



Surreal activities

Creative ideas for
exploring surrealism
in the classroom





About this resource



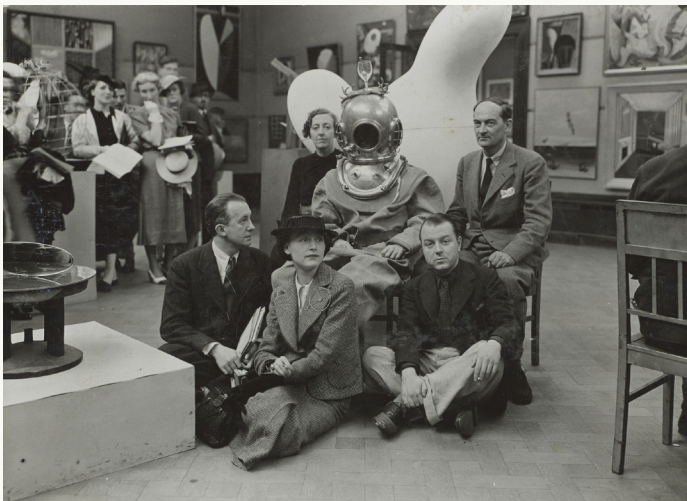
Hugo Ball, reciting a poem at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, 1916

This resource is full of activities that will help you to explore surrealism with your students. The activities are playful and sometimes irrational, a bit like surrealism itself.

We've designed the activities so you can hand them straight out to your students. For a quick overview of each, look at the summary at the top of each page. This will also tell you what you need for the activity. If you see an asterisk* next to an item on the list of things you'll need, that means it's an item you can print or photocopy from the 'Resources and templates' section of this booklet.

We hope that completing these activities will result in liberating and unexpected consequences for you and your students!

This resource includes images from *Surreal Art*, Te Papa's 2021 exhibition on international surrealist works. It also includes images by artists from Aotearoa New Zealand where surrealism continues to have an influence. Have fun exploring surrealist artists from Aotearoa in more detail by using Te Papa's Collections Online at collections.tepapa.govt.nz



Salvador Dalí in a diving suit at the International Surrealist Exhibition, 1936. National Galleries of Scotland. Purchased with the assistance of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund, 1995

Surrealism began in Europe in the 1920s. Surreal means 'above reality', and it reflects the surrealists' desire to transcend the rational world – a world turned upside down by World War I.



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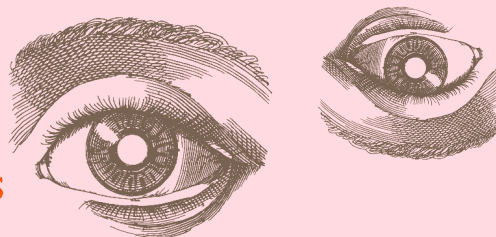
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Her de Vries, The Debutante Ball, 1957-1991, collage, wood, textile, paint, paper, silver foil, and metal. Courtesy of the artist. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Tom Haartsen



Surreal ART



Man Ray, Gift, 1921 (1974), cast iron and copper tacks. © Man Ray 2015 Trust/ADAGP. Copyright Agency, 2021. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Jannes Linders

activities



Surrealist collage

The what

Make a collage, just like the surrealists. You'll choose the images, but the results will be unexpected.



Copy of Landscape, Nelson, 1872, by John Gully. Gift of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, 1936. Te Papa

You'll need:

- copies of images from Te Papa's Collections Online <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/>
- a magazine, scissors
- glue
- paint or coloured pens

Surrealists enjoyed playing with juxtaposition (putting different kinds of images next to each other). They also loved the element of chance. In this activity, you're using chance when you randomly select images.

The how

Step 1: Choose an image of a landscape

You could cut this out from a magazine, or use a copy of a landscape from Te Papa's Collections Online, or draw a landscape on a sheet of paper.



Step 2: Randomly select other images

Close your eyes and flick through a magazine or images, then choose whichever picture your finger lands on.

Step 3: Put the images together

Place the images on your landscape page. This is a chance to play with scale (how big things are compared to each other) and juxtaposition.

Step 4: Add paint or drawing to the finished collages

Add colour and texture.

Step 5: Give the collage a surreal title

This title doesn't have to be logical. It might be so strange that it makes the viewer of your artwork look at it in a new way. For example, if you called an image of a rock a 'night creature accompanied by clouds', other people would look at the image of the rock differently.

Exquisite corpse



The what

Create a fantastical creature with your classmates. The results will be strange, funny, and unpredictable. Your teacher might time you for each step, so listen out for instructions.

You'll need:

- the exquisite corpse templates at the back or a sheet of paper folded into three
- coloured pencils or pens.

The how

Step 1: Draw a head

Use the exquisite corpse template or a piece of paper folded into three. Draw the head of a strange, imaginary creature in the first third. Once you've finished, fold over your creation so the next person can only see the two lines where the neck begins.

