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Damarice Amao, Amanda Maddox, and Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska, eds., *Dora Maar*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2020. 208 pp. Illustrations and index. \$40.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-60606-629-4.

Review by Heather Diack, University of Miami.

The notion of a “surrealist fact” is bound up with transformation, a shift that results in newfound meaning. That is, at least according to the preface of the first issue of the avant-garde Parisian journal *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1924, which reads: “Every discovery that changes the nature, the destination of an object or of a phenomenon constitutes a surrealist fact.”[1] It is curious to think of the life and work of Dora Maar in this way, as a challenge to established meanings and categorical boundaries. Arguably such a transformation is integral to the project of *Dora Maar*, the publication accompanying Maar’s first solo exhibition, presented at the Centre Pompidou, Musée nationale d’art moderne, the Tate Modern, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, with more than 400 of her works on view. This extensive exhibition and monographic catalogue are attempts to remedy the lack of attention that Maar received for her prolific and storied career. It is also an effort to reframe her apart from a one-liner legacy as Pablo Picasso’s “Weeping Woman,” a tremendously distorted shadow that has too long occluded the fortitude of Maar’s unique achievements, eclectic interests, and longevity.

This richly illustrated exhibition catalogue contains ten short, focused essays, each examining a different angle of Maar’s multifaceted art and life. This continuous shifting of perspectives, documenting the many, varied manifestations of Maar’s creativity, ingenuity, and everchanging roles, is an apt approach to chronicling such a multi-dimensional figure. Ultimately, it remains a work in pieces, however, as Maar’s genre-traversing history refuses to cohere into an easily graspable whole. The book unfolds chronologically and thematically, organized around six subsections, covering her early years, family life, and self-invention; her contributions to commercial and erotic photography; her move towards socially-concerned image making; her involvement with surrealism and enigmatic engagement with realism; her relationship with Picasso in both personal and artistic terms; and her eventual move to painting as a practice. Each of the volume’s three editors—who also contribute writing—are curators of photography (Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska and Damarice Amao from the Centre Pompidou, Musée nationale d’art moderne, Paris, and Amanda Maddox from the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles). It is interesting to see Maar through their lens, in relation to shifting experiments in photography, even in moments where photo could easily be relegated to the periphery, such as in the discussion of painting. Instead, the catalog acknowledges how photo’s dynamism propelled other forms of aesthetic invention.

Born Henriette Th  odora Markovitch (1907-1997) to a French mother, and a Croatian father who worked as an architect, the artist spent her youth between Paris and Buenos Aires, Argentina. The first essay, "What's in a Name: The Invention of Dora Maar" by Amanda Maddox, delves into her name change and the many misrecognitions and authorial slights that spin off of it. Of these, her partnership with set designer Pierre K  fer, with whom she opened a photographic studio under the name 'K  fer-Dora Maar' (1932-1935), is focal. Maddox goes on to establish Maar's early use of collage and montage techniques and use of heightened shadows to deliberately enhance illegibility. As she points out, Maar worked actively in commercial photography between 1930 and 1939, including the genres of fashion, advertising, and architecture. She notes that in this regard, working across disciplines and media with a surrealist approach, she shares much in common with Man Ray.

The very act of linking and comparing Maar's work with that of her male counterparts is a loaded gesture, however. For while the *Dora Maar* project seeks to give credit where it is due and to historicize Maar with her contemporaries, it also strives to redress how truly underappreciated she has been until now. To do this successfully requires being frank about--and critical of--the many gendered reactions at play during Maar's lifetime, which continue to haunt her legacy today. Unfortunately, in many places, the text reestablishes rather than deconstructs the gender divide. For example, narrow preconceptions emerge when we learn that Jacques Guenne referred to Maar in 1933 (the same year Maar joins the surrealist group), as a "brunette huntress of images... [possessing] the candor of a man, with the curiosity of a woman" (p. 15). This sexist description is worth unpacking yet remains untouched.

