

The Early Years (1904 - 1929)

When Salvador Dalí was born in 1904 in Figueras, Spain, he was actually the third Salvador Dalí. His father was named Salvador, and he had an older brother, who had died 9 months before Dalí's own birth. Because of the incredibly coincidental dates between the death of the first child and the birth of the second, Salvador Dalí's parents chose to look at the second son as a reincarnation of the first, and as such, treated him accordingly. OUR Salvador Dalí was actually told that he was the reincarnation of his dead brother, and Dalí himself admits that the ghostly memory of this lost sibling was to haunt him for the rest of his life. He was taken to the grave of the older brother, and given free reign over the Dalí household. One of the young boy Dalí's favorite pastimes was parading about in a blue sailor suit or preferably, an emperor's costume. The royal treatment accorded to him by his parents was the result of their fears surrounding the death of their first son. The golden treatment and always present shadow of his elder brother caused in him a distinct shift in personality.

It is this treatment as a young child that relates directly to Dalí's formation of a very unique and conspicuous personality. He says in several of his writings that the dualistic stresses imposed upon him, that of living both as himself, and his dead brother, caused in him a particular obsession with decay and putrefaction. This is where many of his disturbing images of things like decaying corpses, insects, and other disturbing images began forming. In addition, Dalí was often teased by the local schoolchildren, who often threw insects, especially grasshoppers at him. The grasshopper became a distinct symbol of revulsion and horror for Dalí, especially during his Surrealist period. Thus it can be said that the events of Dalí's first 7 or so years of life profoundly influenced his psyche and thus his destiny. This is very much in accordance with the Freudian principles of psychoanalysis, which point to young childhood as a critical development stage, especially with regards to the parents.

The Dalí's were not about to have another burial. Dalí was often tended by his childhood nurse Lucia, who pops up in many of his Surrealist paintings, but he was seldom truly ill. One of the best examples of Lucia appearing in a later work is ~~The Weeping Woman~~, which was completed in 1934, which makes it a Surrealist painting.

Another child was born to the Dalí Family in 1908. Anna Maria Dalí, the baby of the family, came to be one of Dalí's most close childhood attachments, and also served as a model for many of Dalí's academic works later in life. Although there was the typical young sibling rivalry, Dalí's antics still allowed him to reign as the young dictator in the family.

The scholar Dalí was not an overwhelmingly brilliant academician. However, this author is convinced that Dalí was aware of his own genius at a young age. He began painting in earnest at about the age of 10, although his more notable works begin at age 13. During this period, Dalí would often visit the Pichot family, who lived just outside Figueras. The Pichot were very artistic in their own right; in fact, many of Salvador Dalí's earliest influences can be tracked directly to the Pichot. Ramon was a painter, while Ricard was a cellist who became the subject for one of Dalí's early Impressionist works. The Pichot encouraged Dalí's early interest in art, and soon his father set him up his own small studio complete with easel and other needed equipment. One later work by Dalí, ~~Three Young Seaside Women~~, has specific details that refer back to Dalí's love of the Pichot family. This particular Surrealist work is covered in another section in greater detail.

Most of the works done by Dalí as a young teenager were of the landscape surrounding Cadaqués and Figueras.

Another important aspect of the landscape in and around Dalí's home were the ruins near Ampurius. These more than millennia old Roman garrison ruins were the playground for Dalí's imagination. This sense of continuity with an ancient heritage is probably at least partially responsible for Dalí's love of his Catalan heritage.

This deep rooted love for his heritage is seen over and over again throughout Dalí's works, thus making this area of study an important one in understanding the man behind the myth. Yet another facet of Dalí's life at this point was the beginning of his formal art training, at the hands of Juan Nunez. Studying under Nunez at the Municipal Drawing School, Dalí absorbed the basics of draughtsmanship, painting and engraving. In 1917, Dalí's father arranged a small exhibition of his son's charcoal drawings at their home. It was to be the first of many occasions in which people would marvel at the wonder of Salvador Dalí's abilities.

