

Paolo Uccello in French Surrealism: Doubling Antonin Artaud

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Abstract

In the 1920s and '30s the fourteenth-century Italian artist Paolo Uccello was appropriated as a precursor of Surrealism in the French surrealist discourse. Pivotal were two texts, a mini-play and an essay, that the playwright Antonin Artaud, then in his surrealist phase, dedicated to Uccello between 1924 and 1926. This article analyses both texts and shows the construction, by Artaud, of Uccello as his potential double, and especially as someone dedicated to mind over matter, a key facet of

Uccello's reception as a fellow traveler of Surrealism. It identifies an artwork ascribed to Uccello, discussed by Artaud and thought imaginary, as a panel currently in the Louvre. Finally, it shows that an imagined biography of the artist by the symbolist writer Marcel Schwob forms the key hypotext for Artaud and other surrealists, with strong echoes of Vasari's *vita* of Uccello, which was in turn Schwob's hypotext.

Introduction

[1] In 1895 a new biography of the fifteenth-century Florentine painter Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) appeared in a French newspaper: "Paolo Uccello, peintre", by genre-defying French symbolist writer Marcel Schwob (1876–1905).¹ With Schwob's 'imagined' biography the mythologization of Uccello, which was rooted in the already quite fanciful account that Vasari had provided in his sixteenth-century collection of artists's lives, entered a new phase.² It heralded a slight but slowly growing resurgence of interest in this artist. For instance, the 1896 landmark publication *The Florentine Painters of the Italian Renaissance* by the American connoisseur Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) included attributions to Uccello.³ Still, publications on the artist remained few and far between for a while.⁴ Then the 1930s saw more articles published on the artist than ever before, as well as a monograph.⁵ What occurred in between? In the wake of Schwob, Uccello was discovered by, among others, the French surrealists, and by the end of the 1920s he was claimed as a surrealist forefather on par with Bosch, Bruegel and Blake.⁶ This may have been an impetus for increased scholarly focus on Uccello: taking note of the surrealists's rather overt attempts at surrealistisation of this artist, some art historians felt the need to set the record straight.⁷ We cannot attribute the Western reception of Uccello in the twentieth century solely to the surrealists' intervention, but it is clear that their appropriation also had an impact outside the surrealist discourse.

[2] The first stage towards the full surrealist appropriation of Uccello occurred around 1924–26. It was mainly textual – surrealist art that responds to or resonates with Uccello is almost all from the 1930s and later.⁸ Surrealist frontman André Breton (1896–1966) referred to Uccello by name

¹ Marcel Schwob, "Paolo Uccello, peintre", in: *Œuvres*, ed. Alexandre Gefen, Paris 2002, 402-404. It was part of a series of such biographies, *Vies imaginaires*, which appeared in instalments in *Le Journal* throughout 1895; published collectively as *Vies imaginaires*, Paris 1896.

² Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter E. Bondanella, Oxford 1998, 74-83: "Paolo Uccello (1397–1475)".

³ Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*, New York 1896; more attributions to Uccello in the second edition (1900). One of the first modern essays solely about the artist is Charles Loeser, "Paolo Uccello", in: *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 21 (1898), 83-94. Hugh Hudson, *Paolo Uccello: Artist of the Florentine Renaissance Republic*, Saarbrücken 2008, 2, 238.

⁴ In the late 1920s, images of some of Uccello's works were included in Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas, specifically plate 28/29. Charlotte Schoell-Glass, *Aby Warburg and Anti-Semitism: Political Perspectives on Images and Culture*, Detroit 2008, 139, 144-147.

⁵ Wilhelm Boeck, *Paolo Uccello. Der Florentiner Meister und sein Werk*, Berlin 1939; Hudson (2008), 2, 240.

⁶ Robert Desnos, *Écrits sur les peintres*, ed. Marie-Claire Dumas, Paris 1984, 109; 250-251.

⁷ Sabine Mainberger, "Paolo Uccellos *Mazzocchi*, Marcel Schwob und die Grenzen der Euklidischen Geometrie", in: *Poetica* 46 (2014), no. 3-4, 359-411: 361 n8.

⁸ As I have explored in Tessel M. Bauduin, "The Incomparable Artist: Renaissance Painter Paolo Uccello in Surrealist Discourse Around 1930", in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual* 3 (2022), no. 3, 657-682, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2022.3.90236>.

in his first *Manifesto* of 1924, in an aside, and in his 1928 novel *Nadja*.⁹ Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), playwright, took especially to the mythopoetic potential that Uccello's (supposed) life offered and dedicated a number of pieces of writing to him between 1924 and 1926. The surrealist poet Philippe Soupault (1897–1990) undertook a study trip to Italy to see Uccello's work in situ, which resulted in *Paolo Uccello* (1929), one of the first studies in French on this artist as well as the first monograph.¹⁰

[3] The written appropriation of Uccello to Surrealism enacted by Artaud and others in the years around 1925 was to prove persistent and influential, despite the fact that the relevant publications constitute only a small selection when set against the entire body of texts produced by the French surrealists in that decade alone. In the 1930s, Uccello and his art were referenced in writing and visually in surrealist texts and art works by, among others, Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) and Georges Hugnet (1906–1974). A high point of interaction between the surrealist discourse and the art historical discourse on the Renaissance was reached in 1935, when the German art historian Georg Pudelko (1905–1972) published an illustrated essay about Uccello in *Minotaure*, the luxury art journal intimately associated with the Bretonian surrealists.¹¹

[4] Here I will focus on the two Uccellan texts by Artaud, one of which exists in two versions. Of course these are but a slice of the initial surrealist reception and construction of Uccello in French Surrealism, yet they establish and demonstrate the mythopoetic potential of Uccello. That in turn formed the foundation of the subsequent appropriation, within the French and international surrealist discourse, of Uccello as a proto-surrealist. The mediators of Uccello to Surrealism, foremost among them Marcel Schwob, will be explored first. Subsequently the construction of Uccello as mind and Artaud as Uccello in Artaud's texts will be discussed. This will also bring out the intertextual references to Schwob's "Paolo Uccello, peintre" as main hypotext, with Vasari as secondary hypotext and another essay by Schwob as hidden hypotext. Uccello-as-mind clears the way for his close association with surrealist doctrine, whereas Artaud-as-Uccello opens the door for the full surrealist appropriation of Uccello as precursor. Although the focus lies mainly upon textual reception and construction, I will also touch upon the reception history of one of Uccello's panels from the *The Miracle of the Host* (1467–1469) and the supposed self-portrait by Uccello in the Louvre.

