Surreal
September
2024

SURREALISM

Prompt + Artist Studies

NightCafé

ABOUT

Surreal September on NightCafé

Surreal September is a month-long journey into the world of surrealism, blending imagination with reality through creative AI Art challenges on NightCafé.

Each week, we explore new techniques and styles, paying homage to the original surrealist visionaries.

This event isn't *just* about fun - it's designed to serve as mini "lessons", helping you understand the 'why' behind choosing prompts and modifiers.

We hope you enjoy exploring surrealism with us this month. We cannot wait to see the art you create!

– The NightCafé Team

CONTENTS

WEEK 1: DREAMSCAPES

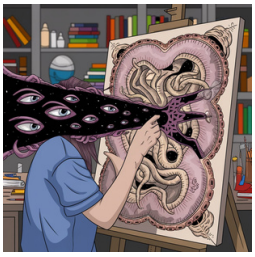
- Dreamscapes Modifiers and Keywords
- Practice Prompt Exercises

WEEK 2: THE UNCANNY

- Uncanney Valley Modifiers and Keywords
- Exploring the Uncanny Valley in Art
- Practice Prompt Exercises

WEEK 3: SURREALIST TECHNIQUES

- Surrealism Technique Modifiers and Keywords
- Exploring Surrealism Techniques
- Practice Prompt Exercises



WEEK 4: A SURREAL FINALE

- Inspiration Prompts
- Quick Modifier Combinations
- Self Evaluation Checklist

CONT'D.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND TIPS

- Surrealism Modifier Cheat Sheet by u/Gully
- Artist Modifier Cheat Sheet by u/Gully
- Recreating Surrealist Artist Styles

RESOURCE LINKS FOR YOU

- Links to various other resources around the web

FINAL THOUGHTS & ENCOURAGEMENT

- Our letter to you

WEEK 1: Dreamscapes

This week, we're diving into the world of dreamscapes - those ethereal, otherworldly scenes that blur the line between reality and imagination. By the end of the week, you'll have the tools and inspiration to bring these surreal visions to life!

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Week 1: Dreamscapes Modifiers + Keywords

Ethereal Atmospheres

- Ethereal
- Foggy
- Misty
- Luminescent
- Glistening
- Iridescent
- Veiled in haze
- Twinkling
- Sparkling
- Glimmering

Surreal Landscapes

- Distorted geometry
- Melted structures
- Fragmented terrain
- Inverted landscapes
- Floating elements
- Exaggerated scale
- Non-Euclidean
- Soft-edged terrain
- Mirror-like reflections

Set the Tone and Mood

- Pastel hues
- Vivid saturation
- Soft gradients
- Iridescent glow
- Muted tones
- Rainbow mist
- Color-shifting
- Neon twilight

Playing with Light and Shadow

- Soft glowing
- Diffused light
- Twilight
- Glimmering
- Bioluminescent
- Backlit
- Golden hour
- Reflected light
- Halo effect
- Eclipsed light
- Flickering shadows

GET CREATIVE WITH PROMPT EXERCISES

Explore these ideas to build your dreamscapes. Experiment with blending different atmospheric and color modifiers to create surreal, otherworldly scenes.

1 FLOATING FOREST

Create a scene where islands float in the sky, surrounded by soft clouds and mist. Use ethereal and pastel modifiers to give it a light, airy feel.

2 SUSPENDED CITY

Design a city that hovers above the ground. Incorporate luminescent and foggy effects to enhance the surreal atmosphere.

3 MIRRORED LAKE

Imagine a perfectly still lake that reflects not just the sky, but an alternate reality. Use color-shifting and soft glowing light to make the reflection feel like a portal to another world.

WEEK 2: The Uncanny

This week, we're delving into "The Uncanny" - a concept that explores the eerie and unsettling. We'll be walking the fine line between the familiar and the strange, stepping into the unsettling depths of "The Uncanny Valley," where what seems almost human becomes disturbingly *off*.

