



LIFE



The art and character of Salvador Dalí are inextricably tied to Catalonia and the region of Empordà (Ampurias), a plain abutting the Pyrenees, near the French border. (In this book, Catalan spellings for place names are used, indicating common Spanish (Castilian) ones on their first appearance. Spanish spellings will be found in older books.)

In 1900, a young Catalan named Salvador Dalí Cusí (1872–1950) was awarded the status of notary and returned from Barcelona to live in Figueres (Figueras), regional administrative centre of Alt Empordà. That year, livelihood established, he married Felipa Domènech Ferrés (1874–1921). Their first son, Salvador, was born in 1901 and died in 1903. Nine months later, on 11 May 1904, the future artist, Salvador Felipe Jacinto Dalí was born in Figueres. Four years later a sister—Anna Maria (1908–1990)—was born. The family would buy a holiday home in Cadaqués, Dalí senior's birthplace. Young Salvador was given a traditional education and did well, despite being spoiled and badly behaved. He was also socially timid, incapable of handling money (his sister had to do it for him) and had a paralysing fear of grasshoppers. His strong aversions and erratic temper were indulged by the family. The tale of the madness and suicide of his paternal grandfather troubled Dalí, who feared for his own sanity.

The boy took up painting, making small landscapes. Molí de la Torre (Mill Tower) near Figueres was a property owned by the Pichot family. (The Pichots are discussed on page 40.) As a guest of the Pichots, adolescent Dalí would climb the tower to daydream alone, plotting a



Portrait of Anna Maria Dalí and her father, 1925

road to fame and indulging sexual fantasies. He painted Impressionist pictures in the grounds of the Pichot property. In his diary, Dalí wrote, "This morning I painted the geese, under the



Figure at a Window, 1925



cherry-tree, and I've learnt quite a lot about how to do trees, but what I like best are the sunsets, that's when I really like to paint, using the cadmium straight from the tube to edge the mauve and blue clouds, this way they have a thick layer of paint, necessary because it's so difficult to avoid making a sunset look like a tinted print!"

In autumn 1916, Dalí enrolled in drawing classes of Juan Núñez Fernández (1877–1963) at the Figueres Instituto. He was an inspired teacher and his best pupils were devoted to him. He instilled in students a love of the Old Masters and respect for academic technique. As a youth, Dalí formed an attachment to academic painter of mythology William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905) and Victorian History painter Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891). Over the years, Dalí would work in the styles of Impressionism, Modernismo (Catalan Modernism), Pointillism, Futurism, Purism, Surrealism, classicism, Photorealism and Op art, yet never stopped defending "outmoded" art against Modernist criticism.

Young Dalí supported the Russian Revolution in 1917, as we can see in his adolescent diaries. He continued to voice support for Communism until the early 1930s, when part of the Communist-affiliated Surrealist movement, but this seems to be an attachment to radicalism rather than egalitarianism. The death of Dalí's mother (on 6 February 1921) shocked and outraged the young man. He took it as an affront, later writing, "With my teeth clenched with weeping, I swore to myself that I would snatch my mother from death and destiny with the swords of light that some

day would savagely gleam around my glorious name!" In September 1922, Dalí began studying painting at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid. He would live at the Residencia de Estudiantes (hall of residence), which had a vibrant social, sporting and cultural life. It was an intellectual hub of Modernism, where Europe's most prominent figures were invited to lecture. At the Residencia, the young painter would meet individuals who helped him overcome timidity and broaden his horizons. The two most important were poet Federico Garcia Lorca (1898–1936) and future film director Luis Buñuel (1900–1983). With others, they formed a loose intellectual vanguard intent on overturning the status quo and achieving glory.

When Dalí first met him, Lorca was already a promising poet attempting to blend a love of Andalusian folk culture with political progressivism and literary Modernism. Lorca (who was homosexual) was smitten by Dalí and wrote a poem to celebrate him. They collaborated on drawings and constantly wrote letters when apart. Before his friends, Lorca used to act out his own death and decay; evoking these performances, Dalí depicted Lorca's severed head with closed eyes as a feature of many pictures in the mid-1920s. Dalí would paint stage sets for the first production of Lorca's play *Mariana Pineda*, in 1927.

