

Media release, 14 February 2025

The Key to Dreams.

Surrealist Masterworks from the Collection Hersaint

16 February – 4 May 2025

In a world premiere, the Fondation Beyeler is showing a representative selection of surrealist masterpieces from the Hersaint Collection. The exhibition includes around 50 key works by artists such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, Dorothea Tanning, Toyen as well as Balthus, Jean Dubuffet, Wifredo Lam and many others, reflecting on major themes of Surrealism such as the night, dreams, the unconscious, metamorphoses or the forest as a site of mystery. The paintings from the Hersaint Collection are presented in dialogue with important works from the Fondation Beyeler.

Referencing the title of a major work by René Magritte from the Hersaint Collection, “The Key to Dreams” encapsulates the surrealist focus of the collection with its numerous references to the mysterious and uncanny world of dreams, nightmares and the unconscious. The Hersaint Collection was founded by Claude Hersaint (1904, São Paulo – 1993, Crans-Montana), one of the earliest and most important collectors of Surrealist art. Growing up in Brazil, he later moved to Paris, where he acquired his first painting by Max Ernst in 1921 at the age of 17. A life-long passion for art evolved, resulting in one of the most remarkable collections of surrealist painting. Today, the Hersaint Collection comprises around 150 works, including one of the most important private collections of works by Max Ernst. Throughout his life, Claude Hersaint was friends with many artists and supported them significantly. His enthusiasm and commitment to art extended to his wife Françoise Hersaint and his daughter Evangéline Hersaint.

Among the numerous masterpieces in the collection is Max Ernst's impressive *The Fireside Angel (The Triumph of Surrealism)* from 1937, which has become an icon of Surrealism in its own right. Salvador Dalí's enigmatic and mysterious painting *The Lugubrious Game* from 1929 epitomises the quintessence of his art with its focus on erotic and psychological taboos. Also on display is Balthus' *Passage du Commerce-Saint-André* (1952–1954), the artist's monumental masterpiece, which has been on permanent loan to the Fondation Beyeler for many years. Dorothea Tanning and Toyen, two key Surrealists, are also represented with characteristic works that have hardly ever been shown in public before.

Claude, Françoise and Evangéline Hersaint maintained a lasting friendship with Ernst and Hildy Beyeler. While the collection of the Fondation Beyeler and the Collection Hersaint exhibit both similarities and differences, they complement each other in an ideal way. In dialogue with the Collection Hersaint, the references to surrealist art in the Beyeler Collection are brought to light, becoming particularly evident in the encounter with paintings by Louise Bourgeois, Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso and Henri Rousseau from the collection of the Fondation Beyeler.

Claude Hersaint was born in 1904 in São Paulo, where his family, originally from Alsace-Lorraine, had emigrated to in the mid-19th century. He grew up in the traditional milieu of the intellectual upper class and moved to Paris as a young man, where he attended “Sciences Po” and studied law. Claude Hersaint went on to work in banking, a profession he pursued for the rest of his life. In Paris, he became close friends with important surrealist artists such as Max Ernst, Victor Brauner and Óscar Domínguez, as well as with Balthus and Jean Dubuffet. Claude Hersaint was also friends with influential writers, intellectuals and collectors such as Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille, Jean Paulhan and Marie-Laure de Noailles. In 1938, he married his first wife Hélène Anavi, a flamboyant personality of her time. Due to the Second World War and persecution by the Nazis, Claude Hersaint and Hélène Anavi fled Paris at the beginning of 1942. After first leaving for Rio de Janeiro, they immigrated to New York. There they became friends with Robert

Oppenheimer, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Leo Castelli and Pierre Matisse as well as Man Ray, Dorothea Tanning and numerous artists who had gone into exile during the war.

After the Second World War, Claude Hersaint returned to Paris, where he met his second wife, Françoise Moutier. Claude Hersaint and Françoise Hersaint then lived in Montreux and Paris until they finally settled in Crans-Montana in the Valais. After her husband's death, Françoise Hersaint was heavily committed to the collection. Today, their daughter Evangéline Hersaint carries on the Hersaint Collection and is making it accessible to the general public for the first time with this exhibition.

A richly illustrated catalogue in German and French, edited by Raphaël Bouvier for the Fondation Beyeler and designed by Uwe Koch and Silke Fahnert, is published by Hatje Cantz Verlag, Berlin, to accompany the exhibition. It comprises 152 pages and contains an introductory foreword and an in-depth conversation with the collector Evangéline Hersaint.

"The Key to Dreams. Surrealist Masterpieces from the Collection Hersaint" has been made possible by the generous support of Evangéline and Laetitia Hersaint-Lair. The exhibition is curated by Dr Raphaël Bouvier, Senior Curator of the Fondation Beyeler.

The exhibition is generously supported by:

Beyeler-Stiftung
Hansjörg Wyss, Wyss Foundation

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Fondation Beyeler

The Fondation Beyeler in Riehen near Basel is internationally renowned for its high-calibre exhibitions, its major collection of modern and contemporary art, as well as its ambitious schedule of events. The museum building was designed by Renzo Piano in the idyllic setting of a park with venerable trees and water lily ponds. It boasts a unique location in the heart of a local recreation area, looking out onto fields, pastures and vineyards close to the foothills of the Black Forest. In collaboration with Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, the Fondation Beyeler is constructing a new museum building in the adjoining park, thus further enhancing the harmonious interplay of art, architecture and nature.