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Week 2: Uncanny Valley Modifiers + Keywords

Ambiguity in Forms

- Abstract humanoid
- Ghostly figures
- Vague outlines
- Blended features
- Morphing shapes
- Half-formed faces
- Undefined anatomy
- Obscured details

Somewhat Off Human-like Features

- Unnatural
- Exaggerated features
- Cartoonish
- Unrealistic
- Unsettling features
- Out-of-place features
- Sinister smile
- Dead eyes

Unnatural Movements or Poses

- Contorted posture
- Unnatural position
- Awkward pose
- Non-human posture
- Contorted stance
- Mannequin pose
- Stiff
- Robot-like

Distorted Reality

- Fish-eye lens
- Tilt-shift
- Chromatic aberration
- Double exposure
- Blurry edges
- Pixelated
- Motion blur
- Vignette
- Disjointed composition

EXPLORING THE UNCANNY VALLEY

The uncanny valley is that strange, unsettling feeling you get when something looks almost human but isn't quite right. It's the discomfort that comes from seeing something familiar yet disturbingly off, often leaving you uneasy.

The Uncanny Effect

Think of dolls, robots, or lifelike mannequins - things that look nearly human but have just enough of an "off" quality to make them unsettling. In art, this effect can be powerful, drawing the viewer in while making them question what they see.

Is it Uncanny?

When creating your art, ask yourself:

- Does this scene make the viewer feel uneasy?
- Is there something almost, but not quite, human about this element?
- Does this piece blur the line between the familiar and the strange?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these, you're likely tapping into the uncanny valley.

Using the Uncanny in Your Work

Experiment with creating scenes that feel familiar but unsettling. Maybe it's a town square where the city dwellers are all mannequins, or a portrait where the features are just off enough to feel not quite human.

Quick Tip

Focus on subtlety. Start with a familiar scene and introduce one or two unsettling details - like a mirror that reflects something that isn't there or features that are slightly too unhuman. These small changes can make the entire scene feel eerie without being too obvious.

DREAMS
MELT
HERE

GET CREATIVE WITH PROMPT EXERCISES

Use these exercises to create art that plays with the unsettling and strange. Mix human-like elements with distortions to evoke the uncanny effect.

1 UNCANNY MANNEQUINS

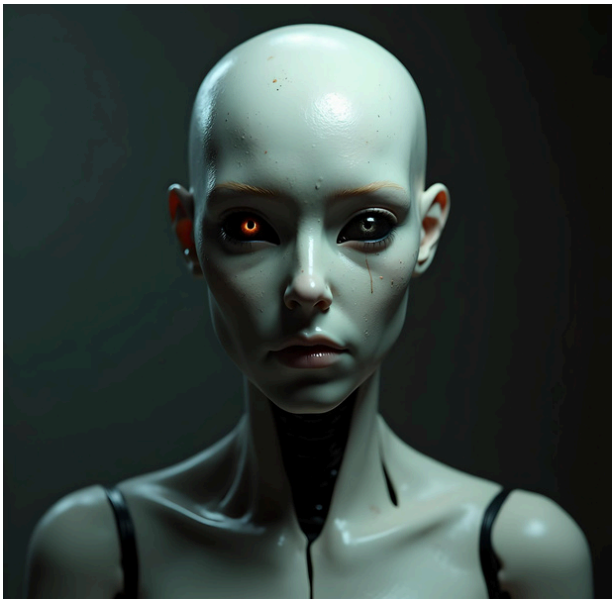
Create a scene featuring mannequins that blur the line between human and inanimate.

2 ABANDONED SPACES

Design a lonely, abandoned space with a touch of the uncanny. Consider adding small, disturbing elements - like unexpected eyes or distorted reflections - to enhance the unsettling vibe.

3 ALMOST HUMAN PORTRAIT

Generate a portrait of a figure that appears almost human but has subtle distortions. Experiment with features that are slightly off to create a disturbing effect.



