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## Salvador Dali

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Ed. Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art. New York, N.Y.: Pelion Press (1984): 78-80.  
[Permalink](#). © Pelion Press 1984. Used with permission.

6. For mention of this commission, see Cabanne, *The Brothers Duchamp*, 237, and J. P. Crespelle, *Villon* (Paris, 1958), 1. The finished paintings each measure approximately seven by six meters.
7. Both studies were published with brief commentary by Vallier, *Jacques Villon*, between pages 100 and 101.

## SALVADOR DALÍ

Spanish (1904- )

Salvador Dalí was born in Figueras, a tiny village in the Spanish province of Catalonia.<sup>1</sup> While he began painting as a young child (and with the encouragement of the Impressionist painter and family friend Ramón Pichot), Dalí enrolled for his formal training in 1921 at the Fine Arts Academy in Madrid. His controversial personality, with manifest tendencies toward anarchism, led to his suspension from the Academy in 1923 for walking out of an assembly convened to announce the appointment of a professor whom Dalí and other students considered incompetent. Dalí returned to the school in 1924 but was permanently expelled in 1926 when he declared that his professors were unqualified to examine him.

Perhaps the most lasting influence of these school years was his associations with avant-garde writers and artists such as Federico García Lorca and Luis Buñuel, and his own experiments with a variety of traditional and modern approaches to painting. During his student years, Dalí explored the pictorial vocabularies of painters ranging from the Spanish masters (Velázquez, El Greco, Goya) to "the successive stages of European modernism" (Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, the fantasy painting of Chagall and Kandinsky, and the Purism of Ozenfant and Jeaneret, known as Le Corbusier).<sup>2</sup> The influence of Picasso was an important force in Dalí's formative years, especially during the late twenties.

The mature painting of Dalí has been profoundly influenced by the Surrealists and by his admiration for the Renaissance painters, especially Piero della Francesca and Raphael. Surrealism, founded in 1924 by the French poet André Breton and inspired by the discoveries of Sigmund Freud, favors the creative and imaginative forces of mind over reason. Thought "in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations" (Breton) is the motto of Surrealist art.<sup>3</sup>

Although Surrealist images began appearing in his works around 1926, Dalí first met the Surrealists on a visit to Paris in 1928. In contrast to other Surrealist painters (Giorgio De Chirico, Max Ernst, and René Magritte), Dalí's imagery presents the extremes of unconscious experience. In this respect the outpourings of his unrestrained personality exemplify Surrealism in its most complete form and content. Dalí's relations with the Surrealists were nevertheless punctuated with differences on questions of theory, taste,

and politics.<sup>4</sup> In his writings of 1927 he identifies a fundamental distinction between himself and the surrealists based on a realist approach to seeing objective reality.<sup>5</sup> Even after he "joins" the Surrealist movement in 1929, the range of Dalí's interest never quite matches that of the Surrealists. Despite their concurrent interests in Freud and the irrational imagination, Dalí remained indifferent to the social and political concerns of the Surrealists, and his attraction to Catholicism and the painterly values of classical Renaissance artists led to interim quarrels between Breton and Dalí (1934) and to a complete break by 1940.

His intermittent years from 1940 to the period of the religious paintings (the *Marquette Madonna of Port Lligat*, 1949, is the first) were mainly spent in the United States, where he attracted worldwide attention for the eccentric behavior that has perhaps unduly drawn attention from his brilliance as painter and theorist.

### Madonna of Port Lligat, 1949 (59.9)

Oil on canvas, 19 1/2 x 15 1/16 in. (49.5 x 38.3 cm). Signed l.r.: "Dalí."

*Provenance:* Carstairs Gallery, New York; collection of Mr. and Mrs. Ira Haupt; their gift to the University, 1959.

#### *References:*

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*The Milwaukee Journal*, October 13, 1959 (ill.).

Isodor Montiel, "Madonna of Port Lligat," *Hobbies* 66 (August 1961), 45 (ill.), 57.

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Pick, *Marquette University Art Collection*, 9, cover ill.

*A Guide to Works by Salvador Dalí in Public Museum Collections* (Cleveland, 1974), 23 (ill.).

Robert Descharnes, *Salvador Dalí* (New York, 1976), 148.

Claude Pallene, "Comment les servitudes de son inspiration ont amené Dalí à la grandeur," *Journal de l'amateur d'art*, no. 654 (December 1, 1979): 15 (ill.).

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Guido Almansi, "Quel libidinoso pennello di Dalí," *La Repubblica*, Milan, December 31, 1979.

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Ramón Gomez de la Serna, *Dalí* (New York, 1979), 121.

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Gazetta del Popolo, February 6, 1980 (ill.).

Le Democrate, March 26, 1980 (ill.).

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Art News 79, no. 4 (April 1980):91 (ill.).

The Milwaukee Journal, August 20, 1980 (ill.).

"O Sonho domesticado," *Journal do Brazil* (1980):18.