⁹ André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)", in: idem, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor 1972, 1-47: 25; André Breton, *Nadja*, rev. ed., Paris 1964, 109f.

¹⁰ Philippe Soupault, *Paolo Uccello*, Paris 1929; reprinted in idem, *Écrits sur la peinture*, Paris 1980, 17-65. Soupault saw Uccello's painted predella *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host* in Urbino and subsequently travelled on to Florence where he visited churches where Uccello's frescoes could be seen, as well as the Uffizi. Keith Aspley, *The Life and Works of Surrealist Philippe Soupault (1897-1990): Parallel Lives*, Lewiston, NY 2001, 47; Adelaïde Russo, "La Médiation dans la critique artistique de Philippe Soupault: Paolo Uccello et William Blake", in: *Philippe Soupault, le poète*, ed. Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron, Paris 1992, 160-182: 170.

¹¹ Georges [sic] Pudelko, "Paolo Uccello, peintre lunaire", in: *Minotaure* 7 (1935), 32-41.

Trajectories of mediation to Surrealism

[5] Between the 1890s and the 1930s three groups (re)discovered Uccello: connoisseur-art historians such as Berenson, concerned with establishing the œuvre of the artist; poets and novelists such as Schwob and later the surrealists, inspired by the mythopoetic potential of Uccello's life; and, by the 1910s, artists, who were primarily drawn by Uccello's aesthetics. The afterlife of Uccello and his art amongst art historians was mixed but frequently quite negative; in contrast several artists responded positively to Uccello's style and composition, finding "something radically modern" in the painter's work.¹²

[6] The main intertext for surrealist Uccello in the 1920s is Marcel Schwob, as will be discussed below. Yet it seems that surrealist minds were already primed by their connection with Italian Modernism and (proto-)Futurism, in which Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), the French poet, art critic and godfather of Surrealism, functioned as lynchpin. In the 1910s Uccello's work became a point of reference for a number of Italian artists, including Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) and Carlo Carrà (1881–1961). Turning to their country's Renaissance heritage for inspiration, they showed their appreciation for Uccello's works in text and art.¹³ Subsequently Uccello became a reference point for contemporary critics discussing exactly those painters. De Chirico, for example, was described by Apollinaire as "a kind of Paolo Uccello in love with his divine perspective and oblivious to everything that lies outside his beautiful geometry".¹⁴ In a 1914 essay Apollinaire had furthermore noted that the nineteenth-century artist Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) might have been "the Paolo Uccello of our century" if only he had had "technical knowledge".¹⁵ Both Rousseau and De Chirico were important surrealist predecessors (the latter a living one, even), and the Uccello-Chirico and Uccello-Rousseau associations must have resonated strongly in early Surrealism. Importantly, Uccello operates here as a conceptual standard. The legacy of the Apollinairian approach is that the context in which Uccello features is literary, namely art criticism, and moreover that Uccello's function is to indicate something about another, *modern*, artist.

[7] Marcel Schwob's "Paolo Uccello, peintre" can be considered an important turning point for the modern reception of Uccello both in art history and among artists.¹⁶ There is no doubt that Schwob's writing found its way to a select surrealist audience, including Artaud, Breton, Soupault and Michel Leiris (1901–1990), as resonances and references in their work show, and Schwob's

¹² Jimena Berzal de Dios, "Uccello's Fluttering Monument to Hawkwood, with Schwob and Artaud", in: *Diacritics* 44 (2016), no. 2, 86-103: 88.

¹³ Mauro Minardi, *Paolo Uccello*, Milan 2017, 354-359 as well as 360-361, figs. 261 and 262; Maria Christina Bandera, "Giorgio Morandi: 'The Metaphysics of the Most Common Objects'", in: *De Chirico, Max Ernst, Magritte, Balthus: A Look into the Invisible*, ed. Paolo Baldacci, Florence 2010, 77-83, 78, 82. Carlo Carrà, "Paolo Uccello costruttore", in: *La Voce* 8, no. 9 (September 1916), 375-384. See also Hudson (2008), 243-244; Mainberger (2014), 361.

¹⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902–1918*, ed. LeRoy C. Breunig, New York 1972, 422; he cites the Italian writer Ardengo Soffici.

¹⁵ A citation of French art critic Arsène Alexandre; Apollinaire (1972), 342, 349.

¹⁶ Mainberger (2014), 362.

story was clearly the primary hypotext for surrealist Uccello.¹⁷ For instance, some of Schwob's writings are reflected in Breton's early work of the late 1910s, making it probable that he had read Schwob's "Paolo Uccello, peintre".¹⁸ Soupault, for his part, wrote: "Inspired by reading *Vies imaginaires* by Marcel Schwob, I wanted to get to know the painting of Paolo Uccello and I departed for Florence and Urbino. I was amazed."¹⁹ It is clear why some surrealists were drawn to "Uccello, peintre" in particular: Schwob's Uccello is an artist on a quest for the essence of art, disdaining – or losing – contact with the world of the senses in the process.²⁰ While certainly not identical with the surrealist quest, it does resonate strongly with it.

[8] A milestone in the mythopoetic narrativization of the life of Uccello, "Paolo Uccello, peintre" is the eleventh of twenty-two fictionalised biographies of historical persons in *Vies imaginaires*.²¹ These lives are not so much imaginary as they are imagined: Schwob, proceeding from particular historical details, rewrote his figures' lives with a specific characteristic as main narrative drive, creating a potential life dominated by one aspect. Using Vasari as his primary hypotext, Schwob focuses on Uccello's fascination with perspective. Schwob's Uccello is an alchemist who wants to dissolve all forms in the crucible of form, believing that "he could blend all lines into a single, ideal form".²² In Schwob's narrative, his obsession with lines and perspective at the exclusion of all else leads to the death of his young wife Selvaggia from starvation, something Uccello, engrossed as he is in his art, does not notice. Finally a situation very reminiscent of a key moment in Balzac's *The Hidden Masterpiece* (1831) – but based in Vasari's account – occurs: Uccello, like a proto-Frenhofer, unveils to his friend Donatello, the sculptor, a masterpiece he had been working on for a long time. It is a disaster: shocked and dismayed at the – apparently incomprehensible – painting, Donatello asks Uccello to cover it up.²³ Uccello dies a failed and frustrated genius.

