

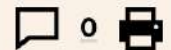
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## A century of surrealism on show in London exhibition

The Design Museum will play host to more than 300 objects and pieces of jewellery that pay homage to the work of Dali, Cocteau, Man Ray and more



Melanie Abrams 9 HOURS AGO



Dalí's 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' (1937) © Salvador Dalí/Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation/DACS London/Tate

Surrealism — the early 1900s movement that embraced unusual combinations and the unconscious, and among whose pioneers was Salvador Dalí — is having a moment at art fairs, in museums and on catwalks. And, now, jewellery is sharing in this surrealist spotlight, in a travelling show from the Vitra Design Museum in Germany, which opens at the London Design Museum on October 14 and runs until next February.

Called *Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924-Today*, the exhibition explores the influence of the movement on design through around 350 objects. Among those on show are Dali's lobster telephone and a blue-glass beaded eye and faux-pearl teardrop brooch, originally designed in 1937 by Jean Cocteau for Elsa Schiaparelli and remade by him in 1952.

Indeed, contemporary jewellers have long been inspired by [surrealism](#), a movement that is “all about disrupting expectation and breaking the rules”, says Kathryn Johnson, curator of the Design Museum's exhibition.

New York-based Taiwanese jewellery designer Anna Hu has adapted the runny lines of Dali's melting watches from his painting, ‘The Persistence of Memory’, on a crucifix — adding a fluid edge of silver-grey diamonds and aquamarines to the traditional cross lines for her Beethoven Moonlight pendant.



Dali's lobster telephone © Salvador Dalí/Fundacio Gala/DACS London

Yet, alongside the creative inspiration, surrealist designs have a business value for contemporary jewellers, too.

“Surrealism is one of those things that people can understand, whether someone is an art aficionado or not,” says Los Angeles-based jeweller Sonia Boyajian. Her surrealist collection, with pieces named after various artists, includes a ceramic Rene butterfly brooch pin — the wings glazed with a sky motif; and skies that feature in the paintings of Belgian artist René Magritte, a leading figure in the Surrealist movement known for his reality-distorting paintings.

“There’s reality and then there’s social media, and that whole thing is surreal, if you ask me, because we are no longer connected to what is real and what is not,” says Boyajian, who created her Surrealist Collection in 2017 after reading Dali’s autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. “Everything is like this idea, and we don’t know any more what the truth of the idea is.”



Sonia Boyajian's Rene brooch pin

Sonia Boyajian's Rene brooch pin

Alexander Pertot, co-founder of the Swiss art jewellery house Gems and Ladders, said that its reproductions of artist Meret Oppenheim's sketches and designs in 2014, such as her fur bracelet — included in the London Design Museum show — kick-started the business. "She's a well-known artist, especially in central Europe, Germany and Switzerland, and this helped to create attention around what we do," he says. While Pertot declined to disclose its revenues, the Oppenheim pieces now make up between 25 and 30 per cent of the business, with the sugar-cube ring its bestselling piece, racking up 70 sales since 2014.

Paris-based jeweller Lorenz Bäumer, founder of Maison Bäumer Vendôme, has been using surrealist works and techniques since the 2003 sale of writer André Breton's art collection in Paris. He says it makes his work distinctive. "It puts you in a spot where you don't use the same techniques, as perhaps you'd sketch around a stone, or you'd make a specific design for a necklace. There, it's about finding elements and letting your brain wander and coming up with something — it's a very different way of creating jewellery," says Bäumer, who has designed jewellery for Chanel.



Jean Cocteau's Schiaparelli Eye brooch © Franks Strous for Design Museum den Bosch

He offers several examples: his rose brooch with a diamond dewdrop, which references American avant-garde photographer Man Ray's iconic shot of glass tears; his Kiss of the Bee ring, which used automatic drawing; his free association where he "put together randomly all these elements". Also, the mouth, Dali's brooch with pearl teeth, features a bee. "The fact the bee stings, the fact that it's such an interesting animal symbolically, and why would it land on somebody's mouth which is something that would make people [feel] very uncomfortable but at the same time beautiful," he says.

Jewellers agree that their surrealist-inspired designs attract a new type of art-collector client. As Matthew Harris, founder of Mateo New York, puts it: She "definitely has deeper pockets and she's not scared of wearing something interesting. She doesn't have a million Cartier bracelets on."



Meret Oppenheim x Gems and Ladders fur bracelet © Hans Jorg Walter

Last month, Harris reintroduced an eye pendant with a 0.21-carat diamond teardrop at \$5,250, based on Dali's 1945 painting, 'The Eye', but feminising the eye shape adding diamonds and a teardrop.

Indeed, his earlier limited-edition pendants, made for online retailer Net-a-Porter in 2018, led to him creating his first high jewellery collection in May, "because the demand was there". The crystal-quartz version sold out to the luxury retailer's private VIP customers before they even hit the website, according to the jewellery designer.

Meret Oppenheim x Gems and Ladders fur bracelet © Hans Jorg Walter

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Yet there are challenges with surrealist-inspired designs as they can be less easy to sell, according to Paris-based jeweller Lydia Courteille. She has yet to sell her Dali- and Schiaparelli-inspired, 18ct yellow-gold, orange sapphire and black diamond lobster earrings, with hanging fire opal, and a few other pieces from her Homage to Surrealism collection from 2012. They are large — 7.5cm long by 2.5cm wide — and "people are looking for things to wear every day", she says. "There are not enough collectors to sell these things to."

As to the future, jewellers are still seeking inspiration from surrealist designers, such as Joan Miró for Gems and Ladders, and Yves Tanguy for Bäumer.

And, with the centenary of Breton's first Surrealist Manifesto in 2024, the value of these surrealist-inspired designs could pay dividends.

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