

THE ART OF BEER

This is Not an Apple

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Belgium is not only known for unbridled creativity in beer; it has also produced some great painters. René Magritte (1898–1967), for example, was a famous surrealist artist born in the Belgian province of Hainaut. Just as Belgian brewers do not feel constrained by arbitrary limits on their brewing creativity, surrealist artists do not feel constrained by the arbitrary limits of reality.

Although the surrealist movement held itself out as a revolutionary philosophy, it is best known for its paintings, though surrealists also made films and wrote music and books. Surrealists rejected rational thought and were heavily influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, who believed that dreams and the hidden subconscious had great meaning. As a result, surrealist paintings often contain absurd figures and only vaguely recognizable shapes.

As oxymoronic as it may sound, Magritte distinguished himself from other surrealist painters by painting very realistic things, relying solely on composition to create surreal images. For example, in the 1935 painting *The Human Condition*, Magritte painted a seascape. It is simple enough, until the viewer realizes that only half of the image is the seascape, while the other half is a painting of the seascape, mounted on an easel. In 1964, Magritte painted an apple, large enough to fill the entire canvas, with the words "Ceci n'est pas une pomme" ("This is not an apple") painted at the top of the canvas. Apples featured prominently in many of Magritte's works. The *Son of Man*, also painted in 1964

shows a standing man, wearing a bowler hat, his face largely obscured by an apple floating in mid-air.

These paintings, of course, bring to mind apple-flavored beers. While cherries and raspberries are commonplace, apple-flavored beers are relatively rare. Perhaps this is because green apple-like flavors, coming from the chemical acetaldehyde, is considered a brewing fault in many beers.

Still, as Canada's Unibroue demonstrates with its apple-flavored *Éphémère*, apples can add a little sweetness and a gentle tartness to a well-made beer. In the case of *Éphémère*, the apples add a cider-like character to a beer that also has hints of flowers and pineapples. A gentle mustiness envelopes all of these flavors and gives the beer an overall softness. The beautiful thing about this beer, is that it is still beer, and a delicious one at that, with apples merely adding further dimension.

Lesser apple beers include Lindemans *Pomme* and Liefmans *Fruitesse Appel Pomme*. Both of these are quite sweet with Lindemans tasting like an apple-flavored candy while Liefmans is reminiscent of apple juice. Unibroue is, of course, a Belgian-inspired brewery while Lindemans and Liefmans are the real Belgian deal.

Next time you're on a Belgian beer trek, make time for the Magritte museums in Brussels. There are two. The first is the René Magritte Museum at 135 rue Essegheem, where Magritte lived from 1930 to 1954. The second is the Magritte Museum, part of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts at 3 Rue de la Régence.