



- 1 Exhibition title (pencil drawing)
- 2 Eileen Agar, *The Muse Listening*, c.1940 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 3 Ithell Colquhoun, *The Chain - Poem*, unpublished poetic apparatus and examples, 1971: John Lyle Archive.
- 4 *Surrealism Now.*, manifesto of the Surrealist Group in England, final draft signed by John Lyle, Anthony Earnshaw, Conroy Maddox, Patrick Hughes, Brian Mills, Her de Vries, Laurens Vanerevil, Ken Smith, B. L. Kearns, A. Budik, Alan Shipway, John Rudlin, Alan Burns, Ian Breakwell, Ithell Colquhoun, Gérard Lalan, Philip West, dated 12/08/1970: John Lyle Archive.
- 5 *No Surrealism for the Enemies of Surrealism!*, response “broadside” by the Chicago Surrealist Group to the *Surrealism Now.* dated 09/1971: John Lyle Archive. Lot 175: Lot 175: One small section of the John Lyle Archive. (featuring original drawings & collages from E.L.T. Mesens, Marcel Mariën and Conroy Maddox)
- 6 Visitor book for the exhibition *The Enchanted Domain*, undated 1967: John Lyle Archive.
- 7 An incomplete run of the journal *TRANSFORMaTION* (1967–1979): John Lyle Archive.
- 8 Promotional poster for the Exeter Festival of Modern Arts theatre programme including artwork by Conroy Maddox, 1967: John Lyle Archive.
- 9 Promotional poster for The Enchanted Domain including artwork by Conroy Maddox, 1967: John Lyle Archive.
- 10 Promotional poster for the Exeter Festival of Modern Arts including artwork by Conroy Maddox, 1967: John Lyle Archive.
- 11 Lot 175: one small section of the John Lyle Archive. Various papers: Andrew Hodgson Archive.
- 12 Salvador Dali, *Fantastic Beach Scene*, 1935 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 13 Pablo Picasso, *The Dream and Lie of Franco*, 1937 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 14 André Masson, *Bacchanale*, 1933 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 15 Dorothea Tanning, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, 1943 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 16 Max Ernst, *Pietà or Revolution by Night*, 1923 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 17 Giorgio De Chirico, *La mélancolie du départ*, 1916/17 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 18 André Breton, *Je vois - j’imagine. Poème-objet*, 1935 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 19 Joan Miró, *Maternité*, 1924 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 20 René Magritte, *Le Viol*, 1945 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 21 Man Ray, *Seguidilla*, 1919 (floor vinyl facsimile)
- 22 Leonora Carrington, *Amor che move il Sole et l’altre Stelle*, 1946 (floor vinyl facsimile)

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SURREALISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE DEATH!
Curated by Andrew Hodgson

13 December 2025 – 24 January 2026
Open Thursday to Saturday 14h – 18h

We have occasion to observe that a number of contemporaries appear to have felt that acceptance into the surrealist group might be more confining than liberating [...] Some people—they are mainly persons who wandered away from the surrealist camp or who had been banned from re-entry—have complained that the surrealist air was unbreathable. Others, meanwhile, could not imagine drawing breath except in the rarefied atmosphere peculiar to surrealism.
J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism: Perspectives on the Avant-Garde* (1984)

You have pressed in the door code 19B63 at 22 rue de l’Échiquier (75010) and entered the courtyard of the building there, upon which you have crossed said courtyard and approached a dark green door labelled in white lettering GOSWELL ROAD; a street name taken from another place entirely. Through the windows you have noted a bright yellow piece of paper, in amongst many others high upon the wall. It reads: “WE NEED YOU COHN-BENDIT.” The left of the double-doors has been propped open, and as you step through it in front of you is a low white reception desk next to a bouquet of flowers. You have stepped over an engraving by Salvador Dalí, and from atop that table, you have picked up a folded white A3 paper with this writing on. You have taken to read it, stood in the middle of this white-lit ground floor rectangle. You have chosen for now to remain in this white rectangle rather than the one in which you have entered, but, shortly, this text won’t go on too too long, you will look up and become a part of that other white space, though they are, more or less, one and the same thing.