¹⁷ Marie-Claire Dumas, "'Comme dit l'autre': Marcel Schwob chez quelques Surréalistes", in: *Marcel Schwob, d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, ed. Christian Berg and Yves Vadé, Seyssel 2002, 323-336: passim; for Leiris, who will not be discussed here, see 331-336. *Vies imaginaires* was continuously reprinted; Gallimard's editor of Artaud's *Œuvres* (1970, I: 387) notes that a 1923 publication of Schwob's *Vies* formed the impetus for Artaud's writing about Uccello; other editions came out in Paris in 1921 and 1927.

¹⁸ Dumas (2002), 325-326.

¹⁹ New foreword to a later reprint; Soupault (1980), 17 (my translation).

²⁰ Dumas (2002), 329.

²¹ For an extensive study of this work and Schwob's overall œuvre, see Bruno Fabre, *L'art de la biographie dans Vies imaginaires de Marcel Schwob*, Paris 2010, especially part III.

²² Marcel Schwob, "Paolo Uccello", in: *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Cambridge, Mass. 2001, 375-378: 377.

²³ There is another interesting parallel, besides Balzac: with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842). In this short story a painter disregards everything, including his wife, in favour of painting, and when he finally accedes to making her portrait becomes so lost in the painting of it that he fails to notice her withering away and dying. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Oval Portrait", in: *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott et al., vol. 2: *Tales and Sketches 1831–1842*, Cambridge, Mass. / London 1978, 662-666. It bears keeping in mind that Poe was a cherished surrealist predecessor too. Incidentally the stories by Poe and Schwob are part of a whole subset of literature about the tragic deaths of women married to painters that all seem to suggest that the pursuit of art does not combine well with family life.

[9] Central to the surrealist reception is an understanding of Uccello as a single-minded, obsessed artist who prioritised the intellectual pursuit of art over the daily concerns of life and body; that aspect in particular is shaped in and by Artaud, as will be shown below. Secondly, Uccello is considered an artist who treated form as concept rather than as representational device, as I have explored more in depth elsewhere.²⁴ The first aspect speaks to both the surrealist understanding of Surrealism as a lifestyle, a lived experience, and the understanding of the (surrealist) poet or artist as a visionary, rooted in nineteenth-century ideas about the poet-genius. The second aligns with the aesthetic aspiration (and need) of Surrealism and surrealist poetry and art to manifest the *sur-real*; this, in turn, operates on the fundamental premise that artists, as much as poets, should be inspired by conceptual or internal models, not by the mere representation of daily reality.

[10] Another relevant factor is the surrealists' love for the forgotten and discarded. The surrealists often brought people, events and things that mainstream society considered passé, kitsch or retrograde, or that were just unknown, into the limelight. André Breton in particular unearthed a slew of artists, poets and radicals from the realm of the archival to put them on a surrealist pedestal – a location from where several made their way into the current Western canon.²⁵ A well-known example is the poet Isidore Ducasse, the Comte de Lautréamont (1846–1870), who languished in near complete obscurity until popularised by the surrealists.²⁶ Another example is Piero di Cosimo (1462–1522), a contemporary of Uccello; Cosimo's journey from relative obscurity into the canon of Western art was to a considerable part contingent upon his reception in Surrealism.²⁷ The same may be said for the sixteenth-century artist Arcimboldo (1527–1593). Paolo Uccello was hardly obscure, but he can still be taken as a case in point: when the surrealist reception of Uccello was gathering steam in the 1920s, the artist was as yet quite 'out of vogue' in the (European) art historical world, with less than twelve publications about him available.²⁸ This archival side of Uccello too must have played a role in his early and quick assumption into Surrealism.

Artaud: Uccello the detached mind

[11] During the 1920s Artaud associated closely with several surrealists. His writing would retain surrealist themes throughout his life. Pertinent here is that his reception and construction of Uccello took place during 1924 to 1926, when he was an active surrealist. Early in 1924 Artaud

²⁴ Bauduin (2022).

²⁵ Following Aleida Assmann I understand the archive as "passively stored [in libraries, museums, collections, etc.] memory that preserves the past as past". The canon, then, is "actively [and publicly] circulated memory that keeps the past present". Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive", in: *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Berlin 2008, 97-108: 98. A key source about the French surrealists's reception and appropriation strategies of historical figures and their political subtext is Kirsten Strom, *Making History: Surrealism and the Invention of a Political Culture*, Lanham 2002.

²⁶ Andrea S. Thomas, *Lautréamont, Subject to Interpretation*, Amsterdam 2015, 17, 106, 107, 109-110.

²⁷ Sharon Fermor, *Piero Di Cosimo: Fiction, Invention and Fantasia*, London 1993, 7-9.

²⁸ Aspley (2001), 47.

became, as he noted himself, "obsessed by the theme of Paolo Uccello":²⁹ a brief but intense period of engagement with Uccello through Schwob, perhaps triggered by the psychosexual undercurrent in the latter's *Vies*.³⁰ This resulted in a mini-play titled "Paul les Oiseaux". Two versions from 1924–25 still exist: "Paul les Oiseaux ou la Place de l'Amour" (Paul the Birds or the Place of Love), published in 1925, and "Paul les Oiseaux ou la Place de l'Amour suivi d'une Prose pour l'Homme au Crâne en Citron" (Paul the Birds or the Place of Love followed by a Letter to a Lemon-Headed Man), which remained unpublished.³¹ Artaud then developed some of his thoughts on Uccello further in the essay "Uccello, le Poil" (Uccello, the Hair), which was published in *La Révolution surréaliste* 8 (1926).³² In both cases the intertextuality is layered, with Artaud's texts taking their inspiration from Schwob's "Paolo Uccello, peintre", which in turn responded to Vasari's life of Uccello.³³ The timing is notable: in the spring of 1924 Breton was writing the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, which would be published in October 1924. In it, Uccello is accorded the honour of being the only non-nineteenth-century painter mentioned by name, although it is very briefly and in a footnote to boot.³⁴ This is the same time-frame in which Artaud was drafting and redrafting "Paul les Oiseaux". Although Artaud and Breton appear to have come to Schwob's Uccello independently, it is quite possible (but unknown at this stage) that the painter became a shared interest through the attention one paid to him influencing the other.

