

SALVADOR DALI

CHILDHOOD AND EARLIER PAINTINGS

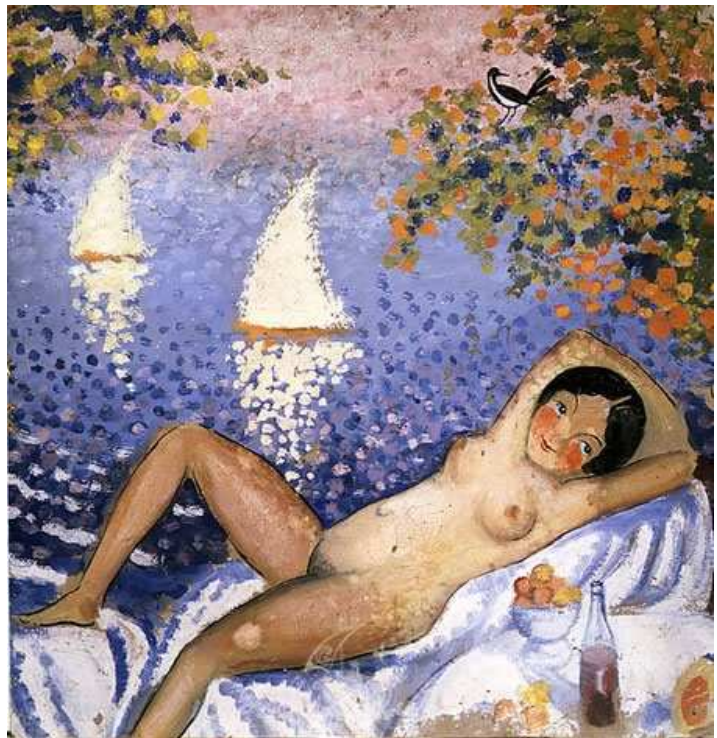
Salvador Felipe Jacinto Dali I Domenech was born in 1904 in the small agricultural town of **Figueres**, Spain. The son of a prosperous notary, Dali spent his boyhood in Figueres and at the family's summer home in the coastal fishing village of Cadaques where his parents built his first studio. Many of his paintings reflect his love of this area of Spain.

The young Dali attended the **San Fernando Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid**. Early recognition of Dali's talent came with his **first one-man show in Barcelona in 1925**. He became internationally known when three of his paintings were shown in the third annual **Carnegie International Exhibition** in Pittsburgh in 1928. The following year, Dali held his first one-man show in Paris.

The Smiling Venus

Temper on cardboard 51.50 x 50.30 cm.
c.1921, Teatre Museu Dali.

Along with the **sensual features**, we have the smiling face of the girl who "offers herself", just as in the foreground some food delicacies (wine, fruit, etc.) are "offering themselves" in consonance with the landscape: a cove in which two lateen-sail boats are cutting through the water with their corresponding reflections. The painting - oil on cardboard - which uses for the marine view in the background a **pointillist** technique often to be found in Dalí's work over the course



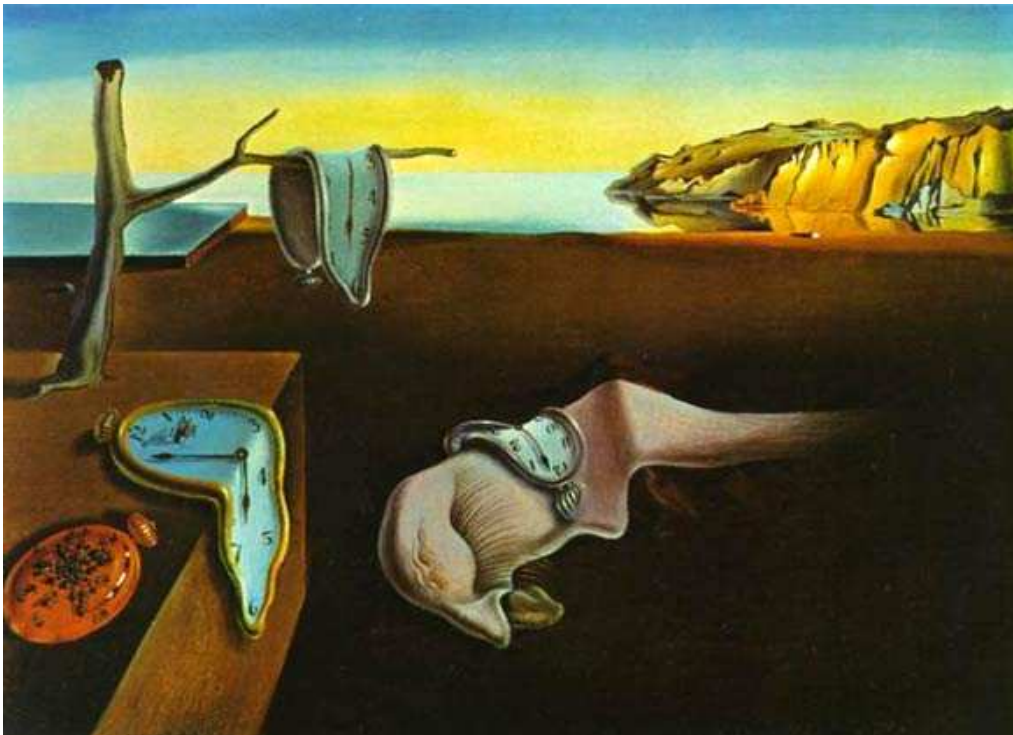
of 1921 and 1922, was probably conceived as an **ironic** version of the feminine archetypes of Catalan Noucentisme. This we might deduce from the girl's vulgar face, jutting breasts and open legs, features which, rather than constituting a kind of homage, seem more like a **sarcastic distortion of** Giorgione's **idealized figures**.

