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HISTOIRE CULTURELLE
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PANTHÉON SORBONNE
UNIVERSITÉ PARIS 1

CALL FOR PAPERS

Women in Surrealism: Archives, Networks and Political Engagements (1920–1980)

Conference marking the launch of the virtual exhibition “Simone Kahn, Surrealist Trajectories”

November 26–27, 2026 — DFK Paris

Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art (DFK Paris)

Association Atelier André Breton (AAAB)

Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes (LARHRA)

Centre de recherche universitaire Histoire culturelle et sociale de l'art (HiCSA)

This conference marks the launch of the virtual exhibition *Simone Kahn, Surrealist Trajectories*, presented by DFK Paris with the support of the Association Atelier André Breton. The exhibition brings together reproductions of hundreds of previously unpublished documents from Simone Kahn's personal archives—letters, catalogues, press clippings and photographs—giving the scholarly community access to a corpus that has until now remained largely inaccessible and which spans half a century of Surrealist history.

Long relegated in the movement's historiography as simply being André Breton's first wife, Simone Kahn has, through the 2005 and 2016 publications of her correspondence with Denise Lévy and with Breton respectively, come to be recognized as a full-fledged member of the Surrealist group and a key interlocutor for its painters and poets throughout the 1920s. As her archives confirm, she was present at every foundational moment of the movement, from her participation in its collective activities to her role in assembling the renowned collection she built with her husband at the 42 Rue Fontaine. Beyond this early chronology, these archives make it possible to reconstruct her lesser-known trajectory up to her death in 1980—defined, above all, by sustained political engagement and artistic commitment. Politically, she was active within the *Gauche communiste* and later the *Gauche révolutionnaire*, supported the Spanish Republicans and was a member of the French Resistance during World War II. Later she supported anti-colonial and feminist causes. Artistically, she was a collector and she directed the *Artiste et Artisan* (from 1948) and *Furstenberg* (1954–1965) galleries, where she fostered dialogue between first-generation Surrealists and a younger generation of international artists, thereby helping to revitalize the movement's networks in the post-war period.

Building on the virtual exhibition dedicated to Simone Kahn, this conference invites a broader examination of the paths taken by the women of Surrealism who contributed to the movement's artistic, literary, and political dynamics through diverse and hybrid initiatives—contributions often difficult to identify or classify within Surrealist historiography (such as those of Nusch Éluard, Gala, Suzanne Muzard, Denise Lévy and others). Their roles—as collectors, gallerists, activists, translators, publishers, critics, patrons, organizers, and network builders—were often inseparable from the movement's everyday life. They attended meetings, took part in collective activities, and contributed

to the production, dissemination, and circulation of works and ideas. They also helped sustain the intellectual and emotional bonds that made the group's very existence possible. The conference also seeks to capture the more fleeting trajectories of women whose ties to Surrealism were sporadic or intermittent—and whose archival traces have yet to be fully reconstructed. This issue is particularly timely, given that recent exhibitions on Surrealism which have significantly reshaped the field's historiography by highlighting many previously overlooked female artists. Through their curatorial approaches, these exhibitions, however, have often prioritized contributions that take the form of easy-to-exhibit artworks, thereby obscuring the roles of women whose engagement manifested itself in other ways and whose activities fall outside the standard frameworks of museography. Thus, beyond merely expanding the canon of recognized artists, this conference's aim is to question the very categories used to write the history of Surrealism, as well as the forms of participation that history privileges or, in contrast, leaves in the shadows.

Taking Simone Kahn's trajectory as a starting point, three key themes emerge for this conference, though contributions need not be limited to them:

Focus Area 1 — Archives and Historiographical Invisibility: Trajectories of Women in Surrealism that Defy Easy Categorization

How are the roles of women to be considered who left behind neither a substantial body of Surrealist artworks nor a significant body of Surrealist literature, yet whose names or images appear in period publications, and whose archives attest to a continuous presence and a structuring role in the group's life—whether through participation in collective Surrealist artistic and poetic experiments, or through activities involving correspondence, translation, publishing, criticism, the editing of journals, and intellectual sociability? How can we write the history of trajectories that escape the standard categories of art history and are revealed only through the archives? How can we account for the singularity of these archives, whose conservation, classification, and accessibility have themselves a history that calls for critical scrutiny?

Focus Area 2 — Political Trajectories of Surrealist Women

This sub-theme covers Surrealist women's anti-fascist, anti-Stalinist, anti-colonial, or feminist commitments, whether as authors, signatories of pamphlets, campaigners, or activists. Although archival research has begun to reveal these trajectories, they have not yet been the subject of dedicated study, even though the circumstances of Surrealist women's political engagement—shaped by their exclusion from French political life—arose from contexts and raised questions that were different from those of their male counterparts. Particular attention may be paid to how these commitments evolved over the long term, within the broader legacy of Surrealism, and in particular to the links between Surrealist women and feminist movements, links that remain little-studied in their full diversity. These range from active engagement to critical distance: from Simone Kahn's membership of France's Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (MLF) in the 1970s, to Annie Le Brun's critical

stance toward “neo-feminist ideology” in *Lâchez tout* (1977), by way of Lise Deharme, who repurposed the MLF acronym to mean *Mouvement de Libération des Fées*, etc.

Focus Area 3 — Mediation, Galleries and Networks

This sub-theme examines the roles of women in Surrealism, both before and after World War II, in championing, disseminating, funding, circulating, and transmitting the movement’s ideas and works, as well as in offering various forms of support to painters and poets, including exhibitions, publishing, commissions, and mediation with institutions (including Peggy Guggenheim and Divonne Ratton, among others). Particular attention may be paid to the networks and friendships these women forged with one another, revealing a parallel—and still largely unexplored—history of female solidarity within Surrealism. Case studies might focus on the artists Simone Kahn represented through her galleries, *Artiste et Artisan* and *Furstenberg*; on the intergenerational and cross-stylistic dialogues she fostered, involving figures such as Edgar Jéné, Endre Rozsda, Agustín Fernández, Delia Nimo, among others; and on the patterns of circulation she helped establish between France, Germany, Peru, Argentina, and Cuba.

Submission Guidelines

Paper proposals (300–400 words), accompanied by a short biography, should be sent to: conferencesimonekahn@gmail.com by **September 20, 2026**.

Papers, lasting 25–30 minutes, may be presented in French or English.

Scientific and Organizing Committee

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