Comparisons and allusions to the influence of Eli Lotar, Brassai, Jacques-Andr   Boiffard, Andr   Breton and others recur and are certainly relevant. However, the volume fails to emphasize the fact that despite the centrality of "femininity" as a subject throughout surrealist art and ideology, the movement was incredibly misogynist.

Details are frequently included in these essays in ways that make Maar sound dependent rather than distinctive. We learn that Maar's photograph with coral from 1934 is created four months after the publication of Breton's article "La Beaut   sera convulsive" in *Minotaure*, illustrated by photos of crystals and corals by Brassai. Works like Maar's photograph of the Sphinx hotel is noted by Dawn Ades as a direct reference to Andr   Breton's *Nadja* (1928). Nevertheless, each of these should also be taken on their own terms. It seems significant to me that in Maar's view the hotel windows are filled with onlookers by contrast to Boiffard's lone single figure, which appears in *Nadja*.

Dislocation of meaning and the cultivation of associations and misapprehensions are crucial to the work of surrealism in general, and Maar in specific. Maar's *Untitled (Metal bench)*, ca. 1927 and *Untitled (Reflections from a gate)*, ca. 1927, resemble and predate Henri Cartier-Bresson's famed setting in his *Gare St. Lazare* (1932), but this is mentioned nowhere. The subtleties need to be acknowledged in both directions. Moreover, where lines of influence are traced, the implications should be teased out. Alix Agret's "The Audacity of Erotic Gazes," an excellent analysis of negative and positive image tensions in Maar's nude photos of Assia Granatouroff, concludes that these photographs "assert their independence from the explicit texts that dominate them" (p. 42). The statement itself is compelling but, in the absence of substantiated argumentation, not entirely convincing.

“Dora of the Varied, Ever Beautiful, Faces,” by Patrice Allain and Laurence Perrigault, is chock full of historical detail, some of which would benefit from further elaboration. They mention that for a short time, Maar and Georges Bataille were lovers. This strikes me as a notable connection, especially in the ways one can imagine that her affinity for Bataille may be linked to their shared resistance to conformity. More than signing the *Appel à la lute*, the anti-fascist tract instigated by Breton and Louis Chavance in 1934 in reaction to riots in Paris, both Maar and Bataille recognized deeply the political capaciousness and the transgressive potential of the poetic and the erotic.[2] This aspect of the surrealist revolution deserves more attention.

Victoria Combalía’s essay, “Dora Maar, Street Photographer: Barcelona and London,” describes Maar’s travels to Spain in 1933, which Combalía notes is, “an intrinsically surrealist country, both vibrant and cruel” (p. 52). These kinds of assignments come across as mildly melodramatic and, though somewhat lyrical, embed problematic presuppositions about national character. Referring to Marr’s photograph of a homeless boy sleeping in the streets as a counter-point to the supine figures of Manuel Alvarez Bravo is equally strange in its elision of cultural specificity. Combalía argues that Maar’s work in Spain and London should be seen as necessarily humanist, as socially concerned documentary. This conclusion feels misleading as it disregards the voyeuristic impulse at work in Maar’s photos and the role it played in Surrealist chance encounters.

“The Imaginary is What Tends to Become Real’: The Photomontage Period” by Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska focuses on the strategy and content of Maar’s photomontage work, particularly in surrealist publications and exhibitions between 1933 and 1938. Maar’s insistence on realism even within constructed form is reinforced by her decision to rephotograph her assembled piece, creating the illusion of a unified whole. Ziebinska-Lewandowska remarks on the prevalence of familiar surrealist iconography and preoccupations in Maar’s imagery, including eroticism, sleep, the eye, the unconscious, and the realm of the sea. Maar’s intriguing first photomontages, which appeared in the magazine *Bravo: Le Mensuel de Paris*, in connection with the 1931 Exposition coloniale internationale, are reproduced here. These feature the face of a Black African man atop diamond patterned walls, and the seams of the magazine spread bisecting his face. It would be wonderful to have more in-depth analysis here. Doing so would stretch Ziebinska-Lewandowska’s narrative beyond the commonly acknowledged tropes of Surrealism in a way that could expose the underlying role of colonialism. Moreover, engaging with this history complicates Ziebinska-Lewandowska’s arguments about Maar’s originality, while raising important questions about how the disorientation of spatial possibilities in the 1930s was far more than an aesthetic formulation.

