Steve Pantazis

**Cornell, Joseph (1903–1972) Word Count 212**

Joseph Cornell was an American artist known for his poetic use of collage and assemblage. He was born in 1903 in Nyack, New York, but lived on Utopia Parkway in Flushing, Long Island, for most of his adult years. Having no formal training in art, Cornell made his first artwork in 1931 after observing the gallerist Julien Levy unpacking some Surrealist works. The influence of Surrealism on Cornell’s work is apparent in his free attitude toward objects, his approach to fragmentation as the condition of modernity, his technique of irrational juxtaposition of unlike materials, and his passion for nineteenth-century Symbolist writers such as Arthur Rimbaud and Gérard de Nerval. Through Levy’s gallery in Manhattan, Cornell came to know several European Surrealists personally. Around 1935, Cornell began to concentrate on his famous “boxes,” which are simple, glass-fronted containers in which found objects are arranged. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing throughout his career, Cornell experimented with film by splicing together found film strips. Towards the end of the 1950s, Cornell’s production of boxes slowed, and he returned to collage. He died from a heart failure on 29 December 1972.

**References and further reading**

Blair, L. (1999), *Joseph Cornell’s Vision of Spiritual Order.* London: Reaktion Books.

McShine, K., ed. (1980), *Joseph Cornell.* New York: The Museum of Modern Art.