Step 2: Swap your paper

Give your paper to someone and take their paper.

Step 3: Draw a body

Draw a fantastical body that joins up with the neck lines. This body could have wings, or gills, or lots of arms – whatever! Add some guiding lines so the next person can see where to start drawing the next part of the body. Now fold over the paper so the body is hidden.

Step 4: Swap your paper

Give your paper to someone new and take theirs.

Step 5: Draw the last part of the creature

This last section is for the legs, or tail, or feathers – or all of them!

Step 6: Reveal the creature

Open up the wonderfully bizarre creatures you've made.

Want to keep working on the creature? Cut it out and display it on the wall. Give it a name and explain where it lives and what it eats. You could even write a story about it.

Hybrid creatures



The what

Make your own bizarre creature using examples from Te Papa's collections – it will be a New Zealand native too!

You'll need:

- a sheet of paper folded into three
- copies of images from Te Papa's Collections Online* or use the body outlines on pages 31–33
- scissors
- coloured pens or pencils
- glue

The how

Step 1: Select a head

Select a head from one of the images from Te Papa's Collections Online. Stick it on the top section of your sheet of paper.

Step 2: Select a body

Choose a body from one of the images from Collections Online. Stick it on the middle section of your piece of paper.

Step 3: Select legs and feet

Choose legs and feet (or a tail or tentacles!) from one of the images from Collections Online. Stick it on the bottom section of your sheet of paper.

Step 4: Describe your creature

Give the creature a name, a preferred habitat (a place it likes to live), and some identifying features. For example, you could describe what it eats and when it's active. Write your description on the back of your hybrid creature.

This activity is a lot like the exquisite corpse activity. Have a go at that activity if you want to work with your classmates to come up with something even more unexpected and bizarre!

Surreal costume

The what

In this activity, you get to design a weird and inventive costume.

You'll need:

- magazines or copies of images from Te Papa's Collections Online*
- pens
- a sheet of paper
- scissors
- glue

You could use an image of yourself and design a bizarre outfit just for you. You could even do this activity on the computer using Photoshop or PIXlr.

The how

Step 1: Draw or cut out a person

Draw a person on a sheet of paper, or cut out a person from a magazine and stick it on a sheet of paper.

Step 2: Cut out images for your costume

Use images from magazines or from Te Papa's Collections Online. Be inventive! For example, you might make hats out of cheese and wings out of cars! Cut these images into shapes for your costume.

Step 3: Arrange the parts of your costume

Experiment and play with your design before you stick it down.

Step 4: Glue the costume to your person

Once you've decided on your design, glue the parts of the costume onto your person. You could even make a catwalk and give your costume an inventive name.



Frottage (RUBBING)

The what

Discover the textures of different kinds of surfaces then use them to create a landscape or seascape.

You'll need:

- sheets of paper
- pencils or crayons
- scissors
- glue

Surrealists loved the unexpected results of frottage. They liked to imagine that the textured pattern could be something else. For example, if you rub on a wooden board with a pencil and paper, the resulting woodgrain pattern could be cut up and used to represent mountains, or birds, or even ... trees!

The how

Step 1: Find a textured surface

Interesting textures are hiding everywhere. Find one now.

Step 2: Create a rubbing

Hold your sheet of paper over the surface, and gently rub over the paper with your pencil or crayon.

Step 3: Repeat steps 1 and 2

Create at least five rubbings.

Step 4: Cut up your rubbings

Cut your rubbings into different shapes.

Step 5: Use your cuttings to create an artwork

Arrange your cuttings on a blank sheet of paper to create a surreal landscape or seascape. Once you're happy with how you've arranged them, glue down your cuttings.

Accidental collage

The what

Rip up bits of paper and let them fall to create a random and surreal collage.

You'll need:

- a selection of paper – for example, coloured paper, pages of text, pages from magazines
- a blank sheet of paper
- glue

The how

Step 1: Rip papers into smaller pieces

Choose some papers and rip them into pieces. Try to use a selection of different kinds of paper.

Step 2: Gather all your bits of paper together

Gather up all your bits of paper in your hands, and hold them above your blank sheet

Step 3: Let your bits of paper fall on your blank sheet

Wherever they land is where you'll stick them.

Step 4: Glue down your collage

Glue down each bit of paper exactly where it fell.

Step 5: Stand back and look at your collage

You might even find a hidden image or pattern.

Automatic drawing

The what

Free your unconscious mind by creating an artwork without using your eyes. This activity will help you enter a surreal state of mind and drown out the noise of your conscious mind. Music can be helpful.

You'll need:

- a blindfold (or the will power to keep your eyes shut!)
- a blank sheet of paper
- pencils

You could also use something like clay for this activity.

The how

Step 1: Close your eyes or use a blindfold, but ...

