

**The Dream  
Factory**

# Magritte Folon

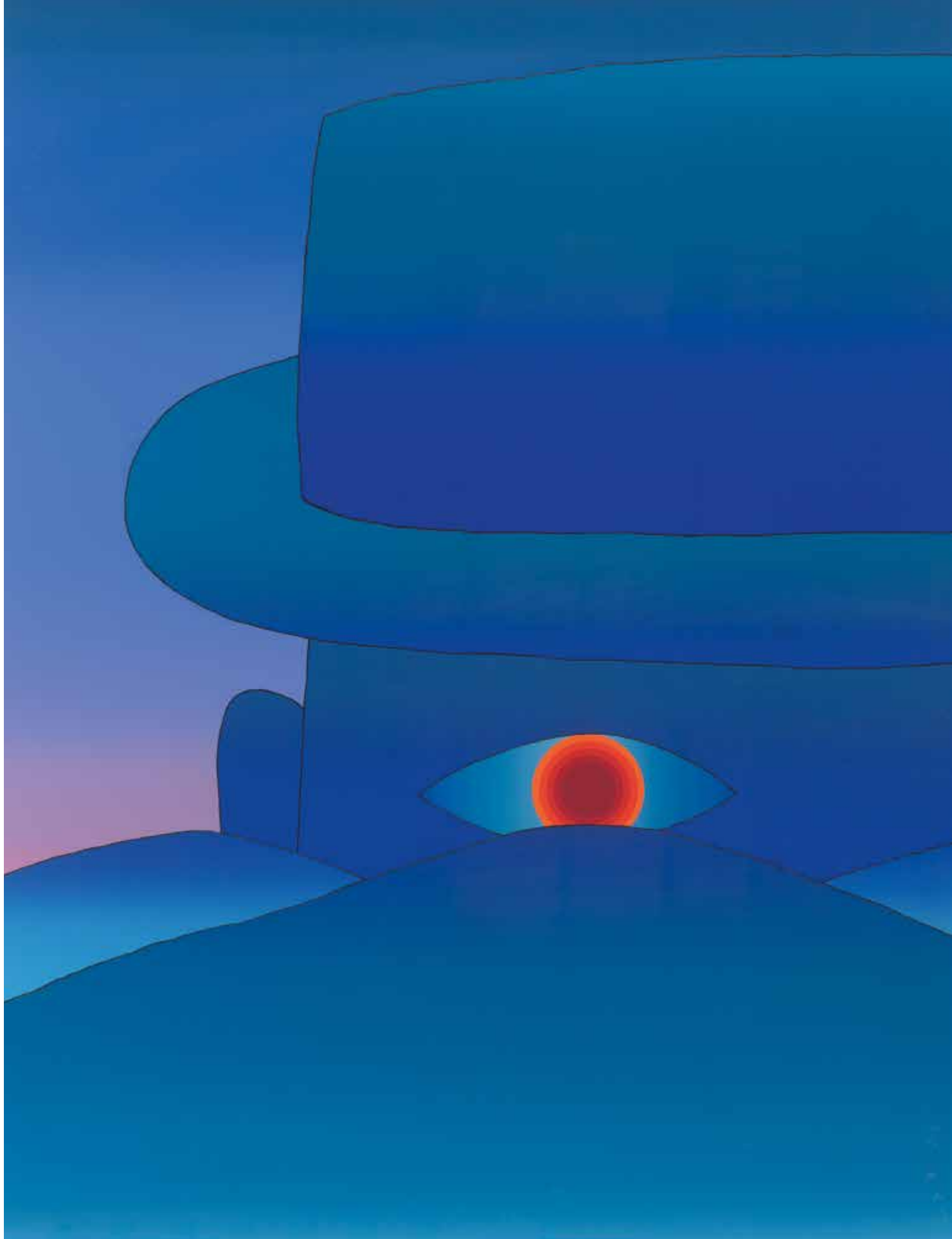
Everything in my works  
comes from a sense of certainty  
that we belong, in fact,  
to an enigmatic universe.

RENÉ MAGRITTE

Very often in my images, I draw an eye.  
A huge presence that we can't quite  
put our finger on. I created a Sphinx  
with its finger over its mouth,  
calling for silence. I don't really know  
what it means. Maybe that we should  
preserve the silence of art.

