

SURREALIST TRAITS IN THE HEADS OF ALFRED PELLAN¹

Surrealism advocated the primacy of the subconscious in an attempt to correct what it viewed as an overemphasis on man's rationalism. To achieve this aim, the principles of automatic writing and painting were explored, psychoanalytic theory was studied and the Romantic notion that love, the most irrational of emotions, championed all became an important tenet of the movement.

Surrealist painters were no longer content to portray the world as the rational mind saw it. Instead, they created dream worlds, some of which were abstract, others depicted with photographic realism. In the context of these paintings anything was possible. Familiar objects need not have logical connections nor conform to the laws of gravity or proportion. In addition, fantasy objects were created by the use of the double or composite image and traditional spatial concepts were altered. These dream paintings were more than a visual record of an individual artist's subconscious: they were a declaration of the validity and importance of man's irrational nature.

Alfred Pellan's introduction to Surrealism occurred in Paris, where he lived from 1926 until 1940. At the time he was not actively involved with the Surrealists but he was aware of and influenced by their work.² As evidence of this Pellan "preached to all who would listen of Apollinaire, Eluard, Picasso and of Breton's *Manifestes du Surréalisme*"³ on his return to Montreal. Although not all of Pellan's oeuvre is Surrealist, Surrealist subject matter, imagery and stylistic devices are found with frequency in his work.

Pellan's treatment of the head, a favourite and recurring subject, is indicative of his relationship with Surrealism. Eschewing the morbid or decadent manifestations of the unleashed subconscious,⁴ Pellan's abstract approach is basically straightforward, often optimistic and sometimes playful. In some instances his use of Surrealist vocabulary is conventional; in others, it is more personalized.

Pellan's interest in the human head is seen in his earliest works. Prior to 1935, a number of portraits were executed in which the head, naturalistically rendered and based on the work of Modigliani and Picasso,⁵ is the most prominent feature. Examples are *Self-Portrait* (P. 60p)⁶, 1928; *Mme Claude Bernard* (P. 90p), 1934⁷; and *Mlle Genevieve Tirot* (P. 82p),



Fig. 1. Alfred Pellán, *Tête or Le Père Ubu* (P. 40p), 1935, gouache, 13" x 8". Private Collection.



Fig. 2. Alfred Jarry, *True Portrait of Monsieur Ubu*, 1896.



Fig. 3. Max Ernst, *Ubu Emperor*, 1924, oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Private Collection.

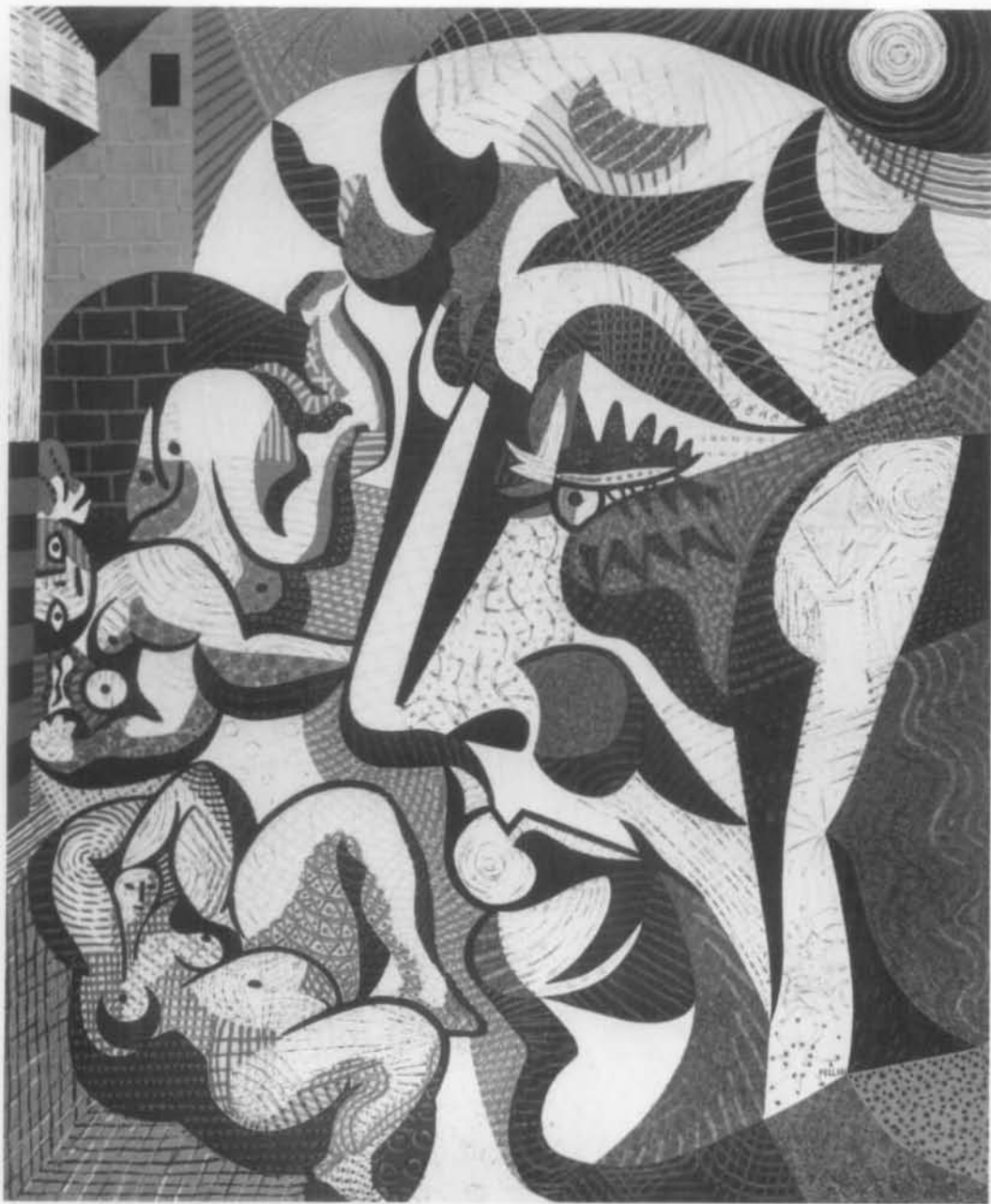


Fig. 4. Alfred Pellán, *Sur la Plage* (P. 230p), 1945, oil on canvas, 81 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 66". Coll. The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

1930-35.⁸ The portraits are characterized by the proximity of the sitter to the picture plane, the simplicity of the background, the strong modelling of the facial features, the use of simple geometric shapes and the calmness of mood.⁹

Although Pellán continues to work in this naturalistic geometric manner, a large number of works dating from the mid-1930's are considerably more abstract, more organic, and more agitated, indicating a new approach. *Tête* or *Le Père Ubu*¹⁰ (P. 40p), 1935, contains these new attitudes to form and is Surrealist in both subject matter and style (Fig. 1). Ubu is the central character in Alfred Jarry's play, *Ubu Roi*, published and produced in 1896. Jarry's stupid, vulgar, aggressive, violent hero, or anti-hero, who ignores the conventions of life, refuses to compromise and rejects logic, symbolized the revolt against a bourgeois mentality and the absurdity of life. Jarry was hailed by the Surrealists as a precursor of their movement. His influence on Surrealism though, was primarily literary, reflected in the Surrealist writers' expansion of the black comedy genre and their continued experiments with the French language.