Other questions also persist. Of the twenty known photomontage compositions made by Maar, why were only two works exhibited during “Maar’s Surrealist period” (p. 103)? It would be interesting to hear some speculation as to why *29, rue d’Astorg* (plate 127) and *Le Simulateur (The Pretender)* (plate 134), which both use Versailles as a backdrop, were given such primacy. On one level, it seems that Maar recognized the “simulation” that is photography, in spite of its illusion of unmediated optical perception. This duality was prescient during the growing tensions of the interwar period and the ascent of fascism, with further conflict immanent. Could we then understand Maar’s work as embedded critiques of established power structures more broadly?

In “Ubu in London: Between Surrealism and Documentary,” Ian Walker acknowledges the fact that photography actually played a limited role in surrealist exhibitions. In many cases, the

medium was used mainly as a form of documentation for sculpture, as opposed to being exhibited as an art in its own right. It is also true that Maar holds the distinction of being the only photographer whose work appeared in all six of the international exhibitions Walker mentions from the 1930s, including shows in Tokyo, Amsterdam, London, and New York. Walker goes into great depth regarding *Portrait d'Ubu* (1935), which proves to be full of surprises. This appropriated and rephotographed image of an armadillo fetus, frequently misrecognized as a sea creature, once more displays Maar's interest in mistaken identities. The allusion to Ubu Roi, or namely, Alfred Jarry's *Père Ubu* (1896), might also be read as a discreet critique of the continuous search for seminal sources.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau's essay, "Bande à Part: Jacqueline Lamba, Dora Maar, and the Surrealist Women's Network," presents the most ardent, sharp, and well-researched feminist critique in this collection. Connections here are wide-ranging, bringing Maar into orbit with Jacqueline Lamba, Lee Miller, Nusch Eluard, Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Leonor Fini, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, Lise Deharme, Valentine Hugo, Alice Rahon, and Didier Desroches. In emphasizing the friendships between women, as well as their joint struggles within the patriarchal framework of surrealism and their romantic relationships, Solomon-Godeau shifts the conversation towards a new recognition of vital exchange. She thoughtfully hones a close-reading of Maar's ambiguous photographic portrait of Lamba (a fellow artist and Breton's wife), entitled *Dawn (Aube)* (1935), which at first glance seems to be about the quiet pensiveness of early morning. Exposing the subtleties of its surrealist "expectation," Solomon-Godeau explains that though we are unable to see the lower half of Lamba's body, she is in fact pregnant. Three months after the photo was taken, she gave birth to a daughter and named her Aube. Such a reading enriches insights into the complexity of Maar's game with realism and recognition via photography.

Nearing the end of *Dora Maar* attention turns specifically to the artist's relationship with Picasso. The two met in 1935 and remained embroiled in a romantic relationship for some nine years. But their partnership exceeded the personal, and as Emma Lewis aptly demonstrates in her essay, "In the Darkroom and the Studio: Dora Maar and Picasso," it was an intense situation of mutual influence. With Maar, Picasso experimented with photographic processes, while Picasso encouraged Maar to embrace painting. They collaborated on a series of photos that were printed in *Cahiers d'art* in 1937, though these were credited to Picasso alone.

