



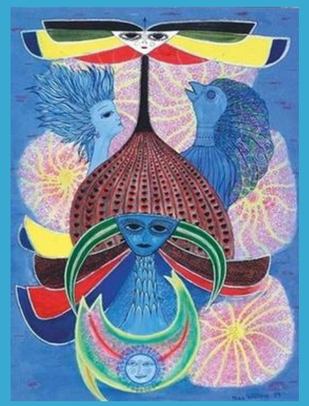














MAX WALTER SVANBERG



INTRODUCTION

Max Walter Svanberg (1912–1994)

Born in Malmö, Sweden, in 1912, Max Walter Svanberg became a distinctive figure in Scandinavian Surrealism, developing a deeply personal artistic vision rooted in imagination, beauty, and transformation. Raised in a working-class family, with a father who worked as a baker and a mother who sold fish, he began his artistic career producing film advertisements for the Palladium cinema in Malmö. He later studied at Skånska målarskolan and Otte Sköld's art school in Stockholm, where he encountered Cubism and discovered Surrealism. Despite contracting polio in 1934, which left his left arm paralysed and his right arm with limited mobility, Svanberg continued to pursue his artistic ambitions. His early exposure to European modernism provided the foundation for a distinctive visual language characterized by intricate ornamentation, symbolic imagery, and imaginative transformation.



Grotesken och offret
(The grotesque and the victim), 1942, Oil on canvas, 110,2 x 90 x 4,5 cm

During the 1940s, Svanberg became associated with the Swedish avant-garde through the Minotaur group, alongside artists including Endre Nemes, Adja Yunkers, and C. O. Hultén. In the mid-1940s, he helped establish the Imaginist movement (Imaginisterna) in Malmö with Hultén and Anders Österlin, developing an artistic philosophy that distinguished his work from conventional Surrealism. Rather than relying on the immediate psychological shock associated with orthodox Surrealism, Svanberg sought to create a sustained imaginative encounter through beauty and surprise, allowing the viewer's experience to unfold progressively. His distinctive approach to Imaginism emphasized the transformative power of imagination, where beauty became an active force rather than mere decoration.



L'idole, 1986, mixed media, 69 x 25 cm

His compositions frequently depict female figures merging with birds, fish, butterflies, and plants, creating hybrid beings that blur the boundaries between human, animal, and botanical forms. These elaborate, often erotic images combine jewel-like colours, filigree-like lines, intricate ornamentation, and poetic titles, inviting viewers to discover unexpected associations rather than fixed symbolic meanings. Working across painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, and pearl mosaics, Svanberg developed a richly layered artistic language that united material beauty with psychological and imaginative exploration.

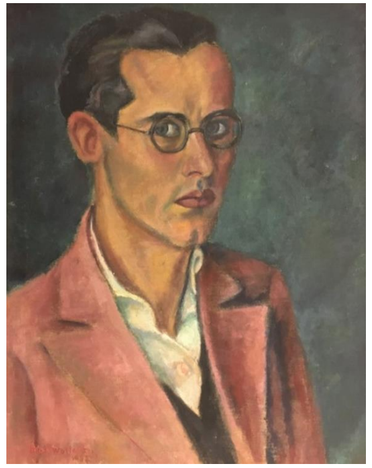
Svanberg's international recognition grew significantly after his work attracted the attention of André Breton at the 1953 Imaginist exhibition at Galerie de Babylone in Paris. His subsequent exhibition at À l'Étoile scellée in 1955, accompanied by a catalogue preface by Breton, strengthened his position within the international Surrealist movement. Although his artistic practice remained closely rooted in Malmö, his distinctive fusion of erotic transformation, poetic imagination, and ornamental complexity established him as an important contributor to Scandinavian and international Surrealism.

max walters

BIOGRAPHY



Max Walter Svanberg (1912–1994). Reproduced from Svenskt konstnärslexikon. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (public domain in Sweden).



Självporträtt (Self-portrait)
1932, Oil on canvas, 75 × 57 cm, Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 5666

1 1912 - Early Life

Born in Malmö, Sweden, into a working-class family. Developed an early interest in drawing and painting, later pursuing artistic training in Malmö and Stockholm.

