

ARTS

Daniella Luxembourg on René Magritte's Phantom Landscapes

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René Magritte. *Le paysage fantôme*, 1928. Private Collection. © 2025 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

SAVE

Luxembourg + Co., a tony gallery that's been putting on museum-like shows in New York and London since 2011, has outdone itself in their 57th Street space in Manhattan. The Luxembourg part is a powerful mother-daughter team—Daniella and her daughter Alma—and this time, they're introducing us to the idea of Magritte as a landscape painter.

"René Magritte: The Phantom Landscape" (through July 12) asks us to put aside pipes, bowler hats, green apples, and clouds when we think of the Belgian Surrealist painter, and to consider Magritte as a landscape artist of a different kind—one for which landscape and psychology and fantasy and emotion all play in the same sandbox. (When I tell George Condo about the show, he says: "Nice angle on Magritte. Nobody ever zooms in on that.")

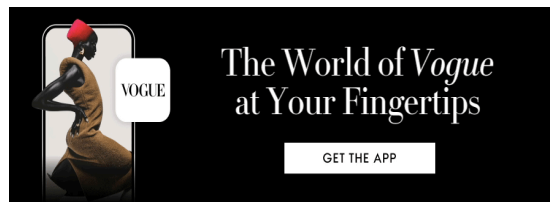


René Magritte with his wife, Georgette Berger, circa 1937. Photo: Getty Images

Daniella Luxembourg, one of the most innovative and far-sighted dealers-slash-art advisors working, is also a top-notch collector. When in New York, she lives in Pierre Matisse's house on the Upper East Side (she bought it in 2001), and a couple of weeks

ago she sold 15 of her important works installed there—works by the likes of Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Alexander Calder, Claes Oldenburg, and other post-war masters—at Sotheby's in New York. Bare walls, not a problem: She's already brought in paintings by Domenico Gnoli, another Fontana, and two kinetic sculptures from the '50s by Jean Tinguely, all from her vast private collection, to replace them.

