



# Max Ernst and Alchemy : A Magician in Search of Myth (Surrealist

*M. E. Warlick*

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Surrealist artist Max Ernst defined collage as the "alchemy of the visual image." Students of his work have often dismissed this comment as simply a metaphor for the transformative power of using found images in a new context. Taking a wholly different perspective on Ernst and alchemy, however, M. E. Warlick persuasively demonstrates that the artist had a profound and abiding interest in alchemical philosophy and often used alchemical symbolism in works created throughout his career.

A revival of interest in alchemy swept the artistic, psychoanalytic, historical, and scientific circles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Warlick sets Ernst's work squarely within this movement. Looking at both his art (many of the works she discusses are reproduced in the book) and his writings, she reveals how thoroughly alchemical philosophy and symbolism pervade his early Dadaist experiments, his foundational work in surrealism, and his many collages and paintings of women and landscapes, whose images exemplify the alchemical fusing of opposites. This pioneering research adds an essential key to understanding the multilayered complexity of Ernst's works, as it affirms his standing as one of Germany's most significant artists of the twentieth century.

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