

Salvador DALÍ

Liquid Desire

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“Knowing
how to look
is a way of
inventing.”

— Salvador Dalí
in *Salvador Dalí*,
Mary Ann Caws,
Reaktion Books,
2009, p. 95.

Dalí the man

Introduction



I am painting pictures which make me die for joy, I am creating with an absolute naturalness, without the slightest aesthetic concern, I am making things that inspire me with a profound emotion and I am trying to paint them honestly.

Salvador Dalí in *Dalí and Surrealism*, Dawn Ades, Icon (Harpe), 1983.

Salvador Dalí, the flamboyant Catalan artist most commonly recognised for his vivid, unforgettable dreamscapes depicting an inner surreal world, could be described as the Renaissance man of the twentieth century. His tireless curiosity and extraordinarily fecund imagination led him to engage deeply at different phases in his life with Surrealism, contemporary science, religion, mysticism and popular culture, including Hollywood cinema, advertising and fashion. Unsurprisingly, a friend once described him as a ‘thinking machine’, and Picasso is known to have suggested that he resembled ‘an outboard motor that’s always running’ (Antonio Pasolini, ‘Dalí, Surrealism and Cinema: An interview with Elliott H. King’, Kamera.co.uk, June 2000).

As a precocious teenager, his early paintings reveal his fascination for both Classicism and more recent art movements such as Impressionism, Cubism and Fauvism, which were to evolve into his own distinctive signature style characterised by hyper-real images, often containing double meanings, which Dalí himself described as ‘hand made photographs’.

What is less well known is that Dalí could create equally memorable and bizarre imagery as a distinguished writer. His books include an autobiography, *The Secret life of Salvador Dalí*, 1942; a novel, *Hidden Faces*, 1945; and a practical text titled *50 Secrets of Magic Craftmanship*, 1948, which was a reaction to what he saw as the decline of painterly skills and techniques he associated with Modernism.

In the mid-1940s he decided to launch his own newspaper, *Dalí News* (a pun on the title of the *New York Daily News*), which was entirely devoted to the topic of Dalí – the man, his exhibitions, his paintings and his films.

Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48

Philippe HALSMAN

Latvian/American 1906–79, worked in France 1931–40
Surrealism is myself 1954

gelatin silver photograph
33.6 x 26.0 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida

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Introduction

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Dalí was a man of many contradictions – his insatiable desire for fame and notoriety led him to indulge in self-promoting activities such as delivering a lecture in a diving suit or contorting his distinctive moustache into strange positions. These kind of grandiose and eccentric behaviours sometimes drew more public attention than his artwork, annoying both those who loved his art and his critics. On the other hand, his public persona concealed a deeply serious and highly educated man whose acute intellect could grasp new and challenging ideas, particularly the complexities of modern scientific and mathematical discoveries. Dalí also acknowledged the importance of other people's expertise and creative ideas on his own practice, explaining that apart from being a universal genius he was 'also an intellectual vampire who enriches himself with all the people who come close to him' (José Montes Baque, *The Great Collaborator, Tate Etc*, Issue 10, Summer 2007). His career was marked by a series of ingenious collaborative projects with artists highly regarded in their field, such as film-maker Alfred Hitchcock and photographer Philippe Halsman.

Dalí's creative genius is only now being recognised as a dynamic force on the development of contemporary art. His extraordinary capacity for invention and disregard for the pretensions of high culture were an inspiration to emerging artists in the 1960s and 1970s, reflected in the imagery of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Sigmar Polke and Jeff Koons.

The diverse and constantly evolving oeuvre of Dalí, which included oils, watercolours, drawings, graphics, sculpture and jewels, are testimony to his incomparable insight, imagination and extraordinary skill as a draftsman. There are few who would argue with his early prediction at the age of sixteen that 'I will be a genius, and the world will admire me. I may be despised and misunderstood, but I'll be a genius, a great genius, because I am sure of it' (Cristina Jutge, *Portrait of the adolescent artist*, *El Punt*, September, 2005).

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— Salvador Dalí

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The painting
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Daddy Longlegs of the evening – Hope! is reportedly the first work Dalí painted following his arrival in the United States, where he and Gala fled in 1940 to escape the devastation of the Second World War.

The grim, unsettling imagery and dark, menacing shadows, accentuated by the crispness of the electric blue sky, appear to express the horrific, dehumanising nature of war. At the core of the painting is the lifeless, ant-infested, self-portrait head of the artist. No longer bursting with creative energy, his life-blood drains into the extruded, drooping neck of a wasted female form, who tries in vain to play the melting cello slipping from her grasp. The two inkwells resting on the figure's back may refer to Dalí's father, a lawyer, perhaps suggesting the harrowing experience of living in exile, far from his family and Catalan homeland.

