

A study of Surrealism – Artist spotlight: Salvador Dalí



Quick summary



Salvador Dalí was a famous artist from Spain who lived in the 20th century (1904-89). As a child, Dalí liked to draw and paint boats and houses and, when 17, he went to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid, the capital of Spain. Dalí was not a good student and often got into trouble with his teachers. After leaving the academy, Dalí experimented more with art and became interested in Surrealism. He was inspired by the work of artists like René Magritte and Joan Miró and eventually became one of the most important artists of the Surrealist movement.

In 1931, Dalí painted *The Persistence of Memory* (see left), which is still considered by many to be the most famous painting by a Surrealist artist. His ability to shock and entertain made his paintings particularly popular. Many artists have been inspired by Dalí's work.



Emotions

Dalí was famous for creating strong emotions with his artwork. In one painting, *Autumnal Cannibalism*, Dalí expressed his anger about the Spanish Civil War by showing a male and female form who look like they are eating each other's flesh with a knife, fork and spoon. He used this image to say something important: by fighting, the Spanish people were destroying each other.



Visual language

Dalí's most famous painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, looks like something a person might see in a dream, rather than when they are awake – and as such is typical of Surrealist artwork. Most people believe the painting shows how the passing of time is irrelevant in the unconscious world.

Critics have often tried to explain the meaning behind the melting clocks. Dalí himself said that the watches were inspired by Camembert cheese melting in the sun. The orange clock in the bottom left of the picture is covered in ants. Dalí often used ants in his paintings as a symbol for death.



Process

As Dalí developed his style, he increasingly returned to using the same objects as symbols, such as:

- elephants – distorted reality
- eggs – hope and love
- ants – death
- locusts – waste and fear
- snails – the human head!



Techniques

Dalí usually painted on canvas or a wood panel, although his earlier work was sometimes on cardboard. He would start by covering the surface with white paint before painting in the horizon, sky and landscape.

For the important objects and figures, Dalí used black or blue pencil. He then used tiny brushstrokes of oil paint which he believed made his work more realistic.



Vocabulary

persistence: continuing to do something even though it is difficult or other people are against it

Civil War: a war fought between different groups of people who live in the same country

irrelevant: not important, not connected with what is being discussed or dealt with

unconscious: unaware of something, like being asleep

distorted: changed from its usual or natural condition

horizon: the line in the far distance where the sky seems to meet the land or sea



Media and materials



Techniques



Process



Colour theory



Emotions



Artists and artisans



Effects



Visual language



Styles and periods

