

A National
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 Victoria
 Education
 Resource

Dalí and the media

Introduction



Dalí's
 sensibility
 was
 naturally in
 tune with the
 zany humour
 of the Marx
 Brothers

Dalí grew up in the era of silent movies, admiring the work of innovative slapstick comedians such as Buster Keating and Harry Langdon. He developed a lifelong fascination with cinema, which initially flowered when he became a pioneer of avant-garde Surrealist film, and culminated in his collaborations with Hollywood celebrities and producers. The filmic world was an important formative influence which allowed him to further explore the power of illusion.

His first film, *Un Chien andalou*, 1929, produced in collaboration with fellow Surrealist Luis Buñuel, was lauded as a turning point in the history of cinema. The opening scene, where a cloud floating across a full moon in the night sky fades into a knife slicing through the eye of a young woman, typifies the bizarre and irrational events that follow in no logical sequence.

The artist was equally fascinated by the power of photography to create a fantastical world in which dream and reality merge. He entered into a number of collaborations with notable photographers, including Man Ray, Brassäi, Cecil Beaton, Eric Schaal and Philippe Halsman.

Dalí's sensibility was naturally in tune with the zany humour of the Marx Brothers, a comedic troupe of brothers from America known for lampooning the conventions of social respectability, and for whom he wrote a screenplay called *The Surrealist Woman*, which was never filmed. He created a surreal harp with strings of barbed wire for Harpo Marx, who responded by presenting Dalí with a photo of himself playing the harp with bandaged fingers.

Dalí was acutely aware of the possibilities that cinema, and later television, offered him to engage with mass culture. While in exile in the United States in the 1940s, the artist's Surrealist vision was embraced by Hollywood. He created the dream sequence for *Spellbound*, Alfred Hitchcock's powerful drama inspired by Sigmund Freud's theories on psychoanalysis, and also designed visuals with Walt Disney's studio for a short film entitled *Destino*. While the latter project never reached fruition at the time, it was finally completed in 2003 by a contemporary team of Disney animators and features some of the artist's iconic Surrealist images, including the melting clock.

The advent of television was eagerly grasped by Dalí, who saw the opportunity to publicise himself to a vast audience. He appeared in a number of advertisements including Lanvin chocolate, and frequently took part in interviews.

UNITED STATES

Salvador Dalí and Harpo Marx 1937
 gelatin silver photograph
 25,3 x 20,4 cm
 Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,
 Figueres
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 Salvador Dalí, VISCOPY, 2009
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 Dalí, Figueres, 2009.

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Spellbound
 was
 nominated
 for 'Best
 Picture' at
 the Academy
 Awards

In 1945 Dalí accepted a commission from Alfred Hitchcock to create a dream sequence in the psychological drama *Spellbound*, an ambitious exploration of Freudian analysis, later nominated for 'Best Picture' at the Academy Awards. The two men got on well and Dalí is known to have commented at the time that 'Hitchcock is one of the rare personages I have met lately who has some mystery' (*Dalí News*, 20 November 1945, p. 2). The film, starring Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck, tells the story of psychiatrist Dr Constance Peterson, who falls in love with a patient suffering from loss of memory and mistakenly believes that he has committed a murder. She protects him from the police and the plot is resolved when she uses her psychoanalytical skills to restore his memory.

Hitchcock, anxious to move away from the traditional portrayal of dreams as blurred and hazy, was attracted by the hard-edged, hyper-real style of the Catalan painter. The film's producer, David O. Selznick, however, keenly aware of Dalí's growing popularity with national magazines, was more interested in capitalising on the surreal behaviour and shock value associated with the artist's name.

Dalí illustrated the patient's dreams using a painted collage of pictorial clues that hinted at his identity and provided clues to the possible murderer. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the film was the disquieting atmosphere created by the two backdrops painted in tones of black and white and featuring an intense patchwork of startled eyes.

Despite the fact that Dalí's sets were dramatically edited by cutting and overpainting following the initial filming, he was still paid the negotiated fee of four thousand US dollars, an immense sum of money. He had also demanded that he be allowed to keep half of his original paintings and drawings, which were of considerable commercial value.

