

Emotions in the Surrealist Works of Salvador Dali

How did Salvador Dali's Use of the Surrealism Movement Evoke Emotion

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Introduction

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In the 1920's, amidst the beginning of a new era, an aspiring artist named Salvador Dali joined a group of artists who dreamed of a new way to express themselves. Thus began the Surrealism movement; this form of expression would allow the artist to hypothetically "unlock" their subconscious. It allowed the artist to include an enhanced sense of emotional intimacy in their works. This art movement was a clash of past movements; it evoked strong Rationalist techniques while also using the freeing concepts of Dada. As the movement grew, so did Salvador Dali's reputation as a prominent Surrealist artist. Dali used many facets of the Surrealism movement to evoke a desired emotion from his viewers. Some specific areas that Dali focused on included his use of juxtaposition, the dreamlike quality present in his works, as well as his use of reoccurring themes. All of these reasons contribute to the notion that Salvador Dali was a larger-than-life presence during the creation of the Surrealism movement.

To answer the question of how Salvador Dali used the elements of the Surrealism movement to draw emotion from his viewers, his beginnings as not only a Surrealist painter, but also as an artist must be investigated. In his early years even, it was apparent that Salvador Dali had a passion for creating art. Starting near the beginning, in 1910, Salvador Dali was enrolled at the Hispano-French school of the Immaculate Conception in Figueres. There Dali learned French; this language would later become a key element in which to help in his immersion into the Surrealism movement.

Dali spent much time on the outskirts of Figueres at the Moli de la Torre estate. This estate was owned by artists and intellectuals; the Pichot Family (Salvador-dali.org). There Salvador Dali discovered impressionism. Impressionism as a movement was the movement admired for its focus on the presence of light. Most works created in the impressionist period were modern, focusing on the current "here and now" rather than the past. Pieces during this time captured scenes of everyday life and seemingly mundane middle class activities like shopping, working, recreational activities and landscapes from everyday life. Artists during this movement focused on minimizing the appearance of brush strokes and attempted to create an illusion of a smooth surface. The movement was filled with soft lines, blended colors, and a new perspective on scenes taken from everyday life. By the year 1920, Dali was determined to become a painter. His father convinced him to travel to Madrid where he would attend and study at the Fine Arts School. There he learned many useful techniques and gained a teaching degree (Salvador-dali.org).

Indicative of low-grade research sources? It's all internet based...

Salvador Dali strived to improve his techniques of art in the 20th century. He tried to apply his artistry to many different styles of art; such as Impressionism, a style which he was already quite familiar with in his youth, Pointillism, Futurism, and Cubism. Dali found that although his pieces that fell into each of these movements were good paintings, but did not express his inner emotions and visions as an artist (Salvador-dali.org). He felt that none of the above movements could provide a good enough representation of these visions and didn't know where he as an artist would fit in. Salvador Dali continued to feel lost as an artist until he discovered the Surrealism movement and the community of artists involved in the creation of this movement.

“The Surrealism movement was founded in Paris by a small group of writers and artists who sought to channel the unconscious as a means of power to unlock the imagination (theartstory.org).” These artists craved a new and different movement that would help them to express their imagination without restrictions. Modern day, “Surrealism has come to be seen the most influential movement in twentieth century art (theartstory.org).” Surrealists believe that revelations and creativity could be found even in the most ordinary places (theartstory.org).

The bibliography and citations are a mess.

Dali found his niche in the Surrealism movement. He worked to expose the inner workings of his mind and subconscious to the public in hopes of conveying a sense of strong emotion. Here Salvador Dali found that he could truly express and showcase his inner thoughts and visions as well as generate the emotional responses that he felt suited his works. By 1929, Dali was fully converted to a Surrealist and was welcomed and fully immersed into the movement by Andre Breton. Andre Breton was seen as the leader of the birth of the Surrealism movement.

Salvador Dali's noted and most significant contribution to the Surrealism movement was the "Paranoiac-Critical Method (Art History)." In Salvador Dali's "Paranoiac-Critical Method," a sane person could supposedly cultivate the ability to think like mentally insane persons. This was done to be able to misread ordinary appearances and become "liberated from the shackles of conversational thought (Art History)." Surrealism as a movement was not at all focused on rationalism. Artists from this creative and unordinary movement were determined to unlock their subconscious emotions and hidden ideas; and wanted to express them in ways not yet seen before (theartstory.org). "The Surrealists depicted dream imagery and archetypal symbols derived from their unconsciousness (theartstory.org)." They enjoyed using a kind of collage derived aesthetic in their works to depict the continuous waves and jumbling of the thoughts in their minds as well as their emotions (theartstory.org). As artists, "Their aim was to help people discover the larger reality, or "Surreality," that lay beyond narrow notions of what is real (Art History)." Ways that Surrealists like Salvador Dali attempted to free their unconscious thoughts and escape from the restrictions of normality included dream analysis, free games, and hypnotic trances (Art History). Salvador Dali would come to achieve his many illusion-like and fantasy based images and scenes by dreaming. Dali would take time out of every day to nap. He believed that these reprieves would help him to more easily unlock his subconscious (Salvador-dali.org). "A true painter is

It's not until page 4 (of a ten page essay) that the student begins to address the essay question...

