

# Introduction



Catalonia is a  
land of both  
exquisite  
beauty  
and harsh  
austerity

In Portlligat, I take care of my orchard and my boat: in other words of the canvas I am finishing. Like a good worker, I covet simple things: eating grilled sardines and strolling with Gala along the beach at sunset and seeing how the Gothic rocks are transformed into nightmares by the darkness ... I need to be in Portlligat, to see the sailors, the colour of the olive trees and the bread, to feel the landscape, with its uncton and inner peace.

**Sebastià Roig, *Dalí y El Triángulo de l'Empordà* (Figueres, 2003) pp.102, 134.**

Catalonia, the region in north-eastern Spain where Salvador Dalí spent his formative childhood and adolescent years, is a land of both exquisite beauty and harsh austerity. The seemingly bizarre and fantastical rock formations and sweeping landscape vistas that frame so many of Dalí's classic and celebrated Surrealist paintings are, in fact, faithful representations of the rugged and breathtaking *terribilità* of the local Catalan landscapes that inspired and nourished the artist throughout his life – the majestic Empordà Plain and the rocks and waves at Cadaqués, Portlligat and the Cap de Creus. Over centuries, this arid coastline etched with little creeks has been pummelled by violent storms that lash the sea against the rocks, carving out geological structures suggestive of animals or human forms.

Dalí has referred to Cadaqués, where he spent his childhood summers, as 'the best place in the world' (Mary Ann Caws, *Salvador Dalí*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London, 2008, p. 15). The eccentric shape of a rock nearby lent its silhouette to his key composition, *The great masturbator*, 1929 (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid).

His Surrealist friends found the coastal village equally inspiring and it was here that the poet Federico García Lorca wrote his *Ode to Salvador Dalí*, which lyrically describes the wide, peaceful bay.

## Salvador DALÍ

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

*The angel of Portlligat* 1952

oil on canvas

57.8 x 77.5 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum, St

Petersburg, Florida

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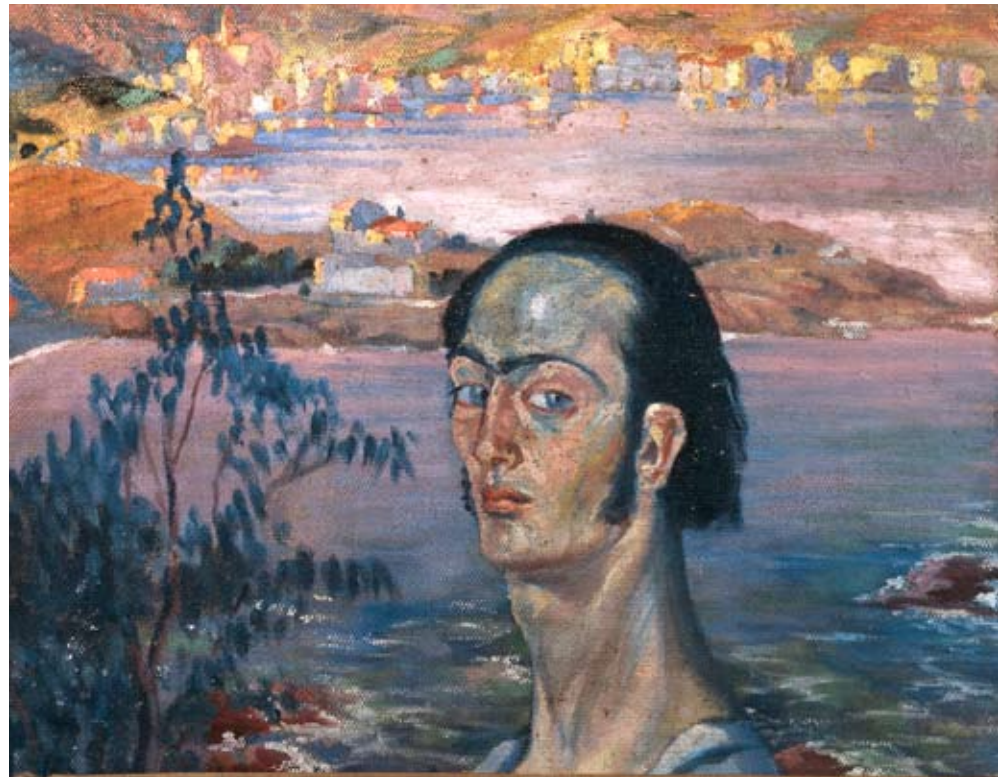


**Extract from *Ode to Salvador Dalí*:**

Cadaqués, at the fulcrum of water and hill,  
lifts flights of stairs and hides seashells.  
Wooden flutes pacify the air.  
An ancient woodland god gives the children fruit.  
Her fishermen sleep dreamless on the sand.  
On the high sea a rose is their compass.  
The horizon, virgin of wounded handkerchiefs,  
links the great crystals of fish and moon.  
A hard diadem of white brigantines  
encircles bitter foreheads and hair of sand.  
The sirens convince, but they don't beguile,  
and they come if we show a glass of fresh water.  
Oh Salvador Dalí, of the olive-coloured voice!  
I do not praise your halting adolescent brush  
or your pigments that flirt with the pigment of your times,  
but I laud your longing for eternity with limits.