... before you do, read through step 2 – you'll need to remember it!

Step 2: Draw!

After you've closed your eyes, go ahead and draw. Don't think! Just let your hand move.

Step 3: Open your eyes

Look closely at your artwork. Can you find a hidden picture within it? If you are working in a group, you could even pass your artwork to some else – they might see something you can't.

Step 4: Add lines and shading

Add lines or shading to emphasise parts of your artwork.

C u b o m a n i a

The what

Cut up and rearrange a picture to make a new mind-bending artwork.

You'll need:

- magazines or copies of images from Te Papa's Collections Online*
- a blank sheet of paper
- scissors
- glue

The how

Step 1: Choose an image

Choose your image from a magazine or Collections Online.

Step 2: Divide your image into squares or rectangles

Fold your image in half. Then fold it in half again and again until it's divided into many small squares or rectangles.

Step 3: Cut up the image

Cut along the folded lines and make a pile of squares or rectangles.

Step 4: Put the pieces back together

Choose a new and inventive way to put the squares or rectangles back together.

Step 5: Glue down your artwork

Glue the squares or rectangles down in their new order on the blank sheet of paper.



Edward McKnight Kauffer, circa 1915, London, by Raymond McIntyre. Gift of the estate of C. Millan Thompson to mark the occasion of the retirement of the director, S.B. Maclennan, 1968. Te Papa (1968-0002-22)



Surreal



The what

Create a bizarre plate of kai using collage techniques.

You'll need:

- a blank sheet of paper
- a pen or pencil
- magazines
- scissors
- glue

Optional extra – nominate someone in the class to create a surreal menu using the names of all your dishes. You could even think of the name of the restaurant where you serve this surreal menu.

The how

Step 1: Draw a big plate

This could be a bird's-eye view looking down on the plate from above, or you could use a side view.

Step 2: Cut out images

Cut out a selection of different objects from magazines – cars, sofas, hats, trees.

The more different the things you choose, the better. You can even choose some images of food.

Step 3: Arrange images on your plate

Play with the items you've cut out to create your surreal dish. Size differences will contribute to the overall surreal effect.

Step 4: Glue down your images

Once you're happy with your dish, glue your items to your drawing of a plate.

Step 5: Give your dish a name

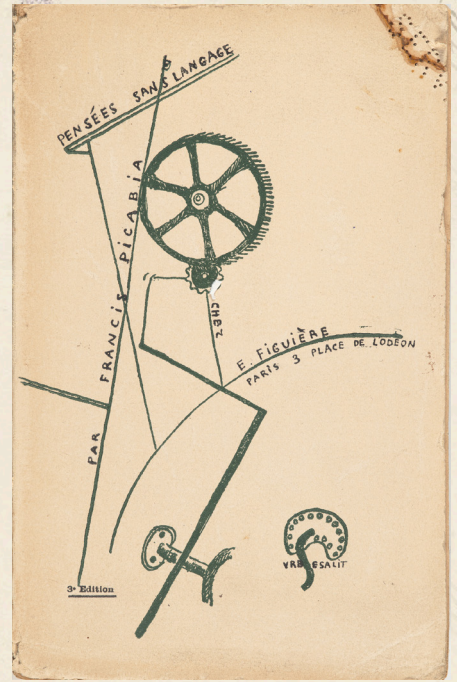
You can be playful and inventive when naming your dish. Come up with a name people are likely to remember.



Surreal



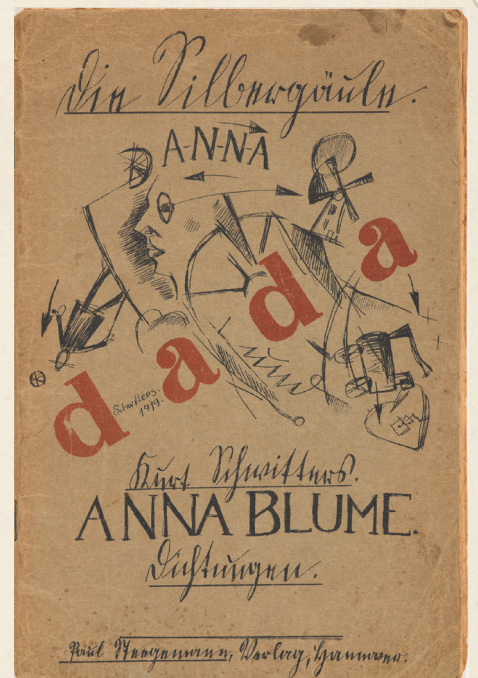
Kurt Schwitters, The Cathedral: 8 Lithographs, 1920, publication. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Studio Tromp



Francis Picabia, Thoughts Without Language: Poem, 1919, publication. © Francis Picabia/ADAGP. Copyright Agency, 2021. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Studio Tromp

word

activities



Kurt Schwitters, Anna Blume: Poems, 1919, publication. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Studio Tromp

Surreal Sentences

The what

Create a nonsensical sentence using letters from your name.