WEEK 3: Surrealist Techniques

This week, we're exploring the real-life techniques that surrealist artists used to create the iconic art style we know as surrealism. From unexpected juxtapositions to playing with scale and perspective, these methods turned prompts will help you see how their creative choices shaped their work - and inspire your own.

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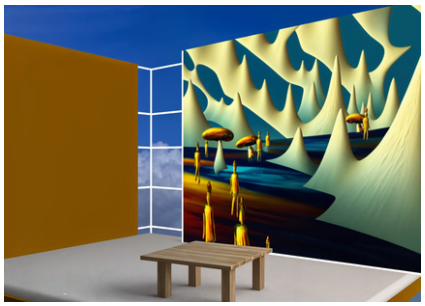
Week 3: Surrealist Techniques Modifiers + Keywords

Juxtaposition

- Split composition
- Contrasting [feature]
- Dual-tone
- Opposite [feature]
- Mixed media
- Color clash
- Juxtaposition
- Inverted colors
- Collage effect
- Hybrid imagery



Displacement

- Erratic placement
- Inverted perspective
- Surreal backdrop
- Shifting environments
- Object mismatch
- Out-of-place
- Transposed
- Unfamiliar setting
- Context clash
- Floating [object]

Distortion

- Warped
- Stretched
- Melted
- Twisted
- Fragmented
- Curved lines
- Liquid form
- Soft edges
- Elongated
- Deformed

Scale Manipulation

- Macro/micro scale
- Exaggerated size
- Miniature
- Giant
- Proportional shift
- Oversized [feature]
- Tiny [element]
- Unbalanced proportions
- Perspective shift

Automotism

- Abstract scribbles
- Fluid brushstrokes
- Chaotic textures
- Organic flow
- Randomized patterns
- Unpredictable lines
- Freeform doodles
- Dreamlike swirls
- Erratic marks
- Intuitive layering

EXPLORING SURREALISM TECHNIQUES

Surrealist artists have long mastered the art of distorting reality, creating works that challenge perceptions and evoke a dreamlike or uncanny atmosphere. Here are some of the key techniques they use:

Juxtaposition

This is when an artist combines unrelated or unexpected elements to create surprising contrasts. This technique turns the familiar into the strange, like in Salvador Dalí's work, where everyday objects merge with bizarre, dreamlike elements.

Displacement

This refers to taking objects out of their usual context and placing them in unexpected settings. René Magritte used this to make ordinary scenes feel surreal, as seen in his painting "Time Transfixed."

Scale Manipulation

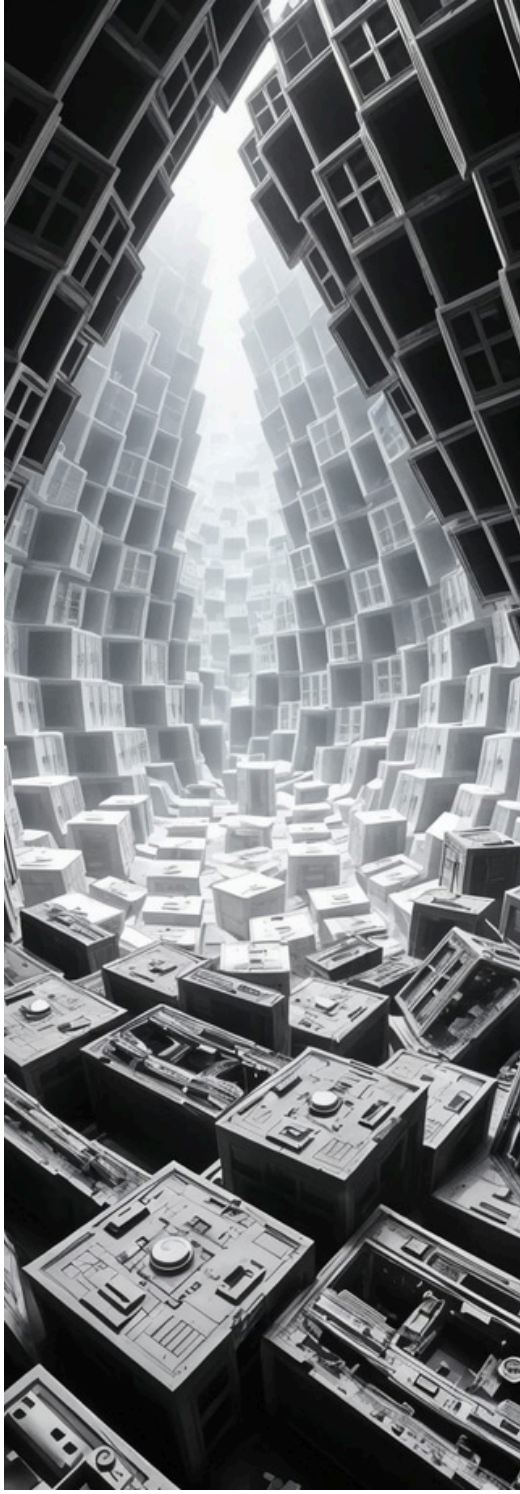
Changing the size of objects to make them feel unreal. Altering scale, like in Dalí's "The Persistence of Memory," where clocks melt over branches, adds to the dreamlike atmosphere.