2 1930s — Artistic Formation

Studied modern painting and discovered Surrealism. Contracted polio in 1934, resulting in significant physical limitations, but continued developing his artistic practice.

3 Mid-1940s — Imaginist Movement

Became involved in the Swedish avant-garde and helped establish the Imaginist movement in Malmö, developing a distinctive visual language combining fantasy, symbolism, and elaborate ornamentation.

4 1949–1952 — Imaginist Philosophy

Developed his Imaginist declarations, emphasizing beauty and sustained imaginative discovery over Surrealism's immediate shock effect. His imagery increasingly featured hybrid female, animal, and botanical forms.

5 1953–1955 — International Recognition

His work attracted André Breton's attention at a Paris exhibition in 1953. Exhibited at À l'Étoile scellée in 1955, with a catalogue preface by Breton, strengthening his international reputation.

6 1960s–1994 — Later Years and Legacy

Returned to the United States in 1953 and settled in Seattle the following year, continuing to explore lyrical abstraction and organic forms until her death in 1994. Today, she is increasingly recognized as an important figure in Scandinavian Surrealism.

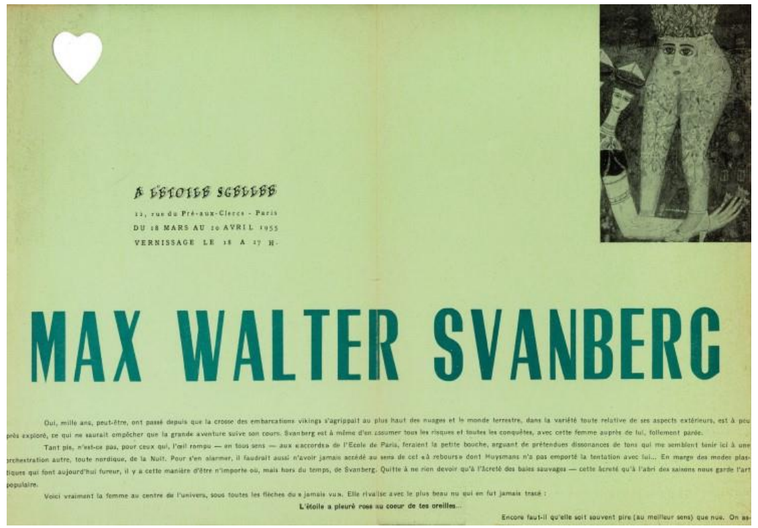
International Exhibitions & Visibility

Max Walter Svanberg gained international recognition in the 1950s through his association with the Parisian Surrealist movement. In 1953, his work attracted the attention of André Breton at the Imaginist exhibition at Galerie de Babylone in Paris. This recognition led to his first solo exhibition in Paris, held at À l'Étoile scellée from March 18 to April 10, 1955, featuring 27 works. Breton contributed an introductory text to the exhibition, further establishing Svanberg's presence within the international Surrealist circle. The exhibition was accompanied by a distinctive green-paper invitation featuring a heart-shaped cutout revealing an illustrated face.

His international presence expanded considerably during the 1960s, as his work gained recognition beyond Europe. In 1965, he represented Sweden at the 8th São Paulo Biennial in Brazil, followed by an exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro in 1966. He also participated in significant European exhibitions, including Pentacle at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1968.



MEDIUM MAGAZINE. La publication de Medium No 3. Le lundi 31 Mai [1953], de 18 h. 30 à 21 heures. Illustration by Svanberg. Rectangular coated paper. [Paris: A L'Etoile Scellée, 1953].



SVANBERG, Max Walter. Du 18 mars au 10 avril 1955, Vernissage le 18 à 17 H. Two illus. Green paper sheet, vertical median fold, cutout heart to reveal a face in one of the illustrations. [Paris: A L'Etoile Scellée, 1955].

International Exhibitions & Visibility

A major retrospective was held at Göteborgs Konsthall in 1967, highlighting his artistic development and contribution to Swedish modernism. In 1969, he was awarded France's prestigious Légion d'honneur, reflecting his recognition within the French artistic community.

