

Submerging into the Surreal

An exhibition at the State Hermitage Museum in Russia explores the surrealist work of Roberto Matta

April 4-June 30

State Hermitage Museum

2 Palace Square

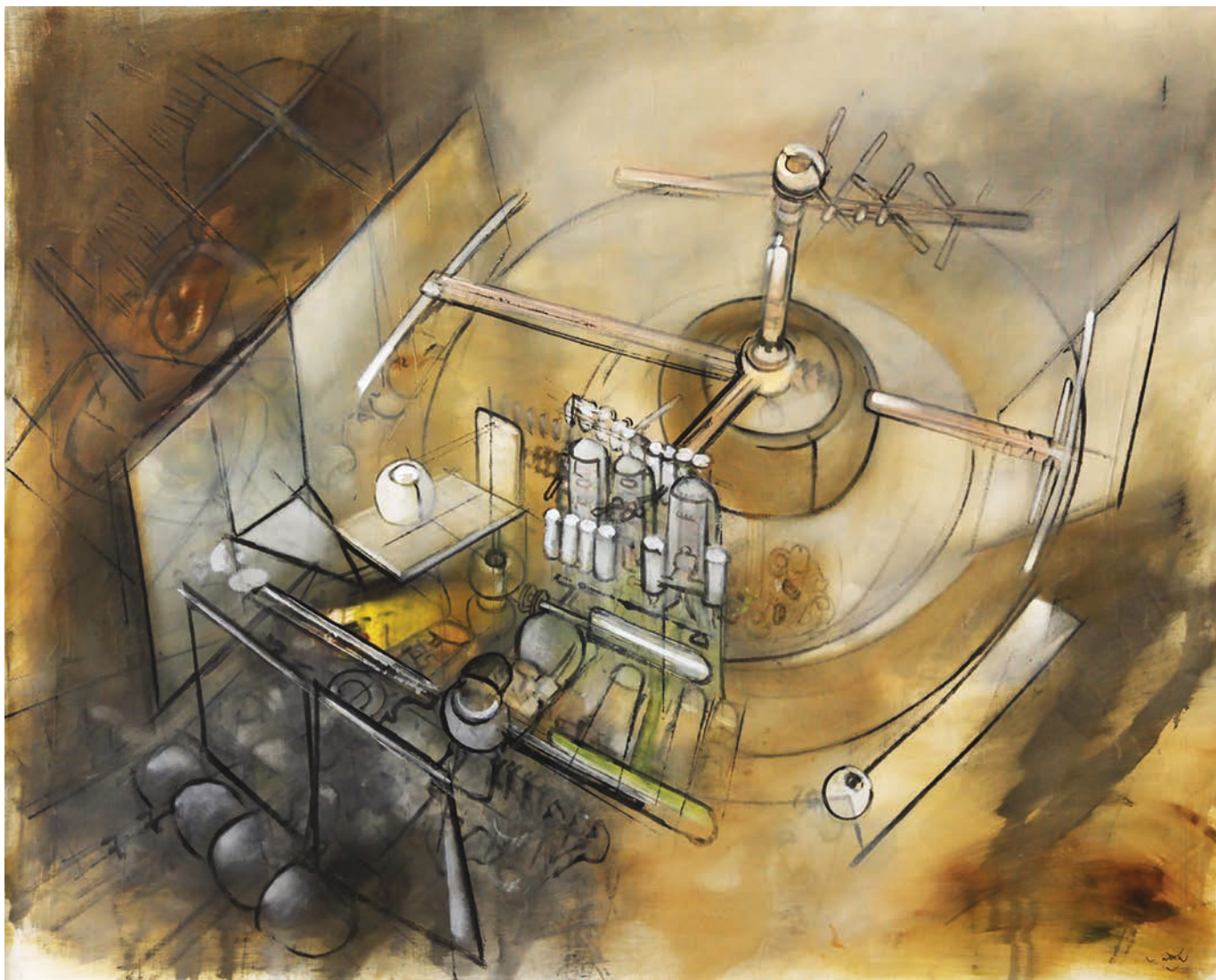
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The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, continues its exploration of surrealism with the exhibition *Roberto Matta and the Fourth Dimension* April 4 through June 30. It will be the first exhibition of the Chilean artist's work in Russia and the first major exhibition of his work since the

