

## 'Surrealism and the rue Blomet'

**Eykyn Maclean**

From 1921 to '26, André Masson and Joan Miró occupied adjacent studios on the rue Blomet in the slums of Montparnasse. Miró was a neat freak whose studio was off-limits; Masson was a slob and had a constant parade of guests. When their unheated studios were too dark and cold, the two patronized the Bal Nègre, populated by workers from Martinique.

This multimedia exhibition made an airtight case for the importance of the rue Blomet circle in the formation of Surrealism. The artists fought, drank, played cards, and shared ideas, mistresses, and drugs. Works by Man Ray, Ernst, Dubuffet, Tanguy, Brassai, Arp, Picasso, and Gris, along with a hallway full of exquisite corpses, demonstrated how collective identity shaped individual journeys of self-discovery. Artists and writers would continue to explore disembodied hands, the moon, birds, and playing cards for decades. As Miró put it, on the rue Blomet, "I discovered everything I am, everything I would become."



**Georges Malkine, *Untitled*, 1927,  
oil on canvas, 32" x 23 3/4". Eykyn Maclean.**

Masson's swift-moving *dessins automatiques* were at their most precise during the 1920s, perhaps influenced by Miró, whose compositions convey pangs of poverty, social chaos, and diverse obstacles to clear-headed working, but the Spanish artist's discomfort led to a major breakthrough that was illustrated by two works hung side by side: *Statue* (1926), a man watching his hand and foot swell to fill a room, and *Peinture (Le Cheval de cirque)*, 1927, in which weightless shapes cavort against a blue background.

Two knockout paintings by Georges Malkine offered an alternate route to the unconscious, without pure abstraction. In *La Dame de pique* (1926), a playing-card queen drifts above a landscape of spade-shaped cypress trees. And *Untitled* (1927) pins the viewer to the ceiling of a six-sided room with sheets of paper streaming toward the light.

Close to the beginning of the movement, these works explored Surrealism's less traveled roads, and captured the excitement of its original promise.

**—Johanna Ruth Epstein**