Svanberg's artistic legacy continued to receive institutional recognition following his death in 1994. Memorial exhibitions were held at Nationalmuseum in Stockholm and Malmö Konstmuseum in 1995, followed by his inclusion in Moderna Museet's International Surrealism exhibition in 1998. His centenary in 2012 prompted further reassessment of his artistic achievements, while his work has been associated with major institutions including Moderna Museet, Nationalmuseum, Malmö Konstmuseum, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Tate Modern, the British Museum, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

More recently, Svanberg's work was featured in Surrealist Prelude at Galerie Les Yeux Fertiles in Paris, held from June 7 to July 6, 2024, which included *Sans titre* (1960), a gouache on paper measuring 45 × 37.5 cm. His continued presence in exhibitions, institutional collections, and international art-historical databases, including the Getty Research Institute and RKD, reinforces his enduring significance within Scandinavian and international Surrealism.



San titre, 1960, Stencil on paper, 22 x 16 cm



Exhibition poster, "Homage to Max Walter Svanberg", Malmö Museum, 1972

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Early Period (1930s–1940s): Surrealist Exploration and Artistic Formation

During his early career, Max Walter Svanberg explored modern artistic movements, particularly Cubism and Surrealism, which influenced his approach to composition and visual experimentation. His early paintings reflected an interest in dreamlike imagery, distorted figures, and unexpected combinations of forms, drawing inspiration from European Surrealists such as Salvador Dalí. By the mid-1940s, his involvement with the Swedish avant-garde and the emerging Imaginist movement encouraged him to develop a more personal artistic language. Rather than simply reproducing the visual conventions of Surrealism, Svanberg increasingly explored psychological symbolism, imaginative transformation, and the relationship between human figures and abstract forms. His early compositions laid the foundation for the elaborate, fantastical imagery that would define his mature work.

Significant Work: *Composition with Figures* (1940s), an early painting reflecting his exploration of figurative composition during the formative years of his Surrealist and Imaginist development.



Composition with Figures, 1940, oil on canvas, 84 x 60 x 3 cm

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

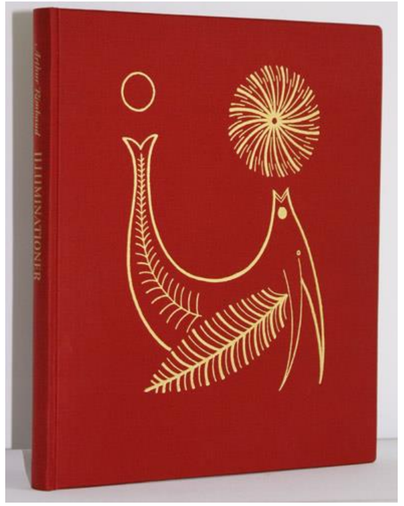
Middle Period (1950s–1960s): Imaginism and Fantastical Transformation

The 1950s and 1960s marked the maturation of Svanberg's distinctive artistic style, characterized by intricate ornamentation, vibrant colours, and elaborate transformations of the female figure. His philosophy of Imaginism emphasized beauty, imagination, and sustained visual discovery rather than the immediate psychological shock traditionally associated with Surrealism. Female figures became central to his compositions, frequently merging with birds, butterflies, fish, and botanical elements to create mysterious hybrid beings. Through delicate lines, jewel-like surfaces, and poetic symbolism, Svanberg constructed richly detailed imaginary worlds that blurred the boundaries between human anatomy, nature, and fantasy. His experimentation also extended beyond painting into printmaking, illustration, and collage, reflecting his growing interest in the expressive possibilities of different artistic media.

Significant Works: *Det imaginära samtalets pärlband* (1953), an important example of his mature Imaginist vision, and his illustrations for Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminationer* (1958), demonstrating his connection between visual art and poetic imagination.