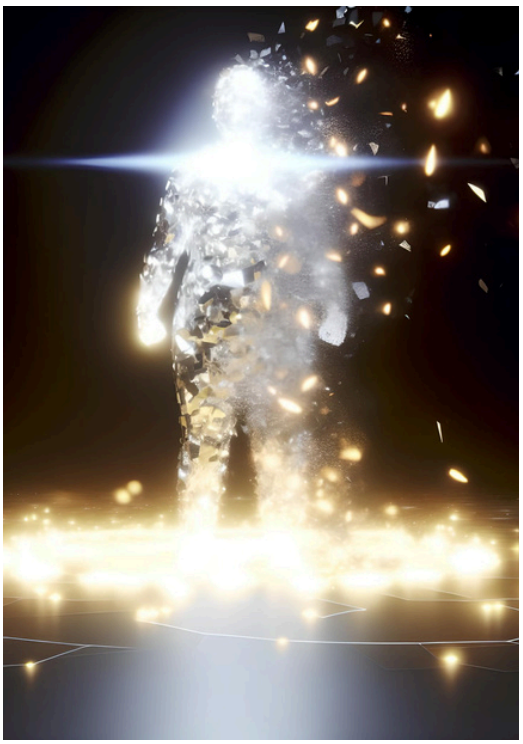
Automatism

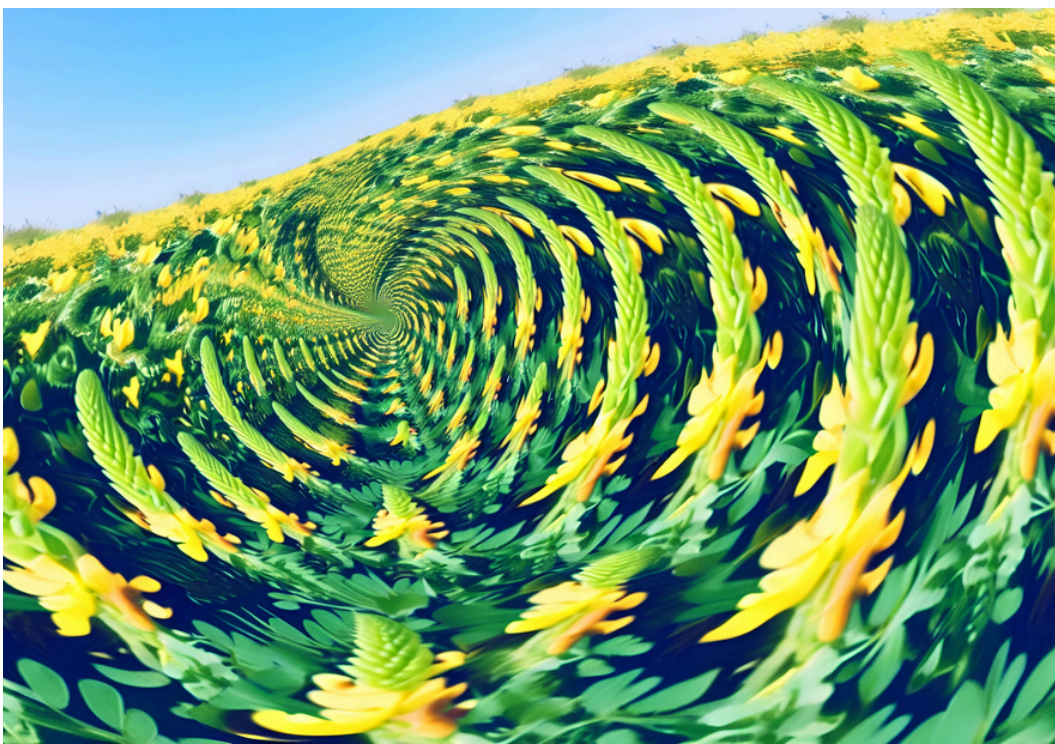
Letting the hand move freely without conscious control to tap into the subconscious mind. This method, used by André Breton, often results in abstract, spontaneous images that seem to come from a dream.