Salvador Dalí, catalogue of an exhibition at the Tate Gallery (London, 1980), cat. no. 213 (color ill.).

Art: Das Kunstmagazin nr. 11 (November 1981):57 (ill.).

Omni 4, no. 3 (December 1981):81 (ill.).

Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (London, 1982), 8, 175, ill. no. 151, 187.

Ignacio Gomez de Liano, *Dalí* (Barcelona, 1982), plate no. 99.

Retrospective Salvador Dalí 1982, catalogue of an exhibition at the Isetan Museum of Art, Tokyo, Daimaru Art Museum, Osaka, Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Kitakyushu, and Hiroshima Prefectural Museum of Art, Hiroshima (Tokyo, 1982), cat. no. 18 (color ill.).

400 Obras de Salvador Dalí de 1914 a 1983, catalogue of an exhibition at the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid, and Palau Real de Pedralbes, Barcelona (Madrid, 1983), cat. no. 380, color ill. facing 216.

Treasures of the Vatican, catalogue of an exhibition at the New Orleans Vatican Pavilion at the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition (New Orleans, 1984), 49-51 (color ill.).

Dalí painted this first version of *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1949) in his beloved Port Lligat, a tiny fishing village on the Spanish coast between Barcelona and the French border, shortly after he returned from the United States, where he had lived during World War II. A preliminary sketch, called a "Study for the Madonna of Port Lligat" (1949), is in a private collection.<sup>6</sup> A larger painting of the same title, with notable differences in the rendering of the subject and an expansion of the symbolism, was formerly in the collection of Lady Beaverbrook of New Brunswick, Canada.<sup>7</sup>

Dalí traveled to Rome with the earlier *Madonna of Port Lligat* during 1949, where he met with Pope Pius XII. The Pope showed great interest in Dalí's Surrealist interpretation of the Madonna and Child. In the

spirit of a Holy Year, the Pope accepted the sincerity of Dalí's pilgrimage and blessed the work.

The 1949 *Madonna of Port Lligat* marks several important transitions in Dalí's career: a gradual break with the Surrealists with whom he had been identified for many years, a public identification with Catholicism symbolized by his visit to Pius XII, and the beginning of a series of important religious works that he was to produce over the next several years. Within an artistic framework representing a merging of classical and surrealist ideas of painting, Dalí manifests his religious mysticism, which can be traced to the Spaniards St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Ávila.<sup>8</sup>

In these works, and especially in the *Madonna*, Dalí combines a tradition of classical Western painting with the mystical and surrealist experiences of his life. He was influenced by classical painters, notably by Piero della Francesca and Raphael. Dalí himself refers to Piero's *The Virgin and Child with Saints and Angels* (Pinacoteca Di Brera, Milan) as the inspiration for his *Madonna of Port Lligat*. Similarities do exist between the two paintings. Both Madonnas are seated on thrones with their hands clasped together and forming an arch above the Christ Child. Both are prominently centered under an arch beneath which a white egg hangs by a string from a large seashell. Even a casual survey of Raphael's Madonnas will show that Dalí's *Madonna of Port Lligat* (1949) belongs to the same classical tradition of painting. Raphael's *The Madonna Di Foligno*, now in the Vatican Museum Pinacoteca, also shows the Madonna and Child suspended in space above the earth. Other Raphael paintings represent the Madonna seated on a throne within an architectural or landscape setting, for example, *Virgin and Child with Saints* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and *Ansidei Madonna* (National Gallery, London).

Dalí's use of the concept of "dematerialization" illustrates the impact the atomic age had made upon him. He explains its meaning: The changes in matter resulting from an atomic explosion are parallel to his spiritual transformation of the Madonna. Because of her unique role, her physical body is "dematerialized." The open space cut through her torso, as depicted in *The Madonna of Port Lligat*, becomes a "mystical and virginal tabernacle" wherein the Christ Child is suspended in space. Her masklike face and head are suspended above dismembered hands and arms.

Dalí's allusions to the atomic age, in combination with his use of surrealist imagery, shows his intention to produce a modern painting, not a mere working of a familiar theme according to an earlier style. The modernity of the *Madonna of Port Lligat* is also sustained in his use of modern optics. A remarkable sense of spatial depth is achieved here by introducing three-dimensional stereoscopic qualities. The colors of striking clarity suggest the medium of modern color photography, which may also have influenced Dalí's approach to the painting.

Although Dalí uses the pictorial images of Christianity and the Renaissance, his symbolism in *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1949) is more complex than it first appears. His Madonna is intended to be doubly understood, first as the Madonna of the mystical spirit and then as Dalí's tribute to his beloved wife, Gala, who is the model. For Dalí, Gala, as the guiding force in his life, was both Helen of Troy and Madonna, the sensuous and spiritual ideal in one.<sup>9</sup>

Although in a visually subordinate role, the Christ Child (Juan Figueras, a fisherman's son from Cadaques is the model) has a central place in the meaning of the painting. His placement in the tabernacle carved out of the Madonna's body, near where her heart would otherwise be, symbolizes his central role in the iconography. The cross and globe signify his intended dominion over the world.

