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Images and Text

When we see an image, we know what we are seeing, if text is presented with the image then we may think of something different than what we see. While many artists have used text to pair with their images an example of a well-known artist who practiced this was Belgian artist Rene Magritte. Magritte was a surrealist painter who painted images with text. When pairing images with text Magritte was able to play with the narrative of his paintings. Examining Rene Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images* we can see how Magritte challenges the narrative of an artwork by representing images with text. While using text with images has been widely practiced in the twentieth century, it is Belgian artist Rene Magritte. Magritte's painting "Treachery of Images" is a prime example of how text can determine the meaning of the artwork. Although Magritte had a different reason for using text in his painting they serve as an example how the viewer's perspective can be directed toward meaning and intention by having the image juxtaposed with certain text.

Rene Magritte was a Belgian painter. Magritte was born in 1898 in Lessines Belgium. While Magritte was studying at the Academie des Beaux-Arts, in Brussels he left the school to focus more on his own artwork. Rene Magritte began to create art that would begin to show what he is known for, using images for expressions to change the meaning of the artwork. In 1922 Magritte saw Giorgio de Chirico's painting *The Song of Love* which is a painting of certain images juxtaposed with other images, such as a glove, a green ball, and a bust of a Greek sculpture, the images are placed within an outdoor architectural dream space. After seeing Chirico's painting gave Magritte the idea to use the surrealism style of painting to juxtapose

certain images to create meaning. In 1929 Magritte painted his most famous piece of work *The Treachery of Images* (fig 1).

The Treachery of Images is a painting that depicts a brown pipe and underneath the pipe is written "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" which is French for "This is not a pipe". The painting is a paradox in itself, because what the painting says is that the pipe is not a real pipe but a representation of a pipe. The pipe is not real, it can not be held, smoked, or stuffed it is not what the viewer thinks it is. Magritte points out that representations are not the real thing. The language of the text in the painting is telling the viewer that the image of the pipe only resembles the real thing. *The Treachery of Images* shows that using text and images changes the narrative by changing the language. Magritte explained it: "It's quite simple. Who would dare pretend that the REPRESENTATION of a pipe IS a pipe? Who could possibly smoke the pipe in my painting? No one. Therefore, it IS NOT A PIPE." *The Treachery of Images* has an Epstein about it as Magritte's intention for creating it was not to direct the narrative of the painting but challenge notions of representations as Magritte said they representations are not the real thing.

Changing the language of a painting can an example of what we see and what we say are two completely different things. Before people can read, they look at images but when they start putting words to the images, they start to have new meanings. When the viewer looks at *The Treachery of Images* the first thing the viewer sees is the pipe so they recognize it as a pipe and say that's a pipe; but when the viewer reads "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" they are contradicted with the fact that the image is not a pipe but a representation. Language plays an important role in artwork as changing language can change narrative.

The Treachery of Images works today as an icon of Magritte's use of text. Magritte wrote an article called *Les mots et les images* (Words and Pictures) (fig 3) for a surrealist journal called

La révolution surréaliste. In the article Magritte shows eighteen images juxtaposed with text. The article deals with representation of both the verbal and visual kind and problems with how words represent images. The first image is of a leaf labeled “le canon”. Each of the eighteen panels talks about aspects of relations between the words and images and the reality they share. One caption written by Magritte says “Un objet ne tient pas tellement à son nom qu’on ne puisse lui en trouver un autre qui lui convienne mieux” which translates to “An object is not so important to its name that we cannot find another that suits it better”. Magritte believes that words do not hold relations to what they reference. Magritte uses text to subvert ideas of what words can mean to images and how their narrative can be changed and directed to fit the meaning of artwork.

Magritte’s use of text was to show his ideas of representation, overtime over works of art that had text in them were seen through a different perspective. Other artists began to use this method of using text that allowed them to challenge ideas of imagery and representation. In his essay the Photographic Message, Roland Barthes talks about the denotation of a piece which is what the piece literally is and the connotation which is the encoded /interpreted message the piece has. The denoted in the Treachery of Images is the image of the pipe with the text while the connotated is the message of representation is not real. Barthes talks about encounters are more than culture about art and Magritte uses visual encounters and textual encounters in the Treachery of Images. Using text in an image has been practiced in contemporary art, modern art, and propaganda. Text can be used as part of the artwork as well as being a head line because when the text is part of the work it has more agency. When the text has more agency then it can be used more as a tool then a visual response, directing the viewers mind to the message of the artwork.

John Berger in his book *Ways of Seeing*, Berger says 'There is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.' This proves that when we look at something and we see it we are not fitting what we see with what we know. While the *Treachery of Images* presents the view with the image of a pipe and the viewer recognizes it the text makes the viewer battle with themselves because the text tells them something different so the viewer has a reaction to stimuli. The stimuli react to seeing what we know but are told something different.

