

*"The imagery in Salvador Dali's paintings  
is influenced by his childhood events"*

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'The imagery in Salvador Dali's paintings is influenced  
by his childhood events'.

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## INTRODUCTION

Few modern artists have attracted as much popular attention as the Spanish artist Salvador Dali, he was a phenomenon even during his own time.

The creations of his bizarre imagination attract interest and controversy wherever his paintings are exhibited.

By his own admission, Dali's art is largely autobiographical. The imagery in his paintings is often weird and fantastic and he stressed that the images he used were often very closely related to memories and incidents from his childhood.

Familiar surroundings are constantly reflected in his paintings. Dali has often stated that the 2 most important factors in his life were the countryside of Catalonia where he was born and spent the latter part of his life and his wife Gala, whom Andre Breton referred to as the 'Muse of the Surrealists'.

Normal objects are found next to or growing out of his creations and his work often suggests the erotic or repulsive. Much of the material used was taken from the realm of the sub-conscious and of dreams and instincts that are normally repressed which give an almost tangible form to his obsessions.

Given Dalis much used reference to his childhood these images must be linked to a dominant obsession. Sigmund Freud claimed that Dalis images contained the latent cause of an obsession which for Freud was almost always that of a sexual nature.



According to Freud, a person's childhood memories are of the utmost importance to the unravelling of an obsession. One important clue to Dali's personality may lie in the fact that he was regarded by his parents to be the reincarnation of his dead brother and he felt compelled to assert his individuality.

".....it was during my childhood that all the archetypes of my personality, my work and my ideas were born ....." (1)

In the following pages I will discuss the memories and obsessions of Dali's personality and determine if and how Dali's personality was influenced by his childhood.

#### FOOTNOTE - INTRODUCTION

1. Meryle Secrest: Salvador Dali, The Surrealist Jester Chp. 2, Pg. 20



## CHAPTER ONE

### DALI'S PAINTINGS FROM 1929 TO 1940

The main impression perceived from Dali's memories around 1929 is one of loneliness and isolation and of a character composed of great timidity and naivety combined with a Napoleonic ambition. But at the same time Dali's paintings of the Spring and Summer 1929, contained a new confidence, a concentration and clarification of themes.

A major factor in this change was Dali's discovery of ways of using his extensive readings in psycho-analytical textbooks and of finding visual equivalents for that material and combining it with personal imagery which had already appeared in earlier paintings.

The commonest ground between Dali and the Surrealists was their mutual interest in psychology and psychoanalysis. The Surrealists leaned heavily on Freudian theory. However the Surrealists felt that Dali was in danger of turning his paintings into psycho-pathological documents because they felt he relied too heavily on textbook theory.

In 1929 Dali began to relive childhood fantasies working on 'Dismal Sport' which included the complicated symbols of a rabbit whose eye also served as an eye for a parrot and the 3rd head of a fish. The association of the fish and grasshopper is interesting because it is one of the first instances of Dali obsessively pursuing an object image which inspired him with horror. Dali is aware and makes use of the sexual impetus behind this horror. This fish-grasshopper image refers to an incident in his childhood which he had repressed until his father brought it to his attention. As a child he had caught a



fish nicknamed a 'slobberer' and upon observing its head closely noticed the resemblance between the fish and the grasshopper which he had previously adored. The grasshopper became a thing of terror for Dali.

The grasshopper in 'The first Days of Spring' fastened to the mouth of a young man's head (presumably Dali) with a threat half, cannibalistic and half-sexual, is another image of horror. For Dali the images were waking dreams which arrived fully formed rather than in the half realised state in which they would take place within a purely automatic drawing.

Dali was attempting to mesh together the 2 strands of Surrealist activity which were dominant during the 1920's; these were automatism (1) and dream narrative. Both of these were linked to Freud. The 1st Surrealist Manifesto paid homage to Freud for his scientific exploration of the human mind. Freud stressed the importance of the dream and the free unstrained monologue as routes to the unconscious.

What the Surrealists valued most of all was the implication of Freud's discovery for the liberation of the human imagination and the value of the unconscious as a quarry for poetic images.

Dali stresses that many of the images that surfaced were very closely related to childhood memories. Freud emphasised the importance of a patients childhood memories and associations as an aid to analysis; for they were often crucial to the unravelling of a dream or the cause of an obsession.



Given Dali's much used references to his childhood and his state of mind at that time; these images and memories must be linked to a dominant obsession.

Freud claimed; after a meeting with the artist; that Dali's paintings contained both the latent cause of an obsession and its symbolic manifestation. The unconscious obsession for Freud was often that of a sexual nature.

One factor that makes Dali's paintings of 1929 - 30 so extraordinary is the way they hold in balance a real neurotic fear and a knowing use of psychology textbooks.

The tiny huddled figures and objects in Dali's paintings are placed in apparently unrelated groups. This suggests the dreaming mind at work where certain things may happen or be seen without clarity. Odd connections are made between disparate objects; people and things can unexpectedly metamorphose into something else. The individual objects are autobiographical, frequently symbolic and often readily interpreted.

Now the dominant theme of the 1929 paintings is of a deep sexual activity in which masturbation plays an important role. An example of this is the grotesquely enlarged and guilty hand of the statue in 'Dismal Sport' which is hiding its head in shame. The attendant parental threat of its terrible consequences interpreted by the subject as emasculation shown in the large sex organ held up against the statue by a young man - probably Dali.



The tearing of the upper part of the body expresses impotence drawing on the classic Freudian concept of the substitution of the upper half of the body for the lower part in dreams.

The alternative to masturbation that is: sexual relations with another person carries its own threat of impotence. Dali expresses this through a number of images. The little coloured drooping shape on the paving stone which Freud interprets as a symbol for impotence.

Staircase, on the other hand commonly stands for sexual references in psycho-analytical literature. The oppressive size of the staircase springs from the theme of impotence and expresses a fear of sexual intercourse - an impassable object. The staircase could be the pedestal steps of a monument, introducing the idea of a hidden statue and interconnecting a running theme of a father-figure.

The grasshopper attached to his mouth (in Dali's paintings) as we know from Dali's testimony was a symbol of terror and its identification with a fish confirms the sexual significance.

At this period Dali felt himself very close to madness. He was still locked in the auto-eroticism and masturbation themes of the previous years. He had fallen in love with Gala and his anxieties concentrated more on the fear of impotence.

Gala and Dali had first met during the summer of 1929, just after Dali had officially joined the Surrealist movement. It was love at first sight although at the time Gala was married to the Surrealist poet; Paul Eluard. She was to be Dali's inspiration, business partner and often tormentor for over 50 years.



.....'she (Gala) was destined to be my Gradiwa' (2)

The novel Gradiwa by W. Jensen. Gradiwa the heroine effects the psychological cure of the male protagonist. Gala's medium - like intuition, enabled her to understand that Dali's laughter was not that of the usual 'gay' laughter but of terror. Through her love, Dali's approaching madness was cured.

'The Great Masaturbator' 1929 reveals with extraordinary thoroughness and often frank details of sexual preoccupations from coprophilia to masturbation and fellatio. The images include a head with obtruding tongue and the torn and bleeding knees represent displaced castration. Dali stated that the painting was 'the expression of my hetrosexual anxiety.....' (3)

Also painted in 1929 was a portrait of his friend Paul Eluard. The face is painted in minute detail. Dali 'cut' the head off at the shoulders reminiscent of an antique bust and set it floating above a landscape. The edges of Eluard's coat has been transformed into a rugged landscape. However the images represented, are more associated with Dali than with Eluard. The grasshopper and the woman holding the jug once again make an appearance.

In 'Accommodation of Desire' 1926 the theme of sexual activity resurfaces in addition to a more explicit reference to the father and son relationship. Freud in the 1919 edition of the 'Interpretation of Dreams' wrote .....

'Wild Beasts are, (also) as a rule, represent passionate impulses of which the dreamer is afraid. The lion is occasionally associated with the father figure'... (4)



The source of the lion image for Dali was taken from a childhood memory. A lithograph (artist unknown) hung in Dali's room as a child. Portrayed in the picture was a girl at a well holding a pitcher and beside her on a wall a moulded relief of a lion.

'Illuminated Pleasures' 1929 is teeming with references from other paintings. The lion's head representing interlocked passion and threat is linked to the head of a woman. By adding a handle to her head, Dali turns her into a jug container.

The encased couple inevitably represent father and son. The bloodied knife gripped too late by a protective hand reminiscent of Lady MacBeth who would have killed Duncan if he had not resembled her father.

Throughout time there has been the eternal theme of father sacrificing his son. Saturn devouring his sons with his own jaws. God the father sacrificing Jesus Christ; Abraham sacrificing Isaac and William Tell aiming his arrow at the apple on the head of his own son.

Max Ernst was also to explore the theme of father and son in 1927; 'Visions de Demi - sommeil' 'Visions of half asleep' was a book in which Ernst divulged childhood memories in which his father appears a threatening figure of whom the child is both afraid and jealous.

With Dali's use of collage he incorporated paper; photographs etc. in such a way that the collage is almost indistinguishable from the painting and completely so in reproduction.



Many new symbols appeared in Dali's paintings in 1930. A frequent symbol was the key; either alone or with other objects such as nails, ants, chalices and a chair. For Freud a clear memory of a key in association with the commonest dream symbolism of a room is that of a woman to be locked or unlocked.

In 'Combinations' 1931, the key and a swarm of ants are in the place of a girl's genitals which Dali suggests as vermin

Krafft-Ebing in 'Psychopathia Sexualis' 1899; recorded an enormous variety of psycho-pathological manifestations of sexual life; laying special stress on the symbolism of sexual aberrations like sadism and masochism. A number of cases illustrate the nature of fetishisms and this seems to have been a particularly rich source for Dali.

One way in which Dali dramatised his own obsessions was his adoption of the legend of William Tell, as the father figure theme. Dali places Tell with Abraham and God as a symbol of parental authority who does not flinch from sacrificing his own son. The interpretation has a personal significance for him and coincides with a crisis in his relations with his father, he had been banished from the house because of his affair with Gala.

The image of Gala or as Dali called her 'Galucka' the diminutive of his wife's name appeared to Dali as early as eight years when as a child his teacher at the local school showed him pictures of a young girl on a sledge in Russia.

Their partnership in business could be at best described as a love - hate affair. Once Dali had been prepared to sign a contract when Gala punched him on the face and badly cut it with the rings on her



fingers. When asked why she had done so her reply was "because I wanted him to know he was hit" (5)

On June 10th 1982, at the reported age of 89, Gala died. (although it was never verified as her true age) Gala's death served to remind Dali of his own mortality; his own hypochondria increased and he went deeper into seclusion.

After Gala's death; Dali did not carry out one of his more bizarre promises - that he would eat Gala if she died before him. 'Some people would say it would be cannibalism but for me eating Gala would be an expression of deep love for her.'

This image of cannibalism had previously been portrayed in a portrait Dali painted of Gala, where she was seen with a pair of chops poised on her shoulders. The meaning was that instead of eating Gala he would eat the raw chops. The chops were the victim of an abortive sacrifice.

Phallic and sexual references, symbolic and otherwise teem in 'William Tell' 1930 and the threat from his father is overt. Dali also quotes from religious iconography to underline Abraham/God parallels. The shamed son hiding his face with a leaf in the place of his genitals reaches a finger toward the extended hand of his father reminiscent of Michaelangelos Adam in the Sistine Chapel.

The 'Old Age of William Tell' 1931 where the young couple depart banished like Adam and Eve are easily read as Gala and Dali. In place of paradise is the old man, the father tended by two women. Secret and ambiguous sexual activity takes place behind a sheet as in a dimly recalled memory; evoking an area of repressed childhood experience.



The head of Napoleon is collaged onto the pedestal and this was an image of rich significance for Dali and entwined with many childhood memories.