You'll need:

- a pen or pencil
- paper
- a book

The how

Step 1: Turn to a random page of your book

Use whichever page you land on to create your surreal sentence.

Step 2: Choose a word that starts with the first letter of your name

For example, if your name is Aroha, you would choose any word starting with 'a' like 'astonishing'. The only rule is that the word has to appear on the page you turned to. If there were no words starting with 'a', you'd go to the next page to find one.

Step 3: Select words that begin with the other letters of your name

For example, if your name is Aroha, you'd choose an 'r' word', then an 'o' word, and so on.

Step 4: Put your selected words together

Rearrange the words you chose to make the most interesting sentence you can.

All Roundabout Opposite Help Animals

Surreal Sayings



EXamples of simple sayings

The what

Create a strange arrangement of words using a simple saying.

You'll need:

- paper
- pencil
- a simple saying

The how

Step 1: Choose a saying

Choose one you know or one from the examples in the background.

Step 2: Reorder the words

Now reorder the words in the saying. For example, let's say you chose the saying 'I am what I am', you might rearrange the words like this.

AM WHAT I AM I WHAT I AM AM I AM I WHAT I AM WHAT I AM I AM

Step 3: Arrange the words on the page

Add spaces and punctuation.

Step 4: Read out your poem

Pair up with a buddy and read your surreal sayings to each other.

a

R

Nonsense poem

The what

K



Hugo Ball, reciting a poem at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, 1916

Create new words using the letters of your name, then put them together to make a nonsense poem.

You'll need:

- a pen or pencil
- scissors
- two blank sheets of paper.

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla
 The surrealists wrote whole poems using nonsense words. The words above are from Hugo Ball's nonsense poem 'Karawane'.

The how

E

Step 1: Write your name in capitals

On one of your blank pieces of paper, write your name in capitals. Make the letters large (about 5 centimetres).

Step 2: Cut out each letter

Cut each letter out in a square shape.

Step 3: Rearrange the letters

Create new words by rearranging the letters of your name.

Step 4: Write down each new word

Write down each new word you come up with. For example, if your name is KATE SHEPPARD, you might come up with new words like EATK DREASHPP or TAEK PHEASPRD. Try to come up with as many words as you can.

You can use spaces in between the letters of your name to make more words. For example, you might divide TAEK PHEASPRD like this: TAE KPHEAS PRD.

Step 5: Create a poem from your nonsense words

Put your new words together in a nonsense poem. Play with the order of the words by sounding them out and putting them in an interesting order.

P

T

P

D

S

E

Erase poem

The what

Create a poem by selecting words on a page and covering up other words.

You'll need:

- a page of text
- a black pen

You could use collage images from magazines instead of a black pen. In this case, you'll also need scissors and glue. You can also do this activity digitally.

The how

Step 1: Choose your words

To choose words from your page of text, you could circle words randomly or you could carefully consider each word.

Step 2: Cover up the words you haven't chosen

Cover the words you haven't chosen so only your chosen words remain. You do this by using a black pen, or by adding collage on top of the text.

Lovell-Smith concentrated on formal concerns in Arbutus **berries**. Commonly known as the strawberry tree, the arbutus was introduced to New Zealand by European settlers and grows in public parks and private gardens. A striking characteristic is the variation in **colour** of the berries, which turn from green to orange to deep red as each cluster **ripens**. These become abstract shapes in the painting, as does the cropped framed picture and the **vivid** green foreground band. Their simplicity is offset by the vividly **patterned** drapery, which plays off against varied shades of **leaves**, while the red, orange and green berries create a vibrant arrangement of shapes and contrasting colours.

[Redacted text]

berries. [Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text] **colour** [Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text] **ripens.** [Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text] **vivid** [Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

patterned [Redacted text]

[Redacted text] **leaves,** [Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

Exquisite corpse Sentences

The what

Create random sentences with your classmates.

You'll need:

- a copy of the template for exquisite corpse sentences*
- a pen or pencil

Remember what adjectives, nouns and verbs are?

Here's a quick reminder.

An adjective is a describing word (like glittering or yellow or ghostly).

A noun is a naming word (like wolf or creature or apple).

A verb is a doing word (like run or lost or smashed).

The how

Step 1: Write a word on the first line

Once you've finished, fold over the first part of the template so the next person can't see what you've written.

Step 2: Give your paper to someone else

This activity works best if you keep passing your paper to people in the same direction. For example, everyone might pass their paper to the person in front of them. The people in the front row would be the only people to pass their papers to the people at the very back of the room.

Step 3: Repeat steps 1 and 2 until you finish the sentence

You'll need to pass your template around the classroom five times.

