

Exhibition
21.09.24 → 26.01.25

Surrealism is a large bearskin,

Marianne Van Hirtum, the artwork

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Belgian poet, painter and sculptor Marianne Van Hirtum (Saint-Servais, 1925 - Paris, 1988) is one of the little-known figures of Surrealism. Although, like many women artists in the movement, posterity has not remembered her name, the hundred or so drawings and oils on canvas that emerged during the preparations for this exhibition testify to the continuous and prolific nature of her artistic output. The dedications, written or drawn on the margins of a drawing or on the frontispiece of a collection of poetry, show that the artist lacked neither humour nor generosity...

Of the many faces the artist worn, it was Marianne, the poet, that first emerged. In the footsteps of studies that are keener to reevaluate the work of women and minorities ignored by history, her poetry is being "rediscovered" in 2019. Marianne Van Hirtum entered Surrealism through words. Back in 1952, she was noticed by the major literary figures who launched her career in Paris: Jean Seghers published her *Poèmes pour les petits pauvres* and Jean Paulhan chose *Les Insolites* for the *Métamorphoses* collection at Gallimard.

In 1955, André Breton, the admired personality, acknowledges that "*Poetry is not rebellious to her*". She joins the Surrealist group and settles in Paris, becoming a regular at the café *La Promenade de Vénus*, where the group weekly met. Marianne Van Hirtum took part in the *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, E.R.O.S.*, at the Galerie Daniel Cordier in 1959, where she presents a painting, *Le Caveau mobile*, and signs, at Breton's request, several definitions for a new erotic lexicon. At the same time, she wrote, drew, painted and sculpted to her heart's

content. After André Breton's death in 1966, she is one of the members who continues the experiment in its poetic form. There is the *Bulletin de liaison surréaliste* with her fellow friend, the poet Vincent Bounoure, and the journal *Surréalisme*.

It belongs to the word surrealism to illuminate the meaning of Marianne Van Hirtum's works. In the only text briefly explaining her artistic intentions (*Le surréalisme est une grande peau d'ours*), she celebrates the surrealist spirit that frees her from convention, morality and the mysteries of her childhood spent in the shadow of Le Beau-Vallon, the psychiatric institute where her father, a renowned psychiatrist, was the director. Surrealism has enabled Marianne Van Hirtum to cross all kinds of borders, both physical and mental, to travel intensely, in dream or reality, with or without her many lovers, but always followed by her cohort of beasts. Ocellated lizards, varans, hedgehogs and cats populated her paintings and never left her flat on rue Delambre, a veritable animal refuge. Indissociable from his literary activity,



Portrait of Marianne Van Hirtum © Pierre Bérenger

The exhibition, organised by the Service of Culture of the Province of Namur, is on view at the Delta from Tuesdays to Fridays from 11am to 18pm and on weekends from 10am to 18pm.

his graphic work extends its automatic techniques. Exclusive forms, inherited from the unconscious, are, according to inspiration, transferred onto paper, parchment, vellum, pebbles, canvas and other magical sculptures. *"My gestures are regulated by the key that contains the mystery of my whole life,"* she wrote. As a veritable phantasmagorical bestiary, Marianne Van Hirtum's work has much in common with the "convulsive beauty" so dear to surrealists.

For those who discover her today, it's probably vain to try to unravel the Hirtum mystery. Let us be guided without a compass through Marianne Van Hirtum's meanders of drawings, paintings and sculptures, and follow the artist's advice: *"Be careful, pay close attention to the signs and I tell you: RISING SIGN"*

Isabelle de Longrée



Untitled, 1963, indian ink on paper, 20,5 x 29,5 cm, collection of the Communauté française, inv. 10453/TER

Balade de l'universelle Ânesse - - in the footsteps of the artist in the Bricgnot district. Imagined by Fiona Wilkinson, implemented by Aurélien Dony, on Sundays 20 October and 24 November 2024, at 10.30 am. Details and booking on ledelta.be.

Art Sunday - Sunday 5 January 2025, from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm. Guided tour with the exhibition curator and children's workshop during the visit.



LE SOIR

Info and reservations
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