Introduction, Special Issue on Salvador Dalí

Elliott H. King, Guest Editor

There was a rich painter named Dali,
A greedy unprincipled Charlie,
Who worshipped the Cross
And called Franco 'boss'—
And yet he's still feted, bizarrely.

Readers of *The Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* will require no introduction to Salvador Dalí. Eminently accomplished in painting, sculpture, writing, filmmaking, and design, he is one of the world's most immediately recognizable artists. In terms of sheer popularity, the numbers speak for themselves: in 2018, over 1.4 million people visited the three Dalí museums in northeastern Spain: the Teatre-Museu Gala-Salvador Dalí, the Gala Dalí Castle in Púbol, and the Dalí House-Museum in Portlligat.[1] In 2012, the Pompidou Center's retrospective of his work nearly broke the museum's attendance record, tallying 790,090 people (an average of 7,315 a day)—a number only exceeded by the museum's previous Dalí exhibit in 1979.[2] In 2015, another retrospective, this time in Brazil, welcomed 1.5 million visitors between its two venues, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.[3] From big-box stores to niche museum giftshops, Dalí merchandise abounds—watches, socks, calendars, notebooks, and of course, the posters that decorate many a college dormitory. The artist's academic reputation has been far less steady, though even so, one could hardly describe him as marginalized. Marking what would have been Dalí's one-hundredth birthday, the year 2004 saw no fewer than seven major exhibitions of his art, spurring a hefty scholarly bibliography that analyzes, among myriad other subjects, his psychoanalytic theorization of "critical paranoia,"[4] connection to mass culture,[5] prolific activity as a writer,[6] work in cinema,[7] abiding interest in science,[8] artistic relationship with Picasso,[9] Duchamp,[10] and Warhol,[11] and influence on contemporary art.[12] With recent studies of Surrealism at last bringing

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welcome attention to the accomplishments of less familiar figures in the surrealist orbit, especially those outside the conventional U.S.-European axis, one might well wonder: why is it worth bringing the conversation back once again to Salvador Dalí? In fact, taking that question a step further, there is even an argument for *opposing* Dalí's prominence in surrealism studies, as the anonymous limerick above—recently passed along to me by a practicing surrealist—suggests. Such complexities have been on my mind throughout the process of guest editing this special issue of *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, and while it is true that Dalí's relationship to Surrealism remains contentious at best, his impact is equally undeniable and enduring.

Dalí made his American premiere in October 1928, when three of his early paintings – *Seated Girl* (1925), *Basket of Bread* (1926), and *Anna Maria* (1926)—exhibited at the "Twenty-Seventh International Exhibition of Paintings" at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. However, it was Arthur Everett "Chick" Austin, Jr.'s inclusion of *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) three years later at the Wadsworth Atheneum's "Newer Super-Realism" exhibition that first established the artist's place in popular consciousness. This is not to say that Dalí was singularly responsible for introducing Surrealism to the U.S., of course—Surrealism was already covered in the American press as early as 1925[13]—but as *The Persistence of Memory* toured the East Coast, eventually finding its way to the Art Institute of Chicago's "A Century of Progress" exhibition in 1934, Dalí eclipsed other members of the surrealist group as the "Spanish leader of the new school," and the movement became increasingly associated with the artist's flaccid timepieces festering with ants and flies.[14] Where many lay audiences had been confounded by cubism's outermost abstractions and the rise of non-figurative modern art, Dalí's paintings satisfied a longing for recognizable subject matter and technical mastery while still being offbeat enough to appear "avant-garde;" even his most abstruse subjects could be explained in the familiar terms of dream-imagery.[15] Most Americans were unaware of Surrealism's literary foundations, much less its revolutionary and emancipatory aims, and the artist's relative accessibility swiftly gave rise to a brand of de-politicized "Surrealism" in U.S. visual and commercial culture. "Dalí had launched one of those crazes which regularly grip everyone in America, from top to bottom of the social scale, like an epidemic," writes Marcel Jean. "The Dalínian version of Surrealism was apparently the latest brilliant successor to the Coué method, mah-jongg, the Charleston, the song *Valencia*, and so many other dazzling and ephemeral fashions."[16] By the time Dalí and Gala made their first voyage to New York in November 1934, the artist was already a celebrity, and *The Persistence of Memory* was a recent addition to MoMA's permanent collection—the anonymous gift of Helen Lansdowne Resor, one of the museum's trustees. From there, Dalí's rise was meteoric: In 1936, his portrait by Man Ray was on the cover of *TIME* magazine, its feature art article highlighting the painter's "extraordinary technical facility" and "faculty for publicity which should turn any circus pressagent [sic.] green with envy": "[S]urrealism would never have