Napoleon as hero had evidently; successfully broken from parental authority and provided Dali with a yardstick for his ambitions since he was a child.

Disguise was one of Dali's strongest passions as a child and he constantly wore a King's ermine cape, a gold sceptre and a gold crown studded with great topazes from which hung an abundant white wig. He fantasised from an early age. 'At 6 I wanted to be a chef; at 7 Napoleon.' (7)

This fascination with Napoleon stemmed from an Argentine family named Matas who lived on the 3rd floor of the Dali house. Each evening this family used to drink tea from a keg on which was painted a portrait of Napoleon. Dali's social fixation was the erogenous zone of his mouth and he wished to sip Napoleon's liquid. This image meant everything to Dali and corresponded exactly to the ideal model he had chosen for himself ... that of a King.

The 'Enigma of William Tell' 1933 was painted when Dali revolts against parental authority but didn't know if he would be the victor or vanquished. The father with Lenins face holds the baby (Dali) in his arms. On the child's head is a raw cutlet, a sign that he had cannibalistic intentions and wanted to eat the child. Just by William Tell's foot is a tiny walnut shell with a minute cradle and baby which is in danger of being crushed which represent Dali and Gala's future.



Another series of paintings begun in 1931 which includes 'The Birth of Liquid Desires' 1932 and 'The Signal of Anguish' 1932 relates to the long and elaborate masturbatory day dreams which Dali fostered and noted down in great detail. The cypress and fountain are variously transformed in Dali's paintings in association with childhood memories and other themes. All capable of provoking according to Dali prolonged and exotic fantasies.

In 1936 a change became noticeable in the general character of Dali's paintings; they tended to consist of unusual monolithic structures placed centrally in the bleak landscapes. His art had taken on a new richness and complexity of meaning.

Among these was 'Suburb of the Paranoiac critical town: Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History' 1936. In this painting several different sets of paranoiac phenomena occur and Dali explores various ways of visually interlocking objects unexpectedly or irrationally linked.

The first set concerns the architecture, three separate architectural spaces are ranged horizontally across the painting but in disjunctive planes, rather like three different stage sets. Each one represents a place well known to Dali. On the left a building from Palamos, South of Barcelona where Dali's friend Jose Marie Sert lived and where Dali painted the picture. In the centre framed through the archway is a village: Vilabertran; and on the right: the main street of Cadaques. The left and centre buildings are linked through the formal conjunction of the archway combined with the circular skylight. Each of these scenes is in itself a separate pictorial space. The image of the keyhole in the chest in the right foreground is repeated. A disturbing link between the two draped and ghost like figures in the



lower left and the imprint of an absent figure in the armchair in front of them.

Another painting during this time is the melting head propped by crutches in 'Sleep' 1937. It is a striking image of human sleep and especially of dream which was one of the central concerns for the Surrealists. The symbol of the crutch has always aroused curiosity in Dali's art. The symbol of the crutch is both social and political. In 'Sleep' the crutches according to Dali have a more specific role 'I have often imagined the monster of sleep as a heavy, giant head with a tapering body held up by the crutches of reality...' (8) when the crutches break there is a sensation of falling, similiar to drifting to sleep.

Another painting 'Swans reflecting elephants' 1937 shows a perfect example of the pictorial device that Dali had been using since 1929; that of the paranoiac - critical method.

Dali's first exhibition had been held in November 1929, a few months after Dali had officially joined the surrealist movement. The surrealist experimentation regained momentum under the impulse given to it by Dali who proved an invaluable catalyst for Surrealism. Dali endowed Surrealism with his paranoiac - critical method, which showed itself to be capable of being applied with equal success to painting; poetry and the cinema. Dali gave the following definition for the method, which was reproduced in Andre Breton's 'What is Surrealism'. 'Paranoiac - critical method: Activity: Spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.' (9)

Dali linked this activity to a form of madness or mental disturbances which he set out to simulate. It was Dali's strange ability to think



like a madman without in fact being mad that enabled him to generate his unique imagery.

His paintings of 1929 were personal documents. The practise of the paranoiac - critical method demonstrated in a general way the relationship between perception and mental states.

Surrealism had from the beginning turned its attention to madness and saw the state defined by a narrow concept of sanity and insanity was not an absolute state for the Surrealists. They believed that madness could be directly connected to the degree of suppression of the unconscious area of the psyche that exists in all people.

Freud refers to the observation of the late 19th century Italian psychologist; Sante de Sante, that paranoia could arrive at a single blow after a terrifying dream in which delusional material is suddenly brought to life. J. Lacan inferred that the structure of the ego is paranoid.

In 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' 1937 the double image expressed a significant theme. Dali uses repeated images of similar configuration and interconnected significance. The seated bowed figure of Narcissus becomes an ossified hand holding a cracked egg from which springs a narcissist flower. The figures in the background are like a parody of a group of figures in a painting of the Renaissance; only this group's attitudes are not innocent. If one gazes at the painting Narcissus melts into the background of rock.

The 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' provided Dali with a psychological element for a myth which he felt was important; Freud's term for Narcissus was self-love. The painting also deals with the cycle of



life. The mystery of rebirth and man's progress from birth to death.

The remaining paintings in this period deal with political themes inspired by the Spanish Civil War and Hitler. 'Soft Construction with Boiled Beans' 1936-37 and 'Autumn Cannibalism' 1937 deal with the former and the 'Enigma of Hitler' 1937 and 'Mountain Lake' 1938 deal with the latter.

'Soft Construction...' and 'Autumn Cannibalism' give a visual image for civil war of astounding originality. Dali painted the 1st shortly before the war and declared, 'I showed a vast human body breaking out into a monstrous excrescences of arms and legs tearing at one another in a delirium of autostrangulation....' (10)

Dali wrote of 'Autumn Cannibalism' '....these Iberian beings mutually devouring each other corresponding to the pathos of civil war, considered as a pure phenomenon of natural history' (11). However a secondary reading of this image could be a reference to Dali's first physical contact with Gala in 1929.

The image of the telephones used in 'The Enigma of Hitler' and 'Mountain Lake' refers to the calls made by the British Prime Minister, Chamberlain to Hitler. The fact that they are disconnected makes an obvious statement to the hopelessness of the forthcoming European situation.

The 'Enigma of Hitler' was based on a series of dreams that Dali had had. The image of Chamberlain's umbrella is a sinister object; identified with a bat which can be associated with a specific childhood memory. Once again Dali uses the paranoiac - critical method and the lake, the fish on the table becomes a giant phallus.



In 1938 in 'The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism Dali stated the following for his construction of 'Aphrodisiac Telephone'

'.... telephonic apparatus will be replaced by lobsters, whose advanced state will be rendered visible by phosphorescent plagues; vertible; flytrap; truffle - grounds....' (12)

The most successful double image was 'The Slave Market' 1940 in which the seated figure of Gala on the left gazes at a group of figures including two women dressed in black and white in the style of 17th century Spain. They together with the gaping arch in the ruined building behind them, form the bust of Voltaire. Their faces become his eyes: their gloved hand and arms: his jaw and the glowing sky through the domed arch form his head. Dali places a 3rd woman similarly dressed at the rear of the group of figures which resists any alternative reading.

Once again Dali returns to the persistent theme of sexual fear and inhibitions in 'Hallucinogenic Torreador' the little boy in the right foreground of the painting dressed in a sailor suit holding a large and rigid penis is Dali.



## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER ONE

1. Andre Breton 'What is surrealism' pg. 360 - Automatic writing: automatism - writing in the absence of conscious control utilised in Surrealism to express the real functioning of thought.
2. Salvador Dali - 'The Secret Life of S. Dali', pg 232 Chp. 9
3. Dawn Ades - 'Dali'
4. C.S. Hall 'A primer of Freudian psychology, pg. 17
5. Mark Rogerson - 'The Dali Scandal', pg. 94
6. Ibid, pg. 65
7. Ibid, pg. 17, Chp. 2
8. Simon Wilson: S. Dali, pg. 17
9. Andre Breton - 'What is Surrealism', pg. 87
10. Ibid, pg. 19
11. Ibid, pg. 19
12. Andre Breton 'The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism', pg. 82



## CHAPTER TWO

### POSTWAR ART

From 1945, Dali began to experiment with techniques that were akin to the post-war generation of artists, which some people refer to as his 'historical' paintings. Many of these paintings, are based on his strong faith in 'traditional painting'. Even though he favoured traditionalism, he did not despise modern art and admired the Abstract Expressionists; especially De Kooning.

Dali frequently used religious subject matter during this period to reintroduce metaphysics into physics. An event that influenced Dali deeply was the explosion of the atom bomb at Hiroshima at the end of World War II; and he was to frequently use this image of disintegration combined with his paranoiac - critical method.

In 'Exploding Raphaelesque Head' 1951 and several other paintings. Dali represents the disintegrating matter as horn-like shapes which he identifies as rhinoceros horns.

'Exploding Raphaelesque Head' is closely related to Italian Renaissance paintings: In this: Dali has linked a Raphael head of a Madonna with the interior of a 'Pantheon' in Rome, and shattered them into shapes that take the form of the rhinoceros horns.

The 'Madonna of Port-Lligat' 1950 was based on an alterpiece by Pirro della Francisco.

The whole composition of this painting is arranged around the eucharistic bread visible through a hole in the centre of Jesus' body. The point of the intersection of the diagonal lines indicates the



centre of the painting. Dali depicts, Gala as the Virgin and also as the angels on the right hand side of the painting. Although the architecture and the figures are dismembered, a balance is achieved by the egg suspending from a shell over the Madonna's head.

The most popular of all Dali's religious works is 'Christ of St. John of the Cross' 1951. The image of Christ hangs on a cross suspended over the Bay of Port Lligat. Dali describes the arrangement of the painting which was influenced by a dream '.... I worked out geometrically a triangle and a circle which 'aesthetically' summarised all my previous experiences and I inscribed my Christ in this triangle. I considered it the very nucleus of the universe'. (1)

The people beside the boat at the bottom of the painting are directly influenced by a drawing by Velazquez: 'The Surrender of Breda'

The 'Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus' 1959 was a major step in Dali's paintings; for the first time he combined all of his previous styles into one. The painting depicts the patron saint of Spain: Saint James pulling a boat to shore. At the same time, the figure of Saint James is holding a banner on which is an image of Gala. The monk kneeling at the bottom of the painting holding a crucifix is Dali. For Dali the jasmine flower in the centre which is exploding into an atomic cloud represents creative genius. There are many images in the painting relating to Spain and Dali felt that this was quite natural as both he and Christopher Columbus were Spaniards.

Two remaining 'religious paintings': 'Saint Anne and Saint John' and 'The life of Mary Magdalene' were both painted concurrently in 1960. The first is a small gouache and water-colour drawing which is part of a series. Dali used the colour with great care which enabled the figures of Saint Anne and Saint John to stand out almost in 3D.



Dali used models to research the body of Mary Magdalene but in the finished painting the curves of her body emerge from the cloudly whirlwinds of a stormy sky. He included several nails that seem to be suspended in mid-air and are aiming threateningly at the body of Mary Magdalene. At the right of the painting is the seated figure of a woman, in shadow that gives another threatening quality to the overall tone of the painting; presumably through Dali's use of colour.

For Dali, the late fifties were years of exceptional activity and disconcertingly various ideas. He began to experiment with Pop and Op Art and some of these works had obvious connections to Lichtenstein. He experimented with exploding stereoscopic paintings and holographs during the seventies.

At the opening of the International Surrealist Exhibition in New York; the Surrealists issued a protest dated December 1960. 'We remind everyone concerned that Salvador Dali was expelled from the Surrealist 20 years ago. More than ever we see in him Hitler's one time apologist; the fascist painter; the religious bigot; the avowed racist and friend of Franco; who opened Spain as a drillground for the most abominable thrust of barbarism the world has ever faced'. (2)

In holography and stereoscopy; Dali delighted in finding an area where technology could help create a new means of expression. Duchamp had also been fascinated by optical ingenuities. Holographic technology had not advanced as far as Dali had hoped and the ambitious scale of Dali's ideas outstripped the capacity of the medium.



## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER TWO

- 1 R. Descharnes 'Dali', pg. 54
2. A. Breton 'What is Surrealism', pg. 49



### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE DISCUSSION OF THE SOURCE OF DALI'S IMAGERY

Born 45 minutes after 8 on the 11th day of May 1904, to Salvador Dali Cusi, a notary and his wife Felipa at Figueras; the child was given the names Salvador y Jacinto Dali.

One of the chief clues to Dali's personality may lie in the fact that an older brother whom Salvador was named after, died from gastroenteritis nine months before his own birth. Man has long believed that a pregnant woman can 'mark' her baby by thought; experiences or emotions. However there is not enough scientific knowledge to prove or disprove this.

Indulged and spoiled the second Salvador Dali felt himself to be a substitute for the first ....'he was wisely loved, I was loved too well....' (1) There is also recorded evidence to show that the artist; Vincent Van Gogh was named after a dead brother. It is possible that this could give a clue to Dali's obsessional behaviour.

Dali as a child was to spend much of his childhood trying to prove that he was not his own dead brother and behaved irrationally. His brother and himself '.....resembled each other like two drops of water but had different reflections....' (2)

It is more than likely that this led to an obsessive fear of death which haunted him in later years. Jealousy combined with a morbid self identification with his brother made Dali an ambitious and attention seeking exhibitionist child.



At the age of seven, Dali was sent to the State School in Figueras but after a year he had forgotten the alphabet and how to spell his own name. He retained three clear memories from this period spent with the Christian Brothers which resurfaced in later paintings.

'I was the only child in the class upon whom the window exercised such an absolute power of fascination....' (3) Through this window he was able to see two large cypress trees of almost equal height. The one on the left was smaller and it leant slightly toward the other which was vertical. This image is also reminiscent of Van Gogh's paintings.

The second was a reproduction of Millet's Angelus: The third memory was a large enamel yellow statue of Christ nailed to a cross - the feet were dirty: produced by the daily contact of children's fingers.

At twelve, Dali's father enrolled him in the drawing class of Nunez, a local Spanish artist of whom Dali later said, he owed a great deal to.

There were many memories on which Dali placed the utmost importance and he was to represent many of these in later paintings. The one reason why child psychology is so important is that adult personality has its roots in childhood. What we are and what we do as adults is largely determined by the ways in which we were allowed to experience the inevitable events of childhood. Freud claimed that a patient's childhood memories and associations can be an aid for analysis and are crucial to the causes of an obsession.

At the age of five, Dali was given a present of a wounded bat from his cousin. He immediately loved the bat and placed it under a glass jar to heal it. However the next day the jar had been overturned and



the half alive bat was bristling in a writhing mass of ants. Dali picked up the bat and intended to kiss it; but instead bit it furiously and threw it into a pool of figs where the bat and the figs appeared to become one. This obsessional horror image resurfaces again and again in Dali's paintings. Death as a finality has little meaning for children until some real death of a friend; relative or pet hits home.

As a child Dali was to spend many summers in the home of the Pitchot family which was called 'El Muli de la Torre' the Tower Mill, where most of his reveries, especially those of an exotic character took place. The actual tower became a sacred spot for him and Dali referred to it as 'the Mansion of Sacrifice'. He was to discover French Impressionism in the dining room where he had breakfast every morning. One of the sons, Ramon had painted these Impressionist paintings.

During this time Dali executed a drawing on an old disused door of a still life; a basket of cherries. He applied the paint directly on to the door using only three colours; vermilion, carmine, and white. However he had forgotten to paint the stems so he directly glued 'real' cherry stems on to the door. He also placed the worms from the door into the real cherries. Even at such a young age, Dali showed inventiveness in his approach to painting.

A second incident occurred regarding the death of a pet - this time a hedgehog at 'El Muli de la Torre'. Dali discovered it covered with the ceaseless to and fro movement of a frenzied mass of wriggling worms. Dali touched and moved it with the crutch he had found in the tower. And in that instance the crutch had become transformed into a frightful symbol associated with death and resurrection.



'....my symbol of the crutch so adequately fitted and continued to fit into the unconscious myths of our epoch...' (4).

When Salvador Dali entered the School of Fine Art in Madrid 1921, he began his first Cubist paintings which were directly and intentionally influenced by Juan Gris.

Between 1922 - 23 Dali's paintings were a curious mixture of deliberate naivety and childishness and sophisticated introduction of dislocated space and abandonment of perspective: an example of this was 'Madrid Slum' 1922. He was also influenced by futurism; the lacemaker by Vermeer 1665 - 68 obsessed Dali all of his life as his parents had a reproduction of it in their home. Picasso was also an influence after he visited the studio of the artist and painted a still-life by moonlight where a cubist structure is infiltrated by new Expressionist and Surrealist elements.

Some text from 1924, taken from Dali's memoirs introduce an important dimension of Dali's thought at the time, he explains he was trying to paint in the most normal and natural manner possible. He said his paintings '....were perfectly understandable to children or to the fishermen of Cadaques, who were able to look at his paintings with 'pure eyes'. They are only incomprehensible to people with aesthetic preconceptions who can understand the complexities and richness of contemporary artistic painting but have lost the ability to look at nature simply....' (5)

While at college Dali was asked to paint a statue of the Virgin. Instead he represented a pair of scales - the Zodiac sign for the Virgin which was an example of future Dali philosophy - that of suggested imagery.



King Alfonso XIII paid a visit to the college which prompted two paintings, that of a double jealous image of Dali as a King and young girl which in turn can represent absolute monarchy.

Dali did not complete his course at the college, he was expelled twice, the first time in 1923 and the second and final time in 1926, after declaring '.... none of the professors being competent to judge me.... I withdraw....' (6)

The theme of masturbation which runs through the 1929 paintings surface clearly for the first time in 1926. The tiny round head in 'The Bather' tops a hermaphrodite body with a swollen arm merging into a sex organ.

In 'Loiseau Blesse' - 'The Wounded Bird' 1926 floats the phallic finger on an abstract sanded ground. And in 'Anthropomorphic Beach' the ambiguous sexual connotations are emphasised.

'Senicitas' 1926 - 27, the large central torso is shown bristling with black and mixed with red and yellow strokes which obviously represent underarm hair. This is also similar to a scene in 'Un Chien Andalou' where a woman's armpit hairs dissolve into sea-urchins. At the base of 'Senicitas' there are scattered fragments of more carefully realised objects which suggest a state of delirium.

Dali was now mixing techniques of representation in his paintings so that some images were half-realised and ghostly and others vividly palpable. This imagery was directly influenced by De Chirico and Ernst. Dali's adaptation of naive drawing stemmed from the idea that the contents of a dream should be noted down immediately in order to avoid the distorting influence of memory and the intervention of



learned drawing skills. The Miroesque genital phallic fingers and the dominant lumpen biomorphic torso in 'Senicitas' are obviously influenced by Arp and Miro.

In October 1928, the Barcelona Autumn Salon turned down his paintings 'Big Thumb Plate, Moon' and 'Decaying Bird' because the jury was shocked by some of its erotic imagery.

Dali first met Bunuel at the University of Madrid and wrote the scenario for 'Un Chien Andalou' an Andalusian Dog in Paris in three days. They worked closely together throughout the planning and filming and achieved a remarkable conjunction in their ideas. Dali wrote of their intention to make a film that '.... would carry each member of the audience back to the secret depths of adolescence, to the source of dreams; destiny and the secret of life and death..'.(7)

Dali's contribution to the films imagery have been repeated in his paintings - pianos; swarming ants; mud; armpits; keys; the severed hand; the painting of Vermeer; hair growing in the place of mouth or eyes, bicycling figure seen from behind and the cyclist white apron.

Some of the images in the film relate closely to the obsessional themes that already had begun to appear in his paintings - eroticism; death; and decay. The putrefying donkey appeared in 'Honey is Sweeter than Blood' and among others 'Senicitas' and L'Ane Povrri.

In the 'L'aberation dels dits', the liberation of the fingers 1929 published in 'L'Amic de les Artes' in March of the same year. Dali described seeing a lizard decomposed and eaten by ants when he was three or four years old. This image is also a throwback to the bat and the hedgehog incident.



Bunuel afterwards said that the film was a result '....of conscious psychic automatisim and to that extent does not recount a dream, although it profits from a mechanism analogous to dream ....' (8)

The distance between Dali and the Surrealists had been a result of seeing Surrealism wedded to the principle of automatism. Now he saw clearly it was more flexible and could include his own ideas.

Bunuel had helped Dali to a greater understanding of the surrealist movement. Dali did not connect himself to Surrealism until 1929

#### FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER THREE

1. S. Dali, The Unspeakable Confessions of S. Dali, pg. 20
2. S. Dali, The Secret Life of S. Dali, pg. 2
3. Ibid, pg.64
4. Ibid, pg. 257
5. Ibid, pg.301
6. Ibid, pg. 239
7. Dawn Ades, 'Dali', pg. 250
8. L. Lippard, 'Surrealists on Art', pg. 101



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DALI'S ASSOCIATION WITH SURREALISM

Many of the ideas of Surrealism, i.e. automatism (1) found objects etc. had been found to some extent in Dadaism but in a disjointed state. These ideas, systemised within a Freudian framework, inspired the origins of Surrealism. It was not merely a new artistic movement to contrast with Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism and Dadaism but was a basic change in the way people wrote, painted and saw.

The Dadaists transformed themselves into the Surrealist under the leadership of Andre Breton who sought a philosophical foundation for their art.

Bretons (originally trained as a psychiatrist) experience had been gained through the Parisian Dadaist group which included Tzara Tristan (2) who with Hugo Ball started publication of the Dadaist Magazine in 1917. Breton and the other Surrealists went along with Tzara's intent to dispute the falseness of logic. They wished to launch a movement of radical renewal and to promote a positive plan. This movement was conceived not as a breaking away from reality but a greater penetration into it.

The word Surrealism was first used by Apollinaire in June 21 1917 in a context that coupled avant-garde art with technical progress. In the Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 Andre Breton gave the following definition, '....Surrealism - noun: masculine: Pure psychic automatism by which one intends to express verbally in writing or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind. Didation, by thought in the absence of any control, exercised by reason and beyond any aesthetic or moral preoccupation.' (3)



The Surrealists didn't seek their heritage in past literary movements but in certain individuals of the past. An example of this is William Blake (4), whom the Surrealists saw as rejecting the exterior reality as a subject of artistic expression and attempted to transform the physical work.

In the 1920's and 1930's Andre Breton was Surrealist's greatest spokesman and he gave the movement a precise form which was closely linked to the psycho-analytic discoveries of Freud.

Salvador Dali entered the Surrealist group in the Summer of 1929 and revived the movement by effecting its adoption of his method of analysis known as 'paranoia - criticism' (5) so that the movement became reorientated to its original aims.

In November 1930, the Galerie Goemans held Dali's first Parisian exhibition which was an important event for Dali as it publicly classed him among the Surrealists. Along with Duchamp and Ernst; Dali was in revolt against Roger Fry's doctrine: art for art's sake.

In attempting to continue the symbolists' wish to break down antithesis between matter and mind which had been accepted for so long; the Surrealists found support in Hegel and in searching for a basis for the faith they had in that the mind's scope could outreach its determined logical powers looked to Freud '....What had been a therapy for Freud became a philosophy and literary point of departure for Breton'. (6)

The Surrealist movement had aspects of unbridled visionary qualities and of black humour; both derived from its Freudian influence. Peter Selz in '7 Decades' has defined the intention of Surrealism as that of



'....penetrating to the artists innermost visions .... deep in the unconscious of dream fantasy and hallucination ....' (7)

What Breton saw in Freud's work was confirmation that the materialist - realist needed challenging. Breton believed Freud had proved the existence of a psychic reality beyond the realities of everyday life to escape from the construction of logic. The work of Freud was to influence the entire modern art movement on an international scale.

