions of nation-states and terrestrial boundaries. Indeed, as early as 1925 in their tract ‘La Revolution d’Abord et Toujours’, the Surrealists state: ‘What sickens us most is that the idea of the nation-state is so beastly, the least philosophical idea with which we try to reconcile our spirit’.[[42]](#endnote-42)Surrealist displays of African and Oceanic artefacts can certainly be seen to tie in with the worldwide expanse of the movement and a refutation of the nation state. Displaying African and Oceanic art demonstrated that specific styles were the hallmark of tribes and not national communities, often confined to geographically small and remote localities. The exquisite craftsmanship of works like the Tangaroa equally disrupted narratives of national artistic prowess with the work of so-called ‘primitive’ peoples challenging canonised narratives of western art-historical greatness.

Figure 3 *Photograph of Wood Figure Tangaroa Upau Vahu*, (British Museum Photography Collection) © Trustees of the British Museum.

**New Guinean Stone Pestle**

Henry Moore regularly made trips to the British Museum to sketch non-western objects which inspired his sculpture from the early 1920s.[[43]](#endnote-43) This mirrors his French counterparts’ pilgrimages to the Trocadéro. There exists documentary evidence that Moore had sketched Stone Pestles from New Guinea, a photograph of which also features alongside his artwork in the International Surrealist Exhibition. As part of the exhibition’s objects sub-committee, Moore may well have expressed wishes for the inclusion of a stone pestle. At the 1936 surrealist exhibition, Moore’s sculpture *Figure (1933-4*) was displayed alongside *Drawing Stones in a Landscape (1936).* [[44]](#endnote-44) His notebook states that he found New Guinean Carving ‘too thin’.[[45]](#endnote-45) Therefore, we can see the same shaping widened in his *Figure*. Regarding the usage of material, a reporter for the *Yorkshire Post* on the 15 June 1936 conjectures that wood is used: ‘Beside me at the moment are three photographs of the exhibits of Henry Moore, a Yorkshire exhibitor. They look like carvings in wood – I don’t know of what- but you can never tell with these surrealists, they may be dripping disguised to look like wood’[[46]](#endnote-46). The sculpture appears too rounded and smooth to be made from wood, yet the patina is most definitely of a similar colour. However, the reporter is correct in that the material remains ambiguous. It seems that the formalistic qualities and rounded quality of the stone pestle inspired Moore rather than the materials.

Besides Moore, the British Museum Stone Pestle was obviously an object dear to other surrealists. At the Roland Penrose Archive held by SNGMA, Penrose has a postcard of the same Stone Pestle sold at the British Museum. [[47]](#endnote-47)Again, as Max Ernst’s *Bird Monument,* the abstract bird shape has strong resonances of liberty, transformation, and freedom which are fundamental ideals espoused in the Surrealist *Manifesto*. Despite this, several reviewers of the 1936 exhibition comment that the surrealist exhibition is based largely on incongruity. A reviewer for the *Birmingham Mail* states on the 12 June 1936 that ‘Incongruity, then, may be said to be the keynote of surrealistic art. The Surrealists think nothing of depicting a cabbage side by side with a cathedral, or placing half a hard-boiled egg on top of a stone pillar in the foreground of an impressively realistic seascape.’ A *Daily Express* reviewer also states on the 12 June 1936 that ‘visitors will see scrupulously detailed representations of recognisable people and objects- but in fantastically incongruous juxtapositions.' [[48]](#endnote-48) Hopefully, the clear formal resonances of the Henry Moore sculpture and the rigorously selected photographs from the British Museum demonstrate that although chance was a fundamental surrealist precept, intended linkages between the African and Oceanic Art and those of the Surrealists was the organising committee’s unambiguous intention. The inclusion of African and Oceanic Art at the 1936 exhibition clearly was supposed to resonate with surrealist works rather than engender notions of incongruity.

As such, Kosinski comments ‘to be presented with direct evidence of a one-to-one dialogue with a well-known work of tribal sculpture is very rare indeed in the history of modernist primitivism.[[49]](#endnote-49)’ This reinforces the need for close visual analysis of surrealist art in comparison with ‘primitive’ art, which has so far proven elusive. Moore’s copious museal engagement with non-western art led to the transference of non-western motifs into sculptural iconography. This was in turn positioned amidst international works by surrealist curatorial juxtapositions. It would seem that Henry Moore‘s sculpture blurs the lines between abstract and figurative whilst often depicting the human form. A cosmopolitan being is created. For Moore, the photographic form was what Sullivan (2015) termed ‘an extended field of communication.’ This would effectively distribute Moore’s work to an ‘international public’[[50]](#endnote-50). Ultimately, Moore was a pragmatist who used photography’s cosmopolitan traits to disseminate his hybrid modernist sculpture whilst drawing inspiration from photography of non-western objects. Notwithstanding, his inclusion on the Object sub-committee for the 1936 surrealist exhibition clearly testifies to his interest in the area of African and Oceanic art.

