Excerpted from Laurie Adams, *A History of Western Art*, 1995, 478 – 486.

Dada, Surrealism, and Fantasy

The devastation of World War I affected the arts as well as other aspects of western civilization. For the first time in western history, armies used trench warfare, barbed wire, machine guns firing along fixed lines, chemical weapons, and poison gas. After treating the victims of gassing and shell shock in World War I, Freud and other medical researchers published accounts of the long-term psychological traumas of the new warfare. Gertrude Stein's phrase "the lost generation" (see p.461) captured the over whelming sense of desolation experienced by the post-World War I intellectuals. In the visual arts of that era, the same pessimism and despair emerged as Dada.

Dada

The term "Dada" refers to an international intellectual movement that began during the war in the relative safety of neutral Switzerland. Artists, writers, and performers gathered at a Zurich cafe, the Cabaret Voltaire, for discussion, entertainment and creative exploration. Dada was thus not an artistic style in the sense of shared formal qualities that are easily recognized. Rather, it was an idea, a kind of “anti-art," based on a Nihilist (from the Latin *nahil* meaning "nothing") philosophy of negation. By 1916 the term Dada had appeared in print—a new addition to the parade of artistic "manifestos" that had developed in the nineteenth century. Dada lasted as a cohesive European movement until about 1929. It also achieved a foothold in New York, where it flourished from about 1915 to 1923.

According to the 1916 manifesto, "Dada" is French for a child's wooden horse. "Da-da" are also the first two syllables spoken by children learning to talk, and thus suggest a regression to early childhood. The implication was that these artists wished to "start life over." Likewise, Dada's iconoclastic force challenged traditional assumptions about art, and had an enormous impact on later twentieth-century Conceptualism (see p.527). Despite the despair that gave rise to Dada, however, a taste for the playful and the experimental was an important creative and ultimately optimistic aspect of the movement.

28.1 Marcel Duchamp, Replica of *L.H.O.O.Q.*. Paris. 1919, from "Boite-en-Valise." Color reproduction of the Mona Lisa altered with a pencil, 7 3/4 X 5 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art (Louise and Watter Arensberg Collection). Duchamp was born in Blainville, France, the third of three sons who were artists. In 1915 he moved to New York and in 1955 became an American citizen. After painting only twenty works, Duchamp announced his retirement in 1923 and devoted the rest of his life to chess.

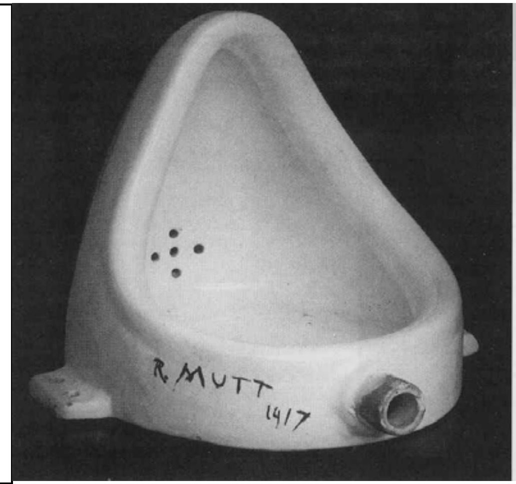
Duchamp

One of the major proponents of Dada was Marcel Duchamp whose *Nude Descending a Staircase* (fig. 27.15) had already caused a sensation in the 1913 Armory Show. He shared the Dada taste for word play and punning, which he combined with visual images. Delighting in the pleasure children derive from nonsensical verbal repetition, for example, Duchamp entitled his art magazine *Wrong Wrong*. The most famous instance of combined and verbal punning in Duchamp's work is *L.H.O.O.Q.* (fig. 28.1), the very title of which is a bilingual pun. Read phonetically in English, the title sounds like "LOOK," which, on one level, is the artist's command to the viewer. If each letter is pronounced according to its individual sound in French, the title reads "Elle (L) a ch (H) aud (0) au (0) cui (Q)," meaning in English "She has a hot ass." Read backward, on the other hand, "LOOK" spells "KOOL," which counters the forward message.