It was this kind of hard-nosed behaviour and engagement with popular culture that led Dalí to incur the wrath of André Breton, the founder of Surrealism, who in reference to his commercial approach to art nicknamed him Avida Dollars, an anagram of Salvador Dalí.

Salvador DALÍ

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

Set design for the film *Spellbound*:
Eyes and staircase (c. 1945) (detail)
 oil and gouache on composition
 board

88.8 x 113.1 cm

Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,
 Figueres (0329)

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

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Halsman was well known for his 'Jumpology' photographs

Although Dalí had worked with the Surrealist photographers Man Ray and Brassai in the early 1930s, his most considered investigations of photography were to take place in the United States.

In 1941 Dalí met the Latvian-born Philippe Halsman, who became one of America's leading portrait photographers. He was well known for his 'Jumpology' photographs, which were based on the principle that 'When you ask a person to jump, his attention is mostly directed toward the act of jumping and the mask falls so that the real person appears'. This highly unusual strategy was employed in some of his portraits of celebrities, including the famous jump photo of Marilyn Monroe featured on the cover of *Life* magazine.

Dalí recognised Halsman's potential as a collaborator with exceptional technical skill who could realise Dalinian ideas in a medium that the public had increasingly come to associate with 'the Truth'. Dalí and Halsman became close friends and were to work together for more than thirty years, creating some of the most iconic photographic images of the artist. Their collaboration resulted in the book *Dalí's Moustache* (published by Simon and Schuster in 1954), dedicated to the artist's increasingly stylised facial hair. Dalí cultivated this 'hairy protuberance', as Halsman called it, with enormous care as a physical symbol of his genius, fortifying it with Hungarian moustache wax.

Dalí Atomicus, 1948, explores the idea of suspension and the title refers to Dalí's explorations of nuclear imagery in paintings such as *Leda Atomica*, which can be seen in the right of the photograph behind the two cats.

The interview with Dirk Armstrong on this webpage tells us just how this fascinating photograph was made in a pre-computer era.

Salvador DALÍ

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

Philippe HALSMAN

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

Dalí Atomicus 1948

gelatin silver photograph

26.7 x 34.3 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum, St

Petersburg, Florida

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Dalí, Figueres, 2009.

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Dalí and the media

Dalí under the microscope



Symbols include eyes, curtains, scissors, playing cards, a man with no face and a wheel

Nothing seems to me more suited to be devoured by the surrealist fire than those mysterious strips of 'hallucinatory celluloid' turned out so unconsciously in Hollywood, and in which we have already seen appear, stupefied, so many images of authentic delirium, chance and dream.

Salvador Dalí, 'Surrealism in Hollywood', *Harper's Bazaar*, 1937

Dalí on the set of *Spellbound*

http://www.studio-international.co.uk/studio-images/dali/8424_b.asp

Looking and discussing

- What does *Eyes and staircase* make you think or wonder about?
- How has Dalí used tone and contrast to create mood?
- What effect is created by the repetition of eyes?
- View the *Spellbound* dream sequence in the exhibition or if possible rent and watch the whole film on DVD. The dream sequence contains a number of symbols, including eyes, curtains, scissors, playing cards, a man with no face and a wheel, which the two doctors use to discover the true identity of the murderer in the film.
- What might the wheel symbolise? What is unusual about the shape of the wheel? How might this shape refer specifically to Dalí?
- The eye is symbolic in many of Dalí's paintings. What might the eyes in *Eyes and staircase* symbolise?
- What particular characteristics of Dalí's art are evident in the dream sequence?
- Why might the director of the film, Alfred Hitchcock, have wanted to move away from the hazy quality normally applied to dreams in films?
- Discuss other films or television dramas you may have seen containing dream sequences. In what ways are they similar to or different from *Spellbound*?
- What advances in science and technology have affected the way films are made today? Discuss how a director might re-make the dream sequence in *Spellbound* today in order to attract a contemporary audience. Consider the actors they might employ, use of computer technologies and style.

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Set design for the film *Spellbound*:
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oil and gouache on composition board

88.8 x 113.1 cm

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

Dalí under the microscope



The language of art

- Choose one eye from *Eyes and staircase* and describe it in detail – use evocative words and similes to evoke the particular character of that eye, such as a serene eye gazing slyly, a bulging eye staring accusingly from a pendulous swathe of fabric or a sinister eye rimmed with lashes like the menacing spikes of a sea urchin.
- Imagine you are describing *Eyes and staircase* to someone who has never seen it before. In one sentence create a 'picture' of it with words. It may be helpful to start with: 'A forest of giant eyes popping out of ...'