attracted its present attention in the U.S. were it not for a handsome 32-year-old Catalan with a soft voice and a clipped cinemactor's moustache, Salvador Dalí."[17] The artist made headlines again in 1939, when he was commissioned to design window displays for New York's Bonwit Teller department store—a project that infamously turned into a publicity stunt when, in a rage over his designs being altered, he climbed into a fur-lined bathtub, slipped, and crashed through the glass onto Fifth Avenue. Bigger, more public commissions followed, and with each success, Dalí became more self-aggrandizing and increasingly dismissive of Breton and the Paris group.[18]

Dalí and Gala left New York for France in 1939, but as the German army advanced, occupying Paris in June 1940, the couple set sail again for the U.S., where they would spend the next eight years in exile. Officially expelled from the Surrealists, Dalí continued to garner commercial attention, creating fantastical advertisements and magazines covers for *Town and Country*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. Between 1944 and 1947, he produced fifteen collages to advertise Bryan's Hosiery, and other artworks were used to sell Johnson Paints and Waxes (1942), Chen Yu lipstick (1945), and Leich's "Desert Flower" perfume (1947). The artist later boasted, "America recognized me as its prodigal son and threw dollars at my head like handfuls of confetti."[19] In 1942, he published his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, mostly written at Caresse Crosby's palatial Hampton Manor estate near Bowling Green, Virginia, which he followed in 1944 with his first and only novel, *Hidden Faces*, penned at the New Hampshire home of his patron, the ballet impresario Marquis George de Cuevas. A series of extended sojourns in California saw the creation of the dream sequence for Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) as well as designs for Disney's animated film, *Destino* (1946/2003). Though Dalí returned to Europe in July 1948, the United States would continue to play a key role in his success through the 1970s, with regular exhibitions at the Carstairs and Knoedler galleries, and appearances on such widely-watched television programs as *What's My Line* (1957), *The Mike Wallace Interview* (1958), *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1961), and *The Dick Cavett Show* (1970). He found success in other geographic areas of the Americas, too. I am cognizant of focusing this introduction—perhaps too myopically—on Dalí's relationship with the United States, the country where he enjoyed the greatest renown, but future research in terms of "Surrealism and the Americas" would fruitfully trace his trajectory beyond the U.S. as well. Dalí did not personally visit Latin America,[20] though images of his paintings were circulating in Mexico as early as 1930 through the journal *Contemporáneos*, influencing a generation of Mexican painters,[21] many of whom took part in the 1940 "Exposición internacional del surrealismo" at the Galería de Arte Mexicano (Dalí's own painting, *The Sublime Moment*, was also included despite his recent estrangement from the movement). In 1944, the Buenos Aires-based publisher Editorial Poseidon produced the first Spanish translation of *The Secret Life* (*Vida Secreta de Salvador Dalí*), this eight years before Michel Déon provided the