Figure 4 *Photograph of Stone Pestle in the Form of a Bird* (British Museum Photography Collection) © Trustees of the British Museum

**New Guinean Bark Cloth Mask**

The Bark Cloth Mask from New Guinea was exclusively worn by men in all-male dance rituals praising spirit-deities. Tythacott inscribes the mask with a metamorphic role in non-western societies stating, ‘Masks symbolise a distortion or a disruption of the human condition. They transform the body of a dancer, shifting them from one reality to another.’[[51]](#endnote-51) Viewed from a western perspective, this reifies a potent gender inversion, the male adopting a performative role traditionally assigned to the female sex in a Euro-American context. Commenting on feminist Cosmopolitanism, Pason states ‘The body must become the site for cosmopolitan connections because it is within the body that governance exists. It is [due to] manipulation from outside, or from the government, that we forget our obligations to others’[[52]](#endnote-52). Indeed, for many indigenous societies, governance and status of roles stems from bodily performance and provides a framework through which governance can take place. This reflects the Freudian uncanny in their doubling. Indeed, Freud states ‘the “double” was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an energetic denial of the power of death’[[53]](#endnote-53)’ Given the teleology of this New-Guinean dance whereby ‘the light of a flickering fire, through which at the climax, the dancer's stride’[[54]](#endnote-54), it serves a cleansing purpose and voluntary exposure to pain. The mask and its uncanny capabilities of doubling was a trope clearly evidenced by copious surrealist artists who displayed at the exhibition, Paul Klee’s *Mask of Fear* being a prime example.

Jacques Viot was one of the few surrealists to actually visit New Guinea and have direct contact with its artistic milieu, despite the Surrealist’s copious collections of art from this region. Upon his return, Viot writes an anti-colonial tract entitled ‘N’Encombrez pas Les Colonies’ [Don’t Impede the Colonies] in which he references his memories of New Guinea. He laments how colonialism has threatened the very survival of indigenous cultures. Viot equally riles against colonialist excuses for criminal acts and missionary activities: ‘Since we stopped treating them like imbeciles, the prevailing strategy has always been to convince the savages that they are unhappy. Come on! Own up! They don’t admit it. Courting mystery leaves them perfectly satisfied’[[55]](#endnote-55). Ironically, during his time in New Guinea, Viot acted as a dealer to the surrealists and was commissioned by Pierre Loeb to buy ‘primitive’ arts objects.[[56]](#endnote-56) Viot wrote a text entitled *Déposition de Blanc* published in 1932 in which he ‘appealed for an ideal state in which Europeans and the indigenous islanders, although irretrievably separate, should come together.’[[57]](#endnote-57) Despite these utopian ideals, Viot was undoubtedly complicit in plundering an indigenous culture of its art, much like the criticism levelled against the Mission Dakar Djibouti in which surrealist ethnographer Michel Leiris partook. It is in this instance where the photographic reproduction of indigenous art objects assumes a layer of irony; if the European penchant for an auratic original and compulsive collecting were not as strong, European audiences would have still become *au fait* with non-western artworks through photographic reproductions whilst the extant artworks physically remained in their land of origin.

Figure 5 *Photograph of Bark Cloth Mask* © Trustees of the British Museum

**Solomon Islands Wooden Fish Containing Skull**

Hopkins states ‘Oceanic objects were particularly admired for the disorientating liberties they took with their anatomy.’ [[58]](#endnote-58). The British Museum photograph of a wooden fish containing a skull from the Solomon Islands is exemplary, used to bury remains of the dead.[[59]](#endnote-59) Solomon Islanders clearly sought an affinity with their surrounding organisms that they rely on for sustenance, even after their own demise. The fish casket is used as a receptacle to transform loved ones into ancestral spirits. As such, the Solomon islanders casket is a receptacle of transference to the heavenly domain. The practice was considered to be honorific and primarily afforded to tribal chieftains.

Art from the Solomon Islands had already been analysed in dissident surrealist George Bataille’s publication *Documents* in 1930. An article on the art of the Solomon Islands was written by Louis Clarke, who worked at the Cambridge Ethnographic Museum. Art from the Solomon Islands was apparently previously unheard of in France.[[60]](#endnote-60) The islands were a British protectorate which may explain the British Surrealists’ increased knowledge of these islands and their artistic output. Clarke states that not long ago, the islanders had practiced Cannibalism and dubs them one of the most ‘primitive’ peoples still in existence. Within the wider context of Surrealism, Peletier notes that art from the Solomon Islands was very rarely collected, coupled with the fact that the surface area of the Solomon Islands appears reduced in the surrealist map of the world. [[61]](#endnote-61) Indeed, the Surrealists were interested in ‘primitive’ art due to its spirituality and border-crossing capabilities, Solomon Island works may have been ostracised due to their more brutal, crude nature.

