

DIANA NAYLOR

E.L.T. MESENS: HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE
DADA AND SURREALIST MOVEMENTS IN BELGIUM
AND ENGLAND AS ARTIST, POET AND DEALER.

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph.D.
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON.



E.L.T. MESENS: HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE
DADA AND SURREALIST MOVEMENTS IN BELGIUM
AND ENGLAND AS ARTIST, POET AND DEALER.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The aim of this thesis is to provide a survey of E.L.T. Mesens' activities within the Dada and Surrealist movements and an initial assessment of his work.

The thesis outlines Mesens' career and considers his work as an organiser and polemicist of the Dada and Surrealist movements in Belgium and the Surrealist movement in England. The period in which Mesens initiated Dada activities in Brussels and developed important contacts with Paris, though brief, affected his whole outlook on art and poetry. The development of Dada and the work of a number of European Dadaists whose work influenced Mesens' own development and the Dada movement in Antwerp and Brussels is discussed. Differences emerged between the theory and practice of Surrealism in Paris and Brussels and the thesis considers the diverging development of Surrealism in each of these centres. Mesens' involvement in the Surrealist movement in Belgium is examined and his theoretical position is appraised. The thesis also briefly outlines late nineteenth and early twentieth century art movements in Belgium, in particular Symbolism and Expressionism, in order that the Dada and Surrealist movements may be seen in context.

Mesens' main efforts were concentrated in his work as an art dealer in Brussels and London, where he promoted the work of Dada and Surrealist artists in particular. From 1954 onwards, however, he turned to the making of collage, a medium which he had already explored during the 1920's. The thesis will provide an examination of Mesens' work as an art dealer in Belgium between 1928 and 1938, and

in England between 1938 and 1950. It will provide an analysis of Mesens' poetry, mostly written between 1923 and 1940, and his collages both of the early period in the 1920's, and later from 1954 until his death in April 1971.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page No.</u>
Introduction.	5
<u>Chapter</u>	
1. E.L.T. Mesens. The Early Years.	8
2. Modernism in Belgium.	31
3. The Dada Movement, 1916 - 1922.	42
4. Surrealist Art in France.	64
5. Dada in Belgium.	88
6. Surrealism in Belgium.	103
7. Mesens' Understanding of Dada and Surrealism.	123
8. Mesens' Work as an Art Dealer in Belgium 1924 - 1938.	132
9. Mesens' Poetry.	144
10. Mesens' Early Collages, 1924 - 1931.	157
11. Mesens' Work as an Art Dealer in London 1936 - 1940.	170
12. Mesens' Collages, 1954 - 1971.	221
13. Mesens in London 1940 - 1950.	260
Conclusion.	289
List of Illustrations.	293
Appendix A. Extract from "Le Miroir infidèle" <u>Le Savoir Vivre</u> , Brussels, 1946.	302
B. One man exhibitions of Mesens' collages, listed chronologically.	305
C. Group exhibitions in which Mesens' work was exhibited, listed chronologically.	306
D. Mesens Collection.	308
Bibliography.	318

INTRODUCTION

E.L.T. Mesens (1903 - 1971) was very well known in Surrealist circles in London, Paris and Brussels. Abandoning a musical career in 1926, Mesens worked as an art dealer in Brussels until 1938 when he moved to London and opened The London Gallery. The gallery closed in 1950 and Mesens devoted the remaining years of his life to making collages and occasionally mounting exhibitions. He wrote poetry from 1923 onwards and his complete works were eventually published in Paris in 1958.

Mesens played a major part in establishing Surrealism in Belgium through his early connections with the Dada and Surrealist painters and poets in Paris; and in his capacity as an art dealer he publicised the work of French, Belgian, German, English and American Dada and Surrealist artists. In London Mesens worked with the English Surrealist Group until its demise in 1947, exhibiting their work and organising many of their activities, and he mounted important exhibitions of Surrealist painters in England both before and after the War. He also edited the London Bulletin, (1938-40,) a major review of Surrealist art and poetry, together with a number of tracts, manifestos and magazines in Brussels in the 1920's and 1930's.

There is no one main source for information about all of Mesens' activities. Some details of his childhood and student years are to be found in Jean Scutenaire's book A Mon Ami Mesens, privately published in Brussels in 1972, which was written with Mesens' collaboration and was intended to cover his whole life. Scutenaire started writing it in 1971 but sadly Mesens died at a stage when Scutenaire had by no means managed to get enough material together to publish a monograph. It is, one must assume, accurate on details of Mesens' childhood and early years, but becomes somewhat vague in dealing with his career after the age of eighteen. Details about Mesens' early career have had to be elucidated from unpublished sources in the Dubucq collection, Brussels, transcripts of radio and T.V. broadcasts in which Mesens was

interviewed in London and Brussels, together with material from catalogues, periodicals and newspapers. José Vovelle's thesis, Le Surréalisme in Belgique, published in Brussels in 1972, gives a fairly accurate introduction to Mesens' activities within the context of the Surrealist movement in Belgium though her coverage of Dada in Belgium is sketchy, and she does not discuss Mesens' early involvement with the Constructivist and Expressionist movements.

Several articles discuss Dada and Surrealism in Belgium: Rick Sauwen's L'Esprit Dada en Belgique, 1970, and two articles by the Belgian critic André Blavier, Le Surréalisme en Belgique, 1968, and La Belgique Sauvage, 1972, which give admirable short, concise introductions to the movement and are good sources for Mesens' activities as a publisher of manifestos and tracts. The introduction to Christian Bussy's Anthologie du Surréalisme en Belgique, 1973, also provides useful background information and a selection of documents and writings by members of the Belgian Surrealist group.

Mesens' work as an art dealer in Belgium has not been given adequate attention in any text. This thesis does attempt to indicate Mesens' stature as an art dealer in Brussels, but until the archives at present in private hands in the Belgian capital are made fully available to scholars, it will be difficult to give a thorough assessment. Similarly, Mesens' relationship with the Surrealists in Paris will not be properly understood until these sources have been explored more fully. The author has been allowed very limited access to the above mentioned archives.

A brief consideration of Mesens' work as a dealer in London before the War appears in Dennis Farr's recent study English Art 1870 - 1940. Mesens' work as a dealer since the War has not yet been assessed, however, nor has his relationship with the English Surrealists. The main sources for information about these activities are the London Bulletin, the Herbert Read correspondence, University of Victoria, Canada, the Conroy Maddox correspondence, Tate Gallery Archives, the Dubucq Collection, Brussels, catalogues, periodicals, newspapers and reviews. The author is indebted to the critic and jazz singer George Melly for the help and encouragement which he has

unerringly given. Mr. Melly worked at the London Gallery after the War and was a great friend of Mesens. Also extremely helpful have been a number of poets, artists, critics and art dealers who knew Mesens well and who gave interviews and corresponded with the author: Sir Roland Penrose, Henry Moore, Conroy Maddox, Roy Edwards, Eileen Agar, Annely Juda, Jean Scutenaire, Hugo van den Perre, Jean Miló, Feyyaz Fergar, Francine Legrand, Giselle Ollinger-Zinque, Maurice Jadot, Nigel Henders on.

The lengthiest discussion to date of Mesens' collages is in Vovelle's book. However this is by no means exhaustive and it does not analyse Mesens' early collages adequately. Vovelle does not consider Mesens' poetry either, an important aspect of his work. No analysis has ever been made of his poems which were first published in a number of periodicals in Brussels, London and Paris between 1923 and 1958. Mesens published two short collections, Alphabet sourd aveugle (Brussels, 1933) and Troisième Front (London 1944), before the collected edition appeared in 1959. The main sources of reference for Mesens' collages are catalogues, in particular Jacques Brunius' catalogue for Mesens' exhibition at Knokke-le-Zoute, 1963, and an exhibition held at the Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, 1965. Mesens' attitude towards Surrealism has been elucidated from his own writings - in particular from two unpublished manuscripts in the Dubucq collection, and a text published in Le Savoir Vivre, Brussels, 1946 (Appendix A).

The author's work was assisted by a grant from the Central Research Fund of London University in 1977, in order to facilitate research at the Museum of Modern Art, Brussels. The author was also granted sabbatical leave by Essex County Council in order to complete the research. These grants are gratefully acknowledged, as is the invaluable help given by Mesens' friends, colleagues and contemporaries.

CHAPTER ONE

E.L.T. Mesens. The Early Years.

Univers voue au massacre
sines hurlant la misere
niformes pour tous les temps
nions sans importance ¹
rinoires aristocratiques.

The world which Mesens mocked in this extract from his Alphabet sourd aveugle was that in which he grew up: the prosperous, self-satisfied world of bourgeois Belgium. Brussels where he was born was, and is still, a city divided by senseless disputes between Fleming and Walloon,² a city in which materialism remains the order of the day. Numerous painters and poets have reacted against the stifling nature of Belgian life³ and in this Mesens was no exception. He eventually chose to quit the country in 1938 and settle in the more cosmopolitan milieu of London and in later years frequently referred to his compatriots as "barbarians".⁴

Mesens had a very aggressive character and was quite uncompromising in his views.⁵ This was in his later life to cause friction with both friends and colleagues alike.⁶ It is probable that his commitment, from the age of twenty-three onwards, to the all-embracing tenets of Surrealism is explicable in terms of his own personal non-conformity. Mesens' refusal to comply with accepted norms of behaviour⁷ was however accompanied by a lively and sardonic wit.⁸ Whilst running the London Gallery after the second World War he once asked his assistant, George Melly, to play a joke "surreal" on a neighbour.

"There was a shop opening opposite us which showed (but didn't sell) expensive luggage that the American tourists from Claridges could order to be delivered duty-free when they had returned home. One afternoon Edouard noticed the manager in the street officiously indicating to a girl in the window how he wanted the suitcases arranged. "Go across," he told me, "and wish that pompous fellow 'Good luck, Sir'. He will thank you dismissively. Wish him 'Good luck, Sir' again, and continue until he loses his temper."

I did as he suggested and it happened as he predicted. With the man shouting that he would call the police I retreated, still yelling 'Good luck, Sir', to find a delighted E.L.T. smiling sardonically over the top of the unsaleable Miró in our window."⁹

Mesens was at once ebullient, tough, shrewd, charming, annoying and quite unconventional, and there can be no doubt that his family were nonplussed by his involvement with Dada and Surrealist painters and poets. He said later that they thought he was a "wild man".¹⁰ This is not surprising in view of his background. Christened Edouard Leon Theodre, he was born on the 27th November, 1903 at 36, rue de la Grande Île, in the artisans' quarter of Brussels. The house consisted of a general store on the ground floor, while the family lived on the two floors above the shop.¹¹ The 'Saint Gery' quarter where the house still stands is an area typified by old three and four storey dwellings and a variety of small businesses - workshops, bistros, hairdressers, cafés and shops. A mixed population of Flemings and Walloons lives in St. Gery and while Mesens' own immediate family were French speakers, those on his maternal grandfather's side spoke Flemish. Although Mesens' main language was French, he had a working knowledge of Flemish¹² - occasionally in later life surprising people by using it in preference to French.¹³

Mesens' father kept a grocer's shop and his family were fairly comfortably off, having only one child to support. The family moved in 1909 to take over a larger general store in the Chaussée de Gand and after the first World War purchased a house at 130, rue Piers.¹⁴ Until he was sixteen Mesens attended the Ecole Charles Buls,¹⁵ where it gradually became apparent that he was very musical. He had a clear singing voice, played the piano well and in his teens began to experiment in composing music. He later recalled that he wrote a song which he hoped everyone in Belgium would sing on the centennial anniversary of Belgian independence in 1930. Needless to say this did not happen and meanwhile "en attendant ce grand tralala" he set sentimental French and Flemish verse to music.¹⁶

He described his early musical training to George Melly in a programme broadcast on BBC radio in 1969:¹⁷

"My mother bought an upright piano. I was compelled to exercise my ten fingers on the keyboard, with a piano mistress, of course. My first mistress was blonde and dry. An upright piano can be a dangerous weapon in the mind of a child. A grand piano even worse on account of the tail. By the time my exercises reached Czerny I was already trying to write little melodies on one line. The ash blonde said to my mother, "Your son is gifted, he has a good ear"."

While in his later life Mesens was to become a shrewd businessman¹⁸, he was at the same time very sentimental. He said of himself:¹⁹

"Je suis très sentimental. Je pleure dès que l'on me parle de gens pauvres ou malades. J'essaye toujours de les aider. Mais cela n'empêche que j'ai toujours bien vécu, que j'ai toujours pu choisir ma table et mes vins".

This sentimental side of his nature was probably inherited from his mother, whom he described as smothering him with affection during his childhood.²⁰

"Elevé dans une famille athée mon pere ne s'occupait beaucoup de moi et ma mere me couvrait de tendresse, de sentimentalité excessive et même d'un brin de jalousie."

This "sentimentalité" was revealed in his collages made after 1954²¹ and in his poems - particularly those written after the second World War.²²

The fact that Mesens eventually earned a living in a fairly conventional manner as an art dealer until 1950, rather than committing himself completely to a possibly penurious existence as a musician or poet must be partly attributed to the influence of his family background.²³ Although his father Theodore never made a lot of money²⁴ the family life was well regulated, even humdrum,²⁵ and until Mesens was seventeen they lived over the grocer's shop. Nevertheless it is significant that in later years, once Mesens had assured himself of an income by selling pictures occasionally from his extensive collection,²⁶ he eventually abandoned dealing and devoted his time to making "tableaux poèmes".²⁷ George Melly made the point that "there were

two horses between the shafts of his life: the Surrealist poet who whinnied for the marvellous and the businessman".²⁸

Mesens' father had hoped that his son would eventually become a lawyer or an army officer²⁹ when he left school, but his proposals were rejected. In particular the young Edouard resented the idea of going into the army as he disliked anything to do with military affairs.³⁰ Later, between 1923 and 1924 when he had to do his military service he managed to arrange things so that he avoided actual soldiering by playing in a military band:

"Then I found this trick. I entered in the music. I had to spend two years voluntary service in order to be able to stay at my parents'. And this was called "hors ménage", so that I got some money for my pocket to live not in the barracks."³¹

Since Mesens showed not the slightest inclination to take up his father's suggestions for a career, in 1919 it was decided that he should enter the Brussels Royal Conservatoire of Music. There he registered to study the organ and music theory but left after a few weeks³² because, as he later said, he couldn't "master" organ playing at all.³³ He then began to take private lessons in harmony, composition and orchestration - Scutenaire recalls that his teachers were Paul Gilson and Raymond Moulaert.³⁴ While his earlier compositions as a school-boy had been "sentimental in the extreme"³⁵ he now began to study the work of contemporary composers, in particular Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric,³⁶ Igor Stravinsky,³⁷ Arnold Schoenberg³⁸ and Erik Satie whose work he loved best.³⁹ When he was eighteen he had his first piano composition, Danse,⁴⁰ (fig. I) published, and over the next few years, as he later estimated,⁴¹ he wrote between twenty and thirty "small scores of songs with piano music", some of which can be traced in reviews published mainly in Belgium in the early 1920's;⁴² these include several poems by contemporary French poets such as Apollinaire, Péret and Cocteau. Mesens gave his first public performance of his music in 1922.⁴³ Patrick Waldberg, a great friend in later life, recounts⁴⁴ that the concert was given by a young singer, Evelyn Brelia, who specialised in the interpretation of contemporary music

and she was accompanied at the piano by Mesens. The performance was greeted with boos, whistles and catcalls by the audience, while opposition to the audience was provided by the Magritte brothers, George Monnier⁴⁵ and other young poets and painters.

It was during this period, while Mesens was beginning to establish himself as a promising young musician, that he also began to take a serious interest in painting and poetry. His father and mother were not interested in literature - in fact the only serious book which Scutenaire tells us that Mesens' father had ever read was Lourdes by Emile Zola. In future years Theodore Mesens often pointed to the moral to be learned from this work when Mesens became involved with the Dada and Surrealist poets.⁴⁶ At school Mesens read widely⁴⁷ and it was evident that by his late teens he had already made himself familiar with current developments in French poetry, and the work of such authors as Cocteau, Soupault and Péret. He had a very good memory⁴⁸ and this early reading was to stand him in good stead in later years when he began to make collages seriously, for he constantly used literary references in these works.

In 1919 Mesens became friends with a number of budding artists and poets, in particular a young painter Karel Maes who had brought back copies of Schoenberg's scores for him from Vienna,⁴⁹ and the poets Pierre Bourgeois and René de Clerck.⁵⁰ The latter ran a small art shop and gallery, the 'Centre d'art', near the 'Taverne du Globe',⁵¹ a café frequented by Mesens and other students from the Conservatoire. In December 1919⁵² pictures by Pierre Floquet and René Magritte were exhibited in the window of the little gallery⁵³ and Mesens, who already knew de Clerck, went in to have a look. As he was chatting to Pierre Bourgeois, René Magritte happened to call in and Bourgeois introduced Mesens to him.⁵⁴ Magritte was some four years older than Mesens, but the two young men quickly became great friends, a friendship which was to last until they died and which was to be fruitful for both men. Magritte, Mesens, Floquet and Bourgeois in the meantime became what Mesens later called the "nucleus"⁵⁵ of a small group of students, painters and poets interested in abstract art and contemporary music and poetry.

Magritte and Floquet at this time shared a studio and were, according to Mesens, "very influenced by French Cubism and Italian Futurism".⁵⁶ Mesens began to visit exhibitions in the company of his friends and they eagerly discussed the new styles of painting and poetry then becoming known in Brussels. Meanwhile the group became larger very quickly, though they "didn't understand everything as well as all that". Mesens later said: "At that age one goes to exhibitions and museums and one swallows whatever one proposes to you".⁵⁷ After all, Mesens was only sixteen or seventeen, Floquet was twenty and Magritte barely twenty-two.

The two main areas of interest in modern painting in Belgium after the War were abstract art and Expressionism. The latter had, during the War, been confined to a group of painters subsequently known as the second Laethem St. Martin group⁵⁸ (several of whom came from Ghent),⁵⁹ who had worked together before the War in the village of that name. During the period between 1914 and 1918 the group, which included Gustav de Smet, Frits van den Berghe and Constant Permeke, had become dispersed, but after the War in 1920 their work became much more widely known in the capital. Previously confined to provincial Flemish speaking areas, from 1920 their painting was to be seen in Brussels as a result of the patronage of André de Ridder, P.G. Van Hecke,⁶⁰ and Walter Schwarzenberg⁶¹ who arranged exhibitions of their work, and Expressionism was to become the dominant movement in Belgium between 1923 and the financial crash which took place in Brussels in 1930-31. The other main area of interest, abstract art, suffered partly as the result of a lack of patronage, and was not to develop into a coherent movement in the 1920's, although initially between 1919 and 1925 there was considerable interest among young artists, in particular Pierre Louis Floquet, Karel Maes and Victor Servranckx. The painters involved in the movement in Brussels gathered in small coteries and although they were defended by reviews in the early 1920's they worked more and more in isolation.⁶² Emile Langui gives several reasons for the eventual failure of abstract art to gain a real hold in Belgium during these years.⁶³ The aggressiveness of the Expressionists, whose backers at the Centaure Gallery and in the

Sélection review ignored their work; their own defeatism which led to the abandonment of Abstractionism by these painters or to their adoption of Expressionism; and finally their own style which was too rigidly determined by the rules of geometric abstraction as formulated by the De Stijl group.

In 1920 interest in abstract art in Brussels was stimulated by a lecture given by Theo Van Doesberg, who was introduced by Georges Vantongerloo.⁶⁴ Mesens attended the lecture with Pierre Bourgeois,⁶⁵ who subsequently founded the group already referred to interested in abstract art - Sept Arts: they went on to publish a review under that name from 1922 until 1928.⁶⁶ Mesens,⁶⁷ Karel Maes and Pierre Floquet⁶⁸ were members of the original group, while Victor Servranckx, the main pioneer of Constructivism in Belgium from 1917 onwards,⁶⁹ was a co-founder of their review.⁷⁰ The Sept Arts group in Brussels and the Het Overzicht (The Survey) group in Antwerp formed the main nuclei of the abstract art movement in Belgium during the 1920s.⁷² Magritte was asked to contribute to the Sept Arts review but refused,⁷³ though he did briefly come under the influence of abstract art in 1922 through his connection with Victor Servranckx⁷⁴ with whom he had been a student at the Académie des Beaux Arts. Servranckx obtained a job for Magritte early in the 1920s designing wallpaper at a wallpaper factory where the former was artistic director until 1925.⁷⁵

Through their friendship with the Bourgeois brothers and the members of the Sept Arts Mesens and Magritte retained their interest in the abstract art movement during the first part of 1922. In that year Magritte dedicated a small text to Mesens which he had written with Servranckx.⁷⁶ The text takes a stance in favour of 'pure art' - the artist must be "master of his materials not their slave". Pierre Bourgeois wrote an introduction in which he stressed the point that "each object ought to be stated according to its own rhythm".⁷⁷ However, both Mesens and Magritte split from the Sept Arts group when it became clear that those involved were turning their attention more and more to Constructivism,⁷⁸ in particular with the publication of their review to which neither man was prepared to contribute.⁷⁹ By this stage, in any

case, Mesens was beginning to bring back books of poetry from Paris which he later said "annoyed the Constructivists".⁸⁰ Scutenaire says that Mesens was beginning to feel that the abstract art movement was becoming "outmoded",⁸¹ and this attitude was the result of Mesens' contacts with the Dadaists in Paris.⁸² From the end of 1922 Mesens later said, he and Magritte began to consider that

"the poetical was the essential and a picture could be painted on a canvas or the floor or anywhere. It could play its function as a meaningful thing instead of a decoration."⁸³

Mesens read the little books of poetry which he had brought back from Paris in cafés, and discussed them with Magritte on Saturday afternoons at Magritte's house. The two men's changing attitude towards the arts caused "a fantastic fury on the part of the Constructivist element" said Mesens,⁸⁴ which led to "real battles and physical fights". However, although Magritte was very interested in the poetry which Mesens showed him, and the new ideas emanating from Paris, he was at the same time attracted by Futurism, and Mesens recalled that he was particularly interested in the work of Boccioni and Russolo.⁸⁵

During this crucial period in his development, Mesens had also become interested in the work of the Flemish Expressionist painters whose work, as has already been indicated, was now to be seen in Brussels. Mesens later said that he had met P.G. van Hecke and André de Ridder at the Sélection gallery and this was probably at some time during 1920 or 1921.⁸⁶ He began to contribute music reviews to the Sélection magazine⁸⁷ late in 1922, and in 1923 he became an assistant editor.⁸⁸ Mesens' continuing interest in Flemish Expressionism was to be demonstrated over the next thirty years in his work as an art dealer in both Brussels and London, even though his central commitment was to be to Surrealism. As French was Mesens' main language he tended in the 1920's to become more involved with literary and artistic trends emanating from France rather than from the North and North East.⁸⁹ Belgian Expressionism had developed in the Northern Flemish speaking provinces, and although it was subject to stylistic influences from abroad⁹⁰ it was a relatively parochial phenomenon. It was also a style which was essentially concerned

with the individual subjective interpretation of external reality. Both the Dada and Surrealist movements on the other hand, intended to break down nationalist barriers and rejected the value of a highly subjective approach to external reality. Although Mesens expressed his adherence to the internationalist Dada and Surrealist movements from 1923 onwards⁹¹ and was actively involved in promoting their ideas for the rest of his life, he nevertheless retained a respect for certain Belgian artists whose work he valued regardless of whether they were Surrealist or not; such artists might be Flemings or Walloons, Expressionists such as Gustav de Smet, or Frits van den Berghe, abstract painters - Victor Servranckx or Pierre Floquet, or Surrealists, in particular René Magritte or Paul Delvaux.⁹² Mesens made a particular point of learning and speaking Flemish when he was young, partly, it must be assumed, because of his connection with the Expressionist and abstract painters, although in interview with George Melly he rather exaggerated the situation when recalling Van Doesberg's lecture in 1920.

"Well, these people (Van Doesberg and Mondrian) were very well received by us youngsters who were far away from their conceptions and didn't always understand them but we were so broad-minded that we invited them to lecture. We found a translator from the Dutch to the French because in those days nobody spoke Flemish in my country except me: perhaps because I've always wanted to speak two languages."⁹³

In the years when he was a student between 1919 and 1922 and developing his interest in the arts generally, Mesens must have become more strongly aware of the Flemish/French division in Belgium, since during the period immediately following the Great War one of his friends René de Clerck was a Flemish nationalist and the leaders of the abstract art group in Antwerp, Michael Seuphor and Joosef Peeters, were involved in the patriotic pro-Flemish movement which was very active.⁹⁴ What Mesens' political attitude was during that period is difficult to ascertain and in any case he was still only in his late teens. On the whole throughout his life he tended to avoid political entanglements.⁹⁵ It is evident however that by 1923, as a result of his introduction to the

Dada painters and poets, he was opposed to the Flemish nationalism which he saw expressed in Het Overzicht⁹⁶ and he poked fun at their review, calling it "Poverzicht" (Poor Outlook).⁹⁷ He also felt that Theo Van Doesburg whom he called the "commercial traveller in the pure Neo-Plasticism Mondrian style" was wasting his time with Joosef Peeters and Het Overzicht.⁹⁸

The reason for Mesens' abandonment of the abstract art movement late in 1922 was his conversion to the ideas of the Dada painters and poets who negated the values of fine art and who had launched a search for radically new forms. Mesens came into contact with these ideas as a result of his meeting with Erik Satie at the end of 1920, whose work he already knew and admired even though he was still only seventeen. While at school during the German occupation, the pupils had a great deal of spare time and Mesens tells us⁹⁹ that he occupied himself reading all sorts of magazines and books. In a second-hand bookshop he happened to come across a review which had published Satie's Mémoires d'un amnésiaque and he was "captivated" with it. "Le texte m'en parut mystérieux et distingué mais l'humour m'en échappa presque entièrement".¹⁰⁰ After the War, a friend at the conservatoire showed him a copy of Satie's score Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois and Mesens purchased his own score in order to study the music carefully. He subsequently made himself familiar with Satie's music such as Gnossiennes, Morceaux en forme de Poire and Parade. In late 1920 Satie visited Brussels in order to be present at the first performance of his work Socrate, and Mesens took the opportunity to meet him.¹⁰¹ He was introduced by the young singer Evelyn Brelia who subsequently performed Mesens' own work.¹⁰² Satie encouraged Mesens to continue his musical studies as the latter had become somewhat disturbed by the attitudes of the young artists whom he knew in Brussels, who were not very interested in music. Mesens later said in conversation with George Melly that "there was a general mood which very much favoured the plastic arts and poetry".¹⁰³

Erik Satie was during this period involved with the Paris Dada group: his music had already been played at a Dada Soirée in Zurich in 1919, where the sets had been made by Arp and Richter,¹⁰⁴ and also

at the first public appearance of Dada in Paris in 1920 at which Tristan Tzara read out a newspaper article to the accompaniment of clangings and tinklings while Picabia executed a large drawing on a slate wiping out each section as he finished before going on to the next.¹⁰⁵ It was at Satie's insistence that Mesens made his first trip to Paris early in 1921¹⁰⁶ and later in that year, accompanied by Satie, he made a second visit and was introduced to several members of the Paris Dada group - Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Picabia.¹⁰⁷ Satie took Mesens to Man Ray's first exhibition in France at the Librairie Six¹⁰⁸ and Mesens immediately responded to the "esprit" of Man Ray's work. During the visit Satie took Mesens to visit Brancusi's studio where they had lunch with the sculptor. Mesens described what happened:¹⁰⁹ they had their lunch at an enormous white table in stone, where we had difficulty in pushing our legs - we had to sit sideways to eat and the company was the following:- Satie, Brancusi, Marcel Duchamp and a Napoleonic princess Violette Murat. Brancusi with an enormous square beard and hair dropping all over the place made us an enormous roast, an enormous roast, in his sculptor's oven."

Mesens saw Man Ray each day on this visit which lasted about a week, and Duchamp each night. Picabia was evidently staying at the same hotel but as, according to Mesens, he arrived at midnight and left at seven in the morning he didn't get a chance to see him a great deal.

Mesens made several visits to Paris in 1922 and as a result of his introductions by Satie found that he tended to mix with the group of writers and painters who in 1921 and 1922 split with Breton over Dada activities. Tristan Tzara, who had exploded into Paris in 1919 setting Dada activities into action was by mid-1921 finding André Breton's attitudes to art and literature far too serious, in particular over the Barrès "trial"¹¹⁰ and by 1922 there was an open split in the movement. Satie had aligned himself with Tzara and those anarchic spirits who refused to accept Breton's solemn attempts to re-orientate the movement,¹¹¹ and Breton and Satie now regarded each other as absolutely insufferable.¹¹¹ Mesens' first contacts in Paris were with those who refused to compromise their allegiance to Dada Nihilism. This was to have implications for

Mesens over the next few years, as when he eventually managed to publish his own review Oesophage¹¹² it was anti-Breton and anti-Surrealist, containing material by Tzara and Picabia. Picabia had vacillated in his allegiance to Breton but eventually in 1924 published a furious attack on him in his review 391 to which Mesens contributed.¹¹³

In view of his connections with Satie and Tzara, when Mesens went to meet the poet Philippe Soupault in Paris in 1922 he had to arrange to meet him at night so that Breton wouldn't find out, as Soupault had taken Breton's side in the split among the members of the Paris group. Mesens had come across Soupault's work in a little review La Vie des Lettres ("a very thick magazine", according to Mesens, "where one published all sorts of rubbish, translations by false people who have never existed, signing themselves Pierre Carabinieri and so on").¹¹⁴ He had set a poem by Soupault, Garage, (fig. 2) to music and wanted to meet the author who, as it turned out, was "enchanted" with Mesens' effort.¹¹⁵ The melody which Mesens wrote to accompany Soupault's verse is an amusing combination of Impressionist harmonies recalling Debussy, and coarse music hall songs. It is a very apt setting of Soupault's bizarre lines:

Les éléphants dans la campagne et leurs petits
Les rouges gorges et les ouistitis
Sont des animaux domestiques.....".

By the end of 1922 Mesens was converted to Dada, although Magritte continued to paint works influenced by Cubism, abstract art and Futurism until the beginning of 1925.¹¹⁵ At this point, he finally decided "de ne plus peindre les objets qu'avec leur détails apparents".¹¹⁶

"Puis Magritte et moi", he said later,¹¹⁷ "très influencés par Picabia, qui n'était déjà plus Dada, et Erik Satie, nous nous sommes volontairement isolés avec quelques amis comme Camille Goemans et Marcel Lecompte. Nous partions en expéditions manifester dans les théâtres et cinémas. Mais bien souvent, c'était nous qui nous faisons casser la figure. Notre but? Détruire. Détruire pour reconstruire mais nous ne savions quoi! Nous voulions nous isoler de la bourgeoisie regnante. Cela ressemblait un peu à l'incendie du Reichstag mais hélas! Cela n'avait pas la même magnitude. Nous allions aussi manifester au Théâtre du Monnai,

des concerts populaires, contre par exemple,
l'exécution des oeuvres de Stravinsky, sous
prétexte que nous lui préférons celles de Schoenberg."

The meeting with the Dada painters and poets fundamentally changed Mesens' outlook on art and as he commented much later:

"Grâce à l'oeuvre de Satie, voilà ma
première révolution personnelle d'accomplir.
Adieu sentimentalités du terroir flamand;
adieu harmonies impressionnistes; adieu
poètes humanitaires à l'eau-de-rose!"

Suicide pour moi, une période courte
d'intense production musicale et d'acti-
vités telescopées par un énorme intérêt
dans le mouvement DADA".¹¹⁸

His early contacts, particularly with the work of Picabia, Man Ray, Tzara and Duchamp, were of importance in the development of his attitude towards art and poetry. Even though subsequently, from 1926, he adhered to Surrealism and generally took André Breton's side in any points at issue, his attitude towards "art" and his work both plastic and verbal, is related to the new means of expression which had been formulated initially by the Dadaists. Mesens' and Magritte's work together between 1923 and 1926 was to be influential on Magritte's development, for it was during this period that Magritte changed from an "accepting" style to a means of expression which rejected the concept of style altogether.¹¹⁹ Surrealism in Belgium to a large extent was to be influenced by its Dadaist sources rather than by "automatism" and Freudian inspired "dream imagery",¹²⁰ and the forceful influence of Mesens who had been so deeply affected by his early contacts in Paris must be considered as a major factor in the development of the ideas of the Brussels group.

In purely practical terms Mesens' adherence to Dadaism was to affect his own career. In the period between late 1921 and 1923 he concentrated his main efforts on his musical studies. However at some time during 1923 or early in 1924 when he was involved in his military service he made the decision not to return to complete his studies. Later in 1938 he said that he abandoned his musical career for "moral reasons",¹²¹

but George Melly considers that a more pressing reason for Mesens' abandonment of his studies was that in 1924 his father refused to continue to finance him.¹²² This must have been because Mesens was spending too much time following his artistic and literary interests. In that year he took a job as an assistant at the Galerie Manteau¹²³ and also founded a little review Music which gave information about artistic and theatrical events. This review, which Mesens edited, was published between October 1924 and May 1926 and he published in it one of his compositions, "Péripéties",¹²⁴ based on a poem by Paul Neuyhuys.¹²⁵ Mesens eventually abandoned musical composition completely in 1926 at the time that those in Brussels interested in Surrealism were beginning to form themselves into a group. Marcel Jean said that he had "read the Chirico manuscript belonging to Paul Eluard" and "its call for "no music" influenced him powerfully enough to give up musical compositions altogether".¹²⁶

In spite of this, Mesens continued to have a great regard for Erik Satie who had been so instrumental in changing his outlook. Much later, in 1952, he contributed a piece to an edition of La Revue Musicale dedicated to Satie and ended thus:

'Nos longs dialogues nous entraînaient parfois sur le terrain de la peinture, mais nous discussions beaucoup plus volontiers de poésie: poèmes à mettre en musique, poèmes à ne toucher à aucun prix etc..... Dans ce domaine, bien souvent, nous ne nous entendions pas du tout. L'oeuvre de Satie suscita, pendant une quinzaine d'années, d'énormes enthousiasmes, mais il est à présent évident qu'aucun de ses "disciples" ne porta l'esprit de celui-ci et de celle-ci en avant. Satie s'était moqué toute sa vie durant des réactionnaires et des attardés; mais il souffrit cruellement de l'absurde cabale qu'une partie de la jeunesse monta contre lui, peu de temps avant sa mort."¹²⁷

Satie died in 1924.

FOOTNOTES

1. E.L.T. Mesens Alphabet Sourd Aveugle first published by Mesens Editions Nicolas Flamel, Brussels, 1933.
(See Chapter 9 below)
2. Frank Whitford gives a useful brief analysis of the "Flemish-French confrontation" in his article 'From the Twenty to the Twenties. The Development of Modernism in Belgium'.
Studio International, October 1974, p.124.
3. Ibid.
4. Information provided by Conroy Maddox.
5. See below Chapter 7.
6. See below Chapter 11.
7. See note 5.
8. See below Chapters 7 and 12.
9. George Melly 'The W.C. Fields of Surrealism' Sunday Times colour supplement, August 15th, 1971. pp 23-28.
10. 'Strange Encounters' E.L.T. Mesens talks to George Melly.
Broadcast February 24th, 1970, BBC Radio 3.
11. Jean Scutenaire Mon Ami Mesens Brussels, 1972, p.13.
12. See below Chapter 15.
13. George Melly in a personal communication dated 12.4.79 recalled the following incident which took place in the early 1950's at a banquet at which he had accompanied Mesens held in honour of the Belgian painter Leon de Smet
"whose brother Gustave de Smet was a famous Belgian Expressionist painter and friend of Mesens. Leon on the other hand painted in a rather mediocre Impressionist manner.
The banquet was not actually held in Knokke* but in a small village fairly nearby which had been the centre of Belgian Impressionist painting.+ The meal, which was excellent and copious and accompanied by a great deal of wine, was held in a kind of wooden building rather like a cricket pavilion. Most of those present seemed more

*The casino at Knokke le Zoute on the Belgian coast is a well known art exhibition centre.
+ Presumably Laethem St. Martin. See below Chapter 2.

interested in eating and drinking than in art. At the top table was a very old Government Minister hung with medals and honours. It was he who proposed the toast of de Smet which he took to be an opportunity to attack modern art. Mesens rose from his table in the room and advanced, making a speech in Flemish, a language which he admitted to me later he thought he had totally forgotten, attacking the Minister in the most violent terms for insulting de Smet's brother Gustave and all those of his friends who had attended the banquet. The Minister recoiled under this unexpected and perfectly justified assault. The audience divided into two, and a rather drunken and ineffectual brawl started.

Next day Mesens was rather worried about the effect of such a "scandale" on the owner of the casino who was employing him to hang the exhibition, but all was well."

14. Scutenaire, pp 23-24.
15. Ibid. p.24.
16. Ibid. p.26 .
17. Op. cit. note 10.
18. See below Chapter 11.
19. La Meuse Lanterne Brussels, April 23rd, 1971.
20. Catalogue Hommage a P.G. Van Hecke ed. by André de Rache, Galerie Goevaerts, Brussels, December 1969, p.73. Mesens' mother was Celestine Dubucq whose family had come from Lille. Scutenaire op. cit. p.17.
21. See below Chapter 13.
22. See below Chapter 9.
23. Mesens' father came from Aerchot in Brabant where his family had a small business dealing in horses. Scutenaire op. cit. note 11 p.17.
24. Ibid. pp22-26.
25. Ibid.
26. See Appendix D.
27. Mesens preferred to call his later collages "Tableaux Poèmes". See below Chapter 12.

28. George Melly 'E.L.T. Mesens' Art and Artists, July 1966, p.63. Melly, in this article, makes the following remarks:
"Before opening a letter E.L.T. Mesens subjects it to a thorough examination. Its shape, colour and weight, its stamps and date mark, the neatness or otherwise of the glueing down of the flap are all weighed in the balance. By holding it up against the light, the shape of the contents is established. Finally, and with infinite precision and care it is opened and read. This example, and it could be echoed in almost any department of his daily life, reflects his dialectic solution to his long struggle between his lyrical impulse - poet, Surrealist, eroticist, heavy drinker - and the solid Belgian middle class acquisitive "good sense" of his background.
29. Scutenaire, p.26.
30. Scutenaire considers that the "germ" of Mesens' "anti-militarism" could have been an incident in his childhood (no date given) when he was knocked over on his way to primary school by a large soldier in a blue and red uniform riding a bicycle. Ibid.
31. Radio 3 broadcast, op. cit. note 10.
32. Personal communication from Brussels Royal Conservatoire of Music.
33. Op. cit. note 10.
34. Scutenaire, p.26.
35. Op. cit. note 10.
36. Mesens wrote a review in praise of Darius Milhaud's "La Création du Monde" for the Sélection magazine, December 1922, pp. 228-231, and an article on a "Sonatine de George Auric" Sélection, November 1923, pp. 94-99.
37. Op. cit. note 10.
38. See text below.
39. " " "
40. Published by Fernand Lauweryns, Brussels, 1921, collection Marcel Dubucq.
41. Mesens on Magritte. A discussion between George Melly and Mesens. Broadcast March 7th, 1969, BBC Third Programme.

42. Garage, a setting of a poem by Philippe Soupault for voice and piano pub. Editions 'Music', Brussels 1922 (cover by Man Ray, fig. 2). Défense de Pleurer six pièces brèves et d'un '2' pour piano. Design cover by Magritte, music by Mesens, and a portrait of Mesens by Frits van den Berghe, Brussels 1923 (see note 40 below).
Crime distingué, a setting of a poem by Tristan Tzara, pub. Selection 4^{me} année no. 4, January 1925.
Péripéties, a setting of a poem by Paul Neuhuys published in Music, Brussels, 1924, pp 16-18.
43. Scutenaire, p.27.
44. René Magritte, Brussels 1965 pp 129-130. Waldberg says that the following poems had been set to music by Mesens and were sung at the concert: 'A la santé, la carpe' by Appolinaire; 'Réforme' by Benjamin Péret; three Madagascan poems translated by Jean Paul han; 'Ouest' by Jean Cocteau. These are probably the group Défense de Pleurer referred to above. Waldberg also states that 'Garage' was performed.
45. See note 60 below.
46. Scutenaire, p.23.
47. See below.
48. Chapter 9 gives an analysis of Mesens' own poetry and his knowledge of the work of other French poets.
49. Scutenaire, p.27.
50. René de Clerck was a poet who was a Flemish political activist.
51. Scutenaire, p.27.
52. José Vovelle Le Surréalisme en Belgique, Brussels, 1972, footnote 17, p.75.
53. Scutenaire, p.27. See note 63 below.
54. Ibid.
55. Op. cit. note 41. See note 66 below.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.

58. Emile Langui Expressionism in Belgium translated from the French by Alistair Kennedy, Brussels, 1971, p.38.
59. Gustave and Leon de Smet, Frits van den Berghe and Albert Ser vaes. Constant Permeke had studied at Ghent Academy. Ibid pp 209-219.
60. P.G. van Hecke and André de Ridder opened the Sélection art gallery in Brussels in 1920. From 1922 they edited the review, Sélection, Chronique de la Vie which gave support to the Expressionist painters and included contributions from Ossip Zadkine, Henry Le Fauconnier, Marie Laurencin, Jan Sluyters, André Derain, André Lhote, Amedeo Modigliani, Maurice Utrillo and others. Op. cit. note 58, p.92. The review was published until 1927.
61. Schwarzenberg founded the Centaure gallery in 1923. The review of that name was published between 1926 and 1930.
62. Op.cit. note 58 pp 91-93. See also, Philip Roberts-Jones From Realism to Surrealism, Painting in Belgium from Joseph Stevens to Paul Delvaux, translated from the French by C.H. Mogford, Brussels, 1972, pp 104-143.
63. Emile Langui, foreword to Michael Seuphor, Abstract Painting in Flanders, Brussels, 1963, p.10.
64. Michael Seuphor, Ibid, p.33 Note (1). Theo van Doesberg was passing through Brussels on his way to Paris, in October 1920, to meet Piet Mondrian.
65. Op. cit. note 10.
66. Catalogue, Victor Bourgeois 1897-1967. An exhibition organised by Archives de l'Architecture Moderne A.S.B.L. Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et des Arts Visuels, Brussels, March-April, 1971, p.34. The original group consisted of Pierre Bourgeois and his brother the architect Victor Bourgeois, Pierre Floquet, Karel Maes and Georges Monnier. According to the Catalogue cited the group included "musicians" and one can assume that Mesens was amongst the original members of the group in 1920. The review was published weekly from November 1922 until September 1928 and under Constructivist influences was concerned with architecture, town planning and design. Their manifesto which appeared in 1922 (op. cit. p.38) is strongly influenced by De Stijl. For instance the mission of the architect is:
"d'introduire dans toute l'activité sonale, la paix plastique. Puisque la maison est inséparable de sa voisine et qu'une me prolongue une autre me, toute architecture puissante tend au style, c'est à dire à un équilibre supérieur et collectif." p.38.

67. See notes 55 and 66 above.
68. Seuphor, op. cit. note 63, p.182, says that between 1918 and 1920 Karel Maes (born 1900) executed paintings which were already highly stylised and abstract. He adopted pure geometric abstraction as a style in 1920. Pierre Floquet (born 1900) also was to paint in a style according to rigid geometrical rules from 1920 onwards; *ibid*, p.179.
69. P. Roberts-Jones, op. cit. note 62, p.134.
70. Seuphor, op. cit. note 63, p.157.
71. This review was published in Antwerp between 1921 and 1925. During a second visit to Belgium in 1921, Theo van Doesberg visited Antwerp for the first time. This gave a fundamental impetus to abstract art of a kind influenced by De Stijl. Georges Vantongerloo was a member of the Antwerp group although resident in Holland and France in the 1920s.
72. P. Roberts-Jones, op. cit. note 62, p.130.
73. Vovelle, op. cit. note 52, p.75 (note 26).
74. Vovelle, *ibid*. p.67, states that Magritte's "abstract" period was between 1922 and 1923 and she cites a painting called Abstraction dated 1923, location not specified. Mesens himself stated however that he and Magritte had split from the Sept Arts group and ceased to interest themselves in pure abstraction in 1922, see note 41 above.
75. Op. cit. note 64, p.157.
76. Archives of Modern Art, Brussels, Fonds Servranckx, 1/877.
77. *Ibid*.
78. See above note 66.
79. *Ibid*.
80. Op. cit. note 41.
81. Scutenaire p.31.
82. See main text below.
83. Op. cit. note 41.
84. *Ibid*.
85. *Ibid*. Mesens felt that Magritte in his abstract pictures of the early 1920s never achieved the kind of movement seen in the work of the Italian Futurists.

86. Op. cit. note 20.
87. See note 36.
88. Discussed below in Chapter 8.
89. See note 2.
90. Langui, op. cit. note 58, p.14.
91. Chapters 5 and 6 below.
92. E.L.T. Mesens Catalogue of Pictures by Young Belgian Artists, an exhibition arranged by Mesens at the London Gallery January 28th - February 27th, 1937. Writing of the Belgian artists he exhibited in this exhibition Mesens wrote: "Whether post-Cubist, Constructivist or seeking expression in the Surrealist movement, they have one aim in common - complete liberty of creation" - and he makes the point that "This exhibition affords an interesting illustration of a tendency in art. In Belgium today there are over 4,000 professional painters and sculptors. This in a country of a total population of 8,000,000". (Foreword) No pagination.
93. Op. cit. note 10.
94. Seuphor, op. cit. note 57, p.32.
95. Scutenaire, p.51. See also Chapters 11 and 13 on his involvement with the Surrealists in England.
96. Michael Seuphor in "Perspective sur Dada, Années Vingt" Cahiers Dada Surréalisme no. 1, 1966, states that his review Het Overzicht "se voulait flamigante avant tout, mais largement ouverte nouveautés littéraires et artistiques" p.44.
97. E.L.T. Mesens, under the pseudonym of Cornelis Nelly Mesens, 'En Scheldwoorden vloein' in Mécano, nos. 4-5 Leiden 1923, no pagination.
98. Ibid.
99. First published in S.I.M. (Journal of the Société Musicale Indépendante), Paris, April 15th, 1912 and February 15th, 1913.
100. E.L.T. Mesens 'Le Souvenir d'Erik Satie', La Revue Musicale Vol. 214, Paris, June 1952, p.148.
101. Ibid.
102. Waldberg, op. cit. note 44, pp 129-130.

103. Op. cit. note 10.
104. Hans Richter Dada: Art and anti-Art. Translated from the German by David Britt, London 1965, p.77.
105. Ibid p.173.
106. Op. cit.note 10.
107. Ibid.
108. Exposition Dada, Man Ray A retrospective exhibition of 35 works dating 1914-1921, Paris, December 1921.
109. Op. cit. note 10.
110. Richter, pp 183-186.
111. The most recent discussion of the events of these years in Paris is by William A. Camfield, Francis Picabia, Princeton, 1979. The relationship between Breton and Satie is considered p.205.
112. See below Chapter 5.
113. Camfield, *ibid*, states that Picabia considered, at this stage in 1924, that Surrealism was "another all too familiar and forced or artificial experiment". "Picabia had no tolerance for group activities" p.204. Mesens' contribution to 391 is considered in Chapter 7 below.
114. Op.cit. note 10.
115. Vovelle p.67.
116. Cited in Catalogue Magritte retrospective, Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, October-December 1978, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Paris, January-April 1979, p.288.
117. Op. cit. note 19.
118. Op. cit. note 99, p.148.
119. See below Chapter 5.
120. See below Chapter 6.
121. Alberto Cavalcanti 'Introducing E.L.T. Mesens', London Gallery Bulletin No. 1, April 1938, p.19.
122. Personal communication.

123. The Galerie Manteau was beginning to show works by Expressionist painters. Langui op. cit. note 52, p.133.
124. See note 42. In July 1925, Mesens published an article on the death of James Ensor in Music, and in 1926 an article entitled 'Une Musique Militaire oui.' concerning the Belgian composer Karel Albert. Information provided by Marcel Dubucq.
125. Paul Neuhuys edited the review Ça Ira published in Antwerp between 1920 and 1922. See below Chapter 5.
126. The History of Surrealist Painting, translated from the French by S.W. Taylor, London 1960, p.177.
127. Op. cit. note 99, p.151.

CHAPTER 2 Modernism in Belgium.

Mesens grew up in Brussels during a period of great creativity in art and literature which had started during the 1880's and was to last, with a lull between 1914 and 1918, until the outbreak of the second World War. Poetry, music and literature flourished in Belgium, a country which was prospering economically as a result of rapid industrialisation and colonisation: Brussels itself became a major centre of the arts, benefiting from the "cultural cross-fertilization of French, English and German ideas".¹ During the 1880's and 1890's painters from France, Holland and England² exhibited at the Salons of the group - Les XX³ - centred on Brussels. Neo-Impressionism, Symbolism and the Arts and Crafts movement flourished at the turn of the century, followed by Expressionism which was to be the dominant art movement in the 1920's until the advent of Dada and Surrealism which Mesens was to promulgate so ardently. Cubism and Futurism did not take root in Belgium, although a number of Belgian painters including Magritte and Delvaux had begun their careers painting in a style inspired by these movements. Although Victor Servranckx was to be a notable exponent of pure geometric abstraction during the inter-war years⁴, Brussels did not become a major centre of abstract art in the same way as it was to be for Surrealism, Impressionism and Symbolism.

Belgian painting of the nineteenth century was marked by a taste for the bizarre, for the strange, and in many cases personified a reaction against the bourgeois attitudes which for the artists and poets seemed to be a particular attribute of the Belgian outlook on life. Painters sought an external reality with which to express a moral question, while in the work of apparently "realistic" painters of the early 19th century there is a predilection for creating a dreamlike reality. For instance, De Braekleer was a "realistic" painter whom Philip Roberts-Jones considered "bestowed on his pictures a character of dreamlike reality created by his communication with objects."⁵ Emile Verlandt⁶

commented, "De Braekleer's art of painting was the art of expressing the invisible through the visible world and of communicating to each object its own complete life."

The great genius of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who was to have a strong influence on later Belgian painters was James Ensor. In his earlier works, Ensor made drawings of a variety of "curiosities" - old shoes, watches, ornaments, taps, model boats. He later said, "The previous song of art rings to infinity, all is material for the artist, everything is good to paint, everything is material to paint".⁷ In Coquillages 1895 (fig. 3) Ensor set in a bare space shells formed into a pyramid - but they have a strange feel to them. They are exotic and rare, one shell has its inside directly exposed to the spectator so that it looks like a fantastic mouth. Ensor's early realism changed in about 1883 when his work became ironic and derisory and was marked with a drive for the absurd. He refused to accept the life which external reality presented to him, and although he loved the world, he had a double vision of it - he developed a universe of pain, misery, absurdity and ridicule. Masks, droll or sad, allowed him to express a vision of the world where absurdity reigns. Ensor's biting commentary on the world and his depiction of the absurd was later admired by Mesens. He was the only artist of this period whom Mesens ever mentioned as being of importance to him.⁸

Ensor's spirit reacted against the stifling atmosphere of Ostend, but found encouragement initially with the group 'Les XX', formed in Brussels by Octave Maus with Ensor as one of the original members. This was a group which had no aesthetic theory, made no pronouncements, and existed simply to exhibit the work of artists in the period between 1884 and 1893, and created a climate in which contemporary painting flourished. The group had amongst its members the most important Belgian painters of the time - Vogels, Khnopff, Meunier, Rops, Van Rysselberghe - who were joined by artists from abroad - Rodin, Monet, Van Gogh, Whistler, Seurat and Signac. Octave Maus, who was neither a painter nor a poet, organised the group. Félicien Rops said that what pleased him most about 'Les XX' was the "Absence of a programme."⁹

Ensor had placed the whole perception of reality in doubt in his painting, and he was to provide the link between the Belgian Symbolist and Expressionist movements. His work opened up broader perspectives through its poetry, through its predilection for the unusual and for its coloured unreality. Both the "Sélection" group, which in the early 1920's formed the nucleus promoting Expressionism, and subsequently the Surrealists, hailed Ensor as the initiator of the whole modern Belgian movement, the "forerunner of all our daring, all our emancipation".¹⁰ However, while Ensor has been considered to be a forerunner of Belgian Expressionist art,¹¹ the mystery and fantasy of his work also relates him to the Symbolist movement.¹² The Belgian Symbolist poet Verhaeren wrote, "It is above all in Ensor that the new tendencies surface. No-one gives colours life as he does."¹³

The Symbolists' ideas had been promulgated in Belgium by the review L'Art Moderne in the 1880's and 1890's. Symbolism was essentially a literary movement at the outset. It saw in Belgium the rise of poets and dramatists such as Georges Rodenbach, Emile Verhaeren, Charles Van Leberghe and Maurice Maeterlink. As with the French writers, the Belgians wanted to liberate poetry. "It means withdrawing",¹⁴ said an unknown writer in L'Art Moderne "to the innermost recesses of existence, to the dark fantastic place where dreams and visions have their dwelling." The Symbolists immersed themselves in fantasies, mystical visions of medieval verse, chronicles and oriental legends; they believed in a new society based on the primacy of the spirit and sentiment. Verhaeren discussing Khnopff's work in L'Art Moderne 1886¹⁵ said:

"The modern imagination makes a tremendous foray into the past: that and a great scientific investigation with hitherto unknown yearnings for the vague and still uncharted supernatural have driven us to clothe our dreams and perhaps our fears of something new in an unfamiliar symbolism that reflects the modern soul as the symbolism of antiquity interpreted the soul it knew. But we withhold our faith, our confidence: and into its place we put our doubts, our sudden terrors, ennui, cries and despair, and very probably our dying agonies as well".

The French Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau said, "Je ne crois ni à ce que je touche, ni à ce que je vois. Je ne crois qu'à ce que je ne vois pas et uniquement à ce que je sens."¹⁶

Belgian Symbolists, as those in France, were under the influence of Josephin Peladan and the Rose + Croix movement – Peladan had given a number of lectures in Brussels in 1891. Khnopff, Rops, Delville, Minne and Mellery were all Belgian artists who became members of Peladan's movement. For the latter, art was a kind of religion: "It is the median part of religion, that which lies between physics and metaphysics".¹⁷ Peladan's view was that art was a great mystery, and only subjects which renewed ideas or uplifted the soul were permitted. Allegory held sway, while anything which represented real life, landscape, genre, or still life was banished. Particularly close to Peladan was the Belgian artist Félicien Rops who had been a founder member of the Société Libre des Beaux Arts, a movement calling for complete and unfettered artistic expression with the assertion that all styles are equal. "The way it is done becomes increasingly immaterial", wrote the poet Dujardin in 1885.¹⁸ Ferdinand Khnopff's art represented the true Symbolist preoccupations in his representation of things conceived, and it was closely linked to the literary Symbolism of Verhaeren and Peladan. His paintings executed with great realism present an air of mystery; they are steeped in an atmosphere of slightly perverted dreams combined with a yearning for higher things. Khnopff's painting Memories, 1889¹⁹ shows several identical young women each in different postures taking an evening walk through the fields. The images of the young women are taken from photographs – these are the memories of reality. But yet the women do not seem to communicate with each other – they are all completely isolated within their own thoughts. The picture represents the isolation of the individual, and the use of the juxtaposition of paintings of photographs of each individual singly emphasises the isolation of each. Khnopff created strange enigmatic images in his art – in his work L'Art 1896²⁰ he has depicted a sphinx-like figure, a leopard with a female head, which leans smiling against a thoughtful adolescent figure. The painting anticipates the work of Magritte and Delvaux in its strange, dreamlike conjunction of youth and woman/leopard.

The pessimistic tendencies of Rops and Khnopff were to be replaced by the work of younger artists, notably Jean Delville, whose work, fantastic and dreamlike, was exquisitely beautiful: in 1896 he founded with Fabry and Mel lery the "Salon d'art idéaliste" the aim of which was to provoke an aesthetic renaissance in Belgium. Delville wrote down his own ideas in 'Dialogue entre nous: Argumentation kabbalistique, occultiste, idéaliste' in 1895. Spiritual, mystical, his ideas were extremely complex. Mme. Legrand describes his work as depicting "ecstasy" and his figures "hierarchic attitudes, the dematerialisation of the bodies floating in spirals of vapour, bathed in haloed rays".²¹ Dead Orpheus 1893²² shows a head lying back in a bed of starry water which flows over rippling sand, the head encased in a lyre and painted in exquisite shades of blues and greens, jewel-like and serene, evocative of music and peace.

Spillaert was an artist like Ensor who remained separate from the main group of Belgian Symbolists. His works were mainly inspired by Ostend where he was born - for instance Digue et Kursaal d'Ostende 1908²³ painted in varying shades of blue with a strange white light coming through a doorway creates an eerie bleak scene. His work is a precursor in spirit to De Chirico's mysterious streets and squares. Like Spillaert, Degouve de Nuncie painted strange landscapes; he wanted to create a poetic synthesis of what he had seen. Luc and Paul Haesaerts pointed out that, "Whereas the Impressionists saw objects illuminated from the outside, Degouve saw them from the inside".²⁴ In La Maison aveugle²⁵ we can see a strange white house set against a dark landscape which anticipates Magritte's work Empire des lumières.²⁶

In the early 1900's Belgium saw the transition of Symbolism to Expressionism. The latter movement had a more specifically Flemish orientation than Symbolism which had been largely a French cultural phenomenon. Expressionism was essentially a northern movement and in Belgium took root in the Northern provinces. While the work of the Flemish Expressionists bears superficial stylistic similarities to that of their counterparts in Northern Europe, it differs inasmuch as humour and the tradition of Flemish fantasy was often an

underlying feature of their work. Belgian Expressionism was essentially an emotional art, which was often crudely executed and which made free use of arbitrary colour. The painters rarely considered their work as an end in itself, but their objective was to comment on man's life and nature. Their work had a strong moral bias and forcefully expressed emotions of love or hate, giving exterior vent to interior emotions.

Constant Permeke, perhaps the most important of this group of painters, sought to express important meanings in massive forms and gigantic figures according to his mood. Permeke did not paint individuals but man himself, deformed, rough, permanent as the rich soil to which he belongs in Permeke's vision. For instance La Roulette 1928²⁷ evokes the power and strength of a man and his son pushing forward a heavy gipsy caravan against a background of countryside, neat and simple, dark green and red, bare, reduced to the essentials and yet where the man and his son belong. Permeke rejects all that is irrelevant, seeking to express the essence.

Permeke and two other painters, Gustave de Smet and Frits van den Berghe, formed the nucleus of the Belgian Expressionist movement, from 1908 forming a group at Laethem St. Martin. Before the War they practised a Post-Impressionist style of art, but separated during 1914-18 and each began to develop his own particular style. Whereas Permeke's canvasses hardly seem to be large enough to encapsulate his scenes and figures, for De Smet and Jean Brusselmans the elements are schematised. The latter underlined diligently all the elements he distributed and re-distributed, though like Permeke and De Smet his point of departure is always nature. In Moissons 1934²⁸ a landscape is highly schematised into planes of brilliant colour. Cobalt blue cloud shapes range across a flat orange sky, a brilliant yellow sun sends down thick, neat, white rays; the landscape is divided into blue, yellow and green fields, neatly divided into contrasting planes of colour, everything is formal, ordered and clarified. Brusselmans indignantly refused to call himself an Expressionist, although

his strength lay in his striking use of colour to gain his effect and the emphasis he gives in the distortion of men and things to achieve his effects.

Whereas Jean Brusselmans reduced his vision to absolutely flat surfaces, Frits van den Berghe distributed his forms in rounded volumes, and while De Smet and Brusselmans painted the external world as they saw it, Van den Berghe painted what Philip Roberts-Jones calls "internal landscapes".²⁹ For the artist he says, "The dream is a reality like any other form of life: a reality just as flagrant, just as precious, in fact just as authentic."³⁰ During the War when Van den Berghe and De Smet were in exile in Holland, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the work of these two artists - their landscapes with crooked farms, drooping trees and rolling fields painted in sombre earth colours.

Towards the end of the 1920's Van den Berghe was to be drawn towards Surrealism, and he began to people his work with monstrous figures, dreamlike grotesque shapes in scenes reminiscent of Ernst's petrified forests. He was fascinated by what the Surrealists stood for, although he did not use their means of expression. He continued to distort figures but began to express new emotions of anguish, fantasy, vulgarity - his vision re-creates that of Ensor - this can be seen in Autoportrait à la fête de mort 1938³¹ depicting the head of a dead man which recalls Ensor's masks or skulls.

Van den Berghe, De Smet and Permeke belonged to the "IX" group in Brussels from 1926 onwards which exhibited at the Centaure gallery directed by Walter Schwarzenburg. Whereas this gallery concentrated on the work of Expressionist painters during the early and mid 1920's, by the end of the decade paintings by European Surrealists and René Magritte were being shown. Interest in Surrealism had begun to develop in 1925 and 1926 stimulated by Mesens' enthusiasm for the developments which were taking place in Paris and by the poet Paul Nougé's experiments with language. The dominant Surrealist painter René Magritte had not been involved in the Expressionist movement, his work of the early 1920's revealing an interest in Cubism and Futurism. Mesens was briefly involved with Expressionism as assistant editor of the Sélection review and he later exhibited work by Permeke, Brusselmans

and Van den Berghe at the Palais des Beaux Arts and the London Gallery.

The relationship of the Surrealist movement in Belgium to the Symbolist and Expressionist forerunners poses a problem. One can quite easily trace in Belgian painting of the 19th and 20th centuries a concern for more than the representation of external reality, a certain preference for the bizarre, a constant sense of motives underlying the work:- in the case of the Symbolists the representation of things conceived; for the Expressionists the demonstration of underlying feelings and emotions, for the Surrealists the "re-creation" of reality. Nevertheless, the Surrealists themselves denied that they were operating within a continuing Belgian tradition, and opposed any idea that their work might have a connection with what had gone before. Magritte was familiar with and admired the strangeness of certain Belgian artists such as Wiertz, Rops, Mellery and Khnopff, but he said:-³²

"Grouping artists because they are Walloons or because they might be vegetarians doesn't interest me at all."

Concerning the tendency to link Surrealism with "fantastic" or "fabulous" art, he continued:-

"The parallel of Hieronymous Bosch and Surrealism would seem to be taken as a matter of course, but it is appropriate to resist it for being both facile and false at the same time. Bosch painted ideas which his contemporaries held about monsters - ideas which could have been communicated without his pictures notably by medieval "mysteries". Bosch was a religious "realist" in the way that today there are "social realists" who express the "most up-to-date" or traditional ideas and feelings, like justice, nuclear power industry and so on.

I DON'T PAINT IDEAS. I DESCRIBE insofar as I can, by means of painted images, objects and the coming together of objects, in such a light as to prevent any of our ideas or feelings from adhering to them. It is essential not to confuse or compare these objects with any "expressions" or "illustrations"

or "compositions". The latter would seem to dissipate all mystery, whereas the description I paint does not reveal to the mind WHAT IT IS that might cause objects to appear, or what might connect them or make them fall in with each other." 33

The work of Magritte and Delvaux is typified by the depiction of realistic images but conjoined in unusual circumstances. Mme. Vovelle notes the influence of both Wiertz and Ensor on the work of Delvaux;³⁴ in particular in the combination of female figures with skeletons or skulls. Magritte's work too relates to that of Khnopff, Degouve de Nuncques and Delville, in the instances referred to above. Mesens considered that Ensor was an important precursor to Surrealism in Belgium, in particular in his rejection of convention, realistic depiction and academism.³⁵ However, whereas Ensor was concerned with texture, colour and light depicting a world of imaginary happenings, Magritte invented a new world combining the real and "imaginary" in a very tightly photographic style, and with the exception of the period during the Second World War when Magritte painted in an Impressionistic style, painterly considerations played no part in his work.

The work of the Expressionist painters had virtually no influence on Belgian Surrealism: the moral preoccupations of Expressionist artists simply had no meaning for the Surrealists, for this represented a concern for "outmoded" ideas of aestheticism.

Although, therefore, one can trace some links between the Belgian Surrealists and their forerunners, these were by no means the important influences on their work. Of far more meaning for Magritte, Delvaux and Mesens was the work of De Chirico, Ernst, Duchamp, Man Ray - artists working quite separately from the Flemish Expressionist tradition - indeed totally opposed to that tradition with its values and techniques.

FOOTNOTES

1. Frank Whitford 'From the Twenty to the Twenties. The development of Modernism in Belgium' Studio International October 1974, p.125.
2. Monet, Whistler, Van Gogh, Seurat, Rodin, Lautrec, Redon, Gauguin, Cézanne and Sisley. See Philip Roberts-Jones From Realism to Surrealism, Painting in Belgium from Joseph Stevens to Paul Delvaux, translated from the French by C.H. Mogford, Brussels 1972, pp 42-85: also Frank Whitford op. cit. note 1.
3. Ibid.
4. See Michael Seuphor Abstract Painting in Flanders. Brussels, 1963, pp 44-47, 158-167.
5. Op. cit. note 2, p.10.
6. Ibid, p.50. From Emile Verlandt 'Henry de Braekleer' in La Jeune Belgique, Brussels, 1892 (pp 108-110).
7. Cited by Paul Haesaerts James Ensor, Brussels 1957, p.80.
8. E.L.T. Mesens 'James Ensor', The Listener vol. XXXV, London, February 1946.
9. Cited in the catalogue Le groupe des XX et son temps, Musée Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels, p.98.
10. Op. cit.note 2, p.50. 'La dernière oeuvre de James Ensor', Sélection, August 1, 1920.
11. Emile Langui Expressionism in Belgium, translated from the French by Alistair Kennedy, Brussels, 1971, p.16.
12. Francine Claire Legrand, Symbolism in Belgium, Brussels, 1972, p.135.
13. Op. cit. note 1, p.126.
14. F.C. Legrand 'Fernand Khnopff, Perfect Symbolist', Apollo, London, April 1967, p.281.
15. Cited ibid.
16. Cited in the catalogue Peintres de l'imaginaire, Grand Palais, Paris, 1972, p.11.

17. Op. cit. note 12, p.49.
18. Ibid. p.27.
19. Ibid. plate 31, p.57.
20. Ibid. plate 6, p.67.
21. Ibid. p.89.
22. Ibid. plate VIII, p.83.
23. Ibid. plate XII, p.131.
24. Luc and Paul Haesaerts William Degouve de Nuncques, Brussels, 1938, pp 11-12.
25. Op. cit. note 12, plate 103, p.199.
26. Suzi Gablik, Magritte, London 1970, plate 91, p.112.
27. Emile Langui, Expressionism in Belgium, translated by Alistair Kennedy, Brussels, 1971, plate X, p.109.
28. Op. cit. note 27, plate VIII, p.79.
29. Op. cit. note 2, p.113.
30. Op. cit. note 27, p.120.
31. Op. cit. note 2, plate 70, p.122.
32. Gablik, pp 13-14.
33. Ibid.
34. Vovelle, op. cit. p.181.
35. E.L.T. Mesens op. cit. note 8, p.331.

CHAPTER 3

The Dada Movement 1916 - 1922

Dada reached Brussels much later than elsewhere in Europe. In Paris, the centre with which Belgian artists and poets were to develop the strongest links, the movement thrived between 1919 and 1921. By the beginning of 1922 the Parisian group was beginning to break up and poets in André Breton's circle began literary experiments which were to lead to the founding of the Surrealist movement in 1924. It was not until 1925 that Mesens and Magritte published their first Dada inspired review Oesophage¹ using material by Tzara, Picabia, Arp, Ernst and Schwitters. It was work by these people together with that of Duchamp, Man Ray and Eluard, which was later to influence Mesens' own poetry and collages. These painters and poets had all been involved in the Dada movement and had developed new modes of literary and artistic expression.

After André Breton had broken with the Dada movement in 1921 he wrote that he "never regarded 'Dada' as anything but the rough image of a state of mind".² This statement by Breton pinpoints the main problem in providing a definition of Dada, for not only is it impossible to discuss the movement in terms of style for Dada was "anti-style", but those involved in the movement satirised both art itself and writing about art - in particular Hans Arp and Max Ernst.³ The immediate intent of many of the Dadaists was confusion and their desire was also to make "spectators Dada by inciting their indignation".⁴

The European movement originated in the work of a number of avant-garde writers and poets in 1915 and 1916 who were revolted by the First World War - it seemed to them that rational men were behaving in an inhumane manner. Bourgeois logic was blamed for the War and the resulting chaos and the Dadaists specifically opposed the cultural manifestations of a society which was capable of mass slaughter on such a scale. The painters, poets, sculptors and musicians involved in Dada were against pretension in art and its commercialisation; they believed that art had become totally dependent on society and their disgust with bourgeois values, social conformity and the repression of the individual

led them to use all the means at their disposal to shake people out of their apathy.

"What we need is works that are long, straight, precise and forever beyond understanding",⁵

wrote Tzara, the arch Dadaist.

"Logic is a complication. Logic is always wrong. It draws the thread of notions, words, in their formal exterior, towards illusory ends and centres, its chains kill, it is an enormous centipede stifling independence".

Dada activities began in Zurich in February 1916 - "a haven of refuge among the sea of fire, of iron and blood",⁶ at a bar where the writer Hugo Ball founded a literary cabaret - "The Cabaret Voltaire".

"I was sure that there must be a few young people in Switzerland who like me were interested not only in enjoying their independence but also in giving proof of it",

he wrote in his diary.⁷

"I received much support from Herr M. Slodki who designed the poster, and from Herr Hans Arp who supplied some Picassos, as well as works of his own, and obtained for me pictures by his friends O. Van Rees and much support also from Messrs. Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Max Oppenheimer who readily agreed to take part in the cabaret. We organised a Russian evening and a little later a French one (works by Apollinaire, Max Jacob, André Salmon, A. Jarry, Laforgue and Rimbaud). On 26th February Richard Huelsenbeck arrived from Berlin and we performed some tremendous negro music".

Initially, public provocation was not of prime importance for those who met at the Cabaret Voltaire,⁸ their essential concern being the creation of new art forms in poetry and painting and to make art a "meaningful instrument of life"⁹. Expressionism as a style was rejected for its "inwardness, abstraction (and) renunciation of all objectivity", together with Cubism and Futurism "with their laboratories of formal ideas".¹⁰ The poet/artist Hans Arp, a founder member of the Zurich group, wrote of his work which in 1914 and 1915 had been based on "lines, surfaces, forms and colours"¹¹ "They strive to surpass the human and attain the infinite and eternal. They are a negation of man's egotism".¹²

In 1916-17 Arp abandoned oil painting on canvas and began to make collages and wood reliefs, in a search for new materials

"which were not weighted down with traditions",¹³ and it was at this time that he developed the idea of "chance" as a stimulus to artistic creation. Arp began to experiment with automatic drawing, a technique later to be adopted by the Surrealists, and created forms which, although he had no preconceived ideas as to what would emerge, took on vegetal and organic shapes.¹⁴ Although the starting point was automatic, these drawings were always carefully inked in and finely finished by the painter. Arp also made torn paper collages (fig. 4) according to the "laws of chance", works which he felt would be impersonal¹⁵ and would exist as creations in their own right.

"These pictures are realities in themselves without meaning or cerebral intention. We rejected everything that was copy or description, and allowed the Elementary and Spontaneous to react in full freedom. Since the disposition of planes and the proportions and colours of these planes seemed to depend purely on chance, I declared that these works, like nature, were ordered 'according to the law of chance'."¹⁶

Marcel Janco, a Rumanian architecture student who joined the group early in 1916, also used the idea of "chance" by incorporating "objets trouvés" into abstract sculptures and reliefs. These "objets trouvés" might consist of wire, thread, feathers or potsherds.¹⁷ Janco also made posters and decorations for the Cabaret Voltaire and horrifying semi-abstract masks, used in Dada "performances" there between 1916 and 1919 (fig. 5).