Visual models for Ubu were provided by Jarry in his *True Portrait of Monsieur Ubu* (Fig. 2) and costume directions. Jarry depicts Ubu as a short, rotund figure, clothed in an encasing robe with a hood that ends, appropriately, in a dunce's cap. The hood hides Ubu's face except for his eyes and nose. In early productions of the play Jarry suggested that his hero wear a mask constructed to emphasize Ubu's piglike nose.

There are few Surrealist paintings that depict Ubu but both Max Ernst and Joan Miró portray the subject in the early 1920's. Ernst's *Ubu Imperator*, 1924, contains only the figure of Ubu (Fig. 3) whereas Miró's *Portrait of Madame B*, 1924, with Ubu located at the lower left, includes other elements of the play. Both artists follow Jarry's model in the stocky, bulbous rendering of the figure. Miró alone makes reference to the dunce's cap but both Ubus have a prominent, snout-like nose. Jarry's figure gave the impression of difficulty in moving and this is seen in both Surrealist versions. Despite Ernst's transformation of Ubu's body into a spinning top resting on a tiny point, his actions are tentative and very wobbly.¹¹

Pellán's *Le Père Ubu* is quite unlike these versions. Aside from the nose, Ubu's identifying characteristics are absent, unless one accepts the circular motif to the left of Ubu's head as an echo of the spiral design of the

stomach of Jarry's drawing. In contrast to the earlier, somewhat passive depictions, Pellán has presented Ubu's violent, aggressive nature in the twisting torso and strong, angular arms. The frontal positioning of the figure coupled with the powerful, forward movement thrusts the figure at the spectator. Ubu no longer remains in his self-contained world but is an active, volatile force capable of projecting himself into our world. Where the earlier portrayals convey the stupidity and isolation of Ubu, Pellán also embodies the horrific aspects of Ubu's character that impinge upon other people's lives.

If the message contained in Pellán's *Le Père Ubu* differs from previous depictions so does his style. Reflecting a general tendency of the 1930's for a preference for organic forms, Pellán abstracts the figure, eliminating detail and concentrating on large generalized shapes. Naturalistic proportions are discounted and the head, inordinately large for the body, is stressed. In fact, the power of the figure lies in the head which dominates the composition. The emphasis on the head could well reflect another aspect of Ubu's character; his rather inflated notion of himself, what we would call his "swelled head". The dual title (*Tête* or *Le Père Ubu*) is a further indication of the importance of the head in this depiction.

The radical change in Pellán's style reflects the influence of Abstract Surrealism. André Masson's large organic forms, often outlined in black, containing transparent passages and pulsating with energy probably served as Pellán's inspiration.¹² Both artists' organic style grew out of a similar attitude to Cubism. It is possible that the freedom of style in *Le Père Ubu* also reflects the use of Surrealist automatic painting techniques, however, no documentation has been found indicating the precise date Pellán began using the method and in which works it occurs.¹³

Not all of Pellán's paintings are linked as obviously to literary sources as *Le Père Ubu* but many reflect subject matter common to both Surrealist painters and writers. *Sur la plage*¹⁴ (P. 230 p.), 1945, (Fig. 4) embodies a theme of paramount interest to the Surrealists: the importance of love and desire as an essential part of man's life. In Pellán's version of the subject, man is an outsider in this world of potential joy and fulfillment. Located on a plane in front of the females, the male is visibly divorced from them. His melancholy and withdrawn expression testifies to a lack of hope in partaking of the uninhibited female world behind him. Static and rigid, the male head contrasts with the writhing, floating female

nudes, asserting isolation through disproportionate size.¹⁵ Yet the possibility of male contact with the female figures is not totally excluded. Integrated into the composition by the pervading, multi-patterned design, the male is visually associated with them.

The method of organizing a pictorial surface in this particular manner, by brightly coloured, thickly textured patterns, originates in Synthetic Cubism. It was first used in conjunction with still life subject matter but constitutes an important aspect of Picasso's later figure studies.¹⁶ For the most part Picasso's patterns are geometric, composed of dots and/or lines, either restricted to the figures or present throughout the entire composition. The style is used by Masson and Miró in their Surrealist portrait heads¹⁷ but their patterns are more organic than Picasso's, often expressing an inner life through symbols, not just forming a surface design.

Although stylistically closer to Picasso in this respect,¹⁸ Pellan uses a stock Surrealist device to segregate the head: the isolation of one element in the composition by contrast, unexpected spatial location and/or dismemberment. In *Sur la plage*, the contrast of size, action and expression as well as the unexpected spatial location of the head have been discussed. In addition, the head seems severed, appearing out of nowhere, related to nothing.

A major source for the Surrealist dismembered head image¹⁹ is found in the work of Giorgio de Chirico,²⁰ where heads of statues are presented out of context and seemingly unrelated to other objects in the composition. Salvador Dali, René Magritte and André Masson base their dismembered head images on the de Chirico model and while each artist develops his own approach to the image, de Chirico's eerie, disturbing, enigmatic mood is retained. Pellan too admired the work of de Chirico,²¹ however, the closest prototype for Pellan's dismembered heads appear to be those of Masson (Fig. 5), which are usually depicted in profile, often patterned and throbbing with suppressed energy.²²

The primary manifestation of the dismembered head in Pellan's oeuvre is the head as spectator, seen in profile and set off to one side of the composition. *Mêchant faune* (P. 208d) recalls *Sur la plage* in depicting the plight of the alienated male mesmerized by his inability to make contact with the female. In *Danse de la vie*, (P. 310Ap), the immobility of the figures at the left is symbolized by the stone blocks that comprise their heads. Despite a similar treatment, the dancing women are capable of

ignoring the stone blocks, moving in arched, circular and diagonal rhythms.²³ The figures at the left may be made of the same stuff but their inability to ignore its limitations further emphasizes their solitude.²⁴ Both works are similar in the use of the cut-off, oversized, comparatively static head positioned to one side of the composition.

Redoute (P. 245d), 1948,²⁵ (Fig. 6) is a variation on the theme. The dismembered head is disproportionate in size, rigid, and solitary but unlike the previous examples it is more centrally situated in the composition. The head differs in other respects: it is grafted on to the trees, becoming inextricably part of them and it is transparent, revealing objects within or behind.

The use of transparency to create a dream image is again a Surrealist device. In the work of Magritte the device occurs in its most obvious form: the transformation of an opaque object into a transparent one allowing the spectator to see objects located behind it.²⁶ Francis Picabia's transparencies are somewhat different (Fig. 7). His complex compositions based on mythological themes merge objects both in front of and behind transparent heads. The objects, varying in size and spilling out of the head, are not part of a definable space, thus making the spectator unsure of their spatial location.²⁷ The subject matter of *Redoute* is not mythological, but, the type of transparency with its resulting spatial confusion is akin to Picabia's.²⁸

In *Cupidon* (P. 389p), Pellan employs another form of Surrealist transparency, actually hollowing out parts of a solid form (Fig. 8). The technique is found in Ernst's *Woman, Old Man and Flower*, 1923, where in addition to the transparency of the central figure, the apertures in his torso allow a partial view of the landscape behind him (Fig. 9). Pellan uses the hole in Cupidon's nose for another purpose: the inclusion of symbols related to his subject matter. The form of the opening in the nose is an inverted heart and suspended in it is another heart containing the all-seeing eye of love in the middle. A third heart is located in the hair. Other symbols relating to love are the miniature cupid nestled in the ear and holding an arrow, the arrow earring and the lunar and solar design on Cupidon's chest.

