

# ART ESSAY – BASIL RAZI

## THE GREAT MASTURBATOR

The Great Masturbator is a painting by the famous surrealist artist Salvador Dali. The painting was completed in 1929 during the surrealist epoch. It measures 110 x 150 cm and is Oil on Canvas. The Great Masturbator is currently displayed at Museu Nacional Centro de Arte.



This piece of artwork has a flat plane that stretches into the horizon and runs along the bottom of the image. The background is a sky which fades from dark blue/purple at the top through light blues and yellow-greens, down to light yellow at the horizon. Small wisps of clouds are visible in the top left of the image. The light comes from the right, this creates a chiaroscuro effect. The light is roughly at the level of a large face, a figure that takes most of the canvas and that is formed with an outlined scalp and nose. This face is of an orange skin tone color. The light causes thick black shadows towards the left and the horizon. The majority of the image is covered with a distorted man's head in profile with its large nose resting on the ground. The face features a large closed eye with long eyelashes. There is also a large thin eyebrow to the left of the eye. There is a cheek shown to the right of the eye. Above the eye are colorful (pinkish red, light orange/yellow, and lime green), thin, leaf-like shapes in a semicircular formation facing out. To the left and under them are similar thin shapes in black facing left. To the left and top of these shapes is thin light colored hair that parts along a ridge to the left and right. There is a ridge of shadow extending from the tip of the nose along the left side of the eyebrow to the very top of the head-shape and goes through the left half of hair. Above this ridge, on top of the back of the head are stacked a large grey rock with a semicircular ridge, cork, a long conch shell standing on its tapered tip, a large horizontally oriented, smooth, dark grey rock, and a small, brownish, oval stone on top. To the right of the lowest rock of the column, on top of the head, is a smooth grey rock with some small round form and shell on top of it. There is a hook through the head at the left-most point. Attached to the other end of the hook is some sort of small thin shape attached by a knotted rope.

Below the hook is a small, simplistic, rounded man standing on the plain facing towards the horizon. He is made of a plain sphere head, with simple cylinders for arms, body, and legs. Above the cheek is a hole in the head from which numerous shells appear. To the right of the hole is a large figure of a woman's shoulders, neck, face in profile, and hair attached to the face. She appears to be naked with smooth skin. Her ribs are showing to the right of her right shoulder. There is also a very small smooth white stone on her right shoulder. Her eyes are closed and her eyebrow is very thin and arched. Her lips are small and very red. Her nose is long. Her head is raised upwards. She has non-realistically formed hair made of simple shapes of an orange color. Most of her hair is to the right of her head, but one strand reaches below her chin, and another reaches towards the legs of the man on the right. Below her cheekbone, under her hair is visible the bottom part of her right ear. Her cheekbone is distinctly shown. Parts of her face are whiter than others, such as cheekbone, forehead, left shoulder, and nose. She has two blue veins visible: one running from her eye and one from her nose that both branch, but join together on the right side of the neck. Throughout the painting, such as the appearance of the soft, smooth skin; Dali has made use of visual texture techniques to render realistic surfaces.

To the right of her face are the legs of a man starting at the waist going down to about upper calves. These legs have tight shorts on of a beige color with genitals showing through as distinct bulges. He has cuts along his thighs and knees. The legs connect to the form of the head at the bottom, but there is a hole in this connection between and below the knees. There is a spiral shape formed from the same mass below the hole. There are creeping thin smooth shapes along the rightmost leg. The spiral connects to a mass that extends down and to the right. It is parallel to the creeping shapes.

Below the woman's left shoulder is a lily flower that is also connected at its bottom to the face. Below the lily are visible leaves that blend into the face. Below the woman's right shoulder is a lion's head with mane formed of thin creeping smooth shapes. It is formed of entirely one color, except for white teeth and long pink tongue which is extended and curls upward outside of mouth. This shows that Salvador used local colour here, examples of this can be found all over the painting. Under the face is a large locust with grey upper body, yellow lower body, legs holding onto face, long transparent wing, and two long antennae. There are about four wrinkles in the face around where the locust holds onto the face. At the rightmost wrinkle, which is below the lion's head, are many small red ants. Many more black ants are found on the locust's lower body with most of them clumped in a large pile at the end of the body. Coming off the locust's lowermost leg is a thin strand. Below the locust's lower body is a man figure embracing a woman figure from behind. She appears very rocky shaped, and he is thin, but with developed muscles. Behind them, in the distance, is a small rocky shape. To the right of the figures and closer to the foreground is a small smooth egg-like stone. To the right and up of that stone is a flat grey-brown stone. Below the white stone is a small puddle that reflects part of the white stone and part of the grey stone.