In 1923, Dalí was suspended for joining a student protest. Once readmitted, he largely disdained official tuition. Dalí was just as interested in studying Spanish Golden Age painters at the Prado as he was in Modernism to be found in journals. From

1924 to 1926, he alternated between Modernism and classicism-inflected realism, as can be seen in the careful pencil portrait of his father and sister—"one of my most successful of this period" (page 10). Anna-Maria posed for many portraits at this time (page 11). Still-lives and figure paintings appear alternately in Metaphysical or Purist styles and in classical or Neo-Classical styles. Dalí's radicalism found outlets in switching between anti-traditionalism and anti-Modernism.

Paris-based Surrealist painter Joan Miró (1893–1983) heard about the promising art student through fellow Catalan artists and writers and recommended him to acquaintances. Like Miró, Dalí had an exhibition at Galeries Dalmau, Barcelona, in November 1925. Its critical and financial success explains why Dalí had the confidence to intentionally fail a compulsory oral exam to gain re-entry into the academy (following a second suspension), resulting in definitive expulsion in November 1926.

We should consider the impact of Freud and Surrealism on Dalí. The ideas of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) greatly influenced science and society in the early twentieth century. His central proposal—that people were driven by unknown subconscious aversions and desires and that conflict between these drives and social constraints caused mental dysfunction—seemed to open a window on to the behaviour of human beings. The Surrealist group in Paris, headed by writer André Breton (1896–1966), was formed in 1924 from the remnants of Dada. To replace the nihilism and pranks of Dada, Surrealism was

conceived as complete liberation of the psyche, catalysed through art, poetry and events, with Surrealist principles being anti-theism, anti-patriotism, pacifism, libertarianism (even libertinism) and exploration of the unconscious. Freudianism would be its principle analytic tool and Communist revolution would be its goal because economic liberation of the proletariat should be accompanied by psychic liberation. The affiliation of anarchistic Surrealism to authoritarian Communism was doomed; Communists never accepted the complete individual freedom that Surrealists stipulated.

Dalí read Spanish translations of Freud in the mid-1920s, while in Madrid. His egotism and individualism had left him naturally preoccupied with himself; Freudianism allowed him to turn his psyche into his prime topic and Surrealism gave such preoccupations artistic legitimacy. As Dalí was too idiosyncratic, self-absorbed and chaotic to follow any movement, his relationship with the Surrealists would be both stimulating and tumultuous. It is fair to say that (in spirit) Dalí would remain a Surrealist his whole adult life, notwithstanding later support for Church, crown and tradition.

One sign of Surrealist liberation was the increased sexual content of art Dalí produced in the so-called "Lorca period" of 1925–28. Symbols of a sexual nature (hands, phallic objects, triangles as stand-ins for female genitals) proliferated alongside increased numbers of nudes. Discussions between poet and painter resulted in wild fantasies and exploration of shameful desires and profound fears. Dalí later confessed that Lorca was in love



UN CHIEN
ANDALOU

UN FILM DE
LUIS BUÑUEL
ET
SALVADOR DALI



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with him but he could not physically reciprocate; their homosocial bond would remain platonic.