Surrealism is dead, long live Surrealism!
George Melly, preface to exhibition catalogue *The Enchanted Domain*, 1967.

Lot 175: one small section of the John Lyle Archive. Letters received, drafts of letters sent, letters indeed sent that have somehow made their way back to their sender; article drafts, BBC radio transcripts, press clippings. Insurance forms for the transporting and exhibiting of borrowed art works, published and unpublished manuscripts and drafts of artworks shown and unshown; an incomplete run of the journal *TRANSFORMaTION* (1967–1979), and examples of other publications, like *Blue Food* (1970–?). Bank documents, documents of incorporation with the Inland Revenue for the association EXETER FESTIVAL OF MODERN ARTS LIMITED., letters to and from MPs; successful and unsuccessful applications for funding to Arts Council England. Invoices for morning coffee, paid speaker fees, ticket and event season pass sales and their refund, unpaid phone bills, and orders for vernissage finger food—including such delicacies as sardine stuffed boiled eggs.

They are papers that carry their decades heavily, from their stranding in a barn in the South West of England, and then since 2016, chopped into small lots and sold, or unsold and kept in the storage locker of www.chiswickauctions.co.uk. Delivered to Paris in a piece of baby blue carry-on luggage in January 2025 by Rufus Lyle, John Lyle’s son. Here, you find the innards of this archive spread across the walls of Goswell Road. An unsold section of the archive; Lot 175. In 2025, that is nine years after I first learnt of its existence through five photographs posted on the Chiswick Auctions website. It is a lot I did not buy, but has arrived here all the same. Eventually. Around you in this room here, this lot of the archive is curated for your ophthalmic consumption; it is Lot 175 that you will shortly find yourself engulfed in.

Surrealism is dead, long live death.
J. N. Watts, visitor book to exhibition *The Enchanted Domain*, 1967.

The exhibition you have come here to view, though you have chosen to read this piece of paper instead, documents a small section of the collection of ephemera meticulously kept by British bookseller John Lyle (1932–2002). Or, it is a totemic evocation of the activities of the internationally-recognised leader of Surrealism in England from 1967 and into the early-1970s, *Joawn Lyerl*. Alternatively, it demonstrates the “retrograde mish-mash” produced by enemy of the surrealist movement and cop-caller, Nazi-entrepreneurial-Épicier” *Mr. Lyle*. The truth is perhaps somewhere within these slipping indices of definition.

Somewhere in-between these slipping indices, the exhibition depicts a renewed and somewhat forlorn call in the movement’s wilderness years for *SURREALISM NOW* (title of the 1970 manifesto of Lyle’s Surrealist Group in England), or perhaps *NO SURREALISM* at all (title of the 1971 response to that manifesto by the Chicago Surrealist Group).

The textures of a forgotten archive, a lost art historical episode: the papers around you are a collection of rotten, mouse-chewed yellow paper that recounts the quotidian minutiae of mounting an exhibition; publishing a modernistic “little magazine,” and in doing both, incurring considerable financial losses. In turn, they give evidence of the coordination of the activities of an avant-garde grouping of artists and writers in Britain within the hangover of the 1960s under a shared ensign, and signed to a common manifesto—however misfiring those efforts may have been. Together, *SURREALISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE DEATH!* paints a picture of some of what happened to Surrealism in the immediate aftermath following the death of that artistic and literary tendency’s *Pape*, André Breton on the 28th of September, 1966.

The centre of the activities, organisation and arguments shown here revolve around the Exeter Festival of Modern Arts that took place between the 24th of April and 20th of May, 1967. The core organisers of the festival in Exeter are the near-spectral figure of John Lyle, but also the founders of Surrealism in England in the 1930s—and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1946—Sir Roland Penrose (1900–1984), and Belgian artist E. L. T. Mesens (1903–1971), alongside another first-wave surrealist, French filmmaker Jacques Brunius (1906–1967). The event was MC’d by the writer George Melly (1926–2007); its visual identity was designed by artist Conroy Maddox (1912–2005)—as the letters show, Sir Herbert Read was already too ill by this point to participate (1893–1968).