Distortion

Altering the form and features of objects or figures to make them appear unsettling or bizarre. This technique is often used to give solid objects a fluid, melting appearance, enhancing the surreal effect.







GET CREATIVE: PRACTICE PROMPT EXERCISES

Practice these exercises to master surrealist techniques. Try incorporating unexpected elements or altering scale and perspective for a surreal impact.

1 JUXTAPOSITION

Create a scene where two unrelated elements are placed side by side.

2 DISPLACEMENT

Design an image where an ordinary object is placed in an unexpected context.

3 DISTORTION

Create a portrait where the scene is deliberately distorted.

WEEK 4: A Surreal Finale

You now have a toolkit full of powerful modifiers and techniques. Combine them creatively to push the boundaries of your art - layer unexpected elements, distort reality, and create something truly unique.

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INSPIRATION PROMPTS

Stuck? Here are a few thought-starters to get your creativity flowing:

A FAMILIAR PLACE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Think of a location you know well—a city street, a childhood bedroom—but make it feel alien. Maybe gravity works sideways, or everything is reflected in a giant mirror.

A CHARACTER IN TWO WORLDS

Create a figure caught between two realities: half in a dream, half in a waking world. How does this duality show in their surroundings, their expressions, their movement?

THE MOMENT BEFORE TRANSFORMATION

Imagine a scene frozen just before something changes—a landscape morphing into a creature, a person turning into light. What does that in-between moment look like?

QUICK MODIFIER COMBINATIONS

Sometimes magic happens when you mix things up. Here are a few combinations to try out:

JUXTAPOSITION + DISTORTION:

Combine unexpected elements with warped shapes or features to create surreal contrasts that challenge the viewer's sense of reality.

DISPLACEMENT + SCALE MANIPULATION

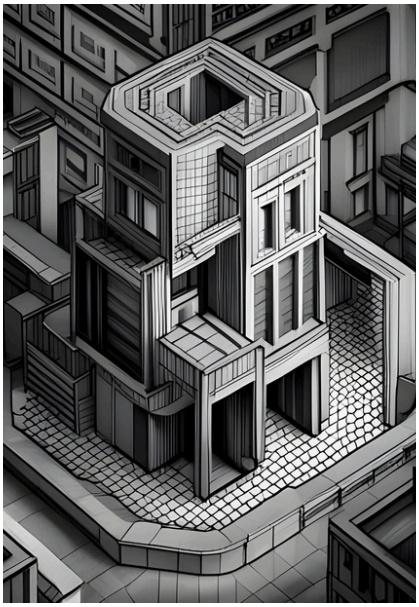
Place familiar objects in unusual settings and alter their size to make them feel out of place, creating a dreamlike or uncanny atmosphere.