[12] The main purpose of Uccello in Artaud's writing is to double Artaud, that is to provide a template for who Artaud wanted to be at that moment. Thus Artaud's texts are less about Uccello and more about the author himself: "I am standing at the window, smoking. I am now Paul the Birds."³⁵ On a larger scale, this is also how Uccello and other historical and mythical figures appropriated to Surrealism function for the movement: they indicate something about Surrealism. If Uccello is positioned as an important precursor, that should not be understood to mean that the historical artist Paolo Uccello was a surrealist (a chronological impossibility anyway); rather it indicates that surrealist Uccello – i.e., what the surrealists see in Uccello – embodies one aspect of what Surrealism is or wants to be.

²⁹ Cited in Kimberly Jannarone, "Exercises in Exorcism: The Paradoxes of Form in Artaud's Early Works", in: *French Forum* 29 (2004), no. 2, 35-53: 49.

³⁰ John C. Stout, *Antonin Artaud's Alternate Genealogies: Self-Portraits and Family Romances*, Waterloo 1996, 13.

³¹ Jannarone (2004), 45. Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, Paris 1970, 68-71 and 301-306, notes: 386-388, 428-431. There are three versions: the first, destroyed by Artaud, dates from before 13 April 1924; the second and third, which differ somewhat but not significantly from each other, were written between April 1924 and February 1925. "Paul les Oiseaux ou la Place de l'Amour" was published in *L'Ombilic des Limbes* (1925). Antonin Artaud, "Paul the Birds, or The Place of Love", in: *Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. by Victor Corti, London 1978, 51-54. Antonin Artaud, "Paul the Birds, or The Place of Love followed by a Letter to a Lemon-Headed Man", in: *idem*, 147-152.

³² Antonin Artaud, "Uccello, le Poil", in: *La Révolution surréaliste* 8 (1926): 22-23, retaken in Artaud (1970), 170-172.

³³ See further Stout (1996), 25, who discusses the winnowing down of Vasari's relatively long sketch to one theme in Schwob and one moment in Artaud.

³⁴ Breton (1972), 25.

³⁵ Artaud (1978), 148.

[13] In Artaud, the doubling often consists of a confusion between the authorial I and the character Uccello, a blending of identities: "Cast away your tongue, Paolo Uccello, cast away your tongue, my tongue, my tongue, dammit, who said that, where are you?"³⁶ This identity game is consistent with other works by this author, for whom writing "acted as a privileged means to attempt self-construction (or reconstruction)".³⁷ Artaud faced "personal crises of self-knowledge and creativity" through writing fictional semi-biographies that function as indirect forms of autobiography.³⁸ In the act of writing about this particular artist, Artaud tried to cross over into Uccello's life, perhaps even into his art, a fusion of being intended to localise and stabilize Artaud's own.³⁹ In Artaud's view, both of them suffered from a certain mental "hollowness" – thus a connection was forged, and also an ambition for doubling on Artaud's part, as he felt that Uccello, in contrast to himself, had managed to fix the problem:

*For I know that you [Uccello] were born with a mind as hollow as mine, but you were able to fix this mind on something even smaller than the outline and the origin of a lash. By the breadth of a hair you are balanced over a formidable abyss from which, however, you are eternally divided.*⁴⁰

The excessive devotion of this Uccello to one motif – in this case perspective, exemplified by the line or hair – lends itself well to such projection as much as it does to mythopoeia.

[14] Another personal struggle Artaud recognised in Uccello's life, as told by Schwob, touched on his love life. "Paul les Oiseaux" dramatizes the death of Selvaggia through Uccello's neglect, although this plot mainly serves as the starting point for musings about mind and identity. Psychosexually, Uccello's failure to provide his wife with food translates as his sexual failure as a husband.⁴¹ In Artaud, Uccello's carnal denial serves his higher goal: dedication to mind, spirituality

³⁶ Artaud (1978), 52. Although I have mainly used this 1978 English edition of Artaud's *Œuvres*, I will incidentally refer to Susan Sontag's translation, which is preferable (for both clarity and style) in some cases. Sontag translates this as: "Leave your tongue, Paolo Uccello, leave your tongue, my tongue, my tongue, shit, who is speaking, where are you?". Antonin Artaud, "Paul the Birds, or The Place of Love", in: *Selected Writings*, ed. and intr. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, New York 1976, 61-64 and 604, 61. In the same: Antonin Artaud, "Uccello the Hair", 135-136.

³⁷ Stout (1996), 5.

³⁸ Stout (1996), 5.

³⁹ Leslie Boldt-Irons, "Walking the Fine Line: *Le Poil* as *Garde-Fou* in Artaud's 'Uccello Le Poil'", in: *Neophilologus* 84 (2000), no. 1, 37-57: 38. Idem, "Crossing over into Painted Space: Artaud's Retrieval of Self in the Work of Paolo Uccello", in: *Literary Texts & the Arts: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Corrado Federici and Esther Raventós-Pons, New York 2003, 119-134.

⁴⁰ Artaud (1976), 136.

⁴¹ Again there is a basis for this in Vasari, who provides the following anecdote. Obsessing over perspective, the painter would work late into the night. His wife would call him to bed but Uccello would dissimulate and respond, "Oh, what a sweet thing this perspective is!" – a phrasing that implies, among other things, that perspective is Uccello's mistress, who thereby doubly fails his wife. Vasari (1998), 83. In Italian, the anecdote additionally functions as a slightly ribald joke revolving around the *prospettive* (both perspective and prospective) of going to bed to/with his wife. As "uccello" is furthermore Italian slang for penis, the double sexual *entendres* in this passage abound. James Elkins, "Uccello, Duchamp: the Ends of Wit", in:

and abstract concepts over body and matter. Besides Selvaggia – whose only purpose is to die on stage – and a brief mention of the surrealist painter André Masson,⁴² the other main personages in "Paul les Oiseaux" are Brunelleschi and Donatello. Their appearance too is sourced in both Vasari and Schwob. In Artaud Brunelleschi functions as the antagonist and rival of Uccello (not least for the love of Selvaggia); he exemplifies body, Donatello exalted mind and Uccello detached mind:

For Paolo Uccello represents the Mind, not exactly pure, but unconcerned.

Donatello is the Mind Exalted. He no longer looks earth-wards, although his feet are still on the ground.

Brunelleschi is firmly rooted in this world and he desires Selvaggia in a worldly, sexual way. He thinks of nothing but copulation.