The image of the painted pipe is reminiscent of Rene Magritte's past as a commercial painter. Advertising relies on text to go along with images to send a message to people. When people see an advertisement, they see something they need and or want and the message in the text of the ad enforces the message that the person wants and or needs the product. When people see an image but the text that goes with the image contradicts the images, they become lost. Like advertising *The Treachery of Images* is only a symbol the image that is being represented.

Another example of Magritte comparing images and words is from his series of paintings called the *Key to Dreams* (fig 2). The paintings *Key to Dreams* are a set of images with words labeling them, however the labels do not match what the images are. One image is of a horse but the words underneath says *The Door*, another image is of a clock that is labeled *the wind*, one image is of a pitcher labeled *the bird*, and the last image is a briefcase labeled *the valise*. The words undermine the images except for the briefcase which is a valise. Magritte has said "It is a union that suggests the essential mystery of the world. Art for me is not an end in itself, but a

means of evoking that mystery”. When Magritte juxtaposes images with unrelated words it creates a dream like sense because he gives new meaning to familiar things.

Other Artists who have used text in their artwork are Barbra Kruguer and John Baldessari. Artist who use text in their work helps create a sense of agency to produce effect of what viewers can interpret from the artwork. Barbara Kruger is a graphic designer who uses words and images to create meaning using critical thinking. Barbara Kruger’s work title Your Manias Become Science (fig 4) is an image of an atomic bomb blast with the words “your manias become science”. The text in the image is in color schemes of white and black. Kruger puts emphasis on the words Your and Science by making them bold so they seem more important to bring ideas of what the view thinks when they read the words. Kruger shows that changing how text can be manipulated can change the viewers perspective. Playing with the text inside of the work Kruger allows for critical thinking to be introduced into the piece to inject irony in the process of image making. Text can be use and manipulated to change perspective of an image to see what meaning can come out.

The other artist famous for using text in their art work is conceptual artist John Baldessari. John Baldessari was a conceptual artist from California who used different type of medias in his artwork including images, collages, text, and painting. In 1967 John Baldessari exhibited his work titled “Wrong”(fig 5). The artwork shows photographs juxtaposed with the word Wrong under it. The meaning of the work is ironic because the word already gives a judgement response to the photographs. Baldessari uses text in his work to show why does art have to be judged and what response do viewers have when they are already told something. John Baldessari is actually a fan of Rene Magritte and has said that an artist “has to think how is one thing different than another”. Baldessari has stated that Magritte informs a lot of his work with the Treachery of

Images being a flagship of “this is not what you think it is” as it provides an interesting question of what art is. When artists use text in their work the text becomes the language of the artwork that can change based on the viewer or the culture surrounding the work.

The use of text in images creates a certain kind of dialect. Depending on the text and how it relates to the artwork and how the viewer reads it creates different opinions and truths. In *The Treachery of Images* the text brings out ideas of the truth that the painting is just representation. When people read the text, it brings this discourse that the painting has because they are faced with the truth. The language used in *The Treachery of Images* is French which creates a language barrier but when viewers can figure out what it says they can pick up the concept very quickly. The painting is a surrealist painting that plays with ideas of what your mind already knows; putting text could be seen as a linguistic gaffe but has purpose to be there. Language can be a tool for art as it can cause barriers but once those barriers are knocked down anyone can see it and understand what is trying to be said.

One example of how images and text can be used for representation and spreading messages is propaganda. Propaganda are images used with text to spread a particular point of view for a certain cause. Propaganda became widely recognized in its use in Nazi Germany during World War Two. Nazi propaganda spread and was a tool of the Nazis to spread their beliefs and hatred. Nazi propaganda reflected the ideas of Adolf Hitler on his views of the master race and his hatred of the Jewish people. One German artist who was against Nazism was John Heartfield. Heartfield printed his own propaganda to go against the Nazis. Heartfield's propaganda appeared in newspapers and one of his works “5 Fingers Has the Hand.” (fig 6) The poster is a response to the rise of the Nazi party telling people to vote for the KPD (German Communist Party) which was the opposite vote against the Nazi party. Heartfield used German

text to subdue Nazi symbolism is a tool that Heartfield used to pursue his message of remind people they have the option to change great things.