Indeed, the debate encircling the display of human remains is rife amongst the Museum Studies community. To my knowledge, the Surrealists do not partake in any direct display of human remains throughout their plethora of pioneering curatorial practice. Here, photography softens the macabre nature of the fish coffin through mediating a visual encounter with death. As archival information has revealed though, the organisational committee had ideally wished to loan the original works. Had their wish been granted, the presence of a human skull at the exhibition could well have stolen the limelight of some of the more performative surrealist gestures at the exhibition such as Salvador Dali’s lecture in a diving suit and Sheila Legge’s phantom.

Since such an event did not occur, art from the Solomon Islands remained a peripheral interest for the Surrealists. Notwithstanding, in 1942 Joseph Cornell creates an exotic elegy to the Solomon Islands by creating a *boîte surréaliste* named after this far-flung Oceanic archipelago. The box is strewn with seashells, fish , exotic birds, twenty compasses and a map leading to the islands in a utopian pastiche of the exotic. Cornell’s box, much like the Surrealist exhibition of 1936, parodies the taxonomic separation and compartmentalisation of non-western artworks by separating the content of the box into squares. Resembling a suitcase, Cornell also parodies the fact that these exotic destinations are seldom travelled. Consequently, the European perception of such cultures relies solely on the artistic works from these islands that were in circulation throughout the western world.

Figure 6: *Photograph of Wooden Fish Containing Skull* (British Museum Photography Collection) © Trustees of the British Museum

**Australian Bark Mask**

A pioneering article by Jorgensen (2011) relates the aboriginal Australian belief of inhabiting a dream to surrealist practice. Jorgensen immediately identifies the cosmopolitan characteristics of aboriginal art commenting ‘Aboriginal Australia, like all of the arts of Oceania, offered a means of glimpsing that which western modernity had repressed – a world that had not been distorted by the bourgeois triumvirate of family, country, and religion.’ [[62]](#endnote-62) Furthermore, Jorgensen comments ‘The cosmological dimensions of dreams and magic also exceed the leftist model of a subversive political art.’[[63]](#endnote-63) In other words, the cosmos’s sense of unity ranks above and beyond political divisions, consequently the photograph of the bark mask could be described as apolitical, representing a metaphysical incarnation of the wearer.

The aboriginal mask was frequently used to enact dreams in a collective context in a ceremony known as ‘*coroboree*’. At the 1936 exhibition, the dream is presented as a universal trait to bind together humanity rather than mere Freudian wish-fulfillment. In fact, in order to transcend racist distinctions, Hugues Sykes Davis appeals to science in an accompanying lecture to the exhibition entitled ‘Biologie et Surréalisme’ [Biology and Surrealism]. Within his lecture he states that Surrealism’s ‘primary concern is the condition of the human race.’ He continues: ‘We wish to shed light on everyone’s dreams, put an end to human solitude when faced with this universally human condition.’ [[64]](#endnote-64) As such, the dream is a transcendental force that renders race, class and religion obsolete.

Furthermore, Breton himself was surprisingly well-acquainted with aboriginal art. He wrote the 1962 preface to Karel Kupka’s *Dawn of Art* focusing on aboriginal sculpture. Here Breton defines ‘primitives’ as ‘being governed by elementary forces more elementary than our own.’ [[65]](#endnote-65). This comment does seem to sameify heterogenous groupings of diverse peoples with their own cultural lineage. Notwithstanding, such a definition very much reflects the argument presented in Hugues Skyes Davis’s lecture portending to a universalism of the human race. In aesthetic terms, the British Museum photograph ‘flattens’ the respective mask which creates a *mise-en-abyme* of the power of representation. The masks are no longer supposed to be worn but to be looked at and contemplated. Consequently, use-value is translated into symbolic value. Whilst the avant-garde deprive this Australian mask of its original context as a conduit for dreaming, its symbolism thematically resonates with the Surrealist’s own artwork.

Figure 7: *Bark Mask* © Trustees of the British Museum

**Micronesian Navigation Chart**

The 1936 exhibition also contrasts different philosophies of cartography, terrestrial and celestial. The British Museum photograph of a Micronesian navigation chart merits comparison with Roland Penrose’s *Last Voyage of Captain Cook* (1936). Penrose’s piece is described by a journalist for the *Cork Examiner* on the 13 June 1936 as ‘The most talked of work in the Gallery.’ Moreover, a journalist for the *Daily Express* on the 12 June 1936 emphasises the globe as the focal point of the exhibition: ‘Impassioned opening speeches were made by the green-tweed clad André Breton, thin professorial Herbert Read. They stood by a wire globe containing a female torso painted in stripes: this was called “The Last Voyage of Captain Cook.’ [[66]](#endnote-66) The reverence and central positioning of a global symbol certainly emphasises the international reach of the exhibition.