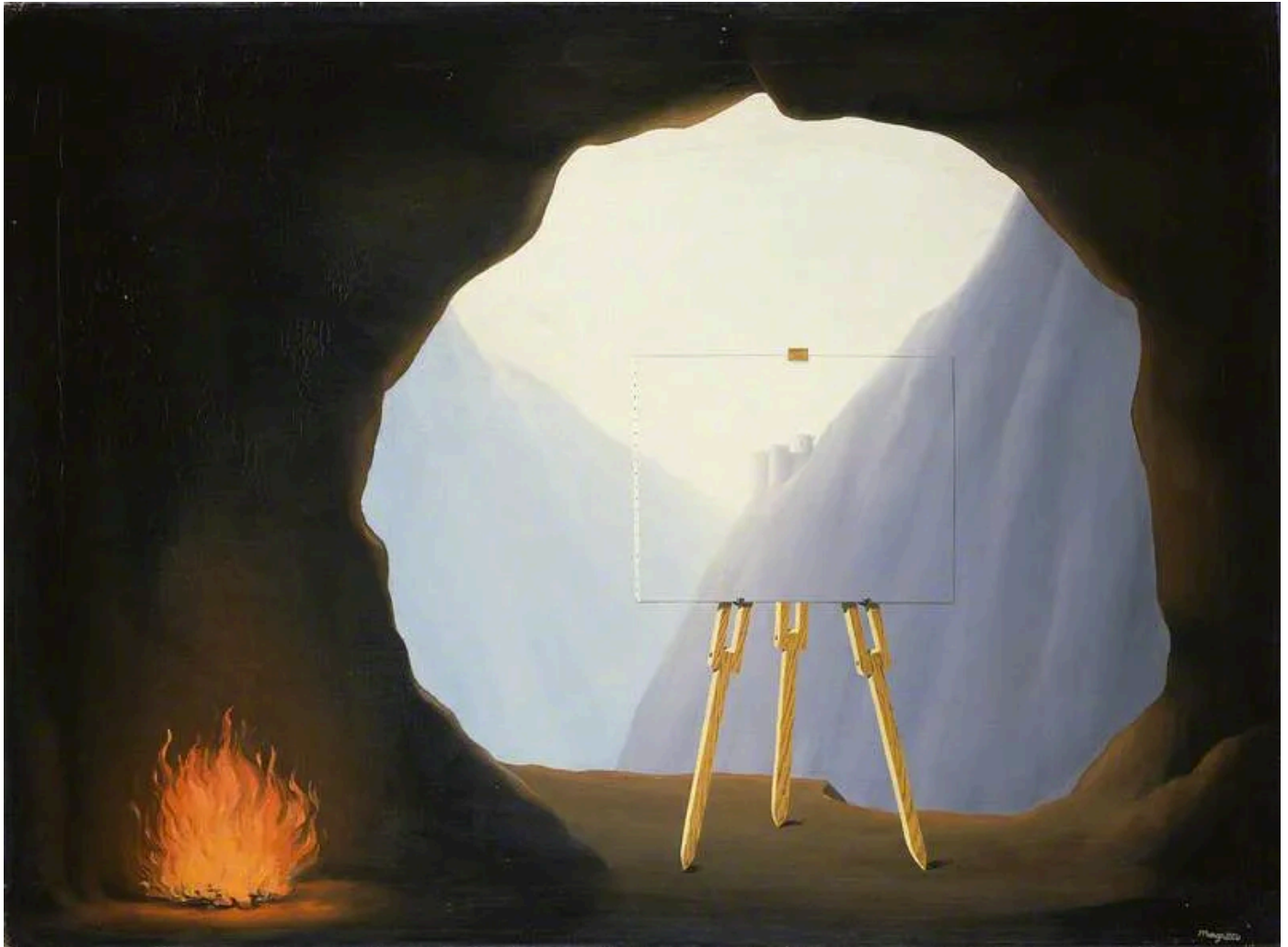
Born in Łódź, a city in central Poland known for its great number of palaces and villas and its National Film School (Roman Polanski went there), Luxembourg is a tastemaker who challenges convention. After moving to Israel when she was only a few months old, she grew up in Haifa, studied the history of art (with a focus on early medieval Jewish art), and started at Sotheby's in Tel Aviv in 1984, when she was in her early 30s. Then, in 1989, she left the auction house to found the Jewish Museum of Vienna. She looks at art as an intellectual but presents it so everybody can see it in ways we perhaps hadn't thought of before.



In “The Phantom Landscape,” 14 well-curated works, most of them little known, tell a three-part story, divided into three rooms. The first, “Frames of Reference,” looks at views outdoors through some kind of a frame. The second room, “The Sky is the Limit,” is all sky. And the third room, “A Human Landscape,” features work that uses the human body and the world around it, or “the morphing of human bodies and natural elements into one another.” In the airy, sixth-floor space, Luxembourg walked me through the show a few weeks ago.

Daniella Luxembourg: The subject of landscape for Magritte is terribly important because, like any artist who is so conceptual, it's obviously all fabricated, like everything in his work. So here are landscapes, which are framed—there is a frame in a frame in a frame. It belongs to a private collector. It's called *The Human Condition II*, 1935. Magritte had moved to Paris in 1927. He was just there for three years. He went back to Brussels, where he was intimidated and fascinated by the Surrealist group. So he always

referred back and forth to that force. And this one from the forties—[it deals with] the same subject of how you look at landscape, but here it's from a cave.



René Magritte, *La condition humaine*, 1948. Gouache and pencil on paper. 13 3/4 x 18 1/4 in. (35 x 46.5 cm) © 2025 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Dodie Kazanjian: You're looking into a cave, into the essence of what a landscape by Magritte can be.