At the time that Salvador Dalí's mother died in 1921, Dalí thought of himself mainly as a Impressionist painter, influenced especially by Ramon Pichot's own landscapes and seascapes of the time. Although Dalí's father remarried his late wife's sister soon thereafter, this was a turbulent time for Dalí, as he struggled to form his own adult identity away from that of his family, and especially his father. Soon thereafter, in 1922, Dalí was accepted at the Special School of Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving, also known as the Academia de San Fernando, in Madrid.

Once he passed the entrance exams, Dalí moved into the Residencia de Estudiantes (the student dormitories) where he was destined to meet with other great young minds of his time. At the age of 18, Dalí had become a part of the young elite, an emerging group of intellectuals that would have a profound effect on Dalí. The most important of his associates at this time were Luis Bunuel and Frederico Garcia Lorca. Both of these individuals, as

we shall see, were important to Dalí's continued intellectual development.

It was in about 1923 that Dalí first started to experiment with cubism, often locked away in the seclusion of his own room. It is speculated that his first contact with cubism came from a futurist catalog that had been brought to him by the patriarch of the Pichot family, Pepito. Most of his colleagues were still experimenting with Impressionism, which, as we have seen, Dalí had mastered some years before. When his peers discovered him secretly at work on the Cubist paintings, he instantly became somewhat of a campus personality, vaulting from standard membership to a leader of an avant garde group of young Spanish intellectuals. Here is an interesting image, Dalí's Picture ID from the San Fernando Academy which shows what he looked like at about this time.

In 1926 Dalí was expelled from the San Fernando Academy, because of his refusal to take his final oral exams. When told that the final exam topic would be about Raphael, Dalí exclaimed that he knew much more about the subject than did his examiners, and thus he refused to take the test. His expulsion adds an interesting twist to his story in that the most influential Surrealist painter of our time never actually obtained a formal art degree.

Over the next few years, Dalí traveled extensively, visiting Paris in 1928. Dalí actually met with Picasso in his own studio, and event which profoundly influenced him. During the year 1928, Dalí also experimented heavily with the artistic materials he had available to him. Several paintings include both sand and pebbles from Dalí's beloved beaches glued directly to the canvases. Dalí's interest in the surreal, and the bizarre was about to blossom as he entered the next phase of his lifetime.

It was also in 1928 that Dalí first obtained true international exposure, when his oil painting Basket of Bread was shown at the Carnegie International Exposition in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. This photo realistic work is a fine example of Dalí's mastery over yet another artistic style. Painting in the beautiful and so real style of the Dutch masters, works like the paintings of Jan Vermeer heavily influenced Dalí as he was maturing.

As Dalí turned the corner into the year 1929, two very important events were about to take place in his life. Both would forever alter the destiny of Salvador Dalí, who was determined to become one of the greatest painters of all time. He had always been aware of his own greatness, and now was standing at the door of a new era. An era in which HE would come to reign supreme, and be elevated to the status of a Master, the very standard against which great works of art are to be judged.

The Surreal Years (1929-1941)

In 1929, two things happened to Salvador Dalí that hastened him down the path to greatness. First, and most far reaching, was his chance meeting with Gala Eluard in 1929 in Cadaqués. She was at that point the wife of the famous French poet, Paul Eluard, but as soon as she and Dalí met, she became inseparable. The other important event was that Dalí decided to formally join the Paris Surrealists in this same year. In January, he met with Luis Bunuel in Figueras to work on a script for the film which would eventually be known as Un Chien andalou [An Andalusian Dog]. He also had his first one man show in Paris at Goeman's Gallery, and was soon on his way to the top. However, there was a price to pay for all this success. Disapproving of his relationship with Gala, Dalí's father threw him out of the house, starting an estrangement that would last almost 30 years before being healed. Additionally, being part of a formal art movement meant producing prodigious amounts of art, and taking place in a variety of events.

With no income to support them, Gala and Dalí moved into a small shack in a small village called Port Ligat, to the north. There they spent many secluded hours together, as Dalí churned out paintings which could be sold to support them. As he exhibited these works, and became more and more involved with the Surrealist, his paintings began to change rapidly, even from the more abstract works he had completed in the early 1920's. Now Dalí's works more and more embraced the ideas of the Surrealists, but in a uniquely Dalianian way that was his alone. The rift with his father was to become a subject for many works, and a small 'father and son icon' can be seen in many of his earlier Surrealist paintings.

