

*Of all the  
major Surrealist  
painters of Paris,  
Mayo remained  
until recently the  
most unjustly  
neglected*

on the international market. Born in 1905 in Egypt, in Port Said on the Suez Canal, of a Greek father and a French mother, he first came to Paris in 1923 with the intention of studying to be an architect, but soon became far more intimately involved in both the artistic life and the night life of Montparnasse which had recently become the Left Bank centre of avant-garde activities. There he painted by day and spent much of his nights dancing the Charleston in the Jockey and the other popular bars of the so-called Gin Age. Soon he even became responsible for the new fashion of decorating some of these

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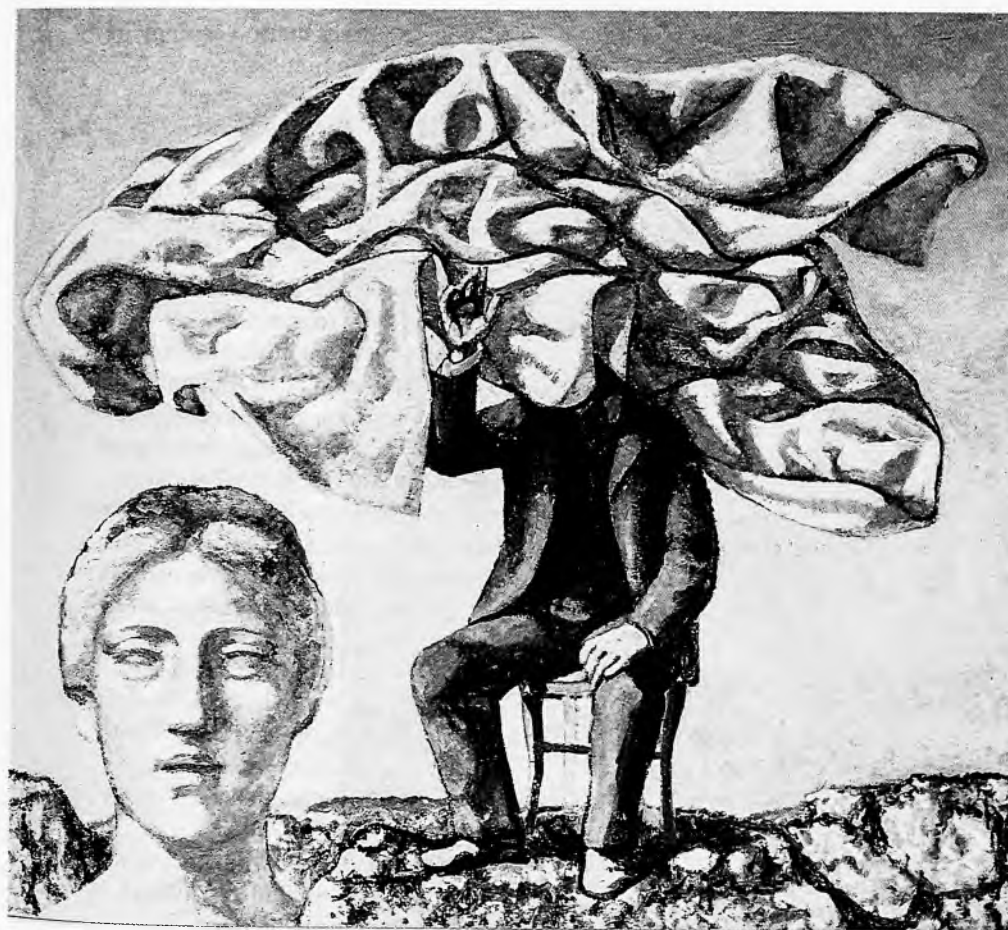
*Mayo: A Surrealist painter  
from the Greek Diaspora*



*Le désir. Rome 1970*

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*La St Patrick, 1971*

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bars with odds and ends gathered from the Paris flea markets. Decorated with fishermen's nets and other marine equipment, the Bar de la Marine proved to be Mayo's first claim to journalistic fame.

Very soon, however, he also became a close friend of some of the more famous denizens of Montparnasse, such as the painters Jules Pascin, André Derain and Foujita and the Surrealist writers André Desnos and René Crevel, as well as the photographer Man Ray.

In spite of his close association with individual Surrealists, Mayo nevertheless preferred to remain independent, never accepting the somewhat authoritarian leadership of André Breton or becoming an official member of the Surrealist Group. After a few months spent in Berlin, Mayo returned in 1929 to Montparnasse, where he began to associate more intimately with the dissident younger Surrealists René Daumal, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and Roger Valliant, who were publishing *Le Grand Jeu*, to which he, the Czech painter Josef Sima and Maurice Henry contributed illustrations. As early as 1929, Mayo also shared an important exhibition at the Galerie des Quatre Chemins with Giorgio de Chirico. It was such a success that he was invited a year later to hold his first one-man show in the same gallery. By then, Mayo had also become a close friend of Antonin Artaud, of the Surrealist playwright Roger Vitrac, of Jacques Prévert, the painters Moise Kisling and Pavel Tchelitchew, and the American poet Charles Henri Ford, among many others.

When the Paris art market began in 1933 to react to the financial consequences of the 1929 Wall Street Crash, Mayo abandoned the French capital for a while and undertook a successful trip to Spain, Greece and his native Egypt. With the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain, he returned to Paris, participated briefly in the activities of William Hayter's Atelier 17 and its experiments in the techniques of etching, and became a close friend of Henry Miller. But the Spanish Civil War and the storm clouds gathering over the rest of Europe inspired Mayo to express in his art his political involvement by also depicting some nightmarish scenes of violence. After a

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*Mayo in his home*











long vacation in Egypt, he returned to France in 1939 and remained there throughout the years of World War II, including the German occupation of France during which he lived most of the time in the South, in what had originally been the 'Free Zone' ruled by Marshall Pétain.

In the course of the following ten years, Mayo became increasingly involved in the designing of sets and costumes for the theatre and for movies. In this very specialised field, he remains, together with Christian Bérard, one of the greatest artists of his age. His greatest and most memorable triumph remains his work as the designer of the sets and costumes for Marcel Carné's classic movie, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, the original version of which is now being experimentally reproduced in colour.

In 1970, Mayo moved from Paris to Rome, where he was likewise kept busy designing sets and costumes for movies while also exhibiting extensively in Italian art galleries. For an exhibition held in a Roman gallery, a lavishly produced book on his work was published with an introduction by Henry Miller.

Until he returned in 1985 to live in France, Mayo continued to exhibit mainly in Italy, but also from time to time in Belgium, France and elsewhere, often in group exhibitions of Surrealist or Fantastic Art. Since 1985 he has been represented in Paris by Galerie Alain Blondel and, especially since his death in 1990, he appears at last to be coming more and more to the fore as one of the major representatives of Surrealist painting.

In some of the Surrealist paintings of his maturity, Mayo displays a few curious affinities with the more widely known Belgian Surrealist painter René Magritte. But Mayo's technique is less blatantly academic and more subtly painterly than Magritte's, and he also refrains from the kind of all too obvious display of sheer tomfoolery that ensured Magritte's popularity with the general public thanks to such works as his famous "Ceci n'est pas une pipe". This proves in the final analysis, to be a merely humorous illustration of the kind of logical-positivist statement made again and again by the