JEAN-MICHEL FOLON





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# Echoes

**STÉPHANIE ANGELROTH AND ISABELLE DOUILLET-DE PANGE**



In 1999, as he was setting up his foundation in Belgium, Folon spoke about his first encounter with art. In 1953, as he was in Knokke's Casino on the Belgian coast, the young Folon discovered a whole new world: René Magritte's *Domaine enchanté* (p. 36-39)<sup>1</sup>. Electrified by what he saw, he exclaimed: "You really can do anything in painting, even invent mysteries."<sup>2</sup>

Did this revelation have a tangible impact on the growth of Folon's artistic universe? The exhibition *Magritte-Folon* and extensive research associated to it will add to this never-ending questioning. Belgian and foreign audiences visiting the Fondation Folon in La Hulpe instantly associate the artist with the Surrealist movement. Some art historians<sup>3</sup> also see it as a natural breeding ground for influence. But how much can we perceive of the great Surrealist master's imagery? Can we discern the spirit of the Belgian movement in the formulation of his work?

Today, the archives of the Fondation Folon enable us to assert that Folon had great admiration for Magritte. His fascination with the oeuvre of the Belgian painter emerged in the early 1970s. From 1971 onwards, Folon's personal library was filled with works on Surrealism<sup>4</sup> and his interest for the work of the Belgian painter appears in his writings and in his work, which it did not in the early years of his artistic career. At that time, when Folon instead acknowledged the influence of Ensor and the impact of French and American illustrators including Bosc, Chaval, André François and Saul Steinberg. In 1973, he wrote:

"I believe that everything has an influence on everything we encounter. I think that all you need to do is draw a black line on white paper. That line has in it everything you've accepted, and everything you've rejected. When I draw a line, I know that James Ensor is in it. He was the first artist I really liked. What's odd, is that I hated Magritte at that time. I remember, I also hated *Waiting for Godot*. Now, when I draw a line,



René Magritte during the painting of the fresco *Le Domaine enchanté* (The Enchanted Domain) in the Casino in Knokke in 1953.

ship between Magritte and Folon. The latter was primarily reacting to this dispersal that reduced “a whole life story” to fragments and robbed the works of their everyday references in an absurd theatrical act. The enumeration of a lifetime’s possessions for dispersal was not without recalling Ionesco. Folon concluded: “none of the everyday objects that belonged to the painter of the everyday<sup>6</sup> remain”.

### **Alliances and Allies**

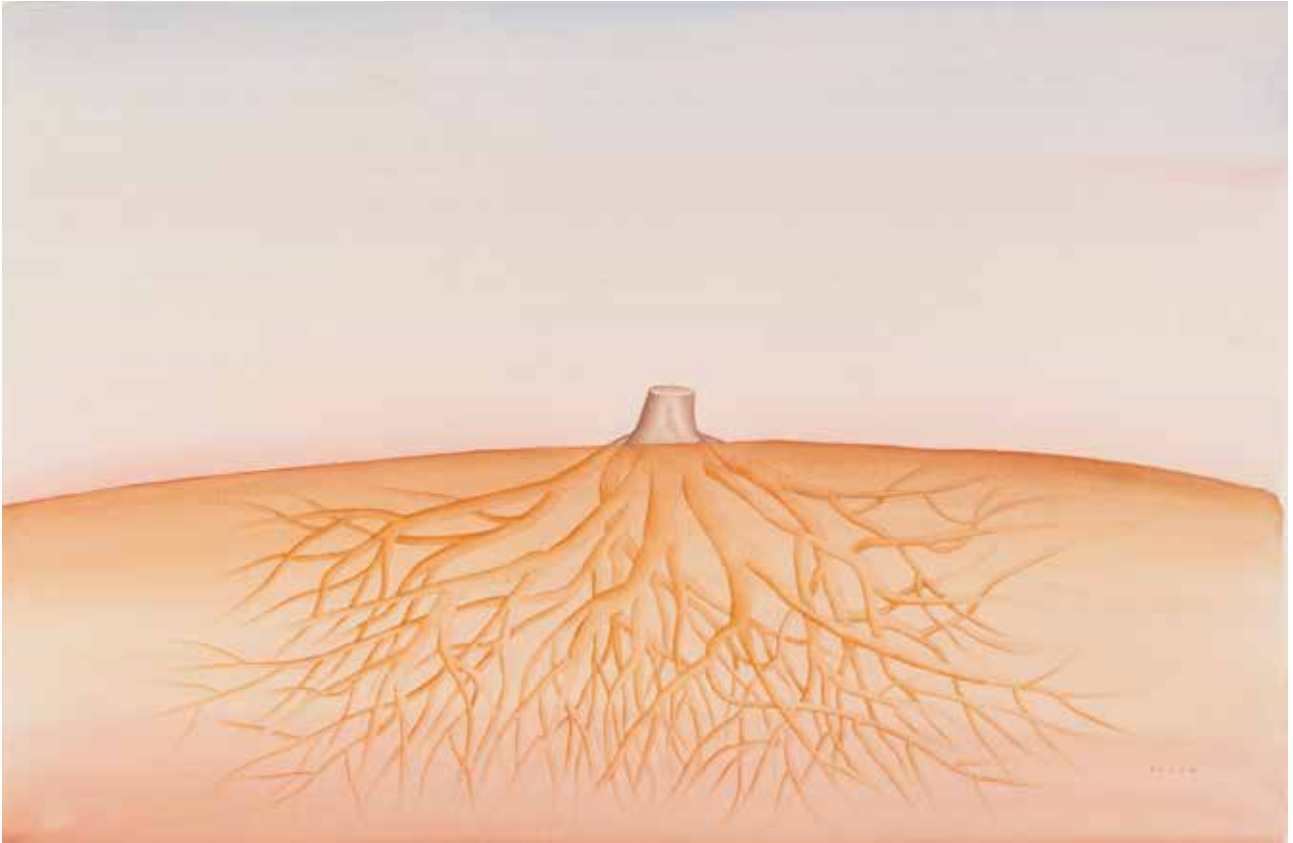
*Magritte·Folon* is laden with emotional resonance. Conducting research into an artistic relationship of any kind is always risky. The overuse of the notion of “influence” or recourse to mimicry to establish a “tradition” creates distortions harmful to both the work in question and the person it is intended to identify by contextualising it.