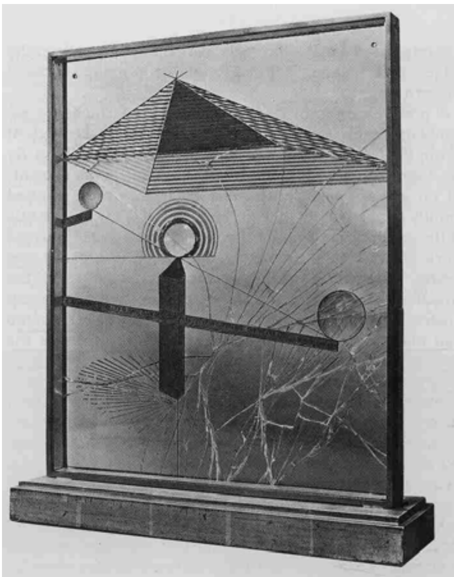
When viewers do, in fact, "look," they see that Duchamp has penciled a beard and mustache onto a reproduction of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (fig. 16.14), turning her into a bearded lady. One might ask whether Duchamp has "defaced" the Mona Lisa—perhaps in a prefiguration of graffiti art (see p.530)—or merely "touched her up." This dilemma plays with the sometimes fine line between creation and destruction. (The modem expression "You have to break eggs to make an omelette illustrates the connection between creating and destroying that is made explicit by the Dada movement.)

Duchamp called the kind of work exemplified by L.H.O.O.Q. a “Ready-made Aided.” When he merely added a title to an object, he called the result a “Ready-made.” Duchamp's most outrageous Ready-made was a urinal 24 inches high that he submitted as a sculpture to a New York exhibition mounted by the Society of Independent Artists in 1917 (fig. 28.2). He turned it upside-down, signed it "R. Mutt" and called it a *Fountain*. The work was rejected by the Society, and Duchamp resigned his membership.

28.2 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain (Urinal)*. 1917. Ready-made, 24 in high. Photo courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery, New York. Duchamp declared that it was the artist’s conscious choice that made a "Ready-made" into a work of art In 1915 he bought a shovel in a New York hardware store and wrote on it "In advance of a broken arm." "It was around that time,” he said, "that the word 'ready-made' came to my mind.... Since the tubes of paint used by an artist are manufactured and ready-made products, we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are ready-made aided."



Despite the iconoclastic qualities of his Ready-mades and his Ready-mades Aided, it must be said that both *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *Fountain* have a basis in traditional art history. In the former, the connection with the past is obvious, for the work is a reproduction of a classic icon. It comments on Leonardo's homosexuality and also on the sexual ambiguity of the Mona Lisa herself. In the latter, the urinal makes a connection between the idea of a fountain and a urinating male, which in fact has been the subject of actual and painted fountains in many works of western art.



28.3 Marcel Duchamp, *To Be Looked At (From the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour*. Buenos Aires, 1918. Oil paint, silver leaf lead wire, and magnifying lens on glass, (cracked), 19 ½ X 15 5/8 in, mounted between two panes of glass in standing metal frame, 20 1/8 X 16 ¼ X 1 ½ “ on painted wooden base, 1 7/8 X 17 7/8 X 4 ½ in; overall height 22 in (55.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

A good example of Dada principles in a Duchamp assemblage is his work of 1918 entitled *To Be Looked At (From the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour* (fig. 28.3). A pyramidal shape is painted on a glass surface above a balance, which is tilted slightly be weight of a circle. As in *L.H.O.O.Q.*, the title of the assemblage is about the viewer's relationship to the work of art, and the potential for shock in looking and seeing. Whereas, in the Renaissance, artists controlled the direction of sight with linear perspective, Duchamp "instructs" the observer verbally via the title. Duchamp also plays with the point of view by using glass as the work's surface, which makes it two-sided. This can be seen as a development of the Cubist multiple viewpoint.