*Yet Paolo Uccello is not blind to sex, but he regards it as glazed and mercurial, cold as ether.*⁴³

The central struggle in this text, mirroring Artaud's in his personal life, is between mind and body. Artaud's Uccello is a man "obsessed with perspective because he was obsessed with the mind", with which Artaud identifies.⁴⁴ Artaud-as-Uccello wishes also to achieve a cerebral and spiritual creative state that is self-sufficient and apart from earthly desires.⁴⁵

[15] The two versions of "Paul the Birds" paint Uccello as detached mind, someone whose mind triumphs over matter and who has succeeded in achieving all-encompassing singular mental focus. This laid the groundwork for the artist's close connection to a key surrealist doctrine: that of the internal model. In his essay "Surrealism and Painting" Breton emphasised that surrealist painting could only be possible under one condition: "the plastic work of art will [...] refer to a *purely internal model*" [emphasis original].⁴⁶ This necessitated predecessors who too worked from "internal" models, i.e. privileged the conceptual over form and execution. That Breton connected the idea of the surrealist internal model to Uccello is indicated a few lines down: "Am I to believe then that everything began with myself? There were so many others, heedful of the clash of gold lances under a black sky – but where are Uccello's Battles? And what is left of them for us?"⁴⁷

Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft 36 (1991), 199-224: 202.

⁴² Who functions as another double of Uccello-Artaud; Artaud (1970), 68.

⁴³ Artaud (1978), 54.

⁴⁴ Jannarone (2004), 47, 48.

⁴⁵ Stout (1996), 39.

⁴⁶ André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, intr. Mark Polizzotti, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, Boston 2002 [first English ed. 1972, original French ed. 1965], 4.

⁴⁷ Breton (2002), 8, a clear reference to *The Battle of San Romano*. In the later, expanded, reprinted edition an illustration of *The Battle* (the third, Louvre panel) is reproduced here, which was not part of the original publication. *The Battle of San Romano* consists of three parts: the first is in the National Gallery, London; the third in the Uffizi, Florence; and the middle panel, *The Counterattack of Michelotto da Cotignola at the Battle of San Romano* (ca. 1455), in the Louvre and thus most accessible to the French surrealists.

[16] *Surrealism and Painting*, while published as a book in 1928, was written and published in instalments in *La Révolution surréaliste* during the period 1925–27.⁴⁸ This overlaps with the timeframe of Artaud's writing of his other Uccellan text, "Uccello the Hair", on the one hand, and on the other, with Breton's confrontation with Uccello's *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host* (1467–1469), which would cement his fascination for the artist and that work in particular.

[17] In his anti-novel *Nadja* (1928) Breton describes receiving, enclosed in a letter, an image of a painting by Uccello that he did not know and calls *The Profanation of the Host* (as it would continue to be referred to in surrealist sources).⁴⁹ When confronted with the full art work, later in 1926 or early in 1927, it appeared to him "full of hidden intentions, and, in all respects, quite difficult to interpret".⁵⁰ Breton's appreciation for the image shows in the fact that, after receiving the reproduction in October 1926, he introduced it into the discourse of Surrealism almost immediately: as illustration to "Uccello, le Poil" in *La Révolution surréaliste* 8, dated 1 December 1926 (Fig. 1; Fig. 2).⁵¹ The same detail is reproduced in *Nadja* (Fig. 3), for which he must have used the same image, possibly a postcard.⁵² This is a relatively minor paper trail, but it nevertheless demonstrates how non-contemporary art travelled into the surrealist discourse – in this case, to stay.

[18] The specific cropping of the image, furthermore, demonstrates how the surrealist eye noted and appreciated entirely different aspects of Uccello's art than the art historian's. The reproduced detail shows the corner of the room, left for the viewer, where a Jewish pawnbroker and his family are anxiously gathered together. The cropping has the effect of highlighting the figures and downplaying what is otherwise often considered the most spectacular aspect of this panel: the "unprecedented off-centre perspective pavement" of the floor.⁵³ The particular cropping also foils any attempt to understand what either the profanation or miracle actually consists of, as that is now not shown; moreover, centralising the figures in distress turns the predella's anti-Semitism on its head, although it is not clear if that was intentional.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ In *La Révolution surréaliste* 4 (1925), 6 (1926), 7 (1926) and 9-10 (1927). More about the internal model in Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton*, Amsterdam 2014, 67-71.

⁴⁹ Breton (1964), 109-110. Note that this book, while published in 1928, was written in 1927 and details events taking place in 1925–26; again therefore indicative of the fact that 1925–27 was a pivotal time for Uccellan reception in French surrealist discourse. Breton writes (on p. 109) that on the morning of October 8 (1926) he opened a letter from Louis Aragon from Italy that contained said image. In a note he adds he would see the entire work a few months later, when it seemed "full of hidden intentions". While it is not clear here whether Breton means the full panel or in fact the complete predella of *The Miracle*, the first seems more probable given the continued popularity of that panel specifically in Surrealism.

⁵⁰ Breton (1964), 109.

⁵¹ To complicate matters, Artaud had been excluded from the group just before, in November 1926. It is therefore quite probable that Breton, who by 1926 had taken over as editor of *La Révolution surréaliste*, selected that particular image, not the author himself.

⁵² Breton mistakenly calls it the "central scene"; it is actually part of the second panel in a total of six.

⁵³ Elkins (1991), 205.

