

André Breton (1896-1966) Collection

MS 160

1 Box

Abstract:

The André Breton Collection contains material pertaining to Breton and related Surrealist artists, writers, and thinkers. Breton (February 19, 1896 – September 28, 1966) was a French writer, poet, theorist, and a founder of the Surrealist movement. Vítězslav Nezval (May 26, 1900– April 6, 1958) was a leading Czech avant-garde writer in the first part of the 20th century. Nezval began the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in 1934, along with Karel Teige, (Marie Cerminova) Toyen, Jindrich Styrsky, Bohuslav Brouk, Konstantin Biebl, and Jindrich Honzl. Maurice Bonnefoy ran the D'Arcy Galleries, which hosted a Surrealist exhibit in late 1960. The collection fills one half-size box and spans the years of 1938-1960. The material includes correspondence and poetry manuscripts and typescripts.

History or Biography:

André Breton (February 19, 1896 – September 28, 1966) was a French writer, poet, and theorist, most famous for his founding role in the Surrealist movement. Breton codified the movement's intent and methods in his *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924, and issued a second version in 1929.

Surrealism was an artistic, philosophical, and political movement beginning in the early 1920s that sought to revolutionize human experience through the liberation of imagination and perception from the confining structures and false rationality of societal norms. It had its beginnings in the Dada movement, which was concerned with using "anti-art" to protest and undo the bourgeois capitalist mindset believed to have precipitated World War I. Breton and others soon came to the conclusion that merely undermining and destroying traditional culture and aesthetics was not an effective tool for societal change. They embraced automatic writing, free association, dream analysis, and more as ways to liberate the human imagination and connect to the unconscious mind under the Surrealist banner. Into the mid to late 1930s Surrealism continued to deeply inform writing, painting, film, music, and more, and moved beyond France to establish an international following. Following WWII its influence waned.

Vítězslav Nezval (May 26, 1900– April 6, 1958) was a leading Czech avant-garde writer in the first part of the 20th century. After founding and participating in the Devětsil and Poetism movements, Nezval began the **Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia** in 1934, growing out of his personal relationships with André Breton and Paul Éluard. An ongoing struggle for political affiliation and identity existed throughout the lifespan of the Surrealist movement, sometimes shifting between anarchist, communist, socialist, and Stalinist allegiances. Political differences led Nezval to declare the Czech Surrealists disbanded in 1938 after he had supported the Stalinist show trials in Moscow, a position at odds with many of the group's members. These other members—**Karel Teige, (Marie Cerminova) Toyen, Jindrich Styrsky, Bohuslav Brouk, Konstantin Biebl, and Jindrich Honzl**—insisted that the group continue without Nezval, and wrote several letters to Breton and others, describing their situation and professing their continued dedication to the Surrealist cause.

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Benjamin Péret (4 July 1899 - 18 September 1959) was a French poet and Surrealist. He worked with and influenced many of the poets connected to the Surrealists, including Octavio Paz and Vítězslav Nezval.

In November and December of 1960, a large survey exhibit of Surrealism from its origins to its present incarnations was put up at D'Arcy Galleries in New York. The works included were selected by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, and the overall show was coordinated by them along with **Maurice Bonnefoy**, owner of the gallery.

Description of the Series:

The collection fills one half-size box and spans the years of 1938-1960. The material includes correspondence and poetry manuscripts and typescripts. All material is in French, except and number of newspaper clippings in Czech. There are 2 letters from Czechoslovakian Surrealists regarding Vítězslav Nezval's break from the group, including clippings from Czech newspapers of articles and poems, with French translations. A series of three letters from Karel Teige follows—apparently two to Breton and one to another, unidentified Surrealist leader—and treats similar themes. A letter from Nezval to Peret is supplemented by two poetry manuscripts (one by each correspondent), but it is unclear when they were sent. Finally, there are three letters—two between Breton and Bonnefoy, and one between Bonnefoy and Raymond Cordier—relating to a 1960 Surrealist exhibit at New York's D'Arcy Galleries.

The materials are arranged chronologically in one series.

Provenance:

These materials were purchased from various dealers over a number of years by the former curator, Russell Malone.

Restrictions:

None

Separations:

None

Processor: Jason Nargis, December, 2009

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<u>Container List</u>			
<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	1	Letter to André Breton from Czechoslovakian Surrealists; 13p	March 17, 1938
1	2	Letter to André Breton from Czechoslovakian Surrealists; 11p	March 23, 1938
1	3	Two letters to André Breton? and one letter to another Surrealist leader? from Karel Teige; 3p, 2p, 2p	March 24; April 4; May 3, 1938
1	4	Letter to Benjamin Peret from Vítězslav Nezval; 1p	May 10, 1938
1	5	"Pluriel de la femme," poem manuscript/typescript, by Vítězslav Nezval; 2p	n.d.
1	6	Benjamin Peret manuscript	n.d.
1	7	Three letters re: 1960 Surrealist exhibit at D'Arcy Galleries in New York, NY. André Breton, Maurice Bonnefoy, and Raymond Cordier; 3p, 2p, 2p	May 5; August 1; August 11, 1960