Det imaginära samtalets pärlband , 1953, Gouache, 50 x 654 cm



Illuminationer by Arthur Rimbaud - Illustrated by Max Walter Svanberg - 1958

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Late Period (1970s–Early 1980s): Material Experimentation and Poetic Reflection

During his later career, Svanberg continued to explore his imaginative world through increasingly diverse artistic techniques, including collage, mixed media, and elaborate decorative compositions. His fascination with femininity, metamorphosis, and symbolic beauty remained central, while his works increasingly emphasized intricate surfaces and the relationship between materials and visual imagination. As the effects of his earlier polio intensified during the late 1970s, physical limitations made painting increasingly difficult, leading him to concentrate more heavily on collage, a medium he had already explored extensively during the 1960s. His later compositions retained their poetic complexity, combining fragmented imagery, ornamental detail, and fantastical symbolism. Following the death of his wife Gunni in 1982, his artistic production came to an end, according to his biographer Helmer Lång.

Significant Works: *De imaginära stjärnbilderna hyllar det vackraste i mitt* liv (1975) and *Det imaginära ögats treenighet* (1980), both documented in the Malmö Art Museum collection and representative of his continuing engagement with imaginative and symbolic themes.



De imaginära stjärnbilderna hyllar det vackraste i mitt liv, *1975, Collage och gouache på papper, 99 x 69 cm*



Det imaginära ögats treenighet (The imaginary eye's trinity), 1980, Collage on paper, 50 x 64 cm

Max Walter Svanberg — Poem om blommande hybrider (1962)

Art Historical Context

Poem om blommande hybrider (1962) represents Max Walter Svanberg's mature Imaginist period, reflecting his distinctive approach to Surrealism through elaborate ornamentation, organic transformation, and poetic symbolism. Executed in gouache, the painting belongs to a body of work in which human, botanical, and fantastical forms merge into intricate compositions. Its title, referring to flowering hybrids, evokes Svanberg's fascination with metamorphosis and the boundaries between nature and imagination. The work exemplifies his artistic philosophy of creating a sustained imaginative encounter through beauty, visual complexity, and unexpected associations.

Auction Result

Sold at Bukowskis in Stockholm in 2011 for SEK 210,000 hammer price (approximately USD 33,138, or USD 43,079[1] including a calculated 30% buyer's premium), significantly exceeding its pre-sale estimate of SEK 80,000–100,000. Achieving 2.1 times the high estimate, the sale represents a notable auction result for Svanberg and reflects collector recognition of his distinctive contribution to Scandinavian Surrealism.

Exhibition History

Formerly in the collection of Bengt Fredin, the painting has a documented exhibition history, including *Max Walter Svanberg* at Konsthallen in Gothenburg (28 October–19 November 1967), where it appeared as catalogue no. 35. It is also listed in connection with exhibitions organized by the Swedish Institute and Malmö Konstmuseum. The work was subsequently reproduced in colour in Helmer Lång's *Max Walter Svanberg och förvandlingen* (1982), page 97, further establishing its significance within the artist's documented oeuvre.

[1] *Currency conversion is based on the historical exchange rate of 1 SEK = USD 0.1578 as of June 2011*

NOTABLE AUCTION RESULTS



Poem om blommande hybrider (Poems about Flowers), 1962. Gouache, 103 × 83 cm. Bukowskis, Auction 563, Lot 109.

Max Walter Svanberg — Vi äro världar skapade av alla de ting vi drömma (1947)

Art Historical Context

Vi äro världar skapade av alla de ting vi drömma (1947) represents an important early example of Max Walter Svanberg's Imaginist practice, created during a formative period in his artistic development. Executed in mixed media on paper, the work reflects his emerging interest in imaginative transformation, poetic symbolism, and the relationship between dreams and visual expression. Its evocative title, translating to *We Are Worlds Created by All the Things We Dream*, encapsulates the imaginative philosophy that would become central to his mature work. Created shortly after his breakthrough solo exhibition at Gummesons Konsthall in Stockholm in 1945, the composition belongs to the period in which Svanberg was establishing his distinctive position within Swedish Surrealism.

Auction Result

Sold at Bukowskis in Stockholm on November 17, 2022, for SEK 165,000 hammer price (approximately USD 15,506, or USD 20,158[2] including a calculated 30% buyer's premium), significantly exceeding its pre-sale estimate of SEK 100,000–125,000. Achieving 1.32 times the high estimate, the sale represents a notable auction result for Svanberg and reflects continued collector interest in his early Imaginist works and their contribution to Scandinavian Surrealism.