The glass surface of *To Be Looked At* cracked while it was being shipped, and the cracks were allowed to remain as part of the design. This accident and Duchamp's decision to let it stand are characteristic of the Dada artists' incorporation of the effects of chance into their works. For the Dada artists, chance became a subject of art, just as the medium itself became a subject in the late nineteenth century. In collage and assemblage, too, the medium is as prominent a feature of the image as brushstrokes were for Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Art based on the "found object" relies on the conscious exploitation of chance in finding the medium for the work. Accepting chance and using what it offers requires a degree of flexibility that is a necessary aspect of creativity.

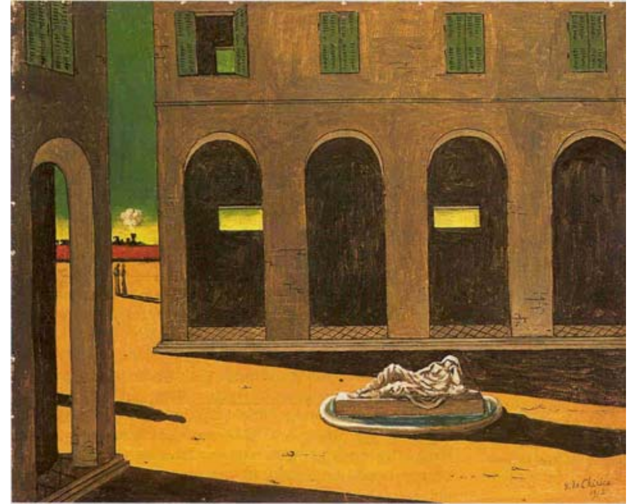
Surrealism

Many members of the Dada movement also became interested in the Surrealist style that supplanted it. It was the writer Andre Breton who bridged the gap between Dada and Surrealism with his first Surrealist Manifesto of 1924. He advocated an art and literature based on Freud's psychoanalytic technique of free association, an exploration into the imagination, and a reentry into the world of myth, fear, fantasy, and dream. The very term “surreal” connotes a higher reality—a state of being that is more real than mere appearance.

Breton had studied medicine and, like Freud, had encountered the traumas experienced by World War I shellshock victims. He defined Surrealism as pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all

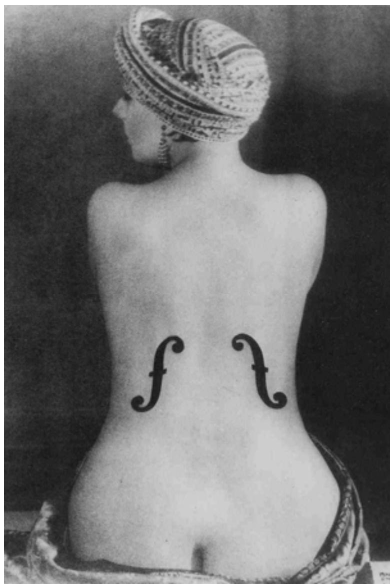
esthetic or moral preoccupation." Breton recommended that writers try to write in a state of free-floating associations, in order to achieve spontaneous, unedited expression. This was referred to as "automatic writing" and had a significant impact on the Abstract Expressionists. The Surrealists' interest in gaining access to unconscious phenomena led to images that seem unreal or unlikely, as dream images are, and to odd juxtapositions of time, place, and symbols.

Breton cited the Greek artist Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) as the paradigm of Surrealism. De Chirico had signed the 1916 Dada Manifesto and then developed an individual Surrealist style, which he termed *pittura metafisica* or "metaphysical painting." His *Place d'Italie* (fig. 28.4) of 1912 combines a perspective construction and architectural setting reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance with an unlikely marble reclining figure in the foreground and a train in the background. Strong diagonal shadows are cast by the buildings, the statue, and a standing couple in the distance. One shadow, entering the picture from the left, belongs to an unseen person.



