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***Surrealism, the Sea, and Queer Allegory: Claude Cahun and James Gleeson* (400 words)**

The ocean, with its qualities of fluidity, ambiguity, and mystery, offered Surrealism a powerful metaphor for the subconscious. It also became a critical site through which French-born Claude Cahun and Australian painter James Gleeson articulated queer subjectivity and desire. Both artists employed the sea not only as a motif but as a conceptual framework for exploring identity and sexuality.

Although often framed as a European movement, Surrealism was profoundly shaped by transnational exchange. In the 1930s, André Breton—its principal theorist—collected Australian Aboriginal art, while Australian artists on the east coast began engaging with Surrealist literature and painting. Cahun and Gleeson, though separated by geography and generation, both responded to these currents and forged their own oceanic allegories.

Claude Cahun, born Lucy Schwob in the port city of Nantes in 1894, where she met her partner, Marcel Moore. By their early 20s, the pair had adopted their gender-neutral names and entered Paris's Surrealist circles. Cahun's practice spanned writing, photography, and assemblage. During summers on Jersey, she collected seaweed, shells, and driftwood to form assemblages that merged Surrealism with the sea. *Le Père* (1932), fashioned from such marine debris, depicts an intersex figure with both phallus and vulva. This thalassic being, born of the ocean, embodies doubled fluidity: Surrealist and queer. Significantly, works like *Le Père* were not exhibited publicly, suggesting that Cahun and Moore conceived them as intimate explorations of selfhood and desire.

Across the globe, James Gleeson, born in Sydney in 1915, was among those profoundly influenced by European Surrealists. Gleeson used myth and dreamlike imagery to evoke psychological intensity and homoerotic desire. Until recently, his 1960s paintings, often centred on seascapes and Greek mythology, received little scholarly attention. Works such as *The Dream of Theseus* (1967) depict the son of Poseidon caught in a vortex of blue, shackled as phallic horns approach. Other canvases feature Pirithous on horseback by the sea, or the poet Arion grasping a fish suggestively over his groin. Once neglected, these works are now recognised as extensions of Gleeson's Surrealism, staging queerness through myth and maritime imagery.

For both Cahun and Gleeson, the ocean functioned as more than backdrop. Its boundlessness, fluidity, and erotic charge provided a visual lexicon for Cahun and Gleeson to grapple with gender, identity, and queer subjectivity.