book's translation into French. In Canada, meanwhile, the Québécois *Automatistes* who emerged in the 1940s worked to steer artistic tastes away from Dalí's veristic style, though some of his large-scale religious artworks, including *The Madonna of Portlligat* and the 13 ½ x 10 ft painting, *Santiago El Grande*, found their way north of the forty-ninth parallel, into the collection of Sir James Dunn and his wife, Marcia Anastasia Christoforides (later to become Baroness Beaverbrook). Four of those paintings—*Santiago El Grande*, *La Turbie: Sir James Dunn*, *Equestrian Fantasy: Portrait of Lady Dunn-Beaverbrook*, and *Sunrise: Sir James Dunn*—can still be found at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Dalí's self-appointed position as Surrealism's individual incarnation justifiably provoked the group's indignation, exacerbated by his unabashed avarice and a snowballing inventory of moral and artistic treasons that included allegations of racism (triggering his expulsion from the movement in 1939)[22] and supporting Franco's dictatorship in Spain. When Gordon Onslow Ford presented a series of lectures on Surrealism at the New School for Social Research in 1941, a garbage can labelled "Dali" was placed near the front door. The same year, the poet Nicolas Calas skewered the artist in the pages of *View* as a "stinking Don Quixote" and "anti-surrealist."[23] Still, these arguments had little impact on Dalí's seemingly interminable popularity. When the artist flamboyantly declared in *Esquire* magazine in 1942, "I am Surrealism!", his identification, at least in the eyes of the public, was not far off the mark.[24] Eighty years later, his barren, oneiric seascapes continue to color the most common conceptions of Surrealism, including the vernacular use of "surreal" as a by-word for "strange" and "unbelievable" (much to the frustration of anyone who has earnestly studied the movement).[25]

It is clear why Dalí's actions ostracized him from both the anti-capitalist, anti-fascist Surrealists and the champions of mid-century formalism, and why they continue to stain his reputation. Citing his "support for fascism, avowal of racism, adherence to Roman Catholicism" and "boundless commercialism," the Chicago Surrealist Group wrote in 1970, "Nothing testifies so clearly to the abysmal ignorance of Surrealism that prevails in this country as the fact that it is still widely assumed to have something to do with the antics of Salvador Dali."[26] Now over thirty years since the artist's death in 1989, Dalí's alignment with Surrealism continues to undergo constructive critique, though hindsight has encouraged an appraisal that is less influenced by the flagrant exhibitionism his contemporaries could scarcely ignore—one that does not whitewash Dalí's faults but also acknowledges his connections, contributions, and shared affinities with Surrealism and other artistic and intellectual movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In an astonishing twist of fate, some of the very positions that made him a target for derision during his lifetime—his opportunism, pursuit of celebrity status, and attitude towards marketing and commercial consumption—have become linchpins of scholarly reassessments of his lasting impact post-millennium. Quoting

Robert Rosenblum, "It's the perfect Old Testament and New Testament story. Warhol picked up right where Dalí left off—no Dalí, no Warhol. He was as much an antimodernist as Duchamp was and as Warhol was—they were all freethinkers."[27] As a unifying thread in this issue of *JSA*, each essay, in its own way, nods to the dual fronts of high- and low-culture along which Dalí oriented his work, though this emerged organically and was not necessarily intended as a centralizing theme. Still, its prevalence speaks to Dalí's position as an important precursor to pop art and its multifarious legacies—a status art historians have only recently begun to recognize.

This special issue of *JSA* builds upon many influential studies and edited collections that have addressed aspects of Dalí's work, particularly in the context of Surrealism and popular culture in the United States. Among these, Dawn Ades' monograph, *Dalí and Surrealism*, first published in 1982 and updated in 1995 and 2021, continues to be a foundational text for the artist's critical reappraisal. Other noteworthy publications include Robert S. Lubar's guide to the Salvador Dalí Museum collection, particularly his essay, "The Martyrdom of Avida Dollars" (2000); *Dalí: The Centenary Retrospective* (2004), edited by Dawn Ades; *Dalí Mass Culture* (2004), edited by Fèlix Fanés; *Pollock To Pop: America's Brush with Dalí* (2006); *The Dalí Renaissance: New Perspectives on His Life and Art After 1940* (2008), edited by Michael R. Taylor; and *El impacto de la metrópolis: la experiencia americana en Lorca, Dalí y Buñuel* (2018), edited by José M. del Pino. Ian Gibson's *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (1997) is an indispensable biography that gives ample attention to Dalí's fame in the United States. Dalí's own writings are famously unreliable but remain a useful resource: *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942), as well as his conversations with André Parinaud, published in 1973 as *Comment on devient Dalí*; the latter contains a full chapter entitled, "How to Conquer America." Suffice to say, then, that this issue of *JSA* has no pretensions of providing a final word on this rich subject. On the contrary, it is my hope that its content further galvanizes the field of "Dalí studies" by presenting novel perspectives on works both familiar and unexpected, and encouraging innovative theoretical approaches to Dalí's oeuvre—not just his painting, but the full array of media in which he was actively engaged and in which he continues to exert a palpable influence.