28.4 Giorgio de Chirico, *Place d'Italie*. 1912. Oil on canvas, 18 ½ X 22 ½ in. Collection, Dr. Emilio Jesi, Milan.

In this painting, de Chirico combines anachronistic time and place within a deceptively rational space. The reclining figure is derived from Classical sculpture and thus denotes the Greek and Roman past. The moving train, on the other hand, refers to the industrial present and the passage of time. There is an eerie quality to this scene that is typical of de Chirico. Isolation and a sense of foreboding pervade the picture space. The viewer is uneasy, as if aware of a mystery that can never be solved.



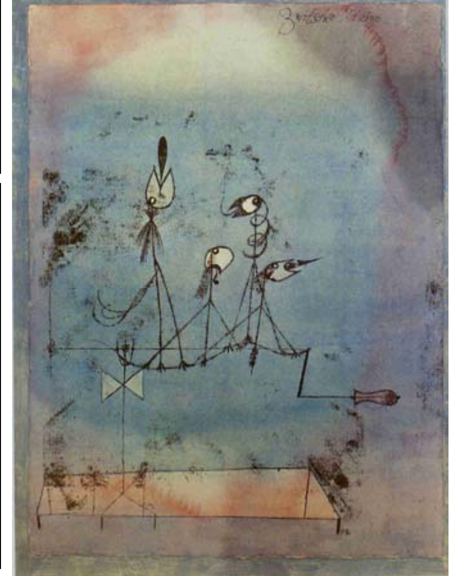
28.5 Man Ray, *Le Violon d'Ingres*. 1924. Photograph. Savage Collection, Princeton, New Jersey. The artist's real name was Emanuel Rudnitsky (1890-1976). His choice of the name Man Ray, although derived from his real name, illustrates the fondness for punning and word games that he shared with other Dada artists. He reportedly chose "Man" because he was male and "Ray" because of his interest in light.

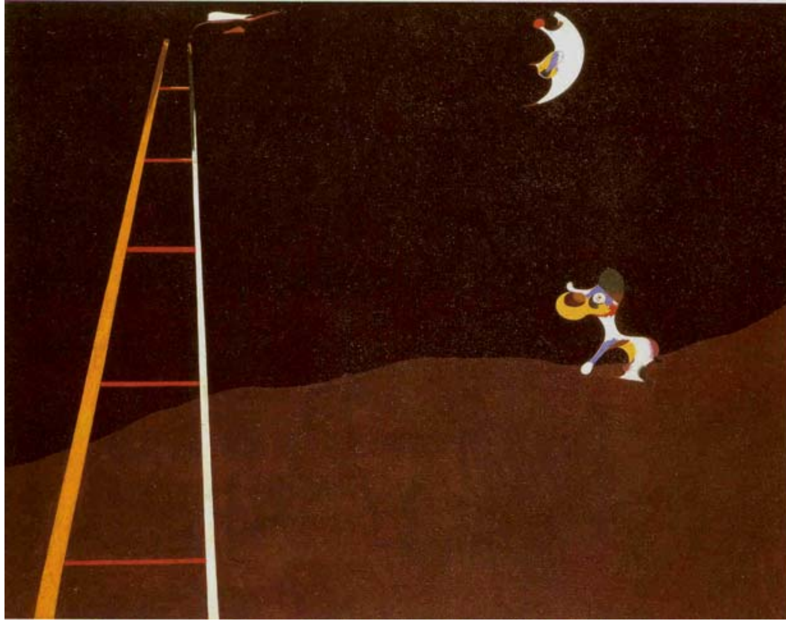
Among the Surrealists who had also been part of the Dada movement was the American Man Ray. In 1921 he moved to Paris, where he showed his paintings in the first Surrealist exhibition of 1925. He worked as a fashion and portrait photographer and avant-garde filmmaker. His experiments with photographic techniques included the Rayograph, made without a camera by placing objects directly on light-sensitive paper. His most famous photograph, *Le Violon d'Ingres* (fig. 28.5), combines Dada wordplay with Surrealist imagery. The nude recalls the odalisques of Ingres (fig. 21.7), while the title refers to Ingres's hobby of playing the violin (which led to the French phrase *violon d'Ingres*, meaning "hobby"). Man Ray also puns on the formal similarity between the nude's back and the shape of a violin, by adding sound holes to the former. The unlikely combination of the nude and the holes exemplifies the dreamlike imagery of Surrealism.