Captain Cook was traditionally hailed as an expert navigator, known for his chaste demeanour amidst exotic temptations. Perhaps Penrose disputes this in a depiction of both corporeal and terrestrial navigation. Of course, Cook represented the colonial mindset of civilizing native populations that the Surrealists abhorred and Penrose surely parodies Cook’s colonialism.

In stark contrast to the three-dimensional geometric globe of Penrose, the Micronesian navigation chart from the British Museum is comprised of wooden sticks with shells representing various atolls. The curvature of the sticks also represents swells in the water. Spennemann comments ‘The Marshallese had no perception of the atolls of the Marshall Islands as a geographical entity differentiated from other surrounding entities.’ He continues ‘Concepts of nationhood or statehood were alien in an environment dominated by the sea—and by the vagaries that sea travel could entail.’ [[67]](#endnote-67) Consequently, the cosmopolitan can definitely be aligned with so-called ‘primitive’, tribal societies and is not anathema to indigenous peoples.

It was not only colonialists who were endowed with the means of worldwide exploration. Often Micronesians boats would drift away from their desired location and Spennemann notes of landings as far away as Indonesia.[[68]](#endnote-68) In stark contrast, Cook’s voyages were meticulously planned survey missions. Penrose’s title seems to refer to the demise of Captain Cook in the Pacific whilst exploring the Hawaiian Islands where he was hailed as a god, his ‘Last Voyage’. At the time of Cook’s sojourn in Hawaii, the indigenous sovereign of the islands was a woman called Kamakahelei, and there are suggestions some form of relationship ensued.[[69]](#endnote-69) His crew, however, were copiously promiscuous. Ostensibly, Penrose posits that colonialism indeed had a sexual dimension of domination. Cook’s death at the hands of the Hawaiians was the result of an escalation of petty disputes. According to O’Sullivan, ‘someone threw either a stone or a breadfruit that struck Cook in the face, and he reacted vigorously to the insult.’[[70]](#endnote-70) Traditionally, the western art canon had depicted Cook as a hero. John Weber’s painting *The Death of Captain Cook* (1784) bequeaths him the caption ‘A victim of his own humanity.’ He is depicted as having been slain whilst simultaneously instructing his crewmates to cease firing in a final altruistic act. The Surrealists seemingly question this interpretation, framing a man bound by both wanderlust as well as lustfulness for the ‘primitive’ body. Comparing Penrose’s sculpture to the British Museum photograph juxtaposes two contradictory cartographies. One is structured, imperialist, domineering and planned whilst the other is a personal navigation guide, untrammelled by national borders. It does not depict the whole world, but merely that relevant to the Micronesian travellers themselves.

Figure 8: *Photograph of Native Chart* (British Museum Photography Collection) © Trustees of the British Museum

**Wooden Easter Island Carvings**

Within the seminal surrealist map of the world, Easter Island is ostensibly the most enlarged entity in relation to its actual size, showing the Surrealists view this mythical territory to be worthy of the utmost cultural prowess. A photograph of miniature Easter Island statues was taken at the British Museum. The British Museum photograph lines up four Moai to instigate a sense of prolific tribal creation. Easter Island was of particular importance to André Breton as the first work of non-western art he purchased at a Parisian flea market came from the region when he was still a child. This was later reproduced in his work of surrealist photo-literature *Nadja* encapsulating the surrealist precept of convulsive beauty by catalysing his erstwhile follower to cry ‘I love you.’ [[71]](#endnote-71) In 1948, Breton writes the preface to an exhibition catalogue entitled *Océanie* incorporating five poems, one of which is entitled ‘Rano Raraku,’ a volcanic crater on Easter Island where several Moai were located. Breton uses the poem to destabilise the euro-centricity of Greece as the origin of artistic endeavour stating at the outset ‘Que c’est beau le monde, La Grèce n’a jamais existé.’ [ Isn’t the World beautiful, Greece never existed.] Moreover, he parodies the copious ethnologists who travel to the island attempting to unravel the mystery surrounding the creation of the Moai figures ‘plaisant les ethnologues, dans l’amicale nuit du sud.’ [pleasing ethnologists, under a hospitable southern sky.[[72]](#endnote-72)] The Surrealists are often criticised for their lack of travel to Oceania, but it seems here that Breton is content with owning the object or a photographic reproduction, mystery being a part of the seductive, convulsive nature of Oceanic art rather than reliance upon ethnographic analysis peppered with European assumptions. Roland Penrose’s archive also contains several articles relating to Easter Island whilst Easter Island heads feature in Max Ernst’s novel of collages *Une Semaine de Bonté*, making it a surrealist inspiration par excellence.