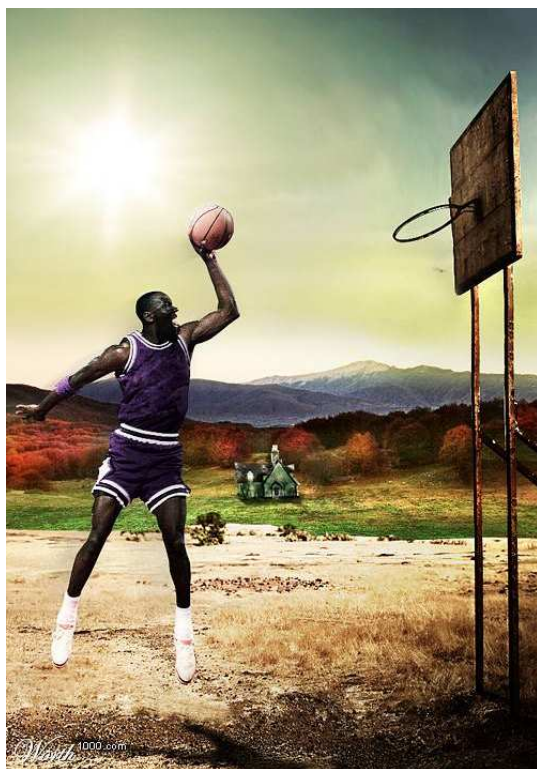
Around where the wrinkles are, the man's face takes a curve inward, then juts out into a chin, then comes back around into an inward curve that then goes down and to the right and forms a deep, but thin, gash to the right. This gash then goes outward to the left and forms a cylindrical shape that has a definite width that then goes down and rests along the plane. In the bottom of this cylindrical shape, which extends off the page, is a hole, through which the horizon is visible. A very small shape is visible through the hole along the horizon. There are many blue, branching, creeping shapes coming off from the right towards the face. These shapes are slug or snake-like, but run like thick veins up and to the right. They have no visible origin, but are thickest at where they come into the canvas. There is a curve from the left of the cylinder shape to the very right, under which the color turns bluer. Above the gash shape is a smooth curvilinear indentation of the face that is parallel to the curve to the right of the chin.

Dali has used a mixture of styles, he has been naturalistic in some ways as he pays close attention to details and he also has stylised some parts of his painting, such as the random pictures of a lion, the salient image

being a huge yellow face which is hard to recognise. Dali made some use of linear perspective, as he portrays the people in the background getting smaller. At the time when the artwork was created, it would be considered as avant-garde, as the artists of the time are trying a new way of painting; that is surrealism. The painting was executed during the surrealist epoch.

## SKYWALKER

This digital media collation was made by npjohnson. The size, date created was not provided. The digital artist used many random pictures and collated them together using the Photoshop Software.



SOURCES



These two artworks have some similarities while at the same time many differences. The first similarity is that the sun is portrayed in both suggesting daytime. The only difference in this is that in Dali's painting the light source is outside the frame. This is similar to chiaroscuro, the only difference being that the shadows appear exaggerated. While in skywalker the sun can be clearly seen. The media is quite different. Dali's artwork is a painting, so paint, brushes etc have been used. He has used long brush strokes to create a smooth appearance in the painting. In skywalker software has been used, which involves many Photoshop tools, such as dodging, creating shadows, transformations etc. Dali's painting has some reference that fellatio might take place, as seen in the top right corner, while the digital artwork has no references to anything of the sort. Both art pieces use local colour. The digital artwork uses atmospheric perspective as the mountains in the distance appear a blue-green colour. The painting uses linear perspective; this is shown by the small man in the background. Dali has used a stylised and naturalistic style to create his artwork whereas the digital picture is also stylised as the basketball player seems out of place. The digital artwork is an appropriation of other pictures, whereas the painting is an original idea.

Technology has been a very effective way of creating artworks this century. With the aid of technology one can create an artwork without any previous art experience or degree. In The Great Masturbator it would have been a challenge for Dali to create a great semi-abstract painting. But these days, software can easily create something like that by the click of a few buttons. A great example of technology put to great use is

Skywalker in which the artist has collated 7 images and put them together to create a digital artwork, creating minimum mistakes. Technology allows the artists to correct mistakes without having to start all over again.

Digital technology has changed the perception of art and its meaning. Appropriation and recontextualisation with the help of modern digital technology has allowed the modern world to view the world and art in other perspective. Modern events such as terrorism, drug problems and crime have changed the way the world is views, these events often appear in art. These events challenge the previous problems that were painted by artists in Dada and modern (mid 1800's – late 1900's) times.

## Bibliography

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