Normally associated with peace, the olive tree is here portrayed in sharp profile exposing its dead, mutilated, brittle branches and perhaps mocking the covered face of a winged *putto*, a symbol of love, unable to face the terrifying landscape confronting him.

However, there are signs of optimism in this otherwise apocalyptic painting, such as the delicate tracery of a daddy longlegs, a traditional French token of good luck. The canon, in this painting supported by a crutch, is a reference to Giorgio de Chirico's work *The philosopher's conquest* of 1914. It too may suggest hope, as it catapults from its sinister interior the heroic form of a Pegasus-like horse and the soft image of an aeroplane metamorphosing into the symbolic figure of Winged Victory (the *Nike of Samothrace*, a third-century marble sculpture of the Greek goddess of Victory displayed at the Louvre in Paris). Some commentators have argued that the aeroplane could reveal Dalí's opinion that the outcome of the Second World War would be decided by formidable use of air power.

This painting heralds the arrival of Dalí's later style. While it features a carnival of familiar Dalínian symbols, they are no longer solely associated with the Surrealist fascination for psychoanalysis, but are more focused on allegories of a social context, in this case war.

Daddy Longlegs of the evening – Hope! was the very first work to be purchased by Mr and Mrs A. Reynolds Morse, the renowned collectors of Dalí's art who became lifelong friends of the artist and founded the Salvador Dalí Museum in St Petersburg, Florida.

Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48

Daddy Longlegs of the evening –

Hope! 1940

oil on canvas

40.6 x 50.8 cm

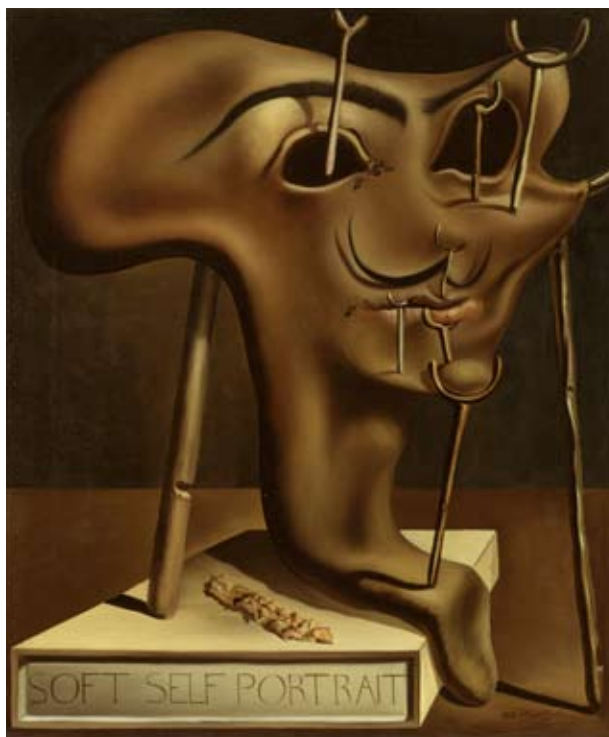
The Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida

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“Instead of
 painting the
 soul – the
 inside – I
 wanted to
 paint solely
 the outside:
 the envelope”

— Salvador Dalí

This enigmatic self-portrait was first shown at Dalí's solo exhibition, which he accompanied with an introductory essay, 'The last scandal of Salvador Dalí', at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York in 1941. Reproduced on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue, framed within a print of a Renaissance triumphal arch, and printed in colour on the cover of his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 1942, the image was clearly of great significance to the artist.

The soft mask of melting bronze supported by a cluster of miniature crutches as it flows onto the golden pedestal below represents a departure from the Surrealist exploration of the inner psychological world. As Dalí explains, he has deliberately produced an 'Anti-psychological self-portrait; instead of painting the soul – the inside – I wanted to paint solely the outside: the envelope, "the glove of myself"' (Robert Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí*, Macmillan, London, 1962, p. 142).

The floppy skin, although swarthy and perhaps suggestive of the global darkness of world war, far from appearing flaccid radiates youth, a reference to Dalí's belief that skin itself is a vital representation of ourselves.

Dalí's obsession with the crutch, a recurring motif in his oeuvre, began when as a child he discovered the bifurcated object in the attic of the home of the Pichots, family friends with whom he was spending the summer. In his autobiography he reveals this early fascination for the remarkable properties of a crutch, explaining that he felt it 'would be useful for life and at the same time for death, something to push with and to lean on: a weapon and a protection, an embrace and a caress' (Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier, Dial Press, New York, 1942, p. 87).

The crutch also inspired one of Dalí's witty jewellery designs made from gold and rubies 'for the criminally elegant American woman' to hang in her nose 'in order to feel the sacred pinch of exhibitionism encrusted in the flesh of her face' (Fleur Cowles, *The Case of Salvador Dalí*, Heinemann, London, 1959, p. 288).

Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48

Soft self-portrait with grilled bacon
 1941

oil on canvas

61.0 x 51.0 cm

Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,

Figueres

© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, VISCOPY, 2009

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The hyperrealistic piece of crispy, grilled bacon basking in strong light on the plinth, a sharp contrast to the shadowy, drooping head, may be a direct reference to the artist's breakfasts at the St Regis Hotel in New York. However, the presence of ants swarming around the eyes and mouth, read in combination with the bacon may indicate the more symbolic pronouncement that Dalí constantly offers himself as inspirational 'food' that will 'succulently nourish our time' (Descharnes 1962, p. 142). It has also been suggested that the bacon is a visual pun for the homonym 'art' (in French, 'lard' means bacon and 'l'art' is the word for art).

The imposing nature of the self-portrait, reminiscent in shape of a grand piano, and the confidence suggested by the elongated, authoritative tongue-like shape beneath his head, confirm Dalí's public persona, perhaps overriding the hint of insecurity indicated by the multiple props and supports. In 'The last scandal of Salvador Dalí', the artist heralds the birth of a new morphological age characterised by a return to classical form, control, structure and precise technique in art, which would take the place of the preceding psychological era. However, on the whole, the paintings exhibited did not yet reveal the radical departure in style that he was predicting.

Anti-psychological self-portrait; instead of painting the soul – the inside – I wanted to paint solely the outside: the envelope, 'the glove of myself'. This glove of myself is edible, and even a little gamey; this is why ants are shown, together with a strip of bacon. I am the most generous of painters, since I am constantly offering myself to be eaten, and I thus succulently nourish our time.

Salvador Dalí quoted in Robert Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí*, 1962.

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Dalí the man

Dalí under the microscope



Why might
Dalí have
wanted to
paint 'the
glove of
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Looking and discussing

- What is the nature of a self-portrait? What are your favourite self-portraits and why?
- What aspects of this self-portrait surprise or puzzle you?
- In what ways is it different from a conventional self-portrait?
- Which characteristic features of Dalí's face are clearly visible in the self-portrait?
- Construct a T-Bar chart. List all the things you see in the left-hand column and what they make you feel in the right-hand column, as shown in the example below.

See	Feel
Drooping eyes	Sadness, insecurity
Stretched skin	Tension, anxiety
Melting bronze sculpture	Constantly changing identity
A shed skin like that of a snake	A new beginning

- What opposite concepts can you find in the portrait, such as rigid/soft, strength/weakness, baggy/taught, real/unreal, bravado/shyness, solidity/emptiness? **How** might these increase your understanding of what Dalí is communicating about himself?
- Read the comment Dalí made about this painting in the quote above. **Why** might Dalí have wanted to paint 'the glove of myself' rather than his soul?
- The use of symbols has occurred throughout art history as a means of communicating an idea. It also occurs in many other fields, such as literature, mathematics and today's popular culture. Dalí explains that he has used the symbols of bacon and ants to show that he is 'edible'. **What might he be suggesting** about himself when he says: 'I am the most generous of painters, since I am constantly offering myself to be eaten, and I thus succulently nourish our time'?
- Read the text on this site about the self-portrait to **find out why** crutches are important to Dalí.
- What might each of the following symbols be communicating about Dalí at the time he painted this self-portrait: the crutches, the drooping face, the elongated tongue shape, the pedestal on which the face stands?
- **What do you most like** and dislike about this self-portrait?

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Dalí the man

Dalí under the microscope



“He had a reputation that was hard to salvage. I have had to work very hard to make it clear how serious he really was”

— Stanley Meisler

The language of art

The vocabulary game: Write down the first word that comes to mind when you look at *Soft self-portrait with grilled bacon*. Use the last letter of the word to find another descriptor for the painting. Continue until you have created a bank of interesting words. Example: weird, droopy, yellowing, grimace, enigmatic.

Use some of these words and the ideas generated by the questions above to create an enticing poster which uses this self-portrait to advertise a Salvador Dalí exhibition.