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This self-  
portrait is  
a homage  
to Raphael,  
the Italian  
Renaissance  
artist

Dalí was only seventeen when he painted *Self-portrait with Raphaelesque neck*, a depiction of himself against a backdrop of the Cadaqués landscape at sunset. The painting was created partly in his studio, where he retreated in the heat of the Mediterranean summer to record the likeness of himself in front of a mirror. In order to capture the particular light of the scene he returned to it every day at the same time when the village was flooded in sunlight and the cliff in the foreground was bathed in shadow.

The painting was executed during the period when he experimented with a variety of styles, colour effects and techniques such as impasto. The shimmering early evening light and broad, broken brush strokes reveal his interest in Impressionism, which he described as 'the school of painting which has in fact made the deepest impression on me in life because it represented my first contact with an anti-academic and revolutionary aesthetic theory. I did not have eyes enough to see all that I wanted to see in those thick and formless daubs of paint ...' (Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1998, p. 87).

Dalí's appreciation of the Fauvist movement led by Henri Matisse, which attached greater importance to colour than form, is also evident in the exuberant colour combinations.

The self-portrait is a homage to Raphael, the Italian Renaissance artist Dalí so revered and whose self-portrait he was familiar with. Dalí appears to be confidently predicting that in his chosen vocation as an artist he will attain the genius and fame of his hero. The self-assured, arrogant pose, distinctive sideburns and long hair allude to the weird persona he deliberately cultivated from his adolescence onwards, and which led to the showmanship that characterised him throughout his life.



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The painting,  
one of only  
six in this  
style, reflects  
the influence  
of Picasso



*Figure on the rocks* reveals Dalí's lifelong fascination with the anthropomorphic – an imaginative practice often adopted by local Catalan fishermen, whereby aspects of the landscape, particularly unusual geographical features, are associated with human forms, so as to assist them with locating their position in the sea.

Dalí later utilised this idea when he developed his paranoiac-critical method of creating Surrealist art based on the concept of double imagery, the human mind's ability to link ideas and objects that are not connected in a rational view of the world.

The undulating lines, shadowy crevices and flowing waterfall depicted on the figure may be suggestive of the mountain range south of Cadaqués known as Toroella de Montgri, where the work was painted, and which is well known for delineating the outline of a reclining woman.

The ample figure stretched out in the form of a cross on the rocks is a distorted portrait of Dalí's devoted sister Ana-María, whose profile is cast in shadow on her right arm. She was his favourite model until she was replaced by Gala, with whom Dalí began an enduring relationship in 1929.

The painting, one of only six in this style, reflects the influence of Picasso, whom Dalí met in his Paris studio in 1926. The synthesis of the momentous scale and distortion of the draped figure, and the geometric structure of the work, suggest that the canvases he saw during the visit, including grossly distorted bathers in neoclassical style and recent Cubist compositions, may have been his source of inspiration.

**Salvador DALÍ**

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

*Figure on the rocks* 1926

oil on wood panel

27.3 x 40.6 cm

The Salvador Dalí Museum,  
St Petersburg, Florida

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

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I am home only here; elsewhere I am camping out.

— Salvador Dalí, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí (as told to Andre Parinaud)*, Quartet Books, London, 1977.

Portlligat is one of the most arid, mineral and planetary spots on the earth. The mornings are of a savage and bitter, ferociously analytical and structural gaiety; the evenings often become morbidly melancholy, and the olive trees, bright and animated in the morning, are metamorphosed into motionless grey, like lead. The morning breeze writes smiles of joyous little waves on its waters; in the evening very often, because of the offshore islands that make of Portlligat a kind of lake, the water becomes so calm that it mirrors the drama of the early twilight sky.

— Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, Dial Press, New York, 1942, p. 268.

Dalí's intense  
relationship  
with  
Portlligat  
was a major  
influence  
throughout  
his adult life.

Dalí's intense relationship with Portlligat was a major influence throughout his adult life. In 1930 Dalí and Gala bought a small fisherman's cottage in the coastal village where they would retire every summer (except during the Spanish Civil War when they lived in Paris) to allow Dalí to work in total seclusion. As the couple grew wealthier from sales of paintings the house was extended to include more cottages, transforming the original modest proportions to a labyrinth of slender corridors, stairways and mysterious places that crept up the steep cliffs overlooking the bay.

