



Smithsonian American Art Museum

New World Surrealisms

Susan Power

Sara Roby Predoctoral Fellow in Twentieth-Century American Realism
Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne

My doctoral work critically reappraises surrealism in the Americas during the 1940s and 1950s, taking up issues of migration and cultural translation while reassessing the circulation and reception of surrealist artistic production in the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean. As James Clifford has observed, surrealism traveled and was changed along its trajectories. Surrealist traffic went beyond artist-initiated journeys or imposed exile under the threat of Nazi deportation. Printed reproductions of surrealist works circulated through artistic journals such as *View* and *VVV* in New York, *DYN* in Mexico, and *Tropiques* in Martinique, and artwork traveled to galleries, institutions, and private collections throughout the Americas. Related exhibition catalogs, reviews, and correspondence further multiplied the channels of communication.

Drawing upon cultural anthropology and postcolonial theory, I explore how the surrealist movement was presented, represented, appropriated, or hybridized as it ventured into new territories. Non-European artists, such as Joseph Cornell, were fellow travelers yet remained marginal to the movement; their encounters and interactions further reveal the transcultural energies that shaped the identity of surrealism. In rereading surrealism—not from its Parisian roots, its European center, but rather from the routes that led to the peripheral sites of the movement’s international exhibitions—I investigate the ways that surrealist strategies of display operated to create a local in-between space that transcended the international. My thesis argues that the exhibitions enacted a transnational or even postnational dimension underlying the surrealist project. This examination enlarges upon previous scholarly understanding of post–World War II surrealism by tracing and analyzing the dynamic forces that transformed the movement along its New World itineraries.