Pellan's incorporation of Surrealist stylistic devices is not limited to the isolated, dismembered head and transparency. His utilization of the double and the composite image reveals the extent of his debt to Surrealism. Initially inspired by Surrealist literature, the concept of *l'un dans*



Fig. 5. André Masson,
Portrait de Goethe, 1940, oil,
18 $\frac{3}{16}$ " x 24". Private
Collection.



Fig. 6. Alfred Pellán, *Redoute* (P. 245d),
1948, pencil, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 9". Coll. Bernard
Beaupré, Montreal.



Fig. 7. Francis Picabia, *Chloris*, 1939, oil,
63" x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Private Collection.



Fig. 8. Alfred Pellán, *Cupidon* (P. 389p), N.D., oil on board, 11¼" x 8½", Private Collection.



Fig. 9. Max Ernst, *Woman, Old Man and Flower*, 1923-24, oil on canvas, 38" x 51¼". Coll. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

l'autre or the double image is a common Surrealist motif. In its simplest form, the double image is an object that contains, or has been given, two or more meanings, one not necessarily related to the others. The comprehension of the multiple significance of these objects is dependent upon a release from traditional modes of perception and presentation.

Punning is an excellent vehicle for indicating the double meaning of words. Roger Vitrac's (1900-1952) famous example *Dés-lyre* = *délire*, the title of his collected poems, illustrates the method by which a common word, *délire* (delirious), is transformed to link two unrelated words, *dés* and *lyre*. The addition of an 's', the substitution of a 'y' for an 'i', and the splitting of the word into two syllables joined by a hyphen results in the irrational or nonsensical phrase "lyrical dice". Although totally unrelated in meaning, lyrical dice are not an improbable result of delirium.

Similar techniques are used by Pellan in *Grise-ailles* ("grey wings"), the title of both a drawing (P. 239d) and a painting (P. 325p) dated 1948.²⁹ The words *grise* and *ailles* are not usually hyphenated: the presence of the hyphen implies that the two words are meant to be seen as a single unit. By actually joining the words together and changing the spelling slightly, the word *grisaille* is formed, a term sometimes referring to a style of painting in tones of grey popular on the exterior wings of Medieval and Northern Renaissance altar-pieces. Unlike Vitrac's example, the pronunciation of each word set is markedly different and the meanings markedly similar. An equally possible interpretation of Pellan's title and one closer in sound to *Grise-ailles* is *grise-elle(s)*.³⁰

Regardless of which version is chosen, all relate to the works under discussion; *Grise-ailles* referring to the winged forms in the composition, *grisaille* to the greyish tones of the original drawing, and *grise-elle(s)* to the overtly feminine character of the flying figure in the sky. The addition of the hyphen acts as a clue, signaling the unusual and pointing to multiple meanings, the basic characteristic of a Surrealist double image.

Pictorial double images were extensively developed by Salvador Dali who realized that the principles applied to words by Surrealist writers could also be used with visual images. His inspiration was a photograph of natives sitting in front of their huts. Turning the photograph vertically, Dali saw a human face.³¹ Rather than continuing to use found objects (i.e. photographs) as a take-off point, Dali began painting his own double, and often multiple, images. In *Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*, 1938, the double image of landscape/face first seen in the

photograph is extended to include a third image, a fruit bowl, and even a fourth, a dog. This visual punning quickly becomes part of the Surrealist painter's vocabulary.

Equally Surrealist is the composite image. Inspired by Lautrémont's famous phrase, "Beautiful like the fortuitous encounter on an operating table of a sewing machine and an umbrella", and supported by Freudian and Hegelian theory, the Surrealists sought new meanings for objects in random combinations. Unlike the double image, each component in the composite image maintains its identity and the new meaning results solely from juxtaposition rather than multiple interpretations of a single object.³²

There are two types of composite image. In the first type different words or objects are located in the same space or on the same plane. Unrelated words are arbitrarily combined in the same sentence or phrase in literature to produce images such as Breton's "wet streetlamps" or "bells made of straw". Magritte's combinations of unrelated objects³³ are the visual equivalent of Breton's "mixed metaphors". Pellán uses this type of composite image in *Jardin mauve* (P. 386p), 1958, when he links a pansy (which can also be read as a double image of a face) to the kite and the moon by a white dotted line. The three objects exist in the same space, the sky, and on the same plane. While the moon and the kite have logical associations, both being objects one expects to find in the sky, the pansy does not.

Although in certain cases whole words or objects are actually joined together to create the second type of composite image, usually only parts of words or images are fused, forming a new entity. Writing on the meaning of the word 'phallustrade' which was created by this technique, Ernst says "What is a phallustrade? It is a product of alchemy, composed of the following elements: autostrade, balustrade, and a certain number of phalluses. A phallustrade is a verbal collage."³⁴ Ernst and the other Surrealists used the technique to make "visual collages". Examples are Ernst's *The Chinese Nightingale*, 1920 and Magritte's *Gigantic Days*, 1928.

Returning to a study of the heads found in Pellán's oeuvre, the double and composite image are used with frequency, sometimes in the same composition. The left side of the head in *Redoute* is both face and tree, creating a double image, while the centre section of the head, through the device of transparency, contains what may be an architectural landscape on the same plane, creating a composite image. The right side of

the head repeats the head/tree double image and the stone blocks and miniature heads of the centre section.

Physionomagie (P.237d), 1948, (Fig. 10) employs both the visual double image and the verbal composite image. The title is a fictitious word created by the first syllables of *physiognomy* and the word *magie*. The resulting hybrid is an apt description of the subject matter: magic is indeed necessary to transform the physiognomy into a double image of a landscape depicted in aerial perspective.

Each feature of the face contributes to the dual meaning. The nose, transformed into a river or a road spanned by a bridge, divides the landscape/face into two unequal parts. The left side connotes female forces. A crescent shaped moon is found in the iris of the left eye. Traditionally a female symbol and one used frequently by the Surrealists, the moon is also a symbol of fertility. It was believed that the lunar cycle had a mysterious connection with the physiological cycle of woman as well as regulating rainfall, thus determining the fecundity of both woman and nature. The dense, full trees in the cheeks relate to the fertility theme while their generalized shapes resemble female heads.

On the opposite side, the sun, the double image of the right eye, nourishes the grass that grows below it. The sun is the male counterpart of the female moon; the straight, upright forms of the grass contrast with the soft, curving forms of the trees of the left side, echoing the masculine motif found in the right side. Although the sun is not usually associated with fertility in the mythological and alchemical sources used by the Surrealists, solar light and heat are necessary components in the maturation process of plant life. The importance of both the sun and the moon in the natural cycle of growth is emphasized by their proximity to the foliage. Completing this part of the face is a mouth turned on end in the bottom section and the double image of hair/bird to the right of the centre part. The location of the bird completes the reading of the landscape as a series of ascending planes moving from earth to sky.