Although there are many connections and references between their two oeuvres, Folon is not the spiritual son of Magritte, who never hid his abhorrence at the idea of being followed by disciples.<sup>7</sup> He neither developed nor refreshed the approach employed on *The Treachery of Images* (The Treachery of Images). Folon considered Magritte as what René Char described as “a substantial ally”<sup>8</sup>: a travelling companion for works of different kinds – Char used the expression to establish the complementarity between painting and writing, an activity that was dear to Folon<sup>9</sup> – with whom he crossed paths in his research or with respect to certain shared concerns. Therefore, alongside Magritte – and Max Ernst in the realm of surrealism –, we should also mention Paul Klee for his special relationship with watercolour, CoBrA as a forum for experimental creation through his friendship with Pierre Alechinsky, photographers Henri Cartier Bresson and Jacques Henri-Lartigue, sculptors such as César, and illustrator colleagues such as Milton Glaser and Roland Topor. In this network, every encounter held the promise of a friendship<sup>10</sup>.

### **A Seminal Moment**

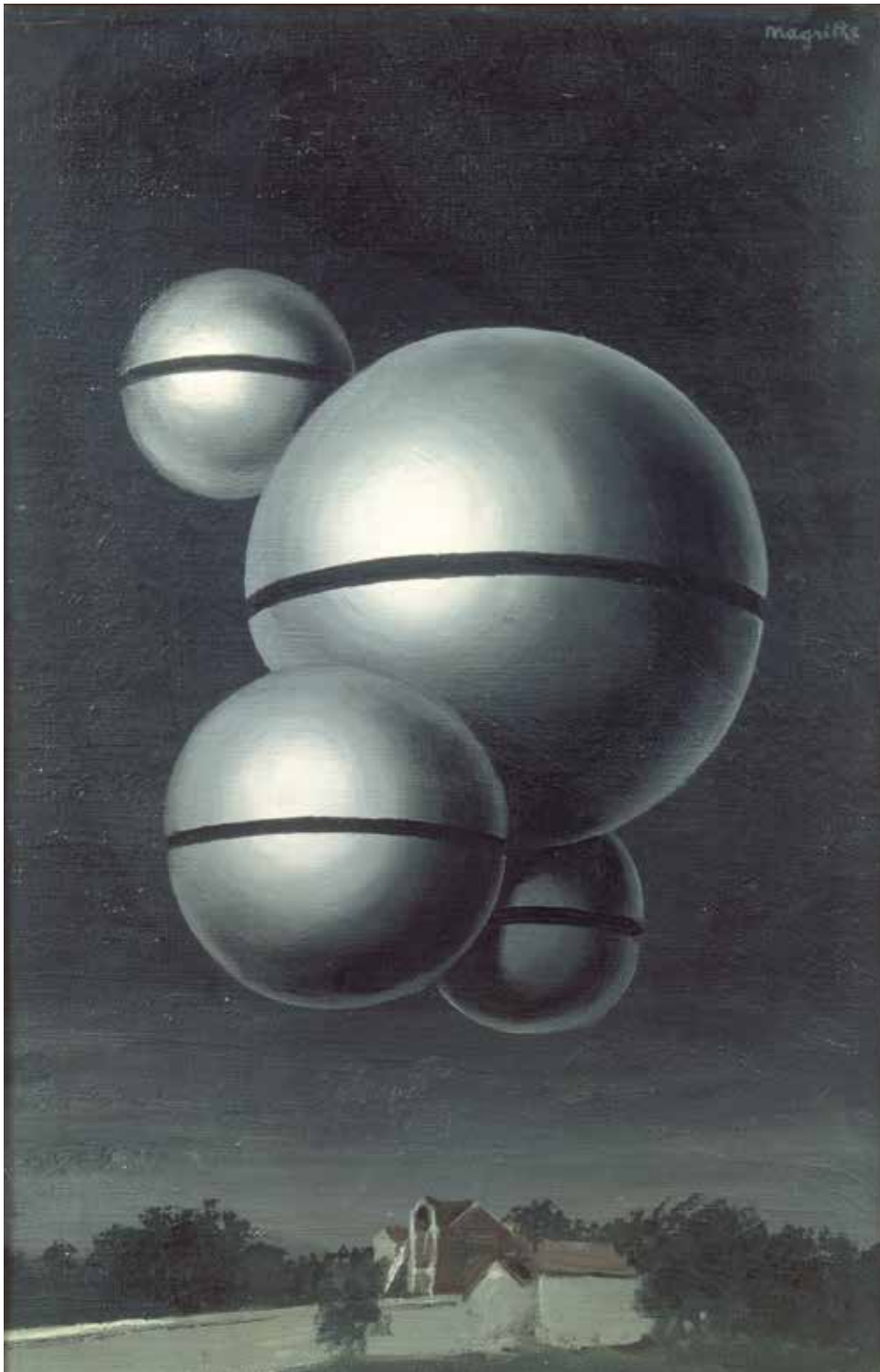
Folon’s decisive encounter with Magritte’s universe proved seminal. One moment that has a specific date and place. 1954, the Belgian coast. When he was 20, Folon went to Knokke-Heist, where he visited the casino, which had just unveiled the murals that Magritte designed in 1953 and which were completed under his supervision. Entitled *Le Domaine enchanté* (The Enchanted domain), the 70-metre-long, seven-metre-high panoramic piece is a sort of collection of the artist’s favourite motifs. The eight panels depict a dream-like world in a form which is not so much the setting for a quest as a scene of jubilant glorification through his theatrical staging of his own inventions.





Jean-Michel Folon, *La Mort d'un arbre* (Death of a tree),  
watercolour on paper, 70 × 100 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.

René Magritte, *La Folie Almayer* (Almayer's Folly), 1951,  
oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm.  
Private collection.