Feature essays are arranged more or less chronologically by their subjects, and so we open with Michael R. Taylor's discussion of the drawings Dalí contributed to the popular magazine *American Weekly* from December 1934 to July 1935. Building upon his established record of Dalí scholarship, Taylor offers a novel comparison between the works of Dalí and Alberto Giacometti, identifying and expounding upon the two artists' shared interest in the legend of William Tell. Darren Thomas follows with a critical interest in film—a medium, he argues, that resonates with Dalí's treatment of surrealist objects as well as works by his American contemporary, Joseph Cornell. Next is Keri Watson, who brings a wholly fresh approach to a familiar subject, Dalí's *Dream of Venus* pavilion, erected in the amusement zone

of the 1939 New York World's Fair. Distinguishing herself within the substantial bibliography on *Dream of Venus*, Watson anchors her analysis in disability studies, arguing that Dalí's use of abjection and deliquescence—far from scandalizing the status quo—reinforced prevailing American attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Moving to the 1940s and Dalí's "American period," Gisela Carbonell analyzes the artist's commissioned book illustrations for Maurice Sandoz's *Fantastic Memories* (1944), *The Maze* (1945), *The House Without Windows* (1950), and *On the Verge* (1950). Carbonell delves deeply into reviews and primary sources to explore the correlation between Sandoz's text and Dalí's eccentric imagery. Finally, Simon Weir concludes the issue's feature articles section from the vantage of architecture, presenting new details and context for Dalí's *Crisalida* (1958), a lesser-known commissioned installation the artist created at the American Medical Association convention in San Francisco on behalf of Wallace Laboratories. In the immediate footsteps of the preceding *JSA* issue, which was the first to include a personal interview, Miguel Escribano provides an insightful dialogue with Louis Markoya, an artist and engineer who worked closely with Dalí for six years in the early 1970s, and whose contemporary work is influenced by aspects of Dalí's 1950s Nuclear Mysticism. Nicknamed by Dalí "Mark Oil" and "Karl Marx," Markoya provides a colorful first-hand account of Dalí's evening "courts" at the St. Regis Hotel, Gala's role in the artist's self-mythology, and Dalí's artistic rivalry with Warhol and other contemporaries.[28]

By way of a conclusion, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Gisela Carbonell, Miguel Escribano, Louis Markoya, Michael R. Taylor, Darren Thomas, Keri Watson, and Simon Weir for their fine contributions to this volume. A special thanks goes out to *JSA*'s anonymous peer reviewers, and to Samantha Kavky, Katharine Conley and Claudia Mesch for their hard work—on this and every issue of *JSA*.