The development of the idea of "chance" was regarded as a stimulus to artistic creation. It provided a conscious break with rationality and gave freedom from preconceived ideas about artistic technique. "Chance" was developed by Arp in his poetry, so that coincidences of words and sounds revealed apparently unconnected ideas - Arp wrote:

"From 1915 to 1920 I wrote my Wolkenpumpe (Cloud Pump) poems. In these poems I tore apart sentences, words, syllables. I tried to break down the language into atoms, in order to approach the creative. At length I rejected art, because it distracts us from the depths and disturbs the pure dream Chance opened perceptions to me, immediate spiritual insights. Intuition led me to revere the law of chance as the highest and deepest of laws An insignificant word might become a deadly thunderbolt".¹⁸

Tristan Tzara extended the idea of chance by cutting up newspaper articles into tiny pieces, often just containing a word, putting the pieces into a bag and then allowing them to fall onto a table, while the arrangement into which they fell constituted a poem. Hugo Ball abandoned language altogether in his phonetic poems, chanting sounds so that the whole consists entirely of abstract sound and rhythm.

"gadji beri bimba glandridi laula
lonni cadori
gadjama gramma berida bimbala
glandri galassassa laulitalamini"¹⁹

As late as 1954, when Dada had again become a live issue, Mesens was one of the first people to revive an interest in the movement. Mesens used some of the devices developed by the Zurich Dadaists in his later collages. He used ephemera of the type adopted by Janco for instance, in a collage depicting a mask-like head Le Noctambule 4/59 (fig. 106) made out of a metal disc, a feather, and different types of paper, while paper clips are incorporated into Lady Kite of Regents Park, 1965 (fig. 116). Mesens also used torn papers in his work particularly in the early 1960's - Enigma II, 1961 (fig. 131) and Parmi les palais les statues, 1960 (fig. 85) for instance. By the time that he used these materials they had become an accepted means of expression and were devoid of a revolutionary character. Mesens used them to consciously recall the origins of Dada and Surrealist collage. He also was exploiting the notion of "chance" and the free association of ideas by his use of discarded elements and unrelated images.

The arrival of the painter Francis Picabia (with whom Mesens later established links in 1923) in Zurich in 1918 meant a shift in attitude for the group from a search for new art forms to a total contempt for art and an urge to deny that there is any sense in life.²⁰ Already in 1917 the Zurich group had begun to indulge in acts of Dada provocation including readings of Ball's phonetic poems, simultaneous poems read by Tzara, Huelsenbeck and Janco, and had published Dada manifestos, all these acts deliberately enticing an enraged response from the public.

"What we are celebrating is at once a buffoonery
and a requiem mass The bankruptcy of ideas

having destroyed the concept of humanity to its very innermost strata, the instincts and hereditary backgrounds are now emerging pathologically. Since no art, politics or religious faith seems adequate to dam this torrent, there remains only the blague and bleeding pose".²¹

Tzara published a new Dada manifesto in 1918 inspired by the arrival of Picabia and this represented the group at its most nihilistic and pessimistic. "Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is Dada; a protest with the first of its whole being engaged in destructive action".²²

However, with the coming of peace in 1918 the group in Zurich began to dissolve; Huelsenbeck had left for Berlin in 1917, Tzara went to Paris in 1919 while Arp went to Cologne to join Max Ernst.

While the Dada group were working in Zurich, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Man Ray were developing their "anti-art" ideas in New York, though until 1917 or 1918²³ the Zurich group was unaware of this. Both Duchamp and Picabia had arrived in New York from Paris in 1915 and there they joined Man Ray and a group of "insurrectionist" poets and painters. The work of Marcel Duchamp was to be crucial in the development of the idea of "anti-art". His nihilism affected not only his immediate contemporaries Picabia and Man Ray, but his rejection of oil painting and of "fine art", his creation of "ready-mades" - objects displaced from their normal environment, and his ironic attitude, were to be influential not only in the course of the Dada and Surrealist movement, but also were to impress a new generation of artists after the Second World War. When Duchamp returned to Paris in 1919, he met, through Picabia, those who were to form the Parisian Dada group - Tzara, Ribemont, Dessaignes, Pierre de Massot, for instance - though he always retained his distance from their activities. The younger group of men was, however, very interested in the attitude of Duchamp and Picabia: "They found that we represented the spirit that they themselves wanted to represent, and they were drawn to us".²⁴ Duchamp was somewhat bemused by the Dada movement and for instance sent a telegram refusing to take part in a Dada salon in Paris in 1920, the reason being, he later told Pierre Cabanne:

"Only so I could make a pun. My telegram "Peau de Balle"²⁵ was spelt "Pode Bal"..... Well, what in the world could I send them? I didn't have anything specially interesting to send, I didn't even know what Dada was".

Duchamp had abandoned oil painting in 1913, and adopting the attitude that life is totally meaningless, he took the idea of "chance" and presented objects to the world like the bicycle wheel to which he was totally indifferent. He called these things "art objects" simply because he said they were, thus reducing the concept of "art" to the absurd.

"A point that I want very much to establish is that the choice of these "ready-mades" was never dictated by aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with a total absence of good or bad taste in fact a complete anaesthesia".²⁶

In his great work, Le grand verre (La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même) made between 1915 and 1923 and then abandoned unfinished, Duchamp executed an extremely complex and esoteric work on glass which was to be accompanied by explanatory notes made between 1911 and 1915 and later published as La boîte verte in 1934.²⁷ This work, in which Duchamp applied in wire and lead paint a variety of images which he had executed in the years before 1915, incorporates "canned chance" and forms which, lacking emotional involvement, are carefully scientifically calculated. Duchamp aimed to create a work founded on the intellectual: "I wanted to be intelligent I thought the idiomatic a way to get away from influences".²⁸ The Large Glass is imbued with irony and paradox, art becomes "non-art", scientific ideas become the "non-science" of the 4th Dimension - André Breton saw the work as a "complete statement of the relationship between the rational and irrational".²⁹

After the War, Duchamp finally bid farewell to painting in his frieze shaped picture Tu M - suggesting "tu m'emmerdes" and in 1920 he began to make ironic machines which were totally useless, such as the Rotary Glass Plate (Precision Optics), 1920 - a motorized construction using painted glass and metal. Between 1916 and 1923 Duchamp

had made a number of "assisted" or "corrected" or "rectified" "ready-mades" such as Apolinaire enamelled, 1916-17 (fig. 6) in which an advertisement for paints is altered, or Fresh Widow, 1920, a model of a French window with panes of leather instead of glass; these objects are "visual puns" which it "amused" Duchamp to make, even though they are very carefully constructed. The "pun" was to become "fundamental to much of Duchamp's work, and often his visual images were the result of an attempt to give concrete and tangible expression to concepts that were purely linguistic".³⁰ The use of the pun and the creation of images based on "linguistic" concepts were to be developed by both Dada and Surrealist artists and poets. Magritte, Ernst and Mesens, for instance, all use the idea of the visual pun and there was to be in Surrealism a tradition of word play which aimed at undermining rational thought and upsetting conventional word usage.

Like Duchamp, Picabia's work is imbued with an ironic sense of humour. Duchamp and Picabia had met and become friends at the end of 1910 and Picabia began making machine drawings under Duchamp's influence in 1913³¹, while in 1915 he made a series of "object-portraits" in which personalities are reduced to machines such as Ici ceci Steiglitz of 1915 showing the photographer Steiglitz as a camera on its back - shutters extended high into the air. Picabia also made machine images using a variety of materials (fig. 7) and in 1919 he began using found objects as collage elements subversive of the notion of "belle peinture" (fig. 8). His wife later wrote:-

"Picabia found in anti-painting a formula of black humour which gave him free rein to express his rancour against men and events, an inexhaustible vein of plastic and poetic sarcasms".³²

In 1919 Picabia moved to Paris, Tristan Tzara joining him there later that year. With these two men in the capital, Dada began to gain momentum in Paris - Picabia and Tzara both represented Dada nihilism and indulged in "gestes" and subversive activities which shocked the public. For instance, in January 1920,³³ at an event which took place in front of an unsuspecting audience, a canvas by Picabia was shown covered with inscriptions and bearing the pun "L.H.O.O.Q." - meaning "She has a hot arse" - painted on it in large red letters (the idea was

derived from a "rectified ready-made" by Duchamp which he produced in 1919 showing a picture of the Mona Lisa adorned with beard and moustache, L.H.O.O.Q. inscribed below), while in March 1920 Breton read a manifesto by Picabia at a Dada soirée, which represented Picabia at his most nihilistic:

"Dada alone does not smell: it is nothing, nothing, nothing.
It is like your hopes: nothing.
Like your paradise: nothing.
Like your idols: nothing.
Like your politicians: nothing.
Like your heroes: nothing.
Like your artists: nothing.
Like your religions: nothing."³⁴

Man Ray joined Duchamp and Picabia in Paris in 1921 and his first exhibition was held there in the winter of that year,³⁵ attracting immediate interest among the Dada group. Man Ray had begun his artistic career painting in a style combining Cubist influences and a flat manner of execution; after meeting Duchamp in 1915 he began to make collages and "ready-mades" and in 1918 he developed his idea of using a paint spray to make "mechanized" images "aerographs" (he had used the paint spray during the day time for his office work as a draughtsman).

"I worked in gouache or tinted and white cardboards - the results were astonishing - they had a photographic quality although the subjects were anything but figurative It was thrilling to paint a picture, hardly touching the surface - a purely cerebral art as it were."³⁶

Man Ray's "ready-mades" were, like those of Duchamp, objects displaced from their normal environment, so By Itself II, 1918³⁷ was simply a three dimensional wooden template which he had made to produce his "aerographs", and Lampshade, 1919³⁸ was a sheet of cardboard hanging from the ceiling.

Man Ray's collages, like his "ready-mades", were attempts to undermine the concept of art; for instance his work now known as Theatr', 1916 (fig. 9) but originally called Transmutation³⁹ was a sheet of the New York Times turned sideways and altered with

lettering, small vignettes, smudges of paint and scraps of paper. Thus the newspaper was turned into a "work of art" by the intervention of the artist - hence its original title. This picture and the collage Involute, 1917⁴⁰ were among Man Ray's works exhibited in Paris in 1921, the first Dada exhibition, which Mesens visited. The ideas contained in these collages were later to be used in Mesens' own work:⁴¹ Mesens exhibited Involute at the Palais des Beaux Arts in December 1937,⁴² together with thirty-three of Man Ray's works including Love Fingers, 1916, which was then in his own collection. He later exhibited these works at the London Gallery in 1939, the first time they were seen in England. Tzara had said at the time that Love Fingers was shown in Paris in 1921:

"New York sends us one of its love fingers which will not be long in tickling the susceptibilities of French painters. Let us hope that this titillation will again indicate the already well known wound which marks the closed somnolence of art. The paintings of Man Ray are made of basil, of mace, of a pinch of pepper and parsley in the form of hard-souled branches."⁴³

Like Duchamp, Man Ray retained a certain distance from Dadaist activities in Paris and remained detached from partisan disputes, though his work was enthusiastically welcomed by Tzara, Breton, Eluard and Aragon.⁴⁴ Man Ray's contacts with the Paris group stimulated him in the creation of bizarre objects intended to shock and surprise such as Cadeau, 1921, made for Erik Satie, and Indestructible Object, 1923, and these "assisted ready-mades" have been considered to be the forerunners of the Surrealist objects made in the 1930s.⁴⁴ It was during this period that Man Ray made his first rayogrammes, a turning point in his creative career. He discovered the technique of making these strange, dreamlike images late at night while developing photographs, producing "astonishing results" by placing objects inadvertently on a sensitized sheet.

"To his surprise, an image grew before his eyes on the paper under the light, not quite a simple silhouette of the objects, as in a straight photograph, but distorted and refracted by the glass more or less in contact with the paper and standing out against a black background, the part directly exposed to the light."⁴⁵

These rayogrammes were instantly called "pure Dada" by Tzara,⁴⁶ while

Breton later commented that Man Ray,

"far from entrusting himself to photography's avowed aims and making use, after the event, of the common ground of representation that it proposed has applied himself vigorously to the task of stripping it of its positive nature, of forcing it to abandon its arrogant air and pretentious aims."⁴⁷

Mesens, later in the 1920's, began to experiment with rayogrammes,⁴⁸ which he used as collaged elements combined with other images. He also mounted a show of Man Ray's rayogrammes in Brussels in 1927,⁴⁹ the first time these were to be shown outside Paris although reproductions had appeared, often uncredited, in almost every number of La Révolution Surréaliste.

In the same year that Man Ray's work was first seen in Paris, the first exhibition of Max Ernst's collages⁵⁰ had opened in the early summer, the opening being staged as a Dada demonstration. This exhibition was of great importance for the future development of Surrealism,⁵¹ for in Max Ernst's work Breton, Eluard and Aragon saw new possibilities of poetic expression by which the irrational could be explored and avenues opened which could lead "beyond painting".⁵² Eluard wrote:

"Around 1919, when the imagination sought to rule and subdue the dismal monsters strengthened by war, Max Ernst resolved to bury old Reason, which had caused to many discords and disasters not under its own ruins - from which it makes monuments - but under the free representation of a free universe."⁵³

Mesens owned several of Ernst's early collages (Appendix D), exhibiting them later in London in December 1938 and in the summer of 1953 at Knokke le Zoute. In his own work Mesens was greatly influenced by Ernst's techniques and by his ability to reveal the "latent" possibilities of reality through collage.

Until 1919, Ernst had painted in oils in an Expressionist style, but in the summer of that year he had come across reproductions of De Chirico's work and his painting began to show not only the influence of De Chirico but to incorporate more extreme dreamlike imagery.⁵⁴ Ernst and Johannes Baargeld,⁵⁵ a left wing political

activist, painter and poet, engaged in a short-lived period of Dada activity in Cologne and were joined there by Arp in 1920. During this period Ernst began experimenting with reliefs constructed with wood, wire and nails, and began making collages using "borrowed" elements from technical journals.

"In the days when we were most keen on our research and most excited by our first discoveries, we would come across by chance, or as it seemed by chance on (for example) the pages of a catalogue for anatomical or physical demonstration, and find that these provided contiguously figurative elements so mutually distant that the very absurdity of their collection produced in us a hallucinatory succession of contradictory images, superimposed one upon another with the persistence and rapidity proper to amour recollections. These images themselves brought forth a new plane in order to meet on a new unknown (the plane of non-suitability). Thereupon it was enough either by painting or drawing to add and thereby only obediently reproducing what is visible within us, a colour, a scrawl, a landscape foreign to the objects depicted."⁵⁵

Ernst collaborated with Arp and Baargeld in 1920 on a number of collages entitles Fatagaga (FABrication de TAbbleaux Garantis GAZometriques), mysterious works using photo-engravings transformed by juxtaposition into strange, dreamlike, humorous fantasies. The poetic power of the pictures was intensified by the titles, some of which were probably invented by Arp such as Hier ist noch alles in der Schwebe, 1920 (fig. 10). Ernst's work in collage during the Cologne period demonstrated not only the use of new materials and a challenge to accepted modes of expression, but also work in which there is a singular relationship between word and image.⁵⁶ Often the titles are very long, sometimes they are scraps of poetry, sometimes they are puns. These titles are verbal images to which the collage is a metaphorical parallel: thus in C'est le chapeau qui fait l'homme, 1921 (fig. 11), the title indicates that the series of illustrations of different types of hats collaged into the work have become manikins, while the meaning of the title proverb is paralleled by the imagery. Ernst's challenge to painting in the 1919-20 collages, and the new identities he gave to things culled from the real world using both words and images was reinforced by Mesens in both his early collage making of the 1920's and in his later works

after 1954. Mesens, essentially a poet, created enigmatic collages in which both image and title formed a whole, undermining the conventional relationship between words and objects. Mesens, like Ernst, used a variety of word play in his titles ranging from little poems to accompany his plastic imagery, and puns reinforcing witty aspects of his work, to strange conjunctions of words complementing bizarre concoctions of materials.

Although Ernst developed his methods in rebellion against accepted modes of expression, he was not interested in using his art for revolutionary ends in the political sense as were some of the Dada group in Berlin in the period after the First World War.⁵⁷ Ernst had used photographic elements in his work⁵⁸ in an attempt to renovate artistic imagery, whilst photomontage was used as political satire by John Heartfield, who was a member of the Berlin Dada group. To a certain extent it was inevitable that the work of the Berlin Dadaists should take on a political nature, given the radical proclivities of the members of the group and the extremely tense political and social situation in that city from 1917 onwards. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the Berlin Dada group were solely committed to art of a radical political nature: the "political intentions of Berlin Dada were 'indeed' diverse".⁵⁹ What had previously been informal activities⁶⁰ in Berlin were given some coherence by Richard Huelsenbeck, who arrived in Berlin from Zurich in February 1917. The group consisted of Raoul Hausmann and Johannes Baader initially, and by 1919 included Hannah Hoeh, Wieland Herzfelde and his brother Heartfield (he changed his surname to an anglicized form during the First World War) and George Grosz. The group contributed to several reviews,⁶¹ made posters and propaganda, most of which was ephemeral and has not survived, and in 1920 held the First International Dada Fair, an exhibition to which Arp, Picabia and Ernst contributed. In their reviews Der Dada and Club Dada, for instance, the Berlin group developed further the idea of a new kind of typescript and layout (which the Zurich group had used and which Picabia experimented with in 391) using a mixed typography, isolated words which were sometimes stamped diagonally across the page Futurist style, or separate letters making up

words but spaced so that the letters virtually become images. In the latter respect, Johannes Baader's collages published in Dadaco and Der Dada were characterised by the use of typography rather than picture⁶².

The technique of photomontage has been variously claimed to have been invented by John Heartfield and George Grosz on the one hand, Hannah Hoeh and Raoul Hausmann on the other,⁶³ at some time during 1916. Photomontage, Hausmann later stated,

"was as revolutionary as its content, its form as subversive as the application of the photograph and printed texts which, together, are transformed into a static film. Having invented the static simultaneous and purely phonetic poem, the Dadaists applied the same principles to pictorial representation. They were the first to use photography as material to create, with the aid of structures that were very different, often anomalous and with antagonistic significance, a new entity which tore from the chaos of war and revolution an entirely new image; and they were aware that their method possessed a propaganda power which their contemporaries had not the courage to exploit."⁶⁴

Whereas John Heartfield made montages (and drawings) attacking the politics of the socialist majority in Berlin in 1919, and George Grosz indulged in political satire, these were not consciously related to Dada preoccupations. Hausmann's collage and photomontage on the other hand are not specifically political; he was much more concerned with Dadaist activity - with manifestations with which to "épater les bourgeois" and with creating images which could express his disgust with society generally. By 1919 he used newspaper cuttings, advertisements, photographs and typographical elements in his work in images subversive of existing styles of art, particularly Expressionism, and made out of objective items of reality which would link the work with life itself. Both George Grosz and John Heartfield made photomontage out of similar types of materials which they adopted as a result of their contact with Dada ideas, though their main preoccupation was polemical, political and with which they continued after the Berlin Dada group ceased working together in 1922.

It was the Berlin group's interest in radical politics and Dada subversion which caused them to reject Kurt Schwitters' attempt to

join the group in 1918. Huelsenbeck and Grosz in particular objected to his joining them - Huelsenbeck later wrote,

".....like a lower middle class Victorian. He had nothing of the audacity, the love for adventure ... the keenness, the personal thrust and the will born of the conviction that to me made up most of the Dadaist philosophy".⁶⁵

However, although rejected by the Berlin group, he was, as Mesens later pointed out,⁶⁶

"recognised by DADA Zurich. He was therefore officially a Dadaist, as he contributed two poems and two reproductions of constructions to the one and only number of Der Zeltweg⁶⁷ and officially Merzist because he was at the same time the founder and inventor of MERZ - activity".

The problem as to whether Schwitters could be called a Dadaist or not derived from his adherence to the concept of art.⁶⁸ In his Merz constructions or collages there is little that identifies him as a Dadaist. He later wrote, for instance,

"I could not, in fact, see the reason why old tickets, driftwood, cloakroom tabs, wires and parts of wheels, buttons and old rubbish found in attics and refuse dumps should not be as suitable a material for painting as the paints made in factories. This was, as it were, a social attitude, and artistically speaking a private enjoyment, but particularly the latter I called my new works utilizing such materials MERZ. This is the second syllable of Kommerz. It originated in the Merzbild, a work in which the word Merz, cut out from the advertisement of the Kommerz and Privatbank and pasted on, could be read among the abstract elements I looked for a collective term for this new style, since I could not fit my pictures into the older categories so I called all my work as a species of Merz pictures, after the characteristic one. Later I extended the use of the word Merz, first to my poetry, which I have written since 1917, and finally to all my related activities. Now I call myself Merz".⁶⁹

Although Schwitters used ephemera in his collages as "abstract elements" and as a substitute for paint in a structured framework derived from Cubism on the radiating patterns of Futurism, his work never-

theless reflects a typical Dadaist desire to "fuse art and life". Schwitters' collages and assemblages are generally very small, and are made out of a great variety of discarded materials and minutiae, (fig. 12) all carefully balanced together in a harmonious whole. Mesens used formats derivative of Schwitters' (whose work he knew from the early 1920's) in his own collages of the late 1950's, and Schwitters' work will be further discussed in this context.⁷⁰

In the 1920's, Schwitters contributed to several Dadaist publications,⁷¹ except in France where he was "practically unknown".⁷² Paris had become the centre of Dada activity in France in the period 1919-1921 when the Littérature⁷³ group, Breton, Eluard and Aragon, became the nucleus of the movement. The review Littérature had been founded in 1919 by Breton and his friends as a result of disillusionment created by the First World War and an urge to free themselves from the literary establishment; the writers had set out to search for a "new spirit" and new means of expression. Breton knew of Dada in Zurich through their publications⁷⁴ and made contact with Tzara, whose "turbulent and aggressive"⁷⁵ imagery seemed to offer new directions in poetry. Tzara's work began to be published in Littérature and he himself arrived in Paris in 1920. Tzara organised Dada manifestations in Paris in the summer of that year with Picabia, Ribemont, Dessaignes, Breton and his friends. These first manifestations were successful joint enterprises but attempts to repeat anarchic activities in 1921 lacked interest for Breton and by 1922 a serious rift had developed between him and Tzara. The latter's desire for total negation of art and literature had ceased to interest Breton, who now sought some kind of underlying principle with which to embark on creating a new attitude to literature and it was evident that by 1922 the movement was dying out with the quarrels, accusations and fights which took place. Breton later pointed out,⁷⁶ "The 1918 Dada manifesto seemed to open the doors wide, but we only find that the doors open onto a corridor which turns back on us". If "art" as a concept was to be negated, there was a paradox in the artists' attempting to create new types of art. It was evident that a more positive attitude towards "art" was needed and in the years between 1922 and 1924, Breton and his friends laid the groundwork for their new "Surrealist" philosophy.⁷⁷

During the period of Dada activity between 1916 and 1922 new techniques in art and literature had been developed. At its most extreme, Dada had demonstrated an apparently totally negative attitude and a will to the total destruction of "art": nihilistic demonstrations led to the inevitable conclusion that Dada was nothing. On the other hand, the very destruction of accepted modes of expression was accompanied by an urge to create new types of imagery not dependent on conventional notions of beauty, nor on representations of the external world, nor descriptive of subjective states of mind. Thus collage, photomontage, rayographs, assemblages and ready-mades were all developed using items culled from the real world and techniques using "chance" or the "accidental" were used. Words assumed a new importance as images or objects in their own right - even the letters of words became separate identities and could be used individually in pictures, poems or texts.

All these techniques were adopted by Mesens in his later collages in which he deliberately recalled the Dada movement. The work of Man Ray, Ernst, Picabia and Schwitters influenced his style, and Mesens purchased works by these artists which, together with those of Magritte and Miró, formed the backbone of his collection.

Mesens did not take part in any Dada activities in Paris, though he and Magritte were to contribute material to Picabia's review 391. The only exhibition which Mesens is known to have visited was that of Man Ray in 1921. He did, however, establish personal contacts with the members of the Paris Dada group, though as will be indicated below in Chapter 6, he did not meet Breton, Aragon and Eluard until much later. Dada revolutionized Mesens' attitude towards art and although his Dada activity in Brussels in 1924 and 1925 was very brief, the rebellious anti-conformist Dada attitude was to remain with him for the rest of his life. The techniques devised by the artists and poets who moved within the orbit of Dada activity continued to be used within the context of Surrealism both in Paris and Brussels, for they represented a challenge to aesthetics, convention and rationality.

FOOTNOTES

1. Published in Brussels. See following chapter.
2. 'Après Dada': this was published in 1924 in Breton's collection Les Pas Perdus, Paris. Reprinted in translation in André Breton, What is Surrealism: Selected Writings, edited by Franklin Rosemont, London, 1978, p.9.
All quotations by André Breton have been taken from this collection of works in translation, or from S. Watson-Taylor's translation of Surrealism and Painting (note 29 below), or R. Seaver and H.R. Lane's translation of Manifestos of Surrealism (Michigan 1969), since these books contain a substantial number of texts in translation not otherwise available in England.
3. Arp's writings on art and poetry have been collected and published in translation in: Hans Arp, On My Way, New York, 1948. A number of Ernst's writings, in particular 'Au delà de la peinture' have been collected and published in translation in: Max Ernst, Beyond Painting, New York, 1948. (See note 52 below.) All quotations by Arp and Ernst are in translation from these two sources.
4. W.C. Seitz, catalogue to exhibition The Art of Assemblage, New York, 1961, p.35.
5. Tristan Tzara, second Dada Manifesto, 1918, reproduced by R. Motherwell in Dada Painters and Poets, New York, 1951, p.80. This book provided an admirable collection of Dada texts in translation, not otherwise available in England.
6. Marcel Janco 'Creative Dada' in Willy Verkauf (ed.) Dada, Monograph of a Movement, Zurich 1957. (Reprinted London 1975) p.18.
7. Zurich, May 15, 1916. Quoted in Richter, Dada, Art and Anti-Art, London 1965, pp. 14-15, from Hugo Ball's diaries, published after his death under the title Flucht aus der Zeit (Flight from Time), Munich and Leipzig, 1927.
8. The Zurich Dadaists were Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Hans Richter and Richard Huelsenbeck from Germany, Hans Arp from Alsace, Marcel Janco and Tristan Tzara from Romania, Dr. Walter Serner from Austria. The circumstances under which the name Dada was adopted are not clear, see William S. Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art, London and New York, 1969, p.64.
9. Richter, op. cit. note 7, p.48.
10. Tzara, op. cit. note 5, p.77.
11. Hans Arp, 'Reality' in On My Way, op. cit. note 3, p.36.

12. 'Dada Land' *ibid.* p.40.
13. Cited in Rubin, *op. cit.* note 8, p.76.
14. Illustrated Richter, *op. cit.* note 7, pp. 38 and 45, dated 1916 and 1917.
15. Arp and his wife Sophie Tauber had in 1915 and 1916 made pictures out of coloured squares of paper, first cut out with scissors, then using a paper cutting machine in order to eliminate any "accident" and any reference to traditional oil painting.
16. *Op. cit.* note 12.
17. Rubin, *op. cit.* note 8. Mask, 1916, fig. 54, p.67. Dada Construction, 1917, fig. D-13, p.427.
18. 'Dada was not a farce' (1949) reproduced in R. Motherwell, *op. cit.* note 5, p. 294.
19. Quoted by Richter, *op. cit.* note 7, p.42. This was Hugo Ball's first phonetic poem and was performed at the Cabaret Voltaire on July 14th, 1916.
20. Arp, however, continued to develop his "new" forms of art, in spite of the activities of the group.
21. Quoted from Hugo Ball's diary in Dawn Ades, Dada and Surrealism, London, 1974, p.14.
22. *Op. cit.* note 5, p.81.
23. *Op. cit.* note 7, p.81.
24. Marcel Duchamp in conversation with Pierre Cabane, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, translated from the French by Ron Padgett, London, 1971, p.62.
25. Roughly translated as "Balls to you". *Ibid.* p.65.
26. Cited in Richter, *op. cit.* note 7, p.89.
27. Boîte verte: ou, la Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même, Paris, 1934.
28. Marcel Duchamp in I propose to strain the Laws of Physics, Art News, New York, December 1968; quoted by John Golding in Duchamp. The Bride stripped bare by her Bachelors, even, London, 1973, p.27.

29. Surrealism and Painting translated by Simon Watson-Taylor, New York 1972, p.99. First published as "Phare de la Mariée", Minotaure, no. 6, Winter 1934/5.
30. J.H. Matthews The Imagery of Surrealism, Syracuse, 1977, p.163.
31. La fille née sans mère - usually dated 1913-15. This was reproduced in the review 391 no. 4, June 1915. Dawn Ades in the catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, London 1978, points out that "the coloured drawing is still close to Duchamp's Bride and his own Edtaonsil, although the mechanised elements are more emphatic", p.36.
32. Gabrielle - Buffet - Picabia Aires abstraites, Geneva 1957, p.35, quoted in translation in Rubin in the catalogue Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968, p.27.
33. The event is described by George Hugnet in the Dada Spirit of Painting: Dada in Paris, Paris 1932, reproduced in Motherwell, p.169.
34. Cited Richter, op. cit. note 7, p.180.
35. See Chapter 1, note 38.
36. Man Ray. Self Portrait, London and Boston, 1963, quoted by Roland Penrose in Man Ray, London, 1975, p.46.
37. Illustration Penrose, fig. 28, no page number.
38. Ibid. fig. 65. This was made for an exhibition in New York in 1916, but the janitor destroyed it thinking it was simply a broken lampshade. Man Ray later in 1959 made a replica in tin.
39. Catalogue Exposition Dada, Man Ray, Paris, Librairie Six, December 1921.
40. Fig. 2.24. Catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, London, 1978, p.50.
41. Discussed in Chapter 10.
42. E.L.T. Mesens, Trois peintres surréalistes, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, December 1937.
43. Quoted by Penrose, op. cit. note 36, p.70.
44. Ibid. chapter 2, pp. 66-84.
45. Ibid. p.76.

46. Ibid. p.82. Earlier in 1918 Christian Schad had developed the technique of exposing objects directly to sensitive paper. Known as Schadographies (Photogrammes), some of these appeared in Zurich Dada publications. Verkauf, op. cit. note 6, p.95.
47. Op. cit. note 29, p.32. First published as Le Surréalisme et la peinture in La Révolution Surréaliste, no. 5, Paris, October 1925.
48. Discussed in Chapter 10.
49. Discussed in Chapter 8.
50. Exposition Max Ernst, Galerie au Sans Pareil, May 3rd - June 3rd, 1921.
51. See Dawn Ades Dada and Surrealism, London, 1974, pp. 29-33.
52. The title of the book written by Max Ernst Beyond Painting, New York, 1948, translated by Dorothea Tanning, Ernst's wife, first published as Au delà de la peinture, Cahiers d'art, Paris, 1937.
53. Paul Eluard Donner à Voir, Paris 1939, cited in translation by Lucy Lippard Surrealists on Art, New Jersey, 1970, p.56.
54. Exhibition catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, fig. 511, Hayward Gallery, London, 1978, Aquis Submersus, 1919, p.113.
55. Op. cit. note 52, p.23.
56. In this respect Max Ernst may have been influenced by the links which the Cologne group had developed with the Parisian group, for work by Picabia, Tzara, Aragon, Breton, Eluard, Ribemont, Dessaignes and Soupault appeared in the two numbers of the Dada review Die Schammade which Ernst and Baargeld published in Cologne in 1920. De Chirico, Duchamp and Picabia all used "poetic" titles to give an added dimension to their images. Picabia, for instance, said, "In my work, the subjective expression lies in the title; the painting is an object," quoted Rubin, p.96. Poetry and a drawing by Picabia appeared in Die Schammade, Cologne, April 1920. Hans Arp also demonstrated a relationship between his poetry and plastic work so that the titles of his collages or reliefs are "poetic equivalents" - thus La planche à oeufs, 1922, is a painted wood relief to which Arp adds an explanatory text telling the viewer that it is a game "for the upper ten thousand in which the participants leave the arena covered in egg from top to toe", op. cit. note 11, p.49.
57. John Heartfield, George Grosz, Johannes Baader.

58. Dawn Ades in Photomontage, London, 1976, p.20, suggests that Max Ernst would probably not have approved of the term "photomontage" being applied to his work as it would have "smacked too strongly of Berlin Dada". Apparently Ernst held a low opinion of Berlin Dada considering it to be a "counterfeit version".
59. Op. cit. note 54, p.86. A detailed discussion of the activities of the Berlin Dada group lies beyond the scope of this account. A good record of their activities is to be found in Motherwell, op. cit. note 5, pp. 141-152, while their publications and their political activities are discussed by Dawn Ades in the catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. note 54, pp. 78-101.
60. Richter, op. cit. note 7, p.102.
61. Jedermann sein eigener Fussball, February 1919.
Der Blutige Ernst, September 1919.
Club Dada, 1918.
Der Dada, nos. 1 - 3, June 1919 to April 1920.
Die Pleite, nos. 1 - 6, 1919 to January 1920.
and others, op. cit. note 54, p.88.
62. Illustrated catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. note 54, pp. 85-87.
63. Richter, op. cit. note 7, pp. 116-118.
64. Cited Dawn Ades, op. cit. note 58, p.11.
65. Quoted by Motherwell, op. cit. note 5, p.58.
66. E.L.T. Mesens 'A Tribute to Kurt Schwitters' Art News and Review, Vol. X, no. 19, London, October 1958, p.5.
67. Zurich, October 1919.
68. One of the reasons Huelsenbeck gave for Schwitters' rejection by the Berlin Dadaists was his involvement with Der Sturm, the German Expressionist review, with which the Berlin Dadaists were in conflict. However, Mesens pointed out, "As far as Expressionism was concerned, Schwitters (by 1919) had already far surpassed that". Op cit. note 65.
69. Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue Merz 20, Hanover, March 1927. Quoted Rubin, p.53.
70. Chapter 12.

71. Mécano, nos. 4-5, 1923:
Twenty-four issues of Merz were published in Hanover between 1923 and 1932, of which issues 1 to 7 have a strong Dada orientation.
72. E.L.T. Mesens, op. cit. note 66.
73. The review Littérature edited by Aragon, Breton and Soupault was published in Paris between March 1919 and June 1924.
74. Dada, issues 1, 2 and 3, Zurich 1917-1918.
75. Dawn Ades, op. cit. note 54, p.162.
76. Entretiens, Paris 1952, quoted by J.H. Matthews in his introduction to An Anthology of French Surrealist Poetry, London, 1966, p.10.
77. The Champs Magnétiques texts which appeared in Littérature nos. 8-10, 1919, were Breton and Soupault's attempts at automatic writing. In November 1922 Breton published Entrée des Médiums in Littérature recording three texts by René Crevel, Robert Desnos and Benjamin Péret spoken while they were in a hypnotic sleep, and explaining that Surrealism meant a psychic automatism whereby automatic writing, dream revelation, and hypnotic sleep could reveal a new type of imagery unforeseen in conscious states of mind. (Hypnotic sleep was abandoned as a means to the unconscious as it could lead to dangerous occurrences.) The new imagery could already be seen particularly in Ernst's disorienting collages shown in Paris in 1921, in De Chirico's bizarre painting, and in Man Ray's rayographs, all of which illustrated the later issues of Littérature.

CHAPTER 4

Surrealist Art in France

The significance of Dada had been in the assertion of artistic freedom from conventional restraints. New methods of expression had been developed in order to base art on life itself, using chance; primitive art had been given a heightened emphasis, reality had been re-defined in assemblages, "objects", collages and photomontages. These liberating techniques of Dada which totally negated formal concepts of beauty, harmony and conventional metaphor in art were systematically adopted by the Surrealists together with new means by which to explore the hidden possibilities of the unconscious and dreams. Painters and poets hoped that by extending the notion of reality to include an infinite variety of juxtapositions and metamorphoses, Surrealism would act as a liberating force and man could re-create the reality of the world in words and images according to his own subconscious desires. A variety of techniques were developed to expand our notion of the possibilities inherent in reality - automatism, frottage,¹ decalcomania,² exquisite corpses,³ "oneiric" or dream imagery. Poets created a new type of metaphor revealing unexpected juxtapositions, subjecting imagery to strange transmutations and denying conventional lyricism.

As a result of their desire for a radical re-interpretation of reality and their attitude of revolt towards accepted norms, the Surrealists espoused revolutionary political change. The desire for total liberation which characterized their approach to literature and art implied a radical re-structuring of society so that people could be totally free from repressive moral, religious and political imperatives. This led the members of the Surrealist group in Paris to become involved in left wing political activities from 1925,⁴ and a commitment to the proletarian revolution and to Marxist dialectical materialism. However, in the 1930's the inevitable split occurred between Trotskyites, Stalinists and those who were not prepared to throw their weight on either side, and the political involvements of the Surrealists were to be an endless cause of dissension: to such an extent that the two most important poets,

Aragon and Eluard, were "excommunicated" from the movement (in 1932 and 1939 respectively) for being Communists.⁵

The Surrealists published a large number of reviews, tracts and manifestos⁶ in which they expounded their ideas, sometimes in rather an obscure fashion, and as a result of this there has been a great deal written about the movement by those participating in it - painters, poets, writers - as well as by historians and critics. It is not possible to provide a detailed analysis of Surrealist theory and practice here, since this would be beyond the scope of a single chapter; nor for the same reason is there space to consider the highly complex political controversies which bedevilled the movement. This chapter merely attempts to introduce some of the theories propounded by André Breton, and considers the attitudes and techniques of the main artists involved, whose work interested Mesens. It also briefly outlines the development of Surrealism since 1945, when a number of new adherents breathed fresh life into Surrealist activities.

The techniques and attitudes adopted by the poets and painters involved in the movement were seen as methods of renovating poetic and plastic imagery. The painters for the most part were stimulated and inspired to action by the literary activities which surrounded them, indeed several of the artists wrote poetry - Ernst, Brauner, Arp and Mesens, for instance. Rejecting the idea that their work was a continuation of Romanticism or Symbolism, a Surrealist image being neither a conventional metaphor nor symbol, the Surrealists were inspired by the work of a number of poets in whose work they discovered the literary precursors of their experiments; in particular they cited the writings of Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Apollinaire and Reverdy.

For Surrealist writers and artists the poet Rimbaud⁷ seemed to have formulated the true nature of the unconscious:

"Car Je est un autre. Si le ceivre s'éveille clairon, il n'y a rien de sa faute. Cela m'est évident: j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute, je lance un coup d'archet: la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs ou vient d'un bond sur la scène."⁸

Rimbaud expressed a spirit of revolt and destruction in his verse, he mocked all established conventions - the family, marriage,

morals, religion, the State; he sought a new vision of the world whereby all its possibilities could be revealed. Rimbaud saw himself as a visionary who could break the bounds of reason and culture and attain the hitherto unknowable:

"Le poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et
raisonne dérèglement de tous les sens. Toutes ces
formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie."⁹

His verse is characterized by strange images - not metaphors in the normal poetic sense, but things removed from their normal context and changing their identity, such as:

"Ainsi, toujours vers l'azur noir
Où tremble la mer des topazes"

or

"Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs,
frissons d'ombelles".¹⁰

The bizarre and often very beautiful word patterns in Rimbaud's work were much admired by Surrealists: the conjunction of disparate images was apposite to their search for a new reality which would supersede ordinary experience and found expression in Surrealist verse and collage.

The Surrealists preferred Lautréamont¹¹ because of their predilection for scandal, and their desire to discourage bourgeois admiration; they took as an explanation of the images they sought examples from Lautréamont's work:

"Beautiful as the law of arrested development
of the breast in adults, whose propensity to
growth is not in proportion to the quantity of
molecules that their organism assimilates".¹²

The essence of Lautréamont's writing had consisted in the quality of these images, in the emotion that they release and in the fantastic aura that they radiate. Lautréamont, who wrote:

"Mais sachez que la poésie se trouve partout où
n'est pas le sourire stupidement railleur de
l'homme à la figure de canard"¹³.

plunges the reader into a hell of nightmares and verbal frenzy, while the beauty of his work is totally unorthodox:

"Quelquefois, dans une nuit d'orage, pendant que des légions de poulpes ailés ressemblant de loin à des corbeaux, planent au dessous des nuages en se dirigeant d'une rame raide vers les cités des humains avec la mission de les avertir de changer de conduite, le caillou à l'oeil sombre, voit deux êtres passer à la lueur de l'éclair, l'une derrière l'autre".¹⁴

For the poets Breton, Eluard and Aragon who were to form the nucleus of the Surrealist movement, the work of Guillaume Apollinaire¹⁵ was to be a formulative influence. John Golding has written:¹⁶

"Throughout his life Apollinaire had preached the doctrine of intuition; now (referring to a lecture which Apollinaire had given in 1917)¹⁷ he suggested, perhaps paradoxically, that intuition, if investigated scientifically and methodically, could yield new results. The new methods of investigation upon which he insisted throughout the lecture and by which he felt, old myths, old truths could be revalidated for modern men, become in the hands of Surrealists, the techniques of analysis and psychic automatism."

It was Apollinaire who invented the term Surrealism¹⁸ and in the preface to Les Mamelles de Tiresias, 1917, he used the word "surreal" to designate the "human ability to create the unnatural".¹⁹ For Apollinaire, the pitfalls in art had occurred because of an imitative approach to nature. Since reality according to his understanding of it was dependent not on the physical world but on the mind's creativeness, all the arts were long overdue for a basic revolution - that of creating rather than representing the object. Thus, in his poem 'La Jolie Russe':²⁰

"Nous ne sommes pas vos ennemies
Nous voulons vous donner des vastes
et d'étranges domaines
Où le mystère en fleurs s'offre à
qui veut le cueiller
Il y a là des feux nouveaux des
couleurs jamais vues
Mille phantômes impondérables
Aux quels il faut donner de la réalité."

Apollinaire explains this further in L'Esprit Nouveau:²¹

"The new spirit then admits even daring literary experiments, and these experiments are on occasion anything but lyrical. That is why lyricism is merely a realm of the new spirit in today's poetry, which is often content with experiments, with investigation

without being concerned to give a lyrical signification.... But such research is useful, it will constitute the basis of a new realism. Surprise is our greatest new resource. It is by surprise, but the rank it accords surprise, that the new spirit is distinguished from all previous literary and artistic experiments."

The poet Reverdy²² had added a new dimension to the ideas of Lautréamont, Rimbaud and Apollinaire:

"The image is a pure creation of the spirit. It cannot be born of a comparison, but of the bringing together of two realities which are more or less remote. The more distant and just the relationship of these conjoined realities, the stronger the image - the more emotive power and poetic reality it will have."²³

The new aesthetic then expounded by the Surrealist writers derived from these literary forerunners - inspiration from the unconscious, the bringing together of two remote realities to create a new image, the creation of new objects - new ideas, the exploitation of the unusual, of surprise, of the dream and even of madness (Breton found a counterpart in Novalis: "There exist great resemblances between madness and enchantment. The enchanter is an artist of madness")²⁴ - all these new ideas condemned formal procedures in art.

It is tempting to consider that Surrealism is the direct descendant of Symbolism in the dreamlike quality of much of its imagery both in written and visual terms, and in the search for a reality beyond an everyday experience - also Surrealism was very much a literary/poetic movement. But Breton and other writers and painters did not use symbols to express their beliefs, nor were they concerned with the "mysterious" in art.

Symbolism had expressed a longing for the spiritual as a protest against naturalism. The belief was that ultimate reality is not in appearances but in the concepts underlying them. Art was to cease to be objective. Although Symbolist art continued to have reference to nature, it did so because it was considered that nature is full of meaningful phenomena whose messages need to be deciphered and whose meanings promulgated. Khan and Moreas in their magazine Le Symboliste²⁵ called for the "creative spirit in art"; they declared that the purpose of

art was to "clothe the idea in a sensuous form". The Symbolists clothed their work in mystery, in hidden meanings reserved only for the "initiated". One had to go by allusions. "To name an object", said Mallarmé, "is to destroy three quarters of the poem's delight. This after all is made from the pleasure of guessing little by little. Suggestion: that is what dreaming is."²⁶ The imagery in Symbolist work possessed a magical or mystical evocative quality, and the marks or signs referred to the invisible world of the spirits; thus Mallarmé wrote:

"It is the perfect use of this mystery which constitutes the symbol: the gradual calling to mind of an object to demonstrate a condition of the soul, or inversely choosing an object and extracting from this a condition of the soul by a process of deciphering."²⁷

For the Surrealists it was not the "mysterious" which interested them, but the "marvellous". In his article Le Merveilleux contre la mystère,²⁸ 1936, Breton attributed what he considered Symbolism's weakness to its confusion of the mysterious with the marvellous. For him it was wrong to create through verbal or visual ambiguities what he considered to be an ersatz air of mystery. For the Surrealist the true poet does not try to hide or symbolise the object but reveal it more fully. In Le Paysan de Paris²⁹ Aragon wrote:

"Il me semblait bien que un objet se transfigurait à mes yeux, il ne prenait point allure allégorique, ni le caractère du symbole; il manifestait moins une idée qu'il n'était cette idée même. Il se prolongeait ainsi profondément dans la masse du monde. Je ressentais vivement l'espoir de toucher à une serrure de l'univers".

Nevertheless, the Surrealists owed a debt to Symbolism: Breton wrote: "Such painting is obviously uniquely able to fulfil Rimbaud's expressed desire for a language which should be 'from the soul for the soul'",³⁰ and he observed in 1961 that Gustave Moreau brought the power of evocation to its highest pitch. "My discovery at the age of sixteen of the Musée Gustave Moreau influenced forever my idea of love."³¹

While the Surrealists rejected the "mysterious" in Symbolism, they also rejected Impressionism and Cubism, what Duchamp called the "retinal"³² in painting, for these movements were concerned

with expressing nature and external reality on canvas. Breton wrote:

"The perspective granted by the passage of time, taking into special consideration the objectives of the most recent artistic experiments, makes it appropriate to reconsider the situation during that era, and helps us declare null and void the facile solutions which have been impressed upon us for so long by Impressionism. (Fauvism and Cubism which both limited themselves to an external view and insisted on wasting our time with trivial objects physically within reach)".³³

Nevertheless, without Picasso's break with what Breton called the "facile connotations" of the "everyday appearance of things"³⁴ and his ability to give "materiality to what had hitherto remained in the domain of pure fantasy"³⁵ it is doubtful whether Surrealist art could have come into being: so many painters who were to be involved with the Dada and Surrealist movements had "Cubist" origins - Picabia, Duchamp, Miró, Arp, Magritte, Ernst, Schwitters - and much of the form of Cubist painting, flat planes of colour, the apparent distortion of the physical world, and of course the use of collage, were to be some of the distinguishing features of Surrealist art. On the other hand Dali, Delvaux and Magritte were to use an extremely concise, academic, illusionistic style to express their ideas - it was the content which was all important - "style" as such was said to be irrelevant. Any aesthetic consideration was ruled out entirely; this would put the work within the bounds of normal rational considerations, and the object of Surrealist art was to go beyond normal aesthetic boundaries, to new feelings, expansions of what art could embrace. Why the Surrealists felt that they were so revolutionary was that they considered that art should no longer be separate from life.

"The real should be fused with the imaginary, the new age which beauty announces is the age in which reason will no longer be contrary to the totality of desire. Many were convinced not without naïveté of the end of literature and all aesthetically founded distinctions of value. At least it was thought total man will take the place of literature, art and tables of value."³⁶

"We have no talent," Breton declared.³⁷

Surrealism started as a movement of writers and poets, and Breton's first Manifesto of Surrealism published in 1924 announced

"poetic" Surrealism as the "subject of study".³⁸ He defined Surrealism as follows:³⁹

"Surrealism, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. Encyclopaedia. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of neglected associations, in the operation of the dream, in the disinterested play of thought".

"I believe", Breton said, "in the future resolution of the states of dream and reality, in appearance so contradictory, in a sort of absolute reality or surreality, if I may so call it."

The new consciousness of the world involved an initial emphasis on psychic automatism and an enthusiasm for dream revelations. By automatism one could reach the unconscious mind where reason and logic do not hold sway. Here, according to Breton, the imagination runs free, and when the writer creates a work "automatically" it is dictated by the unconscious, and the poet has a merely passive role. Breton pointed to Freud's theories as a basis for his argument particularly with reference to dream revelations. Freud had revealed that dreams were a direct expression of the unconscious mind, while the conscious mind was asleep, and Breton saw in the dream the imagination in its primitive state and a pure expression of the "marvellous". The marvellous in art was for Breton very important:⁴⁰ "The marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful!"

A long passage in the manifesto discusses the Surrealist image. Although metaphor is natural to the human imagination, this potential, for Breton, can only be realised by allowing full play to the unconscious, and by doing this the most striking image arises from the "fortuitous juxtaposition"⁴¹ of two different realities, and "the value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained". This kind of image for Breton could not be premeditated, and he quotes what he considers to be a perfect example, Lautréamont's phrase,

"As beautiful as the fortuitous encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table".

Although the manifesto was concerned with literature, Breton does point out the possibilities of visual images of this kind:

"Everything is valid when it comes to obtaining the desired suddenness from certain associations. The pieces of paper that Picasso and Braque insert into their work have the same value as the introduction of a platitude into a literary analysis of the most rigorous sort."⁴²

Breton later stated that images such as this already existed in Max Ernst's collages, which he described in an introduction to an exhibition of Ernst's work in 1921:⁴³

"It is the marvellous faculty of attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience of bringing them together and drawing a spark from their contact: of gathering within reach of our senses abstract figures endowed with the same intensity, the same relief as other figures; and of disorienting us in our own memory, by depriving us of a frame of reference"

Although visual images could demonstrate Surrealist ideas, no real conception of Surrealist painting had been formulated in 1924. In his manifesto Breton had referred to automatic drawing being the equivalent of automatic writing, but the possibility of a new kind of art was called into question the following year by Pierre Naville in La Révolution Surréaliste.⁴⁴ Breton subsequently justified the inclusion of art in a series of articles published between 1925 and 1927⁴⁵ entitled Le Surréalisme et la peinture. Here he proclaimed a revolutionary kind of art, already existing in the work of Ernst, Masson, Arp, for instance, which rejected imitation, and which created images "from the unknown, images that are just as concrete as those that we take for granted as being known."⁴⁶ These images did not reproduce the external world but referred to a "purely internal model", in other words, the artist re-creates the world according to his own desire.

In Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism Breton later defined the two main methods by which he felt that Surrealist artists were to achieve a renovation of imagery. Firstly, by using automatism the artist would be able to reproduce the functioning of his unconscious mind where there is an "absence of contradiction, the relaxation of emotional tensions due to repression, a lack of the sense of time, and

the replacement of external reality by a psychic reality obeying the pleasure principle only".⁴⁷ The other "road" to Surrealism was the "stabilizing of dream images in the kind of still life deception known as trompe l'oeil".⁴⁸

The artists associated with the Surrealist group remained at some distance from Breton as they were unwilling to be dictated to, and their work, much of which was executed under the inspiration of the excitement generated by the group's activities, inevitably could not fall completely within the confines of verbal manipulation laid down by Breton. The fact that no guidelines existed in 1924 whereby the artist could express visually his inner life and desires and that these had to be invented, provided the creative challenge faced by Surrealist painters.

Automatism was the method adopted by Miró, Masson and Ernst to reveal the unconscious functioning of their thoughts. Between 1924 and 1925 Masson produced automatic line drawings under the influence of Breton's first Surrealist Manifesto using a pen and Indian ink: in his hands the lines were transformed into fleeting shapes of sea creatures, fishes, underwater plants or twisting bodies. Masson extended this idea in 1927, making sand and tube paintings "automatically",⁴⁹ while Miró developed automatic techniques so that the images in his paintings of the mid 1920's were reduced to a few economic lines and signed:

"Rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself or suggest itself under my brush. The form becomes a sign for a woman or a bird as I work - the first stage is free - unconscious".⁵⁰

As a direct result of reading Breton's manifesto, Ernst developed frottage,⁵¹ a process which involved taking pencil rubbings of a great variety of surfaces - pebbles, dirt, shells, watch parts, wood, leaves. Ernst wrote that using this process he was able to exclude

"all conscious mental guidance (of reason, taste, morals) reducing to the extreme the active part of that one whom we have called up till now the author of the work It is as a spectator that the author assists indifferent or passionate at the birth of his work, and watches the phases of its development."⁵²

It is difficult when considering these processes used by Miró, Masson and

Ernst to state how far they are truly automatic: indeed, Miró pointed out that the "second stage is carefully calculated",⁵³ while Breton wrote, "I will concede that it is possible for automatism to enter into the composition of a painting or a poem with a certain degree of premeditation".⁵⁴ Neither Mesens nor Magritte experimented with automatism. Their route to the Surreal was through the metamorphosis of reality itself. In this attempt to expand the mind's awareness of the latent possibilities of the everyday world, Magritte and Mesens explored the displacement of images in collage and paint, and subjected ordinary objects to extraordinary transmutations. Masson abandoned automatism in 1929, returning to paint in a Cubist style, while Miró and Ernst found a new freedom in their work not simply in the development of new techniques, but in the representation of childhood fantasies, imaginary landscapes and personages and the fusion of dream and reality.⁵⁵

Tanguy and Dalí were the two painters whose works typify the concept of "dream paintings", but they are not so much records of dreams, as dream landscapes painted in a tightly academic illusionistic style. Tanguy's works were interior landscapes peopled with abstract biomorphic forms (fig. 13). "The element of surprise," he said, "in the creation of a work of art is, to me, the most important factor, surprise to the artist himself as well as to others."⁵⁶ Dalí's paintings represent hallucinatory visions: in his oil painting/collage Le Jeu Lugubre, 1929 (fig. 14), a strange combination of visceral shapes, parts of naked limbs are set in a Chiricoesque urban background, and the photographic nature of the larger part of the picture is so intense that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the collaged items of photographs and coloured engraving from the oil painting. Dalí said:

"My whole ambition in the pictorial domain is to materialize the images of concrete irrationality with the most imperialist fury of precision - in order that the world of the imagination and of concrete irrationality may be as objectively evident, of the same consistency, of the same durability, of the same persuasive, cognoscitive and communicable thickness as that of the exterior world of phenomenal reality."⁵⁷

Underlying most Surrealist art is the systematic displacement of visual imagery, or the "juxtaposition of two more or less distant

realities" referred to in Breton's first manifesto.⁵⁸ Surrealist painters looked to Giorgio de Chirico as its pictorial creator whose work was to have a considerable impact. De Chirico had undermined the rational classical world in his metaphysical paintings executed between 1910 and 1917 in which he created scenes depicting for instance tranquil Italian streets or squares in which one point perspective is distorted and in which enigmatic and disorientating combinations of objects appear.

Max Ernst developed De Chirico's idea of displacing images from their normal environment and situating them in alien surroundings in his paintings and collages of the "proto-surrealist" period between 1921 and 1924. During these years Ernst's work demonstrated a change from a Dadaist attitude whereby the artist revealed a dissective and destructive approach to accepted meanings and pictorial references by relatively simple but harsh conjunctions of opposing realities, to a point where in 1921 "dissimilar objects began to be connected by association"⁵⁹ or metamorphosed into new configurations. In Ernst's oil painting Eléphant Célèbes, 1921, (fig. 15), for instance, a huge elephant-like mechanized creature is created out of the image of a large Sudanese corn bin with a flexible hose attached, and this is combined with a mysterious abstract image and a headless female torso. The title was inspired by the schoolboy rhyme:

"The elephant from Célèbes
Has sticky, yellow bottom grease".⁶⁰

To seek a rational meaning is impossible in this work; it is an enigma only possible in dreams or daytime reveries.

Metamorphosis of images under the influence of De Chirico appears in works by Magritte from 1925 onwards,⁶¹ and in Dali in his "critical paranoia"⁶² works of the 1930's. Breton constantly referred to De Chirico as an important forerunner of Surrealism:

"How often have we found ourselves in that square
where everything seems so close to existence and
yet bears so little resemblance to what really
exists!"⁶³

De Chirico was seen by Aragon as the initiator of Surrealist collage, for the displacement of motifs from their normal surroundings his painting "imita véritablement l'effet de collages".⁶⁴

Collage was to be an important method of renovating artistic imagery - Breton mentioned Picasso and Braque's use of collage in their work creating an element of surprise.⁶⁵ Aragon points out⁶⁶ that it is significant that all the painters who have been called Surrealist have made collage at one time or another, for by this means the artist can create images which are truly Surreal, "a conciliation of the real and the marvellous".⁶⁷ Collage, he said, was an essential criticism of the whole technique of painting and a negation of reality, for "painters used objects as words" thus abandoning all the "sentimentality" of the materials. The imagery of collage represented an "extraordinary displacement", an "unexpected disorder", a "surprising disproportion" characteristic of Surrealism.

For Max Ernst Surrealist collage is the "fortuitous encounter upon a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities".⁶⁸ In 1929 he produced two collage books, La femme 100 têtes and Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel containing 19th Century engravings which have been cut out and glued together precisely so that new and fantastic juxtapositions occur. Collage was used by Arp, Dali, Duchamp, Magritte, Man Ray, Picabia and Mesens: Magritte made only a handful of works using this medium - his paintings themselves can be considered as collages in oils however. In 1926 under the influence of De Chirico he began to make extraordinary pictures in which very ordinary everyday items - furniture, trees, wallpaper, windows, for instance - undergo witty transformations.⁶⁹ The titles in Magritte's work were important elements for they, too, were revelatory; words, titles and phrases were an integral part of Surrealist art and Magritte probes the relational identity of objects and symbols and equivalent resemblances, while the whole value of representational art is questioned (fig. 16).⁷⁰ For Surrealist painters the titles do not necessarily explain what the work is about, they give an added dimension to the disconcerting imagery of the picture or an indication as to its possible meaning.⁷¹

By 1929 Breton felt the need for a re-examination of the aims and objectives of the movement which had adopted a number of seemingly contradictory poses in particular concerning automatism. In his second manifesto Breton re-affirmed the central commitment to revolt

and to an expanded sense of reality, but he also accepted that automatism as such had its limitations. He had come to feel that automatism had served its purpose and by 1933 he went so far as to admit that it had been a "constant misfortune".⁷² The most important field of experiment in the 1930's was that of the Surrealist "object" which was a natural growth of the work of Dali and Magritte. These objects were essentially three-dimensional collages of "found" articles which were chosen for their latent poetic meaning rather than their possible visual value. As early as 1923 Breton had called for the concrete realisation of copies of objects which had hitherto only been perceived in dreams.⁷³ Surrealist objects, that is items liberated from their normal utilitarian functions, were not simply "anti-art gestures", as their forerunners, Dada objects, had been.⁷⁴ Surrealists gave the objects a value derived from their "latent possibilities" and their power of evocation. André Breton saw the possibility of several kinds of Surrealist object:⁷⁵ firstly, "ready-mades" like those of Duchamp which were objects diverted from their normal functions; then "found" objects about which there could be doubt as to their original function, or some ambiguity about their usage, or which had been weathered so that the original purpose was no longer apparent; and finally objects created by combinations of disparate elements in the same way that collages had been made.

Objects were sought and created which would have an effect of "perturbing"⁷⁶ the observer and which would distort reality. Dali's objects which he started creating in 1931 gave an impetus to the Surrealists' interest in this means of expression - Dali describes his works as "representations susceptible of being provoked as fulfilments of unconscious actions".⁷⁷ One of the strangest which he made was his Objet escatalogique de fonctionnement symbolique, 1931, which he described in Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution as follows:

"A woman's shoe inside which has been placed a cup of lukewarm milk in the middle of ductile form and excrement colour. The mechanism consists of lowering a piece of sugar on which has been painted the image of a shoe, in order to observe its dissolution - and consequently the image of the shoe in the milk. Many accessories (pubic hairs glued to a sugar cube, a small erotic photo) complete the object, which is accompanied by a reserve box of sugar and a special spoon to stir the lead pellets inside the shoe."

"This image is rationally quite indecipherable but its very lack of meaning and odd imagery is central to the notion of a form which will disturb the spectator."⁷⁸

In addition to these "perturbed" objects, the Surrealists collected and exhibited items which stirred their imagination by their peculiarity or ambiguity. Religious objects from the Pacific islands had been shown at an exhibition of Man Ray's work in 1926.⁷⁹ Breton collected masks from Alaska which had been used in ritual ceremonies, their lack of naturalism and appeal to the imagination giving them a curious appeal. Hopi Zuni Indian Kachina dolls and North West Coast masks were included in the Exposition Surréaliste d'Objets held in Paris in 1936. In this show, "objets trouvés" and primitive objects were seen side by side with creations by Dali, Dominguez, Jean and artists connected with the group. Meret Oppenheim showed her now famous fur-lined cup and saucer and Mesens showed his object Les Caves du Vatican (fig. 17), (referring to the novel by André Gide), which consisted of a slice of hollowed out tree trunk containing a couple of eggs which could be viewed through a hole in the side, while a miniature Vatican banner poked out of the top. The Surrealist object dominated the International Surrealist Exhibition held in Paris in 1938, which aimed at the creation of a total environment, and the result was completely disorientating, with the décor organised by Duchamp, who had 1,200 sacks of coal hung from the ceiling and a "Surrealist street" leading to the main hall with female mannequins dressed by Arp, Dali, Duchamp, Marron, Man Ray and others.

The War dispersed the Surrealists in Paris, many going to America where they continued their activities and helped create the basis of the post-war American movements - Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. A large number of the group returned to France in 1946, but the movement never regained the primacy it had enjoyed in the inter-war years. The concepts of Surrealism since the War have become expanded and diffused. Artists continued to explore methods developed by Surrealists before the War - chance, automatism, collage, painted images combining the real and the imaginary: Breton wrote in 1963:

"Surrealism is a continuum, an adventure obeying from the start an irresistible impulse and projecting

an unlimited objective Its vitality depends not only on the deepening of its initial insights and intentions, but still more on the level of effervescence on which it maintains itself in regard to the problems posed by the hour".⁸⁰

The movement in Paris was never to be as close knit as in the 1920s or '30s and a number of people no longer worked within its orbit, in particular Aragon and Eluard who broke with the group before the War, and Ernst who was excommunicated for accepting the Grand Prix at the Paris Biennale in 1954. After the War Surrealism in Paris continued to be centred on Breton and explored in particular primitive art, esoteric knowledge and magic. In 1947 Breton wrote, quoting from Frazer's The Golden Bough, that "Magic has contributed to the emancipation of mankind and has raised it to a broader and freer outlook with a deeper view of the world",⁸¹ and in 1957 Breton published an encyclopaedic study of occult practices and principles as shown in art from all over the world.⁸² New adherents were accepted as being Surrealists such as Enrico Baj, whose collages are witty transformations of a variety of materials, (fig. 18), Jean Degottex, whose painting re-emphasized automatism as the "expression of the artist's inner soul revealed initially by his brushstroke",⁸³ and Maurice Hirschfield, whose "naïve paintings confront us with a fascinating decantation of reality".⁸⁴ Max Walter Svanberg, who founded a Swedish version of Surrealism, the Mouvement Imaginiste, in 1950, was discovered by Breton in the early 1950s and exhibited with the Paris group in the 1960s. He wrote of his work:

"One cannot attain to total beauty - disturbing and ambiguous - except through the irrational play of a perpetual poetic and liberating figuration, in which lines and colours are no longer absolute ends, but means to a greater intensity of imagination".⁸⁵

Konrad Klapheck participated in the Phases⁸⁶ movement in the late 1950s and his work has been Surrealist orientated since 1960. Klaphek has produced startling machine images:

"The instruments he depicts are from amongst our closest auxiliaries, but the aim is to pierce through the specific use for which they are intended (telephones, sewing machines,

typewriters) in such a way as to reveal their magnified image".⁸⁷

Breton died in 1966 and since the departure of the main driving force behind the Surrealist movement it has tended to fragment into smaller units in centres all over the world, with no central review to co-ordinate ideas such as Medium⁸⁸ or Le Surréalisme Même⁸⁹ edited by Breton after the War. It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that Surrealism died with Breton, rather it is the case that Surrealist ideas have been given new life by a new generation of artists who have found inspiration in particular in Surrealist techniques and attitudes. Mesens continued to make Surrealist collages until his death in 1971. Surrealism for him was an "eternal truth"⁹⁰ resembling a religion and he remained completely committed to the movement. He exhibited with the Phases group at the Musée d'Ixelles in Brussels in the summer of 1964 and contributed to Breton's review Le Surréalisme Même in 1956 and 1957.⁹¹

FOOTNOTES

1. Main text below.
2. A term used by Oscar Dominguez from 1935 to describe the technique of monotype: paint is applied to a smooth surface and then another sheet is applied to it and peeled off immediately. Dominguez used this on paper, Ernst, Jean and Masson applied it to canvas and Bucaille to sheets of glass.
3. A Surrealist game using either words or images similar to 'Heads, bodies and legs' or 'Consequences'.
4. From 1925 the Surrealists sought a rapprochement with para-communists or with revolutionary intellectuals with the advent of the Moroccan war. Maurice Nadeau in History of Surrealism (translated from the French by Richard Havard), London, 1968, gives a good introduction to the Surrealists' involvement with left wing politics.
5. Nadeau, op. cit. p.197, Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. p.410.
6. The catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, Arts Council, London, 1978, gives details of most of the main Surrealist reviews published between 1924 and 1963. The main reviews were:

La Révolution Surréaliste, nos. 1-12, ed. André Breton, December 1924 - December 1929.

Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution, nos. 1-6, ed. André Breton, Paris, July 1930 - May 1933.

Minotaure, nos. 1-13, dir. A. Skira, Paris, February 1933 - May 1939.

Correspondances, nos. 1-22, Brussels, 1924-5.

Marie, nos. 1-3, ed. E.L.T. Mesens, Brussels, June - July, 1926.

Distances, nos. 1-3, dir. C. Goemans, Paris, February - April 1928.

London Bulletin, nos. 1-20, ed. E.L.T. Mesens, London, March 1938 - June 1940.

VVV, nos. 1-4, ed. David Hare, New York, June 1942 - February 1944.

Le Surréalisme Même, nos. 1-6, ed. André Breton, Paris, October 1956 - Spring 1959.

La Brèche, nos. 1-8, ed. André Breton, Paris, October 1961 - November 1969.

7. Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891). His best known works are Les Illuminations, 1886, and Une Saison en Enfer, 1873.
8. 'Lettre à Paul Demeny', Charleville, May 1871, published in Oeuvres, Paris, no date.
9. Ibid.
10. 'Voyelles', ibid.
11. Isidore Ducasse, known as the Count de Lautréamont (1846-1870). He published only two books, Les Chants de Malador, and Poésies, 1869. In 1936 the Surrealist painters illustrated an edition of Lautréamont's complete works.
12. Cited by André Breton Manifesto of Surrealism, 1924, translated by R. Seaver and Helen Lane, Michigan, 1969, p.38.
13. Lautréamont Les Chants de Malador, 1869-1874, reprinted Paris, 1958, p.326.
14. Ibid, p.213.
15. Wilhelm Apollinaris de Kostrowitsky, known as Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918): the most important critic of Cubism, author of numerous poems, in particular Acools, 1913 and Caligrammes, 1918.
16. Guillaume Apollinaire and the Art of the Twentieth Century', Baltimore Museum of Art News, Summer and Autumn 1963, vol. xxvi no.4, vol. xxvii no.1, p.25-26.
17. L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes, at the Vieux Colombier theatre in Paris, November 26th, 1917. Golding ibid. p.24.
18. In the programme notes for the Diaghilev ballet Parade, New York, 1917, p.29.
19. Cited Anna Balakien Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute, New York, 1959, p.85.
20. Guillaume Apollinaire Oeuvres, reprinted Paris, 1962, from his collection Caligrammes, 1918.
21. Op. cit. note 17. Cited in Nadeau op. cit. pp.55-56.
22. Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960). Dawn Ades wrote:
"Reverdy was a solitary poet of strong views and great integrity. His work and influence on the younger generation was not as great as that of Apollinaire, but has not perhaps been as widely

recognised as it deserves. In March 1918 he published his famous article "l'Image" in Nord Sud, from which Breton quoted in the first 'Surrealist Manifesto'".

Catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. note 11, p.16.

23. Cited op. cit. note 12, p.20, from Nord Sud, Paris, 1918.
24. Cited in Patrick Waldberg Surrealism, London, 1965, p.27.
25. Founded in 1886 by Gustave Khan, Jean Moreas and Paul Adam.
26. Cited by Werner Haftmann Painting in the Twentieth Century, vol. 1, translated by Ralph Mannheim, second English edition, London, 1965, p.36.
27. Ibid.
28. In his book La Clé des Champs, Paris 1953, p.11.
29. L. Aragon Paysan de Paris, Paris 1926, p.139.
30. 'Concerning Symbolism', 1958, in Surrealism and Painting translated by S.W. Taylor, London, 1972, p.357.
31. 'Gustave Moreau', ibid. pp.363 and 366.
32. Pierre Cabanne Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, translated by Ron Padgett, London, 1971, p.39.
33. Op. cit. note 30, p.360.
34. Surrealism and Painting, 1928, op. cit. note 30, p.5.
35. Ibid.
36. Fernand Alquié The Philosophy of Surrealism translated from the French by B. Waldrop, Michigan 1959, p.9.
37. Manifesto of Surrealism, op. cit. note 12, p.28.
38. Ibid. p.35.
39. Breton cited a number of painters whose work he considered demonstrated an affinity with Surrealism in the liberty of their imagination, though he said, "They are not always Surrealists", because, like certain poets of the past who had Surrealistic tendencies in their work, "they had not heard the Surrealist voice". He lists:
"Ucello from painters of the past, and in the modern era, Seurat, Gustave Moreau, Matisse

(in 'La Musique', for example), Derain, Picasso (by far the most pure), Braque, Duchamp, Picabia, Chirico (so admirable for so long), Klee, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and one so close to us, André Masson".

Ibid. p.27.

40. Ibid. p.14.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid. p.37.

43. Reprinted in Max Ernst: Beyond Painting, translated by Dorothea Tanning, New York, 1948, p.177.

44. Third Edition, 15th April, 1925.

"Everyone knows that there is no Surrealist Painting.

Neither the marks of a pencil abandoned to the accident of gesture, nor the image retracing the forms of the dream, nor imaginative fantasies of course can be described." (Op.cit. note 6, quoted p.199.)

However, reproductions of paintings and drawings by De Chirico, photographs by Man Ray and automatic drawings by Miró were included in the first issue of La Révolution Surréaliste, December 1924, and Max Morise in his article Les Yeux Enchantés published in the same number points to De Chirico's images being Surrealist, but not in their execution. Morise was attempting to find in painting some parallel to automatic writing, whereby learned visual conventions could be overcome. Breton published his reply to Naville's rejection of the notion of Surrealist painting in his text Le Surréalisme et la Peinture in La Révolution Surréaliste, no. 4, July 1925, which is referred to in the main text below.

45. Ibid. Continued in no. 7, June 1926, and in nos. 9/10, October 1927, which includes commentary on the work of Picabia, Derain, Ernst, Man Ray and Masson.

46. André Breton, Surrealism and Painting, translated by Simon Watson-Taylor (from the texts cited in notes 44 and 45), op. cit. p.4.

47. Reprinted in Surrealism and Painting, op. cit. p.70.

48. Ibid. p.72.

49. These involved a process whereby glue was spilled onto raw canvas and drawn out with the fingers; the artist then poured sand onto the surface, the stretcher was tilted and sand remained in patches. This process was repeated with different coloured sands in some instances and then paint was squeezed on the canvas. W. Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art, New York, no date, p.176.