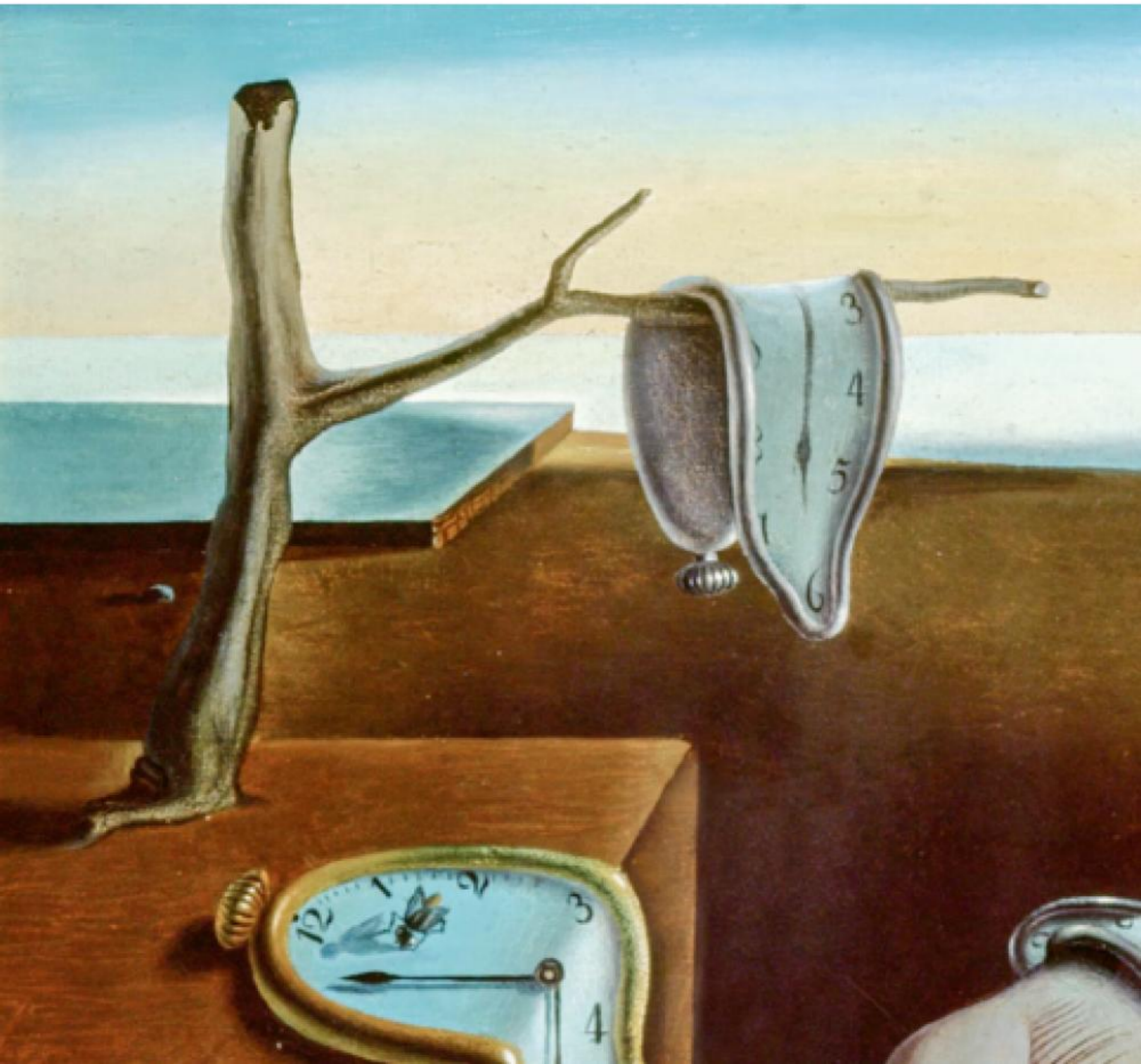
In 1926, during his suspension, Dalí made his first visit to Paris. He went to Picasso's studio, with Miró's introduction. Although he did not meet the Surrealists, he did see their art and read their journal and manifesto. Encountering the Metaphysical art of Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978), as well as the Surreal biomorphic forms by Yves Tanguy (1900–1955) and Jean (Hans) Arp (1886–1966), had a radical impact. Metaphysical Art, which attempted to reveal a hidden deeper reality within scenes that combined ordinary objects and places to atmospheric effect, was a precursor to Surrealist art. At this time, Dalí was writing a lot, mainly reviews and articles on art for Spanish and Catalan journals, but also poems and the *Anti-Art Manifesto*. The latter was published in March 1928, and viciously lampooned traditionalism in Catalan culture, advocating aggressive Modernism. Despite applying Surrealist techniques as early as 1927, Dalí would not fully commit to Surrealism until 1929.

Over seven days in early 1929, Buñuel and the painter wrote the screenplay for a seventeen-minute-long film, called *Un Chien andalou* (An Andalusian Dog, 1929). Buñuel was jealous of Lorca's closeness to Dalí and their artistic-literary partnership; the title was interpreted as Buñuel's jibe at the Andalusian Lorca. (Lorca certainly saw it that way.) The film was a sequence of Surrealist scenes, including sexual imagery, a hand crawling with ants and two priests tied to a grand piano stuffed with two rotting donkeys.