The head as a double image is used again in an illustration for *Le Voyage d'Harlequin* (P.183d). Unlike *Physionomagie*, the head is not the dominant element of the composition (Fig. 11) but like *Physionomagie* the head has become an object capable of multiple interpretations. In this instance the head is both head, female torso and tree. The eyes have become breasts and branches stream from the mouth and hair. In *Femme assise* (P.199d), 1948, (Fig. 12) Pellan does not begin with the head and transform it into

another object but changes the female's torso into a double image of a head. The eyes are synonymous with the breasts, the nose with the rib cage and the mouth with the fleshy folds of the abdomen. Narrowing at the chin or pelvic region, the silhouette of the face is also that of the torso.³⁵

A variation of the merging of the head and the torso to form a double image is seen in *Goétie* ("Evil Spirit")³⁶, (P.242d), 1948. Eliminating the neck of the female at the right, Pellan merges the enlarged facial features (the only reference to the head) with the upper part of the torso. The resulting, almost grotesque, image reflects the title as does the second double image of arm/wings growing out of the face/body. As in *Femme assise* a certain amount of confusion exists due to the unexpected location of the head in a torso. The disproportionate size of the torso/heads increases the disconcerting effect and the presence of more than one head in *Femme assise* adds to the enigma of this work.³⁷

Pellan's association of the head or its features with parts of the body other than the torso occurs in many works. Sometimes a miniature head or eyes are placed almost randomly on the shoulders or legs as in *Femme d'une pomme* (P.227p), 1948, and *La Chouette* (P.290p), 1954. More often, the head is merged with the hand or part of the hand to form a double image. In *Evasion* (P.215p), originally entitled *A la minute, poème de Paul Eluard*, 1949, the whole hand becomes a double image of a head. In *L'Amour fou* (P.271p), 1954, the double image is restricted to the fingernails and only part of the head, the eyes.³⁸

Both devices occur in *La chiromancienne* (P.257p) or *The Palmist* (Fig. 13). As in *Goétie*, the neck is eliminated and the head is absorbed into the upper part of the torso but unlike *Goétie*, the double image of face/torso is replaced by the multiple image of hand (or palm)/face/torso. In addition, part of this hand, the second finger, becomes a double image for part of the face, the nose. The lower section of the torso consists of another torso/hand double image. Attention is drawn to the four hands in the composition by either relocation, disproportionate size and/or the design patterns formed by the other compositional elements. The emphasis on the hands reinforces the subject matter and tellingly, the most important of these is the hand that contains the palm/face double image.

*Equateur magnétique*³⁹ (P.243d), 1948, (Fig. 14) contains four heads, each of which is a double image. Three of the heads are located one above another on the central vertical axis. The lowest of these, the hand/head,



Fig. 10. Alfred Pellán, *Physionomie*
(P. 237d), 1948, pencil, 11¼" x 9". Collection
Unknown.



Fig. 11. Alfred Pellán, *Illustration from Le
Voyage d'Harlequin* (P. 183d).



Fig. 12. Alfred Pellán, *Femme assise*
(P. 199d), 1948, ink, 8¼" x 7¼". Collection
Unknown.

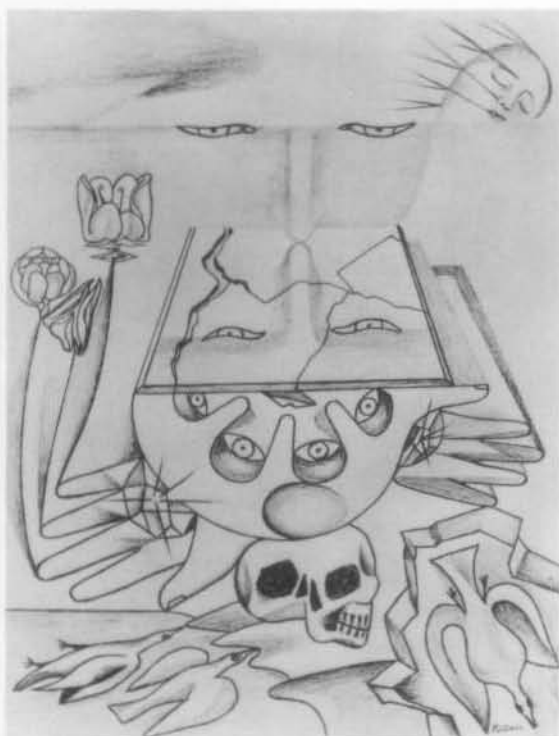


Fig. 14. Alfred Pellán, *Equateur magnétique* (P. 243d), 1948, pencil, 11 3/4" x 9". Private Collection.



Fig. 15. Alfred Pellán, *Médium* (P. 230d), 1948, pencil, 11 3/4" x 9". Collection Unknown.



Fig. 13. Alfred Pellán, *La chiromancienne* (P. 257p), 1948, oil on velvet paper, 13" x 10". Private Collection.

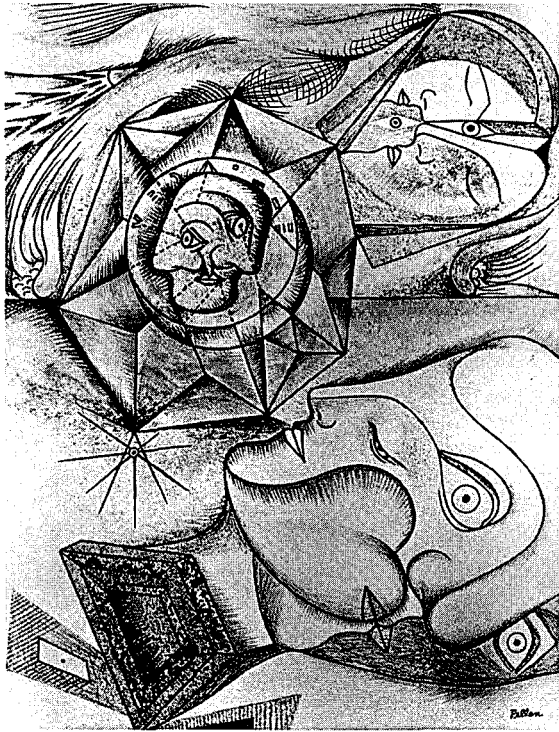


Fig. 16. Alfred Pellán, *Face au Polyédre*
(P. 322p), 1954-55, oil on board,
11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 9". Private Collection.

Fig. 17. Alfred Pellán, *Face et profil*
(P. 158d), 1944, charcoal, 23" x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Coll. Concordia University
Collection of Art.





Fig. 18. Alfred Pellán, *Jeune fille*
(P. 159d), 1944, charcoal, 24 1/8" x 19".
Coll. Musée d'art contemporain,
Montreal.