50. Cited
λ ibid. p.156.
51. The series called Histoire Naturelle, 1925.
52. Op. cit. note 43, p.8.
53. Cited Rubin, op. cit. p.68.
54. 'Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism', op. cit. note 47, p.70.
55. Illustrated catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. pp. 211, 219-20.
56. Cited by L. Lippard, Surrealists on Art, op. cit. from Yves Tanguy, contribution to a symposium on the 'Creative Process', Art Digest (no. 8, January 1954,) p.205.
57. Salvador Dali The Conquest of the Irrational, translated from the French by David Gascoyne, New York, 1935, p.12.
58. Op. cit. note 12, p.20.
59. Lucy Lippard 'Dada into Surrealism: Notes on Max Ernst as a proto-surrealist', Art Forum, vol. 5, no. 1, Los Angeles, September 1966, p.15.
60. Cited
λ catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. p.117.
61. Chapter 6.
62. A term used by Salvador Dali to indicate the deliberately confused state of mind in which he created his works, in which the real and the imaginary are fused.
63. Surrealism and Painting, op. cit. p.13.
64. Louis Aragon, Les Collages, Paris, 1965, p.50.
65. First Surrealist Manifesto, op. cit. p.32.
66. Op.cit. note 64, p.63.
67. Ibid. p.41.
68. Op. cit. note 43, p.21.
69. He said of his painting The Human Condition, 1933,
"I placed in front of a window seen from inside a room, a painting representing exactly that part of the landscape which was hidden from view by the

painting. Therefore, the tree represented in the painting hid from view the tree situated behind it, outside the room. It existed for the spectator, as it were, simultaneously in his mind, as both inside the room in the painting, and outside in the real landscape. Which is how we see the world: we see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of it that we experience inside ourselves".

Cited by Suzi Gablik, Magritte, London 1970, p.124.

70. In L'Usage des paroles, 1929 (fig.115), Magritte points out the disjunction between an object and its symbol. By painting a pipe with the inscription on it, "This is not a pipe", the artist calls into question the whole process of representation or depiction.
71. Thus one of Max Ernst's Femme 100 têtes series is entitled 'Plus légère que l'atmosphère puissante et isolée. Perturbation ma soeur'. This collage consists of two windows out of which apparently jump a young man and woman. The man clutches a walking stick which is decorated with a mask covered with eyes, and impassively brandishes a gun.
72. 'The automatic message', translated by Guy Ducornet from the original in Minotaure nos. 3-4, Paris, December 1933, in André Breton, What is Surrealism? Selected Writings, edited by Franklin Rosemont, London, 1978, p.101.
73. André Breton, Entretiens 1913 - 1952, Paris, 1952, p.161.
74. André Breton, 'Crisis of the Object', 1936, in Surrealism and Painting, op. cit. p.279.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Cited Rubin, op. cit. p.263.
78. Cited Rubin, ibid. from Salvador Dali, 'Objets Surréalistes' in Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution no. 3, Paris, December 1931.
79. Galerie Surréaliste, March 1926.
80. 'Cavalier Perspective' 1963, translated from the French in André Breton, What is Surrealism? Selected Writings, op. cit. p.134, from La Brèche/Action Surréaliste, Paris, October 1963.
81. 'Before the Curtain', 1947, ibid. p.278, from the preface to the International Surrealist Exhibition, Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1947.

82. L'Art Magique, Paris, 1957.
83. 'The Sword in the Clouds, Degottex, 1955', in Surrealism and Painting, op. cit. p.343.
84. 'Autodidacts called "Naïves"', 1942, *ibid.* p.291.
85. M.W. Svanberg Obsédé par la femme, extract from the catalogue of the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, Galerie Danil Cordier, Paris, 1959, cited in Figurative Art since 1945, London, Thames and Hudson, 1979, p.153.
86. Review published in Paris, the first number appearing in 1954. A group of artists joined together under this name dedicated to merging both the ideas of lyrical abstraction and Surrealism, and a number of artists specifically dedicated to Surrealism have exhibited with the Phases group since 1960.
87. André Breton, Konrad Klapheck, 1965, op. cit. note 8, p.412.
88. Medium, edited by Jean Schuster, eight issues appeared in Paris between 1952 and 1955.
89. Le Surréalisme Même, edited by André Breton, five issues appeared in Paris between October 1956 and the spring of 1959.
90. E.L.T. Mesens 'The Cabinet of Curiosities' The Saturday Book, London, 1959, p.275.
91. The collage Au bord des mots 1956 appeared in Le Surréalisme Même no. 1, Paris, October 1956, and the prose/poems 'Mots rares pour salons louches' in no. 3, Autumn 1957, pp. 38, 154-156, 158-159, 161 and 165.

CHAPTER 5

Dada in Belgium

Whereas in Zurich, Berlin and Paris a number of poets and painters formed cohesive groups which were to take a specifically Dadaist attitude towards art and literature in the period between 1916 and 1921, no such group was ever formed in Brussels or Antwerp - the centres of cultural activity in Belgium. A few individual artists and writers were influenced by Dada there after the First World War - notably the poets Clement Pansaers and Paul Van Ostaïjen and the painter Paul Joostens; the two latter worked in Antwerp, where Michael Seuphor and Paul Neuhys occasionally published Dada material in their reviews Het Overzicht¹ and Ca Ira² between 1921 and 1925. Contact was made briefly with the Berlin,³ Paris⁴ and Dutch⁵ groups but no organised activities took place in Antwerp or the Northern provinces of Belgium. In Brussels only Mesens was to develop a serious interest in Dada from 1923 onwards, planning activities with Magritte and briefly interesting the poet Marcel Lecompte⁶ in the movement. Mesens made his first Dada inspired collages in 1924 and began to write poems, which, although marked by subversive imagery, were not, however, totally destructive of rationality, and he swiftly abandoned Dada for Surrealism. The review Oesophage⁷ which Mesens and Magritte published in 1925 was Dadaist, but Marie⁸ which Mesens published in 1926 indicated a desire for a rapprochement with the Surrealists and Adieu à Marie, published later that year was in effect to be the first manifestation of Surrealism in Belgium.

As has already been indicated in Chapters 3 and 4, Expressionism and Constructivism were the main areas of interest for young avant garde painters and poets in the period at the end of the Great War. Expressionism for the Flemish poet Van Ostaïjen meant a "renovated philosophy of life" in "direct relation with the community",⁹ and he was involved with a number of painters and poets in Antwerp who expressed a general desire for social emancipation and free thinking, together with a rejection of inhibiting bourgeois materialist and Christian values.¹⁰ Van Ostaïjen went to Berlin in 1919 in order to meet the Dadaists working

there and according to Rick Sauwen,¹¹ Dada was to be of importance in the evolution of Van Ostaïjen's poetry, but the political activities of Herzfelde and Huelsenbeck came as an unpleasant surprise.¹² Ostaïjen wrote only one piece in the Dada spirit, Bezette Stad¹³ (The City Investigated), giving an evocation of Antwerp cut off during German occupation, written with barbed anti-bourgeois imagery using a dislocated typescript which, according to Rick Sauwen, shows the influence of Huelsenbeck. Van Ostaïjen called his piece "poison" to be used as "contre-poison",¹⁴ though after writing it he never again took a nihilistic attitude. Dada was for him a passing phase only.

This was also to be the case with his friend the painter Paul Joostens, who gradually became aware of Dada between 1917 and 1920. Joostens always preferred to work in isolation: he was interested in Cubism, Futurism and Constructivism as well as Dadaism,¹⁵ though he never involved himself with any groups in Brussels or Antwerp. He did, however, come very near to the spirit of Dada in his work between 1919 and 1924: his rebellious attitude and desire for liberty was expressed in collages and assemblages which show the influence of Picabia's machinist imagery, Schwitters' Merz collages and Duchamp's "ready-mades" (figs. 19 and 20). George Marlier, assistant editor of the Expressionist review Sélection wrote of Joostens in 1925:

"Ce peintre est l'exemple le plus caractérisé de cette inquiétude qui continue à tourmenter de façon si profonde toute notre littérature et notre art contemporains. Éternel insatisfait il a tour à tour emprunté les voies les plus diverses, se complaisant aux recherches les plus imprévues Joostens s'est servi des matériaux les plus divers. Il eut recours à des juxtapositions de papiers colorés, de bouts d'étoffes, de lamelles d'acier, de verre à vitre, etc. A cette époque on pouvait voir Paul Joostens déambulant gravement le long des poubelles à la recherche de quelque boîte à sardines, ou d'un beau papier d'emballage".¹⁶

Joostens published a strange text Salopes, le quart d'heure de rage ou le soleil sans chapeau in 1922,¹⁷ illustrated with lino cuts and with the opening words "Bonjour Dada", and exhibited with the Ça Ira group (who had published this piece) in Antwerp in 1922, alongside Constructivist and Expressionist painters.¹⁸ The editor of Ça Ira, Paul

Neuhys, had become interested in Dada, writing an explanatory article and publishing texts by Picabia, Tzara, Crotti and Pierre de Massot,¹⁹ though he was not agreeably disposed to the automatic texts which Breton and Soupault had published in the Paris review Littérature,²⁰ precursors of the theory of automatism which Breton subsequently propounded in the first Surrealist Manifesto published in 1924. "André Breton se sent plus attiré vers rien", wrote Neuhys. "Les mots sont rouillés et les choses ont perdu sur lui tout pouvoir attraction".²¹ Ça Ira published material by the poet Clement Pansaers,²² the only writer in Belgium to that date who completely assimilated Dada into his work. At the end of the War, his friend Carl Einstein told him about the Dada groups in Berlin and Paris, and Pansaers went there some time at the end of 1920.²³ Disenchanted with what he found in Germany (Sauwen considers that this was probably because of the "politicization" of the movement),²⁴ Pansaers found the activities of the Paris group much more sympathetic, and Breton, Aragon and Soupault persuaded him to join.

Pansaers' writings demonstrate a disgust for art -

"L'art et toute tendance artistique n'est que de la MERDE".²⁵

Aragon later wrote of the violence of his texts and his "esprit de défi".²⁶

Pansaers wrote that in his work:

"J'y démontrai que la fantaisie détruit radicalement la logique en ligne droite des vieux philosophes et comme succédané la psychologie donnant comme résultat la destruction de toute la littérature les mots dans le délayage ont perdu tout sens - puisque à sens multiples - la syntaxe est rédigée par les grammairiers d'après les auteurs donc rien de fixe et ma syntaxe ne correspond pas à celle des autres".²⁷

In his poem "JE" from his series "Je Blennorrhagie"²⁸ words are deprived of their rational and logical meanings and become sound images, while new words are invented for their sonorific value:

"Je indentité kalori - géologique
portée diastatique post retour d'âge accoucha
noëlement genuit
annonce thermo-dernuque au cul
d l'édition après-minuit
illumination infra-rouge de menstrues
en tatouage crucifière parmi

les sages-femmes chiromanciennes
à sondes prodiguez et autres mo-
rales en conserve superdrea d hougrique"

Pansaers corresponded with Tzara in Paris, and in February 1920 Tzara classified him as one of Dada's "présidents".²⁹ Pansaers published work in Littérature³⁰ and stayed in Paris between August and December 1920 where he met Breton and Picabia, and probably Aragon and Tzara.³¹ He had planned a Dada manifestation in Brussels which would take place at a small theatre "La Bourbonnière" and would include a performance of Satie's 'Boeuf sur le toit', Dadaist pictures and posters,³² but the projected manifestation never took place, probably because of lack of funds. By April 1921 Pansaers had moved permanently to Paris, though by April 25th he quit the Dada movement at the time of the clash between Breton and Tzara - he wrote to his friend Maurice Van Essche in May 1921, "Notez que le combat entre pre et post Dada se livrera avec les armes".³³ The exhibition of Max Ernst's collages in the spring of 1921 did not interest him at all³⁴ and he had a violent disagreement with Breton about art - Breton was at this time continuing with his experiments with automatism. Later that year Pansaers published an article on Dada in a special edition of Ça Ira dedicated to Dada "sa naissance, sa vie, sa mort":³⁵ he wrote:

"A Paris je devais découvrir bientôt que j'étais loin de Dada, car le groupe des dadaïstes épatait le bourgeois de Paris, par les mêmes moyens qu'employait ce bourgeois, et depuis longtemps, mais supérieurement alors, pour exploiter son idéologie bourgeoise".³⁶

By this time Pansaers was becoming seriously ill, his problem being identified as glandular tuberculosis. He was in great financial difficulty, his wife had left him and his son was being cared for by nuns. He published nothing in 1922 and having contemplated suicide earlier in the year, died in October.

The work of Ostaijen, Joostens and Pansaers reflected their search for some new and liberating means of expression and their reaction against society as they found it at the end of the First World War. Pansaers in particular took a totally nihilistic attitude, while Joostens and Van Ostaijen were influenced by some of the radical techniques used

by Dada printers and poets. They did not by any means form a Belgian group nor did their brief involvement with Dada lead them eventually to adhere to Surrealism. Mesens' 'Dada' activities during these years, however, led to the establishment of firm links with Paris and the foundation of the Surrealist group in Brussels in 1926.

Mesens had contributed poetry to Ça Ira³⁷ (though one must assume that this was under a pseudonym as it has not been traced). He visited Paris in 1921 and made contact with the members of the Dada group.³⁸ By early 1922 he had already begun to be converted to a Dadaist view of art as a letter to him from the poet Marcel Lecompte reveals:³⁹

"Nous avons tellement le temps de travailler -
il y a en nous une force de destruction qui fera
nous ne saurions jamais apprendre à vivre."

Whatever he and Lecompte had planned did not take place, but the following year Mesens contributed his first Dada text (fig. 21) to the review Mécano published in Leiden.⁴⁰ Copying Van Doesberg, who adopted the name I.K. Bonset as editor of the review, Mesens used the names Cornelis Nelly instead of his own initials. (Nelly was the Christian name of Van Doesberg's wife.) Van Doesberg had founded Mécano to "poke fun at the solemnities of the Bauhaus"⁴¹ and the final edition in which Mesens' piece was printed was dedicated to "Holland's contribution to Dada" and contained work both by Dadaists and Neo-plasticists. Mesens' piece was written in rather bad Dutch and is not an outstanding example of Dada writing.⁴² However, it is interesting inasmuch as it chastises Van Doesberg for imagining that he can set himself up as a Dadaist while he is still involved with De Stijl and Neo-plasticism, "the pro-anti syphilis cultural movement" (fig. 21).

In December 1923 Mesens opened Le Cabinet Malador which functioned as a cinema and small art gallery⁴³ until February 1925. Magritte showed some of his early "nus construits" there, and also at Geert Van Bruane's gallery "La Vierge Poupine". The Cabinet Malador was only a small enterprise⁴⁴ and meanwhile Mesens continued to publish music reviews for Sélection, though a letter⁴⁵ which he wrote to Tristan Tzara in 1924 indicated that he had requested Tzara's permission to publish his Dada manifestos⁴⁶ in Sélection. These were, however, not

al

reproduced, one must assume because the management of the magazine was concerned to promote Expressionist art and anti-art manifestos would not be suitable material.

In the summer of 1924, Lecompte, the poet Camille Goemans,⁴⁷ Mesens and Magritte planned jointly to produce a Dadaist periodical Période, which was announced in a prospectus published by Mesens (fig. 22):

"une revue gratuite en somme
tout le monde le recevra
mais on n'est pas arrivé encore
malgré ou parce que
à mépriser le geste du donateur
puisque sans lui
rien de fait
nous le sommes et n'en
attendons pas moins de vous."

The review was never published because Goemans and Lecompte were persuaded by their friend the poet Paul Nougé to join with him in the publication of "Surrealistic" tracts Correspondances.⁴⁸ Lecompte gave Mesens no reason for abandoning the idea of publishing Période and Mesens never found out why.⁴⁹ A Letter from Lecompte simply notified Mesens of his intention not to go ahead with the review.⁵⁰ Mesens and Magritte then decided to publish a review themselves and Mesens went to Paris to discuss the project with Picabia. Mesens and Magritte had already contributed Dada aphorisms to the last issue of 391.⁵¹

"Pourquoi payer le luxe de votre fournisseur ou
son ignorance?

Pour être un penseur il faut penser.

Pourquoi payer votre fournisseur ou son
ignorance?

Das Leben ist ein schöne abord.

Pourquoi payer le luxe ou son ignorance?

Tout appel non justifié expose aux poursuites
judiciaires et du Salon des Tuileries.

Pourquoi payer son ignorance?

C'est ainsi que les images ont une vague odeur
de fromages.

Pourquoi?

Saviez vous qu'il y a une Adaption Française?"

The new review to be called Oesophage was slow in publication largely because of lack of funds, but eventually appeared in March 1925. Mesens and Magritte used material by Tzara, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Arp, collages by Ernst and Schwitters and a drawing by Picabia. The provocative nature of the review was indicated by Tzara's announcement that he "vient de publier un nouveau manifeste sous le pseudonyme d'André Breton, le manifeste du Surréalisme"⁵² and it continued the spirit of the last issue of 391 which had attacked the emerging Surrealist movement. Thus Tzara wrote, "La Merde, c'est du réalisme le surréalisme, c'est l'odeur de la merde". The anarchic tone of the review is set by two news items which were included from the New York Herald Tribune; one concerning a girl arrested for cutting the wrists of a girl of six, of poisoning a woman with arsenic, of attempting to poison others and of inducing the deaths of her two sisters by making them consume ground glass in their food;⁵³ the other article describes the work of an American woman who started a school where "ladies" could learn to whistle - the school evidently had a large number of people registering for the course. The layout of the review is reminiscent of Picabia's 391 with a typescript of varying sizes and texts and pictures inserted at right angles to one another. Mesens and Magritte published their "Five Commandments" which, as well as rejecting conventional values and creating a witty sense of confusion, in true Dada fashion, negate Dada itself:

1. In politics we will practise autodestruction with all our might, and trust in human virtues.
2. All our collaborators must be handsome so we can publish their portraits.
3. We will energetically protest all erudite decadence, THE CHARTER HOUSE OF PARMA, Dadaism and its substitutes, morality, union of North and South, syphilis in its various stages, coraine, scratchy hairs, compulsory education, polyrhythm, polytone, polynesia, carnal vices and particularly homosexuality in all forms.

4. Our freshness will submit neither to second-hand tubes nor to our friends' wives.
5. Under all circumstances we will refuse to explain precisely what will not be understood.

Our enterprise is as mad as our hopes. Having taken the greatest precautions with things of the least importance, we will claim nothing; love of the most superior girls is more important. "Hop-la, Hop-la", that is our motto".⁵⁴

During this time Mesens and Magritte took part in Dadaist gestes, creating disturbances at concerts, conferences and various public events, as anti-art, anti-bourgeois, anti-conformist gestures. On one occasion they were arrested and locked up in a police station overnight, having urinated over the balcony onto the stalls below at a performance of *La Bohème* at the Théâtre de la Monnaie.⁵⁵

The final enterprise which Mesens undertook before the founding of the Surrealist group was the publication of Marie (figs. 23 and 24) in June and July 1926. While the review contains material by those ex-Dadaists who had set themselves in opposition to Breton, Tzara, Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes, it also defends those painters in Breton's group, Ernst, Miró and Masson, whose work was not included in the annual Salon of Contemporary Art at Antwerp (May 15th, 1926). In an editorial⁵⁶ 'Art Contemporain et Jeune Peinture Française' Mesens remarks:

"Reservé cette année à la "jeune peinture française" celle-ci est brillamment représentée par l'Espagnol Picasso, le Roumain Brancusi, les Russes Chagall, Pascin et Zadkine, les Polonais Kisling et Marcoussis, l'Italien Modigliani Pourquoi le visiteur le plus indifférent ne s'inquiéterait-il de l'absence du Français Max Ernst, du Français Juan Gris, du Français Joan Miró, du Français Hans Arp, du Français Man Ray, du Français André Masson même et de Henri Rousseau le douanier français? Mais nous ne sommes guère étonnés....."

The first number also contains an account by Mesens of the incident at the ballets Russes in which the Surrealists, who Mesens states "ont pris aujourd'hui la place des dadaïstes", demonstrated against the fact that Max Ernst and Joan Miró had painted the décor.⁵⁷ Although Marie also includes material by those opposed to Breton, it does not

have Dada overtones: Ribemont-Dessaignes' text 'Hommes' refers to Dada in terms indicating its demise -

"Il faut reconnaître que la Poésie n'a jamais été
si ardent que depuis le passage du météore dadaïste.
Les cendres sont un excellent engrais".⁵⁸

José Vovelle has made the point that Marie has been considered to be among the "métamorphoses historiques de Dada"⁵⁹ and it is evident that the review marks a move towards Surrealism. Although nothing was published in Marie by Breton, an extract from an article by Aragon which had appeared in La Révolution Surréaliste⁶⁰ was included, together with a note by Marcel Lecompte who had earlier abandoned Mesens and Magritte for the Correspondances group. Later in 1926 the authors of Correspondances joined Mesens and Magritte to publish a small tract Adieu à Marie (published by Mesens) marking the first collaboration of those who were to form the Surrealist group in Belgium.⁶¹

During this period Mesens developed valuable contacts in Paris and according to Blavier played the role of "opening the windows in Belgium to the areas of thought emanating from Paris".⁶² Mesens introduced the "savoir-faire"⁶³ from France in the production of Oesophage and Marie and eventually finalised the links between the Brussels and Paris Surrealists in 1927.⁶⁴ Mesens also consolidated his own attitude towards art and literature between 1924 and 1926; his collages demonstrated a subversive and anarchic attitude very much influenced by Max Ernst, while his verse is reminiscent of that of Tzara: for instance Tzara's poem 'L'Indicateur des chemins de coeur' was published in Marie nos. 2-3:

"Magique démarche des nuits incomplètes
des nuits avalées en hâte, de boissons amères
avalées en hâte
nuits enfouies sous le terreux paillason
de nos lents passions
rêves arides par de longs regards de
corbeau, becquetés".

Mesens' poem 'Les amoureux' written some time between 1923 and 1929⁶⁵ indicates a taste for subversive imagery, tinged with a certain sentimentality.

"Les casseurs de longues vues maritimes
Et les joueurs de gong orientaux
Se rendent par les soirs de printemps

Dans les cimetières municipaux
Ou d'allègres jeunes gens
Torréfient du café

Ils boivent ensemble la liqueur des morts
Les yeux mouillés l'horizon et la mer
Abordent à la table poussiéreuse et amère
Ou se taisent les objets familiers."

While Dada was influential on Mesens' own creative work and his interest in post-Dada activities led directly to the foundation of the Surrealist group in Brussels in 1926, Van Ostaïen returned to writing lyrical poetry influenced by Apollinaire⁶⁶ and as a critic he gave support to Expressionist painters. Paul Joostens turned to mysticism in 1924⁶⁷ though much later in the 1950's he returned to Dadaism in his collages and assemblages. The earlier work of Pansaers between 1919 and 1921 which was totally negative and destructive inevitably led to its own demise and died with its author.

FOOTNOTES

1. Published in Antwerp between 1921 and 1925. A special edition of Het Overzicht was published in February 1929 entitled Cabaret in which material by Tzara and Schwitters was included.
2. Published in Antwerp between 1920 and 1922.
3. Both Pansaers and Van Ostaijen visited Berlin in 1919 and 1920.
4. Pansaers went to Paris in 1920.
5. Michael Seuphor, editor of Het Overzicht, wrote that in June 1921,
"Ma situation intellectuelle lorsque la conférence de Van Doesburg me révéla, du même coup, le dadaïsme et la plastique pure de Mondrian. J'en fus, on l'imagine, profondément bouleversé".
'Perspective sur Dada, années vingt', Cahiers Dada Surréalisme, no. 1, Paris, 1966, p.44. He continued by stating that,
"De Hollande nous parvenaient régulièrement les numéros de la revue De Stijl, avec des poèmes dadaïstes ou phonétiques de Van Doesburg lui-même (sous le pseudonyme de I.K. Bonset)". (p.45)
6. He was a friend of Magritte who had contributed poetry to the Constructivist review Sept Arts in 1922 and was to be a member of the Surrealist group in Brussels from 1926 onwards.
7. One edition was published. Brussels, 1925.
8. Three numbers dated June and July 1926.
9. Phil Mertens, 'Atmosphere and climate around Paul Joostens' catalogue, Paul Joostens, 1889-1966, International Cultureel Centrum Antwerp, June 26th - September 12th, 1976, Antwerp, p.153.
10. Emile Langui, Expressionism in Belgium, translated from the French by Alistair Kennedy, Brussels, 1971, p.91. The painters and poets included Herman Vos, Eugene de Bock, Wies Moens, Gaston Burssens.
11. 'Esprit Dada en Belgique', Cahiers Dada Surréalisme, special number dedicated to Au temps de Dada, problèmes du langage, no. 4, Paris 1970, pp. 122-123.

12. Ibid.
13. Published in Antwerp in 1921.
14. Sauwen, op. cit. note 11, p.123.
15. Phil Mertens, op. cit. note 9, p.153.
16. La Nervie, nos. 1-3, Brussels, January - March 1925, pp 18-19.
17. Published by Ça Ira, Antwerp, 1922.
18. Phil Mertens op.cit. note 9, p.154.
19. Ça Ira, no. 14, 1921.
20. The first had appeared in Littérature, no. 7, Paris, September 1919.
21. Op.cit. note 19, p.60.
22. 'Paradoxes blennorrhagiques de Lampidro', March 1921. A list of Clement Pansaers' publications can be found in Sur un aveugle mur blanc et autres textes, Lettres à Tzara, Picabia et Van Essche, Brussels 1972, pp. 85-88.
23. Rick Sauwen, op. cit. note 11, p.118.
24. Ibid.
25. Clement Pansaers, letter to Picabia, November 12th, 1920, op. cit. note 22, p.45.
26. 'Note sur Couillandoville et Crotte de Bique', ibid. p.67.
27. 'Après six mois de meditation sur un aveugle mur blanc' 1916, reprinted op. cit. note 22, pp. 9-10.
28. Ibid. pp.11-27.
29. Bulletin Dada, no. 6, Paris, February 1920.
30. 'Ici finit la sentimentalité', Littérature, no. 4, Paris, June 1920, aphorism 'La suite à la génération suivante', ibid. no. 17, December 1920, 'Zinzin', ibid. no. 19, May 1921.
31. Op. cit. note 22, p.86.
32. Letter from Pansaers to Picabia, October 19th, 1920, ibid. p.42.
33. Ibid. p.57.

34. Ibid. p.57.
35. 'Dada et moi', Ca Ira, no.16, November 1921, pp 11-115.
36. Ibid. p.114.
37. He mentioned this in a list of reviews to which he had contributed giving the names only and not the dates or place of publication. The list is very brief and gives only an outline of the material which he published between 1922 and 1970. Manuscript, collection George Melly, London.
38. Chapter 1.
39. Dated March 5th, 1922, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels; see also note 6.
40. 'En Scheldwooden Vloein' Mecano, nos. 4-5, Leiden, 1923, no pagination.
41. Dawn Ades, catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, p.125.
42. Mesens was a French speaking Belgian, though he had a working knowledge of Flemish.
43. André Blavier 'Le groupe surréaliste' in La Belgique Sauvage published by 'Phantomas', Brussels, 1972, p.210.
44. Ibid.
45. Dated 1924, no day or month given. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
46. The first was published in Dada no. 3, Zurich, December 1918.
47. Camille Goemans was a friend of Lecompte. He was subsequently a member of the Belgian Surrealist group and between 1927 and 1930 directed the Galerie Goemans in Paris where he exhibited work by Arp, Magritte, Tanguy, Ernst, Miró and Man Ray.
48. *see?* Chapter 6.
49. André Blavier in 'Le Surréalisme en Belgique' writes that Mesens later wrote "Une chose assez obscure se passe le groupe se scinde en deux", but does not cite the source for this comment. Europe, Revue Mensuelle, special number dedicated to Surrealism, Paris, November - December 1968, p.198.
50. Dated 1924, Brussels. Collection Marcel Dubucq.
51. Vol. XIX, no. 4, Paris, October 1924, p.130.

52. No pagination.
53. This tale anticipates the Surrealists' interest in the case of Violette Nozières who murdered her parents in 1933 and whose trial in December of that year was commemorated in a booklet published by Mesens (éditions Nicolas Flamel) containing poems and drawings by Arp, Brauner, Breton, Dali, Eluard and Mesens.
54. Translation by Lucy M. Lippard. This was cited in Surrealists on Art edited by Lucy M. Lippard, New Jersey, 1970, p.154.
55. Christian Bussy, 'Le Surréalisme en Belgique: Entretiens de Christian Bussy avec Marcel Marien', in Anthologie du Surréalisme en Belgique, Paris, 1972, p.16.
56. Marie, no. 1, Brussels, June 1926, no pagination.
57. Miró and Ernst had collaborated on the décor of Constant Lambert's ballet Romeo et Juliette for Deaghilev's Ballets Russes. This was considered to be inimical to the subversive ideas of Surrealism and the opening of the ballet on May 4th, 1926 was broken up by a demonstration by members of the Surrealist group. Miró and Ernst were reinstated, however, a few days later. Marcel Jean, History of Surrealist Painting, London, 1959, p.156.
58. Marie, nos. 2-3, Brussels, July 1926, no pagination.
59. Le Surréalisme en Belgique, p.17. Vovelle cites Noel Arnaud Critique, Paris, July 1958.
60. The review published by the Paris Surrealists between December 1924 and December 1929 (12 numbers). The extract by Aragon appears in Marie no. 1, June 1926, though it is not stated from which edition of La Révolution Surréaliste the item is taken.
61. No date is given on the tract Adieu à Marie: it is given as number 4 of the review Marie and Blavier (op. cit. note 43, p.214) considers that it was published at the end of 1926 or early in 1927. The tract contains texts by Nougé, Souris, Magritte and Goemans, together with two photographs by Mesens.
62. Op. cit. note 43, p.203.
63. Ibid.
64. Chapter 6.
65. This poem was included in a collection entitled 'Défense de Pleurer', 1923-25, which title Mesens had originally intended to use for a group of piano pieces. Abandoning his idea of becoming a composer, he gave the title to his collection of poems which was published by 'Le Terrain Vague', Paris, 1959.

- 66. Op. cit. note 10, p.91.
- 67. Ibid. p.214.

CHAPTER 6

Surrealism in Belgium

The Surrealist group in Belgium was established towards the end of 1926 and was to include Mesens and Magritte together with those poets who had published the Correspondances tracts over the previous two years. In 1927 they were joined by the radical lawyer and poet Jean Scutenaire¹ and subsequently attracted a number of new adherents to Surrealism, in particular Marcel Marien,² Paul Colinet,³ Paul Delvaux⁴ and Jane Graverol.⁵ Over the next twelve years Mesens was indefatigable both in his work as an art dealer in Brussels promoting Surrealist painters (which is discussed in Chapter 8) and as a polemicist for the Belgian group. He formalised contacts between the Brussels group and André Breton early in 1927, and as a result of numerous visits to Paris between 1927 and 1937 kept the Brussels group constantly in touch with the activities of their counterparts, which resulted in a free flow of ideas between the two centres of activity. Mesens arranged for Surrealist literature and art to be presented in reviews - in particular in Variétés 1929, a special edition of the review devoted to Surrealism, and Documents 34.⁶ He published the collection of texts and illustrations by members of both the Paris and Brussels groups entitled Violette Nozières⁷ in 1933 (fig. 25), was instrumental in the publication in Brussels of the Bulletin Internationale du Surréalisme (fig. 26) in 1935,⁸ and signed several tracts and manifestos alongside other Belgian Surrealist painters and poets, which will be considered below.

Surrealism in Belgium had two sources; on the one hand the subversive and derisive attitudes of Dada which influenced Mesens, Magritte, Scutenaire and Colinet,⁹ while on the other hand the critic André Blavier notes a taste for Lautréamont and the influence of Paulhan and Valéry¹⁰ in the Correspondances texts. These were written by Paul Nougé, Camille Goemans and Marcel Lecompte and the first was published in November 1924.¹¹ The tracts, which might loosely be called Surrealist, were written under the influence of Paul Nougé and were "polemical, philosophical and extremely obscure".¹² The three writers were engaged

in methodically pulling to pieces and reorganizing works of well known French writers in order to "re-vitalize" them. These tracts were aimed at forcing the reader to a greater effort than usual, which should result in an intensification of abstract thought.¹³ Marcel Lecompte commented later¹⁴ that the group wanted to show authors how by "re-vivifying" their works in these tracts they could "de-crystallize" their thoughts and feelings. The method used by the group consisted of extracting words, phrases or prepositions from a text, moving the order or altering the whole sequence. In order to follow the changes made by Nougé and his friends one needed to have detailed knowledge of the original texts used. The tracts were written "pour déranger son lecteur, pour troubler ses petites ou ses grandes habitudes".¹⁵

Although sharing the spirit of revolt with the Paris group - for Nougé: "Nous condamnions complètement . . . art pour art" in favour of liberty and revolt,¹⁶ and seeking new forms of expression: "Nous nous aidons à inventer sur le réel deux ou trois idées efficaces",¹⁷ the Belgians nevertheless did not place any confidence in automatism, which Nougé saw as literature in disguise. In 1925 Nougé wrote to Breton to the effect that in automatic writing,

"Les mots sont sujets à se grouper selon des affinités particulières, lesquelles ont généralement pour effet de leur faire recréer le monde sur son vieux modèle".¹⁸

Later in 1929 Nougé said, apropos of the Surrealist idea that the artist or poet is simply a spectator at the birth of ideas which flow from the unconscious, that:

"Il est grand temps de faire remarquer que la notion de 'spectateur' qui semble jouer un rôle si important dans certaines pensées, est bien l'une des plus grossières qui sortent".¹⁹

During 1924 and 1925 when the Correspondances tracts were published, there was, Mesens later stated, general confusion among the avant-garde painters and poets in Belgium. There were, he said, "various zones" of influence, Futurists, Abstractionists and Expressionists, writers who followed Apollinaire or Cocteau, and Mesens and Magritte considered that the Correspondances group was a "very strange enterprise" and neither these two or anybody else understood what they wanted.²⁰

Mesens and Magritte at this time formed what Mesens was later to describe as an "unfriendly popular front"²¹ though in 1926 the two friends eventually joined the Correspondances writers because "they were all now interested in Surrealism and felt that they could all be useful to one another".²² By this time Magritte had abandoned his quasi-Cubist paintings and produced his first Surrealist work in 1926, Le Jockey Perdu (fig. 27) - the expression of a poetic idea rather than an expression of what can be seen in the external world.

This painting, and the works of Magritte which followed, had been directly influenced by De Chirico's Chant d'amour which Mesens and Magritte had come across in a review Les Cahiers Libres.²³ In this painting De Chirico insolently juxtaposed a surgeon's rubber glove with a plaster head of the Apollo Belvedere and a sphere, the whole being set against the blank side of a building in a small Italian square whose perspective is distorted. Mesens wrote,

La rencontre de l'oeuvre de Chirico fut tellement bouleversante qu'elle détermina le point de départ des recherches de Magritte, et bientôt naquirent Le Jockey Perdu, Une Panique au Moyen Age, La Statue Volante, etc. Pour moi, elle mit fin à une crise aiguë en me permettant de me détourner de la musique, brusquement et sans regrets".²⁴

For the Surrealists in Paris, De Chirico's work had summarised that drastic reshuffling of reality which Lautréamont had expressed in his imagery. Magritte said,

"It's a total rupture of the mental habits common to all artists imprisoned by their talent, by all their little aesthetic specialities. It's a new vision of things, in which the spectator recognises his isolation and hears the silence of the world".²⁵

From this time onwards, Magritte was to paint works in which he created new objects or transformed old ones, in which he juxtaposed disparate objects and people, or in which he associated words with strange images.

"I painted pictures", he said,²⁶ "in which objects were represented with the appearance they have in reality, in a style objective enough to ensure that their upsetting effect - which they would reveal themselves capable of provoking owing to certain means utilized - would be experienced in the real world whence the objects had been borrowed. This by a perfectly natural juxtaposition."

The first joint activity in Brussels which can be accurately dated²⁷ was the publication of the tract Quelques Turpitudes²⁸ on October 6th, 1926, aimed as an attack on a modernist group of writers and poets, 'Le Groupe Libre'. The tracts were distributed at a 'Groupe Libre' soirée held at the Salle Mercalis in Brussels where the Surrealists created uproar objecting to the Cocteau inspired entertainment Tam Tam²⁹ which was being performed. The Surrealists arrived at the hall in an old mail coach driven by four horses. They arranged for two tramps to give each member of the audience a tract and a dead flower (Mesens had collected the flowers from dustbins). They then proceeded to shout and interrupt the performance while Van Bruane, an art dealer friend of the group, read out each line which the actors had to speak moments before the actors were due to deliver them.³⁰

In their tract Quelques Turpitudes the Surrealists had announced "Apollinaire, Tzara, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Aragon" as their masters rather than Cocteau, and later in November they published another tract Mariées de la Tour Eiffel,³¹ attacking a Cocteau piece of that name which was being performed at the Casino St. Josse, Brussels. This work, which consisted of a series of short burlesque spectacles, had originally been given its first performance in Paris in June 1921, where the Dadaists led by Tzara (Breton was not present) used the occasion for a noisy demonstration.³² The Belgian group proclaimed in their tract Mariées de la Tour Eiffel that the show was a little exhibition "ordurière" and that they were absolutely indifferent to the theatrical enterprises of commercial travellers dressed up as literature. The group stated that they could not allow repugnant caricatures of images which touched the essence of their lives to be shown without protest.³³

At this stage in the development of the Surrealist group in Brussels there is no mention of André Breton or Paul Eluard in either of the two tracts referred to above, or in Marie published earlier in the year by Mesens. In the summer of 1925, Breton, Eluard and Max Morise³⁴ had paid a visit to Brussels to meet Nougé and the Correspondances group who subsequently signed the tract La Révolution d'abord et toujours³⁵ against

the Moroccan war; but Breton and his friends found the views of the Correspondances group somewhat disconcerting:

"Vous vous en teniez abstraitement à une mystification de chacun par ses moyens propres, de la discrétion active, enfin de toutes falsifications. Un certain défaitisme nécessaire ne nous a jamais semblé suffisant."³⁶

Neither Mesens nor Magritte had been in contact with Breton. Mesens had much earlier published a criticism of Breton in a review published in Antwerp³⁷ condemning automatic writing and vision and as a result of this he received "two or three lines of insults" from Aragon³⁸ in 1923 which he subsequently published in Oesophage: "Vous déplorer monsieur? eh bien, je vous emmerde". Mesens had also been rebuked by Eluard whom he had approached early in 1923 asking if he could set some of his verse to music. Eluard sent a rude reply to his request:

"Monsieur,
Si vous me connaissez un peu, vous ne me demanderiez pas l'autorisation de faire de la musique à mes dépens.
La poésie ne se met pas en musique.
C'est assez: déjà qu'on la mette en vers.
Il faut m'en croire

Paul Eluard

J'apprends, entre temps, que, non content d'être un musicien vous êtes un méprisable individu.
Je vous informe donc qu'à la première occasion, je vous ferai rentrer votre piano à queue dans le cul".³⁹

Mesens evidently sent an equally rude reply to Eluard which the latter was so pleased with that he subsequently made his peace with Mesens,⁴⁰ and the two men were to become great friends in the late 1920s.

Meanwhile it is clear that Mesens was not on particularly good terms with Breton, Eluard and Aragon in the early 1920s and so it is not surprising that when he and Magritte joined up with the Correspondance group their work should be dedicated to Tzara and Ribemont-Dessaignes who had themselves split from Breton in 1921. However, by 1926 Mesens desired to create firm links with Breton's Surrealist group and in October of that year Aragon arranged for Mesens to meet Breton in Paris.⁴¹ When

the meeting took place is not known; probably it was late in 1926 or early 1927 and Mesens much later recalled what happened in his curious brand of English:

"Aragon, the man who insulted me by letters who arranged to make me meet Breton at the Gallery Surréaliste, rue Jacques Callot which was their gallery, which didn't live very long, kept by a very sloppy fourth-rate writer, because this gentleman didn't want to work, and it's boring to be in a gallery from ten o'clock to six you know, it's not a great pleasure I remember I spent the whole afternoon with Aragon and the poet Camille Goemans at a café called La Palette, corner of the Rue de Seine and the Rue Jacques Callot where was the Gallery Surréaliste. And at six o'clock sharp Aragon gave the signal to go next door, and there was the whole tribunal. And Breton received me very gently, and I fell in tears, and immediately there was one fellow called Robert Desnos coming out of a corner starting to curse and to insult me saying "He is a friend of Tzara he is so" - but this man was always drugged, or drunk, so Breton simply said, with one hand "Keep quiet". And he saw my tears rolling. I was much younger than those people, you see and my emotion, and the evening went very well through though, and we met from that day. I went to their meetings at the café Cyrano in Monmartre".⁴²

Subsequently the poet Camille Goemans moved to Paris and opened the Galerie Goemans there which lasted until 1930 and exhibited work by Surrealist painters including Magritte.⁴³ Goemans persuaded Magritte to move to France where he settled at Perraux sur Marne in August, near Paris rather than in the centre as he preferred to live quietly⁴⁴ and, according to Mesens, hated a Bohemian existence.⁴⁵ Although Magritte was evidently very bored in Perraux, in spite of his frequent visits to Brussels,⁴⁶ the period he spent in France was very productive, though Mesens considered that the Parisian Surrealists were not very enthusiastic about his work.⁴⁷ Mesens recalled that:

"The spirit of French Surrealism belonged completely to André Breton,"

and referring to Breton's first manifesto Mesens said that:

"It entirely refers to automatism and Magritte has always negated automatism. He has always said 'I am not an automatic painter. I imagine my

pictures, I make sketches before and measure the weight of what I am going to say, but this weight was not a plastical weight but was to bring two or three objects into action".⁴⁸

Mesens continued by stating that Magritte painted two of his most important pictures while staying in France, Au seuil de la liberté 1929,⁴⁹ and L'Annonciation 1929.⁵⁰ In the former work diverse images are put together in sections to form a kind of pictorial wallpaper in a corner of a room in which a cannon is placed aiming at the wall. Each motif on the wall, clouds, windows, planks of wood, for instance, retains its integrity yet falls into insignificance in the heterogeneous collection of images. L'Annonciation contains three motifs which Magritte constantly reused - filigree cut paper, jingle-bells and balusters which have become relatively enormous when set in a rocky landscape (or "bilboquets", as Magritte would call them)⁵¹ appear in various guises in Magritte's paintings, sometimes with an eye⁵² sometimes as a substitute tree,⁵³ and sometimes as a kind of huge spectator of events such as in Le Jockey Perdu, 1926 (fig. 27), and in L'Annonciation where it appears to lurk menacingly among the natural scenery.

The work of Nougé and Magritte from 1926 onwards demonstrates the distinguishing feature of Belgian Surrealism, that is the determination to fight reason with its own weapons. Like the group in Paris, they were joined together by a "desire for subversion" and for revolt. They united, Mesens observed,⁵⁴ not only to test others but to test themselves. They wanted to "intervene in every region possible in human activity". The group stood for the "poetic" as opposed to the "rational" - a characteristic of the group's ideas, Marcel Marien wrote,⁵⁵ was,

"D'introduire par machination prudente un nouvel amour, de nouvelles passions, de nouveaux vices, de nouvelles formes spirituelles dans le monde".

The route to the marvellous for the Belgians was not by chance or automatism, but by carefully premeditated means. For Magritte this was by carefully painting objects, people, or scenes from the real world in fantastic juxtapositions; for Mesens it was in his carefully constructed collages and poems. Nougé's search was for "intellectual liberty";⁵⁶ for him Surrealism was not simply the enjoyment of freedom from imposed

or inherited aesthetic and technical restraints; it was the promotion of methods calculated to guarantee language its own freedom of action. Nougé spoke of words as "objects": they should not be used as "the repository of recollected feelings or past experiences" but as objects

"propre à provoquer, chez qui subit, certaines idées et en use comme d'un objet modifiable à la manière d'un objet matériel (par adjonctions, suppressions, interpolations, flexions etc.) à la seule fin de produire un certain effet prévu pressenti - ou simplement tenu par imprévisible".⁵⁷

Words for Nougé need to be seen in a usage different from normal, as the objects were to be seen in Magritte's painting, for by these means the mind can precipitate the unforeseen, which for Nougé is a special poetic virtue.

For Nougé and Magritte the essential idea was to conserve the outward form of art and change the content in order to expand our perceptions, and these two men were to provide the intellectual stimulus of the movement. The group published a small review Distances in 1928⁵⁸ which included several Magritte drawings,⁵⁹ together with texts which David Sylvester writes "stand in a close relation with them" and he cites,

"Now the princess runs she clears poetic obstacles: the suitcase; the sky; the penknife; the leaf; the sponge".⁶⁰

Distances nos. 2 and 3 published two of Mesens' prose reveries, 'Je devine, je vois bien des choses' and 'Histoire de l'oeil', which are considered in Chapter 9. The musician Andre Souris⁶¹ played a large part in the publication of Distances where he published anonymously a musical score.⁶² The Belgian group was quite prepared to admit an interest in music, and though Mesens had stopped writing scores in 1926 as a result of his contact with De Chirico, he nevertheless was prepared to concede the right of the other Belgian Surrealists to retain their interest in this mode of expression. André Breton had written in 1928,

"I shall never cease to refuse (any value) to musical expression, the most deeply confusing of all forms. Auditive images in fact are inferior to visual images not only in clarity but also in strictness, and with all due respect to a few melomaniacs they are not destined to strengthen the idea of human greatness".⁶³

Nougé, on the other hand, wrote in Distances that the music of André Souris, the painting of René Magritte, the poetry of Camille Goemans will replace ordinary everyday experience.⁶⁴ At the opening of the exhibition of Magritte's work at the Gallery L'Epoque in Brussels in February 1929, where Mesens was now manager, music for clarinet and piano by Honegger, Hindemith, Milhaud, Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Souris was performed, conducted by André Souris.⁶⁵

In a supplement to Distances, Le Dessous des Cartes 1928 Nougé re-affirmed the necessity of conserving the outward form of art if one wants to change the content, while later in Proposition which he published in 1930 Nougé formulated what he felt was the central position of the group, "une éthique appuyée sur une psychologie colorée de mysticisme". The means involved "la découverte, à la mise en évidence de toute perspective nouvelle sur l'objet de notre étude, de toute propriété, de tout caractère jusqu'aux insoupçonnés".⁶⁶

Although the Belgians had established close links with Breton's movement in Paris they preferred to retain their independence from the French group, in particular concerning automatism, and did not wish to become involved with political activities which had caused so much difficulty in Paris. None of the Belgian Surrealists in the 1920s and '30s wished to adhere to a strict Communist party line. Camille Goemans and Paul Nougé had written in 1925, "Nous nous opposons à ce que l'on situe cette activité sur le plan politique qui n'est pas le nôtre".⁶⁷ The group in Brussels were opposed to any political ideology which would restrict their scope for action, though they supported a number of collective ventures together with the Paris group which they felt would further the cause of social revolution. Marcel Marien comments that Paul Nougé demanded the inclusion of the following sentiments in a tract, which he and Goemans signed with the French Surrealists,⁶⁸ La Révolution d'abord et toujours:

"Il importe de ne voir dans notre démarche que la confiance absolue que nous faisons à tel sentiment qui nous est commun, et proprement au sentiment de la révolte, sur quoi se fondent les seules choses valables".

Mesens, Goemans and Magritte voted for collective Surrealist action as opposed to individual gestures at the Bar du Château meeting in Paris in February 1929, when Breton rallied Surrealist forces in the face of a number of recalcitrants.⁶⁹ Mesens, who was now editor of P.G. Van Hecke's review Variétés,⁷⁰ arranged a special edition devoted to Surrealism in collaboration with the Paris group in 1929, which published the documents relating to this meeting.⁷¹

This special number of Variétés was an important event, for the review had a wide circulation and contained items of general interest such as sport, the theatre and fashion. Mesens took the opportunity to give as much publicity to Surrealism as possible by including reproductions of paintings by Ernst, Magritte and De Chirico, and "exquisite corpse" drawings by Miró, Morise, Man Ray and Tanguy. Variétés ceased publication in 1929, however, and the Galerie Centaure which had promoted Magritte's paintings in Brussels failed in 1930. Goemans returned to Brussels having closed his gallery in Paris and Magritte also returned with his wife from France, having had a disagreement over a personal matter with Breton.

Differences with Paris came to a head over a political issue which emerged in 1932. At the end of 1931 Aragon had published his poem "Front Rouge" on returning from the U.S.S.R. in which he condemned the political regime in France and called for the murder of its leaders. André Breton defended Aragon in a tract published in Paris in January 1932, Misère de la poésie, stating that, because the nature of poetic inspiration is unconscious, Aragon was therefore not responsible for the political or poetic content of the poem. Nougé, Mesens, Magritte and Souris replied in La poésie transfigurée on January 30th, 1932 that they considered that the poet had complete responsibility for what he had written:

"Le poème commence de jouer dans son sens plein. Mot pour mot, il n'y a plus de mot qui tienne. Le poème prend corps dans la vie sociale. Le poème incite désormais les défenseurs de l'ordre établi à user envers le poète de tous les moyens de répression réservés aux auteurs de tentatives subversives".

The Belgians envisaged Aragon's defence solely in terms of the legitimacy of the legal intervention in the publication of this poem. In La poésie transfigurée the Belgians came closer to the ideas of Paul Eluard than those of Breton. Eluard's definition of poetic activity consisted of a conscious re-ordering of external reality - the poet's role was not as one inspired but one who inspires:

"Que la pensée ne se considère pas seulement comme un élément scrutateur ou réflecteur, mais comme un élément moteur, comme un élément panique, comme un élément universel, les rapports entre les choses étant infinis".⁷²

Paul Nougé similarly wished art and poetry to act as a stimulus, to be a miracle and for the spectator or reader to recognise his own power to transform the universe.

"Il s'agit de donner aux êtres, aux objets, une fonction, un usage différent de l'habituel".⁷³

The Belgian group's belief in the "subversion of images" as the means of expanding one's consciousness of reality was given emphasis in an article L'Action Immédiate⁷⁴ published in the review edited by Mesens, Documents 34, published in Brussels in 1934. The article called for revolutionary action, not in the normal political sense by using collective action, strikes or political protest, but by upsetting conventional habits, by disrupting conventional patterns of feelings and ethics. The article indicates the Belgian group's total commitment to Surrealist action rather than any direct political activity fostered by the Communist party. When the Paris group eventually broke with the Communist party in 1935, the Belgians signed the manifesto Du temps que les surréalistes avaient raison which champions art as a revolutionary force when it is the product of men who feel and think as revolutionaries, and rejects the notion of art as propaganda.⁷⁵ Breton's eventual rejection of the Franco-Soviet pact in 1935 is echoed in the Belgian group's tract Le Couteau dans la plaie (1935), which although rejecting the pact states finally,

"Nous affirmons une fois encore, que la libération de l'esprit humain ne peut être cherchée dans d'autres voies que celles de la Révolution prolétarienne mondiale".⁷⁶

The Surrealist group continued to work together in Brussels until the outbreak of War. Mesens introduced the painter Paul Delvaux

in 1936, although the latter never became a member.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, in 1934, another Surrealist group, Rupture, was founded in Hainaut, at Haine St. Paul by Achille Chavée, André Laurent, Marcel Pofondry and Albert Ludé. The purpose of this venture was to "mould revolutionary minds, to participate in the formation of a proletarian morality and to co-operate as closely as possible in the development of the Surrealist movement."⁷⁸ Mesens established links between the Rupture group and his friends in Brussels (see Chapter 8) and in 1935 organised an exhibition in La Louvière where work by Colinet, Mesens and Magritte was shown.

The Rupture group broke up in 1938 but some members reformed as the Surrealist group in Hainaut around Achille Chavée⁷⁹ and in 1940 they published a new magazine L'invention collective⁸⁰ with Magritte and Raoul Ubac⁸¹ as editors. The activities of the Hainaut group were severely hampered during the War but they reformed in 1947 under the name Haute Nuit standing for "rejection of every kind of dogmatism; opposition to conformism in art: faith in original and avant garde events".⁸² The group separated themselves from Magritte and sought Breton's backing for their cause in 1947, which he gave, though none of their work was exhibited at the 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme held at the Galerie Maeght.⁸³ Magritte, meanwhile, had become the mainspring of Surrealist activities in Brussels during the War. Returning from Carcassonne where he had stayed for three months in 1940 after the German invasion of the Low Countries, Magritte found that Nougé had been mobilized and was in France, whilst Mesens had decided to remain in England. In 1941 Magritte began to consider that in view of the troubled atmosphere in Europe, he no longer wished to continue painting the disturbing images characteristic of his pre-war work.⁸⁴ He wanted to express joy in the face of calamity and in 1942 began to experiment with bright colours, while in 1943 he adopted a specifically Impressionist technique. He was particularly influenced by Renoir in his effort to create a luminous and consciously beautiful effect in his work, and in 1943 and 1944 painted all his canvasses in a Renoir style:⁸⁵ this continued until 1947, although in 1945 he returned to creating other works using his normal method of photographic clarity. Magritte signed a manifesto with Marcel Marien,

Nougé, Scutenaire and others in 1945, 'Le Surréalisme en plein soleil', in which the group set themselves in opposition to Breton's new emphasis on magic and the mysterious in art, by adopting a kind of moral optimism:

"Nous ne connaissons pas d'ombres irréductibles,
car une vision attentive révèle que dans toute
ombre physique ou spirituelle il y a des lumières,
des couleurs qui l'animent".⁸⁷

From this time onwards the Belgians were very active in producing pamphlets⁸⁸ and became much more independent of Breton's group than they had been before the War. Magritte joined the Communist party in 1945 which was a further cause for dispute with Breton, though Marcel Marien wrote,

"Malgré notre 'Stalinisme' sincère nous n'avons jamais
cédé d'une pouce devant la ligne intellectuelle et
artistique qu'essayant d'imposer le parti".⁸⁹

The group wrote to Mesens in England asking him to sign their manifesto 'Le Surréalisme en plein soleil' but Mesens refused:

"Je ne sais à quels étranges sentiments vous avez pu
obéir pour accoucher d'un texte si mal balancé, si
mal écrit et - parlant du soleil - si inutilement
obscur".⁹⁰

In 1947 the 'Revolutionary Surrealist Movement' was born in opposition to Breton which issued two manifestos - one in Brussels signed by all the Belgian Surrealists,⁹¹ and one in France,⁹² in which the intent was to "end the splendid isolation of Surrealism and to announce the advent of a collective international spirit".⁹³ Following on from this, Surrealism in Belgium has undergone various phases, which Mesens was only occasionally involved with: the Cobra group in 1948,⁹⁴ Phases founded in 1952,⁹⁵ Phantomas in 1953,⁹⁶ Daily Bul in 1957.⁹⁷ All these groups were attempting to renovate and renew original Surrealist ideas, and have kept the spirit of Surrealism alive in Belgium.

FOOTNOTES

1. Scutenaire (born 1905) collaborated with the Surrealists in Brussels in the publication of all their future tracts and manifestos. His poetry is in the spirit of Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Jarry and Apollinaire and has been published in Brussels and Paris. Vovelle op. cit. gives a list of his publications, pp 341-2.
2. Marcel Marien (born 1920) met the Surrealists in 1937, and his first collages and objects were given their first exhibition by Mesens at the exhibition Surrealist Objects and Poems, London Gallery, November 1937. He worked with Magritte on the publication of Le Miroir Infidèle in 1946, and in 1954 founded the review Les Lèvres Nues which has published numerous Surrealist texts, in particular the work of Paul Nougé; a new series of this review has been published in Brussels since 1968, Le Fait Accompli, which has continued to publish work by all the Surrealist poets and painters in Belgium. Vovelle op. cit. gives a list of his own work which has been published, p.340.
3. Paul Colinet (born 1898, died 1957) collaborated with the Brussels group from 1934 onwards. A poet with a taste for mystery and fantasy, Lecompte remarked that Colinet's poetry, "ne s'entendait pas au sens de grande poésie, mais bien plutôt de la féerie et de la fable dans un climat d'enchantement rustique et familier", (P. Waldberg, René Magritte, Brussels, 1965, p.149). Vovelle op. cit. pp 335-336, for list of texts.
4. Paul Delvaux will be considered below, Chapter 8.
5. Jane Graverol (born 1910) came to know the work of Magritte, Colinet, Goemans and Scutenaire in 1948: her painting is very much influenced by Magritte, Vovelle op. cit. pp 246-249.
6. Published in June 1934 by Mesens and Stéphane Cordier. The special number entitled 'Intervention Surréaliste' marked the close co-operation which now existed between the Brussels and Paris groups, publishing material by Eluard, Péret, Crevel, Tzara, Breton's text 'Equation de l'objet trouvé' reflecting the Surrealists' interest in 'objects', Souris' text on Surrealism and music 'Le fil d'Ariane' in which he opposes Breton's anti-music stance. The 'L'action immédiate' manifesto with which the review opened is considered in the main text.
7. Mesens founded the publishing house Editions Nicolas Flamel (named after the medieval alchemist) at his own address (55, rue du Courtrai, Brussels). The book 'Violette Nozières'

celebrates the girl who murdered her parents, which for the Surrealists represented the ultimate act of defiance of conventional morality. Poems by Breton, Char, Eluard, Maurice Henry, Mesens, Miró, Péret and Guy Rosey, illustrations by Dali, Tanguy, Ernst, Brauner, Magritte, Marcel Jean, Arp and Giacometti.

8. André Blavier 'Le groupe Surréaliste' in La Belgique Sauvage, published by Phantomas, Brussels, 1972, p.225.
9. Blavier, op. cit. note 8, p.204.
10. Ibid.
11. Twenty-two numbers issued in the form of individual tracts, each numbered and designated by a colour, e.g. White 13.
12. Marcel Jean, op. cit. p.177.
13. Marcel Marien in Christian Bussy Anthologie du Surréalisme en Belgique, op. cit. p.18.
14. Ibid.
15. Paul Nougé Histoire de ne pas rire, Brussels, 1956, p.127.
16. Cited by J.H. Matthews 'Paul Nougé: Intellect Subversion and Poetic Language', Symposium, Syracuse, Winter 1970, p.367.
17. Camille Goemans, Marcel Lecompte, Paul Nougé, Pour garder les distances, Brussels, May 20th, 1925. Reprinted in Bussy op. cit. pp 268-269.
18. Paul Nougé to André Breton Réflexions a voix basse, April 20th, 1925. Bussy op. cit. pp 266-267.
19. Paul Nougé 'La conférence de Charleroi' reproduced in Histoire de ne pas rire, op. cit. note 15, p.185.
20. Melly, Mesens, talk B.B.C. radio 3, op. cit. February 1970.
21. Ibid.
22. Marcel Jean, op. cit. p. 178.
Jean Scutenaire in Mon Ami Mesens op. cit. wrote,
"En ces jours aussi, c'est Édouard - et nul
autre - qui lui montre a René Magritte la
réproduction d'une toile de Chirico Le Chant
d'amour"
p.31. Mesens states in his piece on Magritte, published in
Peintres Belges Contemporains, Brussels, 1947, pp 157-165,

that some time after he and Magritte had contributed to Picabia's 391, late in 1924,

"Une reproduction de Chant d'amour de Chirico vint se glisser entre nos mains. Quelques jours plus tard Magritte découvrit, chez un bouquiniste, une brochure Valori Plastici consacrée au même peintre".

Vovelle op. cit. p.86 wrote:

"Marcel Lecompte lui fait découvrir le peintre des Arcades, d'après une anecdote rapportée par Marcel Jean (p.177)",

but the author cannot trace this in Jean's book.

23. Ibid.
24. E.L.T. Mesens René Magritte op. cit. note 22, p.158.
25. Cited by Patrick Waldberg in René Magritte, Brussels, 1965, p.95.
26. René Magritte 'Lifeline', translated by Felix Giovanelli from 'La Ligne de Vie' published in View 7, no. 2, New York, December 1946, pp 21-23. Cited in Luch Lippard Surrealists on Art, New Jersey, 1970, p.159.
27. Adieu à Marie, referred to in Chapter 5, was not dated.
28. Signed by Gaston Bursens, Camille Goemans, Eric de Haulleville, Paul Hooreman, Rene Magritte, E.L.T. Mesens, Paul Van Ostaijen, André Souris.
29. Blavier op. cit. note 8, p.216.
30. Bussy, op. cit. note 13, p.31.
31. Published by Mesens from his address at 55, rue du Courtrai, Brussels, November 1926.
32. Malcolm Haslam, The Real World of the Surrealists, London, 1978, p.77.
33. Single sheet only.
34. Max Morise had published a text in the first issue of La Révolution Surréaliste, 'Les yeux enchantés' which was the first attempt to "give an order to Surrealist painting". Roland Penrose, Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. pp 200-202.
35. According to Nadeau, The History of Surrealism, op. cit. p.131. The text marked a "turning point in the movement's development", for in it the Surrealists made it clear that their movement was no longer a question of a
"revolution of the mind without changing anything
in the apparent order of things no revolution

seemed possible on the mental level, the surrealists' basic goal, without first affecting a revolution in social realities".

36. Cited in Bussy, op. cit. p.23, from 'Au grand jour' published in Documents Surréalistes edited by Maurice Nadeau, Paris, 1948, p.98.
37. Op. cit. note 20.
38. Ibid. The original has not been traced.
39. Dated 1923, no day or month given. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
40. Personal communication from Conroy Maddox.
41. Blavier op. cit. note 8, p.218.
42. Op. cit. note 20.
43. Chapter 5, note 47.
44. Catalogue René Magritte Retrospective, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, October - December 1978, Museum of Modern Art, Paris, January - April 1979, p.288.
45. Op. cit. note 20.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Vovelle op. cit. fig. 145.
50. Gablik op. cit. fig. 31.
51. Ibid. p.26.
52. La traversée difficile, fig. 26, Gablik.
53. L'Art de la conversation, 1961, fig. 30, Gablik.
54. E.L.T. Mesens 'The Cabinet of Curiosities', Saturday Book, London, 1959, p.275.
55. Marcel Marien letter to René Magritte dated 1927 reproduced in Histoire de ne pas rire, op. cit. p.221.

56. Matthews op. cit. note 9, p.374.
57. Cited by Matthews, *ibid.*
58. Nos. 1 - 3, February - April, 1928.
59. The author has been unable to trace any copies of Distances and has had to rely on information provided in the catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. pp 333-336, and Blavier op. cit. p.220.
60. Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. p.333.
61. André Souris (born 1898, died 1970) joined the Correspondances group in 1925, and in 1926 wrote a piece Dessous des cartes parodying the music of Les Six and Cocteau's Mariées de la Tour Eiffel. Initially his music was influenced by the Symbolist poets and he wrote melodies to accompany poetry, in particular that of Rimbaud and the Belgian Symbolist poet Verhaeren. He published texts with the Surrealists until 1936, when he was excluded from the group for directing a mass held to celebrate the memory of one of the founders of the Palais des Beaux Arts. Vovelle op. cit. p.40.
62. 'Une page de Clarisse Juranville', Distances, no. 3, Brussels, April 1928.
63. Surrealism and Painting, (1928) translated by S.W. Taylor op. cit. p.1.
64. Cited in Blavier op. cit. p.220.
65. Exhibition catalogue René Magritte, Galerie l'Epoque, February 20th, 1929, bibliothèque Musée d'Art Moderne, Brussels.
66. Reprinted in Bussy, op. cit. pp 294-296.
67. 'A l'occasion d'un manifeste', *ibid.* p.270.
68. Bussy, op. cit. p.25.
69. In particular a group of writers called Le Grand Jeu who had developed ideas similar to those of the Surrealists but who were not rigorous enough in their application of the "revolutionary" principles required of Breton's group. Haslam op. cit. pp 171-2, Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, pp 197-8.
70. Published in Brussels monthly between 1928 and 1929.
71. 'Le Surréalisme en 1929', Variétés, Brussels, June 1929.

72. Paul Eluard 'Je parle de ce qui est bien', in Donner à voir, Paris, 1939, p.94.
73. Paul Nougé Subversion des Images, Les Lèvres Nues, Brussels, 1968, p.10.
74. Op. cit. note 6, pp 1-3.
75. Paris, August 1935.
76. Reprinted Bussy op. cit. pp 277-280.
77. Note 4.
78. Cited by Rol and Penrose in the catalogue The Belgian Contribution to Surrealism, Edinburgh, 1972, p.8.
79. Achille Chavée (born 1906, died 1969) was the driving force behind the Rupture group whose first publication Mauvais Temps appeared in 1935: he was responsible for a number of Surrealist tracts and manifestos published in the 1940s and '50s. Vovelle op. cit. pp 334-5.
80. Nos. 1-2, Brussels, February and April 1940. The two issues have a strong emphasis on visual Surrealism, reproducing work by Magritte, Ubac, Pol, Bury and Paul Delvaux.
81. Raoul Ubac (born 1910) was attracted to Surrealism in 1934 and began experiments with collages and photography. Several of his photographs were reproduced in Minotaure and demonstrate the influence of Man Ray and a taste for disquieting imagery. Vovelle op. cit. pp 42-43.
82. Giselle Ollinger Zinque 'The Belgian Contribution to Surrealism' translated from the French by Jacques J. Halber, Studio International, October 1971, pp 150-155.
83. Chapter 4.
84. Op. cit. note 65, p.290.
85. Ibid.
86. Joë Bousquet, Jacques Michel, Jacques Wergifosse. The manifesto is reprinted in René Magritte Manifestes et autres écrits, Brussels, 1972, pp 70-73.
87. Ibid. p.72.
88. A list of those published in the late 1940s is to be found in the above cited text.

89. Marcel Mari en, preface to Manifestes et autres écrits, op. cit. pp 27-8.
90. Letter from Mesens dated October 7th, 1946, to Magritte, Marien and Nougé, *ibid.* pp 161-165.
91. Pas de Quartiers dans la révolution dated June 7th, 1947.
92. Manifeste des Surréalistes - Révolutionnaires en France, Paris, dated Summer, 1947.
93. Giselle Ollinger Zinque, op. cit. note 82, p.155.
94. Chapter 4.
95. Founded by Edouard Jaguar who published the magazine of that name.
96. First issue of this magazine which is largely concerned with poetry was published on December 15th, 1953. Edited by Marcel Havrenne, Theodore Koenig and Joseph Noiret.
97. Founded in La Louvière in 1957 and directed by Andre Balthazar and Pol Bury.

CHAPTER 7

Mesens' Understanding of Dada and Surrealism

In reply to the question "What are the things which you most desire?" put by the Belgian Surrealist group to their counterparts in London in 1946, Mesens wrote that he wanted:

- a) La faillite de tous les régimes politiques;
l'abandon de toutes les religions et tous les symboles.
- b) L'avènement, c'est à dire, la compréhension de la REALITÉ entière.
- c) L'égalisation de toutes les valeurs. Exemples:
 - 1. Une pomme = un serpent
 - 2. Echanger un tableau de maître contre une bicyclette
 - 3. Porter comme parure une couronne de couteaux de cuisine au lieu d'un collier de perles fines.
- d) La suppression de toutes les formes de consécration civiques et religieuses du mariage et de la famille; l'extension des formes d'association à tous les âges, toutes les races, tous les métiers et droit absolu pour l'individu de s'en retirer pour créer une autre forme ou pour isoler; LA LIBERTÉ CONCRÈTE".¹

This extract illustrates Mesens' anarchic attitude which stayed with him all his life from the time of his first contacts with the Dadaists; it also demonstrates his fundamental attitude towards art, that is his rejection of all aesthetic value and his belief that in collage and poetry images derived from the real world can lose all their previous connotations and values, and can assume entirely new identities.

For Mesens' development the meeting in the early 1920s with the Dada painters and poets was to be significant. It imbued him with an initial destructive urge, and a desire to make a stand against the conventions of the past. "J'adore la logique", he wrote, "C'est elle qui ne m'aime pas".² His aim in the early '20s was:

"Détruire. Détruire pour reconstruire; mais nous - (Magritte, Goemans, Lecompte) mais nous ne savions quoi. Nous voulions nous isoler de la bourgeoisie regnante. Cela ressemblait un peu à l'incendie du Reichstag, mais hélas! cela n'avait pas la même magnitude".³

It was as a result of seeing Man Ray, Picabia and Ernst's work in Paris in 1921 and 1922 and reading the poetry and prose of Aragon, Eluard and

Breton, that Mesens began to write poetry in 1923 and make collages in 1924. These will be discussed in detail later, but it is evident that Mesens' early work reflected his ardent and bitter condemnation of bourgeois life and attitudes, of academism in art, of formal values. His art was a personal affair in these years, expressing his private hopes and trying out new means of expression. He never considered himself in the '20s and '30s as first and foremost a collagist nor did he try and sell his work. However, he did develop an attitude which was to last a lifetime - a revolt against accepted norms of thought, a subversive attitude which led him to indulge in outrageous escapades and a search for the "marvellous and irrational in art and things which evoke the experience of love".⁴ As he wrote in 'Le Lutteur Endormi',⁵

"Non, non. Je ne suis pas écrivain comme vous
messieurs. Je ne tremperai jamais mon port-lune dans
un peu de lac

Merci".

This attitude was to upset a great many people - it caused a rupture with his colleagues in England, and was to destroy his relationships with several art dealers in England after the War.⁶

In 1926 he was to make the switch from what he called "the negative Dada dance"⁷ to Surrealism. He was, as were Magritte and Nougé, against Symbolism.

"Tout est égal à tout, rien n'est égal à rien. Une
pomme égale une pomme aussi bien qu'une bicyclette".⁸

For Mesens Surrealism was not an aesthetic, it was a "weapon" and each individual could set out in his own way to expand our consciousness of the world. In his twenties he said that he wanted to transform "la vie ignoble à une espèce du paradis en terre".⁹ For Mesens, Surrealism was an essential truth which resembled Christianity.¹⁰ It was certainly not a style of art. He had little confidence in the idea of pure automatism as a means of revealing the "marvellous", a view shared with the other members of the group in Belgium. The work of De Chirico had had an important effect on Mesens - it had created a "frisson of fatality" for him.¹¹ He took up Surrealism with a desire for subversion, and the manifestations in which he took part with the other Belgian painters and writers were a distinct move to "épater les bourgeois". He was later to say that he

decided to concentrate on "poetical expression whose manifestations will conquer all domains of human activities".¹² By poetical expression Mesens went on to define what he meant - it divided for him into two branches - the first poetry and collage, the second his work as a gallery owner. It is essential in considering Mesens' theoretical standpoint to emphasize that he believed collage to be a "poetical" activity. He did in fact construct collage as he was to construct poetry.¹³

The means in his art which Mesens was to use to create a Surrealist image was that formulated in Breton's first manifesto and which found such brilliant expression in Ernst's collages.¹⁴ He rejected automatism as a way to creating image - he used the concrete world to create a new world where "anything is possible", objects displaced from their normal environment which disturb and shock by their new status, words and phrases in poetry acquiring new meanings and new resonances.

"The collage is a hand-made jeu de mots", he wrote,¹⁵
"Conventional and unconventional which consumes its ingredients at measured reading distance. Yes and No. Like you - the collage is - the magic of the looking glass left aside - IRRELEVANT. Yes and now Because my two hands remain two hands, ten fingers well cared for. It is BECAUSE of them that I make collages".