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Fondation Beyeler opening hours: 10am to 6pm daily, Wednesday 10am to 8pm

The Key to Dreams. Surrealist Masterworks from the Collection Hersaint

16 February – 4 May 2025



Max Ernst
The Fireside Angel (The Triumph of Surrealism), 1937
Oil on canvas, 114 x 146 cm
Collection Hersaint
© 2025 ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zurich



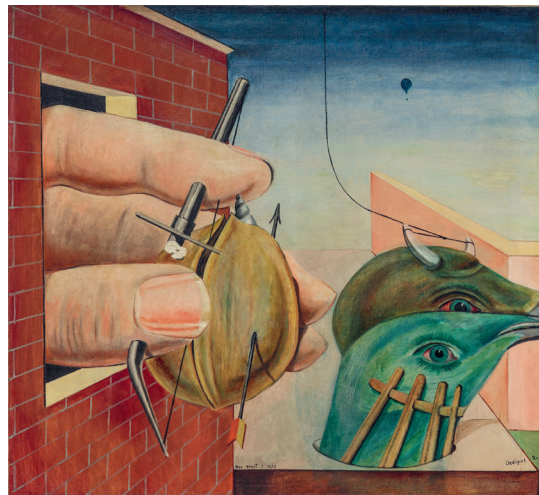
Salvador Dalí
The Lugubrious Game, 1929
Oil and collage on cardboard, 44.4 x 30.3 cm
Collection Hersaint
© 2025 Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí / ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zurich



René Magritte
The Key to Dreams, 1930
Oil on canvas, 81 x 60 cm
Collection Hersaint
© 2025 ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zurich



Joan Miró
Woman, 1934
Pastel on velours paper, 106.5 x 70.5 cm
Collection Hersaint
© 2025 Successió Miró / ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zurich



Max Ernst
Oedipus Rex, 1922
Oil on canvas, 93 x 102 cm
Collection Hersaint
© 2025 ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zurich



Dorothea Tanning
The Blue Waltz, 1954
Oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm
Collection Hersaint
© 2025 ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Peter Schälchli, Zurich

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FONDATION BEYELER

Artists of the exhibition

Balthus

Louise Bourgeois

Victor Brauner

Salvador Dalí

Óscar Domínguez

Jean Dubuffet

Max Ernst

Jean Fautrier

Alberto Giacometti

Asger Jorn

Wifredo Lam

René Magritte

André Masson

Matta

Joan Miró

Pablo Picasso

Man Ray

Henri Rousseau

Josef Šíma

Yves Tanguy

Dorothea Tanning

Toyen

Wols

Surrealistische Meisterwerke der Collection Hersaint / Chefs-d'œuvre surréalistes de la Collection Hersaint

Der Schlüssel der Träume / La Clef des songes



Description

With the presentation of the Hersaint Collection, the Fondation Beyeler is celebrating a world premiere. For the first time, the surrealist masterpieces of this important collection are on public display in a major survey exhibition. The collection was founded by the banker Claude Hersaint. Even as a teenager, he was enthusiastic about the revolutionary art of surrealism. His early interest enabled him to acquire major works by the first generation of surrealists, including Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Yves Tanguy, Man Ray, Victor Brauner, Toyen and Dorothea Tanning, as well as Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier and Wols. He also amassed what is probably the most impressive private Max Ernst collection in the world. Claude Hersaint was friends with many of these artists throughout his life and supported them significantly. Claude and his wife Françoise Hersaint also shared a mutual admiration for Ernst Beyeler. In dialog with the Beyeler Collection, the exhibition and catalog now present around 50 key works from the Hersaint Collection.

Biography

Claude Hersaint (1904 São Paulo – 1993 Crans-Montana) grew up in Brazil before moving to Paris with his family. At the age of just 17, he acquired his first painting by Max Ernst. It was the foundation for a lifelong passion for Surrealism, whose legacy is preserved in his collection through key works. Hersaint's commitment to art, like that of his wife Françoise (1934 Paris – 2023 Crans-Montana), is continued today by their daughter Evangéline Hersaint and her wife Laetitia.

Exhibition

16 February – 4 May 2025
Fondation Beyeler, Riehen, Switzerland

EDITED BY

Raphaël Bouvier für die Fondation Beyeler

TEXTS BY

Sam Keller, Raphaël Bouvier, Evangéline Hersaint

DESIGN BY

fahner.koch, Köln

144 pp.

260 x 160 mm

Paperback with Lay-Flat Binding

CHF 58.–, € 44.–

978-3-7757-5932-8 (German, French)

Publication date: 05.03.2025

Hatje Cantz Verlag GmbH

Mommensenstraße 27

10629 Berlin

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as well as further foundations and patrons
who prefer to remain anonymous.

The art education programme and the free admission scheme for children and young adults up to 25 are supported by the **Thomas and Doris Ammann Foundation**.