

René Magritte

Born 1898, Lessines, Belgium; died Shaerbeek, Belgium, 1967



René Magritte was born in Belgium. When he was twelve years old, he took art lessons in a room above a candy store. Magritte wanted people to look at ordinary things in different ways—and he himself often painted everyday objects in funny or unexpected ways. Before he was able to make a living as a full-time artist, Magritte worked as a draftsman in a wallpaper factory, and then as a designer of posters and publicity. By the end of his life, he had become very a successful and well-known artist.

A painting of carefully arranged objects is called a **still life**. For this still life, Magritte painted images of a bed, a comb, a match, a glass, a shaving brush, an armoire, and a round bar of soap.



René Magritte, *Les valeurs personnelles* (Personal Values), 1952

Fun Fact!

Magritte originally called this painting *The Clear Field*, but he changed the title when a friend suggested *Personal Values*.

The definition of **values** is one's judgment of what is important in life. What might these objects tell us about someone's values, or what they consider important?

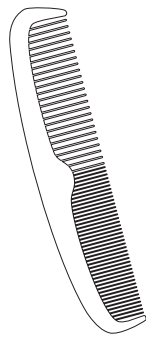
Why do you think Magritte made some objects bigger than others? Do you think the large objects are more important than the small objects? Why or why not?

Explore

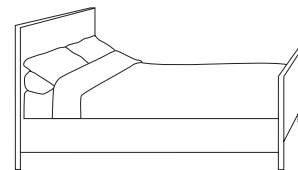
In *Personal Values*, Magritte plays with the size of everyday objects. Some of the objects in the painting look bigger than they would be in real life, while others seem smaller.

Look at the drawings below. If you gathered these objects together in a room in your house, which ones would be big and which ones would be small? Circle the object in each pair that is largest in real life.

Are the objects you circled also the largest ones in Magritte's painting?



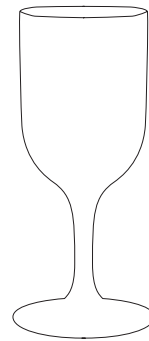
comb



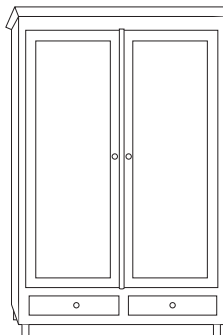
bed



match



glass



armoire



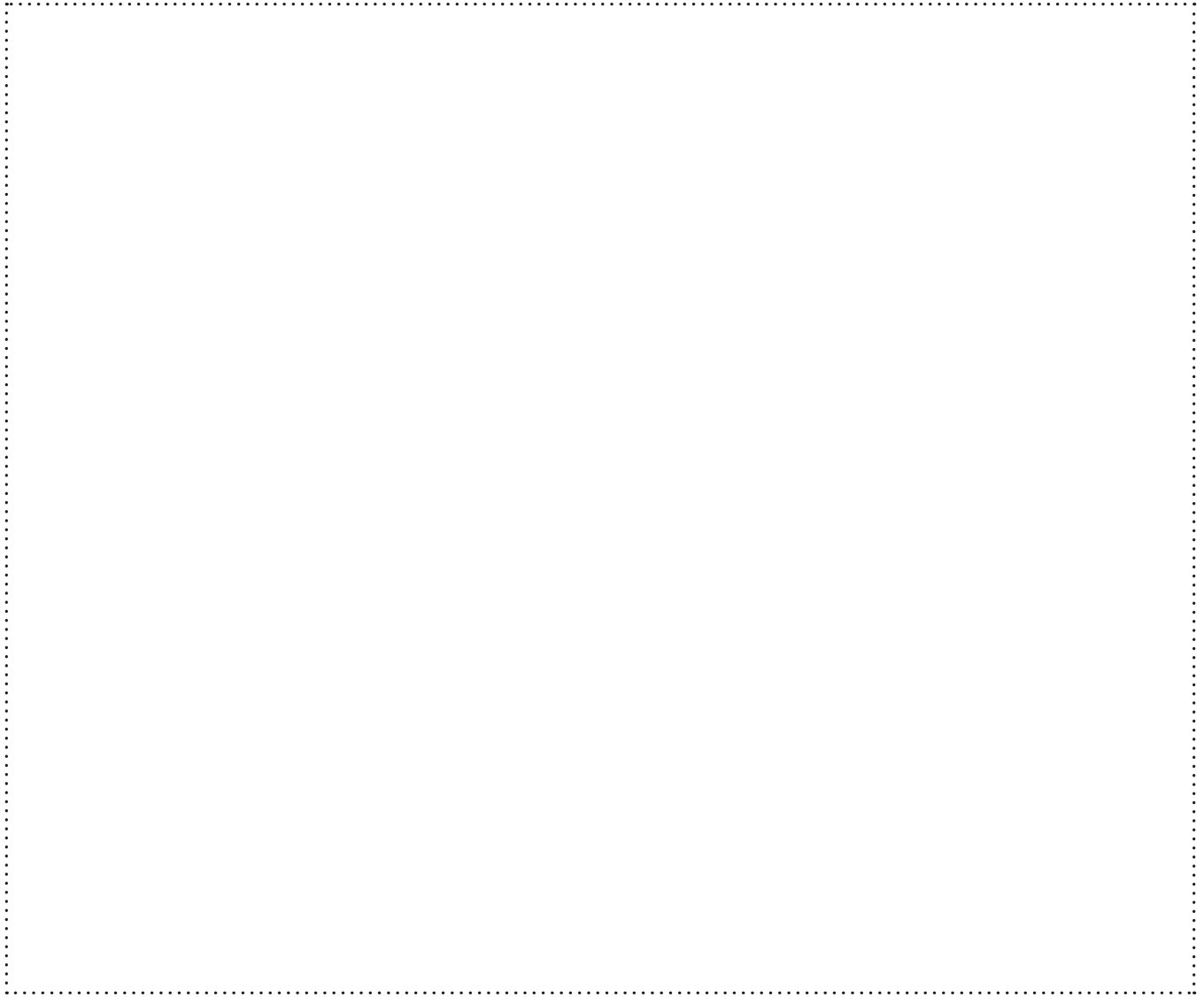
soap

Create

The title *Personal Values* suggests that the objects in this painting were important to Magritte.

What objects would you include in a painting about yourself? How do those objects reflect what is important to you?

Make a work of art—a drawing, painting, or collage—that includes objects that reflect your personal values.



Front cover image: René Magritte, *Les valeurs personnelles* (Personal Values), 1952 (detail); collection SFMOMA, purchase through a gift of Phyllis C. Wattis; © 2021 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

For more information about this work, watch *The Country Dog Gentlemen Travel to Extraordinary Worlds* at sfmoma.org/countrydog.



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