Researching

- Using libraries and the internet, **research the works** of Giorgio de Chirico. **Discuss and analyse** their unique qualities. Why might he have been a strong influence on Dalí, Magritte and other Surrealists?
- Locate Chirico's *The philosopher's conquest* of 1914 and **discuss the symbolism** in the painting. Why might Dalí have wanted to quote the artist's canon in *Daddy Longlegs of the evening – Hope!*, 1940, on this site.
- Using this site and other sources, **research Dalí's work** before 1940 and his subsequent works up to the 1980s.
- Some commentators are scathing of Dalí's work after 1940. For example, Robert Hughes, while acknowledging the power and originality of his early paintings, dismissed his later works as 'kitschy repetition of old motifs or vulgarly pompous piety on a Cinemascope scale' (Robert Hughes, *The Guardian*, London, 2004).
- Dawn Ades, a renowned Dalí scholar from the University of Essex, has explained that when she began specialising in his work thirty-four years ago her colleagues were astounded. She has been quoted as saying: 'He had a reputation that was hard to salvage. I have had to work very hard to make it clear how serious he really was' (Stanley Meisler, *Smithsonian*, April 2005).
- Why might some commentators have reacted to Dalí's later work in this way? **Consider** what art movements were becoming popular at the time and Dalí's public persona. **Explain whether you agree or disagree** with Hughes's comment with reference to some of Dalí's later work.
- Locate** the painting *Soft construction with boiled beans – Premonition of civil war*, 1936, which is related to *Daddy Longlegs of the evening – Hope!* on this site. In what ways are the paintings similar?
- Locate** Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, which also explores the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. **Discuss whether you agree** with Robert Hughes that *Soft construction with boiled beans – Premonition of civil war*, is probably Dalí's greatest painting, believing that it, not *Guernica*, 'is modern art's strongest testimony on the civil war, and on war in general' (Robert Hughes, *The Guardian*, London, 2004).

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33.6 x 26.0 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida

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“Just because
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— Dalí

Dalí the man

Dalí under the microscope



The bigger picture – thinking beyond

‘He’s a real thinking machine.’

Antonio Pichot, family friend, *Arena*, BBC TV, 1986.

‘Dalí is a man of tireless scientific curiosity. Every discovery and invention enters into his work.’

Cristina Judge, Centre for Dalí Studies, *El Punt*, 12 September 2005.

- Discuss the quotations above. **Explain with reference** to some of Dalí’s works where you may see evidence of these ideas.
- Dalí often declared from an early age that he was a genius. **What in your opinion constitutes a genius** and does Dalí fit this criteria?
- Why might the work from Dalí’s Surrealist period elicit such powerful emotional responses? **Discuss with reference** to one of his works.
- Dalí’s later work is now being re-evaluated by art historians and critics in exhibitions such as the NGV’s *Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire*, 2009. Why might this be so? **Consider what factors** affect the way in which an artist is regarded in the years after their death.
- The respected art commentator Robert Lubar has argued that all Dalí’s oeuvre can be regarded as self-portraiture. **Discuss whether you agree or disagree** with this statement with reference to some of Dalí’s paintings.
- Could it be argued that all works of art are self-portraits? **Give examples** of contemporary art and artists where in your opinion this may or may not be true.

The question of interpretation

- **Discuss** the following quote by Dalí: ‘just because I don’t know the meaning of my art, does not mean it has no meaning.’
- What do you believe he meant by this statement? What might this suggest about the nature of art? **Explain** whether you believe his argument can be justified or not.
- Dalí’s work has been interpreted variously by different commentators including Dalí himself. What factors affect the way we interpret a work of art? **Consider** culture, age, personal experience, deference to specialist art commentators.
- To what extent does it matter if there are multiple interpretations of a work that are different to the artist’s intention?

Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48

Philippe HALSMAN

Latvian/American 1906–79, worked in France 1931–40

My hairspring 1954

from the *Dalí’s mustache* series

gelatin silver photograph

30.5 x 25.4 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum,

StPetersburg, Florida

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Dalí, Figueres, 2009.

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MELBOURNE WINTER MASTERPIECES

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Dalí the man

Secrets of the Dalinian World



I think that in order to proceed from *The lacemaker* to the sunflower, from the sunflower to the rhinoceros, and from the rhinoceros to the cauliflower, one must really have something inside one's skull (Salvador Dalí).

Elliott H. King, *Dalí Atomicus, or the Prodigious Adventure of the Lacemaker and the Rhinoceros*, SLS Annual Meeting, 10–13 October 2002, Pasadena, California.

Dalí, like artists throughout history from Leonardo da Vinci to Paul Cézanne, tried to reduce form to elementary geometric volumes. He believed he had discovered that the logarithmic spiral found in rhinoceros horn could also be identified in sunflowers, cauliflower heads and Johannes Vermeer's painting *The lacemaker*, 1669–70.

In December 1955 Dalí delivered a lecture at the Sorbonne University in Paris entitled 'On the phenomenological aspects of the paranoiac-critical method', which explored this connection. He arrived at the university in a white Rolls Royce Phantom 11 that belonged to his friend, the French painter Georges Mathieu. In order to create a spectacle, Mathieu had filled the car with 500 kilograms of cauliflowers! After the lecture they were donated to a Catholic sisterhood.

Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48

Philippe HALSMAN

Latvian/American 1906–79, worked in France 1931–40

Dalí and the rhinoceros 1956

gelatin silver photograph

24.1 x 31.8 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida

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