

<https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/art-and-design/article/world-first-art-exhibition-now-regional-victoria>

## A World-First Art Exhibition is on Now in Regional Victoria

An exhibition exclusive to Morwell, Victoria, is the first of its kind anywhere in the world. It presents legendary surrealist painter Rene Magritte in a never before seen light: as a photographer.



René Magritte, René Magritte and The Barbarian (Le Barbare), London Gallery, London, 1938  
1/10

Published on 29 August 2017  
by WILL COX

“Magritte wasn’t a painter,” says Xavier Canonne, director of the Musée de la Photographie (Museum of Photography) in Belgium. Which is odd – Rene Magritte was very much a painter. The mid-20th century Belgian surrealist is responsible for such iconic images as *The Son of Man* (1964), in which a man wearing a suit and bowler hat has his face obscured by a green apple, and *The Treachery of Images* (1929), a painting of a wooden smoking pipe with the caption *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, which translates as “this is not a pipe”.

“But he wasn’t a painter really,” Canonne insists. “He was a poet. He used paintings to express his own ideas about the world.” Painting, says Canonne, was just one vehicle for expression. So it’s no surprise that he dabbled in other art forms.

The Latrobe Regional Gallery in Morwell is currently offering one such chance to see this fresh perspective on Magritte. *René Magritte: The Revealing Image, Photos and Films* positions Magritte not as a painter but a photographer. According to Canonne, photography was a hobby Magritte never attempted to turn into a professional practice. This is illustrated by his approach. Magritte had only a small point-and-shoot camera and would get his film developed at the local shop. The work on display at the Latrobe Regional Gallery reflects this DIY approach. Many document the artist’s process, and act as studies for new compositions, but retain his playful sense of surrealism. Others resemble family album snaps. All give us an intimate new look at the iconic Belgian surrealist’s life.

For Canonne, the immediacy of the medium shows sides of Magritte we never saw in paintings. One on display, entitled *The Oblivion Seller* (1936), captures his wife Georgette lying on the beach on the Belgian coast. Magritte has arranged a pipe and necklace around her sleeping form. “If you take them out, it’s just a portrait,” says Canonne, “but his improvisation sets it off. It’s that sort of improvisation you won’t find in his paintings.”

It wasn’t until after Magritte died in 1967 that his photographs began to be reappraised. In 2015, Dr Mark Themann, director of Latrobe Regional Gallery, approached Canonne about exhibiting a series of photographs. No-one had asked before. And so, simply because they asked first, the first-ever full exhibition of Rene Magritte’s photography is in Morwell, Victoria. Following its showing at Morwell, *René Magritte: The Revealing Image, Photos and Films* will travel to Asia, South America, USA and Europe, and will be accompanied by a book with an essay by the curator.

“Today photography is art,” says Canonne. “But when Magritte made photos, there was no gallery for it and no way to be a ‘photographer’.” Many of the 130 photos on display came from private collections where they’ve lain in obscurity for half a century. Canonne himself owns some original Magritte photographs, which were originally considered so valueless that they were given to him on a whim by a close friend of the artist. Now they’re travelling the world. And Morwell.

*René Magritte: The Revealing Image, Photos and Films* is at Latrobe Regional Gallery until November 19.

Latrobe Regional Gallery

*This article is produced by Broadsheet in partnership with Destination Gippsland. To explore Gippsland in further detail visit [inspiredbygippsland.com.au](http://inspiredbygippsland.com.au).*

**INSPIRED BY GIPPSLAND**  
DESTINATION GIPPSLAND LTD

Produced by Broadsheet in partnership  
with Destination Gippsland [Learn more](#) about partner content on Broadsheet.

<https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/art-and-design/article/world-first-art-exhibition-now-regional-victoria>