Fig. 19. Alfred Pellán, *Composition*
(P. 160d), N.D., charcoal, 25" x 19"
Collection Unknown.



is similar to *L'Amour fou* with its finger/eyes but includes a mouth, making the whole hand function as a multi-eyed deformed head. Above it, and also inverted, is a section of a head, whose narrowing silhouette forms part of a rectangular frame. Although partially shaded, the head appears quite two-dimensional. The flatness of the face, the frame, and particularly, the crack lines running across the face suggest a mirror or "double image" of the head above it. While not as overt a double image as the landscape/face found in *Physionomachie*, the eyes of this latter head do become part of the horizon line and the silhouette and nose can be read as contours in the earth.⁴⁰ Adding to the reading of this head as landscape/face is the fourth head, situated above and to the right, and joined to its neighbour by a continuing, hence shared, line. The fourth head is a double image of face/setting sun. The interpretation is supported by the head's position on the horizon, the rays emanating from it and its sleeping posture.

Médium (P.230d), 1948, (Fig. 15) contains both double and composite images. Two heads depicted in profile are fused to form a single entity, symbolizing physical union. Joined only at the back, the faces of the male and female retain their individuality, one personifying age, the other youth. In the area where the heads merge is another composite image: a female with an extra pair of legs.

The composite female is also a double image. Her second pair of legs, angled to an upright body, suggests open bird's wings. The head, disproportionately small for the body, is that of a bird, complete with beak. Reinforcing the bird image is her position: she stands suspended in mid-air, seeming to rise slowly, her ascending movement enhanced by the curving lines comprising the head's hair. The source of this double image may lie in the works of Max Ernst and René Magritte where sensuous women hover in mid-air or birds and women are portrayed together.⁴¹

The types of images depicted in *Médium* are only one indication of the drawing's relationship to Surrealism. The Surrealists believed that man could transcend reality and attain the absolute or surreal through the realization of desire and the love of a woman. *Médium* embodies these concepts. The double image of woman/bird alludes to the female's transcendental qualities.⁴² Her rounded body and prominent breasts assert her sensuality. The title of the drawing suits the subject matter and the imagery. The female is not only the mediator between the real and

the surreal, she is the mediator between youth and age. The word medium also implies visionary phenomena: the hallucinatory double and composite images are the vehicle by which concrete form is given to abstract ideas of love and woman.

While Pellán's composite images are Surrealist, the device of fusing two heads attached to a single neck derives from Picasso's heads incorporating both frontal and profile views. Picasso began using this type of head in the early years of Synthetic Cubism to convey simultaneity. Pellán who was most receptive to Picasso's work⁴³ used the simultaneous view frequently. The large, statue head in Pellán's *Face au polyédre* (P.322p), 1954-55,⁴⁴ (Fig. 16) initially looks like a profile but further inspection reveals a full face view in the back section of the head.⁴⁵ The smallest head, located in the polyhedron, contains two noses seen in profile, placed on opposite sides of a head whose mouth and centre nose are presented in full face. In the head at the top of the composition, two profile views facing each other are placed within the same oval head. Following Picasso's example, Pellán uses various methods to depict the simultaneously viewed head.⁴⁶ Regardless of which technique is used the different views are united by shared features, a continuous outline and, of course, the single neck.

A study of three of Pellán's drawings reveals the process by which the simultaneous view is transformed to encompass the Surrealist composite image. *Face et profil* (P.158d), 1944, (Fig. 17) remains close to the Picasso prototype but begins to suggest the presence of two heads rather than two views of a single head.⁴⁷ The head at the right contains references to both frontal and profile views by the inclusion of two eyes and the hint of a full face nose in what is essentially a profile view. Notwithstanding the similarity of this head (the one at the right) with those of Picasso, the addition of another full face view at the left is not at all characteristic of Picasso.

Jeune fille (P.159d), a related work of the same date, more obviously suggests two heads (Fig. 18). Despite the shared neck, body and mouth, the heads seem superimposed. The third eye (a feature not found in the work of Picasso) is more visible and now two chins are included, increasing the quality of superimposition and the individual identity of each head.

In comparison to both drawings by Pellán the heads depicted by Picasso are more expressionistic and abstract; the forms are more organic

and fluid, giving the impression of various views melting into each other to form a cohesive whole. Pellán's forms on the other hand are static and more naturalistic; the line is tight and controlled; the image, composed of separate elements, is a solid structure in which each part retains a distinctive identity.

Pellán's shift to the composite image consisting of two vastly differing elements (Fig. 19) is found in *Composition* (P.160d). While the style, composition and the inclusion of a combined view in the head at the right are based on *Jeune fille*, the image is now composed of a male and a female and can no longer be interpreted as various views of a single object. Originally entitled *Françoise Gilot and Pablo Picasso*, the drawing is a double portrait.⁴⁸ Each of the sitters is identifiable but the figures have been fused, sharing a mouth, neck, torso and a continuous chin line. Fusing the figures is not done for the purpose of simultaneity but to indicate the couple's love. The heart embedded in Picasso's hair and the arrow on his nose reinforce the subject matter, recalling *Cupidon*. Although the image is Surrealist, Pellán continues to employ Cubist techniques, perhaps not inappropriately given the identity of the male figure.

Médium is the last stage in the process. As in *Composition*, the heads have been fused to symbolize physical union but all references to the combination of full and profile views are eliminated. The image, formed by fusing parts of different objects to create a new entity, is now completely Surrealist.

The fusing of a head and a clock in *Le sixième sens* (P.270p), 1954, (Fig. 20) is another example of Pellán's use of the Surrealist composite image. Although the multiple views of the head suggest Cubist simultaneity,⁴⁹ the presence of the clock in the head is clearly a Surrealist device.⁵⁰ Its inclusion is essential to the meaning of the work. While the title *le sixième sens*, somewhat captures the intent of the painting, it is not as helpful a clue in interpreting the work as the title of the drawing for the painting, *Radar de l'aveugle* (P.226d), 1948.⁵¹ The three-faced male head is that of a blind man, "looking" in all directions. The eyes in each of the views are either covered with opaque glasses or closed, indicating lack of sight. The five miniature human figures, three upright and two inverted, situated in the structure representing the upper male torso and the topsy-turvy spatial location of the other elements in the composition convey the disorienting spatial experiences of the blind. Like the birds in

the painting, the blind move through space almost by instinct. This instinct or sixth sense can be trained and controlled until it approaches mechanical perfection. The precision required in spatial movement is symbolized by the clock, as is the necessity of accurate timing. Both these characteristics, precision and timing, are essential for the blind, who more than anyone need a "built-in clock".

The theme of the painting explains the prominence given to the hands in the upper half of the composition. The hand, because of its ability to touch, is a vital tool of the blind, helping him to assess the size and position of objects in space. In the hand located directly above the head, the fingers or agents of touch have been stressed. The hand at the top of the painting is a double image of hand and bird, embodying the link between the radar system of the blind (relying on the hand) and that of the bird. The hand also contains an allusion to an airplane, establishing a connection with the mechanical clock. Dismembered, the hand floats freely above the horizon, further linking the bird/hand/plane image.⁵²

Dismemberment also occurs in the head. Although attached to a structure that suggests the presence of a body because it houses five figures, the dissimilarity of the structure and the head signifies two distinct forms. Lacking movement, the head remains apart from the otherwise active and, at times, chaotic composition. Dismemberment, contrast of movement and stylistic treatment isolate the head, focussing attention on it, counteracting its small size.