Museum of Modern Art's *Matta* in 1957. It reestablishes recognition of his role as an international artist and a catalytic force in the development of abstract expressionism as well as his influence on his fellow artists Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell. More than 8 years in the making, it was



Roberto Matta (1911-2002), *Le Champs de la Memoire*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 45¾ x 59 in. Private collection.



conceived by Matta’s friend and dealer in the ‘80s, Thomas Monahan, and later, Nic Iljine, who was the European representative for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Matta (1911–2002) worked as an architectural draftsman for Le Corbusier in the 1930s and was friends with the great artists of his time from his countryman, poet Pablo Neruda, to the French writer André Breton. His fantasy architectural drawings earned him recognition by the surrealists.

The museum notes, “Courage, thirst for knowledge, being open to new trends in art, deep psychological insight and keen interest in technical progress made Roberto Matta an outstanding figure in the world of art. That said, he never decisively joined any trend in painting: experimenting on the edge of art and science, he never became a ‘complete’ Surrealist. His drive to rework Renaissance perspective with the help of the subconscious and the irrational distanced him from Abstract Expressionism as well. Rejecting the formal boundaries of style, Roberto Matta always checked his art with reality, trying to learn the depths of human nature. Refusing to call himself an artist, Matta would say: “I’m not an

artist. I’m somebody who tries to construct images that will once help us realize the essence of the verb ‘to see.’”

Breton wrote, “Matta had a unique way of showing the necessity to visually depict the four-dimensional universe. In his works, nothing is intentional anymore, everything comes from the desire to submerge into the area of the divine.”

Matta became acquainted with the work of the mystical philosopher P. D. Ouspensky who was a theorist of the “fourth dimension.” The museum explains, “Matta shared Ouspensky’s idea that the fourth dimension adds to the third dimension the feeling of space, of motion and of time that is essential for one to realize the constant and irreversible process of change in the world, where every new moment is different from the previous one.”

He understood the complexities of the mind expressed in Ouspensky’s observation, “I’ve found that the chief difficulty for most people was to realize that they had really heard new things: that is things that they had never heard before. They kept translating what they heard into their habitual language. They had ceased to hope and believe

Roberto Matta
(1911–2002),
Fig Leaf, 1945.
Oil on canvas,
38¼ x 51¼ in.
Thomas Monahan
Collection.





Roberto Matta (1911-2002), *Rosenberg Jury*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 78¾ x 79½ in. Private collection.

there might be anything new.”

His goal to make the “invisible visible” occupied his life and his work. His painting, *Inscapes*, 1943, illustrates the inner landscape he was exploring, projecting the world of the psyche onto canvas. This painting and others explore architectural space, creating a sense of depth more complex than can be experienced by the eyes alone.

Later in his life he broke from surrealism and began to include anthropomorphic forms to express his

growing interest in politics, especially the politics of Latin America. He had admired the iconography of pre-Columbian America and incorporated it in his work. He wrote, “As a painter I feel myself to be a pre-Columbian artist. Those men gave a true and enthusiastic interpretation, telluric [of the earth] and strong, of our America. We ought to paint like them, but replacing their elements by chemical, physics and social symbols that profoundly form our world.”

He created a 13-by-79-foot mural entitled *The First Goal of the Chilean People* in 1971, celebrating the socialist reforms in Chile under Salvador Allende. During the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, it was painted over with 16 coats of paint. The mural was unveiled again in 2008 after a 3-year restoration and is displayed in the city hall of Santiago.

The exhibition has been organized by Dmitri Ozerkov, chief of the contemporary art department of the



Roberto Matta (1911-2002), *Pilgrim of Doubt*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 77 x 99 in. Private collection.

State Hermitage Museum. Scholar and art dealer Oksana Salamatina, editor of *Roberto Matta: On the Edge of a Dream* by Thomas Monahan, is co-organizer and co-curator of the exhibition. A catalog is being published by Skira. In addition to essays by Ozerkov and Salamatina, there are major contributions by Linda Dalrymple Henderson who is David Bruton, Jr. centennial professor in art history at the University of Texas at Austin; Fariba Bogzaran, founder of the dream studies program at John F. Kennedy University in Berkeley, California; and art historian Hans Ulrich Obrist, artistic director at the Serpentine Galleries, London. ■



Roberto Matta (1911-2002), *Inscape*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 21½ x 26 in. Thomas Monahan Collection.