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one who can paint extraordinary scenes in the middle of an empty desert. A true painter is one who can patiently paint a pear in the midst of the tumults of history- Salvador Dali (Salvador-dali.org).”

In understanding the way Salvador Dali conveys emotion through his works, his works themselves must be analyzed. A well-known work by Dali is *The Persistence of Memory*. This particular work is set in a landscape that resembles a bay near Salvador Dali’s birthplace (Art History). In *The Persistence of Memory*, the viewer can see what appears to be several clocks as melted in a desert setting with the ocean appearing below the horizon. This however is only at first glance, upon further inspection, the painting reveals subliminal messages conveyed through symbols and color schemes to create a complex and emotion filled piece. *The Persistence of Memory* is a painting that Dali created in 1931; close to the start of his immersion into the Surrealist community. He used a medium of oil on canvas. This work is one of the most recognized art pieces to be identified as belonging to the Surrealism movement. It is distinguished by its melted clocks and cool toned color scheme (artbeyondsight).

“According to Dali, the idea of the soft watches came to him one evening after dinner while he was meditating on a plate of Camembert cheese (Art History).” One of the melted watches is seemingly thrown across an “amoeba-like” human head. Dali explains the shape resembles a boulder he had once seen on the coast. The oddly shaped head was identified by Dali to be a self-portrait. This head first appeared in a 1929 painting called *The Great Masturbator*.

The appearance of the head “may symbolize the artist’s lifelong obsession with masturbation.” Quote not attributed:

This infatuation caused Salvador Dali a lot of anxiety in his life. Dali feared that sexual impotence could be a result from his indulgence in his autoeroticism. This fear can be symbolized by the limp watches that are strewn around the piece.

There seems to be some confusion over the distinction between *emotion* and idea, anxiety, subconscious etc.

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What emotions exactly - and how are they 'evoked'?

In the lower left corner of the image, the viewer can see another symbol of Dali's anxiety. The ant covered watch is inspired by his childhood. Salvador Dali painted this watchcase to express his strong memories of seeing dead and dying animals swarming with ants (Art History). This evokes a combination of emotions from the audience. Salvador Dali uses the clocks as a symbol that time is eternal and continual. The purpose of this symbol is to reveal Dali's struggle with images of his past and present and helps to convey the urgency he finds in the things that trouble him. Returning to the reoccurring presence of the head-like rock that Dali claims to be a self- portrait; the audience sees that the rock seems to fade away at its right-most edges. This conveys a message to the audience that seemingly nothing is permanent; the artist depicts himself withering away due to time. This may portray yet another fear of Dali's; being forgotten. When viewing this element of the piece, a cocktail of unsettling thoughts driven by mainly confusion but also fear and anxiety presents itself to the audience. The use of the cool toned color scheme provides a basis for many of the dream like qualities of this piece; it makes the entirety of the image seem more ethereal and surreal to the viewer. In analysis of this piece, *The Persistence of Memory*, by Salvador Dali, it is obvious to the viewer that this piece belongs to the dream-like and otherworldly realm of the Surrealism movement based upon the ways that the artist conveys messages and emotions.

The second work by Dali that can be analyzed in association with *The Persistence of Memory* is his later work, *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion*. As he grew, Dali kept the themes in his art consistent and remained mostly unchanged. He tried to keep his style consistent to address various ideas with the same effectiveness (Salvador-dali.org). In 1954 Dali created *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion*. Many thought, and still believe today, that this piece may be the sequel to *The Persistence of Memory* (Soft Watch). This work was created

with the same feeling as its prequel. Although, different to its predecessor this piece was created using ink on paper rather than with oils on canvas.

The clock itself resembles the one that lies on the table in *The Persistence of Memory*. This stopwatch is also draped over the edge of a table-like structure. Also the background of the image is very similar. They both depict the bay scene. Another similarity between the two works And is the cool tones of the color scheme that was used. In this work, Dali incorporates a lot of color juxtaposition (Soft Watch). Dali often heightened the emotions that he wanted the viewer to experience by using colors to accentuate his feelings (Art History). Most of the background uses deep browns and golds and is contrasted greatly by the stark, bright white of the clock. Salvador Dali's use of these golds, greens, blues, and browns remind the viewer of the earlier work. This reminder of *The Persistence of Memory* brings about a strong emotional connection between the works (Soft Watch).