ATMOSPHERIC + LIGHTING MODIFIERS

Set the mood with fog, muted colors, and soft glowing light. Create that dreamlike, “I’m not quite awake” feeling.

SELF EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Ready to submit your masterpiece? Here's a quick guide to make sure you're hitting all the right notes:



- [x] **MAKE VOTERS FEEL SOMETHING:**
  Does your piece evoke an emotion or make people stop and think? Your art should do more than just look interesting—it should leave an impact.

- [x] **MIX IT UP:**
  Did you use an array of surrealism inspired modifiers? Combining elements can bring new depth and dimension to your work.

- [x] **SURPRISE VOTERS:**
  Is there something unexpected in your piece? A twist, a hidden detail, or a surprise element that keeps voters guessing?

- [x] **PUSH YOUR BOUNDARIES:**
  Have you stepped out of your comfort zone with this piece? Surrealism is all about breaking the rules, so don't be afraid to experiment!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES + TIPS

Modifiers for Surreal AI Art

Surreal Artist Inspiration

Prompt Practice Exercises

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Modifiers for Surreal Art

Curated by Gully

Atmospheric Modifiers

- Ethereal
- Foggy
- Misty
- Luminescent
- Glistening
- Iridescent
- Veiled in haze

Color Modifiers

- Vivid
- Pastel
- Neon
- Muted
- Sepia-toned
- Monochromatic
- Colour-shifting

Lighting Modifiers

- Soft glowing
- Diffuse light
- Twilight
- Glimmering
- Bioluminescent
- Backlit

Perspective & Composition

- Tilted angles
- Disjointed
- Escher-like
- Vertiginous
- Fractured
- Layered

Textural Modifiers

- Silky
- Glimmering
- Crystalline
- Vaporous
- Fluid
- Veiny
- Glossy

Modifiers for Surreal Art

Curated by Gully (cont'd)

Structural Modifiers

- Melting
- Fragmented
- Deconstructed
- Floating
- Weightless
- Intertwined
- Twisted

Nature & Environment Modifiers

- Alien landscapes
- Fantastical flora
- Surreal skies
- Organic architecture
- Dreamlike forests
- Shifting sands

Conceptual Modifiers

- Time-warped
- Infinite
- Parallel realities
- Distorted space
- Temporal shifts
- Gravity-defying

Style & Theme Modifiers

- Surrealist
- Dreamlike
- Psychedelic
- Abstract
- Avant-garde
- Fantastical
- Whimsical

Gully's Favorites

- 3d depth
- Tilt Shift Background
- Illusionary Depth
- Fractals
- Fractal Iridescence
- Esoteric
- Celestial
- Strange attractors

Artist Modifiers for Surreal Art

Curated by Gully

Artists

- Igor Morski
- Escher
- Giger
- Cyril Rolando
- Peter Gric
- Yerka
- Max Ernst
- Dali
- Zdzisław Beksiński
- Beeple
- Jackson Pollock
- vincent callebaut
- James R Eads
- Killian Eng
- Zentangle
- Tim Burton

SALVADOR DALÍ

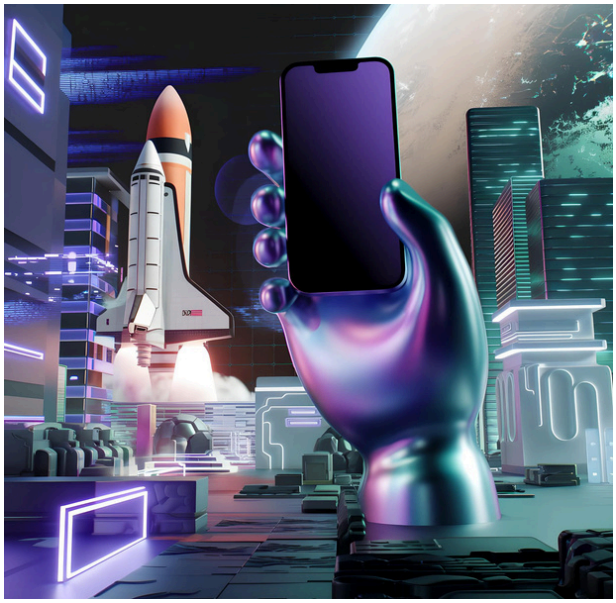
Use modifiers like "melted," "distorted," and "surreal combinations" to capture Dalí's dreamlike, fluid style. Incorporate "elongated shadows" and "floating objects" to add a sense of the unreal.