Indeed, Easter Island was itself is a far-flung destination only accessible by intrepid explorers. In stark contrast, museum photography provides instantaneous access to non-western iconography. Perhaps here, the photograph instigates Freud’s Uncanny, repositioning an iconic symbol of ‘primitive’ art in an alien context. Indeed, Freud states: ‘an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes, and so on.’ [[73]](#endnote-73) This was surely the effect Easter Island artefacts had upon Surrealist artists upon their museum encounters with Moai statues given the site-specific nature of their construction. Estimates state that around nine hundred Moai were constructed on Easter Island whilst several of these remain, to this day, under the auspices of western museums.

The Moai, as copious Oceanic artefacts, were spiritual manifestations of ancestors. Once again, to assume Surrealism had no religious element constitutes a misnomer. Katherine Conely notes that ‘Breton once rejected a particular mask shown to him by an American antiquities dealer with the explanation, “[c]’est un bois sculpte ́, ce n’est pas un dieu.” [It’s a wooden sculpture, not a God] [[74]](#endnote-74). For Breton, symbolic meaning often subordinates form. This also attests to the fact that the Surrealists did not solely make aleatory purchases of objects, Breton in particular behest spiritual meaning.

Figure 9: *Photograph of Wooden Carvings* © The Trustees of the British Museum

**Polynesian Sinnet Trap**

Finally, a photograph of a ‘Sinnet trap to Capture Souls’ from the Danger Islands, Polynesia is considered. The Danger Islands Sinnet trap is referenced in anthropologist Sir James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890). In turn, Freud often cites the observations of Frazer in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Importantly, Frazer’s work tries to identify common trends between the world’s different religions instead of promulgating alterity. The surrealist exhibition has very similar aims. Frazer notes ‘The Sorcerers of Danger Island used to set snares for souls. The snares were made of stout cinet which about 15 to 30 feet long.’ [[75]](#endnote-75) Apparently, if the sorcerers had a grudge against someone they would set up a trap near their house and ‘If a bird or an insect was caught in the snare the man would infallibly die.’ [[76]](#endnote-76) Consequently, the Danger Islanders believed in a sort of metaphysical murder and that man could enact divine retribution. Frazer is cited in *Totem and Taboo* stating ‘men mistook the order of their ideas for the order of nature, and hence imagined that the control which they have, or seem to have, over their thoughts, permitted them to have a corresponding control over things’ [[77]](#endnote-77) . In other words, their supposed metaphysical powers were self-attributed.

The Sinnet trap photographed by the surrealists does not display the same artistic prowess as many of the other objects shown here. This demonstrates that the objects meaning and function held much more weight than its formal characteristics, merely fabricated from a piece of rope. Indeed, the catalogue entry states that it was ‘used to capture souls’ whilst all the other entries only indicate name and provenance, not function. The Surrealists include this object to introduce a religious ritual completely alien to a broadly European audience of Judaeo-Christian heritage whereby the soul is *a priori* immaterial and cannot be captured. Indeed, Judeo-Christian religions forbid the depiction of a God whilst the inclusion of African and Oceanic art allowed for a form of embodied religion and spirituality to be propagated.

Figure 10 *Photograph of Sinnet Trap for Catching Souls* (British Museum Collection) © Trustees of the British Museum

**Conclusion**

The 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition deserves to be situated amidst a substantive lineage of surrealist shows that incorporated non-western works of art. Man Ray’s 1926 exhibition, *Tableaux de Man Ray et Objets des Iles* , which inaugurated the Galerie Surrealiste was the first surrealist show to juxtapose artwork of the movement with non-western objects. During the next decade, many shows of the same nature took place, notably, *Yves Tanguy and Objects from the Americas, Galerie Surréaliste* (1927), *The Truth about the Colonies,* Paris (1931), *the Surrealist Exhibition of Objects, Charles Ratton Gallery* (1936) and of course *The International Surrealist Exhibition, New Burlington Galleries, London* (1936). In 1940, *The International Surrealist Exhibition* held in Mexico City also contained pre-Columbian, African and Oceanic artefacts. Unfortunately, these exhibitions do not enjoy the same critical acclaim or attention as those under the performative direction of Duchamp and Dali from 1938 onwards. Indeed, in Lewis Kachur’s book *Displaying the Marvellous* (2001), the Dali and Duchamp exhibitions take precedence and are astutely analyzed whilst the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition has a very short section dedicated to it. In fact, Kachur considers the 1936 exhibition somewhat peripheral, commenting: ‘the London and New York exhibitions were relatively straightforward and did not in themselves have a surrealist character.’[[78]](#endnote-78) Whilst the display mechanisms of the 1936 exhibition were not as performative, the interspersing of western and non-western art propagated an anti-colonial, cosmopolitan stance in tandem with André Breton's desire to internationalise the movement.