Step 4: Reveal your random sentence

Unfold your paper to reveal your random sentence. You could even take turns reading them out.

Dada poem

Dada was an art movement that rejected reason and logic. It focused on nonsense and the irrational. The poem you make in this activity will be a bit nonsensical and irrational too!

The what

Create a poem that is both strange and random using words from magazines or newspapers.

You'll need:

- a newspaper or magazine
- scissors
- glue
- a blank sheet of paper

Here's another way to do this exercise. Take a piece of text and fold into 4 sections. Cut up the 4 sections and reorder. The text will now be a dada poem.

The how

Step 1: Randomly select a paragraph

Select your paragraph from a newspaper or magazine. You can pick it randomly by opening the newspaper or magazine on any page and selecting the first paragraph your fingers touch.

Step 2: Cut up the paragraph

Cut up the paragraph so every word is on a separate bit of paper.

Step 3: Turn the words face down

Turn the words face down on the table or place them in a bag or your pencil case.

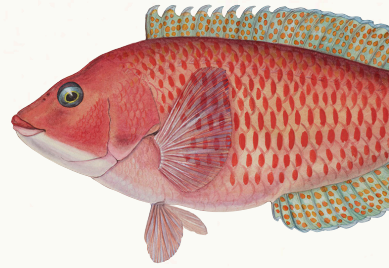
Step 4: Choose words one by one

Write down each word you choose in the order that you pick it up. The resulting poem is will be a dada poem. According to Tristan Tzara (a well-known dadaist), dada poems can resemble their authors. Can you see any relationship between you and your poem?

Step 5: Read your poem out to someone

Pair up with someone and read your poems aloud to each other.

Calligram poetry

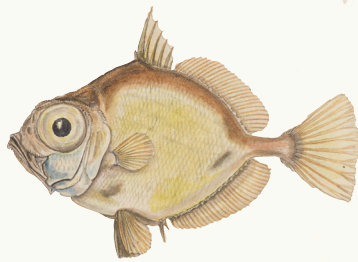


The what

Create a poem that is structured to express or resemble something else.

You'll need:

- coloured pens or pencils
- a blank sheet of paper.



Calligrams are pictures formed out of words that relate to the picture.

The how

Step 1: Create an outline drawing

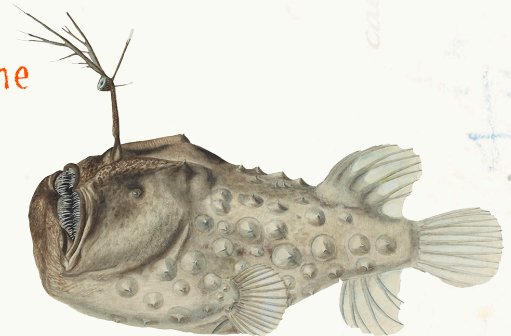
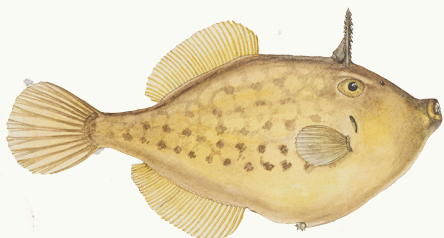
Draw your outline on your blank sheet of paper. Your outline drawing should be the shape of something – a fish, a bottle, anything you can think of.

Step 2: Find words related to your outline drawing

Choose words that say something about the shape. For example, if my outline drawing was a fish, I might choose words like ocean, water, wet, deep, blue, scales, sea, and so on.

Step 3: Write your selected words in your outline

Be creative with the colour and placement of your words.



Ingredients:

Random recipes

The what

Create a list of nouns (naming words) and verbs (doing words), and use them to create random recipes.

You'll need:

- a blank sheet of paper
- coloured pens
- a recipe – choose your favourite one if you like

The how

Step 1: Make a list of nouns and verbs

Write a list of nouns and verbs. Choose strange and unexpected words if you can.

Step 2: Identify the nouns and verbs in your recipe

Read your recipe. Identify all the nouns, and circle them in one colour. Now identify the verbs, and circle them in another colour.

Step 3: Swap the nouns and verbs in the recipe

Replace the nouns in the recipe with nouns from your list. Once you're done, do the same with the verbs.

Notes On Service:

Bake at 220°C

Lower heat to 180°C

until filling is set.

You could also create a surreal advert using this method.

Surreal definitions

The what

Create a new definition for an existing word.

You'll need:

- a pen or pencil
- a blank sheet of paper
- a dictionary

Here's an eXample of a random definition.
Computer: Any of the wild or cultivated, usually prickly-stemmed, pinnate-leaved, showy-flowered shrubs of the genus *Rosa*.

The how

Step 1: Choose a word from the dictionary

Flick to any page in the dictionary, and choose whatever word your finger lands on.