Yes. Also called *The Human Condition* [1948], it belongs to a fabulous collector, who is also a major contemporary artist. Magritte showed his works for the first time in the USA at the Julian Levy Gallery in 1936, and he had no success. On the second occasion, at Sidney Janis Gallery, in 1954, the exhibition caught the attention of artists more than collectors, with Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg being the only buyers.

With Magritte's *La clef des songes*, 1935, we're both inside and outside. It reminds me of Marcel Duchamp's *Fresh Widow*, made in 1920, and with a valise.





René Magritte, *La clef des songes*, 1935. Oil on canvas. 16 1/4 x 10 3/4 in. (41.3 x 27.3 cm) © 2025 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Yes, of course. Because that's a sacred thing. That's the secret within the secret. That is one of the best things here because it's so strange. The only word and writing that correspond is here [with the valise], because everything is so arbitrary—it has no meaning. It's a window, and through the window you see a landscape. It's not a landscape, but that's a window. How do we see? The window or the frame dictates what we see, and we are inside.

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Les signes du soir is an early one, from 1926, the year before he went to Paris. Here, the frame is eating the landscape. You have only menacing things happening to the landscape. These black mountains, everything is suffocating. That poor tree with some stones that also suffocate.

The image is peeled open.

It's very, very strange. What is the frame doing within? Here, [*La parure de l'orage*], 1927, is one of the first landscapes he did when he moved to Paris. It's a collage. He puts some things between us and the main theme of the storm to make a frame. Fabulous painting. That's in a very important American private collection. But before that it was in one of the best collections of Magritte in Europe. And here's a later one [*Le météore*] from '64,

where you also see the landscape: the curtains and the relationship between what we see and what is here.

When have these been seen?

Very rarely. It all comes from private collections and each one has its own destiny.

Now we're in the second room, "The Sky is the Limit."

Here, we commissioned a contemporary artist, Laure Prouvost, to make something about the sky. And she came up with this phrase on the window, "here the sky would take over this room."



Installation view of *René Magritte: The Phantom Landscape*, Luxembourg + Co., New York. Featured works (left to right): Laure Prouvost, *HERE THE SKY / WOULD TAKE OVER THIS ROOM* (2025), *L'apparition* (1928), *La victoire* (c. 1939). © 2025 C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Alexa Hoyer.

Inventive way to use the real sky, looking out the window at the sky. It captures how it's always changing, a moving picture, framed by the window. The paintings in this room deal only with the sky—the sky is the limit, so to speak.

The sky is the limit. And here, in *L'au-delà*, you have the sky and a tomb. When Magritte died—much, much later, in the early '70s—his tomb was designed following that one. But he did this painting in 1938—while he was still alive and kicking.

Now we're in the third and final room, "Human Landscape." Where did you get the idea for this show?

That came from that fabulous painting *Le paysage fantôme*, 1928.

Tell me about this painting. Magritte transforms a portrait of a woman into a landscape by writing one word, "montagne," across her face.

That painting is the "phantom of landscape," and it's the first time he uses a human face and nose to depict a mountain. Basically, he tells you what it is. It's a mountain and the word, but it's a woman. So that's quite radical, to bring it all together. [It's from] the second year he was in Paris. It's a very, very gutsy feeling. And when we saw it, we thought, ohhh, we are going to do *just* landscapes.

When and where did you see this painting?

It was offered for sale a few years ago at auction. Alma went to see it in Paris and she was mesmerized by it. We got it from the owner for this exhibition.

It's such a conceptual way to enter into landscape painting. Do you know anything about the woman in the painting?

Yes. She's taken from a photograph of Suzanne Dhout, a Belgian friend of his wife Georgette. There is something so haunting about it. That positioning and the colors are so strange. The black is a little bit Manet-like.

Androgynous, too.

It's true. That woman is fascinating.

Like *Sargent's Portrait of Madame X*, another landscape of a painting—you could look at her forever.