

The importance of confusion

Salvador Dalí's full name was Salvador Felipe Jacinto Dalí y Domènech, Marqués de Púbol, which sounded somewhat pompous. He was born as the son of a notary in Spanish Figueras on 11 May 1904 and died at the same place on 23 January 1989, which did not mean that he had lived in the church tower's shade all his life. In 1929 he moved to Paris and joined the surrealist throng. He worked together with the famous film director Luis Buñuel on *Un chien andalou*, a cult film which caused a scandal at the time but received public acclaim years later. Although Dalí felt at ease in French surrealist milieus at first, he soon began to look down on his fellow artists and broke up with them. Some critics claim however, that he was expelled from the surrealist movement. With his usual frankness and Spanish passion he proclaimed that 'surrealism was for dummies'. In 1940, when all involved were still licking their wounds, he moved to the United States where he was eager to display an enjoyable type of insanity for the next 25 years. He designed some dream scenes for the Hitchcock film *Spellbound*, starring Gregory Peck as a doctor with a nervous disorder. He wrote a scenario for a Marx Brothers film and worked with Walt Disney. He wrote a libretto and designed the

settings of the ballet *Bacchanal* by Leonide Masine, which had its opening night in the New York Metropolitan Opera. In between all this, Dalí still found time to publish his *Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and Rights of man to His Own Madness*. So that the world would know!

Dalí received so many assignments in America that he stressed out and needed to move back to his quiet birthplace, where he remained until the end of his life. It must have been a triumphant welcome as a young and eccentric painter, multibillionaire and member of the

French *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, soon subject to dismal village gossip. 'Before I have breakfast', he boasted, 'I have already earned 40,000 dollar'. 'And I feel good about it'. Dalí had indeed never shown any sympathy for the hungry artist on his *bohémien* attic studio. Because of his business talents he was soon nicknamed *Avida Dollars* by his fellow artists. This name is added with a fine sense of humour to the effigy of the Master on the commemorative coin that is for sale at the Bruges Dalí Museum. Self-mockery is surely a characteristic of all great minds.

Dalí was married to the Russian Elena Dimitrovna Diakonova, a.k.a. Gala, a woman that he had 'acquired' from his friend the poet Paul Eluard. She must have been an attractive belle, as various artists from Dalí's circles had already fallen in love with her. The affair with Gala started in 1929, when the Eluards came to pay a visit with Buñuel and the Magrittes. Gala was ten years older than Dalí, but it was love at first sight none the less. But Dalí chose to court Gala in his own way, and not as ordinary mortals would do by presenting flowers or chocolates for instance. He painted his armpits blue, used goat's shit as a perfume and paraded with a geranium on his head. Despite these rather conspicuous advances, he still remained too shy to address her and burst into nervous but irresistible hilarity every time he wanted to speak to her. And yet, during one of his laughing fits, he fell upon his knees and managed to ask for her hand, which in the end proved the right approach. Gala took pity on him and accepted, pledging her eternal love. She would remain his forever: his wife, his muse, model and manager. Her influence on his work cannot be underestimated: she was much more than just a model.

Uomo Universale

As all great artists, Dalí went through a rapid series of changes, trying out various styles. His very first paintings were impressionist local landscapes. Soon cubistic influences became manifest in his work. He kept on experimenting with all kinds of materials. He found sand, bolders and cork on his long walks along the beach and used them in his art. His period of *L'art de l'objet trouvé* soon evolved into his surrealist art. As so many contemporary intellectuals he was fascinated by Sigmund Freud. He began to explore his subconsciousness and what he found there became the subject of his symbolic images on canvas.

His imagery became even more impressive and disturbing as it was expressed by hyperrealistic techniques. His paintings make an unforgettable impression and contain true archetypes from our collective memory. His style is authentic, personal and can be recognized at once. His *trompe l'oeils*

and unusual perspectives are beyond our imagination. We all know the melting clocks that run off your plate like ripe camembert, the staggering horses, the crucified Christ from bird's eye view... During his surrealist heyday, Dalí all of a sudden lost his fascination with these dream symbols and subconscious imagery in order to turn to more general themes, such as religion with the Stories of Mankind and the newest discoveries in science. At the same time he started as a *uomo universale* to draw on the rich sources of the Renaissance and its reborn Classics.

