



360 Degrees of Separation

Surrealism and the unconscious mind

Josie Long:

One minute you can't cross the road because two priests are chained to your legs, the next a taxi driven by a shark speeds by. Welcome to the world of the surrealists who believed that the unconscious mind is not that far removed from reality.

Formed in the early 1920s by Andre Breton, the surrealists blamed rationality for causing the First World War and claimed that, to avoid more horror, it was necessary we needed to free up the irrational unconscious mind of dreams. They experimented with automatic writing and hypnotism and produced famous pieces such as Magritte's pipe cunningly inscribed....."this is not a pipe."

Give Breton a big calculator and scientist goggles. He explodes. He re-enters with a shark's head and riding on a space hopper.

Eccentric geniuses or as mad as a box of frogs, there's no mistaking the surrealists were a truly odd bunch. None more so than enfant terrible Salvador Dali who took it all a bit too literally by turning up to an exhibition in a deep sea diving suit and claiming another artist had stolen a profitable idea from his unconscious.

And while Dali didn't hang around with them for long, he did meet the surrealists patron saint Sigmund Freud, whose much darker theory about the power of the unconscious went on to divide psychologists everywhere.