For him like others before him, the making of collage was a completely Surrealist activity. He wrote that he required it to plunge us into a magical drama created by the opposition of elements from a normal world.¹⁶ Aragon in his essay 'La Peinture au Défi'¹⁷ discussed this magic;

"What characterizes the miracle, what proclaims the miraculous, that quality of the marvellous is undoubtedly a bit of a surprise as it has been feebly put. But it is much more, in every sense the word can be given - an extraordinary displacement The modern collage requires an attention for what it has devised that is absolutely opposable to painting, beyond painting; for what it represents of human possibility; for its replacement of a debased art with a mode of expression unknown in force and range; for its pictorial cause which keeps the painter from surrendering to narcissism, to art for art's sake by leading him towards the magic practices which are the origin and justification of plastic representation forbidden by several religions Collage is poor the marvellous must be made by all and not me alone".

Mesens was not concerned with aesthetics in art. Beauty did not interest him as such, and it was not his aim in collage, nor did he consider it to be his aim in poetry. For he rejected all conventions of style and form:

"L'artiste a été à la merci de ces conventions de naturalisme, moralisme et idéalisme qui empêchent et restreignent l'opération libre des forces subconscientes de la vie dont dépend seulement la vitalité des arts. Parfois l'artiste s'est libéré de ses entraves et s'est formé ce qui a été appelée l'imagination à transformer la réalité".¹⁸

This attitude was one shared by all the Surrealists both in Belgium and in France. Paul Nougé said,

"It is not simply to recognise that Surrealism has turned the world upside down. You could say that it has given back to those distinctive forms of thought their real meaning and basic value. Surrealism, in destroying aestheticism, in bringing so called artistic expression back to really vital channels, has given a validity and objective content to what ought to be called universalized poetry".¹⁹

Thus Mesens considered his art in poetic terms - it was the forcefulness and magic of the image produced which was its value. "Je parle pour un art complètement agressif", he wrote, but continued by saying that Surrealist art is difficult to understand because it represents an enlargement of our concept of reality.²⁰ Magritte had written,

"But as assuming as real the poetic fact, if we try to discover its meaning, we find a new orientation which immediately removes us from that barren region that the mind has ceased to fecundate. The object of poetry would become a knowledge of the secrets of the universe which would allow us to act on the elements. Magical transactions would become possible. They would truly satisfy that profoundly human desire for the marvellous which has been deceived by miracles and to which still, very recently, we owe the success of sordid apparitions".²¹

It was with a sense of ironic humour that Mesens looked on the world - this humour was to be used as a weapon as it had been by other artists and poets in the Surrealist movement.²² However, as well as conscious usage in his work, it must be pointed out that it was also part of Mesens' own character, and many of his friends as well as complete

strangers were to suffer at his hands. For instance, at a supper party he insisted that a very old friend's wife should remove her blouse and underwear so that he could admire her figure.²³ Knowing him well, this she did, but he was quite capable of asking this of women in public whom he didn't know at all, to their acute embarrassment.²⁴ On another occasion during the War, when returning home from a Soho restaurant with a group of friends,²⁵ he noticed a single urinal which had been left standing by itself after the surrounding area had been bombed. He insisted on using it in full view as the thing was so bizarre; in the ensuing weeks his friends forced him to take another route to and from the restaurant.²⁶ Add to this kind of episode his extremely proper appearance, always a neat dark suit, stiff collar, white shirt, beautifully manicured hands, immaculate hair - in fact the appearance of a prosperous businessman, his behaviour on many occasions was all the more surprising. But this was all part of the game - contradiction, the upsetting of formal values, of formal behaviour in the quest for a wider experience of the world.

Humour was prized by the Surrealists - it was a means of questioning conventionality and bringing it into disrepute. Not only was humour the disinterested and direct expression of the unconscious, but a humour which is the conjunction of the real and the fantastic helps man to resist the claims of reality to which the world has accustomed him and also gives him the means to shake off habitual thought and aspire to another form of reality answering another kind of logic. So - one of Mesens' poems:

"Dans l'oeil du roi il y avait un timbre-poste
Et dans l'oeil du roi figurant sur le timbre-poste
Il y avait encore un roi qui avait un oeil
Dans lequel il y avait un timbre-poste
Avec ou sans roi
Avec ou sans oeil
Mort au roi
A bas le timbre-poste
Vive l'oeil".²⁷

During the 1930s Mesens espoused revolutionary political change as did the Surrealists in both the Paris and Brussels group; this was felt to be necessary as part of the total revolt which they desired. Mesens explained:

"Le Surrealisme spécialement exprimé par André Breton, chef du mouvement, a été profondément influencé par le matérialisme dialectique de Marx. Il adopte particulièrement l'idée de 'logique totalitaire' de Marx que lui à son tour a pris chez Hegel, le libérant en même temps de son mysticisme inhérent. Mais comme pour Hegel et Marx le système social constitue une totalité aucune non des parties séparées l'une de l'autre, économie, politique, religion et art ne peut être compris isolément, alors l'art lui-même ne peut être regardé comme résultat d'une partie de notre expérience mentale - cette partie que nous appelons consciente mais qu'en vérité doit être regardée comme une synthèse de tous les aspects de notre expérience".²⁸

By the end of the War, however, Mesens had become somewhat jaundiced about the notion of social revolution in the political sense. In 1946 he wrote,

"Il y a six ans j'aurais encore répondu sans hésiter: 'La révolution prolétarienne mondiale'. Je n'aurai pas l'hypocrisie de simuler, à cette heure, le moindre espoir en celle-ci. Il est un peu tard dans le monde. Le prolétariat et ses CHEFS ressemblent dialectiquement à leurs oppresseurs et LEURS CHEFS." ²⁹

The reason given by Scutenaire, who was himself a member of the Communist party, as to why Mesens did not belong to any organised socialist or revolutionary party was his "individualisme congénital ses inquiétudes".³⁰ Mesens felt that too much time was wasted in political controversy, whereas the need was to "battre au centre".³¹

Mesens then considered that the Surrealist revolution would be achieved by "poetical means" and by this he meant a wide range of activities including his work as an art dealer: indeed his colleagues in the Surrealist group in Brussels called him "le colporteur de l'art maudit".³²

FOOTNOTES

1. The English Surrealist group were asked to reply to the following questions:
 1. Quelles sont les choses que vous détestez le plus?
 2. Quelles sont les choses que vous aimez le plus?
 3. Quelles sont les choses que vous souhaitez le plus?
 4. Quelles sont les choses que vous redoutez le plus?The reply sent by Mesens is quoted in full in Appendix A. This was originally published in "Le Miroir infidèle", Le Savoir Vivre, Brussels, 1946, no pagination. Archives de l'art contemporain no. 9,398, Musée d'art moderne, Brussels.
2. E.L.T. Mesens, cited in La Meuse Lanterne, Brussels, April 23rd, 1971, p.3.
3. E.L.T. Mesens interviewed by Hugo van den Perre, Radio Belge, 1969, transcript, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
4. Jean Scutenaire, personal communication, April 1973.
5. E.L.T. Mesens, Troisième Front, London, 1943, p.35.
6. Personal communication, Annely Juda, April 1979.
7. E.L.T. Mesens 'The Cabinet of Curiosities', Saturday Book, London, 1959, p.275.
8. Op. cit. note 2, p.2.
9. Op. cit. note 3.
10. Ibid.
11. Op. cit. note 7.
12. Alberto Cavalcanti, 'Introducing E.L.T. Mesens', London Bulletin, no. 1, April 1938, p.6.
13. Chapter 9 below.
14. Chapter 4 above.
15. E.L.T. Mesens, introduction to catalogue Three Collagists, I.C.A., London, April 1958.

16. E.L.T. Mesens, introduction to catalogue, Max Ernst, Knokke-le-Zoute, 1963, p.9.
17. Cited by L. Lippard in translation in Surrealists on Art, New Jersey, 1970, p.8 (A Challenge to Painting) from 'La peinture au défi', catalogue for Exposition des collages, Galerie Goemans, Paris, March 1930.
18. Manuscript signed E.L.T. Mesens, undated and untitled, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels, thirteen pages. The manuscript is a rigorous restatement of Surrealist principles and may well be that referred to in a letter from Eluard to Mesens dated June 1935, in which Eluard wrote the following:
"Tu ne dois pas, mon cher ami, avoir reçu toutes mes lettres, puisque tu parais déçu que je ne t'ai pas parlé de ton article de Documents 35. Or, je t'ai écrit qu'il était sensationnel. C'est également l'avis de Breton et de tous ceux qui m'ont dit l'avoir lu.
J'admire cet esprit d'examen, cette position rigoureuse et tenace qui sont tiens depuis longtemps".
(Documents 35 was not published).
The letter from Eluard to Mesens has recently been published in a collection of previously unpublished poems, texts and letters by Mesens, Magritte, Ernst, Scutenaire, Eluard, Nougé and others; Le Cache-Sexe des Anges, Les Lèvres Nues, Brussels, 1978.
19. London Bulletin, no. 2, May 1938, p.14.
20. Op. cit. note 18.
21. Cited by L. Lippard in translation op. cit. note 17, p.154, (Ariadne's Thread) from 'Le Fil d'Ariadne' in Documents 34, no. 1, Brussels, June 1934, p.15.
22. Chapter 9 below.
23. Personal communication, Conroy Maddox.
24. Ibid.
25. Members of the London Surrealist group.
26. Conroy Maddox's introduction to catalogue Collages by E.L.T. Mesens, Acoris, The Surrealist Art Centre, London, January - March, 1974.
27. E.L.T. Mesens 'Le Moyen d'en finir', London Bulletin, February 1939, p.19.

28. Op . cit. note 18.
29. Op. cit. note 1.
30. Scutenaire, op. cit. p.50.
31. E.L.T. Mesens interviewed by Christian Bussy, Radio Belge, November 9th, 1970, transcript, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
32. Scutenaire, op. cit. p.51.

CHAPTER 8

Mesens' work as an art dealer in Belgium. 1924 - 1938.

Mesens' most important contribution to the Surrealist movement was as an art dealer. Swift to realise the radical departures which were being attempted in Dada and Surrealist art, he promoted the work of these artists both in Brussels and London, while collecting works for himself. (See Appendix D, Mesens Collection)

His initial interest as a student in the early 1920s had been in the work of young Belgian Expressionist painters, and although his espousal of Dada and later Surrealism meant that he felt by the mid-1920s Expressionism was "outmoded, he nevertheless exhibited work by these painters when later in 1927 he managed P.G. Van Hecke's gallery L'Epoque. In 1937 he mounted a show at the London Gallery of works by James Ensor, Rick Wouters, Gustave de Smet, Constant Permeke, Frits Van den Berghe and Jean Brusselmans whom he considered to be among the "important names of the present century of Belgian artists", and whose work he thought aimed at a "complete liberty of creation".¹

In 1920 the magazine Sélection had been founded by the painter Gustave de Smet and critics André de Ridder and P.G. van Hecke, with the object of promoting contemporary art, in particular the work of young Expressionist painters to be seen in the Centaure and Epoque galleries in Brussels. In 1922 Mesens began to contribute music reviews² to the Sélection magazine and in December 1923 he became an editor, developing his interest in the work of contemporary Expressionist painters. By 1925, however, Mesens had ceased his work as an editor of this review; he and Magritte were now committed to Dada and in the following year they joined together with Paul Nougé's group to develop their joint interest in Surrealism.

One of the new group's first activities was to organise in October 1927 an exhibition of Max Ernst's frottages Histoire Naturelle³ at a small gallery called La Vierge Poupine in Brussels, which was the first showing of this series outside Paris. Mesens was already employed as an assistant in the Galerie Manteau, and in 1927 he was appointed

manager of the Galerie L'Epoque. In the early 1920s L'Epoque had mainly shown work by Belgian Expressionist painters and "quasi" Cubists such as André Lhote, Marcoussis and Zadkine. However, with Mesens as manager between 1927 and 1930, work was now shown by Klee, De Chirico, Hans Arp, Joan Miró, Max Ernst and René Magritte.⁴ The exhibition of Max Ernst which Mesens mounted in 1928 was of particular importance because it showed for the first time Max Ernst's Forêts and Hordes series.⁵ Mesens had a particular sympathy for Ernst's work; this is reflected in his own early collages of the 1920s. He had purchased collages by Ernst in Paris in 1923;⁶ and had also in 1922 and 1923 brought back copies of Ernst's collage series accompanying Eluard's poems Les Malheurs des Immortels and Répétitions (1922).⁷ The collages were made out of old engravings, often of mechanical devices taken out of context and juxtaposed with images of people or parts of people, creating strange accompaniments to Eluard's poems.⁸ The use of little machine images seen in strange circumstances was to be taken up by Mesens in his own 1920s collages and he later pointed out that Magritte was affected by "ce qui était valable" in these works.⁹ Magritte wrote:

"In the illustrations he (Ernst) made in 1922 for Paul Eluard's Répétitions, Max Ernst, through the stunning effect of collages obtained from old engravings and magazines, wonderfully demonstrated that you can perfectly well forego everything from which traditional painting derives its prestige".¹⁰

Magritte's works in 1925 and 1926, of which only a handful were collages, stripped objects of their usual meaning in the manner of Ernst's collages:

"I had replaced plastic qualities - which critics give you good marks for - with an objective representation of objects - which was clearly grasped by those whose taste had not been ruined by all the literature drummed up around art. This detached manner of representing objects points, it seems to me, to a universal style in which the individual's foibles cease to have any place".¹¹

The importance of Mesens' role in introducing the work of Max Ernst to the Belgian group should not be underestimated. One of the paintings which he exhibited at the Epoque gallery in 1928 was Ernst's oil painting Pietà, ou la révolution la nuit, 1923¹² (fig. 44).

Mesens and Magritte had already seen a copy of this work in 1925.¹³

The work is a startling reference to traditional depictions of the dead body of Christ being carried down from the cross. The dead figure is a self portrait of Ernst dressed partly in a white medical shirt, carried by a mouse-tailed bowler hatted businessman.¹⁴ In this oil painting, like others executed by Ernst in the early 1920s, (the Elephant Célèbes, 1921, for instance) the author has transposed the collage idea into paint, by juxtaposing unrelated images in a strange environment and creating an enigmatic and dreamlike vision. The painting was executed at the time when the Littérature group (Breton, Eluard, Aragon, Desnos and Soupault) were experimenting with trance states and hypnotism, and a constant theme was death. In the painting Pietà, ou la révolution la nuit, and others executed by Ernst at this time, "visual Surrealism found itself for the first time".¹⁵

Although Magritte had begun to change his style of painting initially as a result of his contact with the work of De Chirico, there can be no doubt that his work came strongly under the influence of Max Ernst between 1925 and 1928. In works such L'Assassin menacé, 1926, or Au Pays de la nuit, 1928,¹⁶ for instance, Magritte first depicted figures of bowler hatted men in strange and bizarre situations. It was during this period that the Belgian group were formulating their own particular attitude towards Surrealism, based not on automatism but on the conscious use of realistic images in collage, paint or words, to create a new type of imagery. The source of this was in Ernst's Dada collages and in De Chirico's painted works, rather than in the Surrealist automatic techniques of Miró or Masson.

The work of Ernst also influenced a young artist Auguste Mambour, who for a short period between 1926 and 1929 became interested in the activities of the Belgian group. His paintings were distinguished by strange, tortuous figures or dislocated parts of the body, together with everyday objects painted very realistically, such as an egg whose identity was clarified by its name stated below.¹⁷ Similarly, Marc Eemans, who moved away from the group in 1930, was influenced by Ernst in both his collages and paintings. For instance his oil painting Derrière nous, 1928, depicts a dove in a landscape at each side of which are trees formed out of images of octopus tentacles, and is reminiscent of Ernst's Hordes series

1927¹⁸ shown by Mesens at the Epoque gallery in 1928. In a letter to André Breton much later Mesens wrote,

"C'est moi qui l'ai, vers 1927, conduit Eemans vers le Surréalisme, qui a favorisé sa collaboration avec les "Belges" d'alors, malgré une certaine hostilité à son égard et l'indifférence de peintre à peintre à Magritte".¹⁹

At the end of 1930 Mesens opened his own gallery, called the Galerie Mesens, in the rue de la Pépinière, Brussels, with a show containing work by Surrealists - Magritte, Ernst, Man Ray and Marc Eemans, and Belgian Expressionists De Smet, Permeke, Brusselmans, Tytgat, together with work by Ensor, Chagall and Dufy.²⁰ The gallery was not a commercial success and closed within a few months, probably at the same time as the two other galleries in Brussels supporting contemporary painters, L'Epoque and Le Centaure. There was a severe financial crash in Brussels in 1931 which caused a depression in the art market in Belgium over the next few years. Emile Langui has written:

"The Walter Schwarzenberg and P.G. Van Hecke collections were sold at public auctions while the André de Ridder collection was demanded as a guarantee by the banks. More than a thousand works, among them a large number of masterpieces of modern art, were thrown on the market to be snapped up for a song by anyone interested enough to buy them."²¹

The financial crisis particularly affected the Expressionist painters Frits Van den Berghe and Gustave de Smet and Langui writes that,

"Expressionism more than any other contemporary tendency provided the scapegoat for ill feeling towards art in general".²²

When his own gallery failed, Mesens took the post of secretary of the Palais des Beaux Arts, a semi-official organisation in Brussels, where over the next six years he was able to use his influence to arrange exhibitions of work by Surrealist artists. He later recalled,

"An exhibition of L'Art Vivant en Europe was launched in 1931 and I was asked to deal with the sales in that exhibition. It was one masterpiece from every country, the best in Europe until 1931 in the modern spirit, that means after Cézanne; they seemed to have been pleased with me because after the show they made me a proposition to stay, and then I became a very efficient secretary giving all my time at the Palais des Beaux Arts and being so successful, thanks to an ill-made contract, that I earned three times more than the Director General".²³

Asked by George Melly,

"Did you also find within this semi-official organisation the way to introduce artists who interested you, like for instance Ernst, Miró, Klee and so on?"

Mesens replied,

"Ah yes, yes I got the opportunity to shove them in and never missed my opportunity".²⁴

In the winter of 1931-2 Mesens showed thirty works by René Magritte²⁵ and he showed paintings by Paul Delvaux both before the latter became interested in Surrealism in 1931 and 1933²⁶ and later in 1936.²⁷ The most important exhibition, however, which Mesens arranged during this period was the Minotaure show in June 1934. Mesens had managed to persuade the directors of the Palais des Beaux Arts that an exhibition of Surrealist paintings would be worth while mounting in Brussels.²⁸ Minotaure²⁹ was a sumptuous, lavishly illustrated magazine first published in Paris in February 1933, and was originally intended as the organ of Surrealist dissidents - those who had broken with Breton on political issues. The review was concerned with artistic and literary activities and included work by artists not connected with the Surrealist movement - Braque, Derain and Picasso. However, a full range of Surrealist painting and sculpture was illustrated in Minotaure, including the work of new artists who had joined the movement, Brauner, Bellmer, Paalen, Dominguez, Matta Echauen and Stursky. A number of important Surrealist texts were printed by the review, in particular Breton's Le merveilleux contre le mystère³⁰ and Dali's Interprétation paranoïaque - critique de l'image obsédante.³¹ The editor of the magazine, Albert Skira, backed Mesens' Minotaure exhibition at the Palais des Beaux Arts, and the show was the first large exhibition outside Paris where work by Surrealist artists could be seen and work by Duchamp, Dali, Tanguy and Giacometti was exhibited for the first time in Brussels. Mesens lent work by Ernst, Miró, Tanguy and Magritte from his own collection.³²

In the same year as Mesens became secretary to the Palais des Beaux Arts, he acquired about one hundred and fifty of Magritte's paintings.³³ Magritte had exhibited at the Centaure gallery from 1927, and the gallery had helped finance him during his stay in Paris between

1927 and 1930. However, the Centaure gallery had been making heavy financial losses and went into liquidation early in 1931. Mesens raised all the money he could lay his hands on and bought up the Centaure gallery's entire collection of Magrittes (sixty of these were still in the Mesens collection when he died in May 1971). Mesens exhibited a selection of Magritte's work at the Salle Giso in Brussels in 1931,³⁴ at the Palais des Beaux Arts in 1936,³⁵ and there again in 1937³⁶ together with work by Man Ray and Yves Tanguy in a show which he called Trois Peintres Surréalistes. Mesens had an unusual and interesting catalogue printed for this exhibition with an introduction by the Surrealist poet Jean Scutenaire, who makes the point that the work by these artists did not depict dreams but "de vastes et d'étranges domaines où le mystère en fleur s'offre à qui veut cueillir". Scutenaire stresses the "objective" nature of the work of the three artists: thus for him, Man Ray creates "new objects" by a "junction" of familiar objects: Scutenaire describes Tanguy's strange forms again as "objects" being for him both "simple" and "incredible". This illustrates the Belgian group's attitude towards Surrealism as being the "objectification of poetry" in its broadest sense. The catalogue is also notable for its layout. Each pair of pages is in different coloured glossy sheets, aquamarine, yellow, orange, green and grey with quotations by Breton and poems by Eluard on all these painters, combined in the catalogue of paintings with illustrations of some of the work exhibited.

The first exhibition ever devoted to the work of Belgian Surrealist artists was organised by Mesens in October 1935 at La Louvière, an industrial town in the Borinage. Mesens arranged the show with the help of the Rupture group which had been formed in Hainault. This group had initially been founded by two poets, Achille Chavée and Fernand Dumont, in 1934. Dumont had approached Mesens and Nougé in Brussels to discuss the possibility of joint activity. Nougé was not particularly interested in any collaboration, but Mesens wished to join up "tous ceux qui approuvent le surréalisme français".³⁷ Mesens arranged for periodic meetings of the two groups in Hainault and in Brussels. The Rupture group published only one edition of their magazine Mauvais Temps³⁸ which they had originally hoped would become a Belgian Surrealist review since Mesens had not found the time to undertake such a venture.

Mauvais Temps published articles stressing their agreement with Breton's group in maintaining a distance from the Communist Party. Achille Chavée's poetry was published in the review and his work, unlike that of the Brussels Surrealist poets, demonstrated his belief in all forms of "Surrealist spontaneity" and in the power of automatic texts.

At the exhibition at La Louvière work was shown by Colinet, Magritte, Mesens and Servais, in addition to Klee, Arp, Brauner, Dali, Man Ray, De Chirico, Ernst and Miró. Mesens selected the works to be shown and arranged for them to be obtained with the help of the Palais des Beaux Arts. The exhibition opened with a conference organised by Mesens which included poetry readings of work by Breton, Eluard, Char and others, and lectures given by Irene Hamoir and Mesens. Mesens' lecture consisted of an explanation of Surrealism which he described according to the Belgian definition, that is in the conservation of outward forms of art and poetry and the transformation of the content. In his lecture (unpublished)³⁹ he stated:

"L'imagination est matérialiste puisqu'elle se nourrit de tous les objets réels. Elle est le mouvement de la vie, engendrant la vie; ... Le Surréalisme n'est pas une tendance artistique - le Surréalisme se dresse contre tout ce qui traditionnellement ou dictatorialement empêche l'homme de prendre conscience de ses droits, contre tout ce qui lui interdit actuellement de disposer librement de lui-même La lutte pour la défense inconditionnée de l'invention et de la découverte dans le réel".

The exhibition, in addition to being the first group show of the Belgian Surrealist artists, was also the first to be mounted outside Paris which was devoted entirely to Surrealist artists (the Minotaure show had included work by Matisse, Derain, Braque, Lipchitz, for instance). "At the time, this made some say that Surrealism has two capitals: Paris and La Louvière".⁴⁰ The Rupture group continued to work together until 1938, eventually breaking up as a result of political dissension.⁴¹ By this time Mesens was established in London and had ceased to take an active part in the Belgian Surrealist movement.

In 1935, when Mesens was organising contacts between the Rupture group and the Brussels group, Paul Delvaux began painting

his "Surrealist inspired" works. Mesens had known Delvaux for several years before this, but he pointed out that when Delvaux visited the Minotaure show in Brussels in 1934 he avowed:

"de ne rien comprendre aux plus belles oeuvres cubistes de Picasso, suspectant certains des plus authentiques révélateurs de notre temps, de fumisterie...."⁴²

In 1934 and 1935 Delvaux began to visit the Palais des Beaux Arts nearly every afternoon and Mesens showed him works by De Chirico, Magritte and Dali from his own collection. The minutiae of Dali's work and the mysterious quality of the objects and perspectives of De Chirico fascinated Delvaux, though he was mystified by the work of Magritte. Mesens later said of Delvaux that Magritte:

"Lui montrait au compte-goutte. Pourquoi au compte-goutte? Simplement parce que chaque tableau déclenchait chez Delvaux réactions imprévisibles et nous valait des débats d'une demi-journée qui finissent à la Taverne du Globe à l'aigle de la place Royale et de la rue de Namur".⁴³

Delvaux's first Surrealist work⁴⁴ was Femme en Dentelles (1934 - later destroyed)⁴⁵ showing a young woman, her naked body covered with lace, whilst another fully dressed woman moves away with her back to the spectator. Although the head of the naked woman is painted in an Expressionist style, the strange enigmatic overtones of the work marked the change in Delvaux's style from that of an Expressionist painter to a style related to Surrealist ideas. Mesens described Delvaux's later work as

"chargé de poésie ... naît de l'haïkus qu'il y a entre ses grandes figures somnambules et le décor anachronique qui les entoure".⁴⁶

De Chirico was one of the most important influences on Delvaux's work - Mesens said that, "un poète surréaliste introduisit Delvaux aux oeuvres de De Chirico".⁴⁷ Mme. Vovelle considered that this may have been Mesens or Paul Eluard, who made frequent visits to Brussels.⁴⁸ Mesens himself was somewhat more precise than this when he wrote in 1970,⁴⁹

"J'ai fait tout ce que je pouvais pour le faire connaître aussi vite que possible à Eluard (qui un peu plus tard écrivit un poème inspiré par cinq des oeuvres de Delvaux qu'il avait vues dans un appartement à Bruxelles) et plus tard à Breton".⁵⁰

In 1936 Mesens organised the Belgian section of the International Surrealist Exhibition in London, and in 1938 in Paris and Amsterdam. Thanks to his work as a dealer, the work of Belgian Surrealist artists gained a wider audience both in Belgium and abroad, in particular in England in the late 1930s. It was also due to Mesens' initiative that the work of the French group so quickly became known in Brussels and influenced in turn the development of Magritte and Delvaux in particular. Mesens' own predilection for the collages and paintings of Max Ernst was influential, not only in the development of his own and Magritte's work, but in the development of Surrealist thought in Belgium which was to be typified in both poetic and visual terms by the "depaysment" of Ernst's images.

Mesens' contribution to the Surrealist movement as an art dealer in Brussels has not been given the consideration by critics and historians that is merited. Surveys of his work to date, particularly that by Vovelle, have concentrated on his activities as a collagist, even though Mesens was an acknowledged expert on Dada and Surrealist painting.

As a result of his efforts, Brussels became the most important Surrealist art centre in Europe after Paris, particularly in the years following the Minotaure exhibition. Surrealism replaced Expressionism as the dominant art movement in Belgium in the 1930s, largely due to Mesens' initiative both in the publication of Belgian and French texts and in exhibiting the work of the painters involved. Mesens used his contacts with the Paris group to ensure that work by Continental Surrealists could be seen for the first time in Brussels, and as secretary to the Palais des Beaux Arts he was clearly of prime importance in the promotion of Surrealism. Magritte was to be indebted to Mesens after the failure of the Galerie Goemans in Paris in 1930 and the Centaure Gallery in Brussels in 1931, for Mesens was virtually alone in financially supporting his friend whose work he exhibited in Brussels and London. Mesens was always very proud of his support for Magritte, though late in the 1960s on an occasion when he was reminding Magritte's widow Georgette of this, she did point out that it was after all Magritte who painted the pictures, not Mesens.⁵¹

FOOTNOTES

1. E.L.T. Mesens, preface to catalogue Young Belgian Artists, London, January - February, 1937.
2. His first review concerned the first performance in Brussels of Milhaud's La Création du Monde. Later reviews covered work by Stravinsky, Auric and Satie.
Sélection, 2me année, no. 2, December 1922, pp. 228-231.
Sélection, 3me année, no. 1, November 1923, pp. 94-99.
Sélection, 3me année, no. 10, August 1924, pp. 535-539.
3. Chapter 4, p.73, also note 51, p.85.
4. Unfortunately there are no precise dates for these exhibitions. They were advertised as forthcoming in the review Le Centaure, no. 2, 1927, and are mentioned in Scutenaire's book on Mesens, p.38. Mesens died in 1971 while Scutenaire was writing the book and the author published the material he had to date. The catalogues, apart from an undated one for the Magritte show which was held some time in 1928, are missing from the archives of the Museum of Modern Art in Brussels and there are no copies in the Museum library. There are no copies in the Marcel Dubucq collection in Brussels.
5. P. Waldberg Max Ernst, Paris, 1958, p.250.
6. Vovelle, op. cit. p.91. The author does not state what these works were; Mesens possessed three early collages by Ernst, out of a total of about sixteen works. The pre-1923 collages which he acquired were probably:
Die chinesische Nachtigall, collage 1919
Au dessous des nuages marche la minuit. Au dessous de la minuit plane l'oiseau invisible du jour. Un peu plus haut que l'oiseau l'éther pousse les murs et les toits flottent, collage, 1919
L'enigme de l'Europe centrale, collage, 1919.
Mesens also possessed a photocollage by Ernst made in 1921, Die Anatomie (Mariée anatomie).
7. Paul Eluard and Max Ernst Les Malheurs des Immortels, Paris (Librairie Six), 1922: Répétitions, Paris (Au sans-pareil) 1922.
8. Illustrated pages 62, 66, 67 and 76, John Russel. Max Ernst, London, 1967.
9. E.L.T. Mesens Les apprentis MAGICIENS au pays de la pléthore in Le Fantastique dans l'Art Belge, special number of Les Arts Plastiques, Paris, 1954, p.33.

10. Cited Patrick Waldberg, op. cit. note 5, p.111.
11. Cited ibid. p. 115.
12. Scutenaire, p.38.
13. La Révolution Surréaliste, no. 5, October 1925.
14. This figure is derived from De Chirico's work Le Cerveau de l'enfant oil, 1914, fig. 75, Vovelle, op. cit.
15. Dawn Ades, Catalogue, Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, London, 1978, p.177.
16. L'Assassin menacé, illustrated Waldberg, p.15. Collection E.L.T. Mesens.
Au pays de la nuit, fig. 78, Vovelle, p.91.
17. Vovelle, op. cit. p.25.
18. Waldberg Max Ernst, op. cit. note 4, p.255.
19. Dated December 12th, 1957, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
20. Invitation to the opening of the Galerie Mesens, December 15th, 1930, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels. Unfortunately there does not appear to be any further information on the gallery. Dubucq has confirmed that it only had a short life.
21. Emile Langui Expressionism in Belgium, op. cit. p.163.
22. Ibid.
23. "E.L.T. Mesens talks to George Melly," B.B.C. Radio 3, 1970, op. cit.
24. Ibid.
25. December - January, 1931.
26. October 1931 and May 1933.
27. April - May, 1936.
28. Marcel Jean History of Surrealist Painting, op. cit. p.260.
29. Nos. 1-3 published between 1933 and 1939.
30. Minotaure, no. 9, October 1936.
31. Minotaure, no. 1, February 1933.

32. No dates are given in the catalogue for the works lent. They were listed as follows:
- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Max Ernst | <u>Homme fuyant les violences</u> |
| René Magritte | <u>Quand l'heure sonnera</u> |
| Joan Miró | <u>Peinture</u> |
| Yves Tanguy | <u>Peinture</u> |
33. Vovelle, op. cit. p.31.
34. February 1931. Nougé provided the texts for the catalogue.
35. April - May, 1936.
36. December 1937.
37. Cited Vovelle op. cit. p.31.
38. Dated November 1st, 1935.
39. Manuscript copy, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
40. Giselle Ollinger-Zinque. Introduction to The Belgian Contribution to Surrealism, Edinburgh, 1971, p.10.
41. The group was split between those who followed a Stalinist line and those who wished for a more "democratic" Communism.
42. E.L.T. Mesens 'Les Apprentis MAGICIENS au pays de la pléthore', op. cit. note 9, p.37.
43. E.L.T. Mesens, cited in catalogue Hommage discret à E.L.T. Mesens, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, 1970, no pagination.
44. Vovelle, op. cit. p.172.
45. Illustrated Vovelle, op. cit. p.203.
46. E.L.T. Mesens, op. cit. note 9, p.38.
47. E.L.T. Mesens catalogue to exhibition which he mounted, 75 oeuvres du demi-siècle, Knokke-le-Zoute, 1951, no pagination.
48. Vovelle op. cit. p.173.
49. Op. cit. note 43.
50. Ibid.
51. Personal communication from Jean Scutenaire.

CHAPTER 9

Mesens' Poetry

Mesens always thought of himself as first and foremost a poet,¹ though what he called "poetic" activities embraced a wider conception of the poet's role and included his work as a collagist, Surrealist proselytizer and art dealer. Professor J.H. Matthews has commented:²

"The Surrealists treat any mode of expression contributing to the attainment of their ends as poetic. For them Surrealism is poetry".

The French group believed that words, poems and paintings must be considered as means, not ends in themselves, and should be evaluated according to their success in pushing back the frontiers of the so called real.

Thus in the Déclaration du Janvier 1925, they said:

"We have nothing to do with literature. But we are quite capable, if need be, of making use of it like anyone else".³

Writing for Mesens was not an aesthetic enterprise, it was above all a "weapon",⁴ "Tant mieux si elle est belle".⁵ He wanted his verse to be effective, to profoundly influence the reader:

"Dé trompez vous
Ne vous y tromper pas
Je suis ici pour le plaisir
Pour le grand genre
Pour tout pour le tuyau pour la fourrure

Je suis le remplaçant du chef d'orchestre des névropathes
Le voyageur de commerce international
Le célèbre inventeur de la noix à sectionner les dents carrées".⁶

Undeceive yourself
Don't deceive yourself
I am here for pleasure
For the grand style
For everything for the tube for the fur

I am the replacement for the conductor of the nervous wreck
orchestra
The international commercial traveller
The celebrated inventor of a nut which will break your teeth⁷

Mesens' poems are subversive both in their humour and in their attacks on reason and literary form. He sought to unify dissimilar images or ideas in order to create new resonances.

Although the images in his poetry appear to follow one another spontaneously, they were carefully calculated. Louis Scutenaire, the lawyer/poet member of the Belgian group, described⁸ how Mesens was forever searching for motifs but not in the sense of careful literary research; in the street or in a café a phrase or word would come to him which appealed to him – whether logical or absurd; he would write it down on a scrap of paper and put it into his pocket. Mesens collected ideas like this so that when he felt like "creating" a poem he would incorporate these odd words or phrases into a carefully constructed piece. His method of creating collage was a parallel process – he would collect odd scraps of paper and ephemera, and later when an idea for a collage came to him, he would assemble items from his collection into a coherent whole. The poems Mesens wrote varied according to the material at hand just as his collages did, and could be lyrical or harsh, sentimental or bitter, humorous or sad.

Although as a young man Mesens had espoused Dada, his verse was never totally negative or totally destructive of all poetic form as that of Tzane and Huelsenbeck.⁹ His early poems written between 1923 and 1925 demonstrate a reaction against rational poetic metaphor and conventional language usage in their strange imagery:

"Un régiment de brosses à dents
Attendait l'heure du bivouac"¹⁰

or

"Roue en plein bleu
Ombre immobile dans les caves du temps"¹¹

These combinations of disparate words were to typify the imagery of French Surrealist poetry – in particular that of Eluard and Péret. To quote Eluard for instance:

"Ta chevelure d'or anges dans le vide du monde
Dans le vide de vitres lourdes de silence"¹²

or Péret:

"Maintenant partons pour la maison des algues
Où nous verrons des éléments couverts par leur ombre"¹³

For Mesens ,

"A word is a body in itself ... a word can exist in itself,
then an image can exist in itself and can be linked with
any other image".¹⁴

An early poem of Mesens written in 1924 illustrates the harsh imagery which typified some of his early poetry:

Joli Pays

"Si les nymphes chromatiques
Boivent l'essence bitumeuse des convulsions
Si les sangsues médicinales escaladent l'éternité
Si les étalages des confiseries se pâment d'amour
Pour la patrie
Jamais
Dans ce pays de fortes têtes
Les sardines à l'huile de la mer mauve
Ne deviendront les papillons."

Beauty Spot

"If chromatic nymphs
Drink the bituminous petrol of convulsions
If medicinal leeches clamber up eternity
If window displays in confectioners' shops swoon
For their native land
Never
In this hard headed land
Will sardines in the oil of a purple sea
Become butterflies. "

In these verses Mesens gave vent to his despair that the people of the city, the canned dead fish, drugged into torpor, filled with cheap patriotism, will never learn to break out and fly free. He later wrote about his disquiet and how the poet can be inspired to express his inner feelings:

"Inspiré par le vent
Et guidé par la lune
Il inventait sans y penser
L'image atroce
De ma cruelle inquiétude" 15

Between 1925 and 1940 Mesens' poetry attacked the world of appearances and re-created the world according to the poet's inner necessity:

"Je change de jeu
Tous les cinq sens
Et je suis blanc
Mon coeur le dit" 16

For Surrealist poets the essential aim was to "transform" the world by revolutionizing our consciousness of external appearances. In this way

the mind can become aware of latent possibilities in everything which surrounds us. Thus Mesens wrote that for the poet,

"Les paroles qu'il lui arrive de prononcer transforment
le décor".¹⁷

The images used by Mesens were revelatory – a means to enlarge the mind's cognitive powers. Paul Nougé, the Belgian Surrealist poet, wrote in Histoire de ne pas rire that

"The reality of an object will depend closely upon the attributes with which our imagination has endowed it, upon the number, the complexity of these attributes and upon the manner in which the invented complex fits into the whole, pre-existing within us and existing in the minds of those like us".¹⁸

For Mesens, poetry imitates nothing as it is, in the hands of the author, necessarily inventive and reveals "désirs confus latents"¹⁹ and an "Eternel retour des images/Etranges/Entamant mon/Esprit".²⁰

A means which Mesens consistently used in his poems to emancipate language was word play. This had been used to great effect by Marcel Duchamp, for by approaching language "playfully" he had undermined reason and logic: this was an aspect of Duchamp's work much admired by Surrealists. For Mesens word play had revelatory possibilities:

"Jeux de mots se profilant sur l'horizon avec de
reflets d'incendie".²¹

Freeing words from their normal usage, Mesens produced poetic phrases often dictated by sound association:

"Le poème c'est le cheval
le cheval clic clac
le cheval tic tac
le cheval tactique
le cheval de bataille
le cheval de combustion
le cheval d'appréciation"²²

Aragon had used similar word constructions:

"Le ministre
C'est un cuistre
Mais la cuisse
C'est une cuisse
Pour une cuisse c'est une cuisse".²³

Word play was used by Mesens as a means of avoiding rational poetic limitations. The poem quoted above starting with the line "Le poème

c'est le cheval" illustrates also Mesens' use of repetition on an initial theme in his verse. Later in this poem the initial line is expanded and inverted:

"L'écuyère au petit trot au galop se cambre
Sur le cheval de chambre"

.....
"Le cheval c'est le poème
Le poème c'est le cheval
Poème dans mon écurie"

In much of his poetry Mesens builds up each piece from an initial word device or word combination:

"Je change de jeu
Tous les cinq sens
Et je suis blanc
Mon coeur le dit

Jeu en plein blanc
Roue en plein bleu
Ombre immobile dans le cave de temps
Main de femme"

From this initial succession of words emerge images of love:

"Ah quel incompréhensible pendule
Jeu en plein blanc de mon amour
Roue en plein bleu de mon amour"²⁴

Mesens' Alphabet Sourd Aveugle written while he was recovering from an illness in the Edith Cavell Clinic, Brussels, in August 1930, illustrates most completely how Mesens used an initial device to control his poetic expression. Taking each letter of the alphabet as the starting point, Mesens built up twenty-six little poems, each poem printed on a separate page,²⁵ thus:

J mages cent fois perdues
mage toujours présente et
mage cent fois confondue
mages savamment machinées
mmobile et aveugle j'attends votre
nvasion dans mon desert
mmense

J ardin sauvage
alonne de
onchets
ardine piétine comme un corps de femme que
'aime

It is evident that the letter sets the pace of each poem - Paul Eluard wrote in his introduction²⁶ to Mesens' Alphabet that:

"La lettre mange le mot comme une ligne droite
infinie le dessin. Pure abstraction en soi elle n'est
vraiment concrète et objective que pour ces idiots
de la vue qui en ont la perception brute. C'est en
considérant cette vérité psychique que Mesens nomme
son alphabet: sourd aveugle. Ce degré franchi, sachons-
lui gré de nous imposer ces belles initiales qui déterminent
encore, après les avoir remplacés, l'emblème, le symbole
et l'image, ces belles initiales auxquelles succéderont un
jour celles d'un langage commun à toutes les sensations -
à tous les hommes".

The title given by Mesens to his Alphabet probably refers to Eluard's series of poems published under the title Les Dessins d'une Vie ou la Pyramide Humaine²⁷ in which Eluard talks of the dream where receptivity is keener than the sense perceptions of the waking hours, and he can hear the language of the deaf and dumb, and with the "pure facility of sight can envisage such images as "perpendicular green" or "raspberries white as milk" ".

Mesens' Alphabet probably also relates to a poem by Arthur Rimbaud, 'Voyelles',²⁸ in which the latter had attributed resonances to the vowels of the Alphabet. Scutenaire recounted²⁹ that Mesens admired Rimbaud's work and 'knew a great deal by heart'. Rimbaud had written:

"A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes
A noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui babinent autour des puanteurs cruelles

Rimbaud had despised accepted metaphoric convention in his verse and created extraordinary images which would expand our awareness of reality: he had assigned to the poet the task of making himself a "seer" and able to go beyond man's accepted possibilities. Mesens refers to Rimbaud's role of the poet as a "seer" (voyant) when he writes of his own poetic activity:

"Avec mes deux yeux
Je suis VOYANT comme deux"³⁰

The role of the poet is to reveal a wider range of experience through his vision.

"L'oeil est né au fond de l'océan. Il a vécu longtemps à l'état d'embryon dans les cheveux de la méduse. Enfin, conscient de la puissance, l'oeil est monté à la surface des flots. Le jour il brille comme le soleil et la nuit il promène sur les eaux des lueurs équivoques de phare qui font s'égarer les bateaux".³¹

"The eye was born on the ocean floor. It lived a long time in an embryonic state in Medusa's hair. Eventually, conscious of its strength the eye climbed to the surface of the waves. During the day it shines like the sun and at night it casts on the waters ambiguous lighthouse beams which cause boats to lose their way".

Mesens calls on the poet not only to turn his eyes onto the external world but to re-create that world with his own imagination. Thus he advises his tax collector to "go to an oculist" who will tell him "that it is preferable to buy glasses that are black on the outside and looking glass inside, then his thought will grow rich at home".³²

Mesens consistently used his poetry to hammer home the Surrealist message:

"Ne conduisez plus vos enfants à l'école
Apprenez-leur l'usage SECRET
de la parole"³³

while at the same time expressing his rejection of the ordinary world of appearances where true poetry does not exist:

"Dans ce pays cassé la poésie n'existe plus
Il ne subsiste ici que l'erreur et l'horreur".³⁴

The world without poetry becomes an "arid garden" in his poem 'Le mieux est l'ennemie du bien',³⁵ and people blind and deaf to its nascent possibilities:

"Espoinne au masque de cuir
Ecoute tête qui n'écoute pas
LA MAGIE pas assez jardin sec
N'HABITE PAS assez jardin sec
LES PALACES pas assez jardin sec"

The three poems referred to above were written in the 1930s and it was during this period that Mesens' verse became more overtly polemical. The poetry which he wrote from the mid-1930s after he had moved to London was published in the London Bulletin when Mesens was involved with the English Surrealists, and attempting to form a coherent group. He continued to write poems, with a gap during the period of the London

Gallery between 1945 and 1953, until 1958. Mesens' later work of the 1940s and 1950s became much more lyrical, although it still retains an element of surprise:

"La pointe de tes yeux
Sur la pointe de tes seins
Tes yeux dans mon sein
Et tes seins dans ma tête"³⁶

"The point of your eyes
On the point of your breasts
Your eyes in my breast
And your breasts in my head."

The imagery in this poem for instance has mellowed since the period in the 1920s when Mesens' poetry occasionally recalled Lautréamont's nightmare world:

"Ils boivent ensemble la liqueur des morts
Les yeux mouillés l'horizon et la mer
Abordent à la table poussiéreuse et amère
Ou se taisent les objets familiers"³⁷

"Together they drink the liquid from dead men
Eyes wet the horizon and the sea
Reach to the dusty and bitter table
Where familiar objects are silent."

Mesens' collected poems published in 1958 contain a certain number of prose pieces. Some are like records of dreams or reveries such as 'Petit poème en prose' or 'Rêve du 10 mars, 1943' while others are attempts to convey Surrealist ideas in a poetic phraseology such as 'Errements', quoted below, in which strange and beautiful images occur reminiscent of the fantasies in Ernst's collages such as Femme 100 têtes. The Surrealists were opposed to the separation of prose and poetry as methods of expression and like Aragon, Mesens' prose had in common with his verse an element of scandalous protest which for him was fundamental to Surrealism:

"Je devine, je vois bien des choses

Il y une femme au fond d'un puits. Ses seins sont
couverts d'écailles de poisson et son bras gauche, que
fleurit une main en caoutchouc, designe le ciel avec
l'imperturbable majesté d'un personnage mythologique

Il y a, ailleurs, un jardinier-cyclope qui plante
dans son jardin des flumes de paon et les féconde du
regard de son oeil unique. Les plumes prennent racine
et grandissent. Elles seront arbre un jour et leurs branches

(branches de plumes) se couvriront de petits vestons et de longs pantalons".

"I guess, I see all manner of things

There is a woman at the bottom of a well. Her breasts are covered with fish scales and her left arm, decked with a rubber hand, points to the sky with the imperturbable majesty of a mythological character

Elsewhere there is a cyclopean gardener who plants peacocks' feathers in his garden and fertilizes them with a glance from his single eye. The feathers take root and grow. They will be trees one day, and their branches (branches of feathers) will cover themselves with little jackets and long trousers".³⁸

Finally, much of Mesens' poetry demonstrates a delicate wit and an ironic sense of humour subversive of accepted word usage and creating amusing metamorphoses:

"Monsieur niNETte - niNON
Sur la tête un chapeau de carton
Avance à tatons sur le trottoir de droite
De la rue Notre-Dame-de-la-Morte-lente".

The 'monsieur' referred to in the first line is gradually transformed as the poem progresses:

"Cependant tout à coup il s'arrête
Devant la montre minuscule
D'un marchand de brimborions
Qui vend aussi des cartes postales

Sur l'une il voit Ninette et sur l'autre Ninon
Et sur chacune il voit encore
Monsieur Nilettes - Nylon soi-même"³⁹

André Breton in his introduction to his Anthologie de l'humour noir⁴⁰ quotes Freud in his assertion of the "liberating" and "elevating" force of humour and in discussing Péret's work⁴¹ Breton makes the point that employing the liberty of humour,

"Everything is free, everything is potentially liberated by the vigorous reassertion of a generalised principle of mutation, of metamorphosis".

In Mesens' work humour creates extraordinary deranged images:

"Les curés et les fous
Coiffés d'une salade
Jouent au nain jaune
Dans les lieux occultes"⁴²

"Priests and madmen
With salad hairdo's
Play at Pope Joan
In secret places".

Mesens wrote of the place of humour in poetry and its power to liberate words:

"In front of the given sentence stands a sentry. Perhaps it is lieutenant humour? Behind the sentence stands another sentinel. It is perhaps ALSO humour. Humour senior (or General Humour). The sentence is well guarded - like a palace nearly inaccessible. But the interplay of words, the play of words, the "jeu de mots" may spread like wild-fire".⁴³

Underlying Mesens' work is a refusal to equate reality with the visible world. Reality is what our mind makes it and the poet should re-create the world according to his own desire. Humour, word play, irrational imagery are all in an effort to push back the barriers of the real. During the period when he was intimately involved with the Surrealist movement between 1926 and 1940 Mesens was inspired to produce verse characterised by verbal manipulation. Language for Mesens becomes a creative agent once it is released from its normal functional purpose and is able to push back the limits of what is normally accepted as real, achieving a conjunction of internal and external reality in Surrealist images.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Chapter 7.
2. J.H. Matthews Surrealist Poetry in France, New York, 1969, p.2.
3. Cited Maurice Nadeau op. cit. p.112.
4. Jean Scutenaire op. cit. p.55.
5. Ibid.
6. From 'L'art du portrait implique toujours certaines concessions à la caricature', London Bulletin no. 4 - 5 July 1938, p.28.
7. Author's translation. This will be the case with all examples cited unless otherwise stated.
8. Op. cit. note 3, p.56.
9. For instance, part of an un-named poem by Huelsenbeck,
"Here is the beagle damo birridamo
Lolla do funga qualla di mango
damai da dai umbala damo"
Cited Richter op. cit. p.21.
10. "A regiment of toothbrushes
Waited for bivouac time".
From 'Egard-entendu' in the collection of poems 'Défense de Pleurer' published in E.L.T. Mesens Poèmes, Paris 1959, p.22.
11. "Plain blue wheel
Immobile shadow in the caverns of time "
From 'Sommeil-départ' , op. cit. note 10, p. 23.
12. "Your hair of oranges in the emptiness of the world
In the emptiness of the heavy window panes of silence"
Paul Eluard from Capitale de la Douleur in C.A. Hackett Anthology of Modern French Poetry, Oxford, 1964, p.144.
13. "Now we depart for the house of seaweed
Where we shall see elements covered by their own shadow".
Benjamin Péret from 'Sur la colline', op. cit. note 2, p.44.
14. E.L.T. Mesens interview with George Melly for Aquarius,
Broadcast by I.B.A., June 6th, 1970. Transcript, collection
George Melly.
15. E.L.T. Mesens 'Il avait pris pour habitude' in Le Surréalisme en 1929: Variétés, June 1929, p.38.

16. Op. cit. note 11.
17. E.L.T. Mesens 'Errements'. First published without a title in Distances no. 2, Paris, 1928, p.15, later in Le Quatre Vents no. 4, Paris 1946, p.171.
18. Cited by J.H. Matthews in The Imagery of Surrealism, New York, 1977, p.91.
19. E.L.T. Mesens Alphabet Sourd Aveugle, Brussels, 1933.
20. Ibid.
21. E.L.T. Mesens 'Grandir en s'arrêtant à tout', in Le Soupirail no. 6, Charleroi, January 1929, p.132.
22. E.L.T. Mesens 'Le poème c'est' from the collection Défense de Pleurer, op. cit. note 10, p.25.
23. Quoted by J.H. Matthews, op. cit. note 2, p.33.
24. Op. cit. note 16.
25. Op. cit. note 19.
26. Ibid.
27. Reprinted in part from Cahiers du Sud 1926, in Paul Eluard Choix de Poèmes, Paris, 1951.
28. Arthur Rimbaud Oeuvres, first published Paris, 1871.
29. Personal interview.
30. E.L.T. Mesens 'Paysage cycliste - bibi' in "'Le Surréalisme, même' 3", Paris 1957, p.40.
31. E.L.T. Mesens 'Histoire de l'Oeil', Distances no. 3, Paris, 1928, p.11.
32. E.L.T. Mesens, 'Letter to the tax collector', London, February 5th, 1942. Published in Catalogue Three Collagists, I.C.A. London, 1958.
33. E.L.T. Mesens 'Proclamation' in Intervention Surréaliste: Documents 34, Brussels, 1934.
34. E.L.T. Mesens 'Le Présent' in the collection 'La Misère Humaine', 1930-39, op. cit. note 10.

35. E.L.T. Mesens London Bulletin no. 4 - 5, London, July 1938, pp. 26-27.
36. E.L.T. Mesens 'Ce Soir' in Surréalisme, même 3, Paris 1957, pp. 40-41.
37. E.L.T. Mesens, op. cit. note 10, p.16.
38. E.L.T. Mesens 'Errements', translated by Roland Penrose and the author in Troisième Front - poèmes de guerre, London, 1944.
39. E.L.T. Mesens 'Proletaire en faux col masochiste', op. cit. note 10, p.161.
40. Paris, 1940. Part of this is reprinted in translation by F. Rosemont in What is Surrealism? London 1978, p.189.
41. Ibid. p.196.
42. E.L.T. Mesens 'Claquemure!' in La Carte d'après Nature, Brussels, January 1954, p.8.
43. Op. cit. note 32.

CHAPTER 10

Mesens' early collages, 1924 - 1931

Between 1924 and 1931, Mesens made at least fifteen collages.¹ We know of this because, although they were spare time experiments, he kept many of his early works² and some were subsequently reproduced in reviews, journals and books.³ In addition to this, a chalk drawing exists which Mesens executed in 1923 (figs. 28 (a) and (b)).⁴

The latter is an interesting little work as it reveals Mesens' growing enthusiasm for Dada and the concept of man reduced to a machine which had been developed earlier by Picabia and Duchamp.⁵ In the case of Mesens' drawing, man is reduced to a penknife, in this way he becomes a dangerous implement - he can cut away artistic pretension and convention and make a clean start. The concept of man the artist and the idea of individual talent is negated and replaced in the context of the picture by a mere tool. Aestheticism is denied and the picture becomes an "anti-drawing" like Picabia's machine portraits which were "traps for the mind in search of aesthetic sensations".⁶ Several of Mesens' early collages contain machine images - surgical instruments, a syringe, a fire extinguisher (figs. 33, 38), while the photographs, printed material and rayogrammes which he used have all been mechanically made.

In his early collages, unlike those which he produced after 1954, Mesens had no interest in colour - they are all black and white, and in only one, Masque, 1927 (fig.29) does the poet use a variety of textured materials, apart from old illustrations and drawings from journals. Although in all his collages Mesens sought to unify dissimilar images as in his poetry, there is a divergence between his early work and his main output commencing in the 1950s. Those made in the 1920s largely consist of juxtapositions of ready made materials and with one exception, no attempt is made to modify the images produced by using gouache, pencil or crayon as the artist was to do after 1954. There were also so few collages produced in the early period that one cannot isolate any stylistic development. The sources of the motifs are largely magazines or journals, most of which pre-date 1914. The combinations of the images are strange and dreamlike,

and whereas many of Mesens' later works are lyrical, sentimental and expressionistic, here sentiment has no part to play.

Collage was used by Mesens as an expression of Surrealist ideas, and in his exploitation of the new means of expression already taken up by other artists such as Ernst, that is in combinations of disparate motifs - he sought to create disturbing and thought provoking ideas. In his introduction to the Max Ernst Exhibition at Knokke-le-Zoute, 1963, Mesens wrote:

"The papiers collés of Braque and Picasso, and lately, Henry Laurens, are simple plastic solutions or cut elements imitating a real material, counterpointing lines or forms which the artist has invented or interpreted. The only drama in these is the random of an interpretative inscription".

Continuing, he says that in Max Ernst's collages, on the other hand, the artist is not concerned with plastic considerations.

"In one fell swoop, he plunges on into the drama of opposing elements taken from the external world in an irritating way, so that they violate our accepted modes of thought both moral and logical".⁷

Related to Max Ernst's collage series using old engravings, Répétitions and Les Malheurs des Immortels (1922) which illustrated Eluard's poems, are a series of little collages by Mesens which were reproduced in Variétés in 1929⁸ (whereabouts of the originals unknown). These are disturbing images, three of which depict human features combined with inanimate objects in strange juxtapositions - Dessin (fig. 31) is composed of a fireman, standing in a frying pan, La plaque tournante (fig. 30) a woman's head lying in a serving dish, and La fabrication des poissons (fig. 32) shows the head and shoulders of a man gazing at a bizarre scientific experiment out of which small fish bounce into the air. The last image in this series of collages which is untitled (fig. 33) consists of a combination of lethal looking implements, knives, an axe, a pickaxe and an object which could possibly be an oil lamp.

None of these images is rational, but they are intended to perturb and irritate the viewer. Collages of this type, taken from old line engravings or prints do not appear in Mesens' later work. While they represent a specifically anti-aesthetic gesture of a Dadaist nature, they also

demonstrate the Belgian attitude towards Surrealism whereby images of reality itself are taken and combined to create hitherto unforeseen possibilities. In this respect Mesens and other members of the Belgian group were continuing to use the Dadaist techniques developed by Ernst which had been codified into the Surrealist aim of expanding our consciousness by creating a new type of imagery using elements of reality itself. Although Mesens used Dada techniques his work was not a total negation of art altogether. Whereas a number of earlier Dada adherents were totally "anti-art" in their attitude, which inevitably culminated in a negation of Dada itself, others - notably Hans Arp - were concerned to create a new kind of art based on life. Arp continued to develop the methods of expression he had evolved when working with Dada painters and poets; later he said,

"I exhibited with the Surrealists because their rebellious attitude to art and their direct attitude to life was wise like Dada".⁹

There is often a human element in Mesens' work, but reduced to a shell, a flat empty cut-out, a dummy, a mask. Figures are lifeless cut-outs so that in this way the creator is an anti-artist, he does not reproduce nature or the external world, and aesthetic considerations are for him valueless. Throughout the 1920s Mesens' work was biting critical of conventional artistic preoccupations; his first known collage, 1924, exemplifying his attitude and later mode of expression, was called Invasion.¹⁰ It consists of two Chiricoesque headless tailor's dummies, apparently cut out of a journal, one of a child, the other an adult, advancing towards the observer - the sense of movement is created by the smaller dummy being set on a plane further back than the larger one. The dummies are set within a space which is the interior of a library. The title, which is of crucial importance as in so much Surrealist work, gives the meaning - here are the dummy destroyers of the outworn aestheticism represented by the books, marching through - characterless. This work represents a fundamental tenet of Dada/Surrealist work, not only the destruction of outworn modes of artistic expression, but that collage can be made by anybody - the headless dummy.

"The marvellous must be made by all, and not by one alone",

Aragon wrote,¹¹

"What is now being sustained is the negation of the technique on one hand, as in collage, and added to that, the personality technique; the painter, if it is still necessary to call him that, is no longer bound to his painting by a mysterious physical relationship analogous to generation. And born of these negations is an affirmative idea which has been called the personality of choice. A manufactured object can be as easily incorporated into a painting as to constitute a painting in itself".

The motif of the dummy is frequent in much Dada and Surrealist work. Mesens possessed an early collage of Ernst¹² executed in 1920, Anatomie jeune mariée. This depicts part of a dummy - a headless torso and arm, compiled out of moveable parts, which is lying in a tin bath. Max Ernst wrote of his collage,¹³

"....the exploration of a new greater range of experience; in which the borders of the so-called internal world and external world will probably disappear altogether".

Hence the mechanistic appearance of Ernst's dummy, with its internal parts exposed as metal pipes. The reduction of man to dummy, machine or mask was a characteristic of Dada and Surrealist collage. Often deriving inspiration from De Chirico, whose strange dummies inhabit bizarre deserted townscapes, the substitution of the human being for an image of this type was for artists an escape from reality, from the illusionistic representation of the external world, and from plasticity.

The making of collage, by taking ready made images, was considered to be a Surrealist activity in itself, inasmuch as the use of these mechanical means can serve as a point of departure and basis for "poetic hallucinations".¹⁴ In a work of Mesens of 1927, Masque, (fig. 29) the human face is reduced to a frightening paper mask. The nose consists of cut out and folded paper, a cork forming one nostril, while the mouth is not shown, but a real cigarette is glued to the spot where the mouth would be. Feathers cluster on the right-hand cheek and a feather forms an eyebrow. One eye is outlined in, the other is cut out of part of a black photograph in which a kind of iris appears like a cellular structure. The mask is set against the background of a rayogramme (see below) in

which the outline of the head flickers photographically, and a strange white apparition appears to float out of the brain. The whole is assembled Dada fashion and is reminiscent of Marcel Janco's Mask of 1919 (fig. 5), made of paper, cardboard and twine, though colour is added to this in gouache and pastel. Hugo Ball wrote of Janco's masks,¹⁵

"What altogether fascinates us about these is that they personify beings and embody passions larger than life. The dread of our times, the paralysing background of things is made visible".

The unrelated objects stuck together in Mesens' collage make the objects themselves take on a different reality - for instance the feathers on the cheek exist in themselves as soft and fine, but they take on a new meaning when superimposed on the mask; the texture and feeling of the feathers is reinforced by their association with the cheek. They are not a substitute for the skin as they would be in a Cubist collage, but being additional to it they retain their own identity.

After 1954 Mesens produced several more collages with the mask as the main constituent (viz. La Noctambule 4/1959 fig. 106)¹⁶ and this may relate to his admiration for Ensor. He owned a little drawing made by Ensor in 1901 which the artist had given him in 1926.¹⁷ Mesens' early works relate strongly to the "esprit" of this small picture, which consists of a skull with little wings on rising above a crowd of mask-like heads. The heads are bloated and smoke fat cigars, but their expressions are anguished. Mesens very much admired Ensor's work and this artist's biting comments on bourgeois society and its values. In Documents 34 Mesens likened the Belgian Surrealist group's activities to those of Ensor:¹⁸ according to him, the group has revived their mighty predecessor's attacks on the officially accepted social and aesthetic values of their country - the "paradis ridicule" denounced so forcibly by Baudelaire.

Mesens used the idea of the mask in another of his early works - Masque servant à insulter les aesthetes (fig. 34), 1929. Here he has taken a photograph of the head and shoulders of a neatly dressed young

woman who wears a rose on her dress, but he has covered her face completely with cut out bits of picture postcards and advertisements. He said, "Mon but est de provoquer un choc"¹⁹ and this little collage obviously lent strength to this idea. The collage first appeared among the pictures assembled for the magazine Variétés in 1929, a topical paper covering the arts generally; the impact of this work set among the illustrations is powerful and disturbing.

In his capacity as editor of Variétés Mesens was responsible for the selection of illustrations. In January 1929 he selected a series of photographs of beautiful hands posed in various attitudes. Set among these was a photograph of his own of a man's clenched fist with knuckledusters on - the angle of the picture is such that the points of the weapon are directed towards the observer. The title of the photograph is Poing armé and is illustrative of Mesens' radical attitude. Mesens' interest in photography led him to experiment with rayogrammes, the method used by Man Ray whereby objects are placed on sensitized paper on a glass negative lit from above which Man Ray described²⁰ as,

"not quite a simple silhouette of the objects, but distorted and refracted by the glass more or less in contact with the paper and standing out against a black background the part directly exposed to the light".

While Man Ray was still in America during the First World War, he had searched for new methods in painting by which he could be liberated from creating pictures in a conventional manner. Conventional painting in oils or gouache depicting the external world of man and nature would inevitably for Man Ray be constrained by conventional aesthetic considerations. Like his contemporaries in Paris, Ernst and Picabia, Man Ray explored areas hitherto unrepresented visually, and which would open up the possibility of both new means of expression and new areas of representation. Thus in 1914-15, he recalled later,

"Not only would I cease to look for representation in nature, I would turn more and more to man-made sources".²¹

When Mesens was taken to Paris in 1921 by Erik Satie, he visited the first exhibition there of Man Ray's work, and it had a powerful effect on him. George Melly²² said that,

"Man Ray had introduced Mesens to a whole field of thought very much in line with his own".

Man Ray had not started to make rayogrammes in 1921 when the exhibition was shown at the Librairie Six, but commenced later in December of that year. Mesens was continually in touch with him after this date and began to experiment with rayogrammes himself in 1926, at least five of which have been traced,²³ though there may be more. Whereas Man Ray's rayogrammes were not added to by the artist after the print was made, Mesens used the rayogrammes he made himself as the basis for collages. In his first work of this type Je ne pense qu'à vous (fig. 35) (1926) which he initially entitled Portrait d'un poème²⁴ he used a background of photo-sensitized paper - this has a dark upper half while on the lower half in an exposed area there is an image which looks like the profile of a head. Glued onto the dark area are small figures taken out of a fashion magazine of circa 1900, while in the unexposed area are cut-outs of two boys dressed in clothes of the same era, who appear to have a little pumping machine attached to a rubber hose, the end of which one of the boys has pressed against the side of the horse. These figures are set in front of a piece of paper criss-crossed with lines and letters so that it looks like a skeleton crossword puzzle. To the bottom left of the collage the artist has placed a cut out illustration of a woman's hand (one of the first of many instances of this motif which Mesens was to use subsequently). The collage is strange and enigmatic - the overtones are reminiscent of Khnopff's Memories in which a series of photographs of young women in clothes similar to those depicted by Mesens wander over a bleak painted landscape. A photograph of this Symbolist picture appeared in Variétés no. 8 of 1928. Mesens' collage also illustrates his debt to Max Ernst in the use of old-fashioned illustrations. Ernst had used pictures from similar sources in his early collages of 1919, and later in the series Femmes cent têtes and La semaine de bon té of 1929 and 1934.

In the collage La Lumière Déconcertante (fig. 36) 1929, Mesens has again used collage and rayogramme, though this time the collaged section consists of a reproduction of a photograph of New York City, set against a black ground. On the area of sensitized paper which has been exposed appears a giant ray-like apparition which plunges into

an area just above the city from which a collaged eye emerges which seems to billow in vapour round the buildings. Again the title is integral to the poetry of the picture - the disconcerting light (Surrealism) illuminates the subconscious of the city represented by the eye. This collage is of the same polemical nature as Arrière Pensée (fig. 37), 1929, (Ulterior Motive) in which a photograph of an eye appears on a black photo background, while a glistening shape again like a large ray moves downwards culminating at the base of the picture. This rests partly on a glistening biomorphic shape. The whole is viscular and appears to be an interior image. Here, as in Lumière Déconcertante, and as in his poetry, the eye for Mesens is the attribute of the seer who looks inwards on his imagination for inspiration.

"Avec mes deux yeux
Je suis voyant comme deux".²⁵

Even stranger than this collage is a work of 1928 which was given the title Frontispice pour Alphabet Sourd Aveugle (fig. 38).²⁶ This consists of a rayogramme onto which is collaged again an illustration from an old journal. A strange light patch floats to the bottom right, and to the left is a white circular area with a dark circular central patch - like a round eye. Superimposed on this is a torn out text from a medical journal out of which a distorted hand has been cut, while in front of the iris-like area is glued a cut out illustration of a small machine which could be a syringe. The images when juxtaposed with the title become attributes of blindness and deafness - the hand touching the paper, the huge iris, the syringe. The whole is delicately balanced, while the strange combinations are unnerving; and set against the background, attain a nightmare quality.

Mesens' use of rayogrammes differs from Man Ray's. Whereas in the latter's work the images tend to be centralized,²⁷ Mesens disposes his forms hovering in space. In Mesens' collage referred to above, he inserted a little mechanical image. This appears again in two other works of the period, Projet de Monument aux Suicides de tous les temps (fig. 39), 1925, and Instruction Obligatoire III (fig. 41), 1930. In the earlier work Mesens used simply a combination of old illustrations. A machine which could be a pump or fire extinguisher stands behind a

four-legged stool. On the seat of the stool rests a handleless torso in a jacket, with a large head encased in wire mesh, (the stool takes on the appearance of the lower half of the body). The pump attachment is directed at the back of the figure's head. In intent the collage is very much in accord with Mesens' verse,

"Espoinne au masque de cuir²⁸
Ecoute tête écouteuse qui n'écoute pas".

and with the collage Masque servant à insulter les Aesthetes, (fig. 34). The collage in spirit relates to Dada and to a period of that movement exemplified by Duchamp and Picabia in which the artists deliberately created confusion between man and machine, whereby the human being is reduced to an object. But in this collage Mesens goes further and the work is best described in Breton's discussion of Ernst's collages:

"The external object had broken with its normal environment and its component parts had so to speak emancipated themselves from it, so that they were now able to maintain entirely new relationships with other elements escaping from the principle of reality, but retaining all their importance on that plane".²⁹

Executed in the year immediately after he had made L'Invasion, the collage expressly refers to the need to destroy outmoded forms of thought and expression.

Another strange machine appears in Instruction Obligatoire II (fig. 40), 1930 - this time in a bizarre landscape. Here Mesens took an illustration of a Spanish landscape with a couple of horse riders in the distance, and onto this he collaged pictures of flowering plants which, when superimposed on the landscape, take on the apparent size of trees. In the middle other images are glued on - a cut out bulbous flower illustration which takes on the aspect of a giant piece of vegetation, to the right of which stands a strange machine - probably a cut out illustration of a surgical instrument, and above which a giant piece of seaweed floats across the whole. The collage is delicately balanced and the juxtaposition of images creates the vision of the strange landscape of another planet onto which the two horsemen have accidentally strayed.

In Instruction Obligatoire III (fig. 41) of the same year Mesens used similar devices. Here, set against a background of a

Mediterranean sea view, grows a huge form. The lower half is a cut out flower petal illustration, the upper half an illustration of a 'fin de siècle' frilled woman's skirt and bustle. The skirt has been turned upside down and slanted at an angle so that it appears to be a vegetal excrescence growing upwards. In a third untitled collage of 1929 (fig. 42), Mesens again took a Mediterranean view - this time of a road, hills and palms, but a photograph rather than an illustration. Onto this he has collaged a cut out piece of paper in the shape of a bottle neck on a flattened base. Giant lips have been cut out from an illustration and glued onto the lower half, while at the top of the neck more lips are collaged onto a drop shape cut out of a photograph of a palm tree - this representing a head. This is the only collage of the period in which Mesens drew in an outline and cut out a distinctive shape. This thing, abstract and biomorphic, teeters across the work in a drunken manner (a paper crown tumbles off its head) - the huge lips, leering at us, like Man Ray's Hovers or Observatory Time (1932-4).³⁰

Finally, another strange object is evoked in Instruction Obligatoire I (fig. 43), 1927, though on this occasion the background is not a view but black with little stars dotted over it. Onto this is pasted an illustration of a child's broderie anglaise dress, an odd form looking like knitted socks and a large disc with striations across it so that it looks like a planet with a "Martian" landscape. In all three collages entitled Instruction Obligatoire (Compulsory Instruction) Mesens is directing the observer to strange vistas and objects, visions not possible in the world we know, but in the world of the imagination where anything is possible. He was to produce imaginary landscapes in the late 1950s and '60s, not as in Instruction Obligatoire II and III, directly based on a photographic or line illustration of a landscape, but created by combining different textures (see Paysage I (fig. 105), 1958) to build up an abstract scene. In the three works referred to above, Instruction Obligatoire II and III of 1930 and untitled of the same year, although he has taken old magazine illustrations in the manner of Ernst the final format of the works is entirely his own, for Ernst did not create landscapes out of collage.

In his collages Mesens did not, however, make any radical departure, he did not innovate any techniques, but adopted those already evolved in the work of Max Ernst, Man Ray and Picabia. His work at this stage demonstrates the forcefulness of the new type of Surrealist imagery, the poetic nature of this kind of work, and the ironic black humour of collages intended to end realism in art (Mesens had published in his magazine Marie no. 2 of 1926 an aphorism of Tzara, "Réalisme c'est ne que la merde! "). He displayed in these little pieces a diversity of means of expression and a sensitive and delicate feel for design and structure which contrasts with the subversive imagery and biting sarcasm of his work. Although the collage elements of rayogrammes, cut out photographs and black and white line illustrations were rarely to appear in his later work, the motifs - eyes, hands, masks - were to re-assert themselves constantly after 1954.