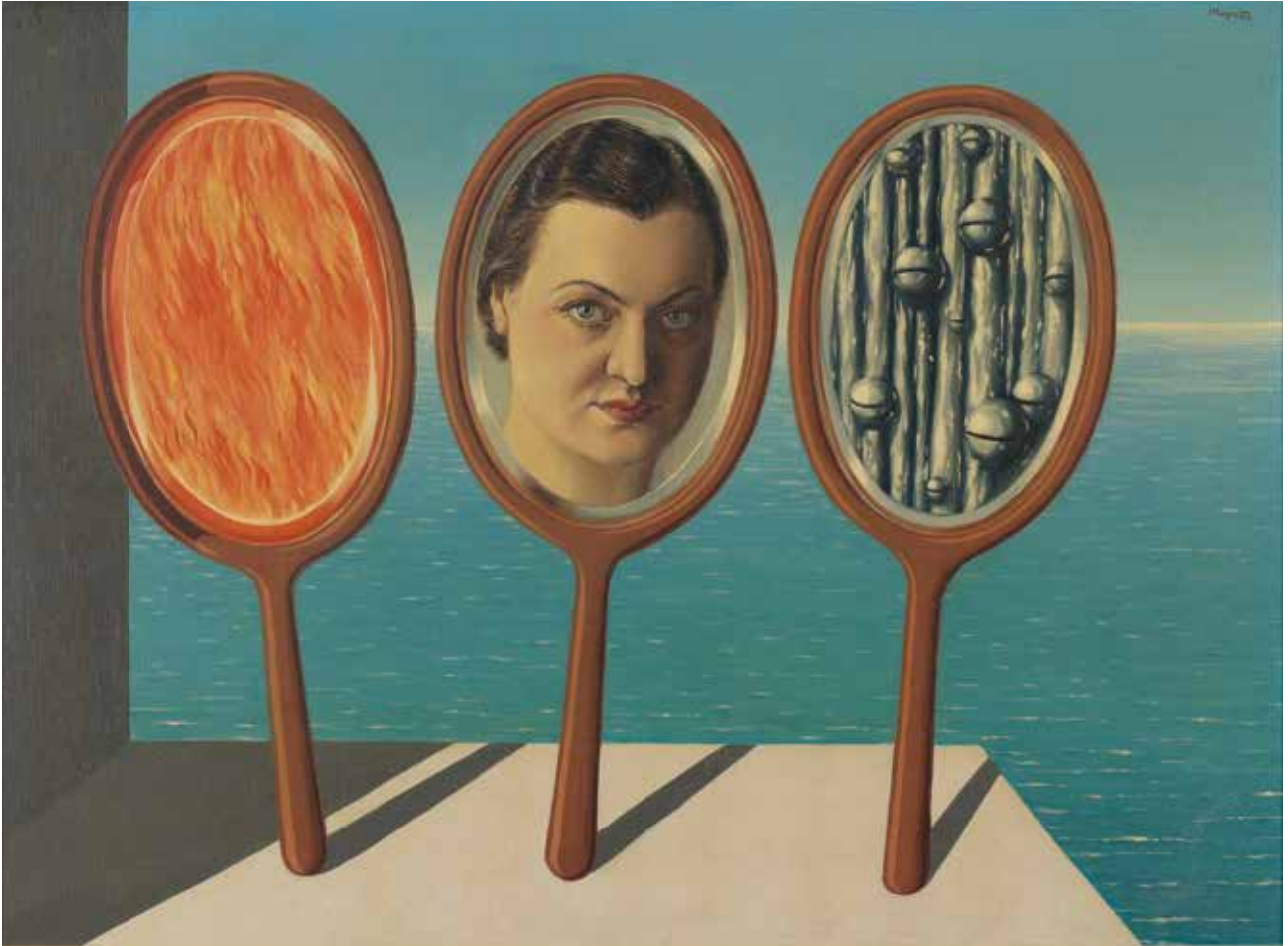


René Magritte, *Les Fleurs de l'abîme* (The Flowers of the Abyss), 1928,  
oil on canvas, 41 × 27 cm.  
Private collection.



Jean-Michel Folon, *Ouverture (Opening)*, undated,  
watercolour on paper, 60 × 46 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.





René Magritte, *Portrait d'Irène Hamoir* (Portrait of Irène Hamoir), 1936,  
oil on canvas, 54.5 × 73.5 cm.  
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 11682.





Jean-Michel Folon, *Réflexion* (Reflection), 1988,  
watercolour on paper inserted into an old wooden mirror, 26.9 × 10 × 1 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.



René Magritte, *La Mémoire* (Memory), 1948,  
oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm.  
Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles collection.



Jean-Michel Folon, *Tête (Head)*, 1993,  
oil on a broken ancient wood sculpture, 17.9 × 9.3 × 5 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.



René Magritte, *L'Art de la conversation* (The Art of Conversation), 1950,  
oil on canvas, 50 × 65 cm.  
Switzerland, private collection.



Jean-Michel Folon, *Seul (Alone)*, 1975,  
aquarelle, 57 × 76 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.



René Magritte, *La Malédiction* (The Curse), [1960?],  
oil on canvas, 33 × 41 cm.  
Belgium, private collection.



Jean-Michel Folon, *Le rêve éveillé* (Waking dream), [1971],  
watercolour on paper, 26.7 × 42.9 cm.  
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 8017.