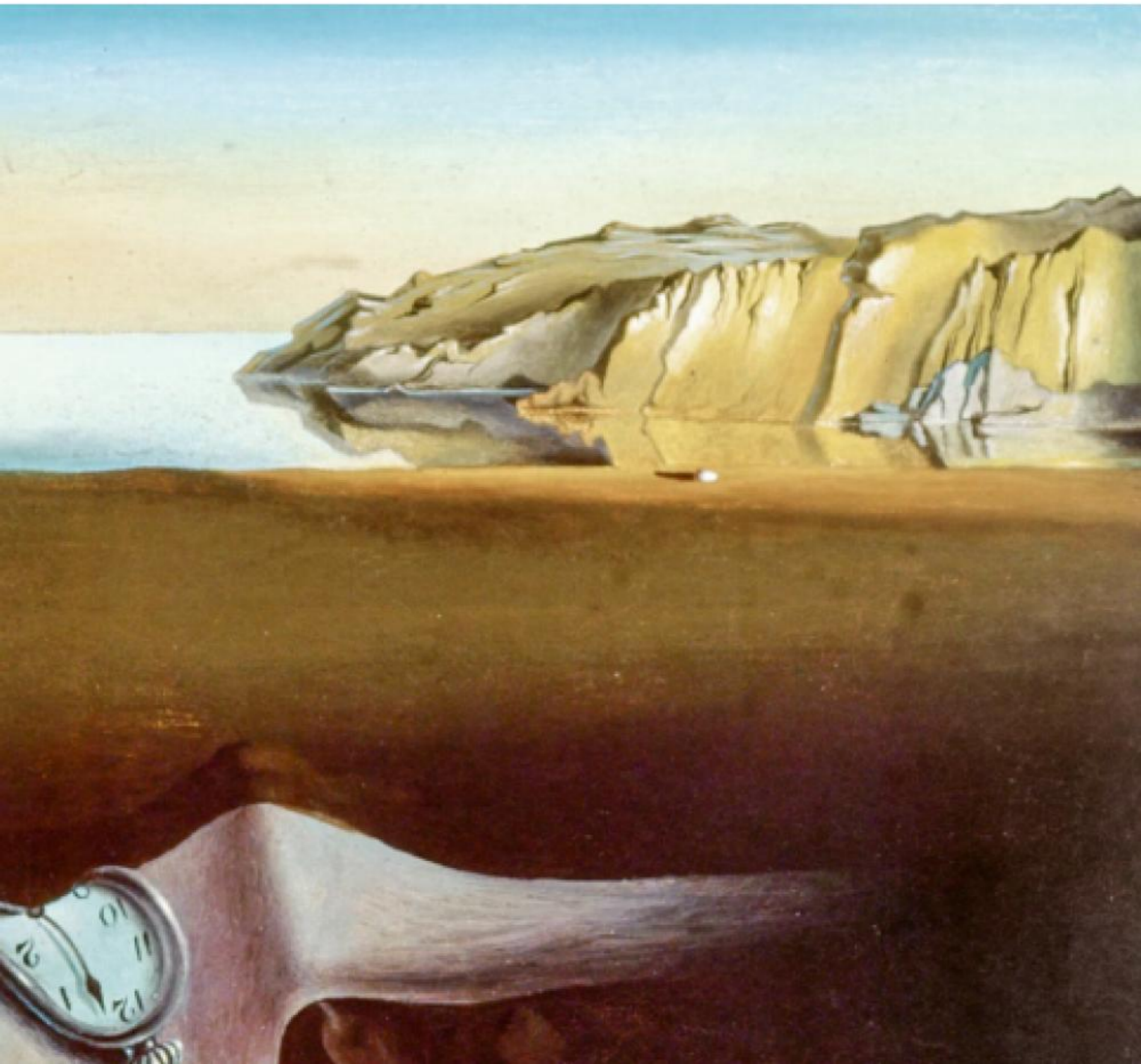
The most notorious scene is of a man watching a cloud bisecting a full moon, then falling into a trance before slicing open a woman's eye (simulated). When the film opened on 6 June 1929, it impressed the Surrealists and patrons the Comte and Comtesse de Noailles, who screened the film in their private cinema and agreed to fund the next Dalí-Buñuel production. The two Spaniards decided to make their next film more shocking.