One of the objectives of Surrealism was to acknowledge frankly the presence and force of sexuality. As disciples of Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists looked upon the attainment of desire as a process of wish-fulfillment. Thanks to Freud they realised how desire in man may find outlets in roundabout ways.

The blatant phallic imagery of 'The Red Tower' 1930 by Salvador Dali is one instance of the erotic symbolism that often informs the work of Surrealism. The Tower itself recalls the frequent presence of similar structures in the metaphysical paintings of De Chirico. Nearly all of the major Surrealist painters were influenced by De Chirico's paintings. Breton never denied that De Chirico blazed the trail for the new art and reaffirmed this in succeeding editions of 'Surrealism and Painting'. However De Chirico's relationship with the Surrealist's was problematic and Breton bore a grudge against the great innovator because of his abandonment of the movement.

For five or six years after his acceptance as a Surrealist, Dali was one of the movements chief theoreticians although he never came close to assuming the leadership of the group as he had hoped. Dali designed illustrations for the Surrealist magazines, published poetry



and essays and started the group off in a new direction - that of making objects.

Andrew Breton did not lose sight of the contribution objects were capable of making to the exploration of Surreality. As early as 1924, Breton had proposed making and circulating objects in dreams.

The Surrealist fascination with objects, whether it be with finds with modified everyday objects or with assemblages, was an outgrowth of their trust in the marvellous as proving reality capable of opening up a path to Surreality. Any discovery changing the nature of an object constitutes a Surrealist fact.

Having vehemently rejected traditional ideas about art in order to explore the new mysteries of psychoanalytical theory and modern technology; artists such as Dali, Duchamp, Ernst, Magritte and Ray created powerful works with strangely disturbing imagery. These images remain compelling today and still influence contemporary art.

Surrealism became an art of risk where the creator had the ability to incur risks and take nothing for granted. The Surrealists avoided developing a style, cliches, mannerisms and fixed forms of expression.

During the mid-30's Dali's relationship with the Surrealists began to suffer. Despite their mutual passionate commitment to Freud and certain aspects of psycho-analytical theory; belief in free-play of the irrational imagination and desire, Dali seemed to the Surrealists to be a reactionary with political interests in Hitler and Franco and an avowed racist. Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 was being discussed in lengthy meetings by the Surrealists.



Dali, in 1934 described Hitler as a Surrealist innovator and supported Franco which went against the very grain of Surrealism. This led to a confrontation with the Surrealists, although Dali argued he had the right to paint anything he pleased since nothing was taboo in Surrealist theory. His association was to continue for several more years although he was never again to be totally committed to the Surrealist movement. By 1939 Dali was estranged from most of the group.

After their final break in 1940, Dali declared '.... the difference between me and the Surrealists is that I am a Surrealist'. (8)

During the summer of 1940, after the invasion of France, Dali and Gala left for the United States and joined many other European artists in exile for a period of time. In 1941 Breton claimed that Dali's work had stopped to have any significance for the Surrealists and rebaptized Dali as 'Avida Dollars', the anagram of his name because of his taste for money.

Dali painted a number of society portraits and constructed several window displays. One of his patrons included Caresse Crosby. Dali and Gala did not return to Europe until 1948.



FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER FOUR

1. Andre Breton, 'What is Surrealism' pg. 360  
'.... by returning to automatism we see means of eliminating the boundaries and of multiplying the ways of reaching the most profound levels of the mental personality....'
2. Tzara Tristan, 1896 - 1963. Born in Romania, Promoter of the Dadaist Movement and participated in the Surrealist activities during 1924 - 34. Thereafter he became a leading figure in French Stalinism.
3. T. Neff, 'Dada and Surrealism', pg. 64
4. William Blake, 1757 - 1827, English preromantic poet and painter. A principal English source of Surrealist inspiration.
5. Explanation of Dali's paranoia - criticism method. See pg. 16 and pg. 17.
6. T. Neff, 'Dada and Surrealism', pg. 65
7. E. Crispolti, 'Ernst, Miro and the Surrealists', pg. 9
8. Andre Breton, 'What is Surrealism', pg. 124



## CONCLUSION

Salvador Dali's creative genius cannot be denied and his imput, through his paranoiac - critical method, into the Surrealist movement must be realised as an invaluable catalyst for Surrealism.

The imagery in his paintings is largely autobiographical, frequently symbolic and often readily interpreted and linked to an obsession, the latent cause may have possibly been related to the death of his brother.

Dali stresses that many of the images he used referred to childhood events. Freud has stated that he believed that an obsession was often linked to a childhood event or experience which may be buried deep in the subconscious, and he strongly believed that such an event may influence a person throughout his or her entire life.

The disturbing imagery in Dali's paintings is powerful and once a painting by Dali is viewed, it is never forgotten. Through his paintings, Dali influenced the entire art movement on an international scale.



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Senicitas, 1926 - 1927

The First Days of Spring 1929

Illuminated Pleasure 1929

Accommodations of Desire, 1929

The Great Masturbator, 1929

Dismal Sport, 1929

William Tell, 1930

The Old Age of William Tell, 1931

The Birth of Liquid Desire, 1932

The Enigma of William Tell, 1933

Suburb of the Paranoiac-Critical Town:  
Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History, 1936