FOOTNOTES

1. All the collages which have been traced are reproduced.
2. These are now in the collections of Marcel and Adrien Dubucq, Brussels. Those known to be in the former collection have been cited. Since access has not been obtained to the latter, it cannot yet be ascertained how many are in it.
3. In particular in the review Variétés op. cit. Brussels, 1928-29. Eight collages were published in this magazine between January and October 1929. It is not known whether they were made that year or earlier.
4. Collection Conroy Maddox, London.
5. Duchamp, La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, 1912, in which the concept of a bride is "expressed by the juxtaposition of mechanical elements and visceral forms". Catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. page 23.
Picabia, Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité, 1915, 291, July - August 1915, in which there is no reference to the human figure at all: it has become parts of a machine. Ibid. p.35.
6. Michel Sanouillet, Francis Picabia et 391, Paris, 1966, p.39, cited ibid. p.39.
7. Cited by J.H. Matthews The Imagery of Surrealism, Syracuse University Press, 1977, p.7, from Exposition Max Ernst, July - August, 1963, p.9.
8. List of illustrations gives the editions and page numbers.
9. Hans Arp, letter to M. Bizekowski, 1929, Art Contemporain no. 3, Paris 1930; cited in D. Ades 'Dada and Surrealism' Concepts of Modern Art, ed. T. Richardson, London, 1974, p.135.
10. Reproduced in Art Forum, London, September 1966, p.10. Original, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
11. Cited by L. Lippard in translation in Surrealists on Art, from 'La peinture au défi' op. cit., p.50.
12. Illustrated in P. Waldberg, Max Ernst, Paris, 1958, p.151.
13. Cited by L. Lippard op. cit. note 11, p.135, from 'Qu'est-ce que c'est surréalisme?', catalogue of Ausstellung, Zurich, October - November 1934.

14. Marcel Jean History of Surrealist Painting, op. cit. p.126.
15. Illustrated Rubin op. cit. p.37.
16. Cited ibid. p.38.
17. Mesens first met Ensor in a café in Brussels called Aux Caves de Maestricht and then later visited him in Ostend (year unknown). He took Miró to visit Ensor at his home where paintings by the artist covered the walls and where The Entry of Christ into Brussels still hung. Mesens wrote,
 "I remember how excited the Catalan painter Miró was
 with these when I took him to see Ensor".
 E.L.T. Mesens, 'James Ensor', The Listener, February 14th, 1946,
 pp. 205-6. See also Appendix D, Mesens Collection, p.312.
18. Documents 34, ed. Mesens and Stephane Cordier, Brussels, 1934,
 footnote p.95.
19. La Meuse Lanterne, Brussels, April 23rd, 1971, p.3.
20. Man Ray Self Portrait, London, 1963, p.129.
21. Cited by R. Penrose, Man Ray, op. cit., p.38.
22. Mesens/Melly broadcast, 1970, op. cit.
23. The author has traced five. Vovelle cites three, op. cit. p.275.
24. Exhibited at the Foto-Auge (Photo-Eye) exhibition, Stuttgart,
 1929. Fig. 45 in the catalogue.
25. E.L.T. Mesens 'Paysage Cycliste-Bibi', Poèmes 1923-1958,
 Paris, 1959, p.158.
26. Used as a frontispiece for Mesens' collection of poems, Alphabet
 Sourd Aveugle, Brussels, 1933.
27. Man Ray, Circular Objects in motion with tacks, spring and
 electric plug, 1922, fig. 39, Penrose op. cit., or Rayogramme
 fig. 41, ibid.
28. E.L.T. Mesens 'Le mieux est l'ennemie du bien', op. cit. note
 24, p.106.
29. André Breton Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism,
 Reprinted in translation in Surrealism and Painting, op. cit. p.64.
30. Roland Penrose, op. cit. fig. X, p.128.

CHAPTER 11

Mesens' Work as an Art Dealer in London 1936 - 1940

Between 1938 and 1939 Mesens was manager of the London Gallery, which became a focal point for Surrealist activity in England before the War. Under his direction the gallery was the first in London to concentrate virtually entirely on Surrealist art, while the London Gallery publishing house printed the London Bulletin edited by Mesens, which was the only major Surrealist review to be produced in England either before or after the Second World War. The exhibitions which Mesens mounted were to be important, as they demonstrated the wide range of techniques which had been adopted by Surrealist painters on the Continent in the 1920s and '30s, most of which had not previously been seen in London: the works shown ranged from the photographic clarity of Magritte and Delvaux to the abstract forms of Miro and the collages and frottages of Max Ernst.

Mesens came to London, probably for the first time,¹ to take part in the International Surrealist Exhibition which was held in June 1936.² He had met the English Surrealist painter Roland Penrose in Paris, and had come to know the Surrealist painters and poets in London grouped round Penrose and Herbert Read who had begun to meet regularly in order to mount the exhibition.³ Mesens began to pay an increasing number of visits to England in 1936 and 1937, and late in 1937 he and Roland Penrose decided to embark on setting up the London Gallery as a "Surrealist Gallery".⁴ Penrose provided the capital to purchase the remainder of the lease of the gallery, which had only a couple of years to run.

It has not been possible to discover the exact reasons for Mesens' decision to settle in England. Julian Trevelyan, a member of the English Surrealist group, considered that Mesens decided to move to London as he saw its "Surrealist possibilities".⁵ Certainly by 1936 and '37 there were a number of people who were actively interested in Surrealism, as will be indicated below, and there was no organised movement as in Paris

or Brussels, while little Surrealist art had been seen in London until the exhibition of 1936. On the other hand it is probable that the reasons for Mesens' decision to settle in England were more complex than the "Surrealist possibilities" suggested by Trevelyan.

In Belgium Mesens was constantly engaged in a battle against "officialdom" in the hanging of exhibitions.⁶ The Palais des Beaux Arts is a semi-official organisation and as secretary Mesens could not dictate what exhibitions were to be held. He, nevertheless, had taken every opportunity to mount shows of artists who interested him, in particular those involved in the Surrealist movement. By 1937, thanks to his efforts, work by Surrealist painters both Belgian and those whose work was shown by the Paris group was gaining a more widespread coverage in his own country, but Belgian Expressionism was the contemporary art form in the 1930s which received official government patronage.⁷ This naturally did not appeal to Mesens but there was an additional irritant: in spite of the fact that Expressionism had originated in the Flemish speaking areas and most of the artists were first and foremost Flemish, all official transactions in Brussels had to be in French including such details as the titles of artists' work in catalogues. The government's insistence on the use of French as the official language during this period was an aspect of Belgian life with which Mesens was not in sympathy. He was, as a Surrealist, in favour of complete liberty of expression, which included the freedom to communicate in both Flemish and French,⁸ and it was evident that London offered him freedom - firstly from the constant language divisions and the problem of official patronage, and secondly because London offered him scope as a commercial dealer and he could be completely free to mount shows of his, by now, very large collection. When he took over the management of the London Gallery, it was a golden opportunity to publicize the work of Surrealist painters and Surrealist theories in general. Not only was it evident that Surrealism, although influencing the work of poets and painters from the early 1930s, was not properly understood in England, but by 1936 there was the nucleus of a Surrealist group which could possibly be galvanized into action.

The situation in England in the mid-1930s was very different from that in Belgium. In Brussels, Constructivist art and geometric abstraction had ceased to be a focal interest for young artists in the mid-1920s - indeed Victor Servranckx moved permanently to Paris in 1925, and the emphasis was on Expressionism and Surrealism. In London, on the other hand, a small group of avant-garde artists in the early 1930s had begun to develop a serious interest in Abstract and Constructivist paintings and sculpture, while a few, such as Paul Nash, Edward Burra and John Armstrong in particular, were beginning to assimilate Surrealist ideas in their work. Expressionism had not really taken root, with the notable exception of David Bomberg.⁹ The spearhead of the modern movement in London for a brief two years was the Unit One group founded by Paul Nash in 1933.¹⁰ The group included Constructivists such as Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth, those interested in Surrealism such as Edward Burra, John Armstrong and Paul Nash, and Henry Moore, who used aspects of both movements as a means of complete liberty of expression. Herbert Read, the poet and apologist for the group has said that:

"The aims of the Unit One group were quite frankly strategical: its members were united against the common enemy, an indifferent public, and had very little stylistic unity in their work".¹¹

Henry Moore has recalled that the general public were not simply indifferent but positively anti modern art: the artists who worked in a modern idiom were called "Bolsheviks" in the 1930s by the public at large.¹²

The group only managed to mount one London exhibition at the Mayor Gallery in 1934, although this travelled on to the provinces and members were thus able to gain the publicity they wanted. By 1935, however, Unit One had disintegrated; the Constructivist element was now grouped around Ben Nicholson and the Surrealist wing around Paul Nash.¹³ Abstract art, however, was also fostered by the Seven and Five Society, which by 1934 had voted out any figurative artists and was limited to a small group including Hepworth, Moore, Nicholson and Piper. The Seven and Five Society mounted the first purely Abstract show in England at the Zwemmer Gallery in 1935, though this was the Society's last exhibition. The quarterly review, Axis, published between 1935 and 1937 defended Abstract art and mounted the important London exhibition Abstract and

Concrete at the Lefèvre Gallery in 1936, though according to Dennis Farr, who has recently published a survey of art in England in the 1930s, the show was somewhat overshadowed by the International Surrealist Exhibition held at the same time.¹⁴

In the 1930s in London, in spite of the country's economic difficulties and the continuing Depression, there were a growing number of commercial dealers prepared to show work by both young British and foreign artists - in particular the Mayor Gallery and the Zwemmer Gallery. Also, from the mid-1930s until the outbreak of war the arrival of a number of distinguished artists from the Continent "contributed" according to Jasia Reichardt "in great measure to the vitality of the art scene" and for a short period London became an international art centre. Reichardt gives the following list of arrivals - "Mondrian, Gabo, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius, Breuer, Lubetkin, Mendelsohn, Calder and Mesens".¹⁵ The Zwemmer Gallery acted as the main showcase for Surrealism, it held the first London show of Dali in 1934, Mesens mounted a Miró exhibition there in 1937, and the Gallery distributed Cahiers d'art, Minotaure and later the London Bulletin.

There was, however, some confusion in London in the mid-1930s as to what exactly Surrealism was all about, and whilst some painters and poets such as Roland Penrose and David Gascoyne had completely assimilated Surrealist ideas, the chief spokesman for Surrealism during this period, Herbert Read, was also involved with the Constructivist painters and sculptors now grouped round Ben Nicholson. Read edited the manifesto Surrealism¹⁶ which was published by Faber in 1936 and to which he contributed a lengthy introduction, and found himself, as he put it, with "his feet planted astride two horses",¹⁷ the Surrealists and the Constructivists. As far as he was concerned, Abstract art and Surrealist art were two dialectical opposites which were "good for the process of art" and in this he was influenced by his close work with Henry Moore, who felt that both Surrealism and Abstraction were extending the possible means of expression available to artists:¹⁸

"All good art has contained both Abstract and Surrealist elements, just as it has contained both Classical and Romantic elements - order and surprise, intellect and imagination, conscious and the unconscious".

Michel Remy¹⁹ has published a brief chronology of the gradual transmission of Surrealism into England between the publication of the first manifesto in 1924 and the closure of the London Gallery in 1950,²⁰ and it is evident that by the time the International Exhibition was held in 1936 there was an increasing interest in the movement among writers and painters.

The Mayor Gallery had opened in April 1933 with a mixed exhibition which, as well as showing work by Continental Surrealists, Arp, Miró, Ernst, Picabia, and paintings by Paul Klee, also included exhibits by Paul Nash and John Armstrong who were showing Surrealist tendencies in their work. Dennis Farr points out that Nash had written appreciative articles on De Chirico and Magritte for The Listener in 1931,²¹ while John Armstrong's work of the late 1920s and early 1930s had made use of puppets, dolls and acrobats in a "sweet, sad fusion of dream and reality".²² It was not, however, until 1935 that knowledge of Surrealism had in any serious way begun to penetrate England, and during that year David Gascoyne's book A Short Survey of Surrealism was published, which gave a good, brief explanation of both Dada and Surrealism including an outline of Breton's first and second manifestos, the Surrealists' political alignments, and an introduction to the techniques adopted by the painters and poets involved in the movement on the Continent.²³ However, this was some eleven years after the publication of the first Surrealist manifesto in Paris. Dawn Ades has recently stated²⁴ that one of the main reasons for the tardy Surrealist development in England was the "very ease with which an interested English artist could keep in touch with Paris". This is true to the extent that Paul Nash was aware of events there and in 1930 had stayed for a time with Edward Burra in the South of France; Nash had made frequent visits to Paris and showed the influence of Ernst and Magritte in his work; Roland Penrose too had lived in Paris between 1922 and 1935 and knew Eluard and Mesens. However, Dawn Ades continues by pointing out that "real isolation from this centre (i.e. Paris)..... necessitated the founding of a group" and he cites Japan, Chile and Czechoslovakia as examples. This point must be disputed, as a Surrealist group was founded in Brussels only two years after the formation of the Paris group. Brussels is about the same distance from Paris as London and historically has very

close links with France, yet an independent Surrealist group was created there while no such event took place in London until 1936, and even then it never became a coherent force formulating a central policy. The reason for the tardiness of the arrival of Surrealism in England must be attributed partly to the language barrier - the nature of Surrealist poetry for instance being such that it is impossible to translate adequately: also the lack of any one person totally committed to the movement who would act as a theoretician such as André Breton in Paris or Paul Nougé in Brussels. The attachment of English painters, poets and critics to the English Romantic tradition must also be considered as an inhibiting factor, together with a traditional attachment to individual freedom and liberty to express oneself on one's own terms and not as part of a group effort, while the all-embracing philosophical idealism of Surrealism is very different from the English pragmatic philosophical tradition. The Surrealists themselves were not very interested in England, hence this country can barely be seen on the 1929 Surrealist map of the world, while Ireland is ten times her size.²⁵

Herbert Read outlined in 1936 the reasons why he felt that Surrealism had arrived so late in this country, concentrating on what he felt to be the congenital individualism of the English which "prevents us from uniting in defence of the individual" and goes on to point out that:

"This pathological individualism is favoured among us now by the fact that the actual forms of our social life (the Churches, the British Constitution) permit endless confusions, equivocations, and disguises".²⁶

Dennis Farr also makes the point that:

"It could be argued that Surrealism, primarily a literary movement, had to battle against the English distaste for extremism and a strong counter current of rational Constructivist art".²⁷

The International Surrealist Exhibition marked a turning point in the development of Surrealism in this country. There were twenty-three British painters among the sixty-eight exhibitors from the fourteen countries represented, and this would naturally lead one to assume that Surrealism was well established in England; but Professor J.H. Matthews points out that the situation was complex:

"Not all the English artists who displayed their work had discovered Surrealism for themselves, responding

intuitively as Conroy Maddox was to do. In some cases they had been discovered by Surrealism."²⁸

Julian Trevelyan, who subsequently joined the Surrealist group in London, had described for instance how his studio was visited by some of the organisers of the exhibition who selected paintings that appealed to them and he recalled how, "overnight, so to speak, I became a Surrealist".²⁹ On the other hand, Conroy Maddox, who had become a "passionate adherent" to Surrealism³⁰ in Birmingham along with John and Robert Melville, refused to take part in the 1936 show because he felt that the British participants were artists who "in their day-to-day activities, professional habits and ethics could be called 'anti-surrealist'".³¹ Mesens said later, however, that this statement was not "completely true".³²

The "leading spirits" of the British organising committee were Herbert Read, Roland Penrose, Paul Nash and Henry Moore, and Farr points out that British interest in Surrealism owed much to the "missionary zeal" of Penrose, Read and the poet David Gascoyne.³³ The latter, together with Penrose, had organised a small group which was meeting regularly in Hampstead from late in 1935 in order to arrange the exhibition. It is evident, however, in view of Trevelyan's comments and the fact that Herbert Read suggested Ben Nicholson as a potential exhibitor,³⁴ that there was some confusion about Surrealism. Henry Moore actively wished to participate in the show. He was not concerned whether his work should be labelled Abstract or Surrealist, and wanted to exhibit with others whose concern was for a complete liberty of expression and who directed blows against entrenched attitudes about art.³⁵ Graham Sutherland showed two of his pictures; he was fascinated by the Mirós which he saw at the exhibition because he seemed to see in them "a kind of parallel with the forms that he was finding in nature".³⁶

Sutherland's work was, however, out of place - he later wrote to Douglas Cooper,

"Invited by Penrose. Thought it rather a compliment. Talked to him about light in painting and was witheringly dismissed".³⁷

The problem was that there were few English painters who could demonstrate a consistent application of Surrealist techniques, Freudian inspired

dream imagery, automation or irrational juxtapositions of unrelated images. The group of painters interested in Surrealism, with the exception of Roland Penrose, Edward Burra and Conroy Maddox, rarely managed to sever themselves completely from the tradition of English Romantic painting and poetry, endowing objects and features with a special subjective significance. The poet Herbert Read, who was the chief apologist for Surrealism in England in the mid-1930s wrote, for instance,

"If I am walking along the beach and my eye catches a sea-worm and sun-bleached knot of wood whose shape and colour strongly appeal to me, the act of identification makes that object expressive of my personality as if I had actually carved the wood into that shape".³⁸

Until 1936 there was no official Surrealist group in England, and no organ for expressing Surrealist ideas and for orienting the revolutionary action which these would have imposed. Herbert Read produced the book Surrealism in 1936, but rather than clarifying for the general reader what Surrealism was all about in his introductory essay, saw Surrealism as a "re-affirmation of the Romantic principle".³⁹ Read's essay fails to discuss Surrealist imagery and even states that Surrealism "by no means denies or ridicules aesthetic values as such".⁴⁰ No account is given of chance or automatism as a means of denying aesthetic value and rational considerations, nor of the passive role of the artist or poet who for the Surrealist is simply a "communicating vessel", and no mention is made of the "objectification" of words and images and the transformations which they can undergo in the context of Surrealist poetry, collage or painting. Read outlines an English tradition which emphasizes the poetic imagination and offers Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley as examples, while the specific poetic precursors of Surrealist imagery cited by Breton or Eluard such as Rimbaud or Lautréamont are not mentioned. Alan Bowness points out that Read's emphasis on an English Romantic tradition was "partly dictated by the publishers, Faber and Faber",⁴¹ but nevertheless the whole tenor of the essay would simply confuse any reader attempting to understand Surrealism, and it typifies the desire of a number of English painters and poets to link Surrealism with Romanticism. The poet Hugh Sykes Davies⁴² who contributed an essay to the book edited by Read 'Surrealism at this Time and Place',⁴³ sees Surrealism as being within the great tradition of

English poetry and it is for him "a vigorous continuation" of Romanticism. The essays by Read and Davies contrast strongly with the contributions by Breton and Eluard. Breton's essay 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism'⁴⁴ is a highly condensed presentation of basic Surrealist theories and includes an attack on Socialist Realism,⁴⁵ while Eluard's essay 'Poetic Evidence'⁴⁶ makes the point that the poet for the Surrealists is "he who inspires more than he who is inspired" citing De Sade and Lautréamont as precursors.⁴⁷

"True poetry", says Eluard, "is present in everything that does not conform to that morality which, to uphold its order and prestige, has nothing better to offer us than banks, barracks, prisons, churches and brothels".⁴⁸

Paul Nash exemplified in his work the anglicization of Surrealist ideals into the native British Romantic tradition by distilling an inner essence or particular significance from visual information. In the 1930s he introduced images into his work positioned and related to one another so that they might suggest a special meaning (fig. 45). His work Equivalents for the Megaliths 1935 (Tate Gallery, London), for instance, was inspired by the remnants of Avebury Ring in Wiltshire - he wrote:

"Last summer I walked in a field near Avebury where two rough monoliths stand up, sixteen feet high, miraculously patterned with black and orange lichen, reminiscent of the avenue of stones which led to the Great Circle. A mile away, a green pyramid casts a gigantic shadow. In the hedge at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun. In my art I would solve such an equation".⁴⁹

Margot Eates in her book on Paul Nash says that he had not realised before the International Surrealist Exhibition in London that his work had strong affinities with the vision of the Continental Surrealists,⁵⁰ and while he did not claim Surrealism himself, the movement claimed him. Contact with the movement encouraged Nash in his own particular manner of "seeing things" and "intensified his perception of the object", but Nash never subscribed to the ideology of the movement.⁵¹

Henry Moore's work during the 1930s had affinities with Surrealism - for instance his sculpture transforms parts of the body into shapes deriving from the various natural objects which had always attracted him such as pebbles, bones or rocks. David Sylvester pointed out:

"This obsession with equivalences, correspondences, reveals an affinity with the preoccupations of the Surrealists. Moore differs from them, however, in one essential respect - that their substitutions or transplantations are intended to be outlandish, whereas he would wish his to be perfectly natural and inevitable".⁵²

In this respect, of course, Moore is very close to Arp. During the period when Mesens was actively propagating Surrealism between 1938 and 1940, Moore experimented with "chance" techniques in his drawings, using white wax for the main masses, then pouring water colours onto them: as the water colour receded, accidental effects of colour and texture were produced.⁵³ However, although Surrealism acted as a stimulus in the creating of Moore's abstract sculpture (indeed in the late 1930s Moore called himself a Surrealist), for the unconscious played an important role in the creation of his imagery, nevertheless his attachment to nature and natural forms compromised any total commitment.

Graham Sutherland's work was to come under the influence of Surrealism in the mid-1930s in his selection of strange natural forms but he never wanted to make what he called "poetic pictures".⁵⁴ For Sutherland the organic structure and character of natural forms counted above everything else and objects such as a bloated tree or lobster claw were studied objectively for their innate character rather than juxtaposed with any other image or set down in an unrelated landscape. This predilection for strange natural objects was found in the work of John Banting,⁵⁵ who from the early 1930s onwards became interested in Surrealist art and like Paul Nash, was fascinated by the work of Max Ernst. Banting, Nash and Eileen Agar⁵⁶ all collected curious natural objects (a jaw bone from Banting's collection, for instance, was shown at the Dada and Surrealism Reviewed exhibition in London in 1978), finding the Surreal in nature in the natural forms of stones, fossils, fungi, driftwood, tree trunks or bones. Ithel Colquhoun's work⁵⁷ reflected this particular predilection for the study of natural forms, though subjecting them to a dream-like metamorphosis. She was attracted to the Surrealist theories of art through the exploration of the unconscious and the projection of the dream, believing that a release into new worlds of the creative imagination might thus be obtained.

The London Exhibition of 1936 acted as a stimulus to British artists interested in Surrealism. Ceri Richards found new sources of inspiration particularly in the work of Max Ernst:

"The Surrealist Exhibition of 1936 helped me to be aware of the mystery, even the unreality of everyday things".⁵⁸

Richards' work, however, fell more strongly under the influence of Cubism and Constructivism of the early 1920s; he described himself as an independent⁵⁹ and never interested himself in the Surrealist preoccupations with the unconscious in art. John Armstrong's work of the late 1930s (fig. 46) fused dream and reality in melancholy landscapes reminiscent of Dali, though he always remained independent of group activities and never exhibited with the Surrealists. John Tunnard⁶⁰ during this period painted abstract dream landscapes, while Humphrey Jennings, who had translated Péret and Eluard with David Gascoyne, had studied the techniques of Ernst and Duchamp, experimenting with ready made images which he found in 19th century prints, colour reproductions, postcards and photographs. Jennings was to be an active member of the Surrealist group in the late 1930s⁶¹ alongside Roland Penrose. The latter's work demonstrated both Surrealist and Cubist influences: in two Surrealist works Magnetic Moths (fig. 47) and the Real Woman of 1938⁶² Penrose used postcards so that "the images of objects are used to create colours".⁶³

After the International Exhibition opened a Surrealist group was formed in London which issued the Fourth International Surrealist Bulletin in September 1936.⁶⁴ The people who signed the Bulletin formed the nucleus of those who were interested in Surrealism in London⁶⁵ and they exhibited together over the next few years. The Bulletin contained a speech⁶⁶ which Herbert Read had given at an open meeting of the Artists' International Association⁶⁷ held to discuss the 'Social Aspects of Surrealism' on June 23rd, 1936, at the time that the Exhibition was held; it also announced that:

"A constructive programme for immediate Surrealist activity is already taking shape. We shall explain our social and political position at the earliest possible moment. Numerous discussions and demonstrations will take place during the coming autumn ... A large international anthology of Surrealism is planned, and it is our intention to co-operate in the production of a review".⁶⁸

The group subsequently met at Roland Penrose's house in Hampstead and in various members' studios planning exhibitions and future activities:

"For we never tired of pointing out that Surrealism was not a way of painting but a way of living".⁶⁹

Members exhibited with the A.I.A. at an exhibition organised by the "Unity of the Artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Development" in the spring of 1937.⁷⁰ Their work was shown in the Surrealist section alongside that of F.E. McWilliam, Graham Sutherland and work by a number of Continental Surrealists. Mesens organised the Belgian section of the exhibition. The show also contained a large Abstract section, though the exhibition as a whole was dominated by work by English Realist painters. The A.I.A. had distinctly left-wing leanings and as well as organising lectures and discussions, mounted three major art exhibitions in 1935, 1937 and 1939. Support was given by most of the leading artists in both the Surrealist⁷¹ and Constructivist groups as well as by some members of the Euston Road School.⁷² However, the Surrealist involvement in left-wing politics resulted in a controversy with the supporters of Realism, who used the Left Review to defend their case. Herbert Read, in an explanatory article on Surrealism which appeared in the Left Review in July 1936,⁷³ saw "Superrealism" as a revolutionary art form which challenged not only all the bourgeois conceptions of art but also the official Soviet doctrine of Socialist Realism. Other contributors to the special supplement on Surrealism in which Read's article appeared did not, however, accept the fundamental premises of this art movement; Anthony Blunt, for instance, saw "Superrealism" as a "side track, and considers that:

"It is time that art came back to its true path. It seems no longer possible to produce a bourgeois art that is both rational and alive, but a new art is beginning to arise, the product of the proletariat which is again performing its true function, that of propaganda".⁷⁴

In the articles which followed in the Left Review over the next eighteen months, Surrealism is criticized for being a non-revolutionary art. Revolutionary art is seen in terms of Realism,⁷⁵ in particular in the art of Russia and Spain,⁷⁶ while Surrealist art is seen as resting on bourgeois foundations and not as the product of the proletarian movement. The Surrealists are seen as a bunch of fashionable poseurs⁷⁷ and although it is

admitted that they have produced new forms of painting and literature,⁷⁸ they are criticized for not truly supporting the working class cause. Realism in art is seen to be more effective in this field than the "mysticism" and "lyricism" of Surrealist painters, who although they openly support left-wing movements and oppose Fascism, cannot be said to be effective.⁷⁹

It was during this period of debate and argument in 1936 and 1937 that Mesens began to pay an increasing number of visits to England. He had already been invited by Roland Penrose to help with the hanging arrangements of the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition and had signed the Bulletin produced by the Surrealist group which was produced as the result of a meeting at Roland Penrose's house in Hampstead on July 7th of that year.⁸⁰ In May 1937 he organised an exhibition of Miró's work at the Zwemmer Gallery, where in June he arranged the show Chirico-Picasso, which like the earlier Miró exhibition, consisted of a large number of important works from his collection.⁸¹ He also collaborated with the English Surrealist group in their exhibitions, one mounted by the Cambridge University Arts Society in November 1937 with the help of Roland Penrose,⁸² and later that month the exhibition of Surrealist Objects and Poems held at the London Gallery, Cork Street, which opened at midnight on November 25th.⁸³ Items were exhibited in this show under various groupings which included "oneiric", "mobile", "interpreted" and "book" objects and the work shown was mainly by English Surrealists, though Mesens lent objects made by Magritte.⁸⁴ However, the catalogue contains poems which extend Surrealism to include trivial material⁸⁵ and Read's introduction does not do justice to Breton's definition of the Surrealist object as created by artists and poets who have the

"ability to bring together two images (which) permits them to go beyond the usually limiting consideration of the object's known life. In their eyes the object, no matter how complete, returns to an uninterrupted succession of latencies which are not peculiar to it and which invoke its transformation".⁸⁶

Read, on the other hand, true to the English Romantic spirit, says that:

"The result of such chances is to invest the object with a spirit, a life of its own; and from this point of view Surrealism may be regarded as a return to the animism of our savage ancestors".⁸⁷

It was not until 1938 when Mesens was appointed Director of the London Gallery that a permanent show centre for Surrealist art, both English and foreign, was established, and the review London Bulletin appeared, edited by Mesens from June of that year, designed to disseminate Surrealist thought. The London Gallery had been opened in 1936, and before Mesens took over had shown work by Léger, Gabo, Munch and Moholy-Nagy, while the Surrealist Objects and Poems show in late 1937 was the last to be staged under the previous management.⁸⁸ As a result of Mesens' work the gallery began to concentrate on work by Surrealist artists, though also mounting exhibitions by De Chirico, Picasso and Klee who had been "adopted" by the Surrealists as important precursors. Mesens opened the gallery with the statement:

"The "new" gallery intends to accord its attention to all that is essentially creative in the contemporary movement as well as in the works of the past where primitive races reveal the psychological and moral evolution of man. In consequence painters belonging to the Surrealist movement will be the principal features of the gallery." ⁸⁹

The artists falling within this definition for Mesens were "Dali, Magritte, Tanguy, Ernst, Miró and Man Ray". Mesens also stated his intention to show the forerunners of those painters, "Braque, Picasso, Klee, De Chirico and Gris" and also to mount an exhibition of the work of the painter Frits van den Berghe, whom he considered to be "the most authentic exponent of "fantastic art" in Belgium".⁹⁰

The first edition of the London Bulletin was published in April 1938 and it was printed at regular intervals until June 1940.⁹¹

The review is an important documentary source for the period just before the Second World War⁹² and contributions appeared by English and French Surrealists, while Mesens also ensured that members of the Belgian group collaborated. Mesens' name does not appear as editor, however, until the third issue in June 1938, although according to Roland Penrose, "He edited the review from the very beginning", and "The whole idea of a magazine was largely his".⁹³ The first and second issues contain material

contributed by various members of the English Surrealist group - Herbert Read, Roland Penrose, Humphrey Jennings and Paul Nash. Bulletin no. 1 is wholly devoted to Surrealism and contains the catalogue to the Magritte exhibition with which Mesens opened the London Gallery. In the second issue, however, the catalogue for John Piper's work at the London Gallery seen in May appears together with that for a Geer van Velde show at Guggenheim Jeune and a Miró exhibition which Mesens arranged at the Mayor Gallery. Material is also included by Belgian and French Surrealists in this issue. Bulletin no. 3 of June 1938 carries Mesens' name as editor, assisted by Humphrey Jennings, and from then on, although the contents of the London Bulletin were mostly Surrealist orientated, the review also contained items concerned with Abstract art, in particular no. 11⁹⁴ which prints the catalogue of Ben Nicholson's work at Alex Reid and Lefèvre and no. 14⁹⁵ which accompanies an exhibition of 'Abstract and Concrete Art' at Guggenheim Jeune.

This gallery had opened next door to the London Gallery early in 1938 at no. 30, Cork Street, while the Mayor Gallery was already established down the road at no. 18. It was therefore decided that when the London Bulletin was produced it should carry the catalogues for exhibitions held at these centres. Over the next two years Mayor's and Guggenheim's put on exhibitions of Surrealist artists, both British and European, though at the same time they also mounted work by Constructivist painters - the Mayor Gallery for instance exhibited Leger in 1938. The London Gallery also did not concentrate completely on Surrealism, exhibiting John Piper's work in May of that year, and work by both Abstract and Surrealist artists in the 'Living Art in England' show early in 1939.

There were probably several reasons for the London Bulletin not being solely concerned with Surrealism. In the first place the review was intended not only as an organ for the dissemination of Surrealist ideas through the inclusion of texts, poems and illustrations, but, as has been indicated, for carrying the catalogues for the three galleries in Cork Street, with accompanying explanatory notes; (it is noticeable that for exhibitions previously devoted by the Mayor Gallery and Zwemmers to contemporary art, no explanatory material was included in the catalogues).

Mesens could obviously not have the final say in what exhibitions Mayor's and Guggenheim's mounted, and in the running of the London Gallery he was himself influenced by practical considerations, as will be indicated later. He wanted the Bulletin to be a completely Surrealist enterprise, but because some means had to be found to finance the review he had to make way and compromise by including material from other sources. Roland Penrose has said that the "Abstract art side of the London Bulletin crept in little by little in order to enlarge its circulation and general interest".⁹⁶ Mesens had co-operated with the English Surrealist group before the opening of the "new" London Gallery, and in 1938 the gallery itself became the focal point for members of the group where discussions were held. The leaders of the English group were Roland Penrose and Herbert Read, but whereas Mesens and Penrose were chiefly committed to Surrealism and saw the London Bulletin as a vehicle for the dissemination of Surrealist ideas, Herbert Read on the other hand retained his interest in Abstract art. While Read had "very little to say" about the actual material included in the Bulletin,⁹⁷ he later wrote:

"I tried to argue, and I still believe, that such dialectical positions are good for the progress of art, and that the greatest artists (I always had Henry Moore in mind) are great precisely because they can resolve such oppositions. As a poet I had to give my allegiance to the only vital movement in poetry - that represented by Rimbaud, Lautréamont and Apollinaire. The Surrealist movement, always essentially literary in inspiration, was nourished at these sources. If I contradicted myself, then I embraced my contradictions. As I write, two pictures face me on the wall, one a pure abstraction by Ben Nicholson, the other a Surrealist fantasy by Paul Delvaux. By chance their colours harmonise; if there is any contradiction in their forms it must correspond to a contradiction in my own mind, for both appeal to me with equal force".⁹⁸

In spite of the inclusion of catalogues of work and material by artists and writers other than Surrealists, the London Bulletin was to be the only official Surrealist review to appear since the last publication of Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution in May 1933, although the Surrealists contributed to Minotaure until it ceased publication in May 1939. It must have been of considerable importance for Mesens to get the backing of Breton for his work with the Bulletin. Breton had already

contributed to the first two issues,⁹⁹ whether through the auspices of Mesens or Penrose is not known. In August 1938 Breton gave his backing to Mesens in a letter:-

"Rien n'est plus important que d'assurer sa (Surrealism's) diffusion très large en Angleterre. Pour cela, il me paraît absolument nécessaire que le (illegible)... et qu'on l'imprime à Londres. Qui pourrait y veiller mieux que toi?"¹⁰⁰

From this extract it is possible to deduce that Mesens had expressed some doubts about the advisability of publishing a Surrealist review in London at all.

It is evident that by including catalogues for the Mayor and Guggenheim galleries, the London Bulletin would reach a much wider audience. This would also be effected by broadening the review to cover other aspects of contemporary art and those interested in Modernism as a whole would become more aware of Surrealist ideas. Through his contacts in Paris and Brussels Mesens could also ensure a wider circulation: at the end of the October 1938 edition an editorial note appeared which pertained to this:¹⁰¹

"Since its appearance in April of this year LONDON BULLETIN has assumed the position of the only avant-garde publication in this country concerned with contemporary poetry and art. Although its first number was practically a monograph, by various hands, concentrated on the work of René Magritte, it has rapidly extended its range, reflecting besides exhibitions of paintings, other activities of living interest in its pages. The July double number devoted to the "Impact of Machines" further increased the value of its position by arousing the attention of numerous readers abroad and assuring itself of a wide public in France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and the Americas. Profiting by these connections, every effort is being made to improve the quality of the material presented".

Whilst this was to be the policy of the Bulletin, it is clear that Mesens and Penrose, who was now assistant editor, still aimed at an essentially Surrealist review and they made this point clear in a note which appeared in the Bulletin for May 1939. This issue, which was largely concerned with an exhibition of Abstract and Concrete art at the Guggenheim Jeune gallery, contained an article by Herbert Read on

Abstract art, 'An Art of Pure Form' and a small preface by Kandinsky was added. The editors stated in a note at the end of the Bulletin that they

"accept no responsibility for the ideas expressed by Mr. Kandinsky on page 2 of this number".¹⁰²

Looking at the London Bulletin as a whole, it is clear that Mesens took a very large part in the format and layout of the review and in the choice of material included. Texts and aphorisms appear which he had already used in Brussels: for instance in No. 1, he included a little aphorism by André Breton, translated from the French:

"What is Surrealism? It is the Cuckoo's egg, laid in the nest (whose brood is lost) with the complicity of René Magritte".¹⁰³

Mesens had already used this in the catalogue for a show which he had recently mounted in Brussels, 'Trois Peintres Surréalistes';¹⁰⁴ also from this catalogue he included a poem by Eluard on Man Ray in the Bulletin¹⁰⁵ which accompanied a Man Ray exhibition which he put on at the London Gallery in February 1939. In Bulletins nos. 4 - 5¹⁰⁶ he published an aphorism by the Belgian gallery owner Geert van Bruane, who had mounted the first Max Ernst show in Brussels in 1926,¹⁰⁷

"Tout homme a droit à 24 heures de liberté par jour".

Mesens used reproductions of pictures from his own collection to illustrate the Bulletin - for instance, Tanguy's A l'oreille des voyants, 1935¹⁰⁸ La mariée anatomie, a collage by Ernst made in 1921, or Aérogographie, 1919 by Man Ray.¹⁰⁹

The London Bulletin had features which were similar to Variétés which Mesens had edited in Brussels in the late 1920s, particularly in the combinations of texts and photographs. For instance, no. 1 containing the catalogue for the Magritte show, which has illustrations of Magritte's work and explanatory pieces about Magritte by Herbert Read, Paul Nougé and Paul Eluard. Towards the end of the Bulletin is a typical example of Mesens' use of selected photographic illustrations. Two photographs of dresses designed by Norine van Hecke¹¹⁰ are placed in the centre of the page, while to the left is a reproduction of a fantastic mannequin by Salvador Dalí, covered in small teaspoons and wearing a strange mask-like hood, and to the right is an illustration of a mannequin

by Max Ernst draped in black. Bulletins nos. 4 - 5 contain the catalogue for a mixed media show called The Impact of Machines, in which items were to be seen ranging from 15th century military engines, Newcomer's engine, to machinist images by Max Ernst and Man Ray. The catalogue in the Bulletin was accompanied by a frontispiece poster for the Great Western Railway, machinist drawings by Picabia, line drawings of machines illustrating texts about machines, including a history of the L.N.E.R. and a poem by Blake. A photograph of a machine shown at the 1851 Great Exhibition is set against a Max Ernst collage, La femme chancellante, 1923, which depicts a dummy-like woman attached to a machine and partly becoming that machine. A photograph of Duchamp's Le grand verre (la mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même), 1915-23, and an article on locomotive names is accompanied by a Schwitters collage and a string sculpture by Henry Moore. This edition of the Bulletin illustrates Mesens' use of photographs in such a way that the review itself becomes a collage of illustrators combined with text which explore the theme of the exhibition. The Bulletin has become a vehicle of Surrealist ideas in the juxtaposition of images both literal and metaphoric, written and plastic.

It is noticeable too that in the London Bulletin, Mesens took the opportunity not only to publish Surrealist texts and poems, but critical texts written about the artists shown there. For instance, Bulletin no. 2 includes the catalogue of a Miró exhibition and contains an essay on Miró by André Breton from Le Surrealisme et la Peinture, together with a poem on Miró by Paul Eluard, while Bulletin no. 6¹¹² containing the catalogue for the De Chirico exhibition, includes a translation of De Chirico's essay 'Mystery and Creation'. Mesens also directed a publishing house, London Gallery Editions, which produced several books relating to Surrealism. Its first Surrealist publication, before Mesens took over, was the catalogue to the exhibition Surrealist Objects and Poems which had been held at the London Gallery in 1937, and it then produced Roland Penrose's book, The Road is Wider than Long, 1939, an "image diary" of a journey to the Balkans in the summer of 1938. The book was printed in a variety of colours and typefaces and is illustrated with photographs by the author. London Gallery Editions also published Eluard's Poetry and Truth in 1942, a collection of poems translated into English by the author

and Roland Penrose, and in that same year published a small collection of Mesens' poems, Troisième Front.

The exhibitions devoted to the work of single artists which Mesens mounted at the London Gallery were to be significant in several respects. René Magritte, Paul Delvaux and Man Ray were given their first one-man shows in the U.K. In the Max Ernst exhibition the public for the first time were able to see a wide selection of work by this artist, while the De Chirico exhibition contained paintings executed between 1912 and 1917 - the period which was significant for the Surrealists. The work by these artists was shown by Mesens at a time when there was an increasing awareness and readiness on the part of both artists and critics to give positive consideration to Surrealist ideas, though the exhibitions were not necessarily well received by the press. Mesens had also hoped to show Picasso's Guernica at the London Gallery and a press announcement stated that this would be between March 4th and 29th, 1939. However, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief arranged an earlier showing for it at the New Burlington Galleries in October 1938, whence it went to the Whitechapel Gallery. Herbert Read was vice chairman of the committee, Roland Penrose the treasurer,¹¹³ while Mesens was the organiser of the exhibition, which included not only the painting itself and related canvases, but all the preparatory drawings in pencil and gouache.

Surrealism in England had since the early 1930s developed essentially in terms of the visual arts,¹¹⁴ with the International Exhibition of 1936 providing great interest for painters and a stimulus in the formation of the loose-knit group around Roland Penrose and Herbert Read. The London Gallery from 1938 to 1939 provided a meeting place for members of the group - mainly artists - where the shows mounted could provide a focal point for discussion. During this period the Surrealist group attempted to formulate some kind of central policy, which, as will be described later, was not possible for a variety of reasons. However, the individual works of art seen at the London Gallery were visual representations of the ideas which Surrealist painters on the Continent had developed during the 1920s and 1930s. Mesens also arranged the purchase of Eluard's

collection of paintings in 1938 for Roland Penrose.¹¹⁵ Mesens had been close friends with Eluard¹¹⁶ since the mid-1920s, and their correspondence reveals that Eluard kept Mesens constantly informed about events in Paris when Mesens was in Brussels and in London.

"Tu es un de mes trois ou quatre amis", Eluard wrote to Mesens in January 1935, "peut être que ma lettre d'hier l'inciter à m'écrire plus souvent".¹¹⁷

The fifteen exhibitions which Mesens organised at the London Gallery between 1938 and 1939 fall into rough groups - one-man shows by European and American Surrealists, one-man shows by English Surrealists, mixed exhibitions and shows devoted to artists outside the main Surrealist movement - Picasso, Klee and Marcoussis. The most important in this last category were the two shows of Picasso's work. Mesens had lent several Picasso drawings to Zwemmers for their show, Chirico-Picasso, in 1937, including two papiers collés, Personnage of 1913 and Le picket blanc, 1914, and he exhibited these alongside his remaining small collection of drawings at the London Gallery in May 1938. The following year¹¹⁸ he mounted a much larger exhibition, Picasso in English Collections, which the New Statesman found to be an "impressive show".¹¹⁹ This exhibition contained a number of oils which had been in Paul Eluard's collection and were now owned by Penrose, such as Danseuse nègre, 1907, La femme verte, 1909, and Portrait of M. Uhde, 1910. Works from Mesens' own collection included La tranche du citron, 1913, a small work of pencil and oil on hardboard, and oil on canvas used as collage. Picasso was an acknowledged forerunner of Surrealist experimentation: Breton wrote,

"We cannot fail to acknowledge the immense responsibility that Picasso assumed in so heightening his awareness of the treacherous nature of tangible entities that he dared break openly with them and, more particularly, with the facile connotations of their everyday experience".¹²⁰

Mesens included a number of small extracts about Picasso in the London Bulletin¹²¹ and he subsequently wrote of the Cubist experiments of Picasso, Braque and Gris:

"The radiating power of this work is ever increasing, and its profound nobility becomes more evident each day, despite the poverty stricken rationalisations which have followed it, and the ragged souvenirs it has left unwillingly in the world's vocabulary of painting".¹²²

(Mesens had mounted a small show by the painter Marcoussis in April 1939, whose work was, however, very close to true Cubism).¹²³

The two main mixed exhibitions shown at the London Gallery were The Impact of Machines in July 1938 and Living Art in England in January and February 1939. The first of these was an exercise aimed at reaching a wider general public, and the organising committee consisted of Arthur Elton,¹²⁴ Humphrey Jennings and Mesens. The exhibits in the first part of the show, which consisted of a mixture of drawings, lithographs and paintings, demonstrated a somewhat "romantic" attachment to machines: they ranged from Italian woodcuts of the 15th century to illustrations of 19th century steam railway engines. Items in further sections included material lent by Mesens, Penrose and the English collector, Stuart Legge: Mesens' contribution consisted of two Man Ray collages, Love Fingers, 1916, and Involute, 1918, an aerograph of 1918 together with two early "machinist" Picabias, La ville de New York aperçue à travers le corps and Rotatif of 1912. The catalogue for the show in the London Bulletin contains very mixed material: texts are published which were chosen by Jennings to show the adaptation of man to the Industrial Revolution:

"An immense collage of written materials about the imaginative changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution".¹²⁵

The Bulletin also includes a poem by Charles Madge:¹²⁶

"The walls of the maelstrom are painted with trees
And Napoleon charger pulls up at the filling station
Asking the way. Round they go, terribly late
To a wonderful ballet, invention of hope at despair".

Conroy Maddox has recalled that Mesens was "not at all happy"¹²⁷ with certain aspects of the London Bulletin and when one considers some of the material such as Madge's poem above, it is not surprising. Stuart Legge's contribution on British train names is an amusing piece but hardly merits a place in a serious review which attempts to proselytize contemporary art and poetry.¹²⁸ Needless to say, Humphrey Jennings ceased to be assistant editor of the Bulletin after this exhibition, Roland Penrose taking over the work the following October.

The Living Art in England exhibition which was shown in the early part of 1939 contained work by artists as widely dissimilar as Piet Mondrian, Henry Moore and Oskar Kokoschka. Herbert Read in his

introduction 'In What Sense Living?'¹²⁹ states that:

"One of the objects of the present exhibition is to demonstrate the extent to which England, and more particularly, London, has become what Paris always has been - an international art centre".

Read continues:

"England is a great mass of dough which will only be moved by the addition of foreign leaven".

Mesens later said¹³⁰ that:

"This exhibition was intended to present a united front of the most radical moderns as an opposition to the growing decay in Europe under the pressure of the Nazi art politics and the intolerant attitude of the tenets of Socialist Realism".

As well as work by distinguished refugee artists in England, paintings by the English Surrealist group were shown, which now included Conroy Maddox. The exhibition was also intended to raise funds in aid of Czech and Jewish refugees¹³¹ and in selecting artists to exhibit Mesens used the following criteria which were contained in a cyclostyled letter sent out by the London Gallery in December 1938:¹³²

- "1. It is proposed to present to the public a collection of works by painters and sculptors now living in England whose work on the one hand contributes to the international modern movement (whose originators were Seurat and the Douanier Rousseau) and on the other hand stands for complete liberty of expression.
2. Painters and sculptors who have already exhibited individually or collectively during the past six months in a West End gallery, or whose works have been shown at the London Gallery in a mixed or one-man show since the 1st April 1938, and also those who will have one-man shows during the 1939 season, are invited to exhibit one work".

The letter goes on to request the artists to let Mesens know under what headings they wish their work to be classified - "Cubist, Abstract, Surrealist, Constructivist or Independent" - and several members of the London group who had exhibited previously as Surrealists now called themselves "Independent" - Julian Trevelyan, Ithel Colquhoun, Ceri Richards; Henry Moore called himself Surrealist,¹³³ while Paul Nash continued to go his own way as an "Independent". While Mesens, Read and

the artists who exhibited were prepared to unite in the face of the growing threat of Stalinism and Nazism, the press were not united in their approval of the show where, for one reviewer, the works are seen as "all more or less alike",¹³⁴ while another considers that, "Living Art is a somewhat bump-tious title since almost all the works are Surrealist or Abstract".¹³⁵ The Observer critic also objects to the title of the show as being "cult arrogance", though he approves of the concept of the exhibition showing work together by "two antagonistic movements".¹³⁶

Of the Surrealist exhibitions which Mesens mounted at the London Gallery probably the most important was that devoted to the work of Max Ernst in December 1938. Earlier in 1933 the Mayor Gallery had shown works by Ernst executed between 1929 and 1933,¹³⁷ which were mainly from his series of "forests", together with paintings of vegetal landscapes and birds.¹³⁸ Mesens' exhibition, however, contained a widely representative selection of Ernst's paintings and collages, including an early Dada collage Katherine Ondulata, 1920¹³⁹ and an original frottage from Histoire Naturelle, 1926.¹⁴⁰ The main exhibits were three of Max Ernst's most important paintings which Mesens had purchased from Eluard:¹⁴¹ L'Eléphant Célebes, 1921 (fig. 15), Oedipus Rex, 1922,¹⁴² and Pietà, ou la révolution la nuit, 1923 (fig. 44), the work which Mesens had first shown in Brussels in 1927.¹⁴³ All three works had been important for the development of Surrealist painting - the first for its radical placement of an African corn bin and headless woman as a dramatic centralized image, the second for its chilling literal representation of abnormal imagery, while the Pietà,¹⁴⁴ which was derived from an earlier work by De Chirico, according to Russel possessed a complete range of future Surrealist imagery.¹⁴⁵

Mesens had arranged a show at the London Gallery of the early work by De Chirico two months before his Max Ernst exhibition, and one can safely assume that this was an attempt to pave the way for the Ernst show, since the latter was greatly influenced by De Chirico. This exhibition was entirely devoted to works executed between 1912 and 1917 which found approval amongst the Surrealists, though one later picture was included, a portrait of Gala and Paul Eluard dated 1924.¹⁴⁶ Whilst the press reaction to De Chirico was favourable,¹⁴⁷ their response to Mesens'

opening show of Magritte earlier in the year was not, and the London Bulletin published some of their comments under the heading 'Sidelights on Magritte'¹⁴⁸ including the hostile Observer review which found "Margitte's" work "a kind of pictorial and intellectual facetiousness".

The exhibitions of Magritte and Delvaux were the first opportunity for the English public to see work by these two Belgian painters in one-man shows, who like Ernst used "objective" reality in graphic clarity to create their disturbing images. Mesens' sympathy with the "esprit" of their work is demonstrated by his inclusion of a number of texts by the Brussels group in the London Bulletin, indeed the first number contains the article 'Final Advice' by the poet Paul Nougé, who states that:

"It is not so much to recognise that Surrealism has turned poetic and pictorial expression upside down. One may say that it has given back to these distinctive forms of thought their real meaning and basic value. Surrealism, in destroying aestheticism, in bringing so-called artistic expression into really vital channels, has given a validity and objective content to what ought to be called 'universalized poetry'".¹⁴⁹

Mesens' own theoretical standpoint on Surrealism was derived from his Dada experience, his sympathy for "collage" and the objectification of reality in both plastic and poetic terms, and this affected the kinds of Surrealist work which he collected and showed at the Gallery. The emphasis in his collection was centred on paintings which demonstrate the juxtaposition of unrelated images in striking contexts of the kind to be seen in the work of Magritte, Delvaux and Ernst, and in the "mécaniste" imagery of Man Ray. He mounted an exhibition of ninety-five works by Man Ray in February 1939, which included a number of collages and aerographs - in particular Seguidilla,¹⁵⁰ a work which was executed with an airbrush in 1919 and The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with her Shadows,¹⁵¹ an aerograph of the same year. Two much later collages by Man Ray which Mesens exhibited illustrated Man Ray's use of puns and the importance of titles in his work: Gens d'argent, 1929¹⁵² is a literal rendering of the French colloquial expression "moneyed people" since the shapes of the two characters in the picture are outlined on a silvered background; Le Cafard, 1929¹⁵³ meaning "depression" has a figurative element of a sad profile mask which is reduced to a mere suggestion. These notions were to be used again much

later in Mesens' own collages in which he used titles and imagery in a way related to the work of Man Ray.

The catalogue to this exhibition is introduced with a text by Scutenaire on Man Ray from Mesens' catalogue 'Trois Peintres Surrealistes' shown earlier in Brussels.¹⁵⁴ Mesens and Penrose in a note to Bulletin no. 11 state that

"The poet is clearly better placed than the art critic to deal with painting since he replaces images by images"¹⁵⁵

and Scutenaire in his text says,

"Man Ray, lui, pense des objets. Et ceux-ci ne servent jamais de truchement pour nous renseigner sur les sentiments que lui ont inspirés une nuit de mirages, un jour défaillant, ou sur l'attitude morale qu'il pourrait prendre à propos d'une entrecôte à pommes".

The Man Ray exhibition also showed sixty of his drawings entitled Les Mains Libres which had been published together with poems by Paul Eluard in Paris in 1937.

Whilst Man Ray was a member of the Paris group, Paul Delvaux, whose work was shown at the London Gallery earlier in 1938, never, according to Mesens, adhered to the international Surrealist movement, nor to the movement in Belgium.¹⁵⁶ He was, however, taken up by the Surrealists.

"Nous adoptâmes après 1936 en France comme en Belgique" wrote Mesens, "des oeuvres de Delvaux dans nos expositions à programme tout comme nous avions fait dès avant pour des artistes comme Klee ou Pierre Roy".¹⁵⁷

Delvaux's work had not previously been seen in England. It was not shown at the International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936 because it was only during that year that he began to paint his Surrealist inspired works. Herbert Read published an article in The Listener¹⁵⁸ to accompany the Delvaux exhibition in which he pointed out that the artist had developed his "original" style over the previous three years which was to be of "considerable significance for the future of painting". Read used the Delvaux exhibition to make the point that the Surrealists rescued art from merely technical considerations of pictorial representation and have

created a "new mythology" and a "new subject matter" thus allowing the "imaginative values to triumph". In this context Read states that Delvaux has given "a poetic coherence to our dream world".

These exhibitions which Mesens organised were part of his generalized attempt to create a deeper understanding of Surrealism as a whole. He also arranged for work by English Surrealist painters to be seen, showing work by Humphrey Jennings at the same time as the De Chirico exhibition in October 1938 and collaborating with the Mayor Gallery in their shows of Roland Penrose and Ithel Colquhoun in June 1939.¹⁵⁹ Mesens could not have exhibited work by these last two painters at this time as he had decided to continue the Picasso in English Collections for a further month until the end of June 1939 because of the amount of interest which had been shown.¹⁶⁰ The Gallery closed during the following month: it has not been possible to discover the precise reasons, but probably the lease was due to expire, and during the summer of 1939 it was becoming increasingly clear that another war would soon engulf Europe - conscription had been introduced in England in April, the Anglo-Polish treaty had been signed in May, and now Italy and Germany had formed an alliance; and so as a Belgian national living in England, Mesens must have been unsure about his future. By the end of 1939 a part of his collection was back in store in Belgium but about one hundred paintings belonging to the London Gallery together with a whole documentary library were destroyed in one of the first heavy air raids over London in the autumn.¹⁶¹

The coming of war did not prevent Mesens and the English Surrealists from continuing to work together, though things were becoming increasingly difficult. Early in 1940 Gordon Onslow-Ford, Jacques Brunius and S.W. Hayter had escaped from occupied France and while they stayed in London collaborated with Mesens and Penrose on the final edition of the London Bulletin in June 1940.¹⁶² This edition was devoted entirely to Surrealism and accompanied the 'Surrealism Today' exhibition which Mesens arranged at the Zwemmer Gallery in June, though Zwemmer issued a separate catalogue.

By this stage the London Surrealist group was in some disarray. It had always been loosely knit and as Mesens has pointed out,

"underwent frequent changes"¹⁶³ and had never managed to formulate a central policy. Before Mesens had settled in London the Surrealists had exhibited together and had taken part in left-wing demonstrations, against Oswald Mosley's Fascists in October 1936, and in the May Day demonstration in 1937 protesting against the British Government's non-intervention policy.¹⁶⁴ Julian Trevelyan, who exhibited with the group between 1936 and 1938, said that:

"There were members of our little group who began to feel that our social activities were inadequate. We had ganged up over exhibitions but apart from this we hardly knew each other, and we looked enviously at the gay and almost public life of polemics and demonstration that was led by our counterparts in Paris".¹⁶⁵

In 1937 they decided to meet regularly at a cafe in Leicester Square every Thursday evening but fewer and fewer people attended the meetings.

"Such natural cohesion", wrote Trevelyan, "to a group or an idea is very alien to English painters, and I think that this explains in part the ineffectiveness of our group. In comparison with the French, the English painter is a lazy individual intellectually, undemonstrative, and unwilling or incapable of exchanging ideas and relying very much on the light of nature to lead him".¹⁶⁶

In March 1938, however, the Surrealists accepted an invitation by the A.I.A., which they had never joined, to a debate with the supporters of Realism in art, Anthony Blunt, Alick West, Graham Bell and William Coldstream. Herbert Read, Humphrey Jennings, Julian Trevelyan and Roland Penrose spoke for the Surrealists. Records of the debate do not seem to exist and supporters of both sides claimed victory.¹⁶⁷ Herbert Read said in the London Bulletin that:

"Roland Penrose contributed some very cool and convincing aids to extra retinal vision; Julian Trevelyan revealed himself as a brilliant dialectician, and Humphrey Jennings made some extremely important statements on the nature of automatism".¹⁶⁸

While individual members of the group contributed poems and texts to the London Bulletin, no joint manifesto was published before the War and no group philosophy emerged. "Notre ami, le silencieux E.L.T."¹⁶⁹ had little time to act as a guiding force and his difficulties with the English language were very much an inhibiting factor.¹⁷⁰ In

Brussels, Paul Nougé and René Magritte had provided the theoretical basis for the group's activities, while Mesens had used his organisational talents to publish their ideas, forging contacts with Paris and mounting exhibitions. In England he continued this policy, bringing the attention of the English group to the ideas which had been formulated in Paris and Brussels but not taking any initiative until later in 1940. In any case, Mesens felt that he couldn't speak out too much because he was on unfamiliar ground¹⁷¹ in England, though he was concerned about the lack of understanding by the group as to what a complete commitment to Surrealism would involve.¹⁷²

"Les Anglais ne me comprennent pas beaucoup", he complained in a letter to Paul Delvaux, "à l'exception des amis Herbert Read, Roland Penrose et Humphrey Jennings".¹⁷³

Mesens' own attitude towards Surrealism was summed up in the speech (already referred to) which he had made at La Louvière in Belgium in 1935.

"Le Surréalisme n'est pas une tendance artistique - le Surréalisme se dresse contre tout ce qui traditionnellement ou dictatorialement empêche l'homme de prendre conscience de ses droits, contre tout ce qui lui interdit actuellement de disposer librement de lui-même".

Surrealism was for him the struggle for:

"Une restitution intégrale du fond humain le plus authentique, étouffé jusqu'ici par d'hypocrites contraintes. La lutte pour la défense inconditionnée de l'invention et de la découverte dans le Réel."¹⁷⁴

Whereas this attitude would require a united and positive group stance, the Surrealists in England were not united and this was demonstrated in the autumn of 1938.

In October that year Mesens published the text of a manifesto written by Breton and Diego Rivera¹⁷⁵ in English translation in the London Bulletin. The manifesto, which had originally been published in July in France, called for the formation of a "Fédération Internationale de l'Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant" (F.I.A.R.I.) as an organisation of revolutionary artists in opposition to the Stalinist organisation A.E.A.R.¹⁷⁶ In response to the manifesto the French Surrealists had formed a committee to represent a united front of all the various 'tendances' of revolutionary art in France,¹⁷⁷ and they eventually published a review, Clé, of which

two numbers appeared in January and February 1939, although there was political dissension in the French group as a Trotskyite, Marcel Martinet, objected to the Surrealist domination of the group.¹⁷⁸ According to Paul Ray,¹⁷⁹ the English Surrealist group having published the text of the manifesto subsequently received a statement from the French Surrealists in which they made it clear that they expected the formation of an English Section of the F.I.A.R.I. This would have meant that artists must commit themselves not to exhibit with "Stalinist organisations":

"The artist must understand at once that his place is elsewhere, not among those who betray the cause of the Revolution as well as of necessity, the cause of man".¹⁸⁰

The London group were, however, unable to agree upon a plan of action: according to a letter to Herbert Read from André Breton some kind of manifesto was prepared but it was not published. Breton wrote,

"J'ai reçu avant hier la lettre du Roland Penrose accompagnant le texte du manifeste que vous vous proposez de publier. J'attends qu'on m'en communique la traduction mais je suis à priori très heureux de votre initiative.

Vous avez du recevoir le premier numéro de Clé qui laisse beaucoup à désirer sous divers rapports Le prochain numéro fera l'objet de (soins?) beaucoup plus attentifs.

C'est pourquoi je me permets de compter sur votre collaboration. Pouvez-vous m'envoyer ... un texte de vous sur tel sujet qui vous plaît et qui présente pour vous un intérêt fondamental. Si notre ami, le silencieux E.L.T. (Mesens), est trop occupé pour le traduire, ne craignez pas de me l'adresser en anglais: nous disposons ici d'assez bons traducteurs".¹⁸¹

While the English group did not publish any manifesto, Alan Bowness makes the point that:

"In publishing the F.I.A.R.I. manifesto (in the first place) the English Surrealists were tacitly backing Breton in his struggle with the Communists; as in France, certain members of the group found it impossible to remain both Communist and Surrealist (Roger Roughton) left Surrealism for this reason, although Banting managed to combine the two)".¹⁸²

Following the discussions held to try to decide what response to give the French group Ithel Colquhoun, Julian Trevelyan and John Tunnard no longer called themselves Surrealists when they exhibited,¹⁸³ and one must

assume that this was partly a result of the political problems raised concerning the F.I.A.R.I. text. Professor Matthews has said that:

"Political distractions (Spain; the United Front; Stalin vs. Trotsky) served only to widen differences which no unifying principle resisted".¹⁸⁴

Mesens was evidently unwilling to give a lead in the argument - he wrote to Magritte in November 1938,

"Ici je n'ai absolument aucun droit de m'occuper de politique, je fais dans le London Bulletin tout ce que je vois de possible. Peut-être t'ai-je dit que nous avons du dissoudre le groupe Surréaliste en Angleterre, pour raisons d'hygiène".¹⁸⁵

Paul Ray writes:

"According to Conroy, a member of the London group, the collapse of English Surrealism can be dated from this meeting; not all activity ceased but the group ceased to function as a group".¹⁸⁶

However, the Surrealists did join together with other radical artists at the Living Art in England exhibition at the London Gallery early in 1939, in a united effort against Nazism and Socialist Realism, and this may well have been Mesens' own personal response together with his close allies Herbert Read and Roland Penrose to the F.I.A.R.I. manifesto, though it has not been possible to find evidence to support this. It is known that Mesens felt very strongly that the English group should be more rigorous in their approach to Surrealism.¹⁸⁷

Earlier, in 1938, he had the following press handout printed:¹⁸⁸

"The directorship of the London Gallery passed to E.L.T. Mesens in April 1938 and a deliberate and permanent "swing to the left" was immediately proclaimed in a comprehensive exhibition of the work of René Magritte".

Mesens did not see the "swing to the left" in terms of his own adherence to any particular group.¹⁸⁹ He always felt that the Surrealist preoccupation with left wing politics was a time wasting exercise and that the artist and poet should work for a true liberation of the spirit through revolutionizing our consciousness of the external world. Thus the "swing to the left" would for him mean a "radical" re-interpretation of reality. At the same time he was opposed to bourgeois materialism and exploitation which

fettered the freedom of the individual.¹⁹⁰ Thus in 1939 at an exhibition of Roland Penrose's work,¹⁹¹ he was absolutely furious to find that a tramp was employed to sit in the window of the gallery for the duration of the show. Roland Penrose evidently failed to see why this should cause such wrath on Mesens' part and did not understand that for Mesens this was the kind of materialist exploitation of the individual despised by many Surrealists.

Mesens was initially prepared to co-operate with the English group in their effort to join with other artists to provide a united front in the face of the growing threat of Nazism, having organised the Belgian section at the A.I.A. exhibition in 1937,¹⁹² and arranging the Living Art in England show in 1939. Bowness has said that:

"The avant-garde in England lacked the extreme complexity and sectarianism of Paris. The English Surrealists therefore did not feel the same need to isolate and define their position vis-à-vis other contemporary art nor to place themselves in opposition to the avant-garde as the Surrealists did in the Twenties.... with the threat of Fascism and a Second World War once again unity seemed more important than ideological vigour".¹⁹³

It is clear, however, that by early 1940 he felt that if the Surrealists in England were to have any coherence as an identifiable force, they needed to have a sound basis on which to co-operate. By this time his hand was strengthened by the arrival of Jacques Brunius, the French film director, translator and poet, who had been Buñuel's assistant in the production of *L'Age d'Or*¹⁹⁴ and Gordon Onslow-Ford, the English painter, who had come under the influence of Matta and had joined the Paris Surrealists in 1938.¹⁹⁵ A meeting was arranged on April 11th, 1940 at the Barcelona Restaurant, Beak Street, at which everybody who was still involved with Surrealism in London was present: Herbert Read, Roland Penrose, Humphrey Jennings, Ithel Colquhoun, Eileen Agar, Edith Rimmington, S.W. Hayter, A.C. Sewter, Dr. Grace Pailthorpe, R. Mednickoff, John Banting, Charles Howard and others.¹⁹⁶ Mesens planned to ask the following questions at the meeting, though whether this is the final whole questionnaire is not known.¹⁹⁷

"In order to give all the force necessary to Surrealist action, are you prepared to renounce all participation in group exhibitions springing from an artistic bourgeois spirit? Are you prepared to withdraw your name from the membership list of organisations of the kind of the 'Artists International Association', 'The London Group', 'British Arts Centre'? The position of poets and writers participating in the new Surrealist group requires a very special attention. Although I can admit that a writer should occupy the position of director or editor in a publishing house publishing mainly non-Surrealist books; although I can understand that a poet should be professionally attached to the editorial of a daily newspaper, I affirm that it is totally incompatible with the spirit of Surrealism that the name of the writer or poet should be associated with his professional activities.

That which appears to me to represent the height of the equivocal is for example to defend Surrealism in Surrealist organs and headquarters at the same time as to defend Constructivism in its organs."

It has not been possible to discover whether this was the text which was read aloud at the meeting. Dawn Ades states that the following propositions were put forward:

- "1. Adherence to the proletarian revolution.
2. Agreement not to join any other group or association, professional or other, including any secret society, other than the Surrealists.
3. Agreement not to exhibit or publish except under Surrealist auspices."¹⁹⁸

Paul Ray writes that these were the more important and controversial points which emerged at the meeting,¹⁹⁹ and apart from no. 1, they agree with Mesens' draft.

Herbert Read could not accept the points raised at the meeting: it is quite evident from Mesens' draft that Read could not possibly accept directives which would effectively have meant him abandoning his support for the Constructivists. Paul Ray considers that:

"Read believed that the charge against him was primarily political and proceeded from the militant Communists in the group."²⁰⁰

Eileen Agar, who had exhibited with the Surrealists, had also shown with the London Group and decided to leave the Surrealist group. (She subsequently retracted this decision.) Ithel Colquhoun wanted to be free

to pursue her own interests which included the occult, to which Mesens was opposed,²⁰¹ and raised further objections to the directive that the Surrealists were only to exhibit under Surrealist auspices. She was expelled from the group together with Dr. Pailthorpe,²⁰² and Reuben Mednickoff²⁰³ who also would not accept the latter point, and the three were not invited to exhibit at the 'Surrealism Today' exhibition which Mesens mounted at Zwemmer's in June 1940. Henry Moore exhibited six works at this show, but later that year ceased to have anything further to do with the Surrealists or the A.I.A. when he discovered that he was to be cited as an official war artist.²⁰⁴ Like Moore, Paul Nash also took part in the war artists scheme and his showing of work at the Zwemmer exhibition was the last occasion when he exhibited with the Surrealists.

Work by Mesens, Melville,²⁰⁵ Maddox, Penrose, Tunnard, Rimmington,²⁰⁶ Agar and Hayter²⁰⁷ was shown together with pictures by Matta and Estaban Frances from Gordon Onslow-Ford's collection. Immediately the show was over, Onslow-Ford left for North America and settled in Mexico. The London Bulletin nos. 18-20 published in one volume in June 1940 was a completely Surrealist edition containing much more material by Mesens himself than previously including two photographic illustrations of amusing concepts - The Well of Truth,²⁰⁸ a woman holding up a large handkerchief partly covering her face onto which eyes and a mouth are painted, and Carte Postale,²⁰⁹ which accompanies a poem 'Sing Song': the photograph is of a cravat on a man's shirt collar - the cravat is gradually being transformed into a naked woman. Mesens also published a defence of Henry Moore²¹⁰ which the artist later said he was delighted with.²¹¹ According to the Bulletin the letter was sent to the New Statesman and while its receipt was acknowledged it was never published. The letter is interesting inasmuch as Mesens reveals that he is prepared to defend Moore's work against the banks of criticism because of the very individuality of his "powerful" creations which like those of Picasso, "absorb aspects of a variety of styles and nevertheless remain genuinely his own.

"England has not many contemporary artists capable of comparison with the great of other European countries."

Group activities ceased for the time being after the show, although Mesens continued to mount a series of small shows outside London until the end of 1940, in the autumn at the Oxford University Art Society,²¹² and in December and January he arranged a series of art shows combined with lectures arranged by the art department of Dartington Hall School to trace the development of Fauvism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Cubism.²¹³ In 1941 Mesens was involved in London with work for the Belgian Army and then in 1942 began to work for the Belgian section of the B.B.C. The War had finally put an end to the first attempts at creating a coherent Surrealist group. Roland Penrose, Julian Trevelyan and S.W. Hayter worked on camouflage, Brunijs became head of the B.B.C. French programmes.²¹⁴

According to Conroy Maddox, Mesens "had established" in the period before the War,

"a climate of excitement and disinterested collaboration among the writers and painters who were being drawn towards Surrealism".²¹⁵

Until 1940 he preferred to concentrate on his work as editor of the London Bulletin, and mounting his exhibitions, which he considered to be a Surrealist activity in itself.²¹⁶ He contributed three poems to the Bulletin which were subsequently published in the collected edition of his poetry.²¹⁷ When he attempted to take over the leadership of the Surrealist group in London he failed largely because of antagonism by the members, who objected because of what they felt to be his dictatorial demands. Mesens faced similar problems to those encountered by André Breton from the late 1920s onwards, when various members of the French group were either expelled or left of their own accord because of a failure to conform to what Breton considered to be the Surrealist ethic, or fell by the wayside because of political differences. But, whereas in Paris until 1939 a number of major artists and poets continued to provide a central core of activity and new adherents were constantly assimilated into the group providing fresh interpretations of Surrealism, in London the lack of any artists or poets totally committed to the movement who could develop a substantial contribution to Surrealism in the formal sense effectively inhibited the maturation of the movement in England. Important

painters such as Paul Nash and Edward Burra developed their own interests using aspects of Surrealism which appealed to them as individuals, as did Henry Moore, but they did not wish to involve themselves in the movement in any committed sense. Richard Morphet²¹⁸ has written that:

"British artists pursued Surrealist aims in a manner orderly, idiosyncratic and gentle by comparison with the Continental pioneers".

Members of the group had demonstrated a commitment to Surrealism in their art - Dr. Pailthorpe and Ithel Colquhoun had experimented with pure automatism, both Roland Penrose and Eileen Agar made extraordinary Surrealist objects²¹⁹ and collages,²²⁰ John Banting²²¹ painted strange, sinuous, fluid forms and Conroy Maddox had since 1932 experimented with collage and automatic techniques.²²² But these were individual approaches developing ideas formulated earlier by Continental Surrealists, and none of the members of the London group developed completely new techniques and approaches.