Man Ray strongly defended the art of photography and argued against those who were unwilling to treat it as an art form. In "Photography Can Be Art," he wrote that "when the automobile arrived, there were those that declared the horse to be the most perfect form of locomotion. All these attitudes result from a fear that the one will replace the other. Nothing of the kind has happened. We have simply increased our vocabulary. I see no one trying to abolish the automobile because we have the airplane."

Fantasy characterizes the Surrealism of the Swiss artist Paul Klee (1879-1949). He made many pencil drawings that reveal his attraction to linear, childlike imagery, as well as the influence of Surrealist "automatic writing." In his *Twittering Machine* of 1922 (fig. 28.6), Klee combines natural creatures with the Futurist and Cubist affinity for mechanical forms. The birds "twitter" in a language that has no meaning for human ears, just as the machine cranks out its repeated, industrial sounds. The linear quality of this picture makes the stick-figure birds into wiry, noisy, and mindless beings.

28.6 Paul Klee, *Twittering Machine (Zwitscher-Maschine*). 1922. Watercolor, and pen and ink on oil transfer drawing on paper, mounted on cardboard, 25 ¼ x 19 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Purchase). Klee described the creative process as follows: "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible." Klee himself was enormously productive. He recorded a total of nearly 9000 works.





28.7 (left) Joan Miro, *Dog Barking at me Moon*. 1926. Oil on canvas, 28 ¾ x 36 ¼ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art (A E. Gallatin Collection).

The Surrealist pictures of Joan Miro (1893-1983) are also composed of imaginary motifs, which are often reminiscent of childhood. His *Dog Barking at the Mo*on of 1926 (fig. 28.7) depicts a colorful, toylike dog standing alone on a hill. The night sky contains a fanciful moon and another shape, which may be a bird. The most surreal form in this picture is the unsupported ladder that seems to go nowhere. As the ladder rises, its reach becomes vast, while the space between earth and sky is condensed.

The Belgian artist Rene Magritte (1897-1967) painted Surrealist images of a more veristic kind. Individually they are realistic, often to the point of creating an illusion. However, their context, their size, or their juxtaposition of objects is unrealistic, or possible only in a world of dreams. Magritte sometimes used language as part of his imagery, a feature we have noted in Cubist collages and which we shall see again in the works of artists of the 1960s—Larry Rivers and Roy Lichtenstein, for example. In *The Betrayal of Images* (right), the pipe is convincingly real; however, the legend "This is Not a Pipe" contradicts the illusionistic quality of the image. Magritte is saying that this picture is not actually the object which it faithfully depicts.

28.8 Rene Magritte, *Time Transfixed (La Duree poignardee*). 1938. 0il on canvas, 4 ft 9 5/8 in x 3 ft. 2 3/8 in. Art Institute of Chicago (Joseph Winterbotham Collection). Freud's discovery that time does not exist in the unconscious accounts for certain unlikely condensations in dreams. The uncanniness of temporal condensation contributes to the eerie quality of this painting, as does the impossible juxtaposition of realistic objects.