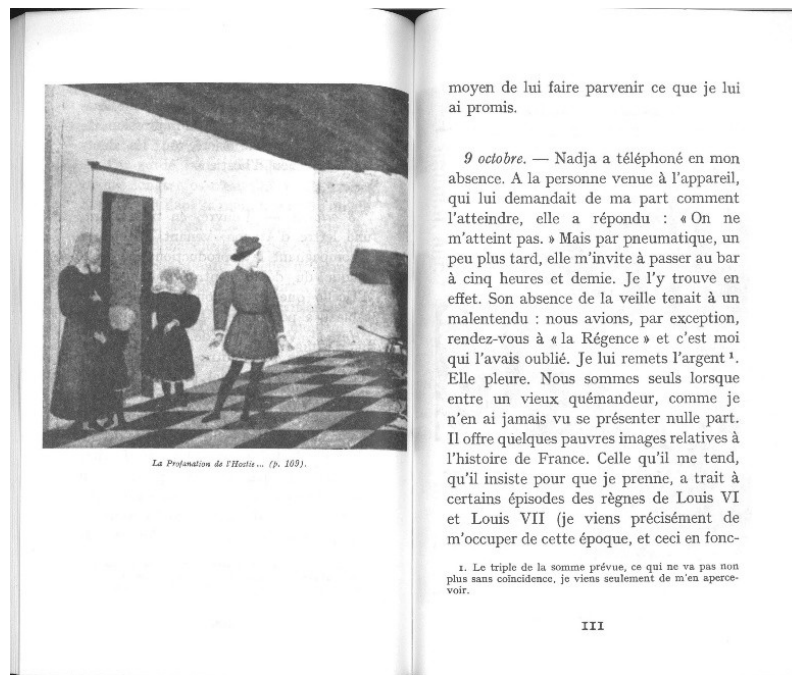


1 Antonin Artaud, "Uccello, le Poil", in: *La Révolution surréaliste* 8 (1926), 22, with a reproduction of a detail from Paolo Uccello's predella cycle on *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host* (as Fig. 2) (reprod. from: André Breton et al., *La Révolution surréaliste: 1924–1929* [complete facsimile edition of original twelve issues], Paris 1975, 22)



2 Paolo Uccello, *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host*, 1467–1469, a six-part predella cycle, tempera on wood, 42 × 341 cm, detail: second panel, 42 x 58 cm. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino (photo: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_Uccello_-_The_Miracle_of_the_Desecrated_Host_-_Detail_-_Urbino.jpg))

⁵⁴ André Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Marguerite Bonnet et al., Paris 1999, 703-704. On the painted "wound" in the wall, a striking invention by Uccello, and the layered anti-Semitism of the predella (and the altarpiece it sits under), see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, "The Wound in the Wall", *Practicing New Historicism*, Chicago 2001, 75-109. Also: Sabine Mainberger, "Paolo Uccello juif oder Antonin Artaud und der *Hostienfrevel*. Mit Überlegungen zu Philippe Soupault, Stephen Greenblatt und Marcel Schwob", in: *Comparatio* 11 (2019), no. 2, 229-259, 229-230, 244-245.



moyen de lui faire parvenir ce que je lui ai promis.

9 octobre. — Nadja a téléphoné en mon absence. A la personne venue à l'appareil, qui lui demandait de ma part comment l'atteindre, elle a répondu : « On ne m'atteint pas. » Mais par pneumatique, un peu plus tard, elle m'invite à passer au bar à cinq heures et demie. Je l'y trouve en effet. Son absence de la veille tenait à un malentendu : nous avions, par exception, rendez-vous à « la Régence » et c'est moi qui l'avais oublié. Je lui remets l'argent¹. Elle pleure. Nous sommes seuls lorsque entre un vieux quémandeur, comme je n'en ai jamais vu se présenter nulle part. Il offre quelques pauvres images relatives à l'histoire de France. Celle qu'il me tend, qu'il insiste pour que je prenne, a trait à certains épisodes des règnes de Louis VI et Louis VII (je viens précisément de m'occuper de cette époque, et ceci en fon-

1. Le triple de la somme prévue, ce qui ne va pas non plus sans coïncidence, je viens seulement de m'en apercevoir.

III

3 André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], Paris 1964, 110-111: reproduction of a detail from Paolo Uccello's predella cycle (as Fig. 2)

Artaud's Uccello, the hair, with beard

[19] The potential for layered identities is already implicit in the artist's name; after all, Paolo Uccello already has a double, a bird (the *uccello* of his nickname). Artaud drew this theme of layered identities directly from Schwob: while Vasari merely notes that Paolo di Dono was given the nickname Paolo of the Birds, Schwob turns it into a *leitmotiv*, referring to the painter alternatively as Uccello and as "l'Oiseau" (the Bird).⁵⁵ In the dialogue "L'Art" Uccello is even directly addressed as "Bird".⁵⁶ In Artaud, Paul the Bird(s) is also the author who writes "I really am Paul the Birds". The aspect of potential multiplicity – Paul the Bird/s – is fascinating too, particularly in context with Artaud's identity-doubling. Is this a Freudian indication of the multiplicity of Artauds whom Artaud creates in his writing?⁵⁷

[20] Although it is not made explicit that Artaud by means of doubling also becomes a, or The Bird, I would point to the possibility of this avian alter ego nonetheless. Alter egos were not unknown among the surrealist group; Marcel Duchamp's alter ego Rose Sélavy, for instance, had made her appearance in 1920, and artists such as Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), Toyen (Marie Čerminová, 1902–1980) and Max Ernst (1891–1976), among others, developed animal doubles, including birds.⁵⁸ Perhaps Artaud, in his search for identity, sought to acquire for himself a

⁵⁵ Vasari (1998), 77; Schwob (2002), passim. Caws's 2001 translation (375-378) gives it consequently as "the Bird Man".

⁵⁶ Schwob (2002), 652.

⁵⁷ Jannarone (2004), 48.

⁵⁸ Well-known for instance is Ernst's bird alter ego Loplop; see Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, Loplop: the Artist in the Third Person*, trans. John William Gabriel, New York 1983.

(temporary) avian double, manifested through Uccello. Fascinating in this regard is that Artaud – keeping the characterisation of bird for himself, perhaps? – suggests for Uccello instead a substitute identity: Uccello (as) "the Hair".

[21] "Uccello, le Poil" is a complex text sometimes qualified as a *painting-poem*, painting a picture through words.⁵⁹ It appears to discuss, among other things, an unnamed work of art, which is not the second panel of Uccello's predella *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host*. Some scholars consider the discussed work to be a complete invention of Artaud. In my view, however, it is quite clear that Artaud refers to an existing work,⁶⁰ and identifying it will not only provide insight into some of the text's more enigmatic phrases but also show what kind of image of Uccello Artaud (and others) may have had in mind. I propose the portrait that Uccello allegedly painted of himself, alongside that of four other Florentine Renaissance masters. This panel is now known as *Cinq maîtres de la Renaissance florentine* (ca. 1500–1550) and sometimes *Five Famous Men (The Fathers of Perspective)*, attributed to an unknown master of the Florentine school (Fig. 4).⁶¹



4 Artist unknown, *Cinq maîtres de la Renaissance florentine: Giotto, Uccello, Donatello, Manetti, Brunelleschi*, ca. 1500–1550, oil on wood, 66 x 210 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris (photograph © 2012 RMN-Grand Palais [musée du Louvre] / Tony Querrec)

[22] Acquired in 1847, *Cinq maîtres* is part of the Louvre's collections and portrays five men, from the bust up, arranged next to one another in a variety of profiles. Their names (inscribed later) read: "Giotto, Paolo Uccello, Donatello, Antonio Manetti, Flipo Brunelles [sic]".⁶² During the surrealisation of Uccello the attribution of this panel to him was still uncontested. The detail of his purported self-portrait (Fig. 5) often featured as a separate illustration in studies of Uccello; it is, for instance, the very first illustration in Soupault's book, where it is captioned "Portrait de Uccello par lui-même".⁶³ Pudelko too attributed it to Uccello.⁶⁴ As Artaud's Uccellan texts essentially

⁵⁹ And thus an homage; Stout (1996), 35.