Herbert Read and Roland Penrose were the most active members of the group who could have provided a lead apart from Mesens, but Penrose concentrated on his own work as a painter and true to the spirit of British compromise did not attempt to devote himself completely to the Surrealist revolution and galvanize people by actively indulging in Surrealist propaganda which might have offended good taste. Herbert Read, in his position with his feet in both Surrealist and Constructivist camps and with his literary career to consider, could not have undertaken the totally radical, anti-rational, anti-conformist position necessary to advance the position of Surrealism in England. Humphrey Jennings drifted away from Surrealism at the beginning of the War. Members were thus too involved in their individual careers to sink their differences in a joint effort. Political dissension and war not only disrupted Surrealist activity in London, but also in Paris and Brussels. Faced with the threat of total warfare, it is not surprising that the Surrealist movement was shattered, though small coteries in Europe and America still continued during the War to keep the flag flying.

FOOTNOTES

1. There is no record of Mesens having visited England before this date.
2. The exhibition was held at the New Burlington Galleries and was opened by André Breton on June 11th, 1936.
3. Personal communication from Sir Roland Penrose.
4. Ibid.
5. Indigo Days, London, 1957, p.71.
6. Personal communication from George Melly.
7. The Exposition Internationale d'Art Moderne held as part of the International Exhibition in Brussels, May - November 1935 showed only work by Belgian Expressionist painters - Ensor, Delvaux, Permeke, Ramah, Servaes, Smits, Tytgat, Wouters, Van Woestyne. No French Surrealist work was shown there - the entries from France included Bonnard, Braque, Chagall, Derain, Signac, Utrillo, Vlaminck, Vuillard, Renault.
8. Personal communication from Mesens' friend, Hugo van den Perre.
9. Dennis Farr; English Art 1870-1940, Oxford, 1978, p.285.
10. Catalogue, Art in Britain 1930 - 1940 centred around Axis, Circle, Unit One. Marlborough Fine Art, London, March - April 1965, p.11.
11. Op. cit. note 10, p.12.
12. Personal communication.
13. Farr op. cit. p.276.
14. Ibid. p.288.
15. Reichardt op. cit. note 10, p.12.
16. The book contained essays by André Breton, Hugh Sykes Davies, Paul Eluard and Georges Hugnet.
17. Op. cit. note 10, p.8.

18. Henry Moore 'The Sculptor Speaks', The Listener XVIII (August 18th, 1937) pp. 338-40, reprinted in Philip James (ed.) Henry Moore on Sculpture, London, 1966, p.67.
19. Michel Remy is preparing a thesis which will probably be entitled 'Le mouvement Surréaliste en Angleterre: essai de synthèse en vue de la définition du geste Surréaliste en Angleterre (1932 - 1947)!' University of Nancy, France.
20. Surrealism in England. Towards a Dictionary of Surrealism in England, followed by a Chronology. Groupe-Edition Marges, Nancy, France, 1978. (Twenty three pages.)
21. Farr, op. cit. p.277.
22. Richard Shone, The Century of Change, British Painting since 1900, London, 1977, caption to fig. 115.
23. David Gascoyne translated André Breton's 'What is Surrealism?' and this was published by Faber and Faber early in 1936. André Breton in a letter to Herbert Read was extremely annoyed about this, as his original text had been cut without his permission and there was no indication of where the cuts had been made by using dotted lines. He also objected to the illustrations which had been selected. Herbert Read documentation, University of Victoria, Canada, HR/AB 1, July 1st, 1936.
24. Exhibition catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, Hayward Gallery, London, 1978, p.347.
25. Illustrated Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, op. cit. p.24.
26. International Surrealist Bulletin No. 4, issued by the Surrealist group in England, September 1936, p.4.
27. Farr op. cit. p.279.
28. J.H. Matthews 'Surrealism and England' Comparative Literature Studies 1, no. 1, Minnesota, 1964, p.57.
29. Julian Trevelyan, op. cit. note 3, p.66.
30. Robert Melville introduction to the catalogue Conroy Maddox, Gouaches of the 1940s, Fisher Fine Art, London, February - March, 1976.
31. Ibid.
32. E.L.T. Mesens. Posthumously published 'Introduction to Conroy Maddox' used on the invitation card to the exhibition of Conroy Maddox, Paintings, Collages, Gouaches 1940 - 1976, Galerie Farber, Brussels, February - March 1977.

33. Farr, op. cit. pp. 279-280.
34. Personal communication from Conroy Maddox. By 1936 Ben Nicholson was working in a completely abstract Constructivist style.
35. See note 12.
36. Douglas Cooper, Graham Sutherland, London, 1961, p.12.
37. Ibid. p.11.
38. Op. cit. note 16.
39. Ibid. p.28.
40. Ibid. p.63.
41. Op. cit. note 24, p.348. André Breton had earlier written to Read (op. cit. note 23) that he thought that Faber and Faber's idea of giving a specifically English viewpoint to Surrealism was ridiculous and that the "commercial necessity" advanced by the publishers could not justify this. Subsequently Breton, Eluard and Hugnet contributed pieces to the book, which appeared alongside Read's anglicized version of Surrealism. (Note 16.)
42. Hugh Sykes Davies had been on the Committee of the 1936 International Exhibition and had delivered a talk during the exhibition on 'Biology and Surrealism' which makes the case for the therapeutic value of Surrealism in its exploration of the unconscious and irrational. Davies later contributed to the first numbers of the London Bulletin and then left the Surrealist group late in 1938.
43. Pages 117 - 168.
44. Ibid. pp. 93 - 116.
45. Ibid. pp. 105 - 6.
46. Ibid. pp. 169 - 184.
47. Ibid. p.173.
48. Ibid. p.182.
49. Cited by Richard Shone, op. cit. note 22, p.26.
50. Paul Nash, 1889 - 1946: The Master of the Image, London, 1973, p.5.
51. Ibid. p.30.

52. Introduction to the catalogue Henry Moore, Arts Council Exhibition, Tate Gallery, London, May - July 1951, p.9.
53. John Rothenstein, Modern English Painters, Vol. II, London, 1956, p.323.
54. Douglas Cooper, op. cit. note 36, p.12.
55. Banting lived in Paris in 1930, where he met Breton, Crevel, Giacometti and Duchamp. Alan Bowness in the catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. note 23, mentions that "Paul Nash noted the Surrealist influence in his work in a review of his exhibition at the Wertheim Gallery in 1931", p.358.
56. Eileen Agar joined the Surrealist group in London in 1936 and exhibited work with them until 1940. She made Surrealist collages and objects and experimented with automatic techniques. (Fig. 14. 1. Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, p.358.)
57. Ithel Colquhoun worked with the Surrealist group in London between 1938 and 1942. (Fig. 14. 10. ibid. p.359).
58. John Rothenstein, Modern English Painters, Vol. III, London, 1974, p.46.
59. London Bulletin nos. 8 - 9, January and February 1939.
60. John Tunnard exhibited with the Surrealists in London between 1937 and 1940. (Fig. 14. 52. Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, p.369.)
61. Jennings was assistant editor on the London Bulletin in June and July 1938.
62. Fig. 14. 48. Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, p.368.
63. Ibid.
64. Eileen Agar, Edward Burra, Hugh Sykes Davies, Mervyn Evans, David Gascoyne, Charles Howard, Humphrey Jennings, Rupert Lee, Sheila Legge, Len Lye, E.L.T. Mesens, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, George Reavy, Roger Roughton, Ruthven Todd, Julian Trevelyan.
65. With the exception of André Breton, Paul Eluard and May Ray who also signed the Bulletin.
66. Note 26.

67. The A.I.A. had been founded in 1933 by Clifford Rowe the painter, who had been according to Farr, "inspired by a vast international painting exhibition in Moscow to which he had contributed in 1932-3" (p.292). The A.I.A. was a left-wing organisation which held its first major exhibition, Artists against Fascism and War, in 1935 and Farr point out that this show had "an explicit political purpose as did the lectures and bulletins it organised".
68. Op. cit. note 26, p.7.
69. Trevelyan op. cit. note 29, p.2.
70. Grosvenor Square, March - April 1937.
71. To the 1937 and 1939 exhibitions.
72. A group with left-wing sympathies founded in 1937 by William Coldstream, Claude Rogers and Victor Pasmore. The painters who belonged to the group wished art to be available to a wider public and shared a
"fundamental belief in Realism, an unrhetorical, objective appraisal of the subject, the emergence of poetic and sensuous qualities through sustained observation, an essential modesty of gesture in paint".
Shone, op. cit. note 22, p.30.
73. Left Review, Vol. 2, no. 10, July 1936, supplement facing p.508.
74. Anthony Blunt 'Rationalist and Anti-Rationalist Art'. Ibid. p.vi.
75. Anthony Blunt, 'The Realism Quarrel', Left Review, Vol. 3, no. 3, April 1937, p.170.
76. Randall Swingler, 'What is the Artist's Job?', Left Review, Vol. 3, no. 15, April 1938, p.932.
77. Review of A.I.A. Exhibition, 1937, Left Review, Vol. 3, no. 4, May 1937, p.231.
78. Op. cit. note 74.
79. A.L. Lloyd 'Surrealism and Revolutions' Left Review, Vol. 2, no. 16, January 1937, p.897.
80. Op. cit. note 26, p.18.
81. See main text below: the exhibitions of De Chirico and Picasso which Mesens later exhibited at the London Gallery.

82. This was mounted at the Gordon Fraser Gallery, 3rd-20th November, 1937. The preface to the exhibition was written by Benjamin Péret and work was shown by Agar, Arp, Breton, Burra, Clayton, P.N. Dawson, Duchamp, Ernst, Evans, Graham, Haile, Hayter, Howard, Klee, Masson, Mednickoff, Nash, Paalen, Pailthorpe, Penrose, Picasso, Man Ray, Richards, Sewter, Smith, Tanguy, Trevelyan and Tunnard. Mesens lent work by De Chirico, Man Ray, Ernst and Magritte and showed his own collage, L'Instruction Obligatoire I, 1929 (fig. 43).
83. Paul C. Ray, The Surrealist Movement in England, Cornell, 1971, P.195.
84. L'avenir des statues, 1927.
L'évidence éternelle, picture object, 1930.
Le premier fait. C'est un morceau de fromage, 1936.
85. For instance, the following extract from a poem by Grace Pailthorpe, a psychologist (who subsequently contributed a piece to the London Bulletin 'The Scientific Aspects of Surrealism' in which she saw the movement as providing therapeutic help. London Bulletin:
- "Don't go! Don't go! Don't go there!
'Tis only a dead man's bones
You wouldn't wish to see that -
a corpse and putrefaction"
86. 'The Crisis of the Object' from 'Le Surréalisme et la Peinture', Paris 1927, reprinted in translation by Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, London, 1965, pp. 85-87.
87. Introduction to catalogue Surrealist Objects and Poems, London Gallery, November - December 1937. Paul Ray (op. cit. p.195 note 22) says however that:
- "In a letter to the author (June 10th, 1964) Sir Herbert stated that he did not recall making the statement and thought that Davies probably wrote it and got him to add the signature". He goes on, "since the statement accords so closely with the position enunciated by Davies in 'Biology and Surrealism'."
- Sir Herbert was probably correct in attributing it to Davies.
88. The previous directors were Lady Norton and her sister.
89. Leaflet published in London, 1938, announcing the intentions of the London Gallery. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
90. Ibid.
91. Nos. 1 to 20.

92. Farr, op. cit. note 9, p.281.
93. Personal communication from Roland Penrose, 20.6.79.
94. March 1939.
95. May 1939.
96. Op. cit. note 93.
97. Ibid.
98. Op. cit. note 10, p.8.
99. 'Aphorism'. Bulletin, No. 1, April 1938.
'Freud at Vienna', Bulletin, No. 2, May 1938.
100. Dated August 1938. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
101. Flyleaf, no pagination. One must assume that this statement was made by Mesens. Penrose, who was assistant editor from this issue until May 1939, always appended his initials to any notes which he wrote.
102. 15th May, 1939, p.22.
103. April 1938, p.6.
104. Palais des Beaux Arts, December 1937.
105. February 1939, p.7.
106. July 1938, p.28.
107. See Chapter 8.
108. July 1938, p.29.
109. Ibid. p.41.
110. A well known Belgian dress designer, wife of P.G. Van Hecke, who had owned the magazine Variétés and the Epoque gallery in Brussels. See Chapter 3.
111. May 1938.
112. October 1938.
113. Penrose later noted in the London Bulletin nos. 8-9, January - February 1939, that whereas only 3,000 visitors were recorded at the month long showing in the West End, there were 12,000 visitors in the fortnight at the Whitechapel Gallery (flyleaf: no pagination).

114. Professor J.H. Matthews, op. cit. note 28, made the point that although Surrealism initially influenced the poetry of David Gascoyne and the prose of Hugh Sykes Davies, it did not inspire them to any extended work. (Gascoyne moved away from Surrealism in 1937 and eventually became a staunch Roman Catholic, Davies left the movement in 1938). The nearest approach to an "official" Surrealist magazine before the London Bulletin, according to Matthews, was Contemporary Poetry and Prose (ed. Roger Roughton), of which ten numbers were published between 1936 and 1937. This included a number of texts by Continental Surrealists (including Mesens) and poems in a wide variety of styles ranging from Dylan Thomas and Ezra Pound to David Gascoyne, and Matthews considers that:
- "It could not be claimed to have contributed notably or even systematically to defending Surrealism or to implementing its principles" (p.60).
- Matthews considers that Gascoyne, Read and Davies compromised their attitude towards Surrealism and this effectively inhibited the development of an overriding commitment to the literature of a Surrealist nature.
- While artists in England also tended to compromise their position, there is evidence that Surrealism was a potent force in the work of major English artists of the 1930s - Paul Nash, Edward Burra and Henry Moore - and found real expression in the collages of Eileen Agar and paintings by Roland Penrose, John Banting and Conroy Maddox, all of whom continued to develop their interests in Surrealism well into the 1940s and beyond.
115. Personal communication by George Bernheim, who had been involved with the Surrealists in Paris during the 1930s and collaborated with Mesens and Stephane Cordier on the production of Documents 34, Brussels. Bernheim subsequently opened a gallery in Paris, Bernheim Jeune.
116. Personal communication by Conroy Maddox. Mesens and Eluard evidently indulged in a number of escapades together in Paris during the 1930s when Mesens was staying there, and Eluard often visited Brussels to see his friend. Mesens had a very high regard for Eluard's work.
117. Paris, January 1935. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels. The author has only been allowed very limited access to the correspondence between Mesens and Eluard which is in the Dubucq collection. Mesens appears to have kept all Eluard's letters and retained copies of a number of letters which he wrote himself to various Surrealist painters and poets. Four letters from Eluard to Mesens in 1935 have recently been published in a little booklet Le Cache Sexe des Anges, Les Livres Nus, Brussels 1978, pp. 13-16. They cover a variety of issues; in the first dated January 1935 Eluard writes:

"Par instants, j'écris de longs textes, mon imagination s'exalte. Je déchire tout et je retombe encore plus bas qu'avant" (p.14).

The second letter tells Mesens of Crevel's suicide, while the third and fourth concern the 'Congrès des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture' which was held in 1936, the possible publication of Documents 35 (this never appeared) and a new International Surrealist Bulletin which the Parisian group helped to publish, which would have included according to Eluard,

"un texte très important d'un Surréaliste anglais.

Un grand article de Reavy (Anglais) sur la poésie soviétique depuis '17" (p.15).

This bulletin was not published in Paris. It was probably replaced by the Bulletin which the London group published in 1936, with the collaboration of Breton, Eluard and Mesens. Reavy's article was not used, however.

George Reavy was a poet and an expert on Soviet literature: he edited a book, Thorns of Thunder, London 1936, which consisted of poems by Eluard translated by Samuel Beckett, Denis Devlin, David Gascoyne, Eugene Jolas, Man Ray, George Reavy and Ruthven Todd. Reavy contributed to the London Bulletin and was assistant editor on nos. 11 and 12, March 1939.

118. May 1939.
119. New Statesman, London, May 20th, 1939, p.778.
120. André Breton Surrealism and Painting, 1928, translated by S.W. Taylor, London, 1972, p.7.
121. Nos. 15 - 16, May 1939.
122. E.L.T. Mesens, The Cubist Spirit in its Time, London 1947.
123. John Golding, Cubism, London, 1959, p.162.
124. He was a railway fanatic, collector and producer of documentary films.
125. Op. cit. note 24, p.353.
126. London Bulletin no. 4-5, July 1938, p.19.
127. Personal communication.
128. Needless to say, the critic in the Observer reflected a typical response to the exhibition, failing to understand the implications of the "machinist" imagery of Picabia, Duchamp, Max Ernst and Man Ray. The critic wrote that the exhibition of machine drawings "poses the question of from what inner source springs the often surprising charm of such drawings.

In his view,
"Real mechanical diagrams" in association with
"deliberately mechanistic but functionless drawings
of the Constructivist painter may, as it were, strip
the gilt from the sometimes too gingerbread construc-
tions and reveal the latter as amusing inventions which
in competition with mechanical reality fail to grip the
imagination".

July 10th, 1938. p.14.

129. July 10th, 1938, p.14.

130. An essay subsequently used by Conroy Maddox as part of the
invitation to the Conroy Maddox exhibition at the Galerie Farber,
Brussels, February 22nd - March 19th, 1977, no pagination.

131. Remy, op. cit. note 20, p.20.

132. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.

133. Henry Moore attended a number of the meetings of the Surrealist
group at the London Gallery in 1938 and 1939 (op. cit. note 12).
He was during this period interested in Surrealist techniques which
explored the unconscious. Op. cit. note 53.

134. The Times, Thursday, January 26th, 1939, p.8.

135. New Statesman, January 28th, 1939, p.129.

136. January 29th, 1939, p.14.

137. June 9th - July 1st, 1933.

138. John Russel, Max Ernst, London, 1967, pp. 106-113.

139. Rubin, op. cit. fig. 90.

140. Ibid. figs. 155-159.

141. See note 113.

c 142. Rubin, op. cit. Colour plate 13.

143. Chapter 8.

144. See Chapter 2.

145. Russel, p.74.

146. Mesens had already shown these paintings at the Chirico - Picasso
exhibition at Zwemmers in 1937. (No months given on catalogue).

147. The Observer noting that the exhibition was a "good and characteristic selection of paintings" (October 30th, 1938, p.14) and the New Statesman pointing out that the exhibition "establishes his claim to be the earliest by years of the Surrealists, and like so many prophets he still towers above his disciples". (October 29th, 1938, p.689).
148. London Bulletin, no. 2, May 1938, p.14.
149. April 1938, pp. 5-6.
150. Arturo Schwarz Man Ray, London 1977, fig. 44.
151. Ibid. fig. 35.
152. Ibid. fig. 57.
153. Ibid. fig. 51.
154. See note 104.
155. No pagination.
156. Catalogue Tendances Surréalistes, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, 1970. No pagination.
157. Ibid.
158. 'The Significance of Paul Delvaux', June 23rd, 1938, pp. 1336-7.
159. Broadsheet published by E.L.T. Mesens Activities of the London Gallery Ltd. 1936 - 1950, London, 1950, no pagination.
160. London Bulletin no. 17, 15th June, 1939, note, no pagination.
161. Op. cit. note 159.
162. Nos. 18 - 20. See main text below.
163. Op. cit. note 130.
164. Remy, op. cit. note 20.
165. Op. cit. note 29, p.76.
166. Ibid. p.77.
167. The Realists' case was reviewed by Randall Swingler. 'What is the Artist's Job'. Left Review III no. 15, April 1938, p.931.
168. London Bulletin, April 1st, 1938, notes, no pagination.

169. André Breton, letter to Herbert Read, December 28th, 1938, HR/AB-7.
170. Conroy Maddox, note 116.
171. Ibid.
172. Eileen Agar, personal communication.
173. Dated 20th February, 1939, Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
174. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
175. According to Malcolm Haslam, The Real World of the Surrealists, London, 1978, p. 250, the manifesto was largely written by Trotsky, although it was signed by Breton and Rivera. The latter had arranged for Breton to meet Trotsky.
176. Op. cit. note 24, p.351.
177. Maurice Nadeau, The History of Surrealism, translated from the French by Richard Howard, London, 1968, p. 227.
178. Op. cit. note 175, p. 250.
179. Op. cit. note 83, p.226.
180. London Bulletin no. 7, December 1938. André Breton and Diego Rivera "Towards an Independent Revolutionary Art", (an English translation of the original text which was published in the London Bulletin no. 6, October 1938) p.31.
181. Op. cit. note 169.
182. Op. cit. note 24, p. 351.
183. Exhibition catalogue 'Living Art in England', London Bulletin, nos. 8 - 9, January - February 1939.
184. Matthews, op. cit. note 28, p.71.
185. Letter dated November 22nd, 1938, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
186. Op. cit. note 83, p. 226.
187. Eileen Agar, op. cit. note 172.
188. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.

189. George Bernheim, op. cit. note 115.
190. Conroy Maddox, personal communication.
191. Ibid. Maddox could not recall where the exhibition was held but it was probably the one at the Mayor Gallery in June 1939.
192. Op. cit. note 24, p.351.
193. Op. cit. note 24, p.353.
194. The film made by Buñuel in collaboration with Salvador Dali, shown at the end of 1930, which contained shocking images of violence and revolt. Marcel Jean History of Surrealist Painting translated from the French by S.W. Taylor, London, 1960, pp. 214 - 217.
195. Ibid. pp. 297-8.
196. Paul Ray, op. cit. note 83, p. 227.
197. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
198. Op. cit. note 24, p.354.
199. Op. cit. note 83, p.227.
200. Ibid. pp. 227-228.
201. Ibid.
202. Dr. Pailthorpe had experimented with automatic techniques, and an automatic drawing was reproduced in the 4th International Surrealist Bulletin op. cit. note 26, p.9.
203. Dr. Pailthorpe had published an article on the 'Scientific Aspect of Surrealism' London Bulletin no. 7, December 1938 - January 1939, in which she described how with the assistance of Reuben Mednickoff, a painter interested in Surrealism, she had performed a series of "scientific" experiments which demonstrated the therapeutic value of Surrealist art.
204. The Official War Artists Scheme was originally set up in 1916 as an additional part of the existing propaganda machine. The scheme was revived in 1940 and the chairman of the Committee, Sir K. Clark, has said,
 "We employed every artist whom we thought had any merit, not because we supposed that we could get records of the War more truthful or striking than those supplied by photography, but because it seemed a good way of preventing artists being killed".
Farr op. cit. note 9, p. 363.

205. John Melville had exhibited with the group in 1936 and 1939, though had not been very much involved with the group in London.
206. Edith Rimmington had joined the group in 1937 and had experimented with automatic drawing and writing. She had not previously exhibited with them, however.
207. S.W. Hayter was an engraver and painter. According to Farr:
 "In Paris he gave a fresh impetus to print making and explored new techniques at his Atelier 17, which he founded in 1927. This was to become an important training ground for artists of many nationalities".
 Op. cit. note 9, p. 362.
208. Illustrated, p.39.
209. Illustrated, p.33.
210. Ibid. pp.20-21.
211. Op. cit. note 12.
212. No catalogue has been traced of this exhibition. Source cited note 213 below.
213. Marcel Jean op. cit. note 194. No lecture notes traced.
214. Remy op. cit. note 20, p.21.
215. Introduction to catalogue E.L.T. Mesens, Collages, 1957-1971, Acoris, the Surrealist art centre, London, January 30th - March 1st, 1974, no pagination.
216. Alberto Cavallanti 'Introducing E.L.T. Mesens', London Bulletin, no. 1, April 1938, p.6.
217. 'Baiser', 'Sing-Song', 'Petit poème en prose', London Bulletin, pp. 47, 33 and 27.
218. British Painting 1910 - 1945, Tate Gallery, 1967. No pagination.
219. Illustrated Read Surrealism op. cit. note 16, fig. 75, and the 4th International Surrealist Bulletin op. cit. note 26, p.14.
220. Two of Penrose's collages are reproduced in the London Bulletin no. 17, 15th June 1939, p.10. A collage by Eileen Agar is reproduced in Remy op. cit. note 20, p.2.
221. See note 55.

222. Robert Melville introduction to catalogue Conroy Maddox,
Gouaches of the 1940s, Fischer Fine Art, London, 13th February -
12th March, 1976, no pagination.

CHAPTER 12

Mesens' Collages 1954 - 1971

During the 1930s and 1940s Mesens made only one or two collages.¹ His move to England in 1938 broke the continuity of his contacts with the Surrealist group in Belgium and in the periods 1938- 40 and 1945- 51 Mesens concentrated on his work for the London Gallery. When he recommenced his collage making again in 1954 it was in circumstances quite different from those which prevailed in his earlier period of collage making in the 1920s.

The War had seen the gradual disintegration of the British group, the Belgian group limped on torn by disagreement, and the French group broke up completely. Many members of the French group - Breton, Ernst, Tanguy, Masson, Dalí and Paalen - stayed in America during the War and attracted a number of young American artists to Surrealist ideas, notably Robert Motherwell. Their work was also one of the main stimuli to the development of Abstract Expressionism, in particular in the work of Gorky, Pollock and De Kooning.

When Breton and the Surrealist painters returned to Europe in 1946, they refounded a Surrealist group in Paris and staged a number of exhibitions, notably the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme at the Galerie Maeght in Paris in 1947. Although a number of new adherents² to Surrealism exhibited with the group, the exhibitions which they mounted, like those of Mesens in London, increasingly took on the air of retrospectives,³ for the War had broken the continuity of the movement, and by the mid-1960s most of the founder members were dead.⁴

In the period after the War, younger artists were more interested in expressing their personal moods and subjective feelings in abstract form, rather than conforming to the strict tenets laid down by André Breton in the 1920s and 1930s. Both Abstract Expressionism and Tachisme (or art informel) developed out of Surrealism, however, for they hinged on the idea of "automatism" or giving full rein to the subconscious. Mesens had little sympathy with these movements, his view coinciding with that of Benjamin Péret:

"In reality, no abstract art can exist, as art tends to represent figuratively either the artist's inner world or the exterior world, or an inter-dependence between the two".⁵

Mesens continued to show pre-war work at the London Gallery, though he exhibited work by younger artists, notably Wilfredo Lam, Lucien Freud and John Craxton.

In Belgium the Surrealist group found themselves in opposition to Breton by dedicating themselves to making close contacts with the Communist movement.⁶ Mesens did not sign their manifestos, since he took Breton's side which rejected any political alignments in preference for total freedom.⁷ Brussels was to be one of the centres, along with Copenhagen and Amsterdam, of the 'Cobra' group, founded in 1948, which eventually joined up with the Belgian Surrealist group in 1952. The Cobra group sought a spontaneity of expression in paint which would be an anti-aesthetic gesture, and the Belgians Pierre Alechinsky and Christian Dotremont, together with the Dane Asger Jorn and the Dutchman Karel Appel, undertook research into possible liaisons between words and images.⁸ The links between Cobra and the Surrealists were strengthened by the founding of the 'Phases' group in Paris in 1954 with whom they worked. Eduard Jaguar gave the 'Phases' movement a Surrealist base and placed a firm emphasis on the imagination being a "major source for all worthwhile (artistic) creation". Pierre Alechinsky developed a visionary fantastic style during the 1950s and 1960s, while Pol Bury, who had during the 1940s and 1950s painted in a style derivative of Magritte, began to make kinetic art forms. Raoul Ubac developed his Surrealist activity in Belgium during this period in Experimental photography, while Delvaux and Magritte continued to work in their pre-war style.

Mesens took no part in these activities, for until 1951 he was fully involved in his work for the London Gallery. He began making collages again in 1954 at the same time as the beginnings of the Pop Art movement in England and a revival of interest in collage in both Europe and America. In the early 1950s artists in both continents had begun to experiment with the materials used in their work, first with acrylic paints and then with collage and assemblage. Artists belonging to the Independent

Group⁹ in London were developing their interest in popular culture (comics, westerns, contemporary advertising, packaging) - Richard Hamilton for instance said that for him the qualities of "meaningful" art should reflect the values of the consumer society.¹⁰ Eduardo Paolozzi had already begun to make collages in the late 1940s under the influence of Dada and Surrealist ideas,¹¹ and in the 1950s he was to extend the "collage aesthetic" to his assemblages - first by incorporating actual objects into the surface of a sculpture and later by using a collage process to make models which he subsequently cast in bronze.¹² The roots of the Pop Art movement in both the U.K. and U.S.A. are to be found in Dada: however, although there was a revival of Dada techniques, there was none of the Dada philosophy behind them.¹³ Dada was specifically anti-art and sprang up in opposition to a situation which already existed, while Pop Art and Neo-Dada used the techniques of Dada - collage, assemblage, photomontage, and "objets trouvés" in a positive sense to create a new art reflecting a consumer society. The new style, although transient and provisional, reflected society's values rather than rejecting them - Mesens recognized this when he criticized Pop Art for being an "accepting movement".¹⁴

Although collage was used a great deal by Neo-Dada or Pop artists, its use was not simply confined to these circles in the 1950s and 1960s. The range of possible effects obtained by using collage was found to be immense, for the medium lends itself to both abstract and representational work, a wide range of texture and colour and an infinite number of combinations. 'Tachisme' in Europe had re-introduced the possibility of using discarded and found materials to express visual ideas, personal moods and subjective feelings. There was a concern for inter-dependent textures and materials were allowed to speak for themselves. Tachisme had grown out of Surrealist automatism and an aesthetic emphasis was put on the principle of "chance" and "action" by the French artists Mathieu and Soulages, for instance. In the 1950s artists in France, the U.S.A. and Italy experimented with "affiches lacérées"; in Paris Raymond Hains, for example, used torn posters, while de la Villeglé took fragments of words and phrases which he reorganized according to formal principles. Although these artists used real items, torn at random, in their work,

their assemblages are the result of "art" rather than "accident" or "chance". Many artists in the late 1950s and 1960s were concerned with an exploitation of the materials in themselves, sometimes in an abstract, sometimes in a figurative sense, the materials used giving expression directly to the ideas or feelings of the artist, and concern is shown for the aesthetic potential of the medium.

A variety of different collage styles emerged; geometric or hard edge collage was made in which the imagery takes on a sharply delineated shape, while there were many exponents of "torn edge" work including Robert Motherwell and Yves Klein, who used torn edges deliberately to "break up patterns that threaten to solidify" in his mind.¹⁵ Dubuffet and Baj used collage to create figurative images, though the very materials out of which they are constructed take on a life of their own and the figures tend to become abstract configurations.

Mesens made a wide variety of collages after 1954, ranging from hard edge abstract constructions to soft configurations and images. The conjunction of disparate images and the metamorphosis of materials is, however, deliberately Surrealist in intent. The collages have very distinctive titles removing the work from plastic to poetic considerations, and concentrate specifically on oppositions of forms, textures, colours or images to create the desired effect.

It was during the period of the general revival of interest in collage in the 1950s that Mesens returned to this medium. His work was not related to the Pop Art movement in England - he was, according to George Melly,¹⁶ "not interested in Pop Art at all and denied that it had anything to do with Dada and Surrealism". The emphasis in Mesens' work is deliberately Surrealist and he invokes the themes and preoccupations of the earlier masters of collage such as Ernst and Schwitters. In 1960 he wrote to Sir Roland Penrose,

"Moi, je reste en 1960, fierement Surréaliste".¹⁷

A reviewer commented on his work in 1961:

"It is surprising to find "1961" written in the corner of most of the collages of Mr. E.L.T. Mesens ... The date seems quite thirty years out. The anarchic wit, combined with such precision and delicacy in the use of materials, belongs to the ambience of Man Ray and Schwitters. A small amount of this sort of work is still being done in odd corners today, but it usually has a touch more of the garishness and tinsel of "popular culture" than Mr. Mesens allows and less of the original Surrealist undertones. His is a more civilized playfulness with a faintly old-fashioned air".¹⁸

Collage was for Mesens a complete expression of Surrealist ideas; he had recognised in the collages of Max Ernst a "subversion mentale"¹⁹ which had exercised "une influence énorme sur la formation de l'esprit surréaliste".²⁰ His own collection of paintings contained a large number of "proto-Surrealist" collages by Ernst²¹ and works of the early 1920s by Picabia and Schwitters; together with rarely exhibited collages made by Magritte between 1925 and 1926. By adopting the methods employed by these earlier artists (fig. 48) Mesens, it could be argued, felt that he could give the most complete expression of Surrealist ideas. Also, in Surrealist collage there is a strong poetic emphasis, for not only is the title an integral image, but the combination of disparate items represents mental concepts possible only in the freedom of the poetic imagination (fig. 49).

Mesens' collages since 1954 are characterized by wit and gaiety in contrast to earlier more anarchic work, and although the materials used are simple and there are constantly recurring motifs, nevertheless the verbal ideas are frequently complex and there is a subtle relationship between word and image. Typical features of Mesens' collages are the use of contrast in texture, colour and material. The repetition of themes both within one work and in a series of works, and motifs which are reused such as a hand, disc, violin or leaf. The works are generally small, rarely more than 50 x 40 cm, and display a delicate concern for detail.

Mesens used a great variety of themes and formats and there is no one particular stylistic feature which typifies his work. Towards the mid-1960s the configuration was simplified, so that whereas

from 1954 over the next few years his work tended to have an overall pattern of shapes mainly constructed out of various types of paper and labels, by the mid-sixties his designs were much more simple and he increasingly used drawn, inked or crayoned images in conjunction with collaged elements. His imagery ranged from formally constructed, hard edged horizontal/vertical configurations to soft, amorphous images. His collages include works in which the whole surface is covered with glued elements so that no nuclear paint emerges and those in which the concentration is on a single figure or image. He exploited a wide range of materials, always alienating them from their original use and context and subjecting them to some kind of metamorphosis. All his methods were employed to obliterate the true identity of the materials and to re-create a new identity for them in a new context by removing them from their normal usage and combining them with water colours, oils, pastels, ink or pencil. Paul Nougé had written:

"The reality of an object will depend closely on the attributes with which our imagination has endowed it, upon the number, the complexity of these attributes and upon the manner in which the invented complex fits the whole".²²

Mesens' meticulous use of materials reflected his almost excessive concern with detail. After his death in 1971, his cousin Marcel Dubucq visited Mesens' flat in London and in one of the rooms found a large collection of junk - boxes of yoghurt carton lids, newspapers, milk bottle tops, matchboxes, labels, booklets, paper, bills, tickets, invitation cards. Each type of item was, however, organised into a separate pile ready to be used in making collage. Nothing was too mundane for Mesens to assemble into his work, for like Schwitters, he was an inveterate collector of ephemera. George Melly wrote:

"He kept everything, including drawers full of flattened Gold Flake packets. When I asked him what he intended to do with them, he said, 'Build a house eventually'".²³

The members of the Paris Surrealist group were themselves passionate collectors but not in the normal sense of the term as this for them smelt of a "bourgeois activity".²⁴ Elizabeth Cowling pointed out²⁵ that in order to avoid being called "connoisseurs" they collected objects which were of little or no commercial value - for instance Paul Eluard had an enormous

collection of picture postcards, while Breton possessed stuffed birds, minerals, glass bottles moulded into fantastic shapes, coins, exotic jewellery, paintings, objects by the insane and by naifs. Mesens, in addition to collecting paintings by Dada and Surrealist artists and junk for his collages, possessed a collection of walking sticks with unusual handles, unusual 19th century flower vases, and objects of curiosity value such as a phrenology head or an argillite totem pole. The collections made by Surrealists consisted of objects strange or exotic and popular or ephemeral, for these items were considered to be just as valuable in their own way as great art; what mattered was whether the objects fitted in with the Surrealist notion of art which included "the strange and the incongruous, the irrational and the dream-like, the revelatory and the inconsequential".²⁶

Mesens began making collages again after a gap of some twenty years.²⁷ In 1954 he had visited the Venice Biennale where he saw three of his early collages²⁸ exhibited in the Belgian pavilion, dedicated to "Fantastic art in Belgium, from Bosch to Magritte". Mesens later said:²⁹

"Lorsque je pénétrai dans le pavillon belge, dans le petit hall d'entrée, se trouvait réunies des gravures anciennes parmi lesquelles on avait accroché, avec un tact rare, mes "modernes" collages. - Je reçus un choc immédiat".

Finding that the collages were better than he had remembered them to be, he returned to London and began to make collages again straight away:

"Mais cette fois le souci de la couleur intervint, pour renouveler cette hantise, qui est aussi un travail manuel".²⁹

In 1954 also, Mesens joined the 'Free Painters Group', which consisted of a number of artists who were members of the I.C.A. Mesens was introduced to the group by Maurice Jadot, a Belgian sculptor living in London. The group had come together to share their ideas about art and to exhibit together.³⁰ They were not committed to any particular style or trend:

"We were free to express ourselves in whatever way we felt best"

Jadot commented.³¹ Joining in the discussions held by the group gave Mesens an added stimulus to experiment with collage, and he started his

work with a Surrealist inspired theme L'évidence m'aime, 1954 (fig. 50), an image which deliberately recalls the original book cover for Breton's novel *Nadja*,³² which the author had designed.

It is difficult to categorize Mesens' collages, as the very diversity of the materials which he used necessarily dictated the diversity of his work. There is little stylistic development apart from the increasingly simplified construction of the collages and it has thus been found impossible to discuss his "style" as such. In any case, as a Surrealist Mesens always saw himself as "anti-style". Surrealism for Mesens was not an aesthetic but a total liberation of knowledge. This being the case, the constraints of any particular style or means of expression would be alien. This is the reason why he considered that all his activities - as a poet, collagist, polemicist or art dealer - were Surrealist, inasmuch as all were aimed at achieving a freedom from conventional inherited restraints which would limit the possibilities inherent in reality.

In 1946 Mesens wrote the following as part of his answer to the question "Quelles sont les choses que vous détestez le plus?"³³

".....la standardisation (prison pour l'imagination; empoisonneuse du goût, de choix, de la qualité, du désir); la rationalisation qui a eu pour conséquence la mécanisation du troupeau humain"

Thus, when asked by Breton why he made so many collages and had so many exhibitions when he was so financially secure, Mesens said that he could only answer that he failed to see why he shouldn't.³⁴

Making collages for Mesens was akin to poetry and his plastic work can be seen as an extension of his poetry. His verse displayed transformations of images in a witty and playful manner, and his collages continue this humorous metamorphosis. As in the work of Duchamp in particular, the title removes the work from the purely visual to the conceptual, while the wit and "jeux des mots" undermine conventional

reality. Mesens' collage Duck Soup au fond vert 1961 (fig. 51) consists of an abstract jumble of bright green papers, torn out shapes of black and orange, smudged with crayon. Without the title the work is meaningless, but once revealed the dancing elements recall the hilarious non-conformist Marx Brothers film. André Breton, commenting in an interview on Surrealist objects, said:

"They seem odd, bizarre, meaningless and ludicrous to the uninitiated. These objects can acquire meaning and purpose only when they are incorporated into the complete picture of a poetic vision".³⁵

"Word play" is a characteristic of many of the titles of Mesens' collages, as it had been a feature of much of his poetry - Madame poire en robe de soir, Maison maniaque, Fausse fuyantes, (fig. 52) Marine marconisée (fig. 53) - creating ambiguities, questioning meanings, undermining reason, reducing thought and image to the illogical. Like the games of "exquisite corpses" in which the Surrealists indulged, word play deals a blow at realism. Of the "exquisite corpse" images Breton wrote:³⁶

Written games to start with, designed to provide the post-paradoxical confrontation between the elements of speech, so that human communication, diverted thus initially from its logical path, should impart the greatest possible sense of adventure to the mind recording it!"

Mesens' titles are close in concept to those of Duchamp. Commenting on the inscriptions which he gave to his "ready-mades" Duchamp said:³⁷

"One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the ready-mades. That sentence, instead of describing the object like a title, was meant to carry the spectator to other regions more verbal".

Thus, Duchamp's work Fresh Widow 1920,³⁸ a window which the artist had made by a New York carpenter, has window panes covered with black leather: the title is a pun on 'French window'. Mesens' few English puns often came out of a literal translation of the English language - for instance the collages The World of plenty 1963 (fig. 54) and the Little World of Plain Tea 1965 are made up of a variety of differently sized letters 'T'. Conroy Maddox has said of Mesens that:³⁹

"He had a love of words. Many occur in his collages and he had his own form of English, learned, he said, from reading the Daily Express..... When Jacques Brunius died on the eve of the Exeter Surrealist Exhibition he said gravely, 'Of course, we must incinerate him'".

Other titles of Mesens' work rely on "double entendre", perhaps the most difficult one being that of a collage which he made in 1955, Charmants calculs des probabilités de la vessie-cul-billiard (fig.55). Translated literally word for word this means "charming calculations of the probabilities of the bladder billiard table". However, if one repeats this sentence swiftly in French, there are puns - "vessie-cul-billiard" sounds like "vessicule biliaire", which means gall bladder, and vessie-cul can be divided into two separate words meaning respectively 'bladder' and 'arse' (this is reminiscent of Marcel Duchamps dirty pun L.H.Q.O.Q. which accompanied his Mona Lisa with a moustache). Mesens' collage is made out of little cut-out numbers so that the author is weighing up the possibilities as to which meaning the spectator will opt for. Whatever meaning is chosen, the collage is in any event reduced to a farce. The title of Mesens' collage Jumelles (de théâtre) étreignant des frères siamois, 1959 (fig. 56) has more than one significance; "jumelles" means either "twins" or "binoculars", and both make sense in this title, for while Siamese twins are identical and joined together, so is each lens of the binoculars. His collage Arbre glabre, 1965 (fig. 57), which literally means smooth tree, depicts a Christmas tree collaged out of smooth paper with the letters of the title suspended like lamps on the branches: however, in German "Aberglaube" means superstition - thus an added dimension is given to the work. Mesens intended that his work should give food for thought and makes this clear in a collage entitled Inscription, 1961 (fig.58) which has the following message scrawled across it:

"Je ne suis pas pour tout le monde".

Wit is an important aspect of Mesens' plastic work. Humorous titles and subject matter were features of Dada in particular, for by this means convention would be undermined. Picabia made a collage using oil on canvas, pasted matchsticks, hair pins, zippers and coins, giving it the title La femme aux allumettes, 1920, (fig. 8), while Ernst in the same

year made a photo-engraving Hier ist noch alles in der Schwebe, 1922 (fig. 10), in which a fish skeleton, a cloud and the cross-section of a beetle float upside-down across the sky. Arp's wood relief La planche à oeufs, 1922, destroys bourgeois pretensions - Arp wrote that the relief was:

"A game for the upper ten thousand, in which the participants leave the arena covered in egg yolk from top to toe"⁴⁰

while Man Ray intended that his Indestructible Object, 1923, consisting of a metronome with the photograph of an eye, should be itself destroyed:-

"Cut out the eye from the photograph of one who has been loved but is not seen any more. Attach the eye to the pendulum and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-aimed try to destroy the whole with a single blow".⁴¹

Mesens' collage Le barbier de Seville, 1968 (fig. 59) is made out of a sherry bottle label illustrating a Spanish dance glued onto a background of oil paint in rectangles of gold, red, blue and almond green. Onto the tacky paint Mesens pressed a razor blade so that the imprint remains. In Variations for the Milkman, 1970 (fig. 60) he used brown corrugated paper as a base and onto this had glued notes which he left out giving instructions to his milkman as to how much milk, yoghurt or eggs he wanted each day. The messages are pasted side by side symetrically across the background and little cut-out phrases - "raspberry seedless" or "antiseptic gargle and mouthwash" are glued between the messages.

Whereas for Dadaists, humour or wit was used as an anti-art gesture - the imagery becoming merely farcical, for the Surrealists humour was adopted as a conscious attitude, which helps people go beyond the confines of environmental reality - it becomes "the triumph of the pleasure principle over real conditions".⁴² In Mesens' collage Marine Marconisée, 1961 (fig. 53) wavy lines are drawn across graph paper with little dots floating across in groups, together with two large disc shapes rolling across a lower area depicting water - the morse code signals and radio waves alternate in a marine setting, and the clue is given in the title. Professor Matthews writes in this context:⁴³

"As is always the case in Surrealism, humour is a significant factor in undermining confidence in the permanence of familiar reality. Subversion of well known phrases by linguistic dissection rebuffs habit and interrogates the forms placed before us by pictorial collage, in works like Mesens' La Dame au Camee lia ... Quoi? Sophistication and archness would count for nothing here. For playfulness strips away the sophisticate's blase acceptance and compels him to take a second look at reality which collage technique shows to be far from reassuring".

The formative influence on Mesens in the 1950s was Kurt Schwitters, whom Mesens had re-encountered just after the Second World War. Mesens wrote:

"Schwitters' name was known to me in the very early twenties through reproductions of his work and texts appearing in many European avant-garde magazines ... Schwitters' work had an immediate impact on me through its really revolutionary aspect, its unpretentiousness and completely anti-traditional effectiveness".⁴⁴

Mesens knew Schwitters personally in 1926-7 when he met him in Paris⁴⁵ and in London in 1946. Mesens bought "two small works from Schwitters in 1944, and some more later in 1946".⁴⁶

Like Schwitters, nothing was too mundane for Mesens to include in his collages, and in his early works after 1954 Mesens made much use of tickets, stamps, small labels and printed ephemera, as Schwitters had done from 1919 onwards.⁴⁷ However, whereas Mesens used collaged elements for their specific poetic value, Schwitters used collage as an alternative to paint, in rather the same way as Picasso or Braque had used collage to supplement their painting technique.⁴⁸ Schwitters came to collage through his training as a painter and the style of his work is related to Cubist/Futurist constructions, while his colour combinations form a harmonious whole. Although Mesens frequently aimed at creating harmonious colour schemes in his work, he also used colour for a specific purpose such as surprising the spectator.⁴⁹ In Schwitters' work the ingredients are metamorphosed into an abstract pictorial whole; Ernst Schwitters wrote:⁵⁰

"Kurt Schwitters always intended to create harmony, aesthetic satisfaction, balance - in other words: the classical aim of all art ... his choice of unconventional material merely served to endow (his) paintings with an additional richness, a dimension all their own".

For Mesens, the meaning of the subject matter is all important. His collage Les profits du fumeur, 1954 (fig. 61) is made of burnt cigarette papers, crushed cigarette ends and a cigarette packet painted magenta. The work is a delicately composed abstract design but the title gives an added nuance, emphasizing the sordid quality of the contents. On the other hand, Schwitters' collage Miss Blanche, 1923 (fig. 62) named after one of the cigarette brand labels used, is an abstract pattern made up of various labels and tickets, while the title is simply taken from the lettering of one of the elements and is not intended to give any further meaning to the construction. Many of Mesens' collages made between 1954 and the early 1960s consist of horizontal/vertical patterns made up of tickets and printed ephemera, but selected for specific values.⁵¹ Le carnaval de Venise, 1954 (fig. 63), for instance, is covered with small stamp book covers, words cut out of Italian newspapers or travel brochures, and these he deliberately selected for their evocative nature.

Mesens' youthful collages were all made in black and white, while his works from 1954 onwards demonstrate a developing interest in colour, and his colour schemes show a relationship with the work of Paul Klee. Mesens never wrote about Klee, though he had a number of Klees in his collection,⁵² and any relationship to the latter's work in Mesens' collages must be discovered by comparison. It is known that Mesens went to Switzerland in 1938 specifically to visit Klee,⁵³ and both Conroy Maddox⁵⁴ and George Melly⁵⁵ have stressed Mesens' admiration for Klee's work. The aspects of Klee's work which find echoes in Mesens' collages are his use of colour, certain compositional elements and the rhythmic repetition of motifs reminiscent of music scores. The fundamental axiom behind Klee's work was that "Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible".⁵⁶ The Surrealists, who adopted Klee as a forerunner of their ideas, admired his work for its "partial automatism",⁵⁷ and its rejection of imitation, and included his work in the first exhibition of Surrealist painting at the Galerie Pierre, Paris, in 1925.

In the late 1920s and early '30s Klee began to use a continuous line in his work, creating abstract dynamic forms.⁵⁸ Mesens deliberately refers to this in a late collage Nu-Klee-US, 1970 (fig. 64) in which an abstract drawn shape hovers over a dark disc on a plain ground, or in Apparition, 1961 (fig. 65) in which an abstract shape is collaged out of newspaper and painted paper. Both these collages demonstrate a concern for a delicate balance of images - this was a primary concern for Klee: he wrote:

"For my kind of composition it is essential that the disharmonies in the values be brought back into equilibrium by counterweights, and the harmony regained in this way be not wanly beautiful but strong".⁵⁹

Mesens' works demonstrate a balance of shapes and colours, and recall the architectonic values of some of Klee's work, for instance the painted squared background of Dans le jardin de Rosamonde, 1965 (fig. 66) recalls Klee's Städtebild (mit der roten Kuppel), 1923.⁶⁰

It is, however, in his use of colour that Mesens is most indebted to Klee, and Mesens makes a number of overt references to Klee's colour schemes. In Mesens' collage Evidence poétique (1), 1963 (fig. 67) two halves of a violin shape cut out of newspaper surround an abstract central motif which is made out of narrow bands of colour merging from deep reds, pinks, whites, yellows, greens to blues. Klee had developed his complex theory of colours in the early 1920s from which two basic ideas emerge - the use of colours in a complementary fashion, thus red merges through orange to yellow, or the use of colours as contrast - green against violet, violet against orange, orange against green, with the colours of the spectrum between these limits set against their own opposites. Thus in Klee's painting Abendsonne in der Stadt (Sunset in the City) 1922,⁶¹ contrasts of green, orange and violet are used to evoke the colours which the setting sun creates in city streets.

The bands of colour in Mesens' work are not intended to have natural resonances as in Klee's paintings, but are used as abstract pictorial motifs - intentionally recalling Klee's work. Bands of colour used in this way can be seen in Le bonheur des rencontres, 1970 (Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels) in which a wasp-like shape is created out of intermittent

bands of black and pastel shades, and in Feuille fortement stimulée, 1965 (Galleria Cavallino, Milan) where a central leaf shape is set between narrow bands of pastel colours.

Much of Klee's work is characterized by its rhythmic content: like Mesens he was trained as a musician and some of his titles have musical allusions: Rhythmical, 1930 or Three Part Time in the Square.⁶² Klee's Gartenbau, 1925⁶³ looks like a musical score with small rhythmic emblems drawn across lines of music becoming both symbols of musical notation and small plant-like forms. Mesens' La partition complète complétée for Marcel Duchamp's Band, 1945 (fig. 68) recalls the structural rhythms of Klee's pen drawings such as Gartenbau. Mesens also has several musical titles for his collages - Eine kleine Nachtmusik, 1960, Black Music, 1957 (fig. 69), La Musique, 1958 (fig. 70), Thème de ballet, 1960 (fig. 71), Cradle Song, 1961.

Much of Klee's work is imbued with a sharp wit and humour, as was that of Mesens whose whole "oeuvre" was ironic and witty. Such titles in Klee's painting as Pastor Cabbage 1932 derived from the pale green colour of the face depicted, or the Barber of Baghdad 1921,⁶⁴ - a figure with a head decorated with a shaving brush for a plume, are similar in conception to Mesens' Le barbier de Seville 1968 (fig. 59), a collage made from razor blade imprints and a sherry bottle label or C'etait presque mon portrait 1962 (fig. 72) in which the bare outline of a face is seen inked in on brown card with a hand collaged in on top.

Schwitters and Klee were the main influences on Mesens' second period of collages, though his work still finds echoes of Max Ernst. Earlier, Mesens had adopted Ernst's ideas in the use of engravings lifted from old magazines or journals. However, the simplicity of some of his later collages in their balanced design and simple imagery can be seen to relate to some of Ernst's 'Loplop' collages of the 1930s. For instance Loplop 1932 (fig. 73) and Plein vol (undated - fig. 74) both use a disc and simple rectangular collaged paper shapes - these can be compared with Mesens' La Siestre 1961 (fig. 75) and Mauvais presage 1965 (fig. 76). Mesens' work is related to that of more contemporary collagists, notably Enrico Baj and Robert Crippa. Baj was a friend of Mesens and had

purchased at least two of Mesens' collages⁶⁵ and Mesens was an admirer of Baj's work - he wrote:

"You are one of my scarce hopes in today's paradise
of mud throwers . . ."66

Baj's collages are satirical in intent: he is interested in the opposition of colour and texture using contrasts to create grotesque and powerful images (fig. 77). In the revival of interest in Dada shown by a number of Italian artists during the 1950s and '60s, Baj joined with other members of the 'Nuclear painters' group to denounce the concept of art "in order to destroy; the final convention STYLE".⁶⁷ Earlier in the 1950s Baj and the poet Sergio d'Angelo stated their desire to

"demolish all the "ism" of a painting that inevitably
lapses into academism whatever its origin may be".68

The anti-aesthetic stance taken by these Italian artists was a view shared by Mesens, who paid many visits to Italy in the late 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁹

The abstract imagery in some of Mesens' work is reminiscent of the collages of Robert Rauschenberg (Rauschenberg possessed three of Mesens' collages),⁷⁰ who used mixed media in his construction - wood, cork, sacking, string and cement. His work is abstract in character, drawing its impact from strong contrasts between the various materials used. Mesens was interested in the play of textures on a surface - for instance, the collage La pensée libérée 1960 (fig. 49) combines a "rayogramme ground with a delicate tissue onto which is superimposed a tiny illustration of a daisy; Paysage II 1958 (fig. 78) combines burnt newspaper and flattened milk bottle tops, Thème de ballet 1960 (fig. 71) used knitting needles and corrugated card.

Although one can trace the influence of other artists in the plastic composition of Mesens' collages, the most potent aspects of his work derive from his unswerving allegiance to Surrealist principles, as revealed in the poetic imagery of Max Ernst or René Magritte and in the playful wit of Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. Besides, if an artist wishes to reveal, by association, latent possibilities in external reality as Mesens so wished, he is forced to use his own resources. Jean Schuster expressed this thus:

"The common link in all Surrealist creations lies in the method that consists in granting mental representation free play by releasing it as broadly as possible from physical perception. The inner model then cannot but take on the appearance of the unique, move about it a unique light and set up with the spectator (or reader) a unique communication".⁷¹

In Mesens' plastic work the materials are deliberately selected for qualities which are not necessarily apparent when the materials are seen in their normal context, and these "submerged" qualities may only become apparent when the elements are combined with other items in a new context defined by the title of the work.

The strange and amusing juxtapositions which Mesens achieved can be related to his work as editor of the magazine Variétés in 1928 and 1929, in which capacity he was responsible for the layout of the magazine and for selecting the illustrations. In general he arranged photographs around a theme: for instance in June 1928⁷² he chose works by contemporary artists to illustrate the theme "Bathing shows" and took for his example Baigneuses by Raoul Dufy, La baigneuse by Frits van den Berghe, Marine, a collage by Max Ernst, and L'aigle de la mer by Gustave de Smet. Sometimes the illustrations were chosen in unusual combinations, thus in November 1928⁷³ a series of articles was published devoted to wild life in Africa and Mesens used as illustrations for these a photograph of a troupe of giraffes above a photo of Max Ernst's La forêt (fig. 79b) whilst on the page facing, a photograph of a hyena in a forest is set next to a reproduction of Magritte's Les chasseurs (fig. 79a). Just as Mesens was to delight in his choice of illustrations for Variétés and later for the London Bulletin,⁷⁴ so was he to delight in the selection of materials for his collages and also in his choice of colour to serve his underlying purpose. For instance in Marine, 1961 (fig. 80) long bright green strips of shiny wrapping ribbon are glued on, evoking the sea, with little comb-like shapes made out of silver paper hovering on the surface like luminous sea creatures.

Mesens always used small, light elements in his work, and employed a variety of materials which he had begun to collect in the late 1940s - for instance his collage Main nue 1961 (fig. 81) is formed out of a post-war ration book. The materials he used included stamp books, bus, train and plane tickets, theatre tickets, newspaper, card, dried leaves, cigar rings, bottle caps and labels, patterned, coloured or plain paper, wallpaper, cigarette packets and cards, corrugated card, illustrations cut out of magazines, and single letters or words cut out of journals, magazines or newspapers. Some examples of the wide range of materials used are in the collages L'oeil les deux 1957 (fig. 82), L'état major 1962 (fig. 83), Salut aux alpinistes 1965 (fig. 84), Thème de ballet 1960 (fig. 71) and Parmi les palais les statues 1960 (fig. 85). The use of many kinds of materials tends to be found in Mesens' earlier works up to 1963, while the later collages become more simple and are reduced to the use of two or three elements such as Salut aux alpinistes 1965 (fig. 84) or Souvenir de la Laguna 1968 (fig. 86). Mesens tended to use stamps, tickets and rectangles of coloured papers on a horizontal/vertical background between 1954 and 1960, probably because this kind of collage is easier to assemble. As his confidence grew he abandoned this format for more adventurous designs.

Au bord des mots 1956 (fig. 87) is a typical early collage, consisting of a rectangular design, divided up by thick lines of blue and pink, onto which are pasted isolated words and motifs. A l'oeil nu 1957 (fig. 88) has a similar rectangular format with cut out words or groups of words pasted on. Words seen in this context lose their original meanings and become little images in their own right. Dada artists such as John Heartfield, Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters⁷⁵ had used words in this way in their collages and photomontages, and these were combined with visual images whether photographic or otherwise to form a synthesis of poetry and painting, a rejection of pure painting as such. Dada artists made collages in the same way as Dada poets made poems - that is, by juxtaposing dissimilar words and images and in this way upsetting logical reality, whether written or plastic. Tristan Tzara wrote how to make a poem in 1917:⁷⁶

**"To make a Dadaist poem
Take a newspaper
Take a pair of scissors
Choose an article as long as you are planning to
make your poem.
Cut out the article.
Then cut out each of the words that make up this
article and put them in a bag.
Shake it gently
Then take out the scraps one after the other in order
in which they are left in the bag
Copy conscientiously
The poem will be like you.**

In a similar vein Mesens gave instructions as to how to make a collage: ⁷⁷

**"Que faut-il pour faire un collage
Deux MAINS comme celle-ci
pleines de printemps**

Quelques paires de ciseaux.

celle-ci est	celle-là
femelle	est mâle
cravalée à la	seche
Lavallière	dure
cependant	et
	aussi
	face à main

La troisième à la dent fine
C'est un poisson carnivore
Les matières des images d'objets et de vraies feuilles
dans faux cadres matières
vraies tissus Imprimés reproduisant
des toiles pour chemisiers
Quelques idées"

It has already been stated that there is a close parallel in the way in which Mesens wrote poetry and the way he made collages, indeed he never thought of himself as a collagist but always as a poet.

"I am not a painter," he said, "I am a poet".⁷⁸

Just as he was to use the letters of the alphabet in his sequence of poems Alphabet sourd aveugle, so also was he to use single letters as a motif in his collages, and although he was to use these motifs throughout his later period of collage making, it was nevertheless mainly a feature of his work in the early 1960s. The use of isolated letters and the spelling out of words in uneven lettering in Mesens' collages is related to Dada poetry and manifestos. The letters in Dada tracts and magazines were frequently printed with a new typography, which according to Richter,⁷⁹

"...gave to the individual letter, word or sentence a freedom it had never possessed an inspired dip into the compositor's type case, and school orthography was replaced by heterography. Large and small letters joined in new combinations and danced up and down; vertical and horizontal words gave new life to the printed page, so that it not only described the new freedom to the reader, but allowed him to feel it for himself".

Mesens' collage The World of Plenty 1963 (fig. 54) uses single letters in abundance - the author has covered the work with 'T's either cut out of coloured paper or from capital letters taken from magazines, and superimposed them onto illustrations taken from contemporary fashion magazines. In Mouvement Immobile 1960 (fig. 89) letters are glued asymmetrically onto a background made up of the backs of British stamp booklets arranged symmetrically, while in a second version of Mouvement Immobile 1960, the collaged background is abandoned in favour of a wash and the lettering is partly collaged and partly painted. Individual letters are used as decorative elements in works such as Grand Mariage des E 1961 (fig. 90) or Anti-symbole 1971 (fig. 91). Inscriptions are also scrawled across such works as Inscription 1961 (fig. 58) or in Les tristes frères dans leur île 1962, (fig. 92) which, like Ernst's work Tableau-poème of 1924,⁸⁰ is less a collage than a poem in paint. In a letter to Madame F.C. Legrand,⁸¹ Mesens wrote:

"En vérité, tous mes collages sont des tableaux poèmes, et il en est qui sont composés presque exclusivement de texte ou de lettres".

In the early 1960s Mesens became more adventurous with his materials - in Verdures dorées 1960 (fig. 93) he uses tin foil and tissue paper, in Télégramme à Mimi 1961 (fig. 94) wallpaper is used as a background. He also constantly reused motifs in his work, such as a disc: this image appears in L'attente 1961 (fig. 95) or Le Baiser 1961 (fig. 96): generally it appears as an abstract shape such as in Composition 1967, (fig. 97), where it is used in conjunction with other shapes but contrasting with them. However, it is also transformed into a sun or moon in the Paysage series (figs. 101, 78) or into a face, Lesbienne pour porc de mer 1970 (fig. 98) or into planets, Pour l'amour du ciel 1960 (fig. 99). In the Paysage series or in Claire de lune sur marine agitée par les mauvaises

nouvelles 1962 (fig. 100), discs recalling planets hover over horizons formed out of newspaper, and in Paysage I 1958 (fig. 101) and Ciel et terre 1959 (fig. 102) "brûlage" is used to transform the newspaper or paper into a more dynamic element. Mesens frequently used newspaper in his work, as being a totally ordinary material: it denies the concept of "art" and oil painting, while it is capable of transformation in a variety of different ways, becoming in Mesens' collages a pear (fig. 105), part of a landscape (fig. 103) the surface of a hand (fig. 104). One of Mesens' earliest friends in the Dada movement, Tzara, wrote:

"A shape cut out of newspaper and incorporated into a drawing or painting is a veritable embodiment of that which is universally understandable, a piece of everyday reality which enters into a relationship with every other reality that the spirit has created".⁸²

The idea of the metamorphosis of materials was a concept crucial to Surrealist art, and particularly in collage, for by using this medium new and unprecedented associations were revealed. Mesens, for instance, transforms knitting needles and corrugated card into a music score, Thème de ballet 1960 (fig. 71), a feather into hair, La noctambule 1959 (fig. 106), an exhibition catalogue into a hand Tension modérée 1961 (fig. 107). Several earlier Surrealist artists had metamorphosed everyday things in collage: for instance, Miró's Danseuse Espagnole 1928⁸³ consists of the image of a dancer composed of pieces of sandpaper, a metal set square, nails and twine; in Dali's work, the irrational juxtaposing of subject matter and the changing of one reality into another are fundamental - Dali wrote:

"By the double image is meant such a representation of an object that is also without the slightest physical or anatomical change, the representation of an entirely different object, the second representation being equally devoid of any deformity or abnormality betraying arrangement".⁸⁴

In Surrealist collage, new images were created by combining ready made elements or by choosing a single ready made thing - what Eluard called "physical objectifications of poetry".⁸⁵ Max Ernst used various kinds of "chance" techniques to create irrational images such as "frottages"⁸⁶ or "grattages".⁸⁷ He called his frottage system:

"The optical provocateur or a vision of half sleep transforming the mere grain of wood into . . . human heads, animals, a battle that ended with a kiss (the bride of the wind), rocks, the sea and the rain, earthquakes, the sphinx in her stable, the little tables around the earth, the palette of Caesar, false proportions, a shawl of frost flowers, the pampas".⁸⁸

Surrealist artists attempt to express the irrational elements of the human psyche. To do this they exploit chance or automatism to free the creative impulse and to give expression to visions provoked by dreams - creating strange, new, unwanted images by exploiting the notions of metamorphosis and magic. Mesens did not use automatism or chance as his route to the Surreal, nor did he draw upon dream imagery, visions or magic. He took the "objective" route by using reality itself and transposing this into a new reality by alteration or juxtaposition, so that one image or material becomes metamorphosed into another.

He used a great variety of materials in his work to illustrate or evoke specific themes. The composition of the collages was dictated by the materials or images used and these transformations were dictated by the titles of the work. The themes of the collages reveal a taste for diversity, a refusal to be tied to any particular style. Some elements retain their original identity - for instance, tickets in Allées et venues 1960 (fig.108) - while other elements gain a new identity - a newspaper becomes a pear or a landscape, or is painted on to become the sea. Lifted from their normal context, materials are given new meanings. Eluard explained this in his text 'Food for Vision':⁸⁹

"It is not far - as the crow flies - from cloud to man; it is not far - by images - from man to what he sees, from the nature of real things to the nature of imagined things. They are of equal value. Matter, movement, need, desire are inseparable. The honour of living is well worth some exertion to give life. Think of yourself as flower, fruit and heart of a tree, since they wear your colours, since they are one of the necessary signs of your presence. Only when you have ceased to ascribe desires to it, will you be granted the belief that everything is transmutable into everything".

Throughout his later career as a collagist certain favourite themes and images are reused a number of times. A study of these reveals how the composition of the works changed during the period between 1954 and 1971, and illustrates the artist's continuing preoccupation with Surrealist ideas.

Differences in the treatment of images in Mesens' work can be illustrated by his use of leaves as motifs. In an early example, La prison agréable, 1958 (fig. 109), leaves, scraps of paper and little discs cover the surface. Dried leaves of various sizes are used and these are balanced and counterpoised by the straight lines of the remaining collaged and painted elements. In a later work The Square, 1961 (fig. 110) the leaves used are no longer real but made of card and are isolated images on a diagonally lined ground, while in Le forestier 1963 (fig. 111) images of leaves cut out of labels form the profile of the "forester". By 1965 when Mesens was using ready made items less and less, the leaf shape in Feuille fortement stimulée 1965, (Galleria Cavallino, Venice) has become a central image made out of newspaper coloured and veined in shades of green, and in Le goût des altitudes 1968 (fig. 112) the collage element is reduced to one motif, a leaf made out of a bottle label on a background of painted squares. These "leaf" collages illustrate several compositional features of Mesens' work: first, they demonstrate the change from the use of a multiplicity of collage elements to a later sparing use, together with the intervention of drawing or painting as an important design element: second, Mesens constantly uses contrasts of shape, colour and texture: and finally, two main compositional formats are found, either a pattern spread over the whole work or a centrally concentrated image or pair of images.

Whilst the use of the leaf motif is confined to Mesens' work after 1954, faces and masks had appeared several times in Mesens' earliest collages of the 1920s and were to multiply in his later work. For Mesens, the human face was never depicted in a realistic way, but always reduced to the image of a mask or doll. Representational art was inimical to Dada

and Surrealist artists.

"We say that the art of imitation (of places, scenes, exterior objects) has had its day and that the artistic problem consists today in bringing a more and more objective precision to bear upon mental representation by means of the voluntary exercise of the imagination and memory".⁹⁰

Representation in art was thus replaced by imagination and fantasy, and the human being becomes an apparition, a figment of the artist's imagination; and as beauty as an aesthetic concern is banished, so is the beauty of the human being replaced by strange chimeras. Mesens gave vent to this idea in L'Alternative 1963 (fig. 113) in which a face bearing a resemblance to an African mask is attached to the image of an upside-down top hat. Here is the alternative to the illusionistic representation of a face. The image is reduced further in a collage entitled Foundation 1962 (fig. 114) where all we can see are a pair of cut out eyes and a cut out lipsticked mouth.

In an assemblage - La noctambule 1959 (fig. 106) Mesens made a face outlined by a metal ring with the features composed of newspaper and coloured tissue, and eyes, nose and mouth collaged on: the hair is formed from a decorative feather which curls round over the forehead. The whole is reminiscent of Mesens' earlier assemblage 'Masque' of 1927, in which he also used feathers, though then to represent the neck. The image in the 1959 work is like a doll or dummy, recalling the work of De Chirico or Magritte. The representation of the face in this way begs the question which the Belgian Surrealist group were so interested in, that is - the relationship of an image to that which it represents. The image of a dog, it could be argued, is not a dog but simply an image, and Magritte makes this clear in his painting of a pipe - L'usage des paroles 1928-9 (fig. 115) in which "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" is written below the image. Similarly, in another version of L'usage des paroles 1927 (fig. 16) blank shapes have words written in them - "horizon", or "cheval" for example. If an image, like a word, is obviously not the thing it represents, why, ask the Surrealists, should the image take on a life-like appearance? An image is the creation of the artist's mind and can be conjured up at will in the artist's imagination. Hence, Mesens' work in which the human face

becomes a variety of things and is made out of a variety of things.

In the late 1960s the human face in Mesens' work becomes a flat spectral image reduced to its barest features. In these, collage elements are barely used and most of the work is drawn or painted. For instance, in Lady Kite of Regent's Park 1965 (fig. 116) the eyes are made out of paper clips while the rest of the work is outlined in pastels. In two other works, Bell flower pour bal malin 1967 (fig. 117) and Wig wag wog wig wa 1968 (fig. 118) in which faces are outlined, there are no collage elements at all.

In Mesens' images of faces or heads, the eyes predominate: for instance in Enfant, il jouait de la flute 1968 (fig. 119), while in other works Mesens simply used eyes as motifs on their own. The eye was an image assuming strong significance for Surrealists, for the artist and poet can enrich his experience by recognizing and learning to control the freedom of the eye. Paul Nougé wrote:

"The eye that sees what no longer is, the star: on the screen the vanished image; which does not see what passes too rapidly, the bullet, the smile, which does not see what is too slow, the grass that grows old age; who recognizes a woman and another one, a cat and its shoe, his love and it is emptiness - the freedom of the eye should have warned us long ago".⁹¹

In Mesens' collage Les oeils 1956 (Collection Norine van Hecke, Brussels), a pair of eyes are transfixed, in Homage to William Blake 1965 (fig. 103) the eye becomes a central image in the sun hovering above a landscape, while in the spectral image in Le samedi soir dans les parcs 1961 (fig. 120) the eyes are made out of the letter 'O'.

The eye was a motif which had appeared in both Mesens' collages and poetry, as did references to hands:

"Dans ma main il y a tes yeux
Je te teurai

Pas assez

Ah! Dans ma main
Il y a MA main".⁹²

"Voulez-vous un trésor caché
Voici cinq doigts
Voici une main
Voici cinq doigts et cinq chemins
Et voici cinq trésors cachés.

Voulez-vous cinq trésors perdus
Voici six doigts
Voici cinq mains
Et cent chevelures dénouées".⁹³

Mesens used hands as motifs throughout both his early and later periods of collage making - the first instance being in Frontispice pour alphabet sourd aveugle 1928 (fig. 38) - as Breton said:

"If one were to displace a hand by severing it from an arm, that hand becomes more wonderful as a hand".⁹⁴

Mesens was extremely careful in looking after his hands, always having a professional manicure. He collected "objets d'art" which featured replicas of hands, in particular a collection of vases which had moulded or carved hands superimposed on them, and had a favourite walking stick made with a hand holding a ball as the handle; he also possessed a bottle opener made in the shape of a hand clasping a ball. The image of the hand which frequently appears in his collages is generally an outline of his own, either singly, or both left and right hands. Hugo van de Perre, a close friend, considers that Mesens used this image because it was an easy one to make and Mesens made no pretence at being an artist (indeed, he was proud that he could not draw).⁹⁵ It was obviously easy for the artist to draw an outline round his hand, just as in his first collages of the 1950s Mesens found it relatively straightforward to make geometrical constructions out of rectangular elements.

When a hand, or pair of hands, is included in a collage, it is generally the main subject of that work, and is always outlined in the same position with the fingers slightly outstretched. The themes of these collages derive from the treatment which the image of the hand has undergone; in La main heureuse 1960 (fig. 104) the hand is covered with flattened bottle tops and is made out of a gallery catalogue, while in Main fortement stimulée flottant entre ciel et terre 1964 (fig. 121) the image is made out of paper inked in with a scrawling pattern of green and pink and is set on a black cloud floating above a landscape made of "papiers brûlés". In general when Mesens uses the image of a hand in his work he retains the outline but alters the normal configuration by paint, collage or ink. In Sablier à deux faces 1960 (fig. 122) two opposing hands

have little skeletal figures painted on them - thus the two hands become an hourglass with the appropriate message spelled out in paint.