In *Le sixième sens* the theme is lack of sight; in *Jongleur*, 1941 (Fig. 21), an unnumbered tapestry based on the painting *Tête de Clown* (P. 160p), the importance of accurate vision is stressed. Both works utilize repetition to convey meaning. The three-faced head of the blind man looks in all directions, attempting to "see". The path of movement of the juggler's ball is portrayed by repeating the ball; the movement of the head following the ball by repeating the eyes and mouth. The pupils face in various directions, indicating the necessity of the juggler to look in all directions at once.

Pellan's depiction of simultaneous vision ultimately derives from Cubism but the device of repeating pairs of eyes may be based on Picabia's Surrealist work of the 1920's. In *Souvenir de Juan-les-Pins*, 1924, by Picabia, the pupils of three sets of eyes placed one above another look in different directions (Fig. 22). Unlike Pellan's *Jongleur*, the image does not represent simultaneity of vision. The multiple eyes indicate the totally disorienting effect of love. It is exactly this meaning that is implied when the triple set of eyes and mouth are used by Pellan in the male

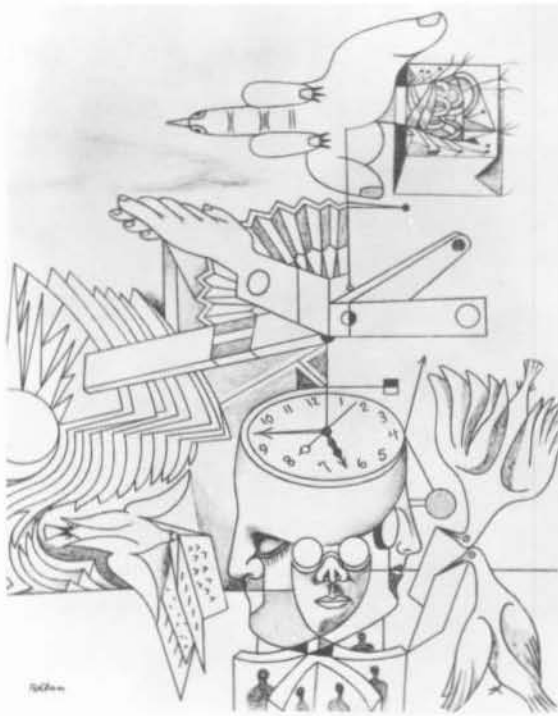


Fig. 20. Alfred Pellán, *Radar de l'aveugle* (P. 226d), 1948, pencil, 11¼" x 9". Collection Unknown.



Fig. 21. Alfred Pellán, *Jongleur*, 1941, tapestry, 75" x 60". Coll. Musée du Québec, Québec.



Fig. 22. Francis Picabia,
Souvenir de Juan les Pins,
1924, oil, 41 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 31 $\frac{3}{8}$ ".
Private Collection.

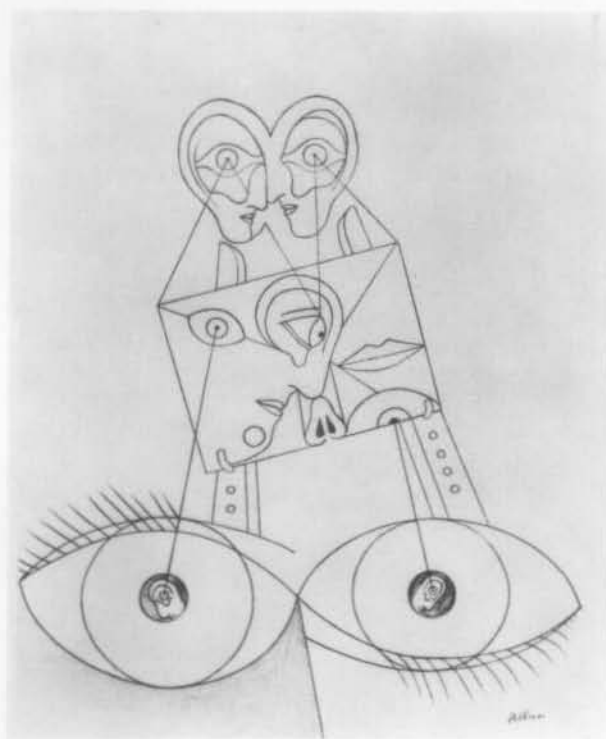


Fig. 23. Alfred Pellán,
Question d'optique (P. 256d),
1948, pencil, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 9". Coll.
Laval University.

figure in *Fragments* (P.229d).⁵³

Pellán's use of the motif in *Question d'optique* (P.256d) is less derivative (Fig. 23). Three sets of eyes constitute the composition. The lower eyes and glasses are enormous suggesting magnification and the need for concentration in seeing accurately. The eyes at the top are contained in a multiple image — two profile heads formed by the joining of two ears or two profile heads contained in a heart — symbolizing the effects of sound and emotion on sight. Additional double images are found in the profile heads in the pupils of the lower eyes. Each eye in the upper and lower sets is connected to an eye in the rectangular painting in the centre. Rather than using the connecting lines to indicate perspective in this 'painting within a painting' Pellán portrays a head in combined view in the left half and dismembered floating facial features in the right. Echoing a basic Surrealist belief, the implication is that vision is controlled by many factors and a new approach to perception outside the world of painting influences depictions within the world of art.

Throughout this article, reference has been made to numerous similarities between Alfred Pellán's work and that of the Surrealists. It appears that Pellán borrows themes, primarily his concept of love, and stylistic devices such as double images, isolation, dismemberment, contrast, transparency and repetition from Surrealist artists. Attention has been drawn to possible sources but it is difficult to say with certainty that Pellán was influenced by specific Surrealist examples, not only because Pellán's exposure to and interest in the movement occurred over a number of years but also because, in many instances, he seems to have absorbed and reworked his initial source of inspiration. The incorporation of elements from other artists, notably Picasso, and the creation of new interpretations of Surrealist subject matter seen in *Le Père Ubu*, *Sur la Plage*, *Médium*, and *Question d'optique* and the introduction of his own subject matter in *Le sixième sens* further complicates the nature of Pellán's relationship to Surrealism. Yet, it is precisely Pellán's ability to utilize Surrealist subject matter and motifs with originality that affirms both his contribution to the Surrealist movement and his originality as an artist.

Reesa Greenberg
Faculty of Fine Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Que.

Notes:

¹ This paper was first presented on February 6, 1975 at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of the lecture series *Canadian Art, Past and Present*. I wish to express my thanks to Grace Brickell for her help in preparing the manuscript and to Jennifer Harper for assisting in assembling the photographs.

² Accounts of the legendary 1936 job interview at the Ecole des beaux-arts in Quebec City vary but the names of artists cited by Pellan as his personal preferences include Max Ernst and Joan Miró. See Guy Robert, *Pellan* (Montréal: Editions du Centre de Psychologie et Pédagogie, 1963), p. 33.

³ Robert, p. 52.

⁴ Pellan's concern for the potential dangers inherent in Surrealist philosophy are expressed in a 1966 interview with Jacques Folch on the occasion of Pellan's sixtieth birthday, reprinted in *liberté*, 9, no 2, (Mars-Avril 1976), pp. 64-70.

