

René Magritte n° 155	First publication: 7 March 2014	Last update : 21/03/2014	Translator: Ostyn Sofie
<p><u>Titre :</u> La trahison des images / The treachery of images</p> <p>1929 60 x 81 cm</p> <div data-bbox="145 459 501 699" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Une pipe</p> <p style="text-align: center;">En dessous, l'inscription: Ceci n'est pas une pipe</p> </div> <p><u>Description :</u> In the centre of the canvas, we see a well detailed pipe (without smoke) and underneath there's a phrase, written in a scholastic way, saying: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe".</p>	<p><u>The problem</u> stems from the proximity between a very realistic representation of the object, which is a pipe, and the written phrase "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ("This is not a pipe"). One is surprised by this declaration.</p> <p><u>The solution</u> to this paradox* is partially given in Magritte's response to journalists who asked him about which sense could be given to this painting. The artist replied with a question: "Have you tried to smoke this pipe?" The only possible answer is negative: this is not a pipe; this is the representation of one.</p> <p>On this aspect, the painting's title, <i>The treachery of images</i>, is very illuminating. Indeed, regardless of how realistic the representation of the pipe can be, even if it were a photography, it can never be mistaken for a real pipe. We cannot smoke it. This perspective could allude to the anecdote of an artist who's still learning from a master and amused himself with creating this image of a fly on a bunch of grapes on a painting – which the master had asked him to complete. While examining his work, the master pretended to chase the fly away, although it was just a representation...</p> <p>To clarify the title of this canvas, we could say that by large there are <u>3 levels of interpretation</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First off, <u>the word (the signifier)</u> that appears the most conventional. It suffices to translate it into another language. To designate the same object, <i>chien</i> becomes <i>dog</i>. The link between the signified and the signifier is arbitrary. Let us take the sentence: "The word "dog" doesn't bite"; nor does its image, only the idea remains the same. - Secondly, <u>the image (the signified)</u> can easily be mistaken for something real. To designate the word <i>chien</i> or <i>dog</i>, we can use the same image. Language doesn't matter. The image of a dog won't be misunderstood. Moreover, it can also more easily cause fear. It's almost reality. - Finally, reality itself (the referent): it's the dog that is close to me, that barks and will bite me... <p><u>To sum up, with his title, Magritte reminds us that the ontological** weight of the image is far bigger than that of words: an image can be mixed up with reality far more easily than a word.</u></p> <p><u>An image "is" more than a word. At the same time, that image is still not reality: it misleads reality "well".</u> Many of Magritte's paintings aim at deconstructing, at dismantling the prejudices of our vision, of our common way of seeing things.</p> <p>* paradox = evident opposition</p> <p>** ontological = refers to ontology (Greek ontos, the being, and logos, science) which is the study of the nature of being, meaning, everything that is alive, exists. Ontology is a branch of philosophy that questions what is part of life. The typical ontological question is: "Why is there something instead of nothing?" Philosophers speak of the ontological proof of God's existence, which is an argument to say that divine essence necessarily bears all perfections. If the idea of God is connected to these perfections, we can only draw the conclusion that it exists. This reasoning was formulated by Saint Anselme and afterwards adopted by Descartes and criticized by E. Kant.</p>		
<u>Catalogue raisonné:</u> Vol.I, cot.303, p.331.	<u>References to other works:</u> <i>L'idole / The idol</i> n°1		
<u>On the internet:</u> http://ww2.ac-poitiers.fr/ia79-pedagogie/IMG/pdf/magritte.pdf	<u>Books with reproduction of the work :</u> <u>Articles; books:</u> Michel Foucault, <i>Ceci n'est pas une pipe : Sur Magritte</i> , 1973, Fata Morgana.		

Small studies on Magritte's work