The core of the month-long festival was an exhibition held both at Exeter’s anthropological institution, The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, and the town’s exhibition space, The Exeter Gallery: it was titled *The Enchanted Domain*. The exhibition featured around a hundred now much-lauded works from early surrealist and surrealist-adjacent artists including Dorothea Tanning’s *Eine kleine nachtmusik* (1943; now held at the Tate Modern), Marcel Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–1941; now held at MoMA, Centre Pompidou, Tate Modern etc.), André Breton’s *Je vois - j’imagine. Poème-objet*. (1935; Centre Pompidou), Man Ray’s *Seguidilla* (1919; Smithsonian), René Magritte’s *Le Viol* (1945; Centre Pompidou), Francis Picabia’s *La ville de New York aperçu à travers le Corps* (1913), Leonora Carrington’s *Amor che move il Sole et l’altre Stelle* (1946), Giorgio de Chirico’s *La Melancolie du Départ* (1916/17; Tate Modern), Pablo Picasso’s *Tête* (1913/14; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.), “among others,” or, “*et al.*” As such, the festival in Exeter stood as the most extensive exhibition of surrealist artwork in England since the *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the New Burlington Galleries in London, held between 11th June and 4th July, 1936; the showing that first announced the arrival of Surrealism in Britain.

Scholar of Surrealism J. H. Matthews (1930–1987) contributed, a rare researcher in the field that would “admit their interest,” as correspondence states, during Surrealism’s hinterland period. The festival included, according to the archive, a lecture by French writer Robert Benayoun (1926–1996), a reading by American poet Charles Olson (1910–1970), a talk by experimental novelist and claimed-inventor of the cut-up technique Alan Burns (1929–2013) on “Armageddon,” or “Accident,” depending on which section of the documentation is read; there was also a reading given by the experimental novelist B. S. Johnson (1933–1973). Ian Breakwell gave a “short performance” (please, “don’t call it a *Happening*”; artists Anthony Earnshaw (1924–2001) and Patrick Hughes (1939–) also participated. Auto-Destructive artist Gustav Metzger (1926–2017) gave an auto-destructive performance, American beat writers Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) and William S. Burroughs (1914–1997) are listed in documentation as having accepted to participate, as well as daughter of Sigmund, Anna Freud (1895–1982).

Publisher John Calder (1927–2018), in the midst of his obscenity conviction for publishing Hubert Selby Jr’s *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964), gave a “teach-in” on censorship, and coordinated the theatrical showing of Spanish dramatist Fernando Arrabal’s (1932–) *Labyrinth*, which was staged during the festival. The events list also includes the “in-person” participation of Roman Polanski (1933–) and others as examples of the “Polish cinematic avant-garde,” and also talks on psychopathology and art, alongside an exhibition titled *Inscape* of schizophrenics’ artworks by famed psychiatric doctor R. D. Laing (1927–1989)—an exhibition that in the archive is sometimes alternatively referred to as *Psychopathology and Art* and attributed to the father of art therapy in England, Edward Adamson (1911–1996), and sometimes American psychotherapist Joseph Berke (1939–2021). Later names that enter the archive around the publication of the journal *TRANSFORMacTION*, first printed during the festival with issues irregularly appearing over the next twelve years, include Belgian poets Marcel Mariën (1920–1993) and Louis Scutenaire (1905–1987), French artist and writer Marcel Jean (1900–1993), American artist Ted Joans (1928–2003), and the artist and writer Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988).

Towards the end of the core window of activity of 1967–1972, between 1969 and 1972 there enters the leaders of the Chicago group Franklin Rosemont (1943–2009) and Penelope Rosement (1942–), as well as Canadian painter Guy Ducornet (1937–2025) and the American poet Rikki Ducornet (1943–). Though correspondence between these figures and Lyle first appears collaborative, it very quickly descends into arguments about who is or is not Surrealist, and what or what is not Surrealist.