The egg and seashell trace back to Piero della Francesca's *Brera Altarpiece* in Milan, as noted earlier, except that Dalí inverts the seashell in the manner of the inverted seashell in Carlo Crivelli's *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (National Gallery, Washington).<sup>10</sup> The egg in Piero's painting is a symbol that has occasioned much debate, both as to the kind of egg it is and as to its possible meanings: as a reliquary, a symbol of Virgin birth, death and resurrection, or of the four elements of the earth.<sup>11</sup> Dalí discusses Piero's and his own uses of the egg at length in his book *Fifty Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*. He compares it to a world suspended from heaven and also uses it to represent the unity of the Catholic Church in the world. Its placement over the Madonna signals her prominence in that world sphere. Or, as we have indicated, the egg may additionally represent the central role of Gala in the artist's personal world.

Seashells, in particular scallop shells, may represent pilgrimage or baptism, while the fish represents Christ and the lemons are associated with fidelity in love. Dalí's use of these symbols apparently follows the conventions of Christian tradition.

The sea urchin (especially prominent in this painting) has a unique meaning for Dalí. He invites any painter to view his own paintings through the microscopic world of the sea urchin's skeleton fitted with a crystal lens, as a measure of perfection. Dalí also compares the "architectural" structure of the skeleton of a sea urchin to the finest of man-made architectural structures and likens the sea urchin's role in the life of a painter to the role of a human skeleton in the life of a saint. The saint, who periodically experiences ecstasies and is drawn by "otherworldly" concerns, is reminded of his earthly condition by a human skull. The painter, whose ecstasies are primarily related to the material world, requires the skeleton of the sea urchin to remind him of the celestial regions beyond the sensuality of his oils.<sup>12</sup>

Important to a complete reading of this painting is the role of architectural symbolism. From the Middle

Agos on, architecture has been used in paintings to express essential thoughts. Dalí follows the Renaissance painters, particularly Piero della Francesca, in his use of an architectural structure to enclose the Madonna and Child (Piero's *Brera Altarpiece*).<sup>13</sup> The architecture is intended to express a synthesis of humankind and the world and is the point of view from which a painter perceives people and nature itself. In this instance Dalí shows the human figures suspended in space, fragmented and dismembered; what he seems to be saying, then, is that they are mystically transcendent and dematerialized in respect to the world.

C. L. C.

Notes:

1. The sources for studying the life and work of Salvador Dalí include a growing number of scholarly catalogues and books. Principal sources for this biography are: Dawn Ades, *Dalí and Surrealism* (New York, 1982); *400 Obras de 1914 a 1983 Salvador Dalí*, exhibition catalogue, 2 vols. (Barcelona, 1983) with extensive chronology and bibliography; *Salvador Dalí retrospectivo 1920-1980*, exhibition catalogue (Paris, 1979); *Salvador Dalí*, exhibition catalogue (London, 1980); A. Reynolds Morse, *Dalí. A Study of His Life and Work* (New York, 1958) and other texts by Morse. Dalí's own writings are not to be ignored in an approach to his life and work: *Conquest of the Irrational* (New York, 1935); *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (New York, 1942); *Fifty Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship* (New York, 1948), and numerous other books and articles listed in the Barcelona catalogue, 1983.
2. Ades, *Dalí and Surrealism*, 14-16.
3. André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (Paris, 1924).
4. Ades, *Dalí and Surrealism*, chapter 3, especially 45, 46, 96.
5. Dalí, "My pictures at the Autumn Salon," *L'Amie de les Arts* (Oct. 1927), cited in Ades, *Dalí and Surrealism*, 46.
6. "Study for the Madonna of Port Lligat," (1949), collection of Gala Dalí. Reproduced in Robert Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí* (Lausanne and London, 1979), 1976.
7. The present location of the 1950 *Madonna of Port Lligat* is unknown. According to a letter from Ian G. Lumsden, Curator, Beaverbrook Art Gallery (May 24, 1984), it was sold from the collection of Lady Beaverbrook in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada, several years before the date of his letter.
8. G. A. Gevasco, *Salvador Dalí* (Charlottesville, N.Y., 1981), 16.
9. Max Gérard, ed., *Dalí*, Eleanor Morse, trans. (New York, 1958). Also, Dalí, *Fifty Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, 79.
10. George W. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York, 1954).
11. Millard Meiss, *La Sacra Conversazione de Piero della Francesca* (Florence, 1971). Also, Marilyn Aronberg Lawn, "Piero della Francesca's Montefeltro Altarpiece: A Pledge of Fidelity," *Art Bulletin* LI, no. 4 (Dec. 1969): 367-371, et al.
12. Dalí, *Fifty Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, 76, 174-176.
13. Henri Focillon, *Piero della Francesca* (Paris, 1952), 135-137. Also, Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (New York, 1962).