And These strong emotional connections between *The Persistence of Memory* and *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion* depict Dali's underlying need to convey a similar theme and feeling to his audience (Salvador-dali.org). Salvador Dali continues to use the theme present in the previous work. He depicts a feeling that is unsettling as time seems to pass and render everything finite and ending except for the element of time itself. This work seems to take place at a later time where not only are things ending; they are disappearing piece by piece. The watch featured seems to be pulling apart, stretching, and shattering. This may encourage Dali's use of the theme of destruction over time.

In *Soft Watch at the moment of First Explosion*, Salvador Dali assimilates shadowy outlines of objects and uses the dream-like quality of the watch and its broken pieces to

Sure there's some analysis, but not about what these emotions are or what the connection with surrealism might be - it's implied, but not explained.

Discussion is similarly present but weak.

The references are from general sources and are descriptive/informative, but not critical.

And again, it's merely suggested, not explained or analysed.

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seemingly and strangely float above it. Dali uses the presence of a dream-like quality and ghostly appearance to accentuate the mysterious and superficially unexplainable in his paintings (Soft Watch). This use of surreal themes helps to heighten the emotions that Salvador Dali included in his works and present them to the audience in a more substantial hard-hitting way.

Lastly, the unofficial series is complete with the consideration of Dali's *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*. This piece was finished between 1952 and 1954 and was created in a medium of oil on canvas as in the original *The Persistence of Memory*. Again, "This painting features one of Dali's most popular images, the melting watch (Salvador Dali Museum)." As in both of the aforementioned works, *The Persistence of Memory* and *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion*, this piece uses a cool toned color scheme. The repetition of this color scheme in all three of Salvador Dali's works hints at the strong connections between them. Seems to suggest that the use of colour + surrealist imagery = the evocation of emotion (but whether these emotions are too mysterious or too obvious to explain is anyone's guess.)

The basic image of *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* is almost identical to the original work, *The Persistence of Memory*. The same bay area is depicted, but upon further inspection, the viewer can see that there are definite changes to the image; though most of the same basic objects reappear in this work. The theme of time as a constant force also continues throughout this image. However, this work shows the effects of time at a much later date than the original. Another new addition to *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* that makes it different than the original is an added theme; Dali uses the continuation of the clocks or stopwatches to hint at a theme of startling dependence. With the use of familiar yet changed images he seems to show the audience that time is always in a continuous flow; but with an added fourth clock, Dali depicts a new dependence on the representation of time.

Some of the argument is even okay, but has nothing to do with the ostensible essay topic. 8

To Salvador Dali, we as the human race use clocks and watches to dictate the way we live our lives. Anything and everything we do in our waking and unconscious hours is dictated by time. The melting and the disintegrating of these clocks lead to eventual chaos (Salvador Dali Museum). As with changes of the image itself, much is different. The entire piece has been rearranged and changed in a way. The image now shows a view of the disintegration occurring above as well as below the water of the bay's surface (eDali). "In this version, the landscape from the original work has been flooded with water (eDali)." This creates an increased sense that time has indeed continued and that changes have occurred because of this fact.

The, at one time, human resembling rock in the image is now morphing into a fish; specifically one that resembles the fish revealed under the water in this work. According to Salvador Dali, this fish represents the continuation of life even in chaos and destruction. Parts of the image now float above the bay's surface in an expanded and suspended manner. Both the plain or valley and the table-like structure, upon which a clock of the original image was laid, have been broken down into smaller block-like shaped objects. Each of these new structures floats simultaneously above the plain and are all relative in position. This new disintegration is explained by Salvador Dali to be representative of the discovery that all objects are made up of atoms. So, Dali uses these structures to symbolize the "breakdown of matter into atoms, a revelation in the age of quantum mechanics (eDali)."

Another new message that Dali incorporates into *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* is based upon the missile shaped objects heading into the distance of the image. These missile-like objects may represent the ability of the human race to bring about their own destruction. This can also be fused with the theme that time continues indefinitely. As time

continues, changes are made; in this image Dali refers to the discovery of quantum mechanics which leads to new technology and weapons.