Step 2: Write down your chosen word

Use your pen or pencil to write your chosen word on a blank sheet of paper.

Step 3: Choose a definition

Again, just flick to any page of the dictionary, and choose the definition your finger lands on.

Step 4: Swap your definition with someone else

Enjoy the surreal wordplay. You could even create a surreal dictionary for the class with the new definitions.

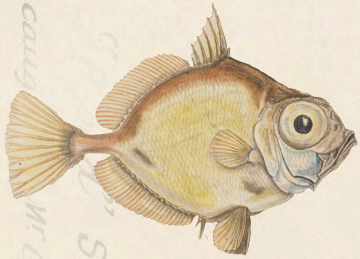


Stingray, *Dasyatis centroura* (Width 5 ft.; total length 10 ft.; tail 7¼ ft.)

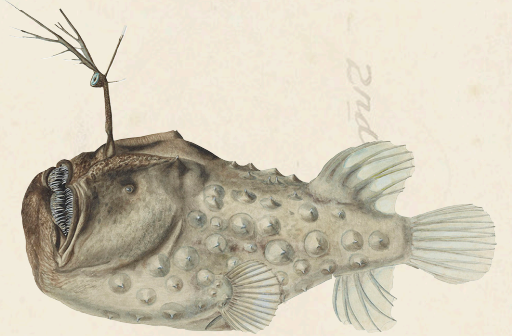


S, Stipe
A, Fern; B, Mushroom;
C, Kelp

Resources



and



templates

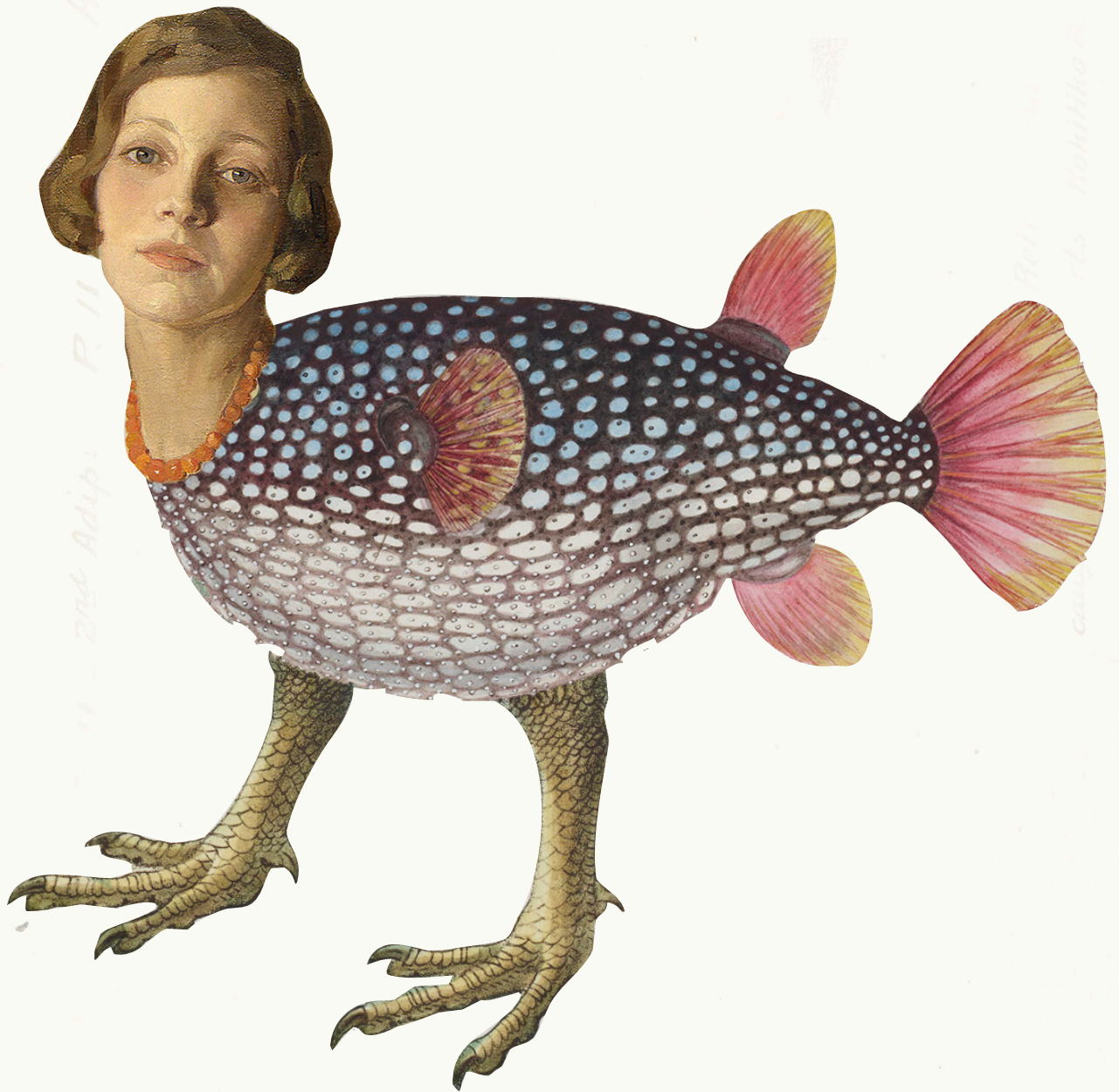


caug. Mr. G. L. Smith (Polka dot wrasse).
Hohihiha R. 3rd Oct. 1890.