In these collages hands are the main subject, whereas in Les mains, les pieds, la cravatte mentale et l'oeil 1970 (fig. 123) the motif appears in conjunction with other Surrealist imagery and becomes a means of exploring, together with the eyes, the world of the imagination. To the left of the collage is a series of manual instructions from a cardboard milk carton showing how to open it - the dexterity of the artist's hands and his mental effort are the key to the world of the imagination. In one of Mesens' early collages La partition complète complétée for Marcel Duchamp's band 1945 (fig. 68) a sentence is written across the base:

"The author's hand can be seen right the way
across the score",

and to give emphasis to this Mesens had outlined his hand on the right of the picture with wind instrument keys as fingernails. The collage is a music sheet covered with instructions derived from a music score but altered by Mesens to reduce the whole thing to a farce. "Baisers de clarinettistes" are illustrated by lips, the harp becomes Hans Arp, and where the trombones divide into four parts, Mesens has inserted quarters of a trombone.

Although as a young man Mesens had abandoned his musical career, musical references are to be found in his poetry⁹⁶ and collages, while his last published poem was dedicated to Erik Satie. The irony and wit of Satie's music were aspects which find references in Mesens' work. Satie's compositions were characterized by their harmonic brevity, rhythmic interest, playful variations, while the composer frequently moulded his music to a descriptive text: Heures séculaires et instantanées, 1914, for instance, were accompanied by fantastic Surrealist prose. Mesens' own music was stylistically similar to that of Satie⁹⁶ preferring to set words to music, such as Philip Soupault's poem Garage 1921 (fig. 2). Satie's highly individual approach to musical form was reinforced by his playful attitude:

"Before writing a work I go round it several times
accompanied by myself",

he said.⁹⁷ He had a fondness for writing pieces in groups of three, each piece presenting a different facet of the same idea; thus in 1903 when criticized by Debussy for not observing a strict enough form in his music,

he turned up with the sardonic title "Trois morceaux en forme de poire", followed by a more formless composition than ever which had nothing to do with pears or the number three. The irony and harmonic playfulness of Satie's music, Mesens considered, could never be imitated, and this is one of the reasons why Mesens felt that he should never become a composer:⁹⁸ Mesens' own compositions were in the same vein as Satie's music and the former felt that as Satie was unique, he should not attempt to develop this style. Nevertheless, the "esprit" of Satie pervades Mesens' poetry and collages in its playfulness and irony and in the numerous variations on simple motifs.

While several of the titles of Mesens' collages have musical themes, the motif of the violin was to appear in his work after 1960 (figs. 124, 125.) This image had been used by Picasso, Braque and Gris,⁹⁹ and in the period after 1912 Picasso had collaged fragments of paper into his work - in particular Violin of 1913 in which the motif is made almost entirely of pasted papers.¹⁰⁰ In Au repos des cubistes 1963 (fig. 126) Mesens has taken the Cubist theme, turned the image of the violin sideways and made it out of brown corrugated paper and knitting needles. Madame F.C. Legrand discusses¹⁰¹ Mesens' attitude to Cubism as revealed in his collage Violin étoilé donnant naissance à un enfant pointilliste 1963 (fig. 127): Legrand considers that Mesens distrusted art historians and was particularly suspicious of the tendency to place artists and art movements in developmental order - thus Monet, followed by Seurat, Cézanne, Picasso and Braque. Having an "anarchic" and "anti-conformist" temperament, Mesens has turned the accepted succession of art movements back to front in this collage and shows Cubism represented by the violin giving birth to Pointillism represented by the little manikin covered with dots.

Direct and indirect references to the work of other artists and art movements are to be found in several of Mesens' collages. Deuxieme hommage à Francis Picabia 1970 (fig. 128) recalls Mesens' friend by inscribing his initials in discs, like eyes, at the top of the work, and in Hommage à Apollinaire 1962 (fig. 129) the poet's initials appear in conjunction with a leaf and an abstract motif. Apollinaire had considered that reality was not dependent on the physical world but on the mind's

creativity, and Mesens refers to the poet's idealistic philosophy by merging an image of a leaf with the letter 'A' so that the leaf is transformed and becomes an abstract configuration.

Indirectly, Mesens referred to Magritte's work in a collage Le Voyeur 1971¹⁰² in which Mesens surrounds the cut out picture of a tastefully decorated interior with a pasted on cut out illustration of a picture frame. Within the illustration of the room, a sofa also has a little cut out picture frame encircling it. This work refers to a series of paintings executed by Magritte La condition humaine¹⁰³ depicting a landscape painting resting on an easel, but that landscape is also the view seen through a window behind the painting. These works of Magritte demonstrate the disjunction between an object and its representation, a theme which is central to the work of Nougé, Mesens and Magritte. This is apparent in Mesens' collage Manhattan 1960 (fig. 130) where tickets become alternately blocks of flats in conjunction with little houses, or men - as they "wear" bowler hats; the title 'Manhattan' means that both these interpretations are valid. Max Ernst's collage C'est le chapeau qui fait l'homme 1920 (fig. 11)¹⁰⁴ shows a series of hats making up little mechanistic figures of people, and makes play with the title. Mesens' collage recalls Ernst's theme while at the same time questioning the identity of his materials with "double-entendre".

Totally abstract images are also to be found in Mesens' collages and these are always accompanied by enigmatic titles - for instance Enigme II 1961 (fig. 131). Works of this kind mainly feature in the early 1960s and in these collages Mesens has taken pleasure in creating strange shapes or in colour contrasts. In Apparition 1961 (fig. 65) an abstract amorphous shape hovers above a block landscape, while in Figures équivoques vivant dans leur entourage 1962 (fig. 132) three large masses emerge from a dark ground. Although Mesens did not have any sympathy for geometrical abstraction in art -

"L'abstraction froide est matérialiste jusqu'à l'absurde. Elle aurait pu servir un communisme purement théorique"¹⁰⁵ -

he enjoyed making works in which mysterious titles accompany soft, abstract, ghost-like forms such as Ophélie 1959 (fig. 133).

In 1945 Mesens organised an exhibition called Surrealist Diversity at the Arcade Gallery, London, and his own work as a collagist reflects that diversity in composition, materials and themes. While Dada had been an essentially nihilistic manifestation and Mesens' collages of the 1920s have anarchic undertones, with the advent of Surrealism a search was instigated for a new reality combining the real and imaginary. Surrealist artists wanted to revitalize matter, to enrich the objects of their perception and to reveal the infinite possibilities within the scope of the concrete world. Paul Eluard's definition of poetic activity had consisted in inventing objects by alienating them from their admitted physical properties and accepted roles, thereby changing the world. In this deviation from the natural object the Surrealists avoided the imitation of nature and sought latent significances. Often the most simple items were for the Surrealists the most significant, so Ernst made his frottages out of rubbings of leaves and wood,¹⁰⁶ Masson used sand,¹⁰⁷ Miró used painted wood, a feather and metal.¹⁰⁸ Magritte's strange conjunction of images in Valeurs personnelles 1952¹⁰⁹ shows the interior of a bedroom in which a huge comb rests on a normal size bed, a vast bar of soap lies on the floor in front of a normal size wardrobe. Magritte has not altered the images at all in this picture, but simply combined images of different relative size within one space.

Mesens used everyday things in his collages, but in such a way that their normal identity is lost. The most important thing for Surrealist artists was not so much the choice of objects as the circumstances in which they were seen, and their position in relation to other things or beings. Thus the association between objects becomes an artistic metaphor. Certain motifs such as the hand or violin were to appear a number of times in Mesens' work, but in each individual collage the item receives a new significance and never do the images take on the properties they have in the external world: the violin never makes music, the hand is never

attached to an arm, leaves do not hang from plants or trees, the face is never realistic. The materials which Mesens used in his work have always broken with their normal usage and their status is changed. Cigarette butts would not have been considered as suitable materials for artists to use until the advent of Dada and Surrealist collage.

It has been shown that there are several basic features of Mesens' plastic work. First - his love of contrast, whether of form, texture or colour: second, his work demonstrates a likeness to musical form inasmuch as he takes motifs and varies these, repeats them and plays variations on them, and he structures his work on either a multiplicity of images or on a simple concentrated motif. Finally, his *métier* as a poet rather than a painter gives rise to the whole "esprit" of his work. Without the titles the collages are meaningless, words and ideas dominate these pieces. Mesens' collages are essentially transpositions of literary concepts into a plastic medium.

His work was typified by a concern for detail and minutiae. He had a gift for both harmony and diversity in composition, and he created an intimate relationship between title and subject matter. Painstakingly slow in constructing his work, his wit and humour nevertheless pervade the collages, and although he denied that aesthetic considerations played any part, it is quite evident that he displayed a concern for the overall design and colour scheme. The 'subversive' nature of Mesens' later collages was considerably less than in those of the 1920s; the reason for this may well be that he was in his fifties when he recommenced this work, but also by the late 1950s and 1960s collage had become a widely accepted art form. Kitaj, Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton had extended the use of collage and photomontage and had placed the art form in terms of the pressures and tensions of the second half of the twentieth century. And so an art form which had violently contradicted accepted modes of thought and expression had been taken up by other younger artists and expanded to employ new techniques and new ideas.

Mesens was to develop his own expertise in making collages which were at once delicate and thought provoking. His object in making these constructions was not as an artistic activity in itself, but as a means

of expression extending on and developing from his activity as a poet. Thus, any discussion of his collages must be seen in the context of his poetical activity which embraced his whole outlook on the world. That this outlook was softened and tempered by time was inevitable, but not to the extent that Mesens ever for one moment abandoned his adherence to Surrealism.

FOOTNOTES

1. Le signal d'alarme, collage, 1940
Pièces détachées, collage and pencil, 1943
La partition complète complétée, collage, 1945
2. See above, Chapter 6. In the journal Arts, no. 10-11, Paris, 1965, Breton catalogued the following artists as being Surrealist: Alechinsky, Baj, Benoit, Camache, Degottex, Gironella, Klaphek, Rauschenberg, Svanberg, Telemaque.
3. For instance, Exposition Picabia, Galerie Drouin, Paris, 1949, Ernst, 1950, Exposition Surréaliste, 1964, Galerie Charpentier, Paris.
4. 1952 Eluard, Mabille
1953 Picabia
1955 Tanguy
1957 Dominguez
1962 Seligman
1963 Tzara
1966 Breton, Arp, Brauner.
5. Cited by Sarane Alexandrian, Surrealist Art, London, 1970, p.215.
6. Giselle Ollinger-Zinque, Introduction to the exhibition Tendances Surréalistes en Belgique, Musée d'art moderne, Brussels, September 1970, no pagination.
7. Interview Conroy Maddox.
8. José Vovelle, Le Surréalisme en Belgique, Brussels, 1972, p.55.
9. It is generally agreed that Pop Art began in England as a result of a series of discussions held at the I.C.A. by a group of artists calling themselves the Independent Group. See Frank Whitford catalogue Edouardo Paolozzi, Tate Gallery, London, 1971, pp. 44 - 48.
10. Cited by Mario Amaya Pop as Art, London, 1965, p.33.
11. Discussed in Chapter 13.
12. Vive M. Schneede, Eduardo Paolozzi, London, 1971, p.54.
13. Concerning American Neo-Dada, Richard Huelsenbeck wrote:
"Neo-Dada has turned the weapons used by Dada and later Surrealism into popular ploughshares with which to till the fertile soil of sensation-hungry

galleries eager for business. An old pair of shoes is an old pair of shoes. But if you hang an old pair of shoes on the wall, they are no longer "the old shoes" but THE shoes which are old, and they arouse in us certain thoughts and certain associations. Pop artists and the new Realists are people who hang old shoes on the wall, and seek thereby to arouse emotions in us".

Cited by Hans Richter, Dada, London 1971, p.211 (no date for Huelsenbeck's comments given.)

14. Interview, George Melly, 24.2.77.
15. Sidney Janis and Harriet Blesch, Collage, p.151.
16. Personal interview with George Melly, 12.4.73.
17. Letter from Mesens to Penrose dated July 27th, 1960, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
18. "A Delightful Exhibition: The Wit of Mr. E.L.T. Mesens", The Times, February 16th, 1961, p.16.
19. E.L.T. Mesens' introduction to exhibition catalogue Max Ernst, Knokke-le-Zoute, July - August 1953, p.8.
20. Op. cit. note 19, p.11.
21. See Appendix D.
22. Paul Nougé Histoire de ne pas rire, p.37, cited by Matthews, The Imagery of Surrealism, Syracuse, 1977, p.91.
23. 'The W.C. Fields of Surrealism', Sunday Times Colour Supplement, August 15, 1971, p.26.
24. Elizabeth Cowling in a lecture given at Burlington House, February 16th, 1978.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Apart from the Complete Score for Marcel Duchamp's Band, made in 1945 (fig. 67).
28. La lumière déconcertante, 1926 (fig. 36)
L'instruction obligatoire I, 1927 (fig. 43)
29. Cited by Jacques Brunius in his introduction to an exhibition, E.L.T. Mesens' collages, Knokke-le-Zoute, July-August 1963, no pagination.

30. Members of the group included Lyall Watson, Peter Stroud, Kathleen Guthrie, Ray Durrant, Halina Nalecz, Clifford Holden, Don Tibbenham, Joan Knoblock, Violet Fuller, Johan Williams, Frances N. Souza, Maurice Jadot, Denis Bowen, Frank Fidler, Robin Davies, Cecil Stephenson, John Ratcliff, Noel Pope, Mary Brooks, Nina Hosali.
31. Interview 8.3.75.
32. Paris, 1928.
33. See Appendix D, page 302.
34. Interview between George Melly and E.L.T. Mesens, B.B.C. Radio 3, London, February 20th, 1970. Mesens maliciously considered that Breton was motivated by jealousy, when querying him about his collages.
35. André Breton, interviewed by Professor S.A. Rhodes for Sewanee Review, Vol. XLI no. 3, July - September 1933, under the title 'Candles for Isis'. Partly reprinted in translation by Franklin Rosemont, André Breton, What is Surrealism?, London, 1978, p.88.
36. André Breton, The exquisite corpse, its exaltation, 1948; reprinted in translation by Simon Watson-Taylor in Surrealism and Painting, London, 1972, p.288.
37. Marcel Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, translated from the French by Ron Padgett, London, 1971, p.66.
38. Fig. 2.14, catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, p.47.
39. Conroy Maddox, introduction to catalogue E.L.T. Mesens, Collages 1957 - 1971, Acoris Gallery, London, January - March 1974. No pagination.
40. Cited in catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. p.176.
41. Cited catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. p.178.
42. Andre Breton 'Limits not frontiers of Surrealism' originally appeared in the Nouvelle Revue Française (February 1937); reprinted in translation by David Gascoyne in Franklin Rosemont André Breton, What is Surrealism, op. cit. p.154.
43. J.H. Matthews The Imagery of Surrealism, op. cit. pp. 83-84.
44. E.L.T. Mesens 'Homage to Kurt Schwitters', Art News and Review, Vol. X, no. 19, October 11th, 1958, p.5.

45. Op. cit. p.6.
46. Ibid. In April - May 1950 Mesens organised an exhibition at the London Gallery, 'An Homage to Kurt Schwitters', bringing together some thirty-three exhibits and some documentation on the artist. E.L.T. Mesens Activities of the London Gallery Ltd., 1936-1950, folded double sheet.
47. See illustrations fig. 15 onwards, Werner Schmalenbach, Kurt Schwitters, Hanover, 1967.
48. Picasso: Still Life with a Calling Card, pasted papers and crayon, 1919. Braque: Clarinet, pasted papers, newsprint, charcoal, chalk and oil on canvas, 1913. Illustrations Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, op. cit. p.19.
49. Viz. Lesbienne pour porc de mer, 1970 (fig. 97) painted in sky blue and magenta, or Arbre Glabre, 1965 (fig. 57) painted in shades of green.
50. Introduction to catalogue, Kurt Schwitters, Marlborough Fine Arts, London, March - April 1963, p.7.
51. Figs. 55 and 91.
52. See Appendix D.
53. Op. cit. notes 7 and 14.
54. Personal communication, George Melly.
55. Jean Scutenaire, interview 27.3.73.
56. Quoted by Christian Geelhaar, Paul Klee and the Bauhaus, Bath, 1973, p.26.
57. André Breton, Surrealism and Painting, op. cit. note 36, p.64.
58. Polyphon Bewegtes, 1930, or Beschwingtes, 1931, figs. 102 and 108, Geelhaar, op. cit. note 56.
59. Geelhaar, op. cit. note 56, p.48.
60. Ibid. fig. no. 17, p.47.
61. Ibid. fig. no. 11, p.39.
62. Cited Geelhaar, p.94. No German titles given.

63. Collection Isy Brachot, Brussels.
64. Geelhaar, pp. 77-9. No German titles given.
65. The two which have been traced are Théâtre ou homme simple, 1957, and Le coq à l'aine, 1958.
66. Introduction to catalogue Enrico Baj, Gallery I, D'Arblay St., London, September 1958.
67. Quoted in catalogue Cinquanti anni a Dada. Dada in Italia, 1916 - 1966, Milan, June - September 1966, p.191.
68. Op. cit. note 67, p.189.
69. Hugo van de Perre and George Melly both recall a great interest in Mesens' work and attitudes taken by a number of Italian artists, notably Baj, Crippa, Poliakoff, Capogrossi, Gentilini, Malliek and Plessi. No evidence of any group activity by these artists and Mesens has yet been traced, and no reply has been received to enquiries.
70. Carte postale en couleurs: le Mont Blanc vu de la ville basse, 1959.
La princesse allemande, 1960.
La balance, 1960.
71. Cited by J.H. Matthews The Imagery of Surrealism, op. cit. note 43, p.54, from Jean Schuster 'A l'ordre de la nuit, au désordre du jour', L'Archibras no. 1, April 1967, p.6.
72. Vol. 1, no. 2, Brussels, June 1928.
73. Vol. 1, no. 7, Brussels, November 1928.
74. Discussed in Chapter 11.
75. For example, Photomontage, 1920, by John Heartfield, fig. 65 Richter op. cit., Head, 1923, by Raoul Hausmann, fig. 69, Rubin op. cit., Das Unbild, 1919, by Kurt Schwitters, fig. 92, Rubin.
76. Cited by Rubin, op. cit., p.73.
77. Cited in exhibition catalogue E.L.T. Mesens: Collages, Galleria de Cavallino, Venice, May - June 1962, no pagination.
78. Cited in Le Soir, Brussels, February 18th, 1961, p.3.
79. Richter, op. cit., p.116.

80. Fig. 130, Rubin op. cit. p.140.
81. Archives Musée d'art moderne, Brussels, dated September 18th, 1962.
82. Tristan Tzara in Cahiers d'Art, Paris, 1931, cited by E. Wolfram Collage, London 1973, p.98.
83. Rubin, op. cit. fig. 139.
84. Salvador Dali in 'Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution' no. 1, Paris 1930, cited by Janis and Blesch in Collage, p.83.
85. Ibid. p.84.
86. Rubbings made with black lead on wood.
87. Made by pressing the canvas onto a textured surface coated with paint, then scraping away parts of the paint with a palette knife.
88. Max Ernst 'Au delà de la peinture' Cahiers d'Art, Vol. XI, Paris, 1936, not paginated. English translation by Dorothea Tanning in Max Ernst, Beyond Painting, New York, 1948, p.14.
89. Paul Eluard 'Food for Vision: Beyond Painting', translated by Lucy M. Lippard from Donner a Voir, Paris, 1939, cited in Surrealists on Art, New Jersey, 1970, pp. 56-57.
90. André Breton, preface to the catalogue of International Surrealist Exhibition, London, 1936.
91. Paul Nougé, 'Les images défendus', 5th edition of Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution, cited by Anna Balakien, Surrealism, The Road to the Absolute, Michigan, 1959, p.178.
92. E.L.T. Mesens 'Chanson nette', Poèmes, op. cit. p.108.
93. E.L.T. Mesens 'A mes amies', Poèmes, op. cit. p.151.
94. Quoted by Dawn Ades, Dada and Surrealism, op. cit. p.20.
95. Personal communication, Hugo van de Perre.
96. Most of his music was published while he was still a student and it would be inevitable that at this stage he could not have gained a mature, individual style.
97. Rollo Myers 'Erik Satie', Transformation, Exeter, 1959, p.7.
98. Mesens/Melly interview, op. cit. February 1970.

99. Picasso, Le Violin, 1913, pasted papers, fig. 18, John Golding Cubism, London, 1959.
Braque, Violon et cruche, 1910, oil, fig. 33, *ibid.*
Gris, Violin and Guitar, 1913, oil, fig. 55A, *ibid.*
100. See Picasso, note 99.
101. F.C. Legrand 'Violin étoilé donnant naissance à un enfant pointilliste', Peinture vivante, sixième année no. 29, Brussels, 1963, p.46.
102. No print available. Exhibited at the Acoris Gallery, London, 1974.
103. Figs. 67-69, Gablik, Magritte, London, 1970.
104. Waldberg, Max Ernst, *op. cit.*, p.149.
105. E.L.T. Mesens, introduction to catalogue Antonio Calderara, Galleria Schwarz, Milan, April 1965, no pagination.
106. For example Elle garde son secret, frottage, 1929, fig. 9.17. catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, *op. cit.*, p.209.
107. For example Deux têtes mortes, 1926-7, fig. 9.47, *op. cit.* note 106, p.216.
108. For example Homme et Femme, 1931, fig. 11.29, *op. cit.* note 106, page 273.
109. Plate XXIX, Rubin, *op. cit.* p.207.

CHAPTER 13

Mesens in London, 1940 - 1950

The outbreak of the Second World War fragmented groups of writers and painters who had worked together during the 1930s, and heralded a period of British art which was diverse and complex. The work of younger painters was in many instances disrupted by War service and Britain's isolation from the Continent between 1940 and 1945 inevitably affected the mood of painting. Mesens was unable to continue his work as an art dealer and was employed by the B.B.C. Belgian service. He kept in touch with the small group of Surrealist painters and poets still in London during the War and the group were not completely inactive, as will be indicated below.

Surrealism continued to influence the style of Nash and Burra during this period, though they had no contact with Mesens' group, while the main area of interest was in the poetic and metaphoric aspect of landscape painting - in particular in the work of Graham Sutherland. The War Artists Scheme gave enlightened patronage to such artists as Nash, Moore and Sutherland and the latter's work had considerable influence on younger artists, notably Keith Vaughan and John Craxton.

The end of the War marked a natural turning point and Alan Bowness has written that:

"The immediate effect was to send cold air into the hot house by showing artists what had been going on in Europe during the enforced isolation of the War. The first shock was the Picasso and Matisse exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum at the very end of 1945".¹

Mesens mounted the "Surrealist Diversity" show at the Arcade Gallery which re-emphasized that the most diverse methods were acceptable, since painting after all was, according to Breton, merely a "lamentable expedient"² in the Surrealist aim to "change life" (Rimbaud) and to "transform the world" (Marx).³ By the late 1940s Francis Bacon was becoming established as a major talent⁴ and his attenuated semi-Surrealist figures demonstrated his obsession with human suffering and isolation; Lucien Freud's work combined Surrealist and fantastic elements in

disconcerting clarity, and Eduardo Paolozzi's collages begun in 1947 were the first manifestations of what was to become Pop Art in the 1950s. Those painters who had briefly experimented with a kind of Romanticism during the War now moved in other directions - for instance, Craxton found new inspiration in Greece; Sutherland went to the South of France, and Bowness writes that:

"Artists tried to slough off the admitted parochialism of British art".⁵

New work by British painters including Sutherland, Burra and Moore was shown after the War at the Lefevre, Redfern, Leicester, Gimpel Fils and Roland Browse and Delbanco galleries, while work by Paolozzi was exhibited at the Major Gallery.⁶ Both Craxton and Freud were shown at Mesens' London Gallery, together with work by major Continental Surrealists. Edward Lucie Smith makes the point that:

"Immediately after the War the great figures of modern art were honoured by a spate of shows, all over the world. In one sense this seemed a reparation for the hostility of the Nazis: in another, it was a way of marking the fact that culture was getting off to a fresh start".⁷

An exhibition of Klee was held at the National Gallery, and Braque and Rouault were shown at the Tate. Peggy Guggenheim's travelling exhibition of American art of the previous twenty years caused a sensation when it was shown in Venice, Florence, Milan, Amsterdam, Brussels and Zurich between 1948 and 1949. The exile of European painters in America during the War, in particular the Surrealists, gave a stimulus to the development of Abstract Expressionism in the U.S.A. which was paralleled by the attraction of European painters to new forms of free self-expression in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While between the Wars and just after, the small and struggling group of avant-garde artists in England had looked almost exclusively to Paris, at the end of the 1940s the situation began to change; America now challenged Europe for primacy.

The Surrealists in London limped on during the War but yet again were plagued by pointless divisions, particularly between Mesens, Brunius and Penrose on the one hand, and a new adherent, Toni del Renzio, who attempted to galvanize activities in the early 1940s. Whilst the arguments which took place seem in retrospect to be petty, and the publications by the group relatively ephemeral, an examination of what happened during the War does reveal the level to which a movement so dynamic in Europe in the inter-War years had sunk.

Toni del Renzio, a poet, had issued a new magazine Arson in March 1942,⁸ and though Mesens did not take part in the venture he approved the concept.⁹ The review was dedicated to Surrealists all over the world and reproduced paintings by a number of English Surrealist artists.¹⁰ A text was reprinted of an interview for the New York magazine View¹¹ given by André Breton in November 1941, reaffirming Surrealist principles: del Renzio felt the need to adopt an unequivocal position towards Surrealism - for instance, no verse was published, the reason being, the editor explained:

"We do not believe there is a single line approaching the nature of poetry being penned in English".¹²

Feeling the need to renew activities, del Renzio had contacted Conroy Maddox, John and Robert Melville in Birmingham, and they collaborated with him on the production of Arson. Later, in March 1942, he wrote to Maddox:

"Mesens and Brunius with whom I have spoken feel that now is the time to take stock of who is with us and who against. Whoever endeavours to compromise us must be considered against."¹³

A questionnaire was prepared by Maddox and del Renzio to form the basis for an open enquiry, "to determine adherence to Surrealism" by investigating attitudes to the use of Surrealist techniques, and suggesting "possible lines for research", including the "reportage of non mental influences upon the flow of subconscious imagery".¹⁴ Del Renzio's suggestions were part of an attempt to give a more rigorous approach to Surrealism. Unfortunately it is not at present known what the response to this enquiry was.¹⁵ Subsequently the International Art Centre in London had asked him to prepare a

Surrealist exhibition in September 1942, and del Renzio proposed to form an organising committee of himself and Robert Melville.¹⁶ He eventually organised the exhibition which was held between November 27th and December 15th, 1942: Roland Penrose lent work by French painters and exhibits were shown by Ithel Colquhoun, del Renzio, Maddox and Melville.¹⁷ In correspondence with Maddox during that year del Renzio reveals a burning desire to revitalize Surrealist painting:¹⁸

"A definitive image must be re-established ... intimately related to moral concepts ... along the lines of Chirico, Ernst, the earlier Dali, Masson, the earlier Tanguy, Magritte, Delvaux. Ideals, as Breton says, need to be re-established on a new base".¹⁹

Unfortunately this did not seem to happen, and there was no renewal of activity.

Del Renzio's activities during 1942 led first of all to a coolness on Mesens' part and eventually to a complete split, with the Surrealist re-forming their ranks behind Mesens. During that year del Renzio had married the artist Ithel Colquhoun, with whom Mesens had had a disagreement in 1940 on account of her interest in the occult and in the Rosicrucian²⁰ movement, and as a result of her influence del Renzio began to move towards a kind of mysticism.²¹ Early in 1943 he was invited by Alex Comfort and John Bayliss to contribute a Surrealist section to an anthology New Road, 1943,²² and wrote a highly provocative and confusing introduction entitled 'The Light that will Cease to Fail'.²³ Having outlined the techniques of Surrealism and chastizing Aragon in couched terms for his homosexuality, which is not in accord with monogamous Surrealist principles, and for his patriotic wartime poetry, del Renzio launched a veiled attack on Mesens:

"It is perhaps this same incompatibility (as Aragon's) that has removed from our midst in this country those wretched creatures who were mistakenly allowed within groups, and who in the fashionable years were loudest in their profession of a bastard creed that they were pleased to call Surrealism".²⁴

The literary review Horizon published a scathing reply from Brunius, Mesens and Penrose calling del Renzio:

A spam brained intellectual (who) institutes himself the Bar num of Surrealism ... 'The discoveries of Surrealism', he writes, 'made at the risk of our lives'.

We wonder how and when and where this gentleman has risked his life in bothering to compile his small anthology. This is not the first time that a buffoon has smuggled himself into the Surrealist waggon. It is not very important".²⁵

Del Renzio was furious with this letter, as correspondence with Maddox reveals, and found it impossible to come to terms with Mesens, Brunius and Penrose.²⁶ He published a reply in the December issue of Horizon in which he chastizes this pair - Mesens and Penrose - with the

"...moribund versification of that renegade Eluard with whom as long ago as 1939 Breton and the Surrealists found it impossible to continue any dealings",

and for daring to assume an "ex cathedra infallibility" when,

"for more than three years they have skulked in silence sitting as a deadweight upon a movement that is alive and demands a voice".²⁷

Mesens and Penrose had translated Eluard's verse 'Poesie et Verité' which had been published in Paris in 1942, and subsequently published the English translation in 1944.²⁸

While del Renzio's accusations of inactivity in the Surrealist field on the part of Mesens were quite true, his own attempts to galvanize Surrealist activity fell on bare ground. It must be said in Mesens' defence that both he and Brunius were fully occupied in their work for the B.B.C., though they defended the translation of Eluard's poetry in Idolatry and Confusion published in March, 1944,²⁹ and attacked del Renzio, whom they stated was:

"...attempting to make up to André Breton having vaguely learned that he is in disagreement with Eluard. We should be curious to know", they said, "in which poem of 'Poésie et Verité' Connelly was³⁰ able to discover the slightest trace of patriotism".

(Paul Eluard had joined the Communist party in 1939. He and Aragon, who had earlier been expelled from the Surrealist ranks for his Communist beliefs, were leading exponents of a new wave of poetry in France demonstrating resistance to the Nazi occupation. They were criticized by the Surrealists for compromising the Surrealist attitude of total defiance of

all who shackled the freedom of the individual, whether Communist or Fascist.)³¹ Having challenged readers to find any patriotic element in Eluard's verse, Mesens and Brunius go on to point out that even though Aragon "ceased to be a Surrealist and repudiated his Surrealist manner of thinking in 1931" and "Aragon -Stalinist started to write vulgar doggerel", one should not forget that he was one of the "most brilliant minds of the post-War period".

Throughout this dispute Mesens adopted a somewhat paradoxical attitude. It is quite evident that he objected to del Renzio's attempts at re-orientating Surrealist activity when he was clearly unable or unwilling to do this himself. Presumably del Renzio's activities irritated him as his own efforts in this field had been a major cause of the break up of the group in 1940. Also, Mesens' pro-Eluard stance was in opposition to that adopted by the small group in Paris left behind after Breton's departure in 1940, who were sharp in their attacks on "the Reverend Paul Eluard".³² However, Mesens and Brunius defend Eluard from a poetic point of view rather than an ideological one, and as a close friend and admirer of Eluard, Mesens would be bound to defend him as far as he could. Del Renzio had constantly adopted a purist line on Surrealism with the exception of a somewhat mystical approach revealed in his pamphlet Incendiary Innocence³³ which he published in April 1944. He constantly affirmed his adherence to Breton and yet Breton himself considered del Renzio as responsible for having split the London group. Mesens remained the head of the "official" London group even though this was barely in existence during the War years.³⁴ Mesens' main strength had been in his work as a dealer and as in wartime he could not continue this, he began to consider other ways in which he could contribute to the movement. There is no doubt that he found working with English painters and poets difficult. George Melly has commented:³⁵

"His relations have always been stormy with the British artists and intellectuals who were attracted to Surrealism in the middle thirties. For their part they failed to recognise the element of caricature in E.L.T.'s business man's persona, which they found vulgar and commercial, while he recognised almost instantly that their gentlemanly charm masked a willingness to

compromise not for money, as he was forced to do, but for the approval of the Establishment. That an element of persecution complex has occasionally driven Mesens towards fantasy is very possible".

Mesens wrote to Herbert Read in July 1943 a long letter in which he summed up his feelings at this point, and his desire to further the Surrealist cause in his own way:

"In five months I will be forty; I have been working all my life to support painters and even to publish other people's writings and have taken very little trouble to have my own work published. Apart from a small extract from 'Femme complète' and the 'Alphabet sourd aveugle' and several contributions to Surrealist anthologies and magazines, my own poetry has never been collected. My greatest desire now is to get rid of this slowly accumulated production. This desire justifies itself by the fact that I should like to start new work in several different lines, and it seems so useless if all that is done is to be kept in a portfolio. Further, this is the time, I feel that my poetry will act upon the reader".³⁶

Immediately following this Mesens published his first book of poems Troisième Front with an English translation by Roland Penrose (these are referred to in Chapter 11), which were also reproduced in VVV in New York.³⁷ Later, in November 1944, Mesens edited a review Message from Nowhere³⁸ which contained no striking new English material and gave little evidence of vitality in the Surrealist ranks, tending to hark back to earlier achievements. The review does, however, publish an extract from Breton's important speech 'The Position of Surrealism between the two Wars'³⁹ and a translation of Ubu Roi⁴⁰ by Mesens and his wife Sybil.⁴¹ The English group contributed to Message from Nowhere,⁴² thus confirming their solidarity with Mesens rather than del Renzio, who had in 1944 printed a leaflet Fires of Arson containing a strong mystical element which, according to Penrose, further alienated him from Mesens.⁴³

The ending of the War in 1945 saw renewed attempts to revitalize the English group. Earlier in February Mesens had corresponded with Brunius concerning this, and Brunius had stressed the need for a systematic plan of action, which was what had been lacking for the last eight years.⁴⁴ From early in 1945 regular meetings were held at the

Barcelona Restaurant in Soho usually chaired by Mesens or Brunius, where a large amount of food and drink was consumed. George Melly described the atmosphere at the meetings where Mesens established himself as the "more formidable figure there" and

"... monumental rows, solemn games, mass ejection by the proprietor, messages from abroad, discussions as to future activities or publications - even expulsions took place.⁴⁵.....

After eating, drinking and general conversation Mesens could propose a subject. Although he had come to England in 1936 and lived here ever since, he had retained his strong Belgian accent, and despite a wide and vividly used vocabulary, constructed his sentences as if they were in French".⁴⁶

By the summer of 1945 Mesens was beginning to make plans for the reopening of the London Gallery, though the meetings were not achieving anything concrete. Simon Watson-Taylor, a young actor, was beginning to attempt to reorganise activities in a more serious fashion and by September of that year it was agreed that a new group should be formed with Taylor as the secretary, and once Mesens had reopened the London Gallery this would be the group headquarters.⁴⁷ The group consisted of Mesens, Brunius, Robert Baxter,⁴⁸ Cheraski, Fergar,⁴⁹ Sybil Mesens, Antonio Petro⁵⁰ and Edith Rimmington, and began working on collective cadavres exquis⁵¹ which would be used as notepaper heading.⁵² The group prepared to publish a new anthology of work, and in February 1946 were planning to publish a new London Bulletin of which number 1 was in preparation and number 2 was to be entirely devoted to the International Surrealist movement.⁵³ Mesens left the organisation of the group to Watson-Taylor, who was the most active member.⁵⁴ He had meanwhile managed to obtain a lease on a five storied Georgian building at 33 Brook Street for the new gallery and although it was attractive it was in a very bad state of repair and Mesens had considerable difficulty in obtaining the necessary permits for reopening and a frustrating time obtaining the necessary building materials.⁵⁵ He converted the top two storeys into a flat for himself and his wife, while offices, galleries, a bookshop and premises for a picture restorer were organised on the floors below.

Mesens attended the meetings of the group, which published

the review Free Unions in July 1946, and contributed one of his best collages La partition complète complétée, 1945 (fig. 68) which covered the whole two centre pages. Watson-Taylor commented that the material for Free Unions was assembled during the War and that:

"It should be borne in mind, therefore, that many of the texts were written under the stress of different circumstances - though the value of their conclusions is perhaps enhanced rather than diminished at the present time".⁵⁶

The texts once again have a retrospective air - for instance a Mesens poem of 1931 is included, 'Au centre d'un syndicat de pierres blanches', and some of the material is of a very poor standard indeed.⁵⁷ However, a fine illustration by Lucien Freud, A Room in West Sussex, 1944 (fig. 134) livened up the pages, together with collages by Conroy Maddox and Valentine Penrose.⁵⁸ (Figs. 135, 136).

After the publication of Free Unions the group began to meet less regularly. Fewer people attended the meetings, while Watson-Taylor left England for a tour of the Middle East with a travelling company of actors; first the group met fortnightly, then monthly, then meetings ceased altogether.⁵⁹ They finally managed to come together again in May 1947,⁶⁰ meeting to discuss a declaration which Watson-Taylor proposed should be made at the time of the International Surrealist Exhibition to be held at the Galerie Maeght, Paris. André Breton had asked Watson-Taylor to arrange for the English group to exhibit at the show, which was being mounted in order to rally Surrealist forces once again. The English Surrealists took the opportunity to produce a manifesto, Declaration du Groupe Surréaliste en Angleterre⁶¹ signed by all the members of the group⁶² with the exception of Toni del Renzio, with whom they had parted company in 1944. The manifesto reaffirms the group's belief in the Surrealist revolution, which they do not consider to be finished. The tract sets out what is considered to be the situation of the Surrealists in England, and pinpoints the reasons as to why they consider that a coherent group never materialized:

"La structure très décentralisée de la société anglaise - qui historiquement pourrait être opposée à l'extrême concentration de toutes les activités françaises sur

Paris, qu'elles soient administratives ou intellectuelles - n'a jamais favorisé la création dans ce pays d'un groupe surréaliste cohérent."⁶³

The authors of the tract point to the irrational tendencies which have always been present in English thought, that Elizabethan drama and romantic poetry are the main props of literary education, rather than the "logic of a coercive nature" present in French thought: even nonsense verse is quite acceptable in England. This has caused the paradoxical situation that while there are many precursors of Surrealism in England - Lewis Carroll, Swift, Blake and Coleridge for instance, there are few "surréalistes intentionnels". Furthermore, the Protestant ethic provides a far stronger enemy to a liberation of thought than the monolithic Catholic Church, for its superficial liberalism masks its powerful moral force which attacks man from within. Herbert Read, Humphrey Jennings and Henry Moore are all denounced for activities which are said to be opposed to Surrealism,⁶⁴ and having outlined evidence of group activities in England,⁶⁵ the group assert their solidarity with Surrealist objectives which were reaffirmed during the War by Breton:⁶⁶

"Changer la vie, transformer le monde en finir avec
LA MISERE HUMAINE".

They do not, however, state any adherence to Breton's new interest in alchemy, voodooism and esotericism which were made clear in the "occultist"⁶⁷ character of the 1947 International Exhibition. Several members of the group⁶⁸ exhibited but Mesens and Brunius were conspicuously absent. Neither shared Breton's interest in the occult and this is reflected in the manifesto, which was written mainly by Mesens and Brunius.⁶⁹

Professor Matthews remarks that:

"Though the 1947 exhibition appeared at the time to be the occasion for a regrouping of the Surrealists in England, their declaration led to no revival of organised action. Instead of a new beginning, the declaration may now be seen to mark the end of Surrealism's influence. The resurgence of interest and productivity in Cairo, Lisbon and Bucharest as much as in Paris had no counterpart in London. Surrealism and England had finally parted company."⁷⁰

This may be one of the causes of Mesens' bouts of depression in the years after the War. It is evident from Watson-Taylor's

correspondence with Conroy Maddox⁷¹ that while Mesens was absorbed in his work at the London Gallery after the War, he sold very few paintings and the gallery had increasing financial problems. Mesens also had a serious disagreement, of a personal nature,⁷² with Roland Penrose, who was a director of the London Gallery and had been a staunch supporter of Surrealism. The other director of the gallery, Peter Watson, had according to George Melly, who now worked as an assistant there,

".... become as bored by Surrealism as by life and would depress us all by wandering around any exhibition we had put on murmuring 'no tension'".⁷³

Thus by the late 1940s the situation contrasted strongly with the optimism of the immediate post-War years. Immediately the War ended, Mesens mounted the 'Surrealist Diversity' exhibition at the Arcade Gallery⁷⁴ with the statement in the catalogue:

"If man ever attains a state of total liberty - the hope of which some have the infamy to renounce - he will have access to objective happiness. He will have vanquished the anguish of the eternal, having discovered eternity in himself
To force in art at this present time the advent of a collective style can only be the accomplishment of one or several totalitarian States. We belong neither to a Gothic age, nor is there a Renaissance taking place. In the present chaos the most individual expressions of a few artists and poets are our only light. To hell with style, long live invention".

In this statement Mesens is emphasizing the, by now, wide variety of means of Surrealist expression, and he included in his show work ranging from Giacometti to Man Ray, Brauner to McWilliam. While the exhibition was on, Mesens also mounted a small show at the Arcade Gallery⁷⁵ of works by Scottie Wilson, who became a new adherent to Surrealism and who subsequently exhibited at the Maeght show in 1947.⁷⁶ Wilson was an artist discovered by Mesens who had invented a technique using minute pen strokes. Mesens wrote:

"I have never seen anything resembling these thousands of little strokes resembling this prosodic play of hatching, giving light or volume. Coloured crayons sometimes applied under the pen strokes, sometimes over them, constituting the eloquent and discreet colour element of this technique".⁷⁷

Mesens wrote the catalogue for the exhibition outlining the artist's life. Wilson was born in Glasgow of a working class family, one of many children. As a young man he went to Canada and set up a junk business in Ontario which was not successful, and eventually abandoned this for drawings in which, according to Mesens, he was able to discover

"... the memory of a Glasgow fountain, the vestiges of the North American Indian's totems, and the spirit of flowers and fishes".

The works which he executed just after the War are dramatic and have a Surrealist quality, while later they become more lyrical and optimistic. His drawings are imbued with a poetic quality and William Gaunt has pointed out,⁷⁸ "seem inevitably the outcome of an instinctive and individual process". Mesens included Wilson's work in a later exhibition at the London Gallery, Three Types of Automatism (February 1948).

Mesens had ambitious plans for the London Gallery when he reopened at its new premises. George Melly has described the gallery, which took up a whole building on the Claridges pavement:

"A picture restorer occupied one room, the rest were galleries. There was a bookshop entrance gallery, the shelves low enough to allow the hanging of smaller pictures. On the wall behind the desk was a cemented three-dimensional mural by F.E. McWilliam; a huge detached plaster eye, mouth, nose and lips arranged with systematized disorder in relation to their usual placing on the head. Three steps led down to the rush-matted large gallery behind. Below was an additional windowless gallery and a storage cellar. Above that a further two rooms. Above that a very pretty maisonette occupied by the Mesens. The house was built about 1780 and painted white throughout".⁷⁹

By the end of 1948 Mesens had opened two more rooms for exhibitions, thus making it the largest commercial gallery in post-War London.⁸⁰

The London Gallery reopened on November 5th, 1946, with paintings which Mesens had brought back from the store at the Palais des Beaux Arts where, despite the German occupation, they had remained untouched since 1939.⁸¹ Mesens also included in his stock works lent by Roland Penrose for exhibitions, while Anton Zwemmer was also involved as a director in a commercial capacity.⁸² The mixed works included those

by well known Surrealists already exhibited before the War, together with paintings by John Craxton and Scottie Wilson. The first show mounted was of twenty drawings by the Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam, whose work had not yet been seen in England.⁸³ Lam first came to know the Surrealists on their way into exile in Marseilles in 1940, and accompanied by Breton, Masson and Levi Strauss visited Martinique in 1941. Staying in Cuba during the War, Lam returned to Paris in 1946 and took part in all the subsequent Surrealist exhibitions. Lam's works, which were first exhibited in Paris in 1938,⁸⁴ fused images deriving from Haitian Voodoo figures and Congolese masks⁸⁵ into strange, nightmare creatures. Michael Compton writes:

"These works use African based totemic images as a deliberate attempt to resurrect this element of African culture".⁸⁶

Breton remarked in 1941 how Picasso had actively supported Lam, whose work had

"...travelled the same path in the opposite direction. Lam started off with a great fund of the marvellous and the primitive within him".⁸⁷

Breton emphasizes the African quality of Lam's work:

"The modern age has gradually taken in the endless variety of these objects of so-called 'savage' origin and their sumptuous display on the lyrical plane, and aware at last of the incomparable resources of the primitive vision, has fallen so in love with this vision that it would wish to achieve the impossible and wed it".

A few mixed shows followed the Wilfredo Lam exhibition while the repair work was being completed on the premises. The basic collection, according to Melly,⁸⁸ consisted of about a dozen Mirós, twenty Max Ernsts, a great many Klees, a few Magrittes (the bulk of the Magrittes were in Belgium), Schwitters, Tanguy, Delvaux, Brauner, Masson, Dominguez, and British artists Penrose, Banting, Wilson and Craxton. In 1947 Mesens began to work in earnest with a mixed exhibition The Cubist Spirit in its Time. This was the first adequate presentation of Cubism in London covering twenty years from 1909 to 1929 and containing representative work by both major and minor Cubist painters including Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger and Marcoussis. Mesens used the

catalogue to clarify some points concerning the development of Cubism, pointing out that Apollinaire's categories⁸⁹ - "Scientific, Physical, Orphic and Instinctive"-

"have not stood the test of time, and have proved to be vague, confusing and on the whole irrelevant".⁹⁰

While this is true, Mesens failed, however, to state that the categories appear in Chapter VII of Les Peintures Cubistes which originated as a lecture which Apollinaire had given in 1912 at the exhibition of La Section d'Or⁹¹ and as Edward Fry remarks,⁹²

"It is really a defence in loose terms of all the avant-garde painters of whom Apollinaire approved".

Unable to show work by Gleizes and Metzinger of the years 1910 to 1912,⁹³ not yet collected in England according to Mesens, he included a brief discussion of the two in the catalogue though in somewhat derogatory terms. While Mesens points out that Metzinger was a "real Cubist", he continues to write that his work:

"... born from the impact upon him of Picasso and Braque but never lifted to the level of their pre-occupations, displays a cold and systematic technique for representing natural appearances with geometrical sectioning of all the shapes".

In this context John Golding has written that:⁹⁴

"His Cubism is the result more of intellectual influences than of a genuine new vision of the world".

Mesens remarks that while Gleizes

"... disclosed an interest in the dynamics of modern life" in his work, it nevertheless "does not appear at all on the same plane as Picasso and Braque's. Later he developed into a theoretician anxious to put painting in the service of collective architecture His particular kind of codification of abstract painting has led to poster design and modernistic interior decoration in deplorable taste".⁹⁵

Mesens was at pains to point out that Gleizes and Metzinger's book Du Cubisme⁹⁶ "codified the rules of 'scientific Cubism' or a potential Cubist school", but goes on to say that the Cubist epoch "has not been a school and neither has it been an aesthetic" and typical to his Surrealist dislike of placing art in terms of a tradition finds that Cubism has been "neither

the continuation of Cezanne's work nor the logical consequence of it". However, the author goes no further than this in introducing Cubism, preferring to leave people to judge the paintings for themselves, thus following Picasso who said:

"Of what use is it to say what we do when everybody can see it if he wants to?"⁹⁷

Mesens then mounted exhibitions of major Surrealist painters, drawings and paintings by Masson (January 1949), early Chiricos (April 1949), Joan Miró (February 1950), Max Ernst (March 1950), though he was sickened by the fact that no public gallery purchased any work. He wrote in 1950:⁹⁸

"The London Gallery Ltd. has not sold a single painting or sculpture to a Public Art Gallery in Great Britain. All our internationally known artists are represented in museums and the most authoritative collections in Europe and the U.S.A." .

The New Statesman had pointed out earlier that:

"In general there is still a British reaction against Surrealism",⁹⁹

and this was reflected in a critic's review of the Masson exhibition, which said of his work that there was "nothing which gives the eye any pleasure or indeed any sensation other than boredom"¹⁰⁰ and makes the case that few Surrealist painters follow the primary requisite of pictorial expression "in which the eye should first receive the impulse and the brain follow in wondering amazement", and "they, like Masson, could almost always express their ideas more powerfully in another medium - literature, for example". Whilst as George Melly has made clear, Surrealism was considered to be "passé" among many British intellectuals,¹⁰¹ Mesens also had difficulties selling paintings because of the post-War economic and financial conditions. It was clear that there was very little money available for the purchase of works of art by both public and private collectors alike, and although the State was now supposed to be the "new patron-in-chief of the arts", Wyndham Lewis showed that in the year 1947-48 for instance, whereas the Arts Council had spent £212,000 in one year on music, only £2,000 was spent on painting.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, the Schwitters which Mesens exhibited in May 1950 sold "unusually well for these days", according to Lawrence Alloway.¹⁰³ Mesens re-encountered Schwitters during the War when the latter paid him a brief visit to his house in Hampstead.¹⁰⁴ Schwitters had fled to England in 1940, where he spent seventeen months in various internment camps before settling in London for a time. He earned his living during the War painting portraits and Mesens bought a few collages from him.¹⁰⁵ In 1945, as the London Gallery was about to reopen, Mesens purchases some more work which formed part of the permanent collection.¹⁰⁶

Schwitters moved to the Lake District in 1945 and while continuing to make collages out of collected scraps and rubbish, he began his third Merzbau. Mesens meanwhile organised two Merz poetry recitals to be given by Schwitters at the London Gallery - the first reading which Mesens presented on Wednesday, March 5th, 1947, included readings of Anna Blume (fig. 137) and the Ursonate or Sonate in Urlauten, and this was attended by sixteen people including two journalists. A recital of the Ursonate was included in the hope that the B.B.C. might be persuaded to record it, but the representative left in the middle of the performance.¹⁰⁷ Anna Blume is a "conventional bourgeois declaration of love interspersed with sarcastic nonsense meant according to Schwitters' son, 'to force us to smile at our own futility'".¹⁰⁸

The Ursonate is, however, a lengthy "poem" which Schwitters had continuously worked on from the early 1920s. Starting originally as a letterist sound poem which Raoul Hausmann had composed in 1921 using f m s b w,¹⁰⁹ Schwitters added and extended the sounds until the poem bore very little relation to the original. The "ur sounds" f m s b w become "fumma bowolas zaa uu pogiff kwiee" and eventually Schwitters began to arrange pure sounds formally, so that the poem becomes a sonata: the last major section, for instance, is a "scherzo" "lanke trr gll" dating from around 1932.¹¹⁰ Later, after Schwitters' death in 1948, Mesens organised an exhibition An Homage to Kurt Schwitters containing 33 collages together with some documentation on the artist.¹¹¹ Mesens recalled that:

"At the private view a director of our company said to me, 'They are quite nice these things. But it's DADA, it's twenty years too late, my dear'. I curtly answered, 'Not twenty ... it's thirty years too late'. For the public (and collectors alike) it was TEN years TOO EARLY".¹¹²

Mesens followed a policy at the London Gallery of supporting important one man shows with the work of lesser known but experimental artists: for instance, Desmond Morris's¹¹³ work was shown in February 1950, alongside the Miró exhibition. However, George Melly writes that Mesens was forced to use any stratagem to keep solvent.

"The purity of the early months was soon muddled. We began to let rooms in order to pay for at least an occasional show not altogether repugnant to E.L.T.'s convictions. This led to some really painful exhibitions: trees on Hampstead Heath, the sculptures of a religious paranoid - (At least", said Mesens, "the Christian iconography is difficult to read") - the polite and whimsical gouaches of an F.O. civil servant, and so on".¹¹⁴

In 1947 Mesens had mounted a show of work by Lucien Freud, whom he found to be:

"The only interesting young painter in London but very perverse".¹¹⁵

Mesens evidently said that he felt that Freud's main object in life was acting against the theories of his grandfather. His paintings were marked by his intense visionary obsessions close to the Surrealist spirit. Mesens tried hard, according to Melly, "to solicit his support for the Surrealist canon",¹¹⁶ but he rejected totally the idea of an external moral imperative. Mesens also exhibited John Craxton's work at the same time as that of his friend Freud, but Craxton bore no relationship to Surrealism at all. Melly wrote:

"His exhibitions were widely reviewed, had brilliant private views and sold out. 'Butter', said E.L.T. defensively, 'but honest butter'".¹¹⁷

Both Freud and Craxton helped the gallery to keep going since they were under contract. Mesens also promoted the work of Austin Cooper, a collagist who made abstract configurations out of torn papers,¹¹⁸ while work by John Banting and Roland Penrose was exhibited in 1948 and 1949 respectively, who both demonstrated their continued adherence to Surrealism.

In reviewing the small Miró exhibition which Mesens mounted in 1950, Desmond Morris made the following points:

"Any London exhibition is welcome which shows up the work of a distinguished artist, especially such a painter as Miró, for there is little opportunity to see and know

his work in England ... The present exhibition is not very large but it has been well arranged and the pictures carefully chosen from a limited number available in this country ... Everyone seriously interested in modern art should see this exhibition".¹¹⁹

Fortunately the visitors' book to the London Gallery¹²⁰ has not been destroyed and in it one can see among the entries the names of Henry Moore, Eduardo Paolozzi, Lawrence Alloway, Francis Bacon, Alfred Barr and Emile Langui. Correspondence reveals¹²¹ that there was considerable interest in Mesens' collection from abroad in spite of the move away from Surrealism after the War. The Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, for instance, wished to arrange an American exhibition of Mesens' collection, while the Julian Levy Gallery, New York, which had exhibited works by Continental Surrealists from 1932 onwards, was very interested in the possibility of buying it all up.¹²² After the London Gallery had only been opened eighteen months Mesens was so depressed with the response to his exhibitions generally that he considered selling up and leaving England for good,¹²³ but it was fortunate that he decided to continue for another two years showing the work of Dada and Surrealist masters, for the work seen at the gallery provided inspiration for two young artists in particular, Francis Bacon and Eduardo Paolozzi.

Bacon was a frequent visitor and George Melly recalled that he was:

"The only visitor who agreed that Magritte was marvellous, a view generally held to be perverse, or proof of a naive idiocy".¹²⁴

Bacon did not, however, like the Ernsts which were shown there, for he considered him to be a painter "without mystery".¹²⁵ Bacon's main work as an artist did not commence until 1944 when he produced Three Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion.¹²⁶ He was to derive much of his inspiration for his work from photographs and film stills,¹²⁷ but again he studied closely the European masters ranging from Cimabue, Velasquez, Rembrandt to Constable. He frequently visited the Tate Gallery, and his ambition, according to Rothenstein was:

"To take shocking or unheard of material and deliver it in the grand European manner. His material he drew from contemporary life often suggested by photographs from popular magazines and stills".¹²⁸

Chance and accident, so much adhered to in Surrealist works, played an important part in Bacon's painting:

"Real painting is a mysterious and continuous struggle with chance ... I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down".¹²⁹

The London Gallery was the only centre after the War where the kind of art in which chance and accident played a part and which contained mysterious and enigmatic subject matter could be seen. Other commercial galleries did not devote their time to works of this kind - the Mayor Gallery, for instance, showed Modigliani, Utrillo and Matthew Smith from 1948 onwards, while their Klee show was not mounted until 1950; the Hanover Gallery similarly did not open until 1948, and work was shown there by such painters as Sutherland, Veuillard, Dufy and Picasso.

Paolozzi was a student at the Slade School during the War, and like Bacon was a regular visitor to the London Gallery, where he was introduced to Surrealist art. "I was", he said, "deeply impressed by Surrealism".¹³⁰ Paolozzi, an Italian Scot, rejected the British tradition in painting, repudiating what he learned at the Slade. The anti-traditional, anti-classical aspect of collage attracted him, he enjoyed the Dadaist rejection of the artist's "mystique" demonstrated in the work of Picabia, Ernst and Duchamp, and he admired the work of Klee and Miró.¹³¹ In the early Ernst collages which were in the permanent collection at the London Gallery - Chinesische Nachtigall, 1919, or Mariée anatomie, 1921, for instance, he would have come across the use of prefabricated elements such as illustrations or engravings together with mechanical forms and technical drawings. Paolozzi began to make collages in 1947 (fig. 138), one of the earlier reminiscent of Schwitters, which Diane Kirkpatrick describes as being loosely rectilinear, consisting of narrow strips of tickets and fragments of paper painted here and there in sections of contrasting colour.¹³² In the late 1940s he made a series of collaged books and sheets from items that interested him: this interest in collage was to extend into his sculpture, firstly in the early 1950s by incorporating actual objects into the surface of a piece of sculpture, later using a collage process to make models to be cast into bronze.

Paolozzi and Lawrence Alloway, who had reviewed the exhibitions at the London Gallery¹³³ together with Toni del Renzio, took part in the meetings at the I.C.A. in the early 1950s which led to the formation of the Independent Group of painters and writers interested in "mirroring" contemporary society in their work. The group were frustrated with the policy of the I.C.A. in London and the "generally apathetic attitudes of the art world to manifestations of contemporary life"¹³⁴ and formed a group in order to hold their own lectures and discussions. The first meeting was late in 1952 and included a screen projection by Paolozzi of his Bunk collages made between 1947 and 1952 (fig. 138) which used a wide range of materials - comics, advertisements, magazines. While the group engaged in "impassioned discussions, learned investigations of Westerns, old comic books and pulp science fiction"¹³⁵ and were seriously concerned with what Edward Lucie-Smith calls "the archaeology of mass produced myths and of popular design",¹³⁶ they were also exploring means to express these interests, and Toni del Renzio writes of how discussions of Dada and Surrealist techniques featured in their meetings:

"Surrealist attitudes particularly as expressed in works rather than in the manifestos, had influenced various members of the Independent Group. Magritte had been frequently cited, particularly the multi-code works by Lawrence Alloway, while American art of the forties was seen as the direct result of the presence of French Surrealists during that period. Automatism, chance, "non-art" in the Duchamp sense, had figured in one way or another in the I.G. discussions from the very beginning".¹³⁷

Whilst the aims of those who developed what Lawrence Alloway was to call 'Pop' art¹³⁸ were different from those who had initially developed the techniques that were employed by Surrealist painters (Magritte, for instance, always denied that his work had anything to do with Pop art at all¹³⁹ while automatic and chance techniques and the "non-art" of Duchamp had been clearly anti-aesthetic gestures), it is evident that there was a revival of interest in Dada and Surrealism developing during the 1950s. Thus while Mesens closed the London Gallery in July 1950, owing to what he called "the discouraging nature of the moral and material conditions",¹⁴⁰ giving up the struggle to sell Dada and Surrealist

works, the paintings, collages and sculpture which had been shown there were to provide the link in London between the pre-War innovations of artists in France, Belgium and Germany, and the 1950s resurgence of interest in these means of communication.¹⁴¹

Although Mesens closed the London Gallery, he continued to be involved in the organisation of exhibitions over the next twenty years. During the late 1940s he was involved in the setting up of the I.C.A.,¹⁴² and he was on the I.C.A. organising committee for the exhibitions in 1948, *Forty Years of British Art* and *40,000 Years of Modern Art*.¹⁴³ He was much in demand in Belgium from the early 1950s onwards, where he mounted shows by Matisse, Ernst, Magritte, Delvaux and Tanguy, in London showing work by Baj and Magritte, and during the 1960s he paid several visits to Italy where he helped mount a show of Calderara's work in Milan whilst exhibiting his own collages there. He produced a number of catalogues for these exhibitions which display a sensitive and poetic understanding of painters' work - the following may be specifically cited: 75 Oeuvres du demi siècle, Knokke, 1951, Max Ernst, Knokke, 1953, and Les Points Cardinaux du Surréalisme, Antwerp, 1956.

Two further publications by Mesens after the War also merit mention: the first, a short biography of Magritte¹⁴⁴ in 1947, which is particularly useful for its brief outline of the influences on Magritte's early work between 1919 and 1926, and his relationship with Mesens, Lecompte and Nougé; secondly, the article 'Les apprentis sorciers au pays de la pléthore', which he wrote in 1954¹⁴⁵ and which gives the first accurate account of the development of Dada and Surrealism in Belgium, emphasizing the point that the Brussels group was essentially "une entreprise de poètes" joined together "dans un désir égal de subversion". The article considers the work of Magritte and Delvaux in particular, together with other artists influenced by Surrealism in Belgium between 1928 and 1954, notably Marc Eemans and Raoul Ubac.

FOOTNOTES

1. Decade, Painting and Sculpture and Drawing in Britain 1940 - 1949, Arts Council Exhibition, November 1972 - June 1973.
2. Andre Breton Surrealism and Painting (1928), translated from the French by S.W. Taylor, p.6.
3. Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, London, 1965, p.18.
4. See end of this chapter.
5. Op. cit. note 1, p.7.
6. Studies by Graham Sutherland, Roland Browse and Delbanco, October - November, 1947.
Henry Moore, drawings and maquettes, from 1928 - 1948, Roland, Browse and Delbanco, October 1948.
The recent work of Edward Burra, Leicester Gallery, June 1949.
Eduardo Paolozzi, Mayor Gallery, February 1948, May 1949.
7. Movements in Art since 1945, London, 1969, p.16.
8. Only one edition was published.
9. E.L.T. Mesens was included in the dedication (flyleaf).
10. Gordon Onslow Ford, John Melville, Conroy Maddox, Eileen Agar, Emmy Bridgewater.
11. An avant-garde literary magazine edited by Charles Henry Ford, which was sympathetic to the Surrealists. A special Surrealist number was published in October/November, New York, 1941.
12. Arson, p.32.
13. Letter from Toni del Renzio to Conroy Maddox, Tate Gallery Archives, TAM.30/1, 31.3.42 (microfiche).
14. Collection Conroy Maddox.
15. Conroy Maddox, Eileen Agar and Robert Melville cannot recall what the response was.
16. Letter dated 24.7.42, op. cit. note 13.
17. Paul Ray, The Surrealist Movement in England, Cornell, 1972 p.234.

18. Letter dated 2.11.42, op. cit. note 13.
19. Letter dated 31.3.42 (note 13).
20. A supposed secret society whose existence first became known in the seventeenth century. The whole subject is veiled in the deepest obscurity; the Rosicrucians are interested in mysticism, magic and hypnosis.
21. According to Conroy Maddox in correspondence with the author, del Renzio published a pamphlet, the Fires of Arson in 1944, which revealed an interest in mysticism.
22. Published by Grey Walls Press, Billericay. The book intended to indicate "New Directions in European Art and Letters (title page).
23. Ibid. pp. 180-183.
24. Ibid. p.182.
25. Horizon VIII no. 46, October 1943, recto of back cover.
26. Letter dated 31.10.43, op. cit. note 13.
27. Horizon VIII, no. 48, December 1943, pp. 433-434.
28. London Gallery Editions.
29. London Gallery Editions.
30. No pagination.
31. 'Le Surréalisme encore et toujours', Cahiers de Poésie, nos. 4-5, Paris, 1943.
32. Cited by Roland Penrose in catalogue, Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, London, 1978, p.410.
33. Privately published.
34. Letter from Ithel Colquhoun to Paul Ray, op. cit. note 24, p.245.
35. Art and Artists, vol. 1, no. 4, July 1966, p.63.
36. Dated July 5th, 1943, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
37. No. 4, February 1944. VVV was published in New York between June 1942 and February 1944 and provided a rallying point for Surrealism in New York (ed. David Hare, editorial advisers André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst).

38. London, London Gallery Editions, November 1944.
39. The speech was given to those studying French at Yale on 10th December, 1942, and emphasizes the "triumph of the art of imagination and creation over the art of imitation". (See catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, op. cit. note 32 p.377-378)
40. From the bizarre play by Alfred Jarry, Ubu Enchaîné, which was first performed in Paris in 1937 (although written in 1890 when Jarry was only sixteen).
41. Formerly married to the abstract painter Cecil Stevenson.
42. Brunius, Penrose, Simon Watson-Taylor, Feyaz Fergar, Emmy Bridgewater and others.
43. Op. cit. note 32, p.412.
44. Dated February 1945, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
45. George Melly, Rum, Bum, and Concertina, London, 1978 p.108.
46. Ibid. pp. 109-110.
47. Letter from Simon Watson-Taylor to Conroy Maddox, op. cit. note 13, TAM.30.5, 5.9.45.
48. See Chapter 12.
49. Sadi Cheraski and Feyaz Fergar had published several volumes of poems, Dirt (no. 1, July 1941 - no. 11, Autumn 1944). Fergar edited a small review Fulcrum, July 1944, containing a certain amount of Surrealist orientated material by Brunius, Rimmington, S.W. Taylor, Banting, and Maddox.
50. A Spanish modernist painter: friend of Edith Rimmington.
51. "A form of the game of consequences first used by the Paris Surrealists in 1925. Everyone wrote a word on a sheet of paper, folding it to hide what was written before passing it on to a neighbour. The first sentence obtained in this arbitrary manner was "The exquisite body drank the new wine". Rene Passeron, Phaidon Encyclopedia of Surrealism, London, 1978, p.259.
52. Letter from S. Watson-Taylor to Conroy Maddox, 17.9.45, op. cit. note 47.
53. Letter from S. Watson-Taylor to Conroy Maddox, 27.2.46, op. cit. note 47.

54. Personal communication, Conroy Maddox.
55. Op. cit. note 45, p. 114.
56. Inside cover.
57. For instance:
"He pulled the blanket and she drew up the blind.
The yellow mice rushed into their corners. The
spiders ran behind the pictures. The lecture
began on Christ the Forerunner. Only the very
young mice sat still to listen"
Emmy Bridgewater, 'The Birds', p.33.
58. Wife of Roland Penrose.
59. Op. cit. note 45, p. 114.
60. May 31st, 1947. Invitation, Maddox collection, Tate Gallery Archives, TAM.30.6.
61. Catalogue Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme, Paris, Galerie Maeght, 1947, pp.45-47.
62. Banting, Baxter, Bridgewater, F.J. Brown, Brunius, Fergar, Maddox, Melly, Melville, Mesens, Penrose, Rimmington, Samson, Taylor, Wilson.
63. Ibid. p.70.
64. Herbert Read for his eclectism; Jennings because he was decorated with the O.B.E.; Moore for his 'sacerdotal ornaments' and his 'miserable vulgarisation of his pre-War reclining figures', p.46.
65. Message from Nowhere and Free Unions: nothing produced by del Renzio is mentioned.
66. René Passeron, op. cit. note 51, p.15.
67. Ibid.
68. Banting, Baxter, Bridgewater, Maddox, Penrose, Wilson.
69. J.H. Matthews Surrealism and England, Comparative Literature Studies 1, no.1, Minnesota, 1964, p.63.
70. Ibid.
71. Op. cit. note 13, TAM.30.5.

72. Manuscript of an article by George Melly on the London Gallery, later published in a shorter version as 'The London Gallery and the Lean Years of Surrealism', Art at Auction, 1971-2. The Year at Sotheby's and Parke Bernet, London, no pagination.
73. Ibid.
74. October 1946.
75. 'Since a few French poets', preface to an exhibition of works by Scottie Wilson, E.L.T. Mesens, Arcade Gallery, London, 4-30.10.75.
76. See note 62.
77. The Enchanted Domain, Exeter Surrealist Festival, Exe Gallery, 1967, no pagination.
78. Introduction to catalogue, Old and New Images by Scottie Wilson, Circle Painting and Sculpture, Fulham, June 6th - 30th, 1968.
79. Op. cit. note 72.
80. E.L.T. Mesens Activities of the London Gallery Ltd, 1936-1950, London, 1950, folded double sheet.
81. George Melly, op. cit. note 45, p.
82. Op. cit. note 72.
83. Op. cit. note 80. No catalogue traced for this exhibition. Periodically Mesens published the London Gallery News and the London Gallery Express, one or two editions of which are in the Dubucq collection, and these were used as catalogues for exhibitions.
84. Galerie Pierre.
85. Rubin, p.362.
86. Op. cit. note 32, p.395.
87. 'Wilfredo Lam, 'The Long Nostalgia of Poets' in Surrealism and Painting, translated by S.W. Taylor, London, 1972, p.169.
88. Op. cit. note 72.
89. First published in Les Peintures Cubistes, Paris 1918.
90. E.L.T. Mesens introduction to catalogue, The Cubist Spirit in its Time, London Gallery, 1947, p.10.

91. The Section d'Or exhibition held at the Galerie de la Boétie during October 1912 was the most important of all Cubist manifestations in France, and marked the 'public consecration' of the movement. See Edward F. Fry, Cubism, London, 1966, p.100-102.
92. Ibid. p.120.
93. Both Gleizes' and Metzinger's work between 1910 and 1911 deliberately 'cubefied' volumes under the influence of Picasso's analysis of solid forms (1909-10), but their vision was still fundamentally naturalistic. By 1912, however, Gleizes began to develop a more mature style with echoes of Léger's synthesis of abstraction and representation. John Golding Cubism, a History and an Analysis, 1907 - 1914, London, 1959, pp. 146-7, 158-9.
94. Ibid. p.158.
95. Op. cit. note 90, p.12.
96. Paris, 1912. This was the first book devoted wholly to Cubism and lays out the essential theoretical ideas of the authors, although many of the themes had been discussed by earlier writers.
97. Cited by E. Fry op. cit. note 91, p.168, from 'Picasso Speaks', The Arts, New York, May 1923, pp. 315-326.
98. Op. cit. note 80.
99. February 21st, 1948, p.154.
100. Art News and Review, Vol. I, no. 1, London, February 1949, p.4.
101. Personal communication.
102. Patrick Heron, New Statesman, June 26th, 1948, p.520.
103. Art News and Review Vol. II, no. 6, London, May 1950, p.4.
104. E.L.T. Mesens 'Tribute to Kurt Schwitters', Art News and Review Vol. X, no. 19, London, October 1958.
105. Ibid. p.7.
106. Ibid. p.7.
107. Ibid. p.7.
108. Rubin, p.104.

109. Ibid. p.109.
110. Ibid. p.109.
111. Catalogue, London Gallery News, 1950, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
112. Op . cit. note 104, p.7.
113. Former Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1968. Now well known as the author of The Naked Ape, 1967, The Human Zoo, 1967, and more recently Manwatching, A Field Guide to Human Behaviour, London, 1977.
114. Op . cit. note 72.
115. Op . cit. note 45, p.145.
116. Ibid.
117. Op . cit. note 72.
118. For example, Tal-Lee (torn and pasted papers, ink and wax) 1948, ill. Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, p.102.
119. Art News and Review, Vol. II, no. 2, February 1959, p.5.
120. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
121. Correspondence, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
122. Correspondence, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
123. Letter from Mesens to Arthur Jeffries, 2.3.48, ibid.
124. Op . cit. note 72.
125. Personal communication from George Melly.
126. Op . cit.note 1, p.21.
127. Ibid. pp. 21-22.
128. Sir John Rothenstein Modern English Painters, Vol. III, London, 1974, p.165.
129. Ibid.
130. Frank Whitford introduction to exhibition of Eduardo Paolozzi, Tate Gallery, 1971, p.7.