*The angel of Portlligat* fuses Dalí's passion for the local landscape with his increasing interest in mysticism and renewed engagement with Roman Catholicism. It is one of several paintings made between 1950 and 1952 where unexpected and bizarre events occur in a depiction of the bay, which is almost photographic in detail.

Gala, whom Dalí casts as a number of symbolic characters, including artistic muse, mysterious child-woman and the Madonna, is seen here in the guise of a divine messenger, the tiny angel in the foreground. The painting illustrates his native landscape as a holy site of divine communion where Dalí connects himself with the natural beauty of Portlligat and God.

Dalí was obsessed with the distinctive outline of the rocky outcrop, depicted in the distance of the painting, and the connections and images it evoked. His house was designed so that every window framed a view of this geological formation which so inspired many of his works, including the sculpture of 1934, *Hysterical and aerodynamic nude – Woman on the rock*. Later in his life, when he became obsessed with rhinoceros horns, he began to 'see' this distinctive shape in the rock formation.

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*The angel of Portlligat* 1952

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# Salvador DALÍ Liquid Desire

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Dalí and the land

# Dalí under the microscope



I spent a delicious summer, as always, in the ideal and dreamy village of Cadaqués. There, beside the Latin sea, I gorged myself on light and colour. I spent the fiery days of summer painting frenetically and trying to capture the incomparable beauty of the sea and of the sun-drenched beach.

Salvador Dalí's letter to his uncle, 1919, Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*, Faber and Faber, London, 1997, p.65

## Looking and Discussing

- What are your first thoughts or impressions when you look at this work? **What does it make you think** or wonder about?
- **What clues may reveal** that Dalí was only seventeen when he painted this self-portrait?
- What might Dalí's pose and expression tell you about him? If the self-portrait could speak, what might Dalí have said?
- How would you describe the style of the painting? Is it realistic or are some parts exaggerated or simplified? If so **how** does this emphasise aspects of Dalí's character?
- If the self-portrait had appeared in a newspaper or magazine review in 1921, what caption or headline might a journalist have written to accompany it?
- **Use the zoom tool** on this site to examine the brush strokes and colour combinations in detail.
- **Create a list** of the art elements, such as colour, line, shape, texture, and so on, that you believe are most important in creating the mood or atmosphere of this painting.
- **Compile a list** of descriptive words and phrases that relate to each of the art elements you have chosen. For example: Colour – shadowy blues in the foreground, splashes of faded pink, burnt orange and lavender shimmering in the early evening light.

Consider the  
descriptive  
language  
the artist  
would use to  
conjure up  
an image

### Salvador DALÍ

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

*Self-portrait with Raphaelesque neck* (c. 1921)

oil on canvas

40.5 x 53.0 cm

Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,

Figueres

Dalí Bequest

© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-

Salvador Dalí, VISCOPY, 2009

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# Dalí under the microscope



Describe  
which  
aspects of  
the portrait  
Dalí has  
borrowed

### The language of art

- **Imagine** you are Dalí writing a postcard to a friend about the Cadaqués landscape depicted in the painting. Consider the descriptive language the artist would use to conjure up an image of the view for his friend who has never seen it before.
- **Discover** Dalí's self-portrait as a group: One student should choose an aspect of the portrait, such as the neck, hairstyle, pose or the expression in Dalí's eyes, and describe it in detail. Other students then build upon the description by adding new material. When this aspect is exhausted continue the same process with other parts of the portrait.
- **Discuss how** this group description may have contributed to your enjoyment and understanding of the self-portrait.
- **Compare and contrast** *Self-portrait with Raphaelesque neck*, c. 1921, with *View of Cadaqués from the Creus Tower*, c. 1923, painted just two years later. Imagine you are an art historian or critic and write an article for art students exploring the differences between the two paintings. Consider the mood, style, technique, influences and art elements, such as colour, line, shape, form and texture.

### Researching

- Research the history of French Impressionism and make a list of the key characteristics associated with this art movement. **Describe features** such as the brushstrokes, subject matter, composition, use of colour, texture and style.
- **Explain the ways** in which this painting shows the influence of Impressionism with reference to your list of characteristics.
- Locate a self-portrait of Renaissance artist Raphael in a library or on the internet. Describe which aspects of the portrait Dalí has borrowed for his painting. **Discuss why** Dalí, aged seventeen, might have wanted to compare himself with Raphael.

#### Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48  
*View of Cadaqués from the Creus Tower* (c.1923) (detail)  
oil on canvas  
98.0 x 100.0 cm  
Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,  
Figueres  
Dalí Bequest

#### Salvador DALÍ

Spanish 1904–89, worked in United States 1940–48  
*Self-portrait with Raphaelesque neck* (c. 1921) (detail)  
oil on canvas  
40.5 x 53.0 cm  
Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí,  
Figueres  
Dalí Bequest  
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, VISCOPY, 2009



# Dalí under the microscope



## Looking and Discussing

- **Describe** which features of the painting surprise or puzzle you.
- Why do you believe Dalí has foreshortened the figure? **What qualities** might it add to the painting?
- Some commentators have suggested that the figure in this painting is suggestive of features in the landscape around Cadaqués, where Dalí spent his childhood summers.
- Use the zoom tool to look closely at this painting – **discuss which aspects** may remind you of particular rock formations or landscapes that you are familiar with.
- **Create a table** like the one below. In the first column, make a list of the art elements and/or principles that you believe are most important in this artwork. In the second column, list descriptive words or phrases that relate to these elements.

Line	Sharp, hard-edged, angular
Texture	Smooth, silken
Colour	Mottled smokey blue, deep liquid brown
Form	The rigid figure like a starfish or a cross
Contrast	Intense black shadows highlight the pale sandy yellow of the figure
Scale	Momentous scale of the figure like an Amazon woman

In what ways have your descriptions increased your understanding of the painting?

## Researching

- **Research** the history of the Cubist art movement and make a list of its key characteristics. In what ways might this painting suggest that Dalí was influenced by Cubism? Annotate a copy of the work, illustrating where Cubist elements occur.
- Locate Mantegna Andrea's *Dead Christ*, 1490, on the internet or in a library. In what ways is the painting similar to or different from *Figure on the rocks*, 1926? **Consider** the pose, style, colour, view and intention of the artist in each case.
- Other artists, like Dalí in this painting, have explored the links between landscape and the human form. **Research the work** of twentieth-century sculptor Henry Moore and photographer Bill Brandt.

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# Dalí under the microscope



## Looking and Discussing

- What are your first thoughts or impressions when you look at this work? **What does it make you think** or wonder about?
- Describe everything you can see. What might be happening? **What might happen** next?
- What mood has Dalí evoked in the painting? Use the zoom tool on this site to examine the painting techniques he has used to create this mood. **Consider** the brush strokes, texture and use of colour.
- **Why** might Dalí have painted an image of his wife Gala as an angel, in the bay of Portlligat that he so loved?
- Use the zoom tool to study a close-up view of the figures. **Write a detailed description** of one of them by using descriptive language, such as adjectives, simile and metaphor, to 'paint' a picture with words. Include details of what the figure might be doing, thinking or dreaming of.
- **What aspects** of the work may suggest that Dalí was interested in mysticism and Roman Catholicism when he painted this image?
- **Compare and contrast** this painting with *Woman resting – Figure on the rocks*, 1926. Consider subject matter, art elements, technique and style.
- Choose one of Dalí's works from the 1930s that you admire. **How** does the style and mood of this painting compare with *The Angel of Portlligat*, 1952?
- Use the zoom tool to examine the rocky island in the bay which inspired Dalí. **Make a list** of all the things it reminds you of – consider animals, human forms and buildings.

## Researching

- Using this site and other references, **study** how Dalí incorporates rock formations in his paintings to create a surreal atmosphere.
- Research images of unusual or bizarre rock formations, such as Hanging Rock and the Bungle Bungles in Australia or the unusual geology of Cappadocia in Turkey. What human, animal or man-made forms do they remind you of? **Let your imagination run freely** and use the rocks and/or what they suggest to you to create a surreal artwork or piece of writing.

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## The Bigger Picture – Thinking Beyond

- **What** might Dalí have meant when he said:

'Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing'?

- **Discuss with reference** to works by Dalí and another artist whom you believe illustrates the point made in this quotation.
- Dalí received his first drawing lessons at the age of ten from Ramon Pichot, a celebrated Impressionist painter, who was a friend of both his father and Pablo Picasso. Dalí's first words to Picasso on visiting him in Paris, 1927, were:

*'I came to see you before the Louvre museum.'*

*'Well, you did the right thing, young man' replied the painter from Málaga, Spain.*

- What does the dialogue above **suggest** about Dalí's relationship with Picasso?
- Research brief biographies of Dalí and Picasso using the internet. What characteristics did the two artists have in common and what made them so different? – **consider** their nationality, personality, politics and contribution to the development of twentieth-century art.
- What characteristics make Dalí's landscape paintings different from conventional depictions of the landscape?
- **Explain**, with references to his paintings, why Dalí might be regarded by some as the landscape artist of Spain.

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# Secrets of the Dalinian World



One of Dalí's favourite foods was sea urchins, considered to be a great delicacy in Catalan. He was so passionate about them that he even designed a handbag inspired by their shape and texture. When Dalí was expelled from home by his father for having a relationship with Gala, a married woman, he protested by shaving his head and burying his hair in the beach at Cadaqués. His Surrealist friend, the film-maker Luis Buñuel, then photographed him with a sea urchin balanced on his head, a reference to the legend of William Tell.