The Signal of Anguish, 1936

Metamorphosis of Narcissus, 1937

Swans Reflecting Elephants, 1937

Sleep, 1937

The Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire, 1940

Madonna of Port Lligat, 1949

Christ of Saint John on The Cross, 1951

Exploding Raphaelesque Head, 1951

Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, 1959





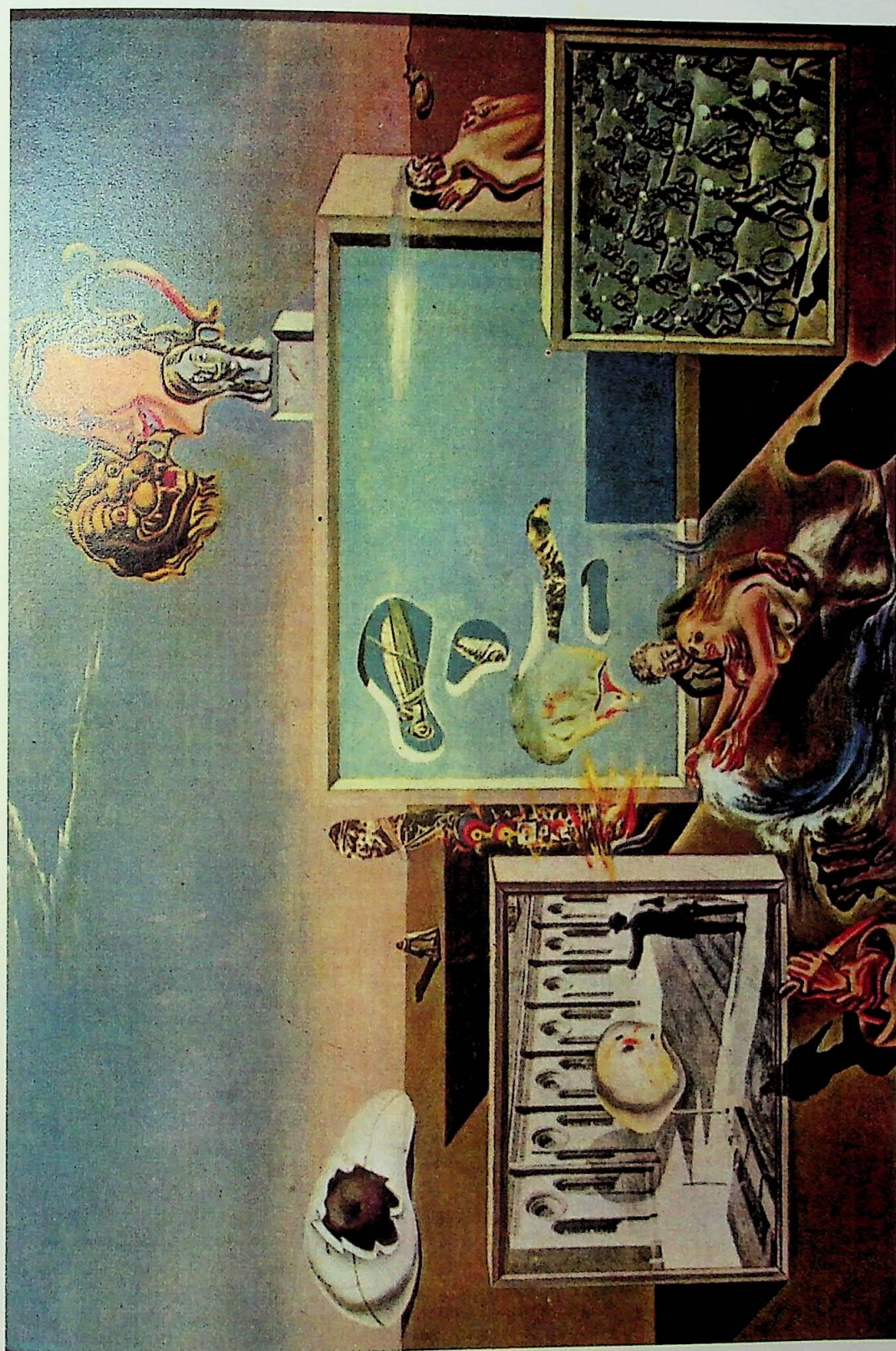