P. 11 V. 6 A. 19 (1st year short) C. 19

PRE

Exquisite corpse



Exquisite corpse Sentence

The

adjective

noun

verb

the

adjective

noun

Surreal inspiration



Felix Kelly, Nuns floating over a dream landscape, 1958, oil on board. Purchased 2015. Te Papa (2015-0020-1)



Salvador Dalí, Sun Table, 1936, oil on panel. © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/VEGAP. Copyright Agency, 2021. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Studio Tromp



Len Lye, Untitled (Life under the sea), circa 1930, oil on canvas. Purchased 2003. Te Papa (2003-0046-1)



René Magritte, The Red Model III, 1937, oil on canvas. © René Magritte/ADAGP. Copyright Agency, 2021. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Purchased with the support of Stichting Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, the Rembrandt Association, the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, the Erasmusstichting, and Stichting Bevordering van Volkskracht. Photo: Studio Tromp



Don Driver, Armoured head, 1965, metal. Purchased 2014. Te Papa (2014-0031-1)



Séraphine Pick, Love school, 1999, oil on canvas. Purchased 1999 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds. Te Papa (1999-0026-1)



Michael Parekowhai, Folie a deux, 1994, wood, fibreglass, and enamel paint. Purchased 1996 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds. Te Papa (1996-0024-1)



Don Driver, Invincible, 1992, mixed media collage. Purchased 2017. Te Papa (2017-0002-3)

Surreal Inspiration



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Four Seasons in One Head, circa 1590, oil on panel. Paul Mellon Fund. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Public Domain



Eileen Agar, Woman Reading, 1936, collage of pen and ink, pasted paper, and pressed leaves. © Estate of Eileen Agar/ Bridgeman Images. Purchased 1972 with Lindsay Buick Bequest funds. Te Papa (1972-0008-1)



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Portrait, Rudolf II as Vertumnus, 1591, oil on canvas. Collection of Skokloster Castle. Photo by Jens Mohr via Wikimedia Commons, CCo 1.0 Public Domain



Brent Wong, Mean time exposure, 1971, acrylic on hardboard. Purchased 2012. © Brent Wong, www.brentwong-painter.com. Te Papa (2012-0016-3)



Rita Angus, Flight, 1969, oil on hardboard. Purchased 1970 from Wellington City Council Picture Purchase Fund. © Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of Rita Angus. Te Papa (1970-0012-1)

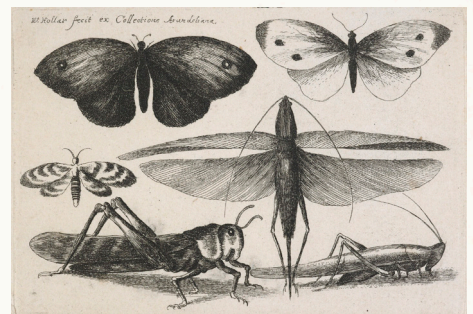
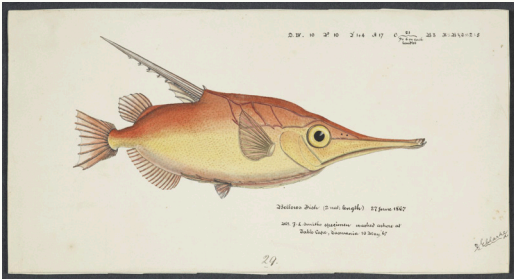