The British Museum photographs clearly display an indexical relation to the real, yet the metaphysical nature of the African and Oceanic artefacts on display proves the Surrealist’s cosmopolitan intent resides far beyond the telluric domain and reconciles the avant-garde movement with a myriad of worldwide religious beliefs despite their inherent suspicion of Christianity. In the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition, the organizers unwittingly undertook the colossal task of reconciling indigenous religions with Christianity, promulgating a sense of cosmopolitan syncretism. Whilst scholars such as James Clifford couch surrealist ethnography as an ‘irruption of otherness.’ [[79]](#endnote-79) it seems this does a disservice to Breton’s adherence to the Hegelian dialectic and the resolution of opposites. This is in stark contrast to the 1931 anti-colonial exhibition where Christianity is publically pilloried for its colonial activities. The metaphysical nature of the artefacts on display also repairs a distinct lacuna in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* which only concerns itself with terrestrial restrictions rather than the metaphysical freedoms of the spirit emphasised by the Surrealists. According to Tythacott, Breton was ‘buried with his favourite Oceanic piece’ [[80]](#endnote-80) symbolising an eternal commitment to the surrealist collection and display of non-western cultures.[[81]](#endnote-81)

1. Whilst the Surrealists clearly engaged in binary thinking between the ‘West’ and the ‘non-Western’, this is not espoused in imperialist terms but rather the non-western is conceived of as an idealised society poised to overthrow a corrupted western world. This is a particularly evident leitmotiv throughout the early periodical *La Révolution Surréaliste*. For example, Louis Aragon exclaims: ‘Monde occidental! Tu es condamné à mort. Nous sommes les défaitistes de l’Europe (… ) Que l’Orient, votre terreur, enfin, à notre voix réponde! [Western world! You are condemned to death! We are the defeatists of Europe. (…) Oh Orient! May your terror heed our call] Louis Aragon, “Fragments d’Une Conférence” in *La Révolution Surréaliste 4*, (July 1925) : 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. New Burlington Galleries, *The International Surrealist Exhibition, Thursday, June 11th to Saturday, July 4th, 1936* (London: New Burlington Galleries,1936): 29-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. British Museum, *Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections [in the] British Museum*. (London: British Museum, 1910). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA/A35/1/1/RPA719, Surrealism in England, 1930s: International Surrealist Exhibition, London, 1936. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Katharine Conley, "Sleeping Gods in Surrealist Collections" *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 67 (March 2013) : 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Surrealist disavowals of the nation-state are numerous. For example, in their tract against the Moroccan war of 1925 they state: ‘What sickens us most is that the idea of the nation-state is so beastly, the least philosophical idea with which we try to reconcile our spirit’ Original French: ‘ce qui nous répugne c’est l’idée de Patrie qui est vraiment le concept le plus bestial, le moins philosophique dans lequel on essaie de faire entrer notre esprit’ “La Révolution d’Abord et Toujours” in *La Révolution Surréaliste* 4 (July 1925) : 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The first being *Tableaux de Man Ray et Objets des Iles* at the Galerie Surréaliste in 1926. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. “Le Monde aux Temps des Surréalistes ” in *Variétés* 2 (June 1929) : 26-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See Evan Maurer, “Dada and Surrealism” in *Primitivism 20th Century Art* ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984) :535-595 , Samantha Kavky, *Authoring the Unconscious: Freudian Structures in the Art of Max Ernst* (Doctoral Thesis, 2001), Wendy Grossman, Martha Ann Bari, Letty Bonnell, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens* (Washington, DC; Minneapolis, MN: International Arts & Artists; University of Minnesota Press, 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Maurer, “Dada and Surrealism,” 542. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. In the 1924 Surrealist Manifesto, Breton proclaims ‘Parmi tant de disgrâces que nous héritons, il faut bien reconnaitre que la plus grande liberté d’esprit nous est laissée’ [Amidst all the disgrace we inherit, we must recognize that we are endowed with the greatest of spiritual freedoms.] See André Breton, Marguerite Bonnet, *Œuvres Complètes Tome 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) : 312. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. André Breton, Jean-Michel Goutier, Jean-Michel Monbrison, Drouot Richelieu *André Breton : 42 Rue Fontaine à Drouot-Richelieu; Expositions Publiques* (Paris: Calmels-Cohen, 2003) :277. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Michel Löwy, “The Speaking Flame: The Romantic Connection” in ed. Fijalkowski and Richardson *Surrealism: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2016) :90. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA/A35/1/1/RPA719, Surrealism in England, 1930s: International Surrealist Exhibition, London, 1936. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA A35/1/1/RPA721, International Surrealist Exhibition, London Press Coverage File, 1936. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. André Breton, Marguerite Bonnet, *Oeuvres Complètes Tome 3* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) : 661. Original French: ‘Tout l’avenir, y compris ce que le surréalisme, en tant qu’unique effort intellectuel sans doute concerté et tendu à cette heure sur le plan international, peut engager d’espoir absolu de libération de l’esprit humain.