Senicitas, 1926 - 1927





The First Days of Spring, 1929





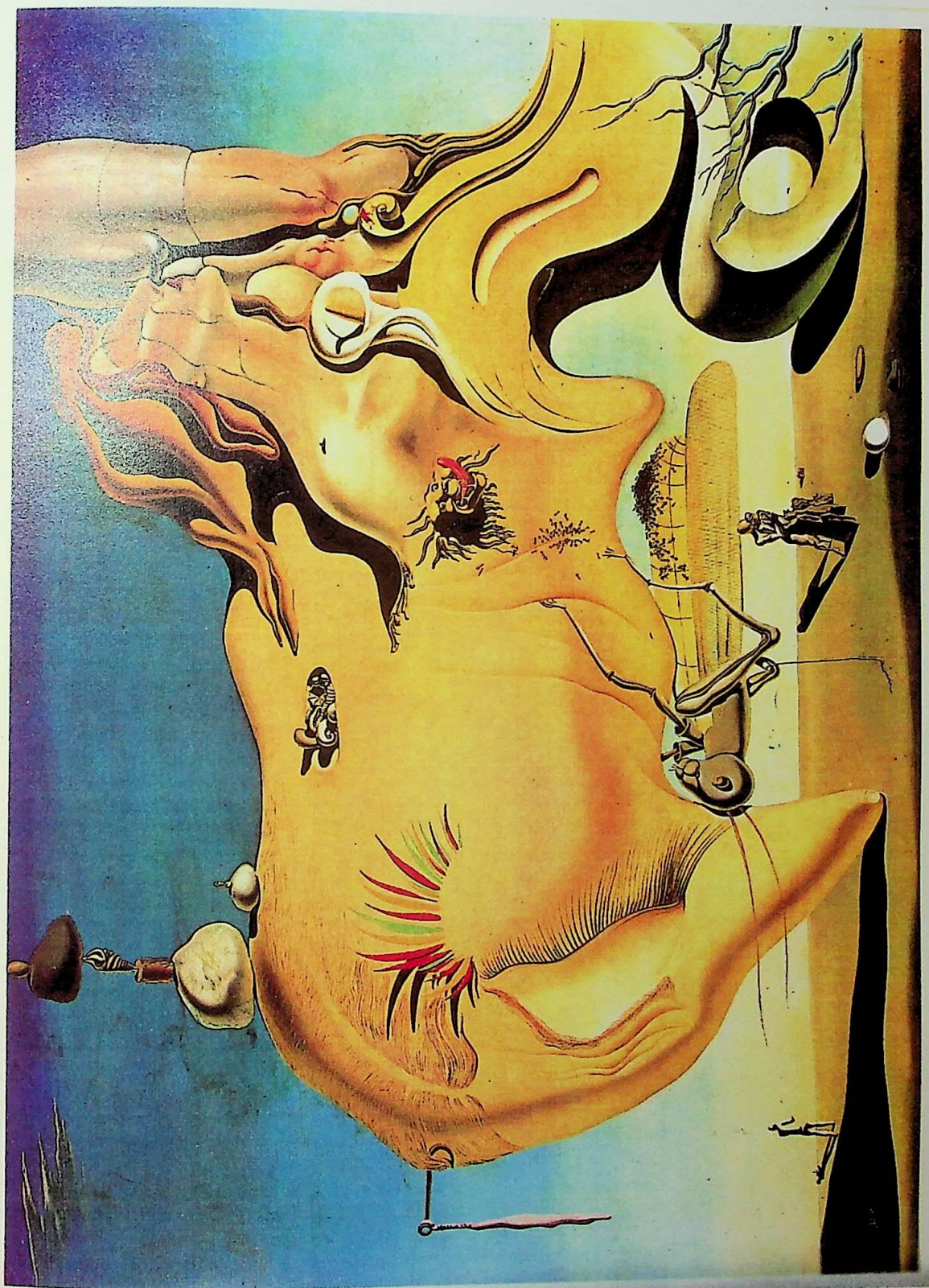
Illuminated Pleasure, 1929





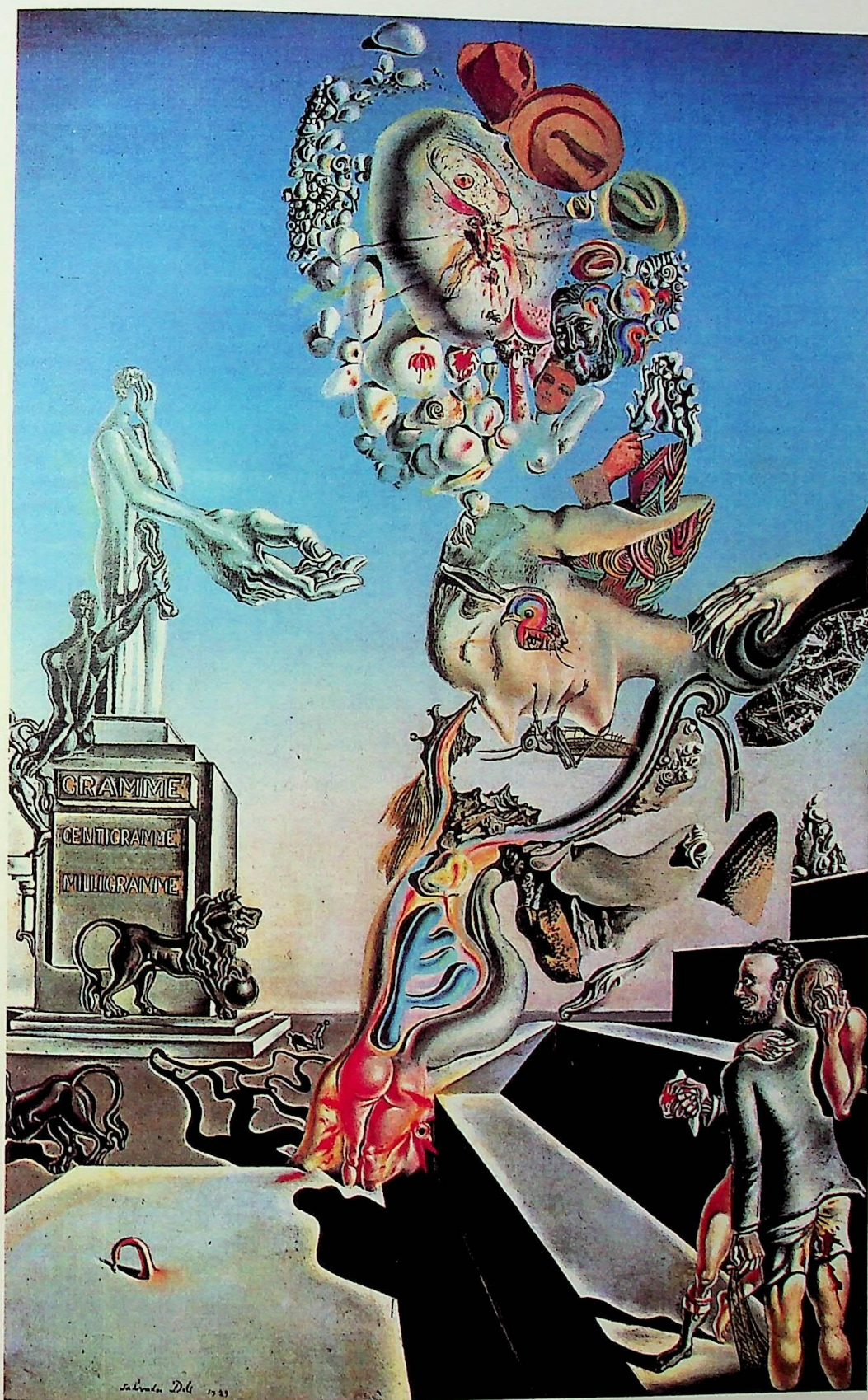
Accommodations of Desire, 1929





The Great Masturbator, 1929





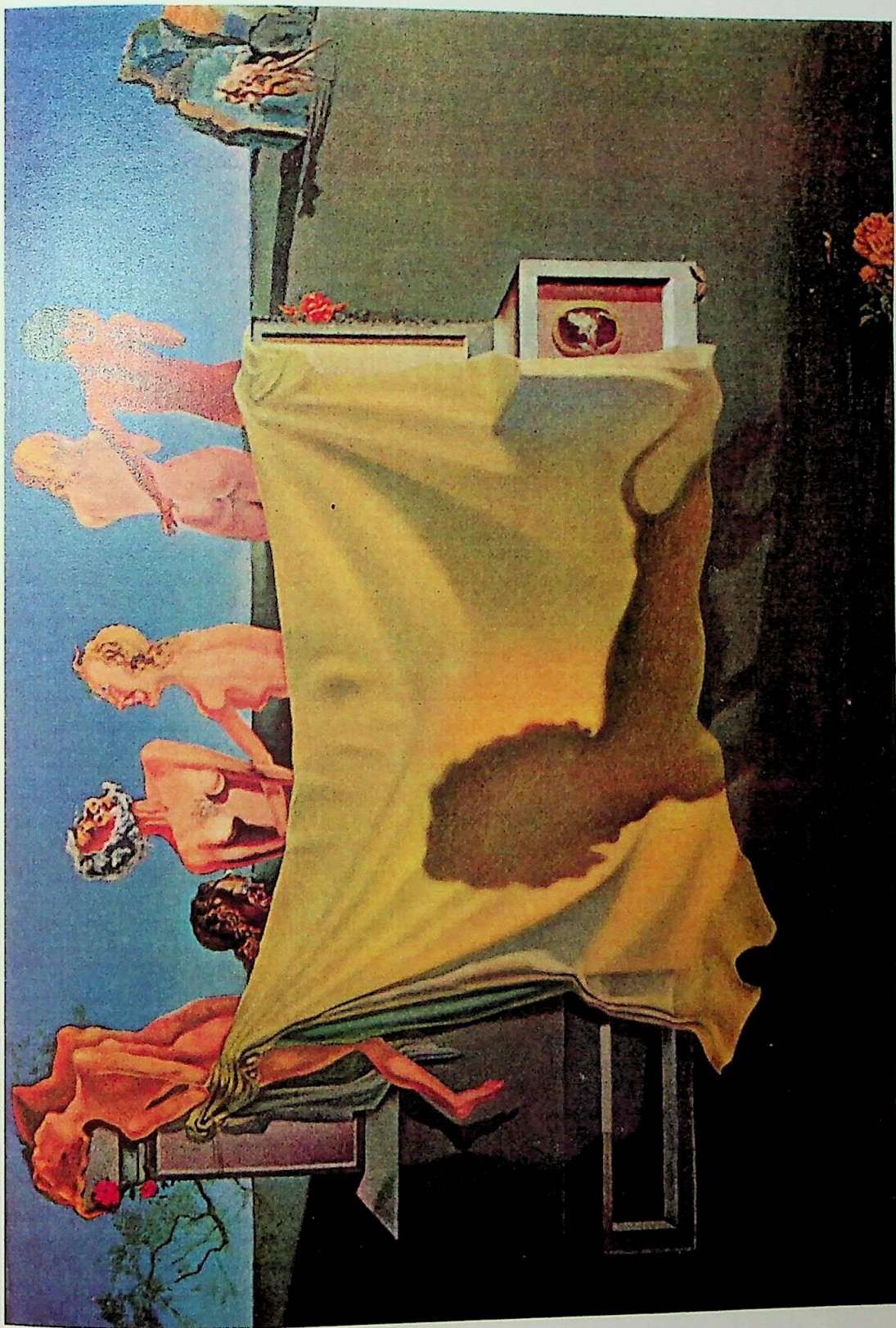
Dismal Sport, 1929





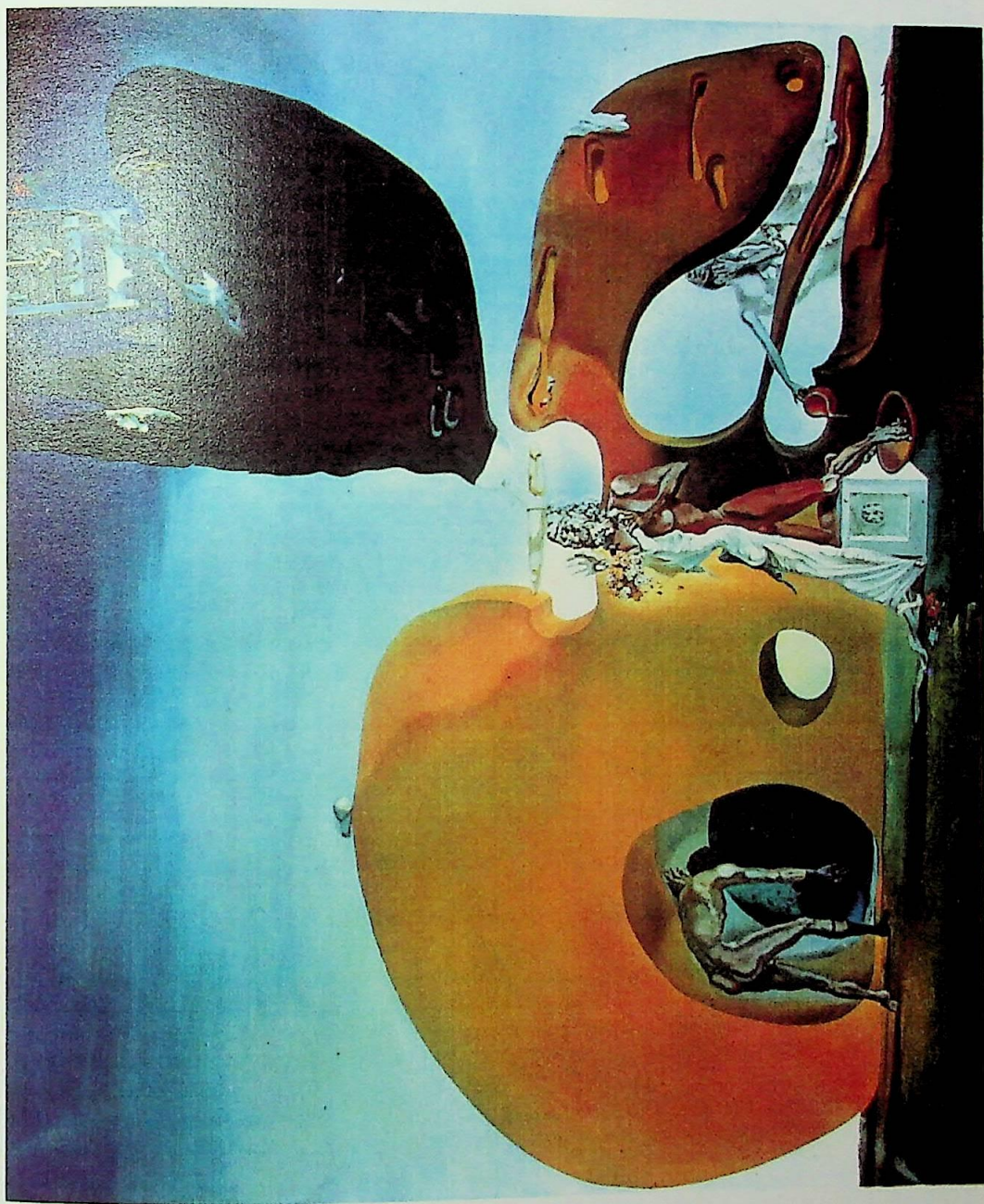
William Tell, 1930