It was in 1934 that Salvador Dalí was formally expelled from the Surrealist Group of Paris. In a mock 'trial' they convicted him of being contrary to the aims set forth for the group, and summarily removed him from their company. Apparently, Dalí had become too fascinated by Hitler, and his telephone calls from Lord Chamberlain. There are a number of paintings in which Dalí depicts Hitler, some directly, some less so. One of the more enigmatic symbols that Dalí used to represent his fascination with the two world leaders, and their telephone conversations is called Beach Scene with Telephone, which corresponded in time to the short lived Munich Agreement of September 1938.

Dalí once dressed a young woman in clothing, complete with a head full of flowers, to promote a showing of Dalí's works at the National Gallery. Although Surrealism never caught on in England, one particular British subject, Edward James, became an important collector and patron of Salvador Dalí. He was an original member of the Zodiac Group, which had been put together by Gala exclusively for the purpose of subsidizing the artistic couple through rough times by the sale of Dalí's art.

In 1938, Dalí actually got to meet the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, while visiting London. He is

involved with a Surrealist Exposition, as part of his ongoing, but informal association with the Surrealist movement. In paintings such as Beach Scene with Telephone Dalí had long predicted the advent of the second World War, though his experiences in the Spanish Civil War certainly must have influenced that vision. In 1940 Dalí and Gala fled from Acheron, France, only weeks before the Nazi invasion, on a transatlantic passage booked and paid for by Picasso. Dalí brought a number of paintings with him when they fled, and created many many more upon his arrival here. It is surmised that most of Dalí's paintings that were distributed throughout Europe were destroyed by the advancing Nazi forces, although a few may have survived and may surface in the future.

Indeed, the fact that Dalí used his Paranoid Critical Method to enter alternate levels of reality, in which his perceptions were markedly different from everyday reality. His Surreal training had served him well, but paintings like Slave Market with Disappearing Bust of Voltaire 1940, showed that he was quickly outgrowing even their influence. He was developing a style totally unique that would become a watershed event in art, that of integrating the surreal with the everyday, so as to offer it to everyone.

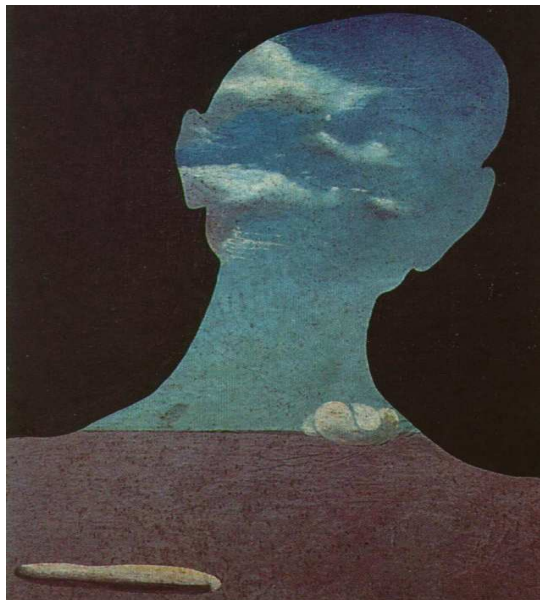
The Dalí's were to remain in the United States until 1948, when they returned to postwar Europe. By the time they had returned, Dalí and Gala had pulled off a variety of publicity stunts, and Dalí had become internationally famous. They spent most of their time in America either in New York City, or in a studio in California. It was also during this time, that Dalí professed his desire to become 'classic.' Soon, he would shift his painting style yet again, and in such a way that would make him the undisputed Master that he had always known he'd become.