⁶⁰ See also Mainberger (2019), 238, who has come to a similar conclusion.

⁶¹ But cf. Hudson (2008), 244, who proposes Uccello's fresco *The Flood* (ca. 1447-48); or Boldt-Irons (2003).

⁶² Franco Borsi and Stefano Borsi, *Paolo Uccello*, New York 1994 [original Italian ed. Milan 1992], 353-355.

⁶³ Soupault (1929), plate I.

⁶⁴ In his 1934 extensive article on Uccello, in turn at the basis of his rather surrealist interpretation of him as a "lunar" painter in 1935. Georg Pudelko, "The Early Works of Paolo Uccello", in: *The Art Bulletin* 16 (1934), no. 3, 231-259.

address and construct the author himself, it seems quite apt that the hair-reverie in "Uccello, le Poil" was primarily inspired by Uccello's "self"-portrait. Also, there is the matter of an additional, hidden hypotext for Artaud's Uccellan writings: the essay "L'Art" by Marcel Schwob, containing a dialogue between the Dutch Golden Age painter Jan van Scorel and several Italian masters, including Uccello.⁶⁵ In it, the character Uccello specifically mentions one work by his own hand: a "tableau oblong" upon which he has painted the portraits of men who "have recreated the universe", including himself. This is, in other words, the Louvre panel.⁶⁶



5 Artist unknown, *Cinq maîtres de la Renaissance florentine*, ca. 1500–1550, oil on wood, 66 x 210 cm, detail of *Uccello*. Musée du Louvre, Paris (photograph détail © 1997 RMN-Grand Palais [musée du Louvre] / Daniel Arnaudet)

[23] Let us first turn to the motif of hair. Although it has been analysed extensively as an analogy for the line,⁶⁷ it is also just hair – more specifically (and often overlooked), *facial* hair: a beard. The first part of "Uccello, le Poil" deals emphatically with lashes, hairs and wrinkles. These are not just lines but facial lines:

*How many secrets and how many surfaces from one hair to the next? But two hairs, one next to the other, Uccello. The repeated, duplicated, inexpressibly fine, ideal hair line. There are some wrinkles which go around the face and extend down as far as the neck, but there are lines under the hair as well, Uccello.*⁶⁸

⁶⁵ "L'Art" was published in *Spicilege* (1896). Schwob (2002), 644-653.

⁶⁶ My translation. Schwob (2002), 651: "J'ai peint sur un tableau oblong les portraits des cinq hommes qui, après Dieu, ont recréé l'univers." Uccello also remarks (p. 652) that these five men including himself each represent a particular facet of the arts, incidentally counting his own portrait as *fourth* in the line-up, which indicates that Schwob may have been looking at a mirrored print image.

⁶⁷ E.g. Stout's interpretation of it as the hair of a paintbrush, a meditation on Uccello's line, and the result of a wordplay; Stout (1996), 35, 37.

⁶⁸ Artaud (1978), 104.

The last sentences appear to refer to a beard. Artaud returns to it in the second paragraph: it "is thus that I live, Uccello, all swaddled in *your beard* [emphasis added] [...]".⁶⁹ Among the men portrayed in *Cinq maîtres*, his long, two-pronged white beard makes (the supposed) Uccello stand out. If Artaud becomes Uccello then he would indeed be "swaddled in" his beard. Incidentally, the painted beard also serves to emphasise the artist's advanced age – something Artaud alludes to throughout "Le Poil" in his references to wrinkles.⁷⁰

[24] Artaud addresses the artist: "you painted your two friends and yourself on a well-applied canvas".⁷¹ These friends are of course Donatello and Brunelleschi, who already made their appearance in the versions of "Paul les Oiseaux". According to the inscription added to *Cinq maîtres*, they are the third and fifth man depicted. Admittedly, if the "canvas" is this portrait (which is a panel), Artaud omits Giotto and Manetti, but even so there are no other portraits of "friends" of Uccello by his hand. Apart from that neither Giotto nor Manetti play a part in Schwob and hence also not in Artaud's writings.

[25] There are a few other phrases in Artaud's text that, in my view, indicate that he is referring to the *Cinq maîtres*. The line "hanging, egg-like faces of the dead watching you" may well refer to this group portrait, which, after all, hangs on a wall and depicts men long dead, two of which seem to watch the painted pseudo-Uccello. Perhaps we can also take Artaud's emphasis on the left in the opening section of "Uccello, le Poil" – "The hairs are left, Uccello"⁷² – as a reference to it, prompted by the direction of the gaze of the painted pseudo-Uccello. Finally, subsequent references to a "table", specifically "this flat table-top on which your heavy head is bowed",⁷³ may have been inspired by this flat panel of heads also. Identifying the art work discussed in "Le Poil" as *Cinq maîtres* indicates that Artaud must have seen it in the Louvre, and perhaps also had an image to hand. It also shows that even if a figure was received in surrealist circles as an almost mythical character with only tenuous connections to a historical past – i.e. Schwob's Uccello – to be moulded into a surrealist fellow traveller for whom the mind took precedence over reality (let alone mimesis or figuration) – i.e. Artaud's Uccello – the actual work of that character, their poems or essays or as here, their art, did remain in play as well.⁷⁴ It is clear that in Artaud the figure of Uccello has many faces, one of which is a pastiche portrait, even. More than just a potential double, this Uccello becomes surrealist in this layering of identities on top of, and/or reflecting off, one another.

⁶⁹ Artaud (1976), 136. Artaud (1978), 104, reads: "And because of that, Uccello, all interspersed through your beard, I saw you had understood and portrayed me beforehand."