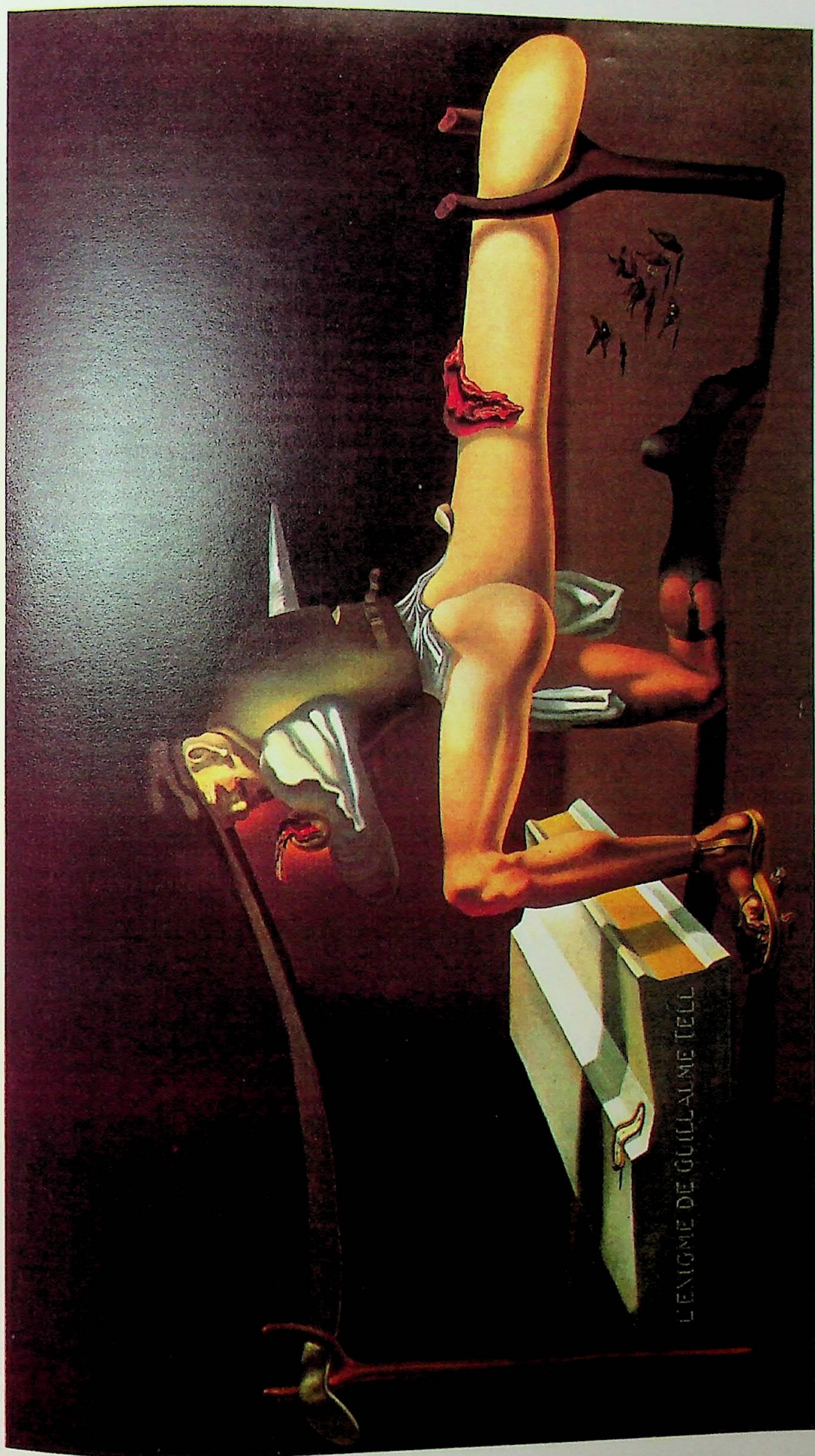
The Old Age of William Tell, 1931





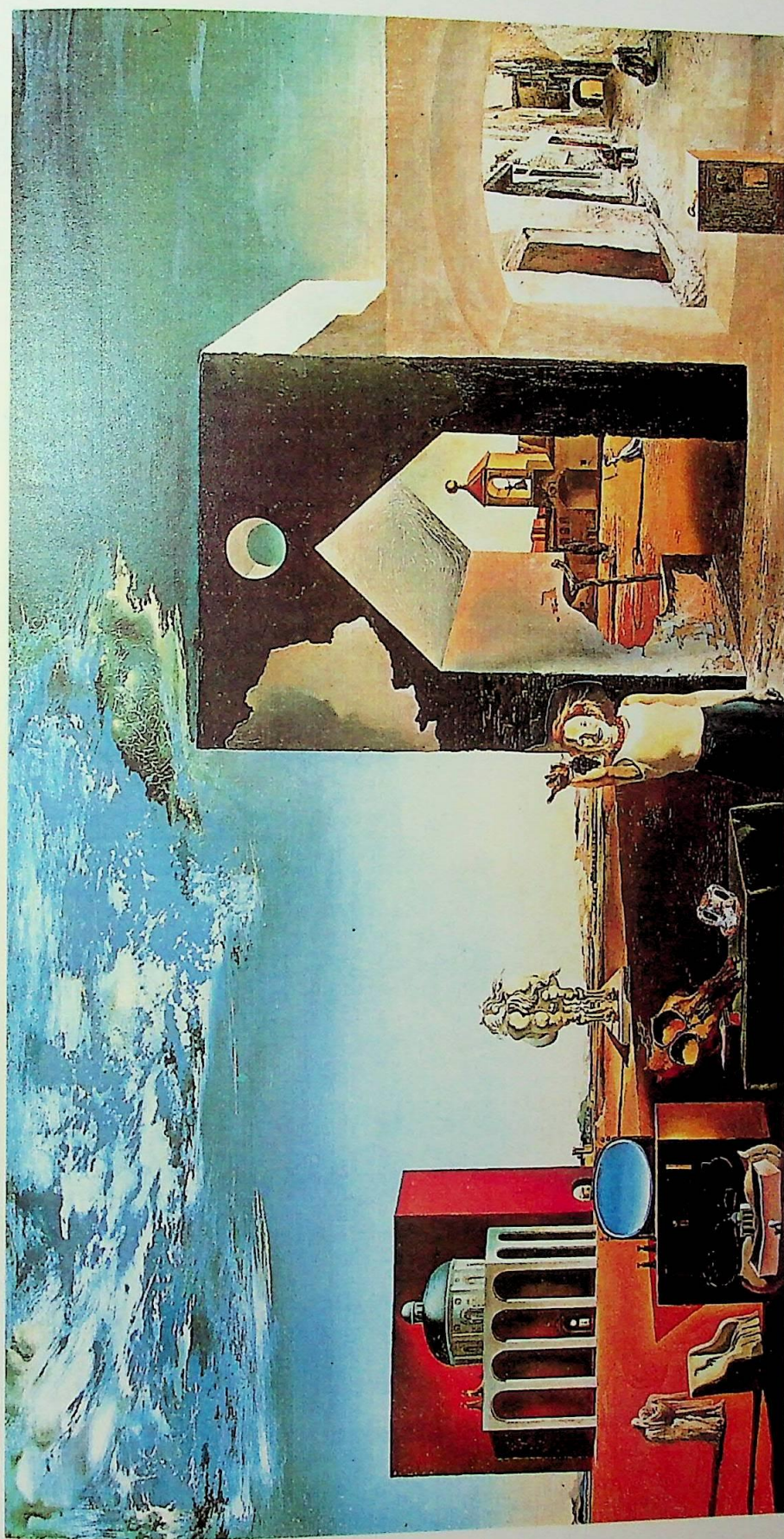
The Birth of Liquid Desire, 1932





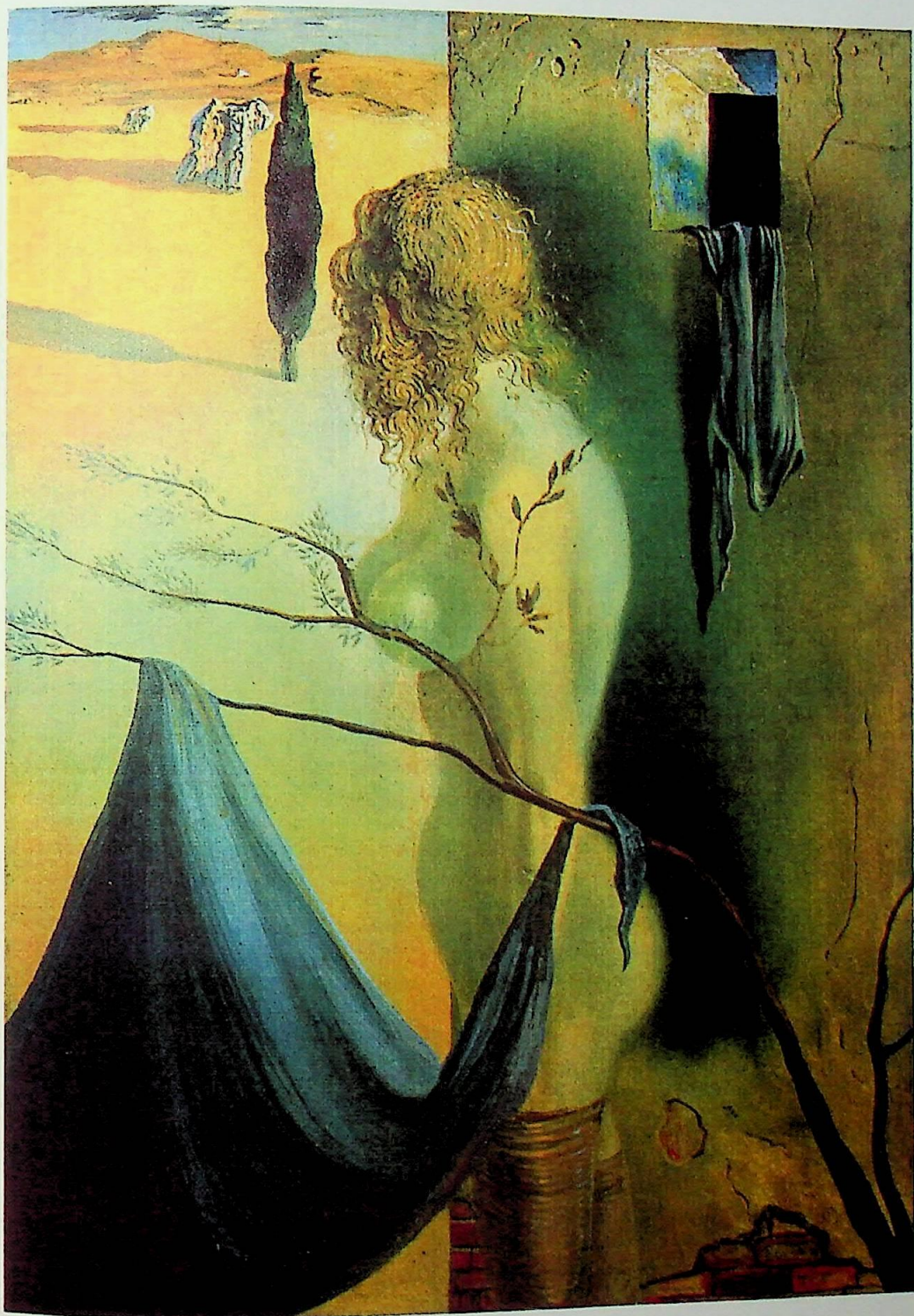
The Enigma of William Tell, 1933





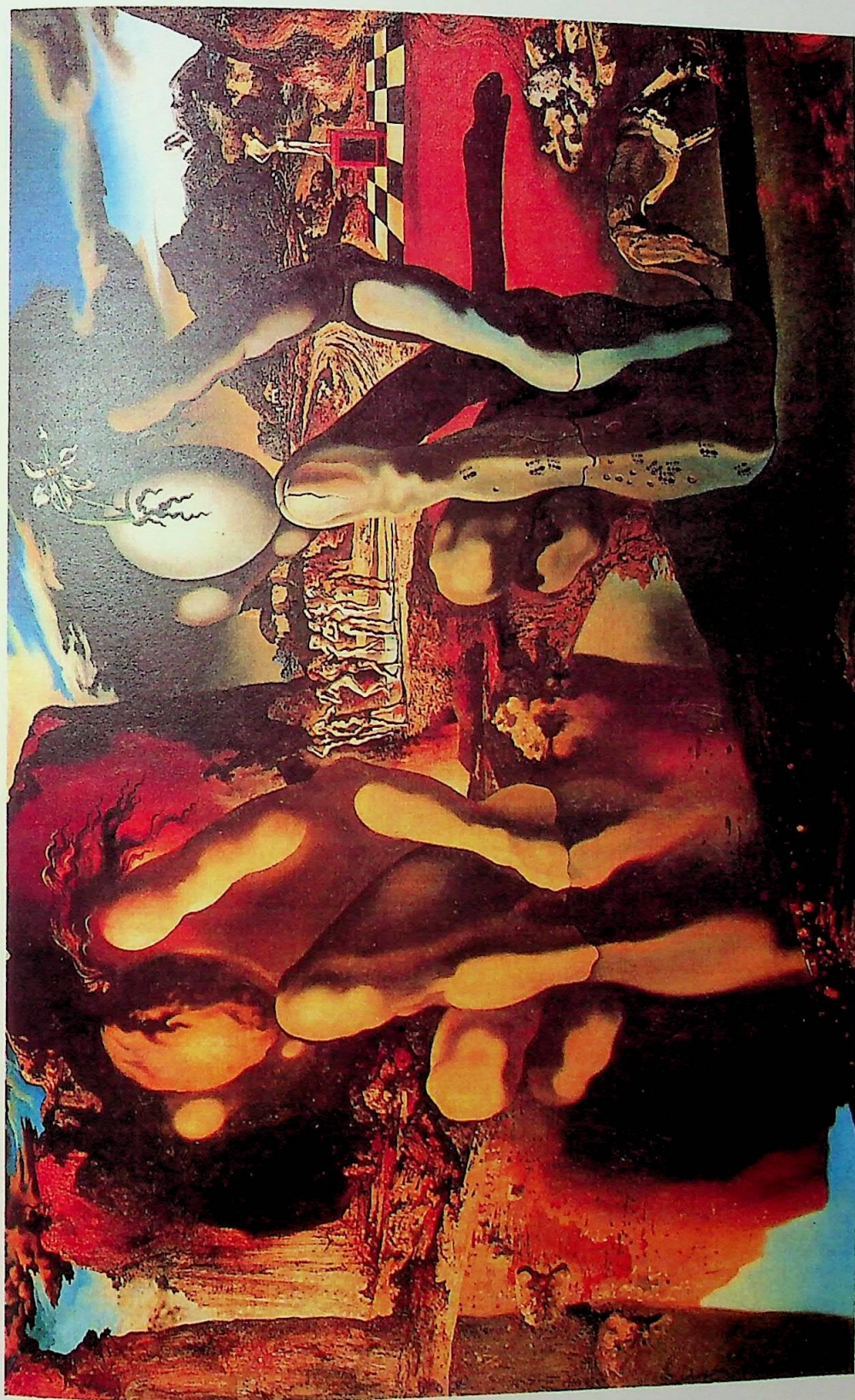
Surburb of the Paranoid-Critical Town:  
Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History, 1936