131. Diane Kirkpatrick Eduardo Paolozzi, London, 1970, p.15.
132. Ibid. p.16.
133. For Art News Review, 1949 and 1950.
134. Shone, op. cit. note 7, p.39.
135. E. Lucie-Smith 'Pop Art' in Concepts of Modern Art, ed. T. Richardson and N. Stangos, London, 1974, p.227.
136. Ibid.
137. 'Pop' in Art and Artists no. 5, London, May 1976, pp. 14-19.
138. Frank Whitford 'Les origines britanniques du Pop Art', Revue de l'Art no. 30, Paris, 1975, pp. 77-81.
139. See Chapter 12.
140. Minutes of the Directors' meeting at which the closure of the London Gallery was agreed upon. Mesens made these comments in his capacity of Managing Director. Dated July 5th, 1950. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
141. In particular in the work of Richard Hamilton, Peter Blake and Ronald Kitaz.
142. Correspondence, collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels. Founded 1948.
143. 40 Years of Modern Art - a Selection from British Collections, Academy Hall, Oxford Street, February 10th - March 6th, 1948. 40,000 Years of Modern Art, Academy Hall, Oxford Street, December 20th, 1948 to January 29th, 1949.
144. René Magritte in Peintres Belges Contemporains, Editions Lumière, Brussels, 1947.
145. Les Arts Plastiques, Numéro Spécial, Le Fantastique dans l'art Belge de Bosch à Magritte (à la XXVII Biennale de Venise), Brussels, June 1954, pp. 31-38.

CONCLUSION

Mesens contributed to the Dada and Surrealist movements in Belgium and England in a variety of different ways and to date his work has not been seen as a whole. It is clear that from his first contacts with the Dadaists in 1921 his activities were coloured by an overriding commitment to Dada and Surrealism so that his work as an art dealer can be considered to be a creative activity, just as much as his enterprises as a poet and collagist.

Mesens introduced Dada to Brussels and influenced Magritte to co-operate in activities: although this was only a brief exercise, from this development Surrealism emerged in Belgium, for Mesens had forged the links with Paris between 1921 and 1926. The use of "objective reality" to disturb and shock adopted by Belgian Surrealists was grafted onto the Belgian tradition of an art of a literary and metaphoric character as exemplified in the work of the late 19th Century Symbolist painters, so that the strange world of the Surrealists was to find a new kind of imagery in the paintings of Magritte and Delvaux. Mesens was influential in the development of the work of these two major Belgian painters, for it was he who introduced both men to the ideas which originated in the Surrealist movement in Paris.

His activities in providing the links between Paris and Brussels by arranging for joint publications of texts, manifestos and reviews ensured the continuing dynamism of the Surrealist movement in Belgium during the 1930s, though he did not publish any major theoretical text himself. His work as an art dealer in Brussels gave publicity to work by both Belgian and French Surrealist painters, though this was not achieved without a struggle. The Minotaure exhibition which he mounted at the Palais des Beaux Arts in 1934 was a major achievement, being the first large Surrealist exhibition to be held outside France and provided an opportunity for work to be shown by all the major painters involved with the movement. Mesens' own formidable collection of paintings which he had begun to acquire early in the 1920s formed the basis of his exhibitions in Brussels and London: in particular he was responsible for publicizing the work of

his friend Magritte, whose painting he recognised very early as adding a new dimension to the concept of Surrealist art.

Mesens' firm belief in fundamental Surrealist principles caused problems in England, as most of the painters and poets with whom he was involved preferred a spirit of compromise rather than a wholehearted commitment to Surrealism, and an amateur, eccentric and individual approach rather than an organised head-on attack on established forms of art and literature. While Mesens was responsible for creating a climate of excitement in London among the group of painters and poets interested in Surrealism, and his exhibitions there before the War were unequalled, Surrealism never became a strongly organised, firmly based movement as he wished, and his attempt in this area in 1940 failed. The London Bulletin provided a nucleus for activities and kept the English group in contact with their counterparts abroad; Mesens' hopes for the establishment of a close knit group were in any case dashed by the advent of war. After 1945, the London Gallery was not a financial success, for Surrealism had ceased to hold any great interest in England, but Mesens' refusal to abandon his overriding commitment to the movement meant that his exhibitions provided a link in the chain which led from pre-War Dada and Surrealism in Europe and America to the 1950s revival of interest in the techniques of these revolutionary movements.

Mesens started his main work as a collagist relatively late in life, by which time the Surrealist movement as a potent force had been superseded. There were a number of younger painters and poets in the 1950s actively involved in Surrealism, seeing it in terms of a total revolution of outlook akin to Marxism, but the techniques which had been developed earlier by Dadaists and Surrealists - chance, automatism, 'objects' assemblages and collages - had since the War been adopted by a new generation of Abstract Expressionist 'Pop', or 'Neo-Dada' painters in a positive sense to reflect the artists' state of mind or the values of a changing society, and not in their original sense to redefine reality, undermine conventional values or as anti-aesthetic gestures.

Mesens' collages of the 1950s and 1960s were overtly nostalgic, re-exploring Surrealist themes and techniques. They reveal a

deep understanding of Surrealism and its preoccupations in their delicate and witty construction, while their imagery displays the artist's fine sense of how ordinary materials can be handled in new contexts. Mesens approached the making of collage from the point of view of a poet, and his poems like his collages are both humorous and subversive. The series of poems Alphabet Sourd Aveugle, 1933, in particular is a highly original concept demonstrating how language can be extended to create a new type of imagery. Mesens' early collages are distinguished by their forceful undermining of rationality and in particular by the experimental use of photography and photographic elements.

Critics and historians to date have considered Mesens mainly as a collagist and relatively minor figure in the Surrealist movement. He was by no means a major artist and did not introduce any new Surrealist techniques. However, while his collages draw on means of expression first developed by others, they are charming and inventive and display an increasing confidence in the handling of materials, developing from the early metamorphoses of found items to a style in which drawing and painting becomes increasingly important. His poetry, like his plastic work, is typified by a playful wit and delicate verbal manipulation, but the force of the imagery is on the whole gentle and romantic. Although the 'Alphabet Sourd Aveugle' can be considered as a major piece of Surrealist writing for its totally new kind of structure and powerful Surrealist metaphor, the remaining works are in a relatively minor key and cannot be considered as important examples of Surrealist poetry.

However, Mesens was not consistently a collagist or a poet and his output in both these mediums is relatively small. He oscillated in his life between his creative work and his activities as a dealer and it may be that the very diversity of these activities has led historians to concentrate on the more tangible aspects of his career to be seen in his collages: thus his most important work as an art dealer has been totally neglected. In Belgium he was responsible for establishing Brussels as the most important centre of Surrealist activity after Paris through his work in the galleries and as a result of his connections with the Paris group. In London before the Second World War his exhibitions were unequalled, while between

1946 and 1951 there was no other centre in the U.K. devoted to contemporary art which could rival Mesens' London Gallery. It is evident that although there was little general interest in Surrealism during the latter period and Mesens had a continual struggle to keep the venture going, the exhibitions kept alive the spirit of Dada and Surrealism which was to influence a new generation of artists in the 1950s.

Mesens' own creative work as a collagist and poet was of relatively little importance in the Surrealist movement, but his work as a dealer was highly significant in its effect on others, providing inspiration and focussing attention on the work of major artists, several of whom, Delvaux and Magritte in particular, owed much of their success to Mesens' work. Mesens' move to London in 1938 provided him with a unique opportunity to concentrate completely on exhibiting Dada and Surrealist art, and to become a major figure in the International Surrealist movement.

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Dimensions where known are given in centimetres, height preceding width. No dimensions are given for photographs, books, assemblages, periodicals or tracts.

1. E.L.T. Mesens Danse pour Piano, Brussels, 1921. Cover by Pierre Floquet.
2. E.L.T. Mesens Garage, Brussels, 1922. Cover by Man Ray.
3. James Ensor Coquillages 1895, oil on canvas, 24 x 32. Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels.
4. Hans Arp Rectangles arrangés selon les lois du hasard 1916-17, collage of coloured papers, 48.5 x 34.6. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
5. Marcel Janco Mask 1916, mask of cardboard with twine. Collection the artist.
6. Marcel Duchamp Apollinaire Enamelled 1916-17. Corrected ready-made; advertisement for Sapolin Enamel, 24 x 34. Private collection, Milan.
7. Francis Picabia L'enfant carburateur 1919. Oil gilt, pencil, metallic paint on plywood. 58.5 x 48. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
8. Francis Picabia La femme aux allumettes 1920, oil on canvas with pasted matchsticks, hair pins and coins. 90 x 73. Collection Simone Collinet, Paris.
9. Man Ray Theatr' 1916. Collage 45.8 x 61. Moderna Musée, Stockholm.
10. Max Ernst Hier ist noch alles in der Schwebe 1920. Pasted photo-engravings and pencil. 10.5 x 12.2. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
11. Max Ernst C'est le chapeau qui fait l'homme 1920. Pasted papers, pencil, ink, watercolour. 35.5 x 45.5. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
12. Kurt Schwitters Merz 1920. Collage, 18 x 14.3. Private collection, Dusseldorf.

13. Yves Tanguy Demain 1938. Oil on canvas. 53.8 x 45. Private collection.
14. Salvador Dali, part of Le jeu lugubre 1929, oil and collage on panel, 24.8 x 35. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
15. Max Ernst L'éléphant Célèbes 1921, oil on canvas 125 x 107, Tate Gallery London.
16. René Magritte L'usage des paroles 1927, oil on canvas 45 x 30, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
17. E.L.T. Mesens Les Caves du Vatican 1936, construction with tree trunk and silk banner. Collection Charles Ratton, Paris.
18. Enrico Baj A Lady Sensitive to the Weather 1960, collage, 40 x 32, Grosvenor Gallery, London.
19. Paul Joostens untitled 1917 collage, 23 x 37, Ministry of Flemish Culture, Brussels.
20. Paul Joostens untitled 1920 collage, 41 x 27, Ministry of Flemish Culture, Brussels.
21. E.L.T. Mesens En Scheldwooden Vloein, Mécano nos. 4-5 1923.
22. E.L.T. Mesens Période 1924.
23. E.L.T. Mesens Marie no. 1 June 1926.
24. E.L.T. Mesens Marie nos. 2 - 3 July 1926.
25. René Magritte Illustration for Violette Nozières, Editions Nicolas Flamel, Brussels, 1933.
26. Bulletin International du Surréalisme, no. 3
27. René Magritte Le Jockey Perdu 1926, oil on canvas. 63.5 x 73.5. Collection Madame R. Michel, Paris.
28. E.L.T. Mesens Drawing 1923, crayons and ink on paper, collection Conroy Maddox.
29. E.L.T. Mesens Masque 1927, collage.
30. E.L.T. Mesens La Plaque Tournante 1929. Reproduced Variétés no. 6, October 1929.
31. E.L.T. Mesens Dessin 1929, reproduced ibid.
32. E.L.T. Mesens La Fabrication des Poissons 1929, reproduced ibid.

33. E.L.T. Mesens Untitled 1929, reproduced *ibid.*
34. E.L.T. Mesens Masque servant à injurier les esthètes 1929, photograph and collage. Reproduced *ibid.* also in Alfred Barr Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism, New York, 1926.
35. E.L.T. Mesens Je ne pense qu'à vous 1926, collage and rayograph, 30 x 22. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
36. E.L.T. Mesens La Lumière déconcertante 1926, collage and rayograph. 27 x 19. Collection Baron and Baroness Urvater, Brussels.
37. E.L.T. Mesens Arrière - pensée 1929, reproduced *Variétés* I^e année no. 9, January 1929.
38. E.L.T. Mesens Frontispice original pour 'Alphabet Sourd Aveugle' 1928. Collage and rayograph, 25 x 26.3. Collection Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
39. E.L.T. Mesens Projet de monuments aux suicidés de tous les temps 1925, collage 18 x 8. Collection Marcel Dubucq, Brussels.
40. E.L.T. Mesens Instruction Obligatoire II 1930, collage, 8.7 x 12.5. Private collection, Brussels.
41. E.L.T. Mesens Instruction Obligatoire III 1930, collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
42. E.L.T. Mesens Untitled 1929. Collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
43. E.L.T. Mesens Instruction Obligatoire I 1927, collage. Reproduced in 'Le Surréalisme en 1929', special edition of *Variétés*, Brussels, June 1929, and in H. Janis and R. Blesch Collage, London, 1967. Present whereabouts unknown.
44. Max Ernst Pietà or Revolution by Night, oil on canvas 115.5 x 88. Collection Sir Roland Penrose, London.
45. Paul Nash Landscape from a Dream, 1936 - 38. Oil on canvas. 67.3 x 101.7. Tate Gallery, London.
46. John Armstrong Dreaming Head 1938. Tempera on wood. 47.6 x 78, Tate Gallery, London.
47. Roland Penrose Magnetic Moths 1938. Collage, crayon, pencil on cardboard. 55.8 x 81.3. Tate Gallery, London.
48. E.L.T. Mesens Homage to Francis Picabia 27/1963. Collage, 26 x 20. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.

49. E.L.T. Mesens La Pensée Libérée 6/1960. Collage. Collection Collection I.C. Frigerio, Milan.
50. E.L.T. Mesens L'évidence m'aime 1/1954. Collage. Collection Marc Hendrickx, Rhode-St-Genese.
51. E.L.T. Mesens Duck soup sur fond vert 17/1961. Collage, 22 x 29.5. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
52. E.L.T. Mesens Fausse fuyantes 12/1954. Collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
53. E.L.T. Mesens Marine Marconisée 38/1961. Collage. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
54. E.L.T. Mesens The World of Plenty 7/1963. Collage, oil and ink, 49 x 36. Private collection.
55. E.L.T. Mesens Charmants calculs des probabilités de la vessie-cul billiard 2/1955. Collage, 15 x 48. Collection Paride Accetti, Milan.
56. E.L.T. Mesens Jumelles (de théâtre) étreignant des frères siamois 12/1959, gouache, ink and collage. Collection Tristan Sauvage, Milan.
57. E.L.T. Mesens Arbre Glabre 24/1965. Collage. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
58. E.L.T. Mesens Inscription 37/1961, gouache, ink and collage. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
59. E.L.T. Mesens Le barbier de Seville 11/1968. Collage and oil, 21 x 27. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
60. E.L.T. Mesens Variations for the milkman 2/1970. Collage. Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
61. E.L.T. Mesens Les profits du fumeur 10/1954. Collage and ink. Collection J.B. Urvater, Rhode-St-Genese.
62. Kurt Schwitters Miss Blanche 1923. Collage, 15.6 x 12.5. Collection Dr. Werner Schmalenbach.
63. E.L.T. Mesens Le carnaval de Venise 3/1954. Collage.
64. E.L.T. Mesens Nu-Klee-US 10/1970. Collage 31 x 24. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
65. E.L.T. Mesens Apparition dated H.C./1961. Collage and gouache. Present whereabouts unknown.

66. E.L.T. Mesens Dans le jardin de Rosamonde 32/1965. Collage 32 x 25. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
67. E.L.T. Mesens Evidence poétique (I) Style E.L.T. 23/1963, oil, ink, pencil and collage. 74.5 x 49.5. Private collection, Brussels.
68. E.L.T. Mesens La partition complète complétée for Marcel Duchamp's Band 1945. Collage. Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
69. E.L.T. Mesens Black Music 1957. Collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
70. E.L.T. Mesens La Musique 13/1958. Collage and gouache. Collection Louise Behrendo, London.
71. E.L.T. Mesens Thème de ballet 29/1960. Collage 22 x 29.5. Tate Gallery, London.
72. E.L.T. Mesens C'était presque mon portrait 1/62. Collage 47 x 36. Galleria Schwartz, Milan.
73. Max Ernst Loplop 1932. Collage, 65 x 57.8. Menil Foundation.
74. Max Ernst Plein Vol, undated collage, 45.5 x 54. Galerie Motte, Geneva.
75. E.L.T. Mesens La Siestre 6/1961. Collage 21 x 28.6. Sold Sotheby & Co., July 4th, 1973.
76. E.L.T. Mesens Mauvais présage 20/65. Collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
77. Enrico Baj Générale 1961. Collage, 146 x 114. Galerie Ance Pauli, Lausanne.
78. E.L.T. Mesens Paysage II 16/1958. Collage and gouache, 41.2 x 52.5. Collection Gustave Van Geliuve, Brussels.
79. Illustrations for Variétés no. 6, June 1929.
80. E.L.T. Mesens Marine 24/1961. Gouache, collage and pencil. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
81. E.L.T. Mesens Main nue II 12/1961. Collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
82. E.L.T. Mesens L'oeil, les deux 20/1957. Transparent collage. Collection Gigina Baj, Milan.

83. E.L.T. Mesens L'Etat-major 20/1962. Collage. Tate Gallery, London.
84. E.L.T. Mesens Salut aux Alpinistes 30/1965. Collage. Private collection.
85. E.L.T. Mesens Parmi les palais, les statues 26/1960. Collage. Sold Sotheby & Co., July 4th, 1973.
86. E.L.T. Mesens Souvenir de la Laguna 12/1968. Collage. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
87. E.L.T. Mesens Au Bord des mots 4/1956. Collage and gouache, 22.9 x 30.3. Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
88. E.L.T. Mesens A l'oeil nu 4/1957. Collage, 24.1 x 31.3. Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
89. E.L.T. Mesens Mouvement immobile 36/1960. Collage and gouache, 31 x 49.6. Tate Gallery, London.
90. E.L.T. Mesens Grand mariage des E. H.C./1961. Collage and gouache. Collection Sergio d'Angelo, Milan.
91. E.L.T. Mesens Anti-symbole 21/1971. Collage and ink, 45 x 39. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
92. E.L.T. Mesens Les tristes frères dans leur île 21/1962. Collage, gouache and ink. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
93. E.L.T. Mesens Verdures dorées 25/1960. Collage, 32.8 x 53.5. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
94. E.L.T. Mesens Télégramme à Mimi 21/1961. Collage and oil on paper. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
95. E.L.T. Mesens L'attente 26/1961. Gouache, inks and collage. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
96. E.L.T. Mesens Le baiser 41/1961. Collage and gouache. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
97. E.L.T. Mesens Composition 1967. Collage and gouache. Present whereabouts unknown.
98. E.L.T. Mesens Lesbienne pour porc de mer 29/1970. Collage and gouache, 28 x 21. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
99. E.L.T. Mesens Pour l'amour du ciel 2/1960. Collage and gouache. Present whereabouts unknown.

100. E.L.T. Mesens Clair de lune sur marine agitée par les mauvaises nouvelles 9/1962. Collage and gouache. Grosvenor Gallery, London.
101. E.L.T. Mesens Paysage I 15/1958. Collage and gouache, 41.2 x 52.5. Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
102. E.L.T. Mesens Ciel et terre 2/1959. Collage 31 x 39.5. Sold Sotheby and Co., December 9th, 1971.
103. E.L.T. Mesens Hommage à William Blake 11/1965. Collage and gouache. Present whereabouts unknown.
104. E.L.T. Mesens La main heureuse 18/1960. Collage and wash. Collection Macchiati, Milan.
105. E.L.T. Mesens Centre sec 10/1955. Collage. Collection Gilbert Perier, Brussels.
106. E.L.T. Mesens La noctambule 4/1959. Collage object, 35 x 35. Formerly collection Jacques B. Brunius, London.
107. E.L.T. Mesens Tension modérée 39/1961. Collage. Galleria Arturo Schwartz, Milan.
108. E.L.T. Mesens Allées et venues 38/1960. Collage, 22 x 29. Sold Sotheby and Co., July 4th, 1973.
109. E.L.T. Mesens La prison agréable 12/1958. Transparent double sided collage. Collection Carlo E. Accetti, Milan.
110. E.L.T. Mesens The Square 1960. Collage and wash. Present whereabouts unknown.
111. E.L.T. Mesens Le forestier 9/1963. Collage, oil, ink and gouache, 50 x 38.5. Collection Hugo van de Perre, London.
112. E.L.T. Mesens Le goût des altitudes 10/1968. Collage and gouache. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
113. E.L.T. Mesens L'Alternative 3/1963. Collage. Sold Sotheby and Co., July 4th, 1973.
114. E.L.T. Mesens Foundation 25/1962. Collage. Collection Prof. Renato Cardazzio, Venice.
115. René Magritte L'usage des paroles 1929. Oil on canvas, 59 x 80. William N. Copley collection.

116. E.L.T. Mesens Lady Kite of Regents Park H.C./1965. Collage and gouache. Sold Sotheby and Co., April 13th, 1972.
117. E.L.T. Mesens Fleur-Cloche
Bell flower pour bal malin H.C./1967. Ink and pastels. Present whereabouts unknown.
118. E.L.T. Mesens Wig wag wog wig wa 15/1968. Ink, gouache and pastels, 33 x 23. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
119. E.L.T. Mesens Enfant, il jouait de la flute verticale sur son roseau 14/1968. Collage, ink and oil. Present whereabouts unknown.
120. E.L.T. Mesens Le samedi soir dans les parcs 35/1961. Collage, coloured pencils, metal pastel. Galleria Schwartz, Milan.
121. E.L.T. Mesens Main fortement stimulée flottant entre ciel et terre 1/1964. Collage. Present whereabouts unknown.
122. E.L.T. Mesens Sablier à deux faces 13/1960. Collage and oil. Collection Signora Lili Brioschi, Milan.
123. E.L.T. Mesens Les mains, les pieds, la cravatte mentale ... et l'oeil 28/1970. Collage. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
124. E.L.T. Mesens Simples (IV) 4/70. Collage, 22 x 28. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
125. E.L.T. Mesens Les violins verts violent aussi bien que les violins noirs 12/1965. Collage and gouache. Present whereabouts unknown.
126. E.L.T. Mesens Au repos des cubistes 8/1963. Collage, 30 x 42.5. Present whereabouts unknown.
127. E.L.T. Mesens Violin étoilé donnant naissance à un enfant pointilliste 18/1963. Collage, ink and gouache, 42.5 x 32. Private collection, Brussels.
128. E.L.T. Mesens Deuxième hommage à Francis Picabia 39/1970. Collage and ink, 44.5 x 29. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
129. E.L.T. Mesens Hommage à Apollinaire 11/1962. Collage. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.
130. E.L.T. Mesens Manhattan 39/60. Collage, ink and wash, 28 x 33. Present whereabouts unknown.
131. E.L.T. Mesens Enigme (II) 22/1961. Collage and gouache. Grosvenor Gallery, London.

132. E.L.T. Mesens Figures équivoques vivants dans leur entourage 4/1962. Collage and oil. Collection Giulio Zattera, Venice.
133. E.L.T. Mesens Ophélie 10/1959. Collage and gouache. Private collection, Brussels.
134. Lucien Freud A Room in West Sussex 1944. Dimensions and present whereabouts unknown.
135. Valentine Penrose Collage, undated. Dimensions and present whereabouts unknown.
136. Conroy Maddox In the Warehouse of Convulsions 1945, collage. Private collection, London.
137. Kurt Schwitters, cover design for Anne Blume Dichtungen 1919, 21.5 x 14. Private collection.
138. Eduardo Paolozzi I was a Rich Man's Plaything 1947, mixed media, 35.5 x 23.7. Tate Gallery, London.
139. E.L.T. Mesens, 1965.

APPENDIX A

The extract below is taken from 'Le miroir infidèle', Le Savoir Vivre, Brussels, 1946, in which Mesens published his views at length.

Mesens' response was in answer to the questions below:

1. Quelles sont les choses que vous détestez le plus?
 2. Quelles sont les choses que vous aimez le plus?
 3. Quelles sont les choses que vous souhaitez le plus?
 4. Quelles sont les choses que vous redoutez le plus?
-
1. a) La morale chrétienne; la civilisation judéo-chrétienne (sous ses aspects capitaliste ou matérialiste, opportuniste, humanitaire, charitable ou socialiste primaire); la religion et tout ce qui la représente (symboles, images, églises, personnel intercesseur).
b) L'idée de patrie; le patriotisme (qu'il soit d'inspiration stalinienne ou national-socialiste, républicaine, impérialiste, raciste ou démocratique).
c) Dans les catégories professionnelles: les journalistes (les plus infâmes des salariés); les politiciens professionnels; les militaires et très particulièrement ceux "de carrière".
d) Parmi les méthodes: la standardisation (prison pour l'imagination; empoisonneuse du goût, de choix, de la qualité, du désir); le rationalisme qui a eu pour conséquence la mécanisation du troupeau humain et qui ne peut qu'engendrer des régimes totalitaires.
e) Parmi les conquêtes dites progressistes: L'instruction obligatoire, responsable du nombre fabuleux et grandissant d'imbéciles qui pullulent sur cette terre. (Jadis l'inculte cultivait son champ et le faisait bien, avec amour et poésie. A présent des millions de médiocres ne cultivent rien du tout, pas même une manie. La demi-nuit de leur esprit et de leur corps éclaire à peine leur entrée dans une légion fasciste ou un parti politique et dès cet instant ils se mettent à revendiquer une place au soleil pour leur imbecillité. C'est alors que leurs chefs leur offrent une guerre, panacée universelle, et vite ... que veut du galon, que veut de la médaille? Les canailles-imbéciles suppriment quelques chefs et se mettent à leur place pendant que les moutons-imbéciles, gobant du Christ et trinquant au drapeau, se font casser la geule sur un champ de bataille. Et les dispensateurs de l'instruction obligatoire continuent l'enseignement des mêmes symboles et de la même éthique au nom desquels les générations montantes s'apprêtent à suivre le même chemin).
 2. a) Le plaisir physique sous ses formes les plus riches et les plus variées, à toute heure du jour et de la nuit, de la naissance

jusqu'à la mort; l'homme et la femme nus en présence; la femme dans tout ce qu'elle a de plus dissemblable de l'homme (tout mystère révélé, bien entendu).

- b) Le travail de dilection.
- c) L'honnêteté et la rigueur dans les échanges et les rapports. L'opinion exprimée constamment sans réserve et sans fard.
- d) Parmi mes goûts personnels: Le gin en moyenne quantité; le genièvre hollandais (un seul petit verre); le whisky écossais et irlandais en assez grande quantité sans eau; l'absinthe (deux verres, de préférence dans les environs du Jardin du Luxembourg entre 6 h. et 7 h. du soir); le slivowitz (orthographe?) (une demi-bouteille dans les environs de Salzbourg mais loin des spectacles de M. Max Reinhardt); l'armagnac après dîner (surtout après un médiocre dîner londonien en temps de paix); le canard à l'orange; les anguilles au vert; la bouillabaisse; la saucisse de Toulouse; pommes purée; la laitue braisée; les asperges à la vinaigrette; les huîtres; le camembert; le gorgonzola mais mûri au porto comme le stilton; le saucisson d'Arles; le jambon de Parme; la tête de veau en tortue (servi très chaud); la cigarette américaine; l'odeur des tabacs anglais pour la pipe (roulés dans la main, je ne fume pas la pipe); le cigare havane frais de grand format; le cigare de la Jamaïque (à défaut du précédent); l'odeur du naphthé de l'ammoniaque; l'odeur du crottin de cheval à la campagne; la toile à voile; le carton ondulé.

(Note: Je pense qu'il est hors de propos d'aborder ici mes préférences en poésie ou en peinture. D'ailleurs ceux qui me connaissent savent à quoi s'en tenir.)

- 3. (Note: Il y a six ans j'aurais encore répondu sans hésiter: 'La révolution prolétarienne mondiale'. Je n'aurai pas l'hypocrisie de simuler, à cette heure, le moindre espoir en celle-ci. Il est un peu tard dans le monde. Le prolétariat et ses chefs ressemblent dialectiquement à leurs oppresseurs et leurs chefs.)
 - a) La faillite de tous les régimes politiques; l'abandon de toutes les religions et tous les symboles.
 - b) L'avènement c'est-à-dire la compréhension de la réalité entière.
 - c) L'égalisation de toutes les valeurs. Exemples:
 - 1. Une pomme = un serpent.
 - 2. Echanger un tableau de maître contre une bicyclette.
 - 3. Porter comme parure une couronne de couteaux de cuisine au lieu d'un collier de perles fines.
 - d) La suppression de toutes les formes de consécration civique et religieuses du mariage et de la famille; l'extension des formes d'association à tous les âges, toutes les races, tous les métiers et droit absolu pour l'individu de s'en retirer pour créer une autre forme ou pour s'isoler; la liberté concrète.
- 4. Et! bien, je ne redoute rien, si ce n'est que notre civilisation moribonde prenne beaucoup trop de temps à crever.

3. **Vivre à Paris, ou alternativement à Paris et à Bruxelles - être libre (je veux dire vivre sans la contrainte du gagne-pain).**
4. **La guerre - l'empiétement des servitudes sociales et matérielles (encore le gagne-pain) sur la part de mon existence qui réussit encore à lui échapper.**

APPENDIX B

One man exhibitions of Mesens' collages, listed chronologically

- Galerie Furstenburg, Paris, April 1958.
Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, April - May 1959.
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, November 1960.
Grosvenor Gallery, London, February 1961.
Hessenhuis, Antwerp, April - May 1961.
Palais des Beaux Arts, Charleroi, May - June 1961.
Galerie des Beaux Arts, Bordeaux, May - September 1961.
Galleria del Cavallino, Venice, May - June 1962.
The Man Gallery, New York, October - November 1962.
Salle 'La Reserve' - Knokke-le-Zoute, July - August 1963.
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, April - May 1965.
Galerie de la Madeleine, Brussels, May 1966.
Galleria il Fauno, Turin, April - May 1970.
Galerie Fonck, Ghent, October 1970.
Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, April - May 1971.
Galerie des Beaux Arts, Bordeaux, May - September 1971.
Acoris, the Surrealist Art Centre, London, January - March 1974.

APPENDIX C

Group exhibitions in which Mesens' work was exhibited,
listed chronologically.

Foto-Auge, Stuttgart, 1929.

Exposition International du Photographie et Cinéma, Brussels, 1931.

International Surrealist Exhibition, New Burlington Galleries, London,
London, June - July 1936.

Collages and objects, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1954.

Three Collagists, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, November 1954.

Free Painters Group, Woodstock Gallery, London, February - March 1959.

Group 13, Summer Exhibition (Free Painters Group), Kaplan Gallery,
London, Summer 1959.

Free Painters Group, Drian Gallery, London, December 1959.

International Surrealist Exhibition, Galerie Daniel Cordier, Paris, Winter
1959 - '60.

Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain, D'Arcy Galleries, New York,
Winter 1960 - '61.

Mixed Exhibition, Brook St. Gallery, London, February - March 1961.

Mostra Internazionale del Surrealismo, Galleria Schwartz, Milan, May 1961.

Five Belgian Painters, Grabowski Gallery, London, June - July 1961.

Free Painters, Quantas Gallery, London, November - December 1961.

La cinquième saison, Galerie du Ranelagh, Paris, June - August 1961.

Divergences 1961, Quantas Gallery, London, November - December 1961.

Aspects 62, Galerie du Fleuve, Paris, October 1962.

La Part du Rêve, Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels,
April - May 1964.

Phases, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, October - November 1964.

Free Painters, F.B.A. Galleries, London, Summer 1965.

Collages E.L.T. Mesens, Marc Eemans, Hessenhuis, Antwerp, Summer 1966.

Exposition d'ouverture, Galerie 44, Brussels, October 1966.

Le Surréalisme, Pavilion H. Rubenstein, Tel Aviv, December 1966.

Le Surréalisme, Gemeente Museum, Arnhem, Summer 1967.

Introduction au Surréalisme en Belgique, Musée d'ancien abbaye,
Stavelot, June - July 1967.

Trésors du Surréalisme, Knokke-le-Zoute, Summer 1968.

Le Surréalisme en Belgique, Musée d'Etat, Luxembourg, 1968.

Art sans frontières, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, January - February 1970.

L'Art en Europe autour de 1925, Strasbourg, May 1970.

Jiri Kolar and E.L.T. Mesens, Grosvenor Gallery, London, April - May 1970.

Surrealist Collages, Grosvenor Gallery, London, Summer 1970.

Mixed Exhibition, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, September - October 1970.

Tendances Surréalistes en Belgique, Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, Brussels, September - November 1970.

L'Eternel Surréalisme, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, October - November 1970.

Métamorphose de l'objet, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, April - June 1971.

The Belgian Contribution to Surrealism, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, August 1971.

Peintres d'imaginaire, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, February - April, 1972.

Phases, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, October - November 1974.

APPENDIX D

Mesens Collection

Mesens began collecting works of art in the early 1920s, the first being Dada collages by Max Ernst and quasi-Cubist paintings by René Magritte. He did not distinguish between his own private collection and those works which he had for sale, either during the periods when he was actively working as a commercial dealer or after the closure of the London Gallery in 1951. He continued to buy and sell works of art privately after this date and was able to make a living by this means and by the sale of his own collages.

It is known that in the 1950s and 1960s he kept about three hundred paintings in England, while an unspecified number were stored in Brussels¹ - in particular most of his Magrittes (about sixty in all)². Mesens died intestate in 1971 and the collection was inherited by his nearest relatives in Brussels. Since his death, access to the collection has not in general been possible and to the author's knowledge, no catalogue exists. Sixty-six paintings and drawings were sold at Sotheby's in April 1972:³ these were mainly by artists involved with the British Surrealist group including Roland Penrose, John Banting, Conroy Maddox, Eileen Agar and Humphrey Jennings, though two works by the Continental Surrealists Richard Oelze and Konrad Klapheke were included.

An exhaustive study of Mesens as a collector remains outside the confines of this thesis, and, since much of the collection has already been dispersed, may never be possible. The list below consists of a number of works of art known to have been owned by Mesens after the Second World War and is included merely as an attempt to indicate generally the range of Mesens' taste, and to suggest the connection between his interests as a collector and as an artist in his own right. The list has been compiled from catalogues and from information provided by one of the legatees.

The collection was notable for the large number of early Magrittes, in particular those painted during the mid-1920s when Magritte dramatically changed his style as a result of his contact with Surrealism. L'Homme blanc 1923⁴ is considered by Vovelle to be the first work to have been influenced by De Chirico in its spatial concept - two figures are set in a plain darkened room which looks out onto a somewhat mysterious open space. Mesens owned at least five⁵ rare papiers collés made by Magritte in 1925 and 1926.⁶ These are constructed of manuscript music paper, newspaper, filigree cut papers, and indian ink on charcoal. One of these was a collage version of Le jockey perdu 1926⁷ which marked Magritte's transition to Surrealism during that year. In this work, images of ballusters are made of music paper and set as if on a stage with painted curtains each side: the ballusters were to be recurrent motifs in Magritte's work. The following year Magritte began to paint pictures inspired by the Fantomas films: Mesens owned the best known of these L'Assassin menacé⁸ 1927, which with its bowlerhatted men and naked female corpse suggests some mysterious and melodramatic clip from a film in its tense photographic imagery.⁹

Among the dozen¹⁰ Mirós owned by Mesens, of which ten are listed below, was Tête de paysan Catalan 1925, painted two years after the artist had developed his schematic and symbolic style. In this work, the head of a peasant is depicted by a cross topped by the red Catalan liberty cap.¹¹ Mesens loved the work of both Miró and Klee, and possessed "numerous"¹² drawings and paintings by the latter, though only five have been traced by the author, dated between 1914 and 1924. The influence of Klee on Mesens has been considered at length in Chapter 13.

He also owned a number of interesting early collages by Max Ernst and Man Ray, in particular Ernst's Die chinesische Nachtigall 1919 of which Breton wrote:

"The human head that opens up, flies around then enfolds its thoughts like a fan, the head falling back on its hair as on a lace pillow, the fragile weightless head teetering down between truth and falsehood..."¹³

Man Ray made only a few Dada collages during the First World War and the two owned by Mesens, Love Fingers 1916 and Theatr' 1916 (fig. 9) were

to have echoes in his own work: Theatr' is composed of isolated letters on a background of newspaper, the columns placed horizontally, while Mesens' collage Mouvement immobile 36/60 (fig. 89) has isolated letters glued onto a background of symmetrically arranged post office stamp books. The images in Man Ray's Love Fingers are made from brown card, a material which Mesens frequently used later instead of canvas on paper, or as material for motifs such as Black Music (fig. 69).

Mesens' interest in collage led him to purchase a number of works by Schwitters, though to the author's knowledge none was left in his collection when he died. No catalogue has been traced from the London Gallery to indicate which Schwitters belonged to Mesens, so it has not been possible to include these in the list below. Mesens possessed a photomontage by John Heartfield and it is unusual to find a work by this collagist in a private collection.¹⁴

In the late 1930s and 1940s Mesens bought work by painters associated with the British Surrealist group, and as has been indicated in Chapters 11 and 12, these formed part of the main stock of the London Gallery. The Jockey 1936, by Roland Penrose, is a work which combines flat, angular planes of colour giving a collage effect; this work contrasts with Antonio Pedro's Nude Woman 1945 in which the back of an armchair is transformed into the torso of a naked woman. Pedro, who was a follower of Dali, was briefly associated with the London Surrealists between 1943 and 1945, though he abandoned painting in 1950.¹⁵ Mesens enjoyed works in which strange metamorphoses of objects took place, or which were naïve like those of Scottie Wilson, or fantastic like those of Edgar Ende.¹⁶ He also collected works which he found simply amusing or unusual: he owned a nineteenth century still life depicting a Moët et Chandon bottle of champagne, celery, oysters and a box of cigars, which had subsequently been used as an advertisement for champagne,¹⁷ and also an 'object' Dolly made by Jann Haworth in 1965 which is a foam rubber figure of a woman wearing a brightly coloured nylon corset, suspenders and black stockings. The latter was the only Pop Art work in the collection and since Mesens was not sympathetic to the Pop Art movement at all, one can safely assume that the object appealed to him simply because it was amusing.

About twenty of the works sold at Sotheby's were by little known British painters purchased by Mesens during the late 1940s when the London Gallery was struggling to survive. These consisted of landscapes, gouaches and vaguely abstract works, which according to George Melly¹⁸ Mesens had been forced to buy and sell in order to try and keep the London Gallery solvent.

In the 1950s and 1960s during the revival of interest in Dada and Surrealism Mesens was approached on numerous occasions by galleries both private and public to lend his pictures for exhibition. He was often most unwilling to co-operate and particularly disliked sending any of his pictures abroad. After the closure of the London Gallery in 1951 none of Mesens' collection was ever shown as a whole, and had it remained intact after his death it would have provided a unique opportunity for a study of the development of Dada and Surrealist art in Britain and Europe.

In the following list of paintings, drawings and sculpture, the dimensions where known are given in centimetres, height preceding width. The details and original titles of some of the pictures have not been traced. Artists are listed in alphabetical order and unless otherwise stated the medium is oil on canvas.

Agar, Eileen	<u>Composition with Leaves and a Profile</u> undated, coloured chalks and gouache, 33 x 42.5.
Banting, John	<u>A Fantastic Figure in an Open Landscape</u> undated, pen, ink and watercolour, 55 x 35.
Banting, John	<u>The Quarrel in the Cloakroom</u> 1934, pencil, pen and ink and watercolour, 65.5 x 101.5.
Craxton, John	<u>Galatas</u> undated.
De Chirico, Giorgio	<u>La mort d'un esprit</u> 1915, 35 x 37.5.
De la Fresnaye, Roger	<u>Nu</u> undated, drawing.
De Maistre, Roy	<u>Orchestra</u> 1934, on board, 90 x 59. (Listed as <u>Concert</u> , catalogue <u>Art in Britain 1930-'40 centred round Axis, Circle and Unit One</u> Marlborough Fine Art, London, March - April 1965.)

Delvaux, Paul	<u>L'orage</u> 1962.
Dominguez, Oscar	<u>Le chasseur</u> 1935.
Eemans, Marc	<u>De einden</u> 1927.
Eemans, Marc	<u>Het heilig virum</u> 1928
Eemans, Marc	<u>Klimopbladeren</u> 1928
Ende, Edgar	<u>Three Figures in a Dark Landscape</u> (original German title not traced) 1933, 69 x 89.
Ende Edgar	<u>Figures in a Seascape</u> (original German title not traced) 1934, 68.5 x 89.
Ensor, James	<u>Masques</u> 1901, indian ink.
Ernst, Max	<u>Composition</u> 1914, 69.5 x 54.
Ernst, Max	<u>Die chinesische Nachtigall</u> 1919, collage, 56 x 40.
Ernst, Max	<u>Au dessous des nuages marche la minuit. Au dessous de la minuit plane l'oiseau invisible du jour. Un peu plus haut que l'oiseau l'éther pousse les murs et les toits flottent</u> 1919, collage, 56 x 39.
Ernst, Max	<u>L'enigme de l'Europe centrale</u> 1919, collage, 17 x 23.
Ernst, Max	<u>Die anatomie - mariée anatomie</u> 1921, collage, 24 x 18.
Ernst, Max	<u>La santé par le sport</u> undated, photographic enlargement of a collage.
Ernst, Max	<u>La fleur du désert</u> 1925, collage, 77 x 58.
Ernst, Max	<u>Forêt</u> 1926, oil on canvas, 54 x 96.
Ernst, Max	<u>Marine</u> 1926, oil on canvas, 81 x 65.
Ernst, Max	<u>Forêt</u> 1926, 72 x 91.
Ernst, Max	<u>Forêt sombre et oiseau</u> 1926, 65 x 81.
Ernst, Max	<u>Histoire naturelle</u> 1926, frottage.
Ernst, Max	<u>Couple dans les flammes</u> 1927, 81 x 100.
Ernst, Max	<u>Danseuses</u> 1927, object, paint on paper in a box, 62 x 52.
Ernst, Max	<u>Personnage</u> 1932.
Ernst, Max	<u>Hommage à un enfant nommé Violette</u> 1934, collage, oil, pencil on canvas, 89 x 115.
Feibusch, Hans	<u>Two Heads</u> (original title not traced) 1940, 44 x 59.5.
Floquet, Pierre	<u>Scène de magie</u> 1934.

French School , 19th century	<u>Still Life</u> (with a bottle of Moët et Chandon, celery, oysters, a box of cigars and other objects on a table) 44.5 x 70.
Gleeson, James	<u>Fantastic Figures</u> undated, pen, ink and watercolour, 50 x 37.
Gleeson, James	<u>Fantastic Figures</u> undated, pen, ink and watercolour, 48.5 x 36.5.
Gris, Juan	<u>Nature morte</u> 1918, 47 x 55.
Haworth, Jann	<u>Dolly</u> 1965, foam rubber construction with nylon and plastic.
Heartfield, John	<u>Der friedfertige Raubfisch</u> 1937, Photomontage.
Jennings, Humphrey	<u>Horse</u> undated, watercolour, 21.5 x 29.5.
Klaphek, Konrad	<u>Die Frühereife</u> undated, 70 x 60.5.
Klee, Paul	<u>Szene aus Kairuan</u> 1914, ink and watercolour, 31.2 x 21.5.
Klee, Paul	<u>Image of a Garden</u> (original title not traced) 1919.
Klee, Paul	<u>Garten</u> 1920, 49 x 42.5.
Klee, Paul	<u>The Face of a Market Place</u> (original title not traced) 1922.
Klee, Paul	<u>Am Follenbach</u> 1924.
Kubin, Alfred	<u>Citoyen soutenu par l'empire</u> undated, lithograph, 27x 19.
Lam, Wilfredo	<u>Les deux yeux</u> 1936.
Laurens, Henri	<u>Guitare</u> 1918.
Lemmen, Georges	<u>The Artist's Wife</u> 1892, red chalk, 38 x 35.5.
McWilliam F.E.	<u>Ears and Jawbones</u> undated, lithograph in colours with watercolour additions, 38 x 55.5.
Maddox, Conroy	<u>The Conspiracy of the Child</u> undated, 45.5 x 35.
Maddox, Conroy	<u>Full Moon</u> 1968, watercolour and collage, 40.5 x 32.5.
Magritte, René,	<u>Georgette</u> 1923, 41 x 30.5.
Magritte, René	<u>Rêve d'étudiant</u> 1924, oil and Ripolin on canvas, 80 x 70.
Magritte, René	Collage without title 1925-6, gouache, indian ink and stuck paper, 38.5 x 54.5.
Magritte, René	Collage without title 1925-6, gouache, watercolour, charcoal and stuck paper, 39.5 x 55.
Magritte, René	Collage without title 1926, indian ink and stuck paper, 42.5 x 58.

Magritte, René	<u>La femme du fantôme</u> 1926, 114.5 x 163.
Magritte, René	<u>L'aube à Cayenne</u> 1926, 100 x 73.
Magritte, René	<u>Les habitants du fleuve</u> 1926, 74 x 98.
Magritte, René	<u>Les grands voyages</u> 1926, 65 x 150.
Magritte, René	<u>L'assassin menacé</u> 1926, 152 x 195.
Magritte, René	<u>Panorama populaire</u> 1926, 120 x 80.
Magritte, René	<u>Le groupe silencieux</u> , 1926, 128 x 80.
Magritte, René	<u>Le joueur secret</u> 1926, 152 x 195.
Magritte, René	<u>L'atlantide</u> 1927 (this work was first entitled <u>Le reflet</u>) 100 x 73.
Magritte, René	<u>L'avenir des statues</u> 1927, object. A plaster cast of Napoleon's head on his death bed. Magritte painted a clouded sky over it.
Magritte, René	<u>Les objets familiers</u> 1928, 81 x 116.
Magritte, René	<u>La promesse salutaire</u> 1928, 73 x 54.
Magritte, René	<u>Les traces vivantes</u> 1928, 50 x 65.5.
Magritte, René	<u>L'usage de la parole</u> 1928-9, 54 x 73.
Magritte, René	<u>Le miroir magique</u> 1928-9, 73 x 54.
Magritte, René	<u>Le sens propre</u> 1928-9, 73 x 54.
Magritte, René	<u>L'annonciation</u> 1929, 114 x 146.
Magritte, René	<u>La nuit populaire</u> 1929.
Magritte, René	<u>La nuit blanche</u> 1929.
Magritte, René	<u>L'invention collective</u> 1935, 73.5 x 116.
Magritte, René	<u>Le mal du pays</u> 1941, 100 x 81.
Magritte, René	<u>L'art de la conversation</u> 1950, 65 x 80.
Magritte, René	<u>Le secret d'état</u> 1952, 46 x 38.
Masson, André	<u>Dessin automatique</u> undated 62.3 x 47.5.
Miró, Joan	<u>Danseuse nègre</u> 1921.
Miró, Joan	<u>Tête de paysan catalan</u> 1925, 91 x 73.
Miró, Joan	<u>La main blanche</u> 1925, 116 x 89.
Miró, Joan	<u>Les amoureux</u> 1925, 73 x 92.
Miró, Joan	<u>Le cri</u> 1925, 89 x 116.
Miró, Joan	<u>Le coït</u> 1926, 91 x 74.
Miró, Joan	<u>Leda</u> 1926.

Miró, Joan	<u>Musique</u> 1927, 81 x 100.
Miró, Joan	<u>Adultère</u> 1928.
Miró, Joan	<u>Deux femmes</u> 1935, 75 x 105.
Morris, Desmond	<u>The Dove</u> 1948, oil and composition in relief, 58 x 67.
Onslow-Ford, Gordon	<u>The Determination of Gender</u> 1939, 90 x 71.
Oelze, Richard	<u>L'Attente</u> 1935, pencil drawing 37.5 x 45; a study for the large painting 1935-36 in the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Paun, Paul	<u>Interior with Fantastic Figures</u> 1943, 36 x 26.5.
Paun, Paul	<u>A Fantastic Figure</u> 1943, pen and ink, 36 x 26.5.
Paun, Paul	<u>Composition</u> 1945, pen and ink, 43.5 x 30.5.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>A Fantastic Figure and Animal in an Interior</u> 1944 40.5 x 51.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>Interior with Skeleton</u> 1944, 43 x 33.5.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>Hands Flying</u> 1944, 59 x 49.5.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>Nude Woman</u> 1945, 62 x 75.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>Head with Mushrooms</u> 1945, 24 x 32.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>Hand, Dove and Wineglass</u> 1945, 39 x 28.
Pedro, Antonio	<u>Surrealist Composition with Nudes</u> 1947, 44.5 x 34.5.
Penrose, Sir Roland	<u>The Jockey</u> 1936, 100 x 85.
Picabia, Francis	<u>La ville de New York aperçue à travers le corps</u> 1913, watercolour on paper, 55.7 x 75.
Ray, Man	<u>Love Fingers</u> 1916, collage, 60 x 46.
Ray, Man	<u>Theatr'</u> 1916, collage, 45.8 x 61.
Ray, Man	<u>Seguidilla</u> 1919, aerograph.
Rose-Pulham, Peter	<u>Dark Figure</u> 1947, 80 x 99.
Rose-Pulham, Peter	<u>Trompe l'oeil à clef</u> undated, 75 x 120.5.
Rose-Pulham, Peter	<u>Grisaille: Figures II</u> 1947, 80 x 100.
Rose-Pulham, Peter	<u>La Cheminée</u> 1948, 72.5 x 91.
Stephenson, Cecil	<u>Composition</u> undated, gouache 42.5 x 48.5.
Survage, Leopold	<u>Paysage</u> undated.
Tanguy, Yves	<u>A l'oreille des voyantes</u> 1937.
Toorop, Charley	<u>Portrait d'Edouard Mesens</u> 1926.

Wilson, Scottie	<u>A Fantastic Composition</u> undated, pen, ink and coloured chalks, 36 x 25.
Wilson, Scottie	<u>Composition with Fantastic Birds and Faces</u> undated, pen and ink and coloured chalks, 24.5 x 35.
Wilson, Scottie	<u>A Fantastic Composition with Fish</u> undated 33 x 26.5.
Wilson, Scottie	<u>A Head in Darkness</u> , pen and ink and coloured chalks, 19 x 18.
Wilson, Scottie	<u>Composition with Fantastic Heads</u> black chalk, pen and ink, 20 x 12.5.

(Other English painters represented in the Mesens collection were Austin Cooper, Joseph Bard, John Pemberton, Alan Milner, Madeline Vyner, Barry Hirst, A. Lewis and Franciska Themerson.)

FOOTNOTES

1. Information provided by George Melly.
2. Ibid.
3. Catalogue of Modern British and Continental Drawings, Paintings and Sculpture. The Property of the late E.L.T. Mesens. Sotheby and Co. London, April 26th, 1972.
4. Vovelle op. cit. fig. 85, p.95.
5. Private collection, Brussels.
6. Twelve papiers collés were included in Magritte's first one man exhibition at the Centaure Gallery, Brussels, 1927. Catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed op. cit. p.338.
7. Gablik op. cit. fig. 16, p.30.
8. Ibid. fig. 39, p.48.
9. The Fantomas series of thriller films became very popular in Paris during the 1920s, and the fact that the diabolical anti-hero Fantomas never got caught greatly appealed to the Surrealists.
10. George Melly op. cit. Chapter 1 , note 10.
11. Op. cit. note 6, fig. 9.51, p.217.
12. Op. cit. note 10.
13. Cited catalogue Dada and Surrealism Reviewed op. cit. note 6, p.115.
14. Information provided by Frank Whitford.

15. René Passeron in The Phaidon Encyclopedia of Surrealism op. cit., notes that he formed a Portuguese Surrealist group in 1947 (p.217).
16. Born in Hamburg 1901, died Munich 1965. Passeron, *ibid.* wrote:
"Without being linked to any group, Ende developed a fantastic vision which established a connection between the tradition of German Romanticism and Surrealism"
(p.156).
17. / Op. cit. note 3, no pagination.
18. Op. cit. note 10.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Publications by Mesens chronologically by date of publication

- A. Poetry (Bibl. 1 - 5)
- B. Reviews and Periodicals edited by Mesens (Bibl. 6 - 16)
- C. Tracts countersigned by Mesens (Bibl. 17 - 30)
- D. Articles, commentaries and reviews (Bibl. 31 - 43)
- E. Gallery catalogues (Bibl. 44 - 58)
- F. General material on Dada and Surrealism (Bibl. 59 - 79)

Secondary Sources

- G. Critical writings on Mesens
Books and articles on Mesens arranged alphabetically by author (Bibl. 80 - 100)
- H. Books, articles and catalogues relating to Dada and Surrealism arranged alphabetically by author (Bibl. 101 - 152)
- I. General reference (Bibl. 153 - 189)

Primary Sources

Publications by Mesens. Chronologically by date of publication.

A. Poetry

1. Alphabet Sour d-Aveugle, Brussels, 1933.
2. Violette Nozières - poems by Mesens, Breton and others, Brussels, 1933.
3. Femme complète, Brussels, 1933.
4. Troisième Front, Poèmes suivi de pièces détachées. Translated from the French by Roland Penrose and the author, London, 1944.
5. Poèmes 1923 - 58, Paris, 1959.

B. Reviews and Periodicals edited by Mesens.

6. Oesophage - edited by Mesens and Magritte, Brussels, March 1925.
7. Marie - Nos. 1 - 4, Brussels, June, July 1926.
8. Variétés - Edited by P.G. Van Hecke, assisted by Mesens, Brussels, 1928 -9.
9. Distances - Nos. 1 - 3, edited by the Belgian Surrealist group, Paris, February - April, 1928.
10. Documents 34 - 'Intervention Surréaliste', special number edited by Stephanie Cordier and Mesens.
11. London Bulletin - Nos. 1 to 20, June 1938 to June 1940.
12. Message from Nowhere - edited by Mesens and Jacques Brunius, London, 1944.
13. Idolatry and Confusion - edited by Mesens and Jacques Brunius, London, 1944.
14. London Gallery News, London, 1947, 1950.
15. London Gallery Express, London, 1947.
16. Activities of the London Gallery, London, 1950.

C. Tracts and Manifestos countersigned by Mesens.

17. Quelques turpitudes, signed by Burssens, Hooreman, Magritte, Mesens, Nougé, Souris, Van Ostaijen and Eric de Haulleville. Brussels, October 6th, 1926.

18. Marées de la tour Eiffel, signed by Herbert Dubois, Camille Goemans, René Magritte, Mesens, Paul Nougé, André Souris. Brussels, November 1926.
19. Preface to Magritte exhibition at Galerie Epoque (organised by Mesens) signed by Goemans, Nougé, Mesens, Lecompte, Souris, Dehoy and Eemans. Brussels, 1928.
20. Poésie Transfigurée signed by Nougé, Magritte, Mesens, Souris. Brussels, November 1932.
21. Protestation signed by all the Belgian Surrealist group plus many others (50 signatures). Brussels, 1932.
22. L'Action immédiate signed by Nougé, Magritte, Mesens, Scutenaire. Brussels, 1935.
23. Les derniers stratagèmes - Nougé, Mesens and Magritte. Brussels, 1935.
24. Du temps que les Surréalistes avaient raison, signed by the group in Brussels. Brussels, August 1935.
25. Bulletin international du Surréalisme révolutionnaire. Brussels, August 1935.
26. Le couteau dans la plaie, signed by the group in Brussels, October 7th, 1935.
27. International Surrealist Bulletin no. 4, signed by Mesens and members of English and French Surrealist groups, July 7th, 1936.
28. Déclaration du groupe Surréaliste en Angleterre, signed by members of the English Surrealist group, Paris, 1947.
29. Démasquez les physiciens. VIDEZ les laboratoires, signed by members of the French Surrealist group, Paris, February 1958.
30. We don't EAT it that way, signed by members of the French Surrealist group, Paris, December 1960.

D. Articles, commentaries and reviews by Mesens appearing in periodicals.

31. 'En Scheldwoorden vloein' (published under the pseudonym Cornelis Nelly Mesens), Mecano, Nos. 4 - 5, Leiden, 1923.
32. 'Aphorisms' 391, No. 19, Paris, October 1924.
33. 'Hans Arp' Variétés, Brussels, December 1928.
34. 'James Ensor' The Listener, Vol. XXXV, London, February 1946.
35. 'René Magritte' in Peintres Belges Contemporains, Brussels, 1947.

36. 'Le Souvenir d'Erik Satie', La Revue Musicale, Paris, Vol. 214, June 1952.
37. 'Les apprentis MAGICIENS au pays de la pléthore', Les Arts Plastiques, numéro spécial, 'Le fantastique dans l'art belge de Bosch à Magritte', Brussels, June 1954.
38. 'Tribute to Kurt Schwitters', Art News and Review, Vol. X no. 19, London, October 1958.
39. 'The Cabinet of Curiosities', Saturday Book, London, 1959.
40. 'E.L.T. Mesens vous parle', Quadrum, no. 16, Paris, 1966.
41. 'Petit poème en prose', Surrealist Transformation No. 3, Sidmouth, November 1970.
42. Mesens on Magritte, a discussion between George Melly and Mesens. Transmitted on B.B.C. Third Programme, March 7th, 1969.
43. Strange Encounters - E.L.T. Mesens talks to George Melly. Transmitted on B.B.C. Third Programme, February 24th, 1970.

E. Articles and commentaries by Mesens appearing in gallery catalogues, chronologically by date of publication.

44. 'Letter to the New Statesman defending Henry Moore', London Bulletin Nos. 18 - 20, London, June 1940.
45. 'Surrealist Diversity, 1915 - 1945', Arcade Gallery, London, October 1945.
46. 'Since a few French Poets' preface to an exhibition Scottie Wilson, Arcade Gallery, London, 1945.
47. Cubist Spirit in its time, London Gallery, London, 1947.
48. 75 Oeuvres du demi-siècle, Salle de la Réserve, Knokke-le-Zoute, July - September 1951.
49. Retrospective des Oeuvres de Max Ernst, Salle de la Réserve, Knokke-le-Zoute, July - August 1953.
50. Les quatre points cardinaux du Surréalisme, Antwerp, April 1956.
51. Enrico Baj, Gallery One, London, September 1958.
52. Pierre Vitali, Galerie Mona Lisa, Paris, October 1961.
53. René Magritte, Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1961.
54. Philip Weichberger, Galerie de la Madeleine, Brussels, 1961.
55. Antonio Calderara, Galleria Schwartz, Milan, April 1965.
56. Conroy Maddox, John Whibley Gallery, November 1967.

- 57. The Enchanted Domain, Exeter Surrealist Festival, Exe Gallery, 1967.
- 58. Hommage à P.G. Van Hecke, Galerie Goevaerts, Brussels, December 1969.

F. General material on Dada and Surrealism, arranged alphabetically by author.

- 59. Apollinaire, Guillaume - Oeuvres, reprinted Paris, 1962.
- 60. Aragon, Louis - Les Collages, Paris, 1965.
- 61. Aragon, Louis - Paysan de Paris, Paris, 1924.
- 62. Arp, Hans - On My Way, translated from the French and German anonymously, New York, 1948.
- 63. Breton, André - Manifestos of Surrealism, translated from the French by R. Seaver and H. Lane, Michigan, 1969.
- 64. Breton, André - Surrealism and Painting, translated from the French by S.W. Taylor, New York, 1972.
- 65. Breton, André - What is Surrealism? Selected writings. Edited by F. Rosemont, London, 1978.
- 66. Duchamp, Marcel and Pierre Cabanne - Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, translated from the French by R. Padgett, London, 1971.
- 67. Eluard, Paul - Donner à voir, Paris, 1939.
- 68. Ernst, Max - Beyond Painting, translated from the French by D. Tanning, New York, 1948.
- 69. Lautréamont, Isidor Ducasse. Known as the Count de Lautréamont - Les Chants de Malador, Paris 1869 - 1874. Reprinted Paris, 1958.
- 70. Magritte, René - Manifestes et autres écrits, Brussels, 1972.
- 71. Moore, Henry - 'The Sculptor Speaks', The Listener, August 18th, 1937.
- 72. Nougé, Paul - Histoire de ne pas rire, Brussels, 1956.
- 73. Nougé, Paul - Subversion des Images, Les Lèvres Nues, Brussels, 1968.
- 74. Pansaers Clement - Sur un aveugle mur blanc et autres textes, Brussels, 1972.
- 75. Ray, Man - Self Portrait, London, 1963.
- 76. Renzio, Toni del - Arson, London, 1944.
- 77. Trevelyan, Julian - Indigo Days, London, 1957.
- 78. Rimbaud, Arthur - Oeuvres, reprinted Paris, no date.
- 79. Watson-Taylor, Simon - Free Unions, London, July 1946.

Secondary Sources

- G. Books and articles on Mesens arranged alphabetically by author.
80. Alloway, Lawrence, 'E.L.T. Mesens', Art News and Review, Vol. VI No. 27, London, February 1965.
 81. Brunius, Jacques, 'Collages di E.L.T. Mesens', Le Arti, Vol. XIII, No. 7, July 1963.
 82. Brunius, Jacques, E.L.T. Mesens, Collages et objets, catalogue of exhibition at Knokke-le-Zoute, July - August 1963.
 83. Brys-Schaten, Gila, 'Mesens et Baruchello - du mythe au langage', Arts Plastiques, Synthese, Paris, April 1968.
 84. Carrieri, Raffaele, 'E.L.T. Mesens', Epoca No. 530, Milan, November 1960.
 85. Caso, Paul, 'Un précurseur du Surréalisme, E.L.T. Mesens l'enchanté', Le Soir, Brussels, April 27th, 1971.
 86. Cavalcanti, ^{Alberto} 'Introducing E.L.T. Mesens', London Bulletin, No. 1, London, April 1938.
 87. D'Angelo, Sergio, 'Diario di un cacciatore di emozioni', catalogue E.L.T. Mesens, collagi, Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, April - May 1965.
 88. Eemans, Marc, 'Mesens, l'enchanteur, grand seigneur du collage', Scarabee No. 4, Brussels, September 1964.
 89. Jaguar, Edouard, 'Au pays des images défendues', Aujourd'hui No. 27, Paris, June 1960.
 90. Lecompte, Marcel, 'L'Univers des collages de E.L.T. Mesens', La Revue Industrie, Brussels, July 1966.
 91. Legrand, Francine Claire, 'Violin étoilé donnant naissance à un enfant pointilliste', Peinture Vivante, 6^{me} année No.29, Brussels, 1963.
 92. Le Roy, Pol, 'E.L.T. Mesens, seigneur du collage', Fantasmagie, Numéro consacré à l'art du collage, no. 8, Brussels, December 1961.
 93. Maddox, Conroy, 'E.L.T. Mesens', preface to Acoris Gallery catalogue, London, January - March, 1974.
 94. Melly, George, 'E.L.T. Mesens', Art and Artists, No. 4, London, July 1966.
 95. Melly, George, 'The London Gallery and the Lean Years of Surrealism', Art at Auction, Sotheby & Co., London, 1971-2.
 96. Otlet-Moutoy, Suzanne, 'Les étapes de l'activité créative chez Mesens', Bulletin des Musées Royaux de Belgique Nos. 1-4, Brussels, 1973.

97. Reichardt, Jasia, 'E.L.T. Mesens', Art News and Review, London, February 25th, 1961.
98. Scutenaire, Jean, Mon ami Mesens, Brussels, 1971.
99. Van Hecke, P.G.; Langui, Emile; Melly, George, 'E.L.T. Mesens', Campo, Antwerp, March 1967.
100. Van de Perre, Hugo, ^{'E.L.T. MESSENS'} Interview between Hugo van de Perre and E.L.T. Mesens, Die Periscoop, Brussels, February 1961.
101. Vovelle, José, Le Surréalisme en Belgique, Brussels, 1972.

H. Books, articles and exhibition catalogues relating to Dada and Surrealism in Europe, arranged alphabetically by author.

102. Ades, Dawn - Dada and Surrealism, London, 1974.
103. Alexandrian, Sarane - Surrealist Art, London, 1970.
104. Alquié, Fernand - The Philosophy of Surrealism, translated from the French by B. Waldrop, Michigan, 1959.
105. Balakien, Anna - Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute, New York, 1959.
106. Bussy, Christian - Anthologie du Surréalisme en Belgique, Paris, 1972.
107. Camfield, William A. - Francis Picabia, Princeton, 1979.
108. Gablik, Suzi - Magritte, London, 1970.
109. Golding, John - Duchamp, The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even, London, 1973.
110. Haslam, Malcolm - The Real World of the Surrealists, London, 1978.
111. Jean, Marcel - History of Surrealist Painting, translated from the French by Simon Watson-Taylor, London, 1959.
112. Matthews, John H. - An Anthology of French Surrealist Poetry, London, 1966.
113. Matthews, John H. - Surrealist Poetry in France, New York, 1969.
114. Matthews, John H. - The Imagery of Surrealism, Syracuse, 1977.
115. Motherwell, Robert - Dada Painters and Poets, New York, 1951.
116. Nadeau, Maurice - The History of Surrealism, translated from the French by R. Howard, London, 1968.
117. Passeron, René - Phaidon Encyclopaedia of Surrealism, London, 1978.

118. Pierre, José - Le Surréalisme, Paris, 1967.
119. Penrose, Roland - Man Ray, London, 1975.
120. Ray, Paul C. - The Surrealist Movement in England, Cornell, 1971.
121. Remy, Michel - Surrealism in England. Towards a Dictionary of Surrealism in England followed by a Chronology. Nancy, 1978.
122. Richter, Hans - Dada: Art and Anti Art, London, 1965.
123. Rubin, William S. - Dada and Surrealist Art, London and New York, 1969.
124. Roberts-Jones, Philip - From Realism to Surrealism. Painting in Belgium from Joseph Stevens to Paul Delvaux, translated from the French by C.H. Mogford, Brussels, 1972.
125. Russef, John - Max Ernst, London, 1967.
126. Sanouillet, Michel - Francis Picabia et 391 Tomes I and II, Paris, 1966.
127. Schwarz, Arturo - Man Ray: the Rigour of the Imagination, London, 1977.
128. Verkauf, Willi - Dada: Monograph of a Movement, London, 1975.
129. Vovelle, José - Le Surréalisme en Belgique, Brussels, 1972.
130. Waldberg, Patrick - René Magritte, Brussels, 1915.
131. Waldberg, Patrick - Max Ernst, Paris, 1958.
132. Waldberg, Patrick - Surrealism, London, 1965.

Articles

133. Blavier, André - 'Le Surréalisme en Belgique', Europe Revue Mensuelle, special number dedicated to Surrealism, Paris, November - December, 1968.
134. Blavier, André - 'Le groupe Surréaliste', La Belgique Sauvage, Phantomas, Brussels, 1972.
135. Lippard, Lucy - 'Dada into Surrealism: Notes on Max Ernst as a Proto-Surrealist', Art Forum, Vol. 5, no. 1, Los Angeles, 1966.
136. Matthews, John H. - 'Surrealism and England', Comparative Literature Studies, 1, no. 1, Minnesota, 1964.
137. Matthews, John H. - 'Paul Nougé: Intellect, Subversion and Poetic Language', Symposium, Syracuse, Winter, 1970.

138. Ollinger-Zinque, Giselle - 'The Belgian Contribution to Surrealism', Studio International, London, October 1971.
139. Read, Herbert - 'Surrealist Supplement', Left Review Vol.2, No. 10, July 1936.
140. Sauwen, Rik - 'L'Esprit Dada en Belgique', Cahiers Dada Surréalisme, special number.
Au temps de Dada, problèmes du langage No. 4, Paris, 1970.
141. Seuphor, Michael - 'Perspectives sur Dada, Années Vingt', Cahiers Dada Surréalisme No. 1, Paris, 1966.

Exhibition Catalogues arranged chronologically by date of publication

142. International Surrealist Exhibition, New Burlington Galleries, London, June 1936.
143. Surrealist Objects and Poems, London Gallery, London, November - December 1937.
144. Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, Galerie Maeght, Paris, June 1947.
145. Cinquanti anni a Dada: Dada in Italia, Galleria Schwarz, Milan, June - September 1966.
146. The Enchanted Domain: Exeter Surrealist Festival, Exe Gallery, Exeter, Summer 1967.
147. Hommage à P.G. Van Hecke, Galerie Goevaerts, Brussels, December 1969.
148. Tendances Surréalistes en Belgique, Musée d'Art Moderne, Brussels, September 1970.
149. Hommage discret à E.L.T. Mesens, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels, 1970.
150. The Belgian Contribution to Surrealism, Edinburgh, Summer 1972.
151. Conroy Maddox, Paintings, Collages, Gouaches, 1940 - 1976, Galerie Farber, Brussels, February - March, 1977.
152. Dada and Surrealism Reviewed, Arts Council, Hayward Gallery, London, January - March 1978.
153. René Magritte Retrospective, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, October - December 1978, Musée d'art Moderne, Paris, January - April 1979.

1. General Reference

154. Amaya, Mario - Pop as Art, London, 1965.

155. Cooper, Douglas - Graham Sutherland, London, 1961.
156. Baylis, John and Comfort, Alex - New Roads, New Directions in European Arts and Letters, Billericay, 1943.
157. Eates, Margot - Paul Nash 1889 - 1946. The Master of the Image, London, 1973.
158. Farr, Dennis - English Art 1870 - 1940, Oxford, 1978.
159. Fry, Edward - Cubism, London, 1966.
160. Gelhaar, Christian - Paul Klee and the Bauhaus, Bath, 1973.
161. Golding, John - Cubism, a History and an Analysis, London, 1959.
162. Hackett, C.A. - An Anthology of Modern French Poetry, Oxford, 1964.
163. Haesaerts, Paul - James Ensor, Brussels, 1957.
164. Haesaerts, Paul and Luc - William Déguve de Nunques, Brussels, 1938.
165. Haftmann, Werner - Painting in the Twentieth Century, (2 volumes), translated from the German by R. Mannheim, London, 1965.
166. Janis, Sidney and Blesh, Harriet - Collage, London, 1971.
167. Kirkpatrick, Diane - Eduardo Paolozzi, London, 1970.
168. Langui, Emile - Expressionism in Belgium, translated from the French by Alistair Kennedy, Brussels, 1971.
169. Legrand, Francine-Claire - Symbolism in Belgium, translated from the French by Alistair Kennedy, Brussels, 1972.
170. Lucie-Smith, Edward - Movements in Art since 1945, London, 1969.
171. Melly, George - Rum, Bum and Concertina, London, 1978.
172. Richardson, Tony and Stangos, Nicholas - Concepts of Modern Art, London, 1974.
173. Rothenstein, Sir John - Modern English Painters, Vol. II, London, 1956, Vol. III, London, 1974.
174. Seuphor, Michael - Abstract Painting in Flanders, Brussels, 1963.
175. Shone, Richard - The Century of Change, British Painting since 1900, London, 1977.
176. Wolfram, Eddie - Collage, London, 1973.
177. Figurative Art since 1945, London, 1970.
178. Art at Auction 1971 - 2. The Year at Sotheby's and Parke Bernet, London, 1972.

Articles

- 179. Golding, John - 'Guillaume Apollinaire and the Art of the Twentieth Century', Baltimore Museum of Art News, Summer and Autumn 1963.
- 180. Legrand, Francine Claire - 'Fernand Khnopff, Perfect Symbolist', Apollo, London, April 1967.
- 181. Whitford, Frank - 'From the Twenty to the Twenties: The development of Modernism in Belgium', Studio International, London, October 1974.
- 182. Whitford, Frank - 'Les origines britanniques du Pop Art', Revue de l'art, No. 30, Paris, 1975.

Principal Exhibition Catalogues, arranged chronologically by date of publication .

- 183. Foto-Auge, Stuttgart, 1929.
- 184. Exposition Internationale d'Art Moderne, Brussels, May - November, 1936.
- 185. Three Collagists, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, April 1958.
- 186. The Art of Assemblage, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1961.
- 187. Le Groupe des XX et son temps, Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels, 1962.
- 188. Art in Britain 1930 - 1940 centred round Axis, Circle and Unit One, Marlborough Fine Art, London, March - April 1965.
- 189. Peintres de l'imaginaire, Grand Palais, Paris, 1972.
- 190. Decade, Painting, Sculpture and Drawing in Britain, 1940 - 1949, Arts Council, November 1972 - June 1973.

Addendum to Bibliography H:

Lippard, Lucy (ed.) Surrealists on Art, New Jersey, 1970.