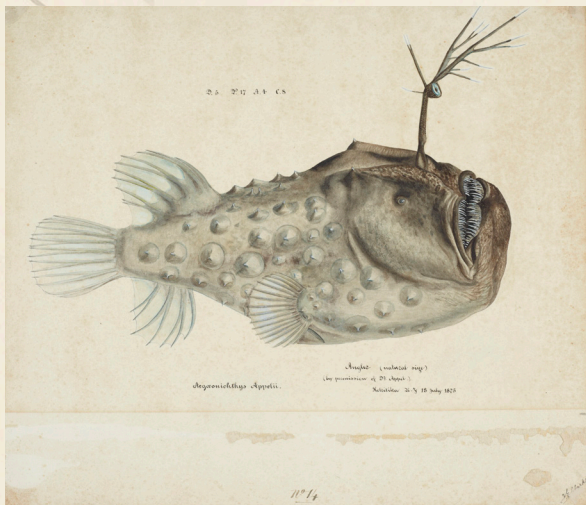
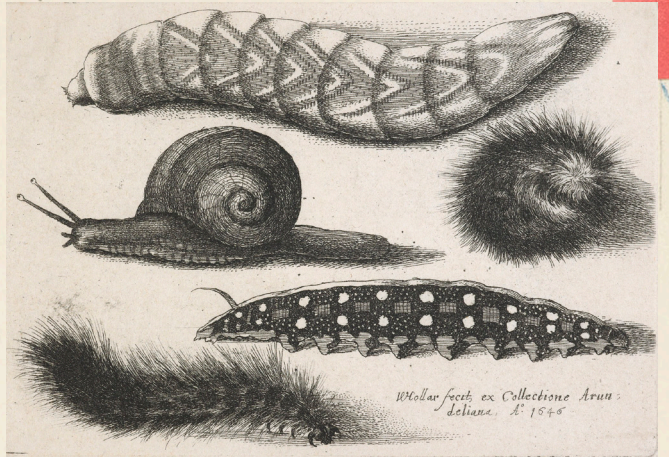
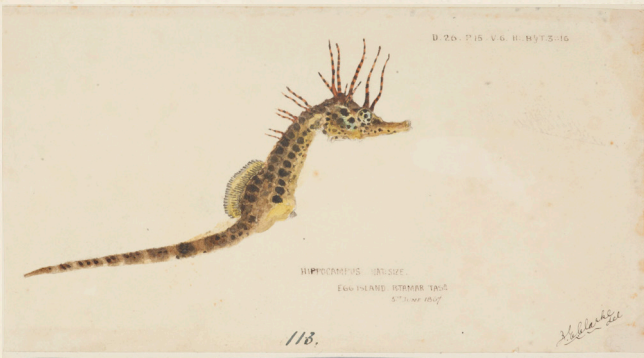
W. D. (Bill) Hammond, Traffic Cop Bay, 2003, acrylic on canvas. Purchased 2003. Te Papa (2003-0027-1/A-C to C-C)

Surreal Specimens

from Te Papa's collections **get creative!**

Find more [here](#) (click the downloadable images box to get the images that you can freely experiment with)





head

body



Bird, mounted penguin, circa 1908, New Zealand, maker unknown. Te Papa (B.043118)

head

body



Tiger, *Panthera tigris*, collected no data. CC BY 4.0. Te Papa (cropped)

legs

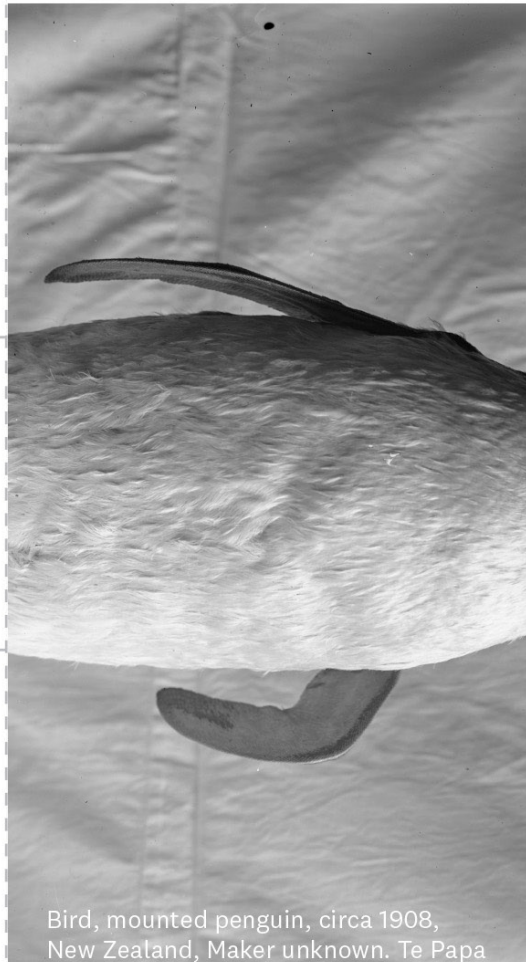
body



Bird, mounted penguin, circa 1908,
New Zealand, Maker unknown. Te Papa

legs

head



Bird, mounted penguin, circa 1908,
New Zealand, Maker unknown. Te Papa

head



Portrait of Mr Crawford, circa 1930, Taranaki,
by William Oakley, F B Butler/Crown Studios Collection.
Gift of Frederick B Butler, 1971. Te Papa

legs

head



Woman in hat. From the album: Snapshot album - Nga Mahanga,
circa 1900, Manawatu, maker unknown. Te Papa.

body

legs