THE SURREALISM

In 1929 Dali joined the **surrealists**, led by former Dadaist **Andre Breton**. That year, Dali met **Gala** Eluard when she visited him in Cadaques with her husband, poet Paul Eluard. She became Dali's lover, muse, business manager, and chief inspiration.

Dali soon became a leader of the **Surrealist Movement**. His painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, with the soft or melting watches is still one of the best-known surrealist works. But as the war approached, the **apolitical Dali** clashed with the Surrealists and was "**expelled**" from the **surrealist group** during a "trial" in 1934. He did however, exhibit works in international surrealist exhibitions throughout the decade but by 1940, Dali was moving into a **new type of painting with a preoccupation with science and religion**.

The Persistence of Memory



Oil on canvas 24 × 33 cm, 9.4 × 13 inches, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1931.

The Persistence of Memory is aptly named, for the scene is **indelibly memorable**. Hard objects become inexplicably **limp** in this bleak and infinite dreamscape, while metal attracts **ants** like rotting flesh. Mastering what he called "the usual paralyzing **tricks of eye-fooling**," Dali painted with what he called "the most imperialist fury of **precision**," but only, he said, "**to systematize confusion and thus to help**

discredit completely the world of reality." It is the classical **Surrealist** ambition, yet some literal reality is included too: the distant golden cliffs are the coast of Catalonia, Dali's home.

Those limp watches are as soft as overripe cheese—indeed "the camembert of time," in Dali's phrase. Here **time must lose all meaning**. Permanence goes with it: ants, a common theme in Dali's work, represent **decay**, particularly when they attack a gold watch, and become **grotesquely** organic. The monstrous fleshy creature draped across the painting's center is at once **alien and familiar**: an approximation of Dali's own face in profile, its long eyelashes seem disturbingly insectlike or even **sexual**, as does what may or may not be a tongue oozing from its nose like a fat snail.

The year before this picture was painted, Dali formulated his "paranoiac-critical method," cultivating self-induced **psychotic hallucinations** in order to create art. "The difference between a madman and me," he said, "is that I am not mad."

THE CLASSIC PERIOD

Dali and Gala escaped from Europe during **World War II**, spending 1940-48 in the **United States**. These were very important years for the artist. The **Museum of Modern Art in New York** gave Dali his first major retrospective exhibit in 1941. This was followed in 1942 by the publication of Dali's autobiography, "**The Secret Life of Salvador Dali**."

As Dali moved away from Surrealism and into his **classic period**, he began his series of **19 large canvases**, many concerning **scientific, historical or religious** themes. Among the best known of these works is *The Sacrament of the Last Supper*.

The Sacrament of the Last Supper



Oil on canvas, 267 × 166.7 cm (5 ft 5 5/8 in x 8 ft 9 1/8 in) 1955 National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Twelve pentagons and twelve apostles, as Dalí said: "...communion must be **symmetric**." "The Sacrament of the Last Supper" was painted using oil on canvas, in 1955. An art collector called Chester Dale commissioned the painting. Whilst he was enormously pleased with the painting, some critics viewed it as a mediocre rendering of a much-used subject. The subject is Christ's Last Supper, which has been painted by many artists over the centuries. Amongst these renditions is a version by one of Dalí's favorite artists, **Leonardo da Vinci**. Like the Leonardo version, Dalí's "The Sacrament of the Last Supper" shows Christ sitting centrally at a table with the disciples around him and in the background, windows look on to a **landscape**, in Dalí's case it is that of a **bay near his home of Port Lligat**. The figure of **Christ is transparent**, and above him the arms and chest of a man appear in the sky, suggesting that he is already ascending to heaven. An aspect of the painting that caused controversy was the fact that **Christ was given Gala's features**. Dalí had already portrayed Gala as the Madonna in several earlier paintings.

LATEST YEARS

In 1974, Dali opened the **Teatro Museo** in Figueres, Spain. This was followed by retrospectives in Paris and London at the end of the decade.

After the **death of his wife**, Gala in 1982, Dali's health began to fail. It deteriorated further after he was burned in a **fire** in his home in Pubol in 1984. Two years later, a pace-maker was implanted. Much of this part of his life was spent in **seclusion**, first in Pubol and later in his apartments at Torre Galatea, adjacent to the Teatro Museo. Salvador Dali died on January 23, 1989 in Figueres from heart failure with respiratory complications.

A CONSTANTLY GROWING AND EVOLVING ARTIST

As an artist, Salvador Dali was not limited to a particular style or media. The body of his work, from **early impressionist paintings** through his **transitional surrealist works**, and into his **classical period**, reveals a constantly growing and evolving artist. Dali worked in **all media**, leaving behind a wealth of **oils, watercolors, drawings, graphics, and sculptures, films, photographs, performance pieces, jewels** and objects of all descriptions. As important, he left for posterity the permission to explore all aspects of one's own life and to give them artistic expression.

Whether working from pure inspiration or on a commissioned illustration, Dali's **matchless insight** and **symbolic complexity** are apparent. Above all, Dali was a superb draftsman. His excellence as a creative artist will always set a standard for the art of the twentieth century.