The First Days of Spring was Dalí's first painting of 1929 and inaugurated his classic Surrealist paintings. It was clearer than previous paintings, more detailed (even hyperreal), painted in absolute fidelity using extra-fine sable brushes and incorporated collaged elements. The sharpness of shadows resemble those of de Chirico's twilight scenes, but the light had the unique brilliance of Empordà. The distant horizon and featureless plain would provide the setting for wild fantasies. At this time, Dalí moved to Paris. He signed a contract with dealer Camille Goemans and met Paul Éluard. Dalí went back to Cadaqués for the summer and would habitually divide his years between summer in Spain and winter in Paris.

In the summer of 1929, a fateful event occurred. Visiting Cadaqués were Goemans and his girlfriend Yvonne Bernard, René and Georgette Magritte and Paul and Gala Éluard; later, Buñuel came to work with Dalí on the script for *L'Age d'or*. Magritte painted; Dalí started a portrait of Éluard; the others dined and sunbathed. Gala, who had perhaps been deputised to curry favour with Dalí so that Éluard could acquire Dalí paintings



WORKS



Portrait of the Cellist Ricard Pichot, 1920

Oil on canvas

61.5 × 50 cm

Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres

This portrait is of Ricard Pichot, part of the prominent family known for their creative accomplishment in literature, painting and music. The Pichots (like the Dalís) lived in Figueres and Cadaqués. Ramón Pichot (1871–1925) was a talented Impressionist painter, whose example and conversation introduced the youthful Dalí to modern painting. His wife was Laure "Germaine" Gargallo, who had a doomed relationship with Catalan painter Carlos Casegomas—whose suicide supposedly inspired his friend Picasso's Blue period. During a stay in Cadaqués in the summer of 1910, Picasso produced his most abstract and complex Cubist pictures. There is a possibility that the six-year-old Dalí may have encountered Picasso then, although there is no record of a meeting. Ramón's sudden death inspired Picasso's convulsive masterpiece *The Three Dancers* (1925).

Ricard and his brother and sister were all professional musicians. It was during Ricard's practice sessions that the young painter tested out Ramón's Impressionist technique in this portrait. It shows impressive sensitivity to light and atmospheric coloration. Although Impressionism would be a passing phase for the painter, Dalí would display a unique command of colour throughout his career.

In later years, Dalí expressed gratitude for the exposure to art, music and cultural discussion during his formative years. The Pichots gave Dalí the idea that art could be both vocation and livelihood and they persuaded Dalí's reluctant father that his son should attend the academy in Madrid. Memories of the Pichots' Molí de la Torre was a central part of Dalí's mental landscape. Ricard's son Antoni Pichot would become Dalí's assistant, confidante and helper from 1972 until the master's death.



View of Cadaqués from the Creus Tower, c. 1923

Oil on canvas

98 × 100 cm

Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres

Cadaqués was the birthplace of the artist's father. It was, at that time, a small village located on the peninsula Cape Creus, where residents of Empordà (including the Dalís and Pichots) came to spend their summers. The Dalí family's summer house was on Es Llaner (Es Llané) beach, adjacent to Cadaqués. The region has been inhabited since prehistorical times and was settled by Greeks and Phoenicians. It was a trading post in the Roman Empire, with *amphorae* from sunken Roman ships being occasionally recovered on the beach to this day. Inhabitants of Cadaqués and neighbouring villages made their living from farming the terraced hillsides, fishing and smuggling; with domestic tourism providing income from the late nineteenth century onwards. The Empordanese have been described as stubborn and idiosyncratic, made difficult by exposure to the strong wind of the region, called the *tramontana*.

Cadaqués, Portlligat and Cape Creus would be profoundly important for Dalí all his life. Art critic Brian Sewell, his companion for a short time in the 1960s, noted, "The beach always had an astonishing effect on him, as though he had never seen it before. I was at first dismayed by this Alzheimer effect, but I think now that he was invariably overwhelmed by so dense a rush of memories that he could not speak."