The Classical Years (1941 - 1989)

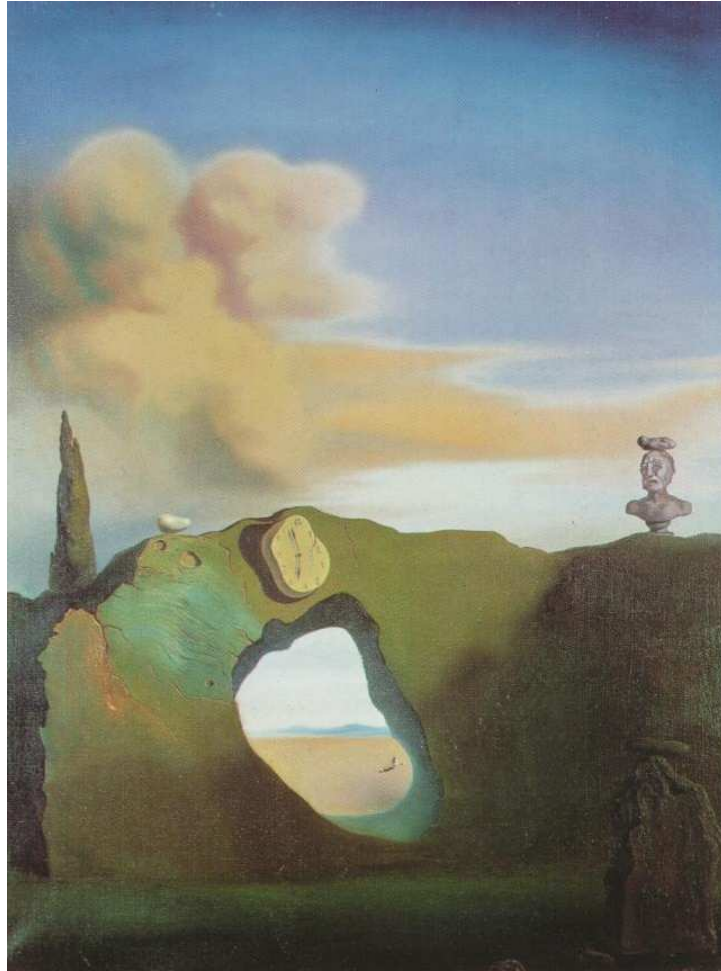
When Dalí scholars speak of Dalí "becoming classic" what they mean is that he was following his professed goal to embrace more traditional and universal themes in his work. In early 1941, Gala managed to convince Dalí that all of his Surrealist glory was nothing, and that even greater heights were his for the taking. It turned out that she was right, but it needs to be mentioned that one of the main reasons for Dalí's success was Gala herself. She constantly advised him on how to act and interact with the art community, especially while they were in America for most of the 1940's.

In the early 1950's Dalí developed his principles of Nuclear Mysticism. This was basically an eclectic combination of all of his artistic, and philosophical influences, especially the seemingly contradictory poles of science and religion. For some time, since childhood actually, he had been interested in science and the way the world worked. During the 1940's and 50's he more fully developed his ideas into the concept of Nuclear Mysticism. He surmised that the nature of reality would be fully explained by science soon enough, and that the very basis of life would prove to be a spiral. Indeed, when Crick and Watson discovered the double helix strand nature of the DNA molecule in 1953, Dalí was somewhat vindicated in his theories. One painting in particular, ~~Wesley~~ ~~Wesley~~ ~~(Sun, Sea, Snow)~~ illustrates this concept directly.

Man with His Head Full of Clouds, 1936



The Triangular Hour, 1933



~~The watch~~ was painted using oil on canvas. After their first appearance in ~~The Persistence of Memory~~ (1931), Dalí's "soft watches" were to become a regular image throughout his work.

The watch in ~~The watch~~ differs from other "soft watches" in that it has no metal casing. In addition it appears to be actually made from stone; it has a crack across its face that is similar to the cracks in the rock that it is placed on. It also does not appear as melted, as "soft", as other watches seen in earlier paintings; here it is merely misshapen.

The watch is mounted on a rock formation as if hung on a kitchen wall. Underneath is a hole in the rock through which we see an Ampurdan plain, where the figure of a child with a hoop can be seen. At the top of the rock formation is the bust of a Classical man, his face in a grimace. Dalí has placed rocks on top of the bust, as well as on top of the rock formation and on the other rock in the shadowy foreground. One interpretation of this painting is that Dalí is viewing mankind and time as governed by the solidity of nature.