In *Time Transfixed (La Duree poignardee* in French) of 1938 (fig. 28.8), Magritte juxtaposed two "immediately familiar" objects in order to evoke a mysterious unfamiliarity. The power of the artist's mind, according to Magritte, would be revealed by virtue of the mysterious image. Various motifs in this work are clearly depicted and easily identifiable, and yet they have an odd quality of immobility and timelessness. The clock indicates a specific hour, but the candlesticks are without candles, whose burning typically denotes the passage of time. The room, empty of figures and composed entirely of rectangular elements, seems formal and cold. A steam engine has burst through the fireplace, but without disturbing the wall. A shadow cast by the train against the wall is

unexplained, because there is no light source to account for it. The smoke, which indicates that the train is moving as well as standing still, disappears up the chimney. *Poignardee*, literally meaning "stabbed" with a dagger, expresses the "fixed," frozen quality of both the train and time.

Sculpture Derived from Surrealism

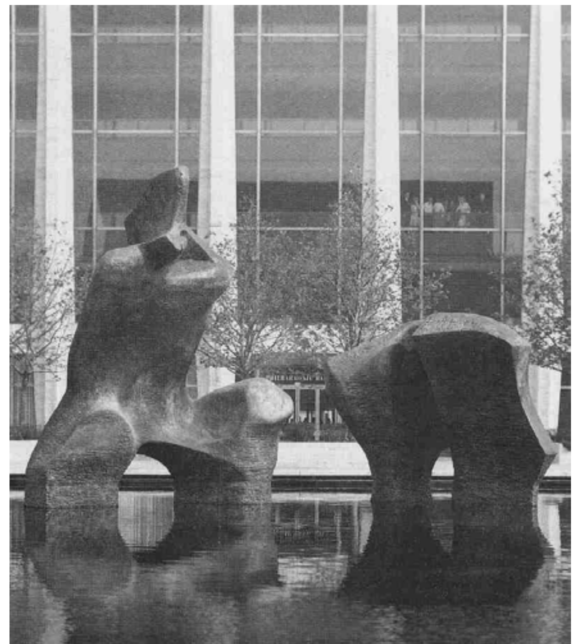
Surrealism influenced sculptors as well as painters and photographers in Europe and America. The Surrealist interest in the literal depiction of unconscious, chance, and dream images contributed to the twentieth-century break with many traditional forms and techniques. *The King Playing with the Queen* (fig. 28.9) by Max Ernst (1891-1916) combines the influence of Surrealism, Cubism, and the playful qualities of Picasso and Duchamp. A geometric king looms up from a chessboard, which is also a table. His horns are related to the role of the bull as a traditional symbol of male fertility and kingship. He dominates the board by his large size and extended arms. The king is a player sitting at the table, as well as a chess piece on the board. He literally "plays" with the queen, who is represented as a smaller geometric construction at the left. On the right, a few tiny chess pieces seem uninvolved in whatever "game" is taking place between the king and queen.

28.9 (right) Max Ernst, *The King Playing with the Queen*. 1944. Bronze (cast 1954, from original plaster), 38 ½ in high, at the base 18 3/4 x 20 ½ in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

28.10 Alberto Giacometti, *Large Standing Woman III*. 1960. Bronze, 7 ft 8 V2 in (2.35 m) high. Photo courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery. Born in Switzerland, Giacometti spent a formative period in the 1930s as a Surrealist. He met the Futurists in Italy and the Cubists In Paris, and finally developed a distinctive way of representing the human figure that has become his trademark.

Large Standing Woman III of 1960 (fig. 28.10), by Alberto Giacometti (1901-66), is one of his most imposing works. Its tall, thin, anti-Classical proportions hark back to the rigid, standing kings and queens of ancient Egypt (fig. 5.15). In figures such as this, whether large or small, Giacometti plays with the idea of extinction. His obsession with existence and nonexistence is evident in the fact that he has made these sculptures as thin as the can be without collapsing. Ironically, the thinner they become, the greater their presence and power to evoke anxiety. By confronting the observer with the potential for disappearance, Giacometti seems to take the viewer to the very threshold of being.