Exhibition History

Formerly held by Norrköpings Art Museum and subsequently included in the Lars Wetterling Collection, the work has an extensive exhibition history. It was exhibited at Norrköpings Museum (1961), Lunds Konsthall (1962), Färg och Färg in Stockholm (1970), Malmö Museum (1972), and Norrköpings Konstmuseum (2001). The composition has also been illustrated in several important publications, including Ragnar von Holten's *Surrealismen i svensk konst*, José Pierre's *Max Walter Svanberg et le règne féminin*, and Helmer Lång's *Max Walter Svanberg och förvandlingen* (1982). Its exhibition and publication history demonstrates its established place within the documentation of Svanberg's artistic development.

NOTABLE AUCTION RESULTS



Vi äro världar skapade av alla de ting vi drömma (We Are Worlds Created by All the Things We Dream), 1947. Mixed media on paper, 50 × 64 cm. Bukowskis, Modern Art + Design 644, Lot 523.

[2] *Currency conversions are based on the historical exchange rate of 1 SEK = USD 0.093977 as of November 17, 2022*

MARKET & COLLECTING



"Skönhetens gudinna (Goddess of beauty)", 1965, Gouache on paper, 62 x 50 cm

HOW COLLECTORS VIEW MAX WALTER SVANBERG'S WORKS

Characteristics Valued by Collectors

Collectors are drawn to Max Walter Svanberg's distinctive interpretation of Surrealism, characterized by elaborate ornamentation, imaginative transformations, and poetic symbolism. His compositions frequently combine female figures with botanical, animal, and fantastical elements, creating intricate dreamlike worlds that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination. Unlike the more provocative imagery associated with orthodox Surrealism, Svanberg's artistic practice emphasizes beauty, sensuality, and visual discovery. His intricate linework, jewel-like colours, and highly personal symbolism distinguish his work within Scandinavian modernism, appealing to collectors interested in both Surrealism and the broader European avant-garde.

Position in the Nordic Modernist Market

Max Walter Svanberg occupies an established position within Scandinavian Surrealism, particularly through his role in developing the Swedish Imaginist movement during the 1940s. His international recognition was strengthened by André Breton's support, including his 1955 exhibition at À l'Étoile scellée in Paris, while subsequent museum exhibitions and scholarly publications have reinforced his art-historical significance.

From a market perspective, his auction results demonstrate collector interest in both his early and mature works. In 2011, *Poem om blommande hybrider* (1962) achieved SEK 210,000 hammer price (approximately USD 33,138), exceeding its high estimate of SEK 100,000. More recently, *Vi äro världar skapade av alla de ting vi drömma* (1947) sold for SEK 165,000 hammer price (approximately USD 15,506) at Bukowskis in 2022, also exceeding its pre-sale estimate. These results demonstrate continued demand for significant examples of Svanberg's distinctive Imaginist practice.

Appeal for New Collectors

Svanberg's work appeals to collectors seeking historically significant examples of Scandinavian Surrealism with strong connections to the international avant-garde. His association with André Breton, involvement in the Imaginist movement, and distinctive artistic vocabulary provide a compelling historical foundation. While major paintings and important compositions can command substantial auction prices, smaller works on paper, prints, and drawings may offer more accessible entry points. His diverse artistic production, ranging from elaborate paintings to intricate works on paper and collages, provides opportunities for collectors with different interests and budgets. As scholarly and institutional attention to Nordic Surrealism continues, Svanberg remains a compelling figure within the Scandinavian modernist collecting landscape.

MUSEUM AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIONS

SELECTED WORKS · Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden

Malmö Konstmuseum's collection includes over 157 works by Max Walter Svanberg, encompassing paintings, drawings, prints, and mixed-media compositions from different periods of his career. The six artworks presented here are selected examples rather than a comprehensive inventory of the museum's holdings. Together, they illustrate the range of Svanberg's artistic practice and the development of his distinctive Imaginist visual language.