⁵ The affinities between Pellan's work in the early 1930's and that of Modigliani and Picasso were noted in a number of contemporary reviews. See in particular J.V.L., "Forces Nouvelles," *Beaux Arts*, 19 April 1935, p. 8.

⁶ The information contained in brackets refers to Pellan's personal inventory. To avoid confusion, "p" designating painting or "d" designating drawing has been added to Pellan's number because, although Pellan lists his paintings and drawings separately, both compilations are numbered consecutively from 1 on. All of Pellan's works are illustrated on microfilm. See *Alfred Pellan et son oeuvre* (Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec), tape 4.

⁷ According to Pellan's inventory, this painting is what remains of a destroyed double portrait depicting Madame Bernard and her sister entitled *Les deux sœurs* (P.86p) dated 1934. The drapery in the background of *Mme. Claude Bernard* appears to have been added after the change in format and composition.

⁸ Both Guy Robert, p. 130 and Germain Lefebvre in his catalogue, *Pellan* (Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts, 1972), cat. no. 4, p. 84, date the painting 1943, following the date given in Pellan's inventory. However in his monograph, *Pellan* (Montreal: Les Editions de l'Homme, 1973), p. 14, Lefebvre suggests a date of 1932. An earlier date was also proposed in *Pellan* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1960), cat. no. 4, in which the painting is placed in the period 1930-1940. Based on stylistic evidence a date in the early 1930's is probably correct.

⁹ One of the few examples of Pellan's sculpture, *Tête*, 1931, is quite similar to the *Self-Portrait*.

¹⁰ The exact title of this work is unclear. The only title mentioned in Pellan's inventory is *Tête*. When first published in Maurice Gagnon's *Pellan* (Montreal: 1943), p. 36, illustration no. 7, the painting was titled *Le Père Ubu*. Robert, p. 130, refers to *Tête ou le Père Ubu*.

¹¹ The symbolism of Ernst's use of a spinning top for the figure of Ubu is discussed in John Russell's *Max Ernst* (London: 1967), p. 14. For an explanation of Miró's *Portrait of Madame B*, see Rosalind E. Krauss, "Magnetic Fields: The Structure" in *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1972), pp. 41-45.

¹² See Masson's *Une dame, Poisson en eventrant un autre* and *Animal blessé*, all dated 1929. It is equally possible that Picasso's organic work of the late 1920's and early 1930's was a direct influence on Pellan.

¹³ Pellan states "de l'automatisme, j'en avais fait longtemps avant Borduas..." in Lefebvre's monograph, p. 95. A general discussion of Pellan's views on automatism is found in a reprint of a 1949 conversation between Pellan and Paul Duval in Duval's book *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries 1930-1970* (Toronto: 1972), p. 113. For a limited discussion of Pellan and automatism see Jean-René Ostiguy, "Les cadavres exquis des disciples de Pellan," *Vie des Arts*, No. 47 (Été 1967), pp. 22-25.

¹⁴ The title of the drawing for the painting is *Tête de faune* (P.191d).

¹⁵ Pellan's bleak interpretation corresponds to a period in which he was experiencing difficulties in his own love life. According to Jean-René Ostiguy in a conversation with the author on October 19, 1973, Pellan locked himself in his apartment for several months refusing to see anyone.

¹⁶ Examples of Picasso's use of patterning in various periods are *Vive la France*, 1914, *Girl Before a Mirror*, 1932 and the portraits of Dora Maar at the end of the 1930's.

¹⁷ Miró's *Self-Portrait 1*, 1937-38, is a rare instance of his use of the technique. It occurs more frequently in the work of Masson. See Masson's *Portrait of the Poet Heinrich von Kleist*, 1939, the two portraits of *Goethe*, 1940 and *Leonardo da Vinci and Isabelle d'Este*, 1942.

¹⁸ Interestingly, one of the earliest examples of the techniques in Pellan's oeuvre occurs in the still life *Nature morte au gant* (P.170p). Pellan's earlier interest in Picasso's work and the number of still lifes influenced by Picasso in the 1930's suggest that Pellan derived the technique from Picasso.

¹⁹ A discussion of nineteenth century sources for the dismembered head motif as an apparition is found in Jean-Pierre Reverseau's "Pour une étude du thème de la tête coupée dans la seconde partie du XIX^e siècle," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (Septembre 1972), pp. 173-84.

²⁰ The statue-head appears in a number of de Chirico's paintings, notably *Song of Love*, 1913/14; *Span of Black Ladders*, 1914; *The Philosophers Promenade*, 1914 and *Hermetic Melancholy*, 1919.

Picasso's paintings which incorporate fragments of sculpture are quite different. The statuary usually relates to still life subject matter (e.g. *Studio with Plaster Head*, 1925) and lacks the enigmatic quality of de Chirico's work preferred by the Surrealists. In later works by Picasso, notably *Guernica*, the statue-head functions symbolically.

²¹ Pellán's esteem for de Chirico is clearly shown in the drawing *Armuré (Hommage à Giorgio de Chirico des années 1912-20)*, (P.251d), 1948.

²² See Masson's *Armand Salacrou*, 1929; *Portrait de G. H. Rivière*, 1930; and *Jardin des Plantes*, 1940.

²³ The arched female in the centre of the composition may be Pellán's version of the female as architectural double image first seen in Dalí's *Of Paranoic Critical Town*, 1936.

²⁴ The device of females made of stone blocks derives from Ernst. For fuller discussion of the motif in Pellán's work see the author's "Pellán and Surrealism: l'Amour fou," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* (Fall 1974), p. 4f. The gender of the dismembered heads in *Dans de la vie*, however, is not easily identifiable. Equally difficult to identify are the heads in *Fontaine de jouvence* (P.312p), 1965, a work resembling *Danse de la vie* in composition and meaning. In *Redoute* (P.245d), the meaning of the stone blocks in conjunction with the head/tree double image is problematic.

²⁵ The date for the 1948 drawings discussed in this paper was provided by Pellán in conversation with the author on November 19, 1974. Pellán remembers the series well as it corresponds to a period of hospitalization. The painted version of *Redoute* is numbered (P.273p); Robert, p. 131, dates the painting 1954.

²⁶ Magritte began using the device in the early 1930's. It is found in *La Condition Humaine I*, 1933; the *Red Model*, 1935; *The Fair Captive*, 1947; *Euclidean Walks*, 1955; and *The King's Museum*, 1966.

²⁷ See *Iodis*, 1929; *Medea*, 1929; and *Chloris*, 1939. Further discussion of Picabia's transparent technique is found in Michel Sanouillet, *Picabia* (Paris: 1946), pp. 47-49.

²⁸ Jean-René Ostiguy, *Un siècle de peinture canadienne* (Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, 1971), p. 54, suggests affinities between the work of Pellán and Picabia but does not specify their nature.

²⁹ Both the pun and the style firmly establish the works as Surrealist, as does the original title *Grise-ailes, Hommage à Miró*.

³⁰ My thanks to Jean-René Ostiguy who suggested this interpretation. According to François Gagnon, "grise-elle(s)" has erotic or at least euphoric connotations in French. *Etre gris* is to be drunk. *Grise* is the imperative form, "make them drunk".

³¹ Dalí's method of "critical paranoia" greatly aided his ability to perceive double images.

³² In writing on the Surrealist image André Breton quotes Pierre Reverdy:

"The image is a pure creation of the mind.