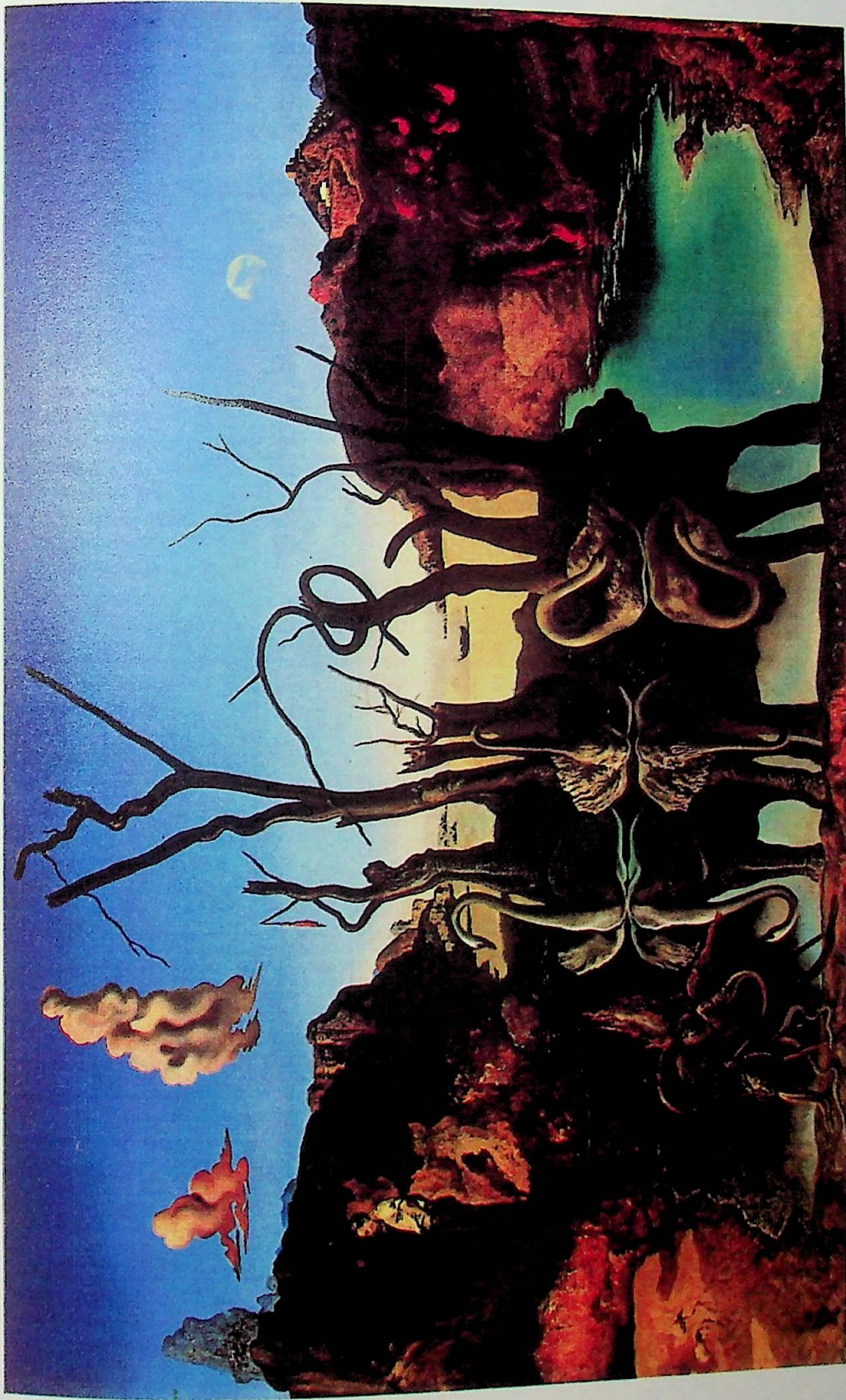
The Signal of Anguish, 1936





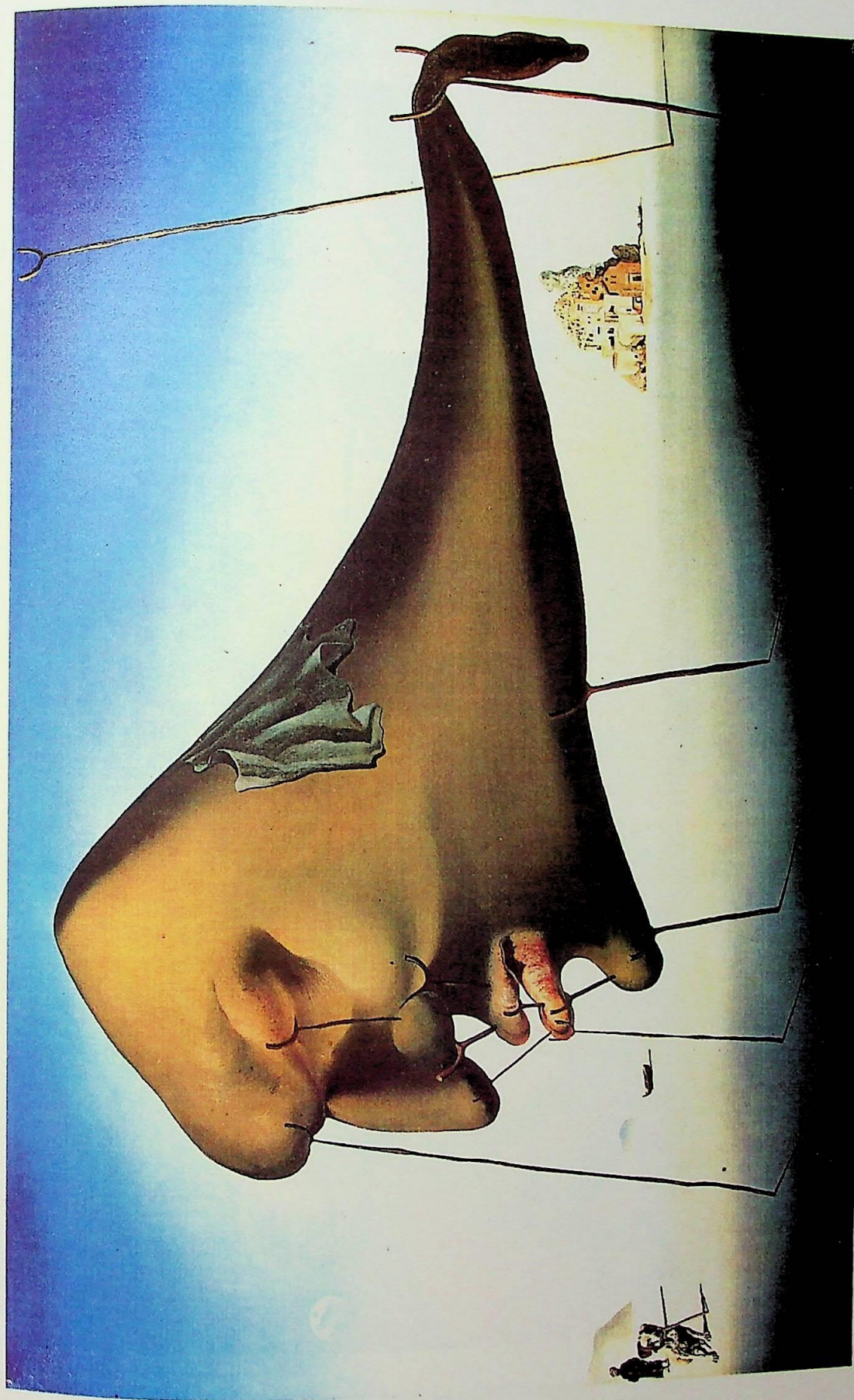
Metamorphosis of Narcissus, 1937





Swans Reflecting Elephants, 1937





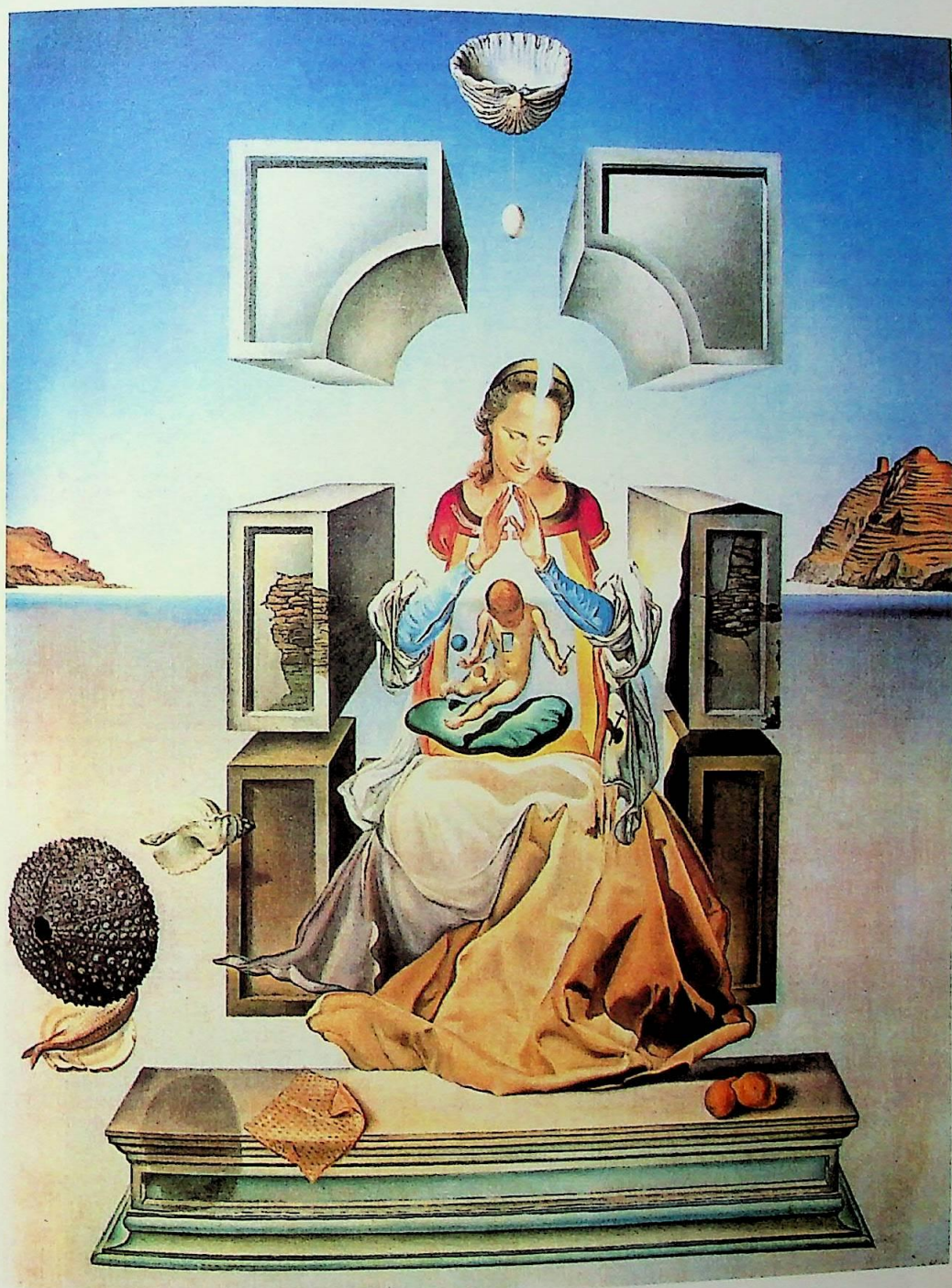
Sleep, 1937





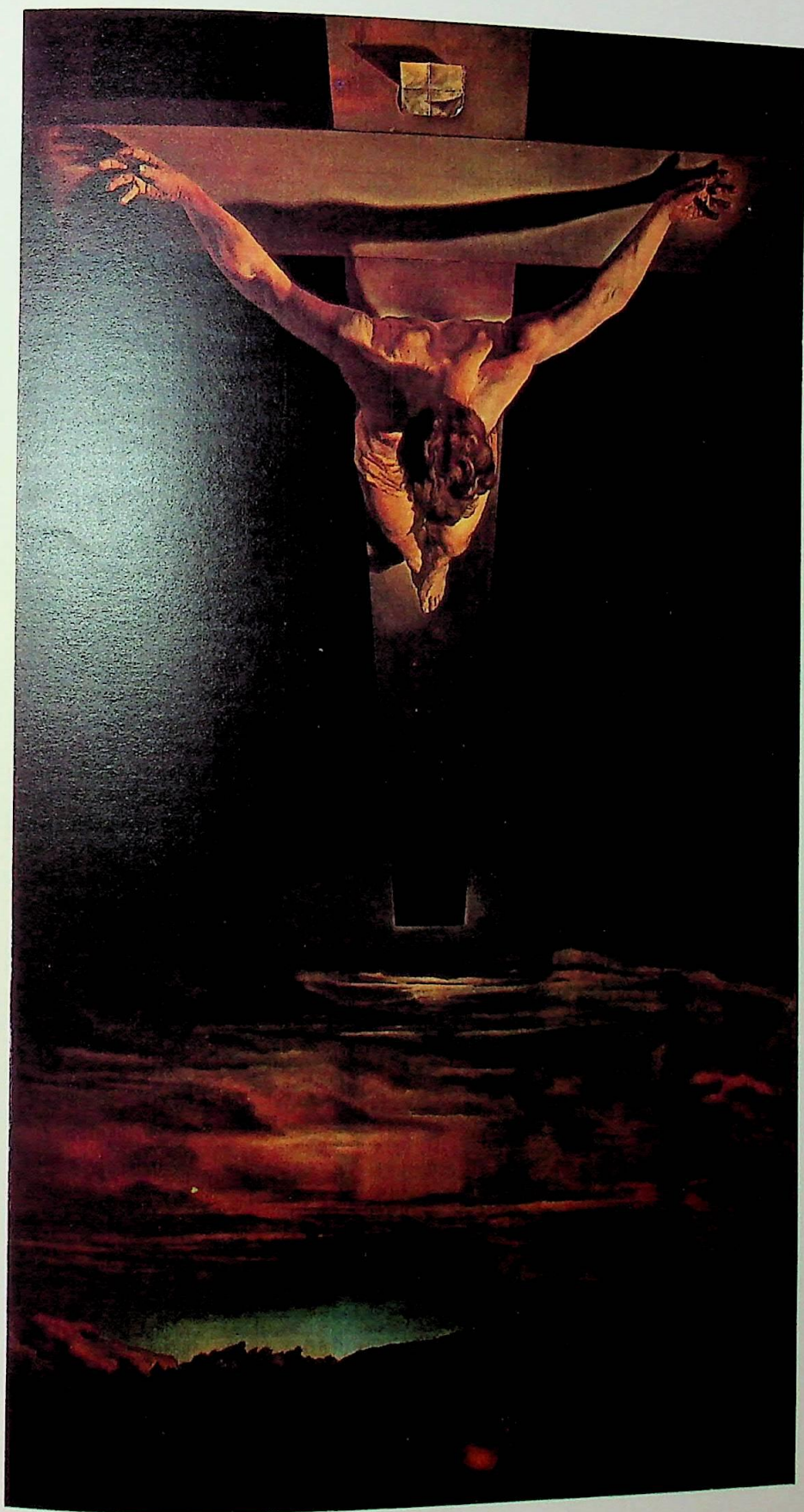
The Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire, 1940





Madonna of Port Lligat, 1949





Christ of Saint John on the Cross, 1951





Exploding Raphaelesque Head, 1951





Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, 1959



CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Senicitas, 1926-7; Oil on Panel,  $24 \frac{3}{4} \times 18 \frac{1}{2}$ , Private Collection
- The First Days of Spring - 1929; Oil and Collage on Panel,  $49 \frac{1}{5} \times 65$   
Private Collection
- Illuminated Pleasure 1929; Oil and Collage on Panel,  $9 \frac{3}{8} \times 13 \frac{3}{4}$ .  
The Sydney and Harriet Janis Collection.
- Accommodations of Desire, 1929; Oil on Panel  $8 \frac{5}{8} \times 13 \frac{3}{4}$ ,  
Private Collection
- The Great Masturbator, 1929; Oil on Canvas  $43 \frac{1}{3} \times 59$ ,  
Private Collection
- Dismal Sport, 1929; Oil and Collage on Canvass,  $12 \frac{1}{4} \times 16 \frac{1}{8}$   
Private Collection
- William Tell, 1930; Oil and Collage on Canvas,  $44 \frac{1}{2} \times 34 \frac{1}{2}$   
Private Collection
- The Old Age of William Tell, 1931; Oil on Canvas,  $38 \frac{1}{2} \times 55 \frac{5}{6}$
- The Birth of Liquid Desire, 1932; Oil on Canvas,  $37 \times 44$ .  
Guggenheim Foundation, Venice
- The Enigma of William Tell, 1933; Oil on Canvas  $79 \frac{1}{3} \times 136 \frac{1}{2}$ ,  
Satensmuseer, Stockholm.
- Suburb of the Paranoiac-Critical Town:  
Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History, 1936; Oil and Canvas  
on Collage,  $18 \frac{1}{8} \times 26$ .  
Former Collection of E.F.W. James E.S.Q.
- The Signal of Anguish, 1936; Oil on Panel,  $8 \frac{3}{4} \times 6 \frac{1}{2}$ ,  
Private Collection
- Metamorphosis of Narcissus, 1937; Oil on Canvas,  $20 \times 30 \frac{3}{4}$ ,  
Tate Gallery, London
- Swans Reflecting Elephants, 1937; Oil on Canvas,  $51 \times 77$ ,  
Cavalieri Inc., California.
- Sleep, 1937; Oil on Canvas,  $19 \frac{5}{8} \times 30 \frac{1}{4}$   
Rotterdam Museum
- The Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire; 1940; Oil on  
Canvas,  $18 \frac{1}{3} \times 25 \frac{3}{4}$   
The Salvador Dali Museum, Florida
- Madonna of Port Lligat, 1949; Oil on Canvas,  $12 \times 8$   
Canada
- Christ of Saint John on The Cross, 1951; Oil on Canvas,  $80 \frac{3}{4} \times 45$   
 $\frac{2}{3}$   
Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum
- Exploding Raphaelesque Head, 1951; Oil on Canvas,  $17 \frac{1}{2} \times 13 \frac{3}{4}$   
Private Collection



Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, 1959; Oil on Canvas 13' x 6" x 9' 4"  
The Salvador Dali Museum, Cleveland.

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