Den röda dagens blommande kroppar The red day's flowering bodies

1955 · Colour lithograph on paper · 51.3 × 43.8 cm

Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 611 · Purchase, 1961



Myt (Myth)

1944 · Tempera on paper · 30.6 × 27 cm

Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 5797 · Gift, 1988



Imaginärt porträtt (Imaginary Portrait)

1945 · Gouache on paper · 34 × 40 cm

Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 8000 · Gift, 1999

MUSEUM AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIONS

SELECTED WORKS · Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden



Imaginär konstellation (Imaginary Constellation)

1954 · Tempera on paper · 56.7 × 44.7 cm

Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 5669 · Gift, 1985



Porträtt av en stjärna IV (Portrait of a Star IV)

1964 · Pearl embroidery, mixed media · 173 × 68 cm

Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 5619 · Gift, 1984



Den blå dagens berusning
The blue day's intoxication

1960 · Gouache on paper· 38 × 46.5 cm

Malmö Konstmuseum · MMK 6294 · Purchased, 1995

ADDITIONAL INSTITUTIONAL HOLDINGS

PRINTS · COLLECTION RECORDS · DOCUMENTATION STATUS

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART · NEW YORK

Ten online collection records, including the portfolio Max Walter Svanberg: 8 Originallitografier (1950), its eight lithographic plates, and Lunds Konsthall (1962).

MALMÖ KONSTMUSEUM · MALMÖ

Extensive holdings of paintings, drawings, prints, collages, and mixed media spanning Svanberg's career. See the six individually documented works on the preceding pages.

NATIONALMUSEUM · STOCKHOLM

Collection records identify exhibition posters associated with Galerie Raymond Cordier, Paris. Verify object-level accession details before publication.

FURTHER IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED

Moderna Museet: 1998 exhibition record, not proof of ownership.
Norrköpings Konstmuseum: exhibition history; holdings unconfirmed.
Vandalorum: 2012 exhibition; ownership unconfirmed.

Scope: selected documented records, not a complete worldwide census. Exhibitions are not treated as proof of ownership.

SELECTED SOURCES AND IMAGE CREDITS

Bibliography · museum catalogues · auction records

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Svenskt biografiskt lexikon. Helmer Lång, entry on Max Walter Svanberg.

Malmö Konstmuseum. Online collection catalogue, individual object records.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Artist and collection records for Max Walter Svanberg.

Bukowskis. Auction 563, lot 109; auction 644, lot 523.

INSTITUTIONAL AND AUCTION IMAGE CREDITS

Pages 4, 13–14: Malmö Konstmuseum, collection database (MMK 5666, 611, 5797, 8000, 5669, 5619; verify final pictured work's record).

Pages 10–11: Bukowskis, auction catalogue images, lots 109 (auction 563) and 523 (auction 644).

Page 4: Portrait reproduced from Svenskt konstnärslexikon via Wikimedia Commons; photographer unknown.

Page 5: 1955 À l'Étoile scellée invitation and Médium ephemera; original image holder not identified.

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IMAGE CREDITS BY PRESENTATION PAGE

Image-source register · verification notes

ARTWORKS AND EXHIBITION MATERIAL

Pages 1–3: Cover collage, Grotesken och offret (1942), and L'idole (1986) Max Walter artworks reproduced throughout this dossier; original image suppliers vary.

Pages 5–6: Médium no. 3 invitation; 1955 solo-exhibition invitation; Sans titre (1960); 1972 Malmö exhibition poster — image owners to confirm.

Pages 7–9: Composition with Figures; Det imaginära samtalets pärlband; Illuminationer (1958); two later collages — individual source credits to confirm.

Page 12: Skönhetens gudinna (1965.

SOURCE STATUS AND REPRODUCTION RIGHTS

Page 13: Den röda dagens blommande kroppar, Myt, Imaginärt porträtt — Malmö Konstmuseum.

Page 14: Imaginär konstellation, Porträtt av en stjärna IV, Den blå dagens berusning — Malmö Konstmuseum; check final image caption against inventory number.

Page 18: Imaginistisk komposition med kvinna och fågel (1952).

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maginistisk komposition med kvinna och fågel, 1952, gouache on cardboard, 31 x 55.5 cm.