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. Original French: ‘Le surréalisme tend à unifier aujourd’hui sur son nom les aspirations des écrivains et des artistes novateurs de tous les pays…cette unification, loin d’être seulement une unification de style, répondant à une nouvelle prise de conscience commune de la vie.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. In February 1926, Breton wished to tear up Catholic journals but could not find the correct places selling them having searched all over Paris. See the chronology section in André Breton, Marguerite Bonnet, *Œuvres Complètes* *Tome 1* : LII. Moreover, a photograph of Benjamin Péret insulting a priest would be published in *La Révolution Surréaliste* *8* (December 1926) : 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*. (London: Routledge, 2003):113 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Kathleen Berzock, 2003 “Power Figure (Nkisi Nkondi)*” Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 29 (January 2003) :14. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Kristoffer Noheden, *Surrealism, Cinema and the Search for a New Myth,* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017):178. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Janine Mileaf,  *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects after the Readymade* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2010):131. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Janine Mileaf , “Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton”  *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (Autumn 2001) :243 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 131. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Tessel Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult : Occultism and Western Esotercism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014) :32. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. David Hopkins, *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2016) : 99 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Louise Tythacott, "A "Convulsive Beauty": Surrealism, Oceania and African art" *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 11 (May 1999): 43-54. On p.53 she comments ‘Breton was clearly unimpressed by African sculpture which he considered too plastic, too naturalistic.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls* (Frogmore: Paladin, 1974): 44. Despite Malraux’s assertion of photography’s transformative potential, enabling works to acquire the status of ‘art’, it is worth noting Grasskemp’s observation that the original Museum Without Walls did not include African or Oceanic art reproductions: ‘Not until 1950 in *La Monnaie de L’Absolu* (…) did Malraux cast his net rather wider and include African and Tibetan masks, carvings from the South Seas, pre-Colombian sculptures, prehistoric rock paintings, Hopi figures, and art by amateurs.’ Walter Grasskemp, *The Book on the Floor: André Malraux and the Imaginary Museum* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2016):112. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Jenny Newell, “The Maori 'Birdman' Kite at the British Museum*” Pacific Arts* 1 (January 2006):38 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* Authorised Translation by A.A. Brill Project Gutenburg, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/820e/5c407f5c5d8f6fc0bc838d3b801fcc39c6a0.pdf> (Accessed June 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Evan Maurer, *In Quest of the myth: an Investigation of the Relationships between Surrealism and Primitivism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1975) :217 [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archives GMA A35/1/1/RPA703, André Breton: Correspondence 1936 – 1941 Original French: ‘Le “monument des oiseaux” de Max Ernst pouvait être remplacé sans inconvénient par la grande toile intitule “Chimène” qui est chez moi et date rigoureusement de la même époque’ [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. There is some dispute as to whether this object is the actual Tangaroa or in fact another, lesser, god called A’a. In the Surrealist’s catalogue however, it is understood to be Tangaroa. The object was given to the London Missionary Society by the Rurutuan people as a symbol of their conversion to Christianity. As such, it has been claimed that Christian missionaries fabricated the personae of the Tangaroa God, core to the Maori belief system, in order to feign capture of their most grandiose God. For more detail, please consult Steven Hooper, “Embodying Divinity: The Life of A’a”*Journal of the Polynesian Society* 116 (June 2007) : 131-179 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches, during a Residence of nearly Eight Years in the Society and Sandwich Islands* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1883):220. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Henry Moore and Pablo Picasso also owned replicas of the Tangaroa. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Breton, *Œuvres Complètes* *Tome 1*,781 Original French: ‘Tout porte à croire qu’il existe un certain point d’où la vie et la morte, le réel et l’imaginaire, le passe et le futur, le communicable et l’incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d’être perçus contradictoirement.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. *La Révolution Surréaliste* 4, 31. Original French: ‘ce qui nous répugne c’est l’idée de Patrie qui est vraiment le concept le plus bestial, le moins philosophique dans lequel on essaie de faire entrer notre esprit.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Henry Moore, Dorothy Kosinski, *Henry Moore, sculpting the 20th century*. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2001) :35 [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Alice Correia “*Upright Motive No.1 : Glenkiln Cross* 1955-6, cast 1958-1960 by Henry Moore OM,CH” , in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity* (Tate Research Publication, 2015) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/henry-moore-om-ch-upright-motive-no1-glenkiln-cross-r1151461>(Accessed September 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Moore and Kosinski ,*Henry Moore, sculpting the 20th century*, 35 [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive. GMA A35/1/1/RPA721International Surrealist Exhibition, London, Press Coverage File, 1936. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archives GMA A35/1/1/RPA168 Ethnographic Art, Ethnography, Anthropology: Roland Penrose Writings. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA A35/1/1/RPA721 International Surrealist Exhibition, London, 1936, Press Coverage File. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Moore and Kosinski, *Henry Moore, sculpting the 20th century*, 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Micheal Sullivan, “Henry Moore’s Photographic Identity”, in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, (Tate Research Publication, 2015) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-pubications/henry-moore/marin-r-sullivan-henry-moores-photographic-identity-r1151299>, (Accessed September 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London: Routledge, 2003): 74 [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Amy Pason, "Towards a Feminist Cosmopolitan Theory: A Corrective to Nationalism, Fear, and War"*Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 94th Annual Convention, TBA, San Diego, CA*, Nov 20, 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, [https://5438d3f9-a-62cb3a1asites.googlegroups.com/site/uwdoppelgangers/assignments/theuncanny/FreudTheUncanny.pdf?attach](https://5438d3f9-a-62cb3a1a-s-sites.googlegroups.com/site/uwdoppelgangers/assignments/theuncanny/FreudTheUncanny.pdf?attachauth=ANoY7cpObB1fGIoXNLzLjVi-DI2N6pjbB1uFhmuDfVpsCkhtvEkVFbgc5QHl6isGBJ6TWjUBJEcOowxp8GlG6LmqrA15GgDW9Lrm9Qrlamv8kJ5gZ9T-LgR2ZxDXshUrtUFLMeQOn6r86IfyLP8hzLPOPP4WPkB7nDHtKt-jxd5BNN2JkQd9oWxTBVdpGjvFdGCeyL-PuhqR8qHbirBJKCCdkF8-ZJDf-z1HLpcQA_u-7PjpsEVd6uY9d28DT-hBmvgsh7CJin83&attredirects=0) (Accessed June 2017) :9. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Eric Kjellgren Carol Ivory, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), *Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005): 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Jacques Viot ,“N’Encombrez pas les Colonies” in ,*Le Surréalisme Au Service De La révolution* 1 (July 1930): 43.Original French: ‘Depuis qu’on a cessé de les considérer comme des imbéciles, la grande tentative a toujours été de faire déclarer aux sauvages qu’ils sont malheureux. Mais enfin, avouez donc! Ils n’avouent pas. La fréquentation du mystère les laisse parfaitement satisfaits.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Phillipe Peltier, “L'Art Océanien entre les Deux Guerres : Expositions et Vision Occidentale” *Journal De La Société Des Océanistes* 65 (January 1979) : 276 [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 147 [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) :32. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. When gaining copyright for these images, the British Museum understandably refused my request to publish the original photograph of the Solomon Islands fish coffin which depicts the skull that was shown by the Surrealists in 1936. Naturally, this constitutes the indirect display of human remains which, in turn, raises issues of cultural sensitivity. As a result of my enquiry, the curators decided to remove this photograph from their publicly accessible online collection. For those who do wish to consult the original photograph for iconographical reasons, it is available in the British Museum’s *Handbook to the Ethnographic Collections*, 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Louis Clarke, “L’Art des Iles Salomon” in *Documents* 5 ed. Georges Bataille (1930): 277-278. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Peltier, “L'Art Océanien entre les Deux Guerres : Expositions et Vision Occidentale”, 280. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Darren Jorgensen, "Dreams and Magic in Surrealism and Aboriginal Australian Art". *Third Text* 25 (October 2011):554. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA/A35/1/1/RPA719, Original French ‘a comme premier souci la condition de la race humaine’ ‘Nous voulons éclairer les rêves de tous, mettre fin à la solitude humaine en présence de cette condition universellement humaine.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Karel Kupka, *Dawn of Art: Painting and Sculpture of Australian Aborigines ... Preface ["Main première"] by André Breton* ( Sydney: London: Angus and Robertson, 1965). [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA A35/1/1/RPA721 [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Dirk Spennemann, “Traditional and Nineteenth Century Communication Patterns in the Marshall Islands” *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 4 (June 2005):37 [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Daniel O'Sullivan, *In Search of Captain Cook: Exploring the Man through His Own Words* (London: New York: I.B Tauris,2008) :162. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid, 225. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. André Breton, Richard Howard, Joseph Richard *Nadja. Translated by Richard Howard. [With Illustrations.]* (Grove Press: New York; Evergreen Books: London, 1960):129 [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Breton and Marguerite Bonnet, *Oeuvres complètes Tome 3*, .416. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Freud, *The Uncanny*.14 [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Conley, "Sleeping Gods in Surrealist Collections",11. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. James Frazer, *The Golden Bough Volume 3* <https://archive.org/details/goldenboughstudy03frazuoft> (Accessed: July 2017) :69. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, .42. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001):12. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Surrealism” *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly* 23 (October 1981):145. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*,145. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)