UNITED STATES

Salvador Dalí in front of one of his sets for Alfred Hitchcock's film *Spellbound* (1944)
gelatin silver photograph
8.2 x 10.3 cm
Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, VISCOPY, 2009

Andy WARHOL

American 1928–87
Self portrait no. 9 1986
synthetic polymer paint and screenprint on canvas
203.5 x 203.7 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the National Gallery Women's Association, Governor, 1987
© Andy Warhol/ARS. Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia

Researching

- Discover and discuss other material involving Dalí in film and television such as *Salvador Dalí and Gala born from an egg*, *Salvador Dalí and Vermeer's Lacemaker* and the advertisement for Lanvin chocolate.
- **The eye** was a common symbol among the **Surrealists**. Research and discuss with reference to examples of Surrealist or Surrealist-influenced film, painting or photography.
- Research the work and lifestyles of twentieth-century US artists Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons. Discuss in what ways they may be regarded as similar to Dalí. Explain why some art commentators believe they were profoundly influenced by Dalí.

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Dalí under the microscope



... the result satisfied my striving for perfection. My assistants and I were wet, dirty, and near complete exhaustion – only the cats still looked like new.

— **Halsman** in his book *Halsman on the Creation of Photographic Ideas*, 1961

Use the
words to
create a
Surrealist or
dreamlike
poem

Looking and discussing

- Describe everything you can see happening in this photograph. Discuss which elements are real and which appear to be surreal.
- Discuss how this photograph might have been constructed considering that computer technologies were not available in the 1930s.
- Find out if you are correct – listen to Dirk Armstrong’s explanation on this site or to the commentary about the making of the work on the audio guide.
- How might a photographic image such as this be created today?
- In his 1961 book, *Halsman on the Creation of Photographic Ideas*, Philippe Halsman explained how to produce unusual pieces of work by following three rules: ‘the rule of the unusual technique’, ‘the rule of the added unusual feature’ and ‘the rule of the missing feature’. Explain how each of these rules is employed in *Dalí Atomicus*.
- Discuss how you might react to this photograph from three different perspectives, such as an animal rights campaigner, a psychologist, a poet, or a cat.

The language of art

- Create your own caption or newspaper headline for this image.
- List all the words that come to mind when you look at this image. Find at least one synonym for each word. Use the words to create a Surrealist or dreamlike poem. Research the poetry of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, whose nonsensical writings may provide inspiration.

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26.7 x 34.3 cm

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Dalí under the microscope

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Dalí was criticised in the art world for involving himself in popular culture such as film and television



Researching

- Research other photographic collaborations between Halsman and Dalí such as the image above. In each case, describe and discuss how you believe they were created and what characteristics identify them as Surrealist works.
- Research the work of other twentieth-century Surrealist photographers such as Man Ray, Maurice Tabard and Dora Maar. Discuss what techniques they used to make ordinary, everyday objects into compelling and bizarre images.

The bigger picture – Thinking beyond

- Discuss what Dalí might have meant when he said that photography grasps 'the most subtle and uncontrollable poetry!' (Salvador Dalí, 'Photography, pure creation of the mind', in *L'Amic de les Arts (Sitges)*, no.18, 30 September, 1927, p. 9).
- Discuss in what ways and why the role of Western art may have changed in the twentieth century.
- Find out what is meant by 'high' and 'low' art. Explain how these terms may be applied to Dalí's art with reference to images on this education resource, books and the internet.
- Dalí was criticised by some artists and commentators in the art world for involving himself in popular culture such as film and television. What do you believe should be the role of the artist in contemporary society? Discuss with reference to Dalí and other twentieth- or twenty-first-century artists whether it is possible to deliberately engage with a mass audience and still be regarded seriously.

Salvador DALÍ

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

Dalí and the skull
(*In Voluptate Mors*) 1951
gelatin silver photograph
34.3 x 26.7 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum,
St Petersburg, Florida

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