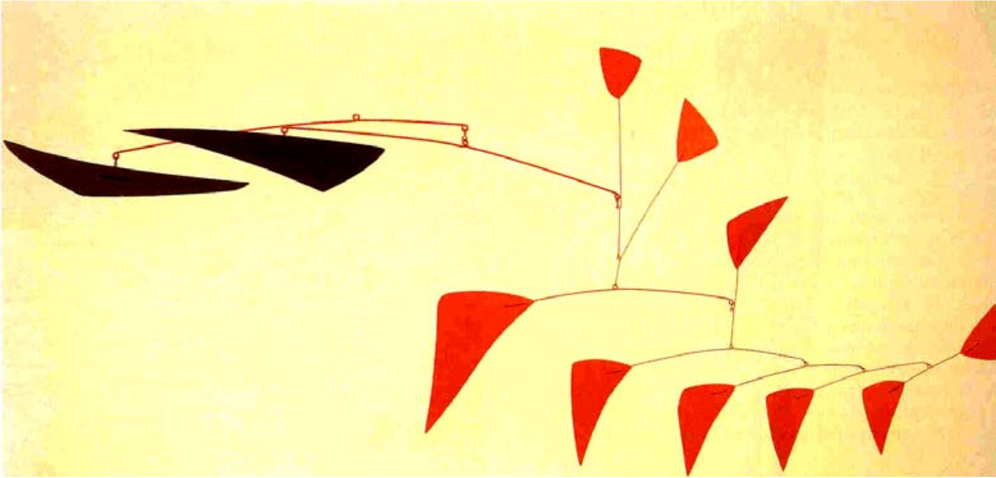
In contrast to Giacometti the British sculptor Henry Moore (1898-1986) was drawn to massive forms. The traditional motif of the reclining figure was one of his favorite subjects. He himself related the image to the Mother Earth theme and to his fascination for the mysterious holes of nature. From the 1930s he began making sculptures with hollowed-out spaces and openings, thereby playing with the transition between inside and outside, interior and exterior. Many of his reclining figures are intended as outdoor landscape sculptures. As such, their holes permit observers to see through the work, as well as around it, and thus to include the surrounding landscape in their experience of the sculpture.



28.11 Henry Moore, Reclining Figure, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York 1963-5. Bronze, 16ft high. Moore's habit of collecting the chance objects of nature, such as dried wood, bone, and the smooth stones from beaches, recalls the use of "found objects" in collage and assemblage. Unlike the Dada and Surrealist artists, however, he used found objects as his inspiration rather than his medium, preferring the more traditional media of stone, wood, and bronze

The Lincoln Center *Reclining Figure* (fig. 28.11) illustrates a reclining figure in an architectural setting. The imposing, monumental forms are separated into two sections. This opens a space through which the surrounding architecture is visible. Softening the angular, urban quality of the work and its environment is the reflection

in the pool, which includes the sky in the experience of the sculpture. In this figure, Moore achieves a formal and psychological synthesis of the woman with architecture and landscape.



28.12 Alexander Calder; *Mobile in Red and Black*. Metal, 2 ft 8 in x 6ft l0 in. Present whereabouts unknown. The playfulness of Calder's mobiles has not been lost on the toy industry. Mobiles composed of various kinds of figures, often activated by a wind-up motor attached to a music box, have been suspended over the cribs of generations of babies.

From the 1930s, the American artist Alexander Calder (1886-1976) developed mobiles, or hanging sculptures that are set in motion by air currents. *Mobile in Red and Black* (fig. 28.12) is made from a series of curved wires set in a sequence of horizontal planes. Flat, colorful metal shapes are attached to the wires. Because they hang from the ceiling, mobiles challenge the traditional viewpoint of sculpture. Their playful quality and the chance nature of air currents are reminiscent of Dada and Surrealism, although Calder is more abstract (in the nonfigurative sense) than many Dada and Surrealist artists.