Landscape and sea views would appear in Dalí's first paintings (from the early 1910s) and would be imprinted on his imagination throughout his life. Young Dalí painted landscapes, sea views, boats and buildings in the local area; this view shows Dalí synthesising direct observation with geometric facets of Cubism. Dalí knew of Picasso's time in Cadaqués making Cubist art and, highly ambitious, would have seen himself in competition with his illustrious compatriot. The combination of practising oil painting at a young age, rigorous training in drawing, poring over illustrations of Old Master works and exposure to Modernist art in journals would make Dalí a formidably protean and technically adept artist.



Portrait of Luis Buñuel, 1924

Oil on canvas

70 × 60 cm

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

Dalí encountered the future film director Luis Buñuel at the Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrid, while living there. Buñuel was a natural-history student from Aragon and the background of this painting seems to be an evocation of Aragon, a region the painter did not know. Buñuel's intelligence, fierce anti-authoritarianism and athletic prowess impressed Dalí. They became good friends and collaborated on two films before parting ways. Relations between Buñuel and Dalí became strained over the 1930s. Buñuel disapproved of Dalí's support for Franco; Dalí was angry that the director had edited him out of the screenplay credits for *L'Age d'or* and had discounted the painter's involvement in that movie. When in need of a loan in 1939, Buñuel (aware that Dalí was, by now, rich) was offended when Dalí refused his written request for money. They never met again.

Buñuel was a scourge of established values. His films criticised the Church, monarchy, capitalism, colonialism, traditional families, bourgeois sexual morals and conventional sentimentality. Surrealist touches recur in Buñuel's films. In many respects, both director and painter were anti-establishment and non-conformist. Dalí could not be described as a "good Catholic" nor a conventional supporter of Franco—not least because of his pride in Catalonia, which was an anti-Falangist position—despite seeming to back the post-war status quo. Conventional socialists resented the intrusion of Surrealist imagery into Buñuel's social critiques.

After years of silence, the elderly Dalí reached out to Buñuel, a few months after Gala died. In an effort to revive his dwindling creativity, he sent Buñuel a telegram, with an idea for a film collaboration. Buñuel replied "I RECEIVED YOUR TWO CABLES, GREAT IDEA FOR FILM [entitled] LITTLE DEMON BUT I WITHDREW FROM THE CINEMA FIVE YEARS AGO AND NEVER GO OUT NOW. A PITY. EMBRACES."

Buñuel died eight months later, in Mexico City.



Pierrot Playing the Guitar (Cubist Painting), 1925

Oil on canvas

198 × 149 cm

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

In the 1920s, Purism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) both lauded the creation of Modernist art that would reflect the modern world and present it with unflinching clarity and perfection. Much of the painting that was being taught and produced by the Bauhaus in this period was in these styles. Painter Amedée Ozenfant (1886–1966) and architect-painter Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (called Le Corbusier) (1887–1965) published *La Peinture moderne* in 1925, which explained the principles of Purism as adherence to modern styles, modern subjects and modern attitude. At the Residencia, Dalí was kept up to date on the latest art news from Paris. In 1926 he made his first visit to the French capital and visited the studio of Picasso, where he was greatly impressed by recent paintings combining figures, statues and still-lives. *Pierrot Playing the Guitar (Cubist Painting)* is indebted to Cubism and is equally reflective of Metaphysical art and paintings by Futurist-turned-Neo-classicist Gino Severini.

In a 1927 letter to Lorca, Dalí wrote of his fanatical support for the new machine aesthetic. "No previous era has ever known such perfection as ours. Until the invention of the machine there were no perfect things, and mankind had never seen anything so *beautiful* or *poetic* as a nickel-plated engine. The machine has changed everything. Our epoch, compared to others, is MORE different than the Greece of the Parthenon from Gothic. You've only got to think of the badly made and highly ugly objects produced before mechanization. We are surrounded by a new perfect beauty, productive of new poetic states."

A photograph of the artist working on the painting (in the presence of his uncle Anselm Domènech) suggests it was made in Cadaqués.

