

DALÍ



MASTERS OF ART

DALÍ

Alexander Adams

PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York

Front Cover: *Enigma of Desire or My Mother, My Mother, My Mother*, 1929, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Sammlung Moderne Kunst, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (detail, see page 57)

Frontispiece: Man Ray, *Portrait of Salvador Dalí*, 1929, © Man Ray 2015 Trust / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023

pages 8/9: Teatre-Museu Dalí, Figueres, 2010, Catherine Bibollet (detail, see pages 34/35)

pages 38/39: *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931 (detail, see page 61)

© Prestel Verlag, Munich · London · New York 2023

A member of Penguin Random House Verlagsgruppe GmbH

Neumarkter Strasse 28 · 81673 Munich

Artworks by Salvador Dalí: © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023

In respect to links in the book, the Publisher expressly notes that no illegal content was discernible on the linked sites at the time the links were created. The Publisher has no influence at all over the current and future design, content or authorship of the linked sites. For this reason the Publisher expressly disassociates itself from all content on linked sites that has been altered since the link was created and assumes no liability for such content.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Editorial direction, Prestel: Anja Besserer

Copyediting and proofreading: Vanessa Magson-Mann, So to Speak, Icking

Production management: Andrea Cobré

Design: Florian Frohnholzer, Sofarobotnik

Typesetting: ew print & media service gmbh

Separations: Reproline mediateam

Printing and binding: Litotipografia Alcione, Lavis

Typeface: Cera Pro

Paper: 150 g/m² Profisilk



Penguin Random House Verlagsgruppe FSC® N001967

Printed in Italy

ISBN 978-3-7913-8737-6

www.prestel.com

CONTENTS

- 6 Introduction
- 8 Life
- 38 Works
- 110 Further Reading

INTRODUCTION

When interviewed in 1928 on his aims, the youthful Salvador Dalí announced: "First, the only moral aim is to be true to the reality of my inner life; the second, my deepest purpose in art is to contribute to the extinction of the artistic phenomenon and to acquire international prestige; third, my definitive aspiration is always to express an alive state of mind."

We think we know Salvador Dalí—with his distinctive moustache, bold stare, flamboyant clothing and outrageous pronouncements—yet the real Dalí is rather stranger than that. Dalí, supporter of Generalissimo Franco, the Spanish monarchy and Catholic church, began as a Communist. He was an anarchistic anti-theist committed to tearing down institutions. When Dalí said he wanted to end "artistic phenomenon", he was not joking. He wanted to make art so radical it would forestall the possibilities of extending tradition and maintaining a distinction between art and everyday life. He would propose Surrealist sculptures that would be anti-sculptural, made of ordinary objects recombined. He had plans to make cinema that would stimulate all the senses.

Yet Dalí did not subscribe to Josef Beuys's dictum "Everybody is an artist". Dalí (even as an anarchist) was never an egalitarian; he was an imperious aristocrat. "Each morning when I awake, I experience again a supreme pleasure—that of being Salvador Dalí." He was an extreme egoist who felt shame and also devoted his life and art to glorifying his wife, Gala.

For the public, Salvador Dalí is the quintessential Surrealist. When Dalí declared "I am Surrealism", the world largely took him at his word. He was a member of the Surrealist group between 1929 and 1939 and affiliated with the group for longer. He is the Surrealist who best recorded the weird, dreamlike, uncanny and grotesque, and whose art transports us to an immediately recognisable (and disconcerting) world. Of all Surrealist artists, he is one who most thoroughly read and thought about Sigmund Freud's theories of libido, ego, dreams and the subconscious. He is the only Surrealist artist who met Freud in person.

Yet, in some respects, Dalí was not a typical Surrealist, perhaps understandably so considering his individualism. The Surrealists were worried that his obsessions were too extreme and his pictures too explicit, even before he officially joined the movement. When he was officially expelled from the Paris Surrealist group by its leader André Breton in 1939, it was due to Dalí's politics. In truth, Dalí was

too eccentric and too shocking for the Surrealists. His art dwelt in troubling and explicit areas: masturbation, sodomy, coprophilia, incest, impotence, cannibalism, putrefaction, blasphemy, disfigurement, death. Even for a group dedicated to overturning the norms of bourgeois society, Dalí went too far and delved too deeply. His art still disturbs.

Mention Dalí to an art lover and you are likely to get a positive reaction, at least regarding the power of his imagery and the brilliance of his technique; yet reactions from critics and historians are often negative. Dalí has been repeatedly dismissed on many grounds, with more than a hint of snobbery. Dalí's attachment to high Catholicism and adulation of academic painting puts him out of step with the tides of history; his fascination with Hitler, support for Franco and attachment to hierarchy of all kinds leave mainstream commentators suspicious or hostile. There are charges of commercialism, repetition, banality, kitsch and puerility that are difficult to refute. Many of these points Dalí himself conceded, even celebrated. It is undeniable that greed led Dalí to debase himself and those around him. This character flaw led to the forgery of prints on a massive scale, fuelled by blank sheets that the artist had signed for cash.

However, the critical tide seems to be turning. In the last two decades, a wave of academic and archival research has re-examined Surrealism. Dalí has been claimed by performance artists and Post-Modernists, by classical painters and supporters of Bad Art. Dalí's work as an author (of fiction and non-fiction) and activities in cinema, photography, ballet and fashion are being reassessed through fresh eyes. Although critics have asserted he misused his talents, few deny that Dalí was hugely gifted. He created a pictorial world that is enduring and captivating. It gets into our imaginations and under our skin, overturning assumptions about what art is and taste ought to be. Dalí's achievements are unique and no excuse is needed to look at and immerse ourselves within his remarkable art once again.



LIFE