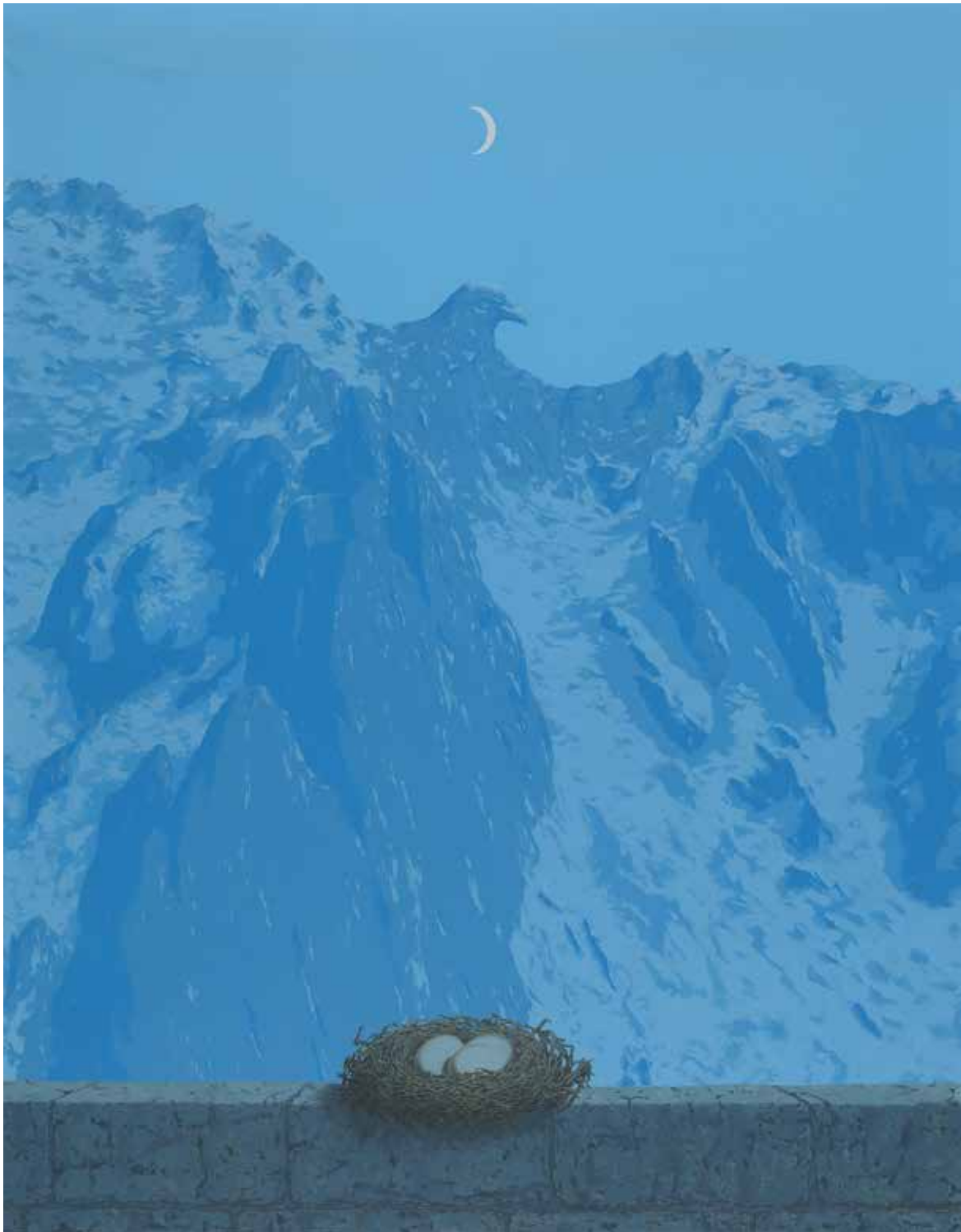


René Magritte, *La Voix du sang* (The Voice of blood), 1961,  
oil on canvas, 90 × 110 cm.  
Private collection.





Jean-Michel Folon, *Untitled*, undated,  
watercolour on paper, 30 × 22 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.



René Magritte, *Le Domaine d'Arnhem* (The Arnhem Estate), [1962],  
oil on canvas, 146 × 114 cm.  
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 10707.



Jean-Michel Folon, *Les Oiseaux* (The Birds), based on Aristophane's play *The Birds*, 1987,  
aquatint, 66.5 × 51 cm.  
La Hulpe, Fondation Folon.