1 "News: The Dalí Museums Receive 1.4 Million Visitors," 10 January 2018. https://www.salvador-dali.org/en/services/press/news/359/the-dali-museums-receive-1-4-million-visitors
2 Tony Cross, "Dali Pompidou Exhibition Beats All Attendance Records… Except His Own," Radio France Intérnationale (RFI), 27 March 2013. https://www.rfi.fr/en/culture/20130327-dali-pompidou-exhibition-beats-all-attendance-records-except-his-own The 1979 exhibition had about 840,662 visitors (https://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/news/2542/pompidou-at-40-the-ten-most-attended-exhibitions-ever)
3 "Dalí exhibit draws record 1.5 mn visitors in Brazil," 16 January 2015. https://www.efe.com/efe/english/varios/dali-exhibit-draws-a-record-1-5-mn-visitors-in-brazil/50000269-2512983
4 Roger Rothman provides a fresh perspective in *Tiny Surrealism: Salvador Dalí and the Aesthetics of the Small* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012). See also David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (Yale University Press, 2000).
5 See Fèlix Fanés (ed.), *Dalí and Mass Culture* (Fundación "La Caixa"/ Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/ Salvador Dalí Museum, 2004).
6 See Carmen Garcia De la Rasilla and Fernando Gonzalez de Leon, *Salvador Dalí's Literary Self-Portrait: Approaches to a Surrealist Autobiography* (UNKNO, 2009).
7 See Matthew Gale (ed.), *Dalí & Film* (Tate Modern and Museum of Modern Art, 2007). Also, Elliott H. King, *Dalí, Surrealism and Cinema* (Kamera Books, 2007).
8 See Carme Ruiz González, *Dalí atómico* (CaixaForum, Seville, 2018). Also, the excellent documentary film, *Dalí Dimension* (Susi Marquès, dir.), Media 3.14, Barcelona (2004).
9 See *Avant-Garde Studies* (special issue on *Picasso/Dalí, Dalí/Picasso*), The Salvador Dalí Museum, issue 1, fall 2015.
10 See Dawn Ades (ed.), *Dalí Duchamp* (Royal Academy of Arts, 2017). Also, Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (MIT Press, 2001).
11 See Torsten Otte, *Salvador Dalí and Andy Warhol: Encounters in New York and Beyond* (Scheidegger and Spiess, 2016).
12 For example, *Dalí Dalí Featuring Francesco Vezzoli* (Moderna Museet, 2009). Also, Elliott H. King (ed.), *Dalí: The Late Work* (High Museum of Art/Yale University Press, 2010) and *Hypermental: Rampant Reality 1950-2000* (Zurich Kunsthaus, 2000).
13 Keith L. Eggener, "'An Amusing Lack of Logic': Surrealism and Popular Entertainment," *American Art*, vol. 7, no. 4 (autumn 1993): 32. For a detailed history of Surrealism in the American marketplace, see Sandra Zalman, *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture* (Routledge, 2015).
14 "Named Most Curious Painting in World's Fair Exhibit," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago), 8 September 1934: 7.
15 Quoting *Life* magazine in 1936, "Surrealism is no stranger than a normal person's dream." ("Surrealism on Parade," *Life*, vol. 14, December 1936, 24)
16 Marcel Jean, *History of Surrealist Painting* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 261.
17 "Art: Marvelous & Fantastic," *TIME*, New York, vol. XXVIII, no. 24, 14 December 1936, 62.
18 See Julia Pine, "Anti-Surrealist Cross-Word Puzzles: Breton, Dalí and Print in Wartime America," *Journal of Surrealism in the Americas*, 2007.
19 André Parinaud with Salvador Dalí, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976), 162.
20 There is oft-quoted tale that Dalí toured Mexico at some point and refused to return, saying he could not stand to be in a country that was more surrealist than his paintings. I have not found evidence of this visit, nor of him making this statement.
21 Tere Arcq, "Mexico City," in Stephanie D'Alessandro and Matthew Gale (eds.), *Surrealism Beyond Borders* (Metropolitan Museum of Art/Yale University Press, 2021), 92.
22 André Breton, "Des tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste," *Minotaure* 12-13 (Paris) May 1939: 17.

23 Nicolas Calas, "Anti-Surrealist Dalí," *View*, vol. 1, no. 6 (June 1941), 1.
24 Salvador Dalí, "Total Camouflage for Total War," *Esquire* no. 2 (New York), August 1942: 64-66. 129-30.
25 In 2016, Miriam-Webster announced that "surreal" was the "Word of the Year." The dictionary's definition received some backlash, including Ron Sakolsky's "Hands Off the Word 'Surreal'!" https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2016/12/23/ron-sakolsky-hands-off-surreal/
26 The Chicago Surrealist Group, "$alvador Dali," *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, 1, Chicago, autumn 1970, 63.
27 George Stolz, "The Great Late Salvador Dalí," *ARTnews*, 1 February 2006.
28 Markoya's website, https://www.louismarkoya.com/, provides many entertaining anecdotes about his years with Dalí as well as links to his recent artwork.