⁷⁰ The recurring theme of wrinkles and age too derives directly from Schwob, a further indication of the strong intertextuality between the two authors's texts. Artaud reflects on wrinkles as "traps", "hairs as tongues", and seeing a tongue in "one of your paintings, Paolo Uccello". Does Artaud see a tongue in Uccello's beard, perhaps? It picks up on a theme of Uccello and tongues (and language) developed in "Paul les Oiseaux", not explored here.

⁷¹ Artaud (1978), 104.

⁷² Artaud (1978), 103.

⁷³ Artaud (1978), 103. Compare also Schwob's rather similar mention of the "tableau oblong" (above, paragraph 22).

[26] Finally, let's return to Uccello's potential for surrealist doubling. There is something rather peculiar to Uccello the Bird. Vasari wrote that Uccello loved animals, "birds most of all", but because he was poor he owned only representations of them, not live ones.⁷⁵ Schwob developed this into the proposition that Uccello preferred the representational (i.e. painted birds) over the real. Such a fascination for the sign over the signified aligns quite well with surrealist interests and the surrealists' ludic experimentation with simile, metaphor and analogy. It is compounded by the fact that the animal most associated with Uccello is the *horse*, not a bird – indeed, there are hardly any birds at all in his existing works. In the end, then, we come face to face with Uccello the Bird, who is named after a simile of an animal he hardly ever painted.⁷⁶ When subsequently Artaud – with the intention of stabilising his own identity, no less – becomes Paul of the Birds, the layers of projection double back upon themselves both ironically and surrealistically.

In conclusion

[27] In closing, I want to point out that there are overall two stages in the mediation of Uccello to French and subsequently international Surrealism. First off, there is his appropriation by Artaud, Soupault and Breton, discussed here with a focus on the first. By the 1930s Uccello's art was making the rounds among the surrealists, with several of them being introduced to him via other surrealists or the surrealist discourse. In 1932 Breton provided an updated version of his 1924 *Manifesto*-list of surrealist predecessors in "Surrealism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", which includes Uccello.⁷⁷ The artist is designated as surrealist "in the free for all fight",⁷⁸ which I read as a reference to *The Battle of San Romano* and its melee. Breton's essay, an English language publication, reverberated internationally. The reception of Surrealism in Britain and the US was just starting to take off at this time,⁷⁹ and this list must have reached much further than earlier, still untranslated French texts, giving a considerable boost to a more general perception, among critics and art lovers, of Uccello as a surrealist predecessor.

[28] Between 1924 and 1929, a rather formative period for French Surrealism, we find a confluence of Uccellan references in the French surrealist discourse. Artaud's texts – especially the published ones, "Paul les Oiseaux" from 1924 and "Uccello, le Poil" in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1926, complete with a detail of Uccello's *The Miracle of the Desecrated Host* provided by Breton – are central. Firstly, the reading of Artaud's Uccellan texts that I have provided here demonstrates the importance of Schwob as a main mediator of Uccello to Surrealism. Secondly, it

⁷⁴ Indeed, Soupault's book on Uccello is an art historical study, albeit of decidedly poetic bent, in which the author discusses and analyses all known Uccello's works as well as the artist's œuvre overall.

⁷⁵ Vasari (1998), 77.

⁷⁶ Of course we cannot assume that, Soupault excepted, the surrealists were familiar enough with Uccello's body of work to know this for a fact. Obviously, had they known they would have appreciated it all the more.

⁷⁷ André Breton, "Surrealism: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", in: *This Quarter* 5 (1932), no. 1, 7-44: 17.

⁷⁸ Breton (1932), 17.

⁷⁹ Tessel M. Bauduin, "[Fantastic Art, Barr, Surrealism](#)", in: *The Journal of Art Historiography* no. 17 (December 2017), 1-23.

shows the flexibility of Uccello as an idiosyncratic character. In Artaud, a subjective vision of Uccello and his art and a correspondingly subjective interpretation of the painter dominate. Mythopoetic Uccello proved enough of a strange figure to be interesting and simultaneously enough of a blank slate to allow Artaud to project himself onto him. Of course the mythopoeia of Uccello's life and personality finds its origins in Vasari, who had painted him as a tragic, excessive and foolish figure. Indeed, as Sabine Mainberger has remarked, Vasari's account of Uccello's life and personality presents a model for the intertwining of fact and fiction that would be a prominent feature of his modern afterlife.⁸⁰ When that took off by the end of the nineteenth century, Schwob constructed Uccello as an artist who leaves life's banal concerns behind to pursue essential matters: the creation of art.

[29] The central concern of Artaud's Uccellos is not so much painting or art itself but the specific mind-set required to create art, namely mind over body. With his demonstration of the potential of Uccello to function as an alter ego, Artaud successfully constructed a surrealist Uccello, that is to say, as a visionary artist perceived as a fellow traveller of Surrealism. Traces of Vasari's Uccello remain in surrealist Uccello, most prominently his devotion to art at the exclusion of all else. In addition, the fusing of art with life in Uccello's "Life" – that is, in the narratives provided by Vasari and especially Schwob – must have strengthened his surrealist reception. The surrealist reception of Uccello continued independently of the fact that later in the 1920s Artaud continued on his own trajectory, beyond Breton-led Surrealism. Uccello became firmly ensconced in the surrealist discourse, never to disappear and in fact only to grow in stature as a surrealist predecessor.

⁸⁰ Mainberger (2014), 360. E.g. Jean-Philippe Antoine, *La chair de l'oiseau: vie imaginaire de Paolo Uccello*, Paris 1991.

About the Author

Dr Tessel M. Bauduin originally trained as a medievalist but has specialized in (the art and culture of) modernism and the avant-garde for over fifteen years. At the University of Amsterdam, Dr Bauduin teaches Art History, Cultural Studies, Museum and Heritage Studies, and Provenance and Restitution Research. Bauduin's main area of research is Surrealism; current research projects focus on: global Surrealism, for instance in the Dutch Caribbean and Indonesia; the decolonization of museum collections, especially modern(ist) collections, by using surrealist anticolonial theory and art practice; and the provenance of surrealist and related collections and works. Bauduin also studies the interaction of modern art and occultism in the long twentieth century, and several of her publications concern the artist Hilma af Klint. In 2015, Bauduin was awarded a four-year VENI research grant from the Dutch Research Council for a project on the reception and appropriation of Early Modern European art in Surrealism. The Leverhulme Foundation has awarded Bauduin a Visiting Professorship at Edinburgh College of Art in 2023. She has been a member of the board of the International Society for the Study of Surrealism since 2022.

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