

SF WEEKLY

By Laura Jaye Cramer on Thu, May 14, 2015 at 11:00 AM

Physics Takes on an Otherworldly Look in Science in Surrealism



Image Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco; Max Ernst Fleurs – Coquillages (Shell Flowers), 1928, Gouache on paper

Years ago, when Gallery Wendi Norris owner Wendi Norris got her hands on Gavin Parkinson's ***Surrealism, Art, and Modern Science***, she knew she had stumbled across a curator's inspiration goldmine — only one that would take a hell of a lot of research to figure out. It's a weighty book. Published in 2008 by Yale University, it's 294 pages of dense theories on how the developments in physics — or, more specifically, how the development of the theory of relativity and in quantum mechanics — affected the artists of the Surrealist movement.

"I felt like I wanted to make the show come to life visually," Norris says of her upcoming exhibition, ***Science in Surrealism***. "The research that he did — I wanted to breathe life into it in terms of color and actual paintings."

And it's not hard to see why a gallery owner would want to bring these pieces together. It was an exciting time when elements like color and shape would have been dramatically different from before.

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“At the turn of the century, the world looked a certain way,” explains Norris. “ Everything was represented as it was, a person, an animal, a building — all looked a certain way. That’s the way we understood the world.”

Then there was a shift. Through their new theories, the physicists of the day, such as Albert Einstein and Max Planck, blew open the possibilities of perception and, in a way, changed the face of the physical world. There were alternate ways of seeing; light and matter could be waves, or they could be particles — a fact that would have dramatically changed the way an artist looked at their subject.



Image Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco; Yves Tanguy *Je te retrouve*, 1938, Oil on canvas

“Whether it was Einstein or Planck, whether it was relativity or quantum physics, we started understanding the world in a very different way,” Norris says.

This understanding, Norris believes, is reflected in their work. “Many of the artists were trying to change compositionally. They were trying to reach new planes and show something that hadn’t been represented by exploring these new dimensions and the relationship between time and space in a painting.”

These artists include Victor Brauner, Max Ernst, Marcel Jean, Matta, Gordon Onslow Ford, Wolfgang Paalen, Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, and Remedios Varo — all a part of Gallery Wendi Norris’ Science in Surrealism.

Gallery Wendi Norris presents *Science in Surrealism*, May 16 - August 1, at Gallery Wendi Norris, 161 Jesse, free, 415-346-7812.

<http://www.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2015/05/14/physics-takes-on-an-otherworldly-look-in-science-in-surrealism>