Conclusion The analysis ignores emotion, and when emotion is mentioned in the argument, it has no bearing either on evidence or analysis presented in the essay:

In reflection of all three pieces, *The Persistence of Memory*, *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion* and *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*, the viewer can see the connection between all three and how each work affects the audience emotionally in similar and strong ways. There are several elements that are incorporated into each work; one of these elements is the melting clocks. “It is not clear why these melting watches are so startling and memorable, but they do suggest several powerful associations. They illustrate how time can be fluid, as in a dream (Salvador Dali Museum).” Salvador Dali’s incorporation of these surreal techniques accentuated the mysterious and unexplainable in his works. This pushed forth a strong sense of emotion in his audience.

Another tool of the surrealism movement that Salvador Dali used to create the emotional response he wanted from each of his works was the use of a cool toned color scheme. The cool tones in the color schemes of each of these works creates the sense of a surreal image and emphasized the dream-like qualities presented. It also helped to generate a sense of continuity between the three images; it linked them in setting and feel. These three works by Salvador Dali also incorporate some of the same themes. Continuing to keep the focus on the images of the clocks and stopwatches, the theme of the permanence and continuation of time emerges. In *The Persistence of Memory*, *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion*, and *The Disintegration of the persistence of Memory* these clocks are incorporated as a symbol of the flow of time; the presence of these watches also helps to link the images together.

First time any explanation is offered as to what these emotions might be:

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In the view of Dali, time was infinite whereas everything else was finite; he believed that almost everything revolved around time which made this theme extremely important in his works. This theme and the way Salvador Dali used and presented it evoke strong emotions from the audience. Mostly the emotions that Dali sought to create were feelings of urgency and an unsettling loss of control of time. Included in two of the works, *The Persistence of Memory* and *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* is the human-like head that is the rock structure. As the audience knows, the human-like head is actually a self-portrait of Salvador Dali himself. This continual incorporation of this image into his works solidifies Dali's ongoing obsession with masturbation. The reoccurring limpness of the clocks in the works can be attributed to Salvador Dali's fear of impotence due to autoeroticism. This also suggests that this anxiety of Dali's never left him even in his later years. The dreamlike style of his art in combination with his constant interest in sexuality gave his works a variety of undercurrents and themes. The dominant themes in Salvador Dali's career evolved around his sexual desires and studies of the subconscious (Art History).

Even so, it is left incredibly vague:

All of these themes and elements from the surrealism movement as well as from his own creation that Salvador Dali incorporated into his work helped him to convey each emotion and feeling that he wanted the audience to reciprocate. This is what helps make Salvador Dali's emotion filled pieces including *The Persistence of Memory*, *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion*, and *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* resonate feeling in their audiences.

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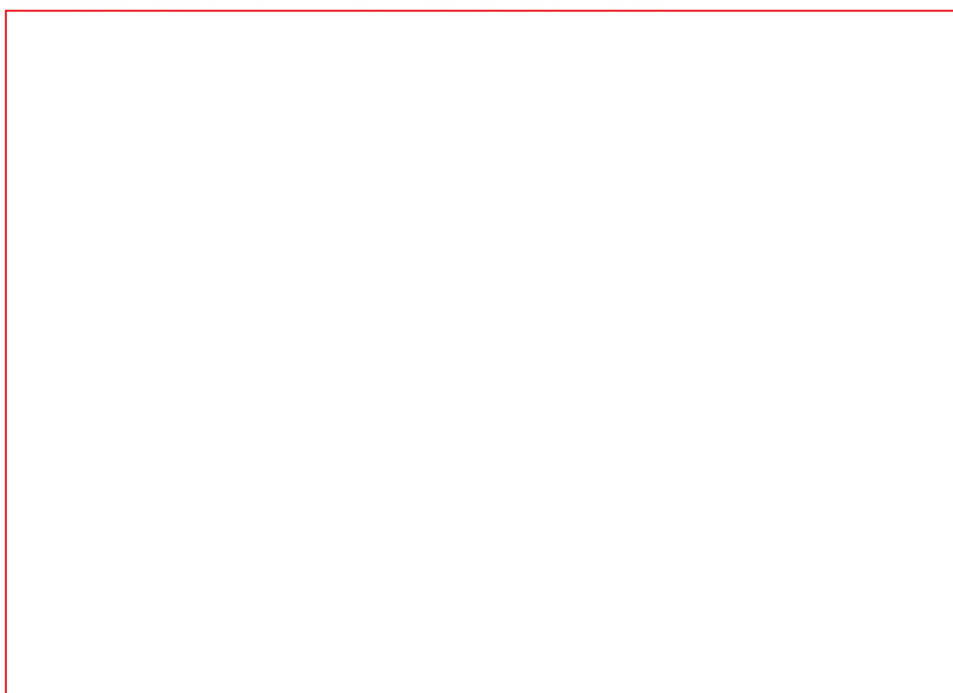
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