Commissioned by Christian Zervos for *Cahiers d'art*, Maar became Picasso's photographer, documenting the progressive creation of *Guernica* (1937). These documents have done much to enhance to myth and detail given to the composition. Fascinatingly, Maar described the famed painting as "like a photograph because it is absolutely modern" (p. 142). Beyond noting the inherent modernity of *Guernica's* representational and abstracted forms that grapple with the visceral gore of war, Maar's comments also point perceptively to the formative role of media, photojournalism, and the circulation of news. Picasso learned of the April 26th, 1937 Spanish Nationalist attack on Guernica, Spain precisely via newspaper reports. Maar later recounted photography's influence on the artwork in these terms, calling Picasso's black and white painted depiction of *Guernica* "an immense photograph" (p. 142). The inclusion of these factors are helpful in rounding out a more accurate picture of *Guernica's* genesis. So, too, is Lewis's discussion of a Maar painting containing an electric lamp, which predates *Guernica* and likely served as inspiration for Picasso's inclusion of a sun turning into an eye-shaped electric light. Sadly, this painting by Maar is not reproduced in the catalogue.

Damarice Amao's attentive essay, "Obligatory Painting," provides a crucial hinge between Maar's youth and her later years, chronicling the long-standing importance of painting. Turning the tables, we learn of Maar's profuse work, her vibrant studies of Picasso's face and her own version of *La Femme qui pleure* (*Weeping Woman*). Maar's dreary still-lives reflecting the realities of life under the Occupation in the 1940s give way to her postwar turn to landscape. Amao recounts how, despite a hiatus from actively exhibiting in late 1940s, Maar continuously dedicated herself to creative work. Descriptions of Maar's hybrid mingling of painting and photography in the form of abstract experiments with negatives and contact prints, some scratched or underexposed, others singed with acid, eventually becoming photogram experiments in the 1980s, emphasize her intermedia position. These details round out a portrait of Maar as an artist that is multiple and singular, or, as Amao states in reference to Paul Eluard's personal inscription to Maar in a 1945 copy of *Malheurs des immortels reveles par Paul Eluard et Max Ernst*, as "the painter of the outmost limits" (p. 162).

The unsystematic dispersal of Maar's work, art collection, manuscripts, and memorabilia in a 1998 and 1999 estate sale—sold by entire lots and never precisely catalogued—poses yet another challenge to the act of reassessment *Dora Maar* seeks. Nevertheless, the compendium that is *Dora Maar* is incredibly impressive. One can only imagine the massive labor and scope of searching and assembly that this project entailed. Despite Solomon-Godeau's assessment that "Maar's presence in the history of Surrealism was secured largely by her role as Picasso's mistress and model, especially because of his *Weeping Woman* series, which she inspired, of which no fewer than sixty paintings, drawings, and etchings are documented, and to which subject at least one major exhibition and catalogue have been devoted" (p. 132), this catalogue forcefully argues for a historical reckoning outside of those confines. *Dora Maar* functions, then, in the mode of "surrealist fact," exhibiting a fittingly complex characterization of Maar's art and life, credibly shifting the meaning and significance of this artist for future researchers and art audiences to come.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Amanda Maddox, "What's in a Name: The Invention of Dora Maar"

Alix Agret, "The Audacity of Erotic Gazes"

Patrice Allain and Laurence Perrigault, "Dora of the Varied, Ever Beautiful, Faces"

Victoria Combalá, "Dora Maar, Street Photographer: Barcelona and London"

Dawn Ades, "Chance Encounters and the 'Modern Marvelous'"

Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska, "'The Imaginary is What Tends to Become Real': The Photomontage Period"

Ian Walker, "Ubu in London: Between Surrealism and Documentary"

Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Bande à Part: Jacqueline Lamba, Dora Maar, and the Surrealist Women's Network"

Emma Lewis, "In the Darkroom and the Studio: Dora Maar and Picasso"

Damarice Amao, "Obligatory Painting"

NOTES

[1] Jacques-André Boiffard, Paul Eluard, and Roger Vitrac, "Préface," *La Révolution surréaliste* 1, no. 1 (December 1924): 2. As cited and translated in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds., *Object.Photo: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909-1949. An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014: https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Hauptman_ORourke.pdf.

[2] Andre Breton and Louis Chavance, *Appel à la lutte*, Paris, s.é., 10 février 1934 1, feuillet grand in-4°. See <https://www.andrebretton.fr/en/work/56600100631090>.

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