

## Salvador Dalí in Brief

As I get ready to leave for a much-anticipated trip to Spain, I leave you with a short piece on one of the artists whose work I plan to see, that of Salvador Dalí, in his hometown, Figueres. Dalí himself is a well-recognized figure known for his iconic mustache.



Dalí was born in 1904 to a prosperous middle-class family. His elder brother died nine months before his birth; Dalí's parents told him at the age of five that he was his dead brother's reincarnation. It is not unreasonable to believe Dalí was influenced in some way by this revelation. Indeed, Dalí exhibited eccentricities from childhood, not tolerated by his strict father but indulged by his mother. At an early age, Dalí exhibited artistic talent, which both of his parents supported, building him an art studio at their summer home before he even entered art school. One of his earliest known paintings is an Impressionist influenced *Landscape Near Figueras*, which Dalí painted at the age of six in oil over a 3.5 by 5.5-inch postcard.



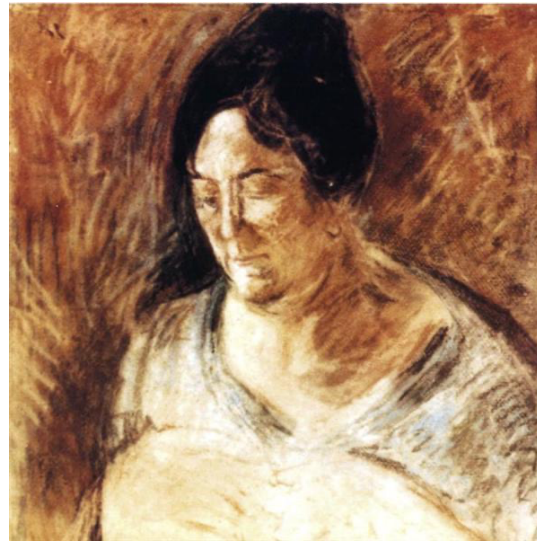
Dalí had his first drawing lesson at the age of 10. At the age of 11 (1915), he painted *Dutch Interior*, another painting that shows Impressionist influence.



Dalí was enrolled in drawing school in Figueres at the age of 12 but was not a serious student, known as a daydreamer and the class eccentric, wearing long hair and unusual clothing. In 1918, at the age of 14, he created this self-portrait featuring the art studio his parents had built for him.



The artist lost his mother to breast cancer when he was only 16 years old (1921), which Dalí described as “the greatest blow I had received in my life.” Below are two portraits Dalí painted of his mother, Felipa Domènech Ferrés, the first in 1918 and the second in 1920.



Not long after his mother’s death, Dalí enrolled in the Special Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving School of San Fernando in Madrid, where his eccentricity rose to new levels. He dressed in the style of 19th-century British aesthetes, including knee-length britches. The appearance he cultivated can be seen in the 1921 self-portrait below, in which he represents himself as a young dandy, complete with a floppy black hat, black cape, red scarf, and sporting a pipe.



Dalí's art school years were tumultuous. He was suspended in 1923 for criticizing his teachers and allegedly starting a student riot over the school's choice of a professor. He was arrested the same year and briefly imprisoned for supposedly supporting the Catalan Separatist movement. He was permanently expelled in 1926 after declaring that no member of the faculty was competent enough to examine him.

During his art school days (1925), Dalí was influenced by the Cubist artists, Picasso and Georges Braque. That influence is obvious in Dalí's 1923 *Cubist Self Portrait*.



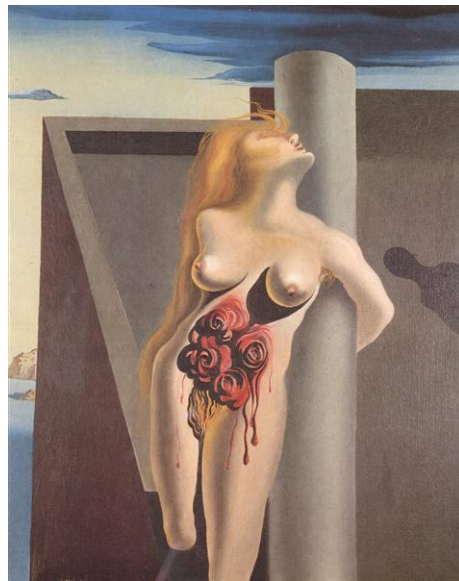
Also, while an art student, he painted these two portraits of his father, with whom he had a difficult relationship.



Following his expulsion from art school, Dalí travelled to Paris several times, trips that would lead to his first Surrealistic period and increasingly bizarre, symbol-laden, hallucinatory images in his work. Among his first works to exhibit elements of Surrealism was *Apparatus and Hand* (1927).