M.C. ESCHER

Apply "Escher-like," "impossible geometry," and "tilted angles" for mind-bending perspectives. Include "repetitive patterns" and "mirrored reflections" to mimic his visual paradoxes.

MAX ERNST

Use "collage effect," "fragmented," and "juxtaposition" to recreate Ernst's eclectic compositions. Add "organic textures" and "mixed media" to evoke his experimental style.



BEEPLE

Blend "hyperreal," "digital textures," and "glitch effects" for a modern, futuristic look. Try "high contrast lighting" and "neon colors" for a tech-inspired aesthetic.

ZDZISŁAW BEKSIŃSKI

Use "muted colors," "eerie atmospheres," and "distorted figures" for a haunting, dystopian feel. Incorporate "decayed textures" and "soft focus" to create a sense of desolation.

TIM BURTON

Focus on "whimsical," "gothic," and "exaggerated forms" for a quirky, Burtonesque vibe. Use "twisted shapes," "dark shadows," and "high contrast" to capture his signature style.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE LINKS

The #surreal Tag Explore Page

Explore a curated collection of surreal art created by the NightCafé community. Get inspired by a variety of styles and techniques that bring surrealism to life.

Surreal September Onsite Chat

Participate in live discussions and activities specifically for Surrealism September. A space to ask questions, share insights, and connect over surreal art.

The NightCafé Lounge Discord

Join our Discord community to chat with other artists, share your creations, and get live feedback. A great place to connect and grow with fellow art enthusiasts.

Getting Started on NightCafé Guide

New to NightCafe? Check out this guide to get up and running quickly. Learn how to create, share, and find inspiration from other artists.

WRAPPING UP AND MOVING FORWARD

Surrealism is about exploring the unknown, finding beauty in the unexpected, and embracing the magic of imagination.

Through this month-long journey, we've encouraged you to challenge norms, experiment with new ideas, and express your unique vision in ways that **only *you*** can.

Think of what you've accomplished - each prompt, modifier, and creation was a step into new creative territory. Your AI art has the power to inspire, provoke thought, and create connections that go beyond the everyday. Remember, every piece you create is a reflection of your individual worldview, a moment captured in your unique voice. **It matters so much.**

Keep pushing boundaries, playing with ideas, and exploring the surreal. The creative possibilities are endless, and we can't wait to see where your imagination takes you next!

– The NightCafé Team

CREDITS

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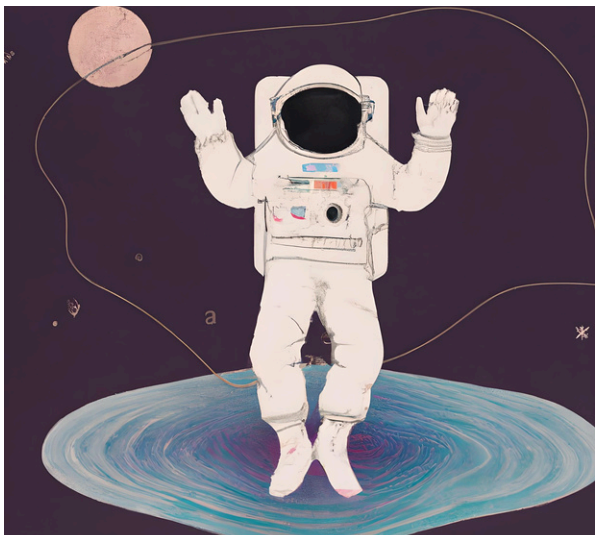
Special thanks to all of our NightCafe community members for your creativity and participation! 💙



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