American use of using text with images for propaganda is the Uncle Sam recruitment poster (fig 7). The Uncle Sam recruitment poster was designed by J.M. Flagg in 1917 used to recruit men to be soldiers in both World Wars. The poster depicts Uncle Sam with a stern look on his face and pointing his finger at the viewer with the text “I Want YOU for U.S. Army, Nearest Recruiting Station.” The poster is a sample of American history, with the image and the text both being used to direct an important message towards the viewer. The text is big and bold with the YOU being colored red symbolizing importance of the individual. Uncle Sam pointing right in the direction of the view gives the idea about who the YOU is supposed to be. Without either the text or the image the message of the piece does not work. The connotated may be a recruitment poster but the denotated is a message that an individual can make a difference.

One big use of images and text juxtaposed with each other is the internet. On the internet billions of images are used to send message to billions of people. An example of this are memes. Memes are images used for comic effect used with text and spread online by internet users. Memes are a piece of culture by systems of behavior used for imitation and other means, memes can be the same image used hundreds of times but with different text each time to direct the views intentions to what is being imitated usually responsive of some human emotion.

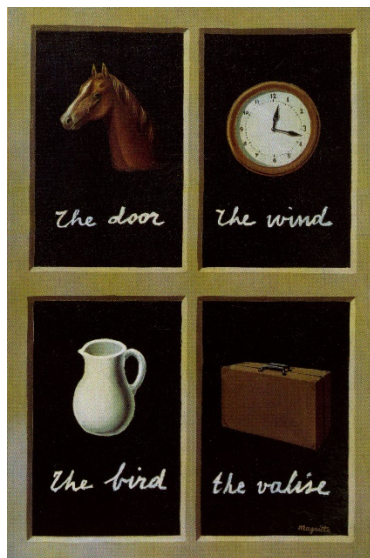
While Rene Magritte used text in only a few famous paintings, Treachery of Images being one of them it serves as an example of how when text is juxtaposed can direct the viewers perspective towards meaning and intention. When an image is juxtaposed with certain text it can create meaning using codes to view the meanings under different perspective, culture, and episteme. This allows the viewer to look at art though different perspective and think of the ideas

of what the artwork is trying to communicate with the viewer. When the image is by itself the view only sees what the image is, when there is text it opens up the viewers mind to new opportunities that allows critical thinking to take over. When there is just text it is just a statement but when paired with an image it expands the connotation of the message. Pairing text with images can be used in modern, contemporary, and formal art in a way to focus on method making in art to spread new ideas with what viewers know or do not know. Text can be an important tool for artists and without The Treachery of Images it would not have the same message it has now.

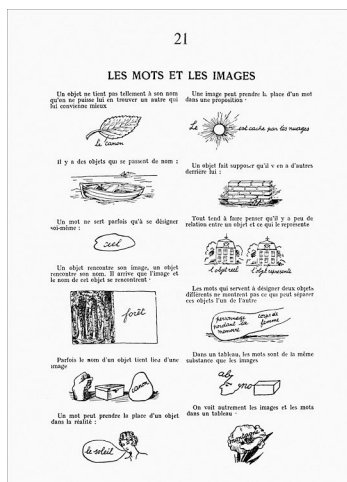
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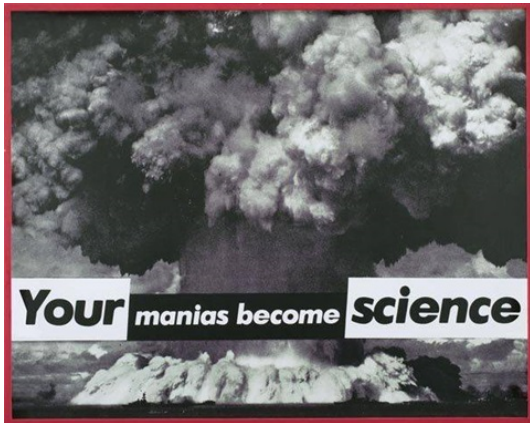
René Magritte, Treachery of Images, 1929 (Figure 1)



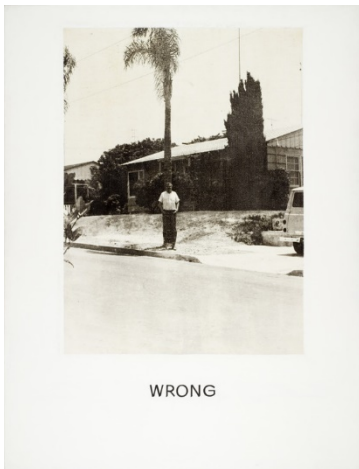
René Magritte, Key to Dreams 1935 (Figure 2)



Rene Magritte, Les mots et les images, 1929, (figure 3)



Barbara Kruger, Your Manias become Science, 1981 (Figure 4)



John Baldessari, Worng, 1967 (Figure 5)



John Heartfield, Five Fingers has the Hand, 1928 (figure 6)



J.M. Flagg, Uncle Sam 1917 (figure 7)

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