In 1929, Dalí met the woman who would become his wife of 53 years. Gala (full name, Elena Ivanovna Diakonova) and Dalí met when the former travelled with her then-husband, French poet, Paul Éluard to visit Dalí in the seaside Spanish town of Cadaques. Even though Gala was 10 years Dalí's senior, Dalí quickly became obsessed with her. Gala was Dalí's muse. Of Gala, Dalí said, "She was destined to be my Gravida, the one who moves forward, my victory, my wife." (Gravida was the heroine in a novel whose main character was Sigmund Freud and who brings psychological healing to him.) Gala would be featured in many of his paintings, including the 1930 *Bleeding Roses*.



In 1931 Dalí painted what is probably his best-known work, *Persistence of Memory*. Part of NYC's Museum of Modern Art collection, *Persistence of Memory* was painted with what Dalí called "the usual paralyzing tricks of eye-fooling". The limp watches picture "the camembert of time".



In 1934, Dalí and Gala were married. The same year, Dalí was expelled from the Surrealists, ostensibly because he refused to take a stance against Francisco Franco. Nevertheless, he continued to take part in Surrealist exhibitions. In addition to his paintings, Dalí created a number of Surrealist objects, including his 1938 *Lobster Telephone*, a classic example of a Surrealist object, a conjunction of items not normally associated with each other. About lobsters and telephones (and champagne), Dalí said, "I do not understand why, when I ask for a grilled lobster in a restaurant, I am never served a cooked telephone; I do not understand why champagne is always chilled and why on the other hand telephones, which are habitually so frightfully warm and disagreeably sticky to the touch, are not also put in silver buckets with crushed ice around them."



In 1940, Dalí and Gala fled World War II in Europe, taking refuge in the United States, where they stayed until 1948. During this period, Dalí collaborated with Alfred Hitchcock and Disney on films, published an autobiography, and met the couple who would found the Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. Dalí's first painting in exile, *Daddy Long Legs of the Evening...Hope!* (1940) is pictured below.



During the couple's stay in the USA, Dalí began to shift his focus away from Surrealism, into what is sometimes called his classical period. After returning to Europe in 1948, Dalí began to paint large-sized canvases with religious, historical and scientific themes. Dali referred to this period as "Nuclear Mysticism". The model for the first of these (19 in all) paintings, entitled *Madonna of Port Lligat* (1949), was his wife and muse, Gala.

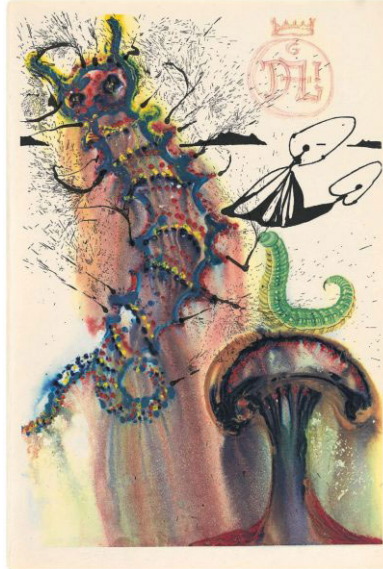




In the late 1940s, Hallmark began reproducing the paintings and designs of contemporary artists on its Christmas cards. The mission was noble: Sharing artistic masterpieces with average Americans. By 1959, Dalí had agreed to join the fold, with several stipulations. He asked for \$15,000 in cash in advance for 10 greeting card designs, with no suggestions from Hallmark for the subject or medium, no deadline and no royalties. Dalí eventually submitted 10 images to Hallmark, mostly Surrealist renditions of the Christmas tree and the Holy Family. Hallmark felt that only two of the 10 designs might have public appeal. Two of the images below, *The Nativity* and *Madonna and Child*, were put into production. Dalí's take on Christmas proved a bit too avant garde for the average greeting card buyer. Hallmark ultimately pulled the cards from the racks. The several hundred Dalí Hallmark cards that are still in existence have become rare collectors' items.



In addition to holiday cards, Dalí illustrated a number of classic literary works, including Shakespeare's *MacBeth* (1946), Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1946), Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1959-1963), *The Holy Bible* (1963-1964), and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1969). The picture below is an illustration from the last, entitled *Advice from a Caterpillar*.



Although he remained an international celebrity in the last decades of his life, Dalí painted less and less. His last painting was in 1983, soon after his wife's death. Entitled *Swallow's Tail*, it was the last in a series of paintings based on catastrophe theory that represent Dalí's understanding and appreciation of mathematical theory.