In one sense, the story the archive tells is not all that different to the narrative arc of the 1993 film *Wayne’s World 2*. However, though they built the festival, and the acts do appear to have more or less turned up, the audience didn’t come. While the

opening planned for 200 attendees—the organising committee ordered 200 “breakfast plates” for the buffet—it is not evident whether this number was reached, and subsequent ticket sales were poor. 2530 flyers were printed in “lemon” or orange for the festival; Lyle used the back of the leftover flyers for years afterwards as draft paper. The Arrabal play staged at St. Luke’s Theatre, Exeter, received an audience of, on average, four. An article from the Exeter *Express & Echo* dated 10th May, 1967 is titled “LIVE FESTIVAL FACES CASH LOSSES,” and quotes Lyle stating:

“*Our exhibition, The Enchanted Domain, seemed to get a better response from the over-60’s oddly enough. They seemed very appreciative although many of the pictures were painted to shock them when they were younger.*” *Students, apart from the Art College youngsters, seemed to take little interest in festival events held at the university, including the censorship in the arts discussion on Saturday [held by Calder]. Mr. Lyle cannot think why.*

As the documents suggest, the student populace did not attend much of the festival, or the events programme. There was little interest in the Devon town of Exeter in 1967 for Calder’s teach-in on censorship and his recent conviction for obscenity, and in records of ticket pre-sales, Metzger’s Auto-Destructive performance sold none. According to letters requesting refund, Olson’s reading never took place, and Benayoun purportedly regarded the festival as a failure. Of all the grand plans for the Exeter Festival of Modern Arts, though large parts of these plans seemingly did take place, it is not clear what, or in what capacity, though it appears clear that whatever did take place drew little audience.

Though the festival led to the founding of a new Surrealist Group in England, this surrealist renaissance was short-lived. As the archive recounts, Melly had expressed already during the 1967 festival that Surrealism was done for, despite declaring “SURREALISM IS DEAD! LONG LIVE SURREALISM!” in the catalogue for *The Enchanted Domain*; Brunius died in Exeter on the eve of the festival, and Penrose disappears from the archive in 1967. Following the festival Mesens underwent a long illness, eventually dying in 1971. With the deaths of Brunius and Mesens, Melly and other figures’ lack of desire to continue, the early-1970s then brings an end to the short-lived post-Second World War revival of Surrealism in Britain. By the mid-1980s and early-1990s, Lyle, arguably one of the last figures ambiguously bestowed with the lineage, finally declared Surrealism on that archipelago over.

John Lyle wrote in response to the researcher Patricia Hope Scanlan on 22nd October 1990, who asks for his blessing to revive Surrealism in Britain:

Previous writers on the subject of surrealists in Britain have been obliged to depend on deliberate misinformation from sources most interested in internecine backbiting and score-settling. This pre-occupation with grinding axes doesn’t appear to me, and I withdrew from the whole bazaar when it became clear that it couldn’t be avoided [...] I lost interest in the local scene. I mention this to explain why, in addition to being an inadequate source of information, I’m an unwilling one, and probably also incompetent, since, far from having gained any ‘insights’ into the English understanding of Surrealism, it has baffled me to the point where I’ve closed the book. Perhaps you will be able to clarify it, and without any irony, I wish you well.

You are about to look up from this sheet of paper, and look upon hundreds of others. Papers that paint a picture of the very ebbing ends of artistic and literary modernism, by this time already some decades an anachronism yet to find cogent retelling as an art history. Works that, in their moment of showing were old hat; dead. Things to be ignored, or avoided. Examples of works shown in *The Enchanted Domain* have been printed in vinyl and applied to the tile floor where you currently stand. You are invited to walk across or around these canon works of artistic modernism; to, in turn, ignore or avoid them. *SURREALISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE DEATH!* comprises, together, a viewing window out upon the decaying and ragged ends of artistic and literary modernism previously passed over by art historians; an aesthetic world already long dead, that passed as this ephemera bears witness, not with a bang, but a whimper.

—Andrew Hodgson