Some skeptics claim that the ambition of being a *uomo universale* is but an illusion in our times. And yet, Dalí came very close to this ideal, as he was a painter, a draughtsman, an etcher, a cameraman, a designer of jewels, furniture, costumes for film and ballet, a scenographer, a designer of *haute couture* for Elsa Schiaparelli ... He wrote scenarios for films, novels and essays, regaling in hefty polemics. Like a Panamarenko *avant la lettre* he invented bizarre and poetic novelties. His most impressive work must be his fine illustrations with *Les chants de Maldoror* by Lautréamont, *Don Quichote* by Cervantes, the *Divine Comedy* by Dante and *Venus in Furs* by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, inspirator of S&M-fanatics.

By the common throng, Dalí is admired for his eccentric make-up, his dramatic posturing and controversial quotes. He liked to pose and exaggerate in a spectacular way and continuously showing off became his trademark. He never cared what people thought of him. He could not live without constant attention and was always seeking scandal and controversy. He lightheartedly admitted being an exhibitionist. "The thing to do is spreading confusion" he used to say. A highlight was the publication of his autobiography in 1968, evidently called '*Diary of a Genius*' about a life that is as spectacular as the one of Baron von Münchhausen, but which at the same time shows a noble and great mind behind the fantastic façade of the imaginary. This biography had already been published before, in 1957, with a different, more prosaic title: Dalí on *Modern Art*. In the same vein he published *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* in 1942.

In Dalí's opinion, any true artist should be able to express his wildest and most chaotic experiments in a classic way. He himself never avoided uncontrolled experimenting. He even claimed to have painted by means of a revolver, which goes way beyond what action painters such as Jackson Pollock did years later. "The madman thinks he is sane. I know I am mad" is one of his thought-provoking quotes, alluding to Descartes. And like Hamlet he adds: " 'it's madness, and yet there's method in it.'"

If you wish to see all works from Dalí, you have to tour the world. Apart from the Spanish musea Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí in Figueras, Púbol and Port Lligat, there are major works on display at the Guggenheim, the Metropolitan and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the National Galleries in Edinburgh, Tate in London, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, the Venetian Guggenheim and the Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. On top of all this, we are now happy to announce a permanent exhibition of excellent Dalí-originals at the Museum-Gallery Xpo in the Bruges belfry.

Art critics have recently resented the fact that Bruges has not exhibited large collections of modern art to its many visitors, but the opening of Museum-Gallery Xpo will be a contribution to welcome change in this respect.

The new Museum-Gallery is an initiative of *Inter Art, Ltd.*, a company led by Stefaan Delbaere, who has been obsessed by Dalí for many years. He has organized temporary exhibitions of Dalí work in the past. Amongst others he exhibited a vast collection of watercolours, paintings and objects at the Oud Sint-Jan's hospital in 1997. The exhibitions that followed contained graphic art and sculptures and many of these were shown in the Bruges belfry. These exhibitions held works of high quality and yet they were but an appetizer of what is to come now: hundreds of works (some of them for sale) in the richly decorated setting of the new Museum-Gallery. This time not only sculptures and graphic works but also a large selection of drawings and watercolours. *Inter Art* has had the Fundació Gala-Salvador, the organization that runs the Dalí museum in Figueras, control all the exhibited works on their authenticity.

A mother-of-pearl museum

Grand Opera Decor of Bruges has developed and designed the concept and interior decorations of the new Museum-Gallery Salvador Dalí. Art Director is Barron Saint Myhelfinger, CEO of Grand Opera Decor and Grand Opera Events. As an artist-decorator who feels close to Salvador Dalí, Barron Saint Myhelfinger, the self-proclaimed '360° sovereign artist-designer', is the right man on the right place. He not only creates paintings and bronzes, but also decorates interiors, designs furniture and carpets.

As a true Dalí aficionado, Mythelfinger works through genial exaggeration. The Museum Gallery has turned out to be a dazzling work of art for that reason. The visitor moves through the grand medieval gates into a number of sensual boudoirs, constructed like the octagonal chamber of Leonardo da Vinci. The decorator has lavishly applied Dalí's favourite colours: gold, mother-of-pearl and (evidently) shocking pink, which enhance the erotic atmosphere of the works on display.

The merchandising department provides, amongst others, champagne and pralines with labels showing the great master himself and his favorite panther pet on a fuchsia background. We assume that Dalí, who gave his name to a perfume, would have liked them. Once again life has become quite pleasurable.