It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities.

The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be — the greater its emotional power and poetic reality..."

See Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism," (1924) in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: 1972) trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, p. 20. Reverdy's statement was first printed in *Nord-Sud*, March 1918.

³³ See Magritte's *Threatening Weather*, 1928.

³⁴ *Cahiers d'Art*, 1937, pp. 38-40.

³⁵ François Gagnon suggests that Magritte's *Le Viol* may be the prototype for merging the female face and body. Unlike Magritte, however, Pellán does not alter the face, but transforms the torso. In addition, Magritte's use of the *vagina dentata* theme is more overt, resulting in a more foreboding image. The Pellán painting based on this drawing is entitled *Une Danseuse*, (P.239p).

³⁶ Robert, p. 130, refers to the work as *La séance de psychanalyse ou Goétie*. In a conversation with the author on November 19, 1974, Pellán stated that the drawing's title was never *La séance de psychanalyse*. Robert may have confused the painting P.242p with the drawing of the same number. It should be noted that P.242d and P.242p are unrelated.

³⁷ Both the drawing (P.240d) and the painting (P.237p), *Rubis sur l'ongle*, contain a stomach/face double image. In addition an extra face is located to the left of the figure.

³⁸ For a discussion of the meaning of the fingernail/eyes double image in *l'Amour fou* see the author's "Pellán and Surrealism: l'amour fou," p. 8.

³⁹ The title may be a reference to the Surrealist *champs magnétique*, taken from the title of the first automatic text written by André Breton and Philippe Soupault in 1921.

⁴⁰ The painted version (P.466p) replaces the shaded contour lines with a broken line and eliminates the cracks in the mirror. The double image of face/setting sun is accentuated by the orange-pink-yellow colouring.

⁴¹ In Ernst's painting *The Fair Gardener*, 1923, a bird is superimposed on the lower part of the female torso and in the drawing of the same title and date, a bird replaces the head and the right shoulder of the woman at the left. Similar imagery is found in a 1931 frottage, ...it is two little birds she has closed up in her dress... in which a bird is placed in each breast. See Magritte's *Black Magic*, 1933.

⁴² Birds appear in numerous works by Pellan. The meaning varies depending on the context but when depicted in conjunction with woman, the bird signifies her free, uninhibited nature.

⁴³ Although Pellan's inventory lists the drawing for the painting as *Face au polyédre* (P.286d), Pellan's debt to Picasso was clearly expressed when the drawing was exhibited in Paris in 1955 under the title *Face au Polyédre* (*Hommage à Pablo Picasso*). See *Alfred Pellan* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, 1955), cat. No. 110.

⁴⁴ In the November 19, 1974 conversation, Pellan stated that the smaller version of this work predated the larger (P.286p).

⁴⁵ The large head also contains a double image of a heart.

⁴⁶ Picasso most commonly depicts full face eyes and mouth with a profile nose placed on one side of the head. Occasionally in this type of head the mouth and nose are located on opposite sides of the face. Even when a nose is depicted essentially in profile view, a full face view is often indicated by the inclusion of two nostrils. Another form of the head shows the nose primarily in profile and the eyes full face. Sometimes a round or oval head is split down the middle, one half depicting a profile head; the other, differentiated by colour, pattern or a small space, depicting a head full-face. More rarely Picasso depicts a head with two noses, one on each side of the head or two profile heads seen from the rear. Some examples are *Girl Before a Mirror*, 1932; *Interior with Girl Drawing*, 1935; *The Necklace*, 1938; *Woman Dressing Her Hair*, 1940. See Leo Steinberg, "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," in *Other Criteria* (London: 1972), pp. 192-208, for further discussion of the simultaneous view in Picasso's treatment of the head.

⁴⁷ In the November 19, 1974 conversation, Pellan stated that the three works, P.158d, P.159d, and P.160d, all dated from the early forties and were executed while he was living on Rue Jeanne Mance. The only work dated in the inventory is P.158d.

Face et profil (P.158d) and *Jeune fille* (P.159d) appear to be part of a larger series of nine portrait drawings of Graïda Esar. Miss Esar, now Graïda Victor, confirmed, in conversation with the author on November 2, 1975, that in 1944 Pellan was commissioned to draw her portrait and during the course of three sittings which took place in his Jeanne Mance studio prepared a number of sketches for this purpose.

The following drawings are believed to belong to the series: the untitled P.149d; *Jeune fille au collier* (P.150d); *Jeune fille* (P.151d); *Jeune fille* (P.152d); *Mlle G.E.* (P.154d); *Mademoiselle Graïda Esar* (P.155d); *Face et profil* (P.158d); *Jeune fille* (P.159d); and *Jeune fille au pullover* (P.161d). Although P.159d is titled *Jeune fille* in the inventory, the Musée d'Art Contemporain, in whose collection the drawing is now located, refers to it as *Trois Yeux*.

Despite the varying titles, each of the drawings portrays a young girl whose facial features and clothing, consisting primarily of a sweater depicted with or without ribbing on the collar and/or at the shoulders, are basically alike. With the exception of *Face et profil*, eight of the drawings are approximately of the same size, 24" — 25" x 19". *Face et profil* is sufficiently similar in size, 23" x 18½", to suggest that its dimensions were slightly reduced. All the drawings are executed in charcoal.

The first six drawings are single views, whereas the last three are composite views. *Jeune fille au pullover*, the last in the series, is the most abstract. Mrs. Victor recalls that some of the sketches were very "Cubist" and portrayed her with three eyes. The drawings to which Mrs. Victor refers are probably the last three in the series.

⁴⁸ The information regarding the original title was gleaned from the brown envelope in which Pellan keeps photographs of this drawing. Despite Pellan's desire to protect the identity of his sitters by scratching out the original title and replacing it with the more anonymous *Composition*, the initials 'F' and 'G' on the sweater of the female, monograms for Françoise Gilot, remain.

⁴⁹ The clarity of presentation in conjunction with the static rendering of the three-faced head suggests that the various views meant to be seen as parts of a whole are also meant to retain their individual identity. Placing two profile heads back to back recalls *Médium*, as does the inclusion of a third element in the central area of the heads.

⁵⁰ The clock/face double image occurs in reverse in *Correspondence* (P.317p). The clock in this work develops humanoid characteristics: the '9' and the '3' are transformed into eyes. Other examples of the clock added to the human form are found in *Lire et vin* and *La minute de pendule*.

⁵¹ Until 1972, the published title of the painting was *Radar de l'aveugle*. See *Alfred Pellán* (Paris: 1955), cat. No. 100 and Robert, p. 131. Germain Lefebvre's catalogue, p.98, is the first publication to record the title *Le sixième sens* although it should be noted that Pellán's inventory lists it in this manner.

In the conversation of November 19, 1974, Pellán stated that the drawing was executed in 1948 and that it was not until the 1950's that he executed a painted version. Robert proposes a date of 1953 for the painting whereas Lefebvre suggests 1954.

⁵² Further discussion of the dismembered hand is found in the author's "Pellán and Surrealism: l'Amour fou," pp. 6-8.

⁵³ In conversation with the author on April 4, 1975, Gilles Rioux suggested that the male figure may be a self-portrait.