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The Monterey History & Art Association on the Themes, Images and Events that Inspired Salvador Dalí's Art

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Salvador Dalí is best known for his Surrealist paintings, but the enigmatic Spanish artist's full body of work also boasts notable pieces of graphic art, film, sculpture, design and photography. Riddled with bizarre recurring symbols and cryptic, dream-like imagery, Dalí's work has long served as a noteworthy subject of discussion in the art world. In exploring his work's purpose and meaning, leading critics often reference the themes, images and events that likely inspired him.

Interestingly, Dalí's skill for manipulating reality is evident not just on the canvas, but in his social interactions and personal accounts as well. Even the artist's own accounts of his inspirations and motives are said by critics to be questionable at best. His notorious habit for distorting the truth has manufactured an ambiance of mysticism and wonder regarding his work that drives interest and inquiry even today.

As one of the country's largest private collections of the artist, the [Monterey History & Art Association: Salvador Dalí](#) is dedicated to capturing and preserving the artist's rich history—especially as it relates to the Monterey region, where Dalí lived and painted for around seven years.

In the following article, the [Monterey History & Art Association: Salvador Dalí](#) outlines a few Dalí's most prominent influences, which are evident through the artist's extensive body of work.

The Seaside Landscapes of Catalonia

A native of Catalonia in northeastern Spain, Dalí's family spent their summers in the seaside village of Cadaqués, which rests on a bay in the middle of the picturesque Cap de Creus peninsula. As a child, Dalí spent long days exploring the region's pebble beaches and jagged coastal scenery. The lighting and landscapes which would later appear in works such as *Honey is Sweeter than Blood* (1927), *Gadget and Hand* (1927) and even the iconic *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) are clearly evocative of the region's coastal colors, images and scenery. The seaside village's marine life and sea-facing rock formations also frequently appear throughout Dalí's body of work.

According to the [Monterey History & Art Association: Salvador Dalí](#), it's highly likely that the artist's sincere love for seaside landscapes (such as those found in his native Catalonia) are exactly what drew Dalí to the Monterey region in the mid-1940s.

The Death of His Younger Brother

Skulls, corpses, and other clear references to death are apparent throughout Dalí's body of work. Likely, the artist's clear fascination with the elements of mortality were the direct result of early tragedies which occurred in his younger years.

For his entire life, Dalí was reportedly haunted by the shadow of his older brother's tragic death. In many ways, Dalí perceived his older brother as the "first version" of himself, at one point saying, "[we] resembled each other like two drops of water, but we had different reflections." The artist, who was born just 9 months after his brother's passing, mythologized his sibling in both his writing and art. His iconic piece *Portrait of My Dead Brother* (1963) is a clear homage on this theme.

Likely, Dalí's clear fascination with the subject of death was further perpetuated by the passing of his mother, who died of uterine cancer when Dalí was just 16. This early contact with the concept of mortality is likely what fixed Dalí with a fascination on death. His body of work, which features recurring symbols of death, is likely evident of a lifetime of contemplation on the subject.

The Works of Sigmund Freud

Like many Surrealists of the time, Dalí was greatly influenced by the written works of Sigmund Freud. Now considered the founding father of psychoanalysis, Freud's theories legitimized Surrealism's fascination with dreams and the subconscious world.

Freud's most influential topics of exploration (neuroses, mental illness, sexual impulses, and aggressive urges) captured Dalí's interest, ultimately inspiring the themes present in his Surrealist pieces—most notably it's suggestive and violent sexual imagery. A longtime fan of the psychoanalyst's work, Dalí aspired to one day meet Freud. His dream became a reality in July of 1938, when the pair met in Freud's London home. During the meeting, Freud drafted a series of sketches of the psychoanalyst, later producing *Portrait of Freud*, which was allegedly intended as a gift.

Natural Science and Mathematics

A lifelong student, Dalí was always keenly interested in both natural science and mathematics. During a 1935 interview, the enigmatic artist described himself as a fish swimming between "the cold water of art and the warm water of science." His Surrealist works, which explore whimsical dreamscapes and nonsensical realities, are equally concerned with clarity and precision.

According to the Monterey History & Art Association: Salvador Dalí, you don't need to look very far to find clear evidence of Dalí's combined love for the whimsy of dream worlds and the stark precision of science and math. His many depictions of the rhinoceros, for example, are clear demonstrations for the artist's fascination with logarithmic spirals. Similarly, his acute interest in the tesseract, a four-dimensional representation of the cube, is apparent in his 1954 piece *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubus)*.

Dali and The Monterey Region

While the region is widely known as an epicenter for artistic expression, many art communities are overshadowed by elitist galleries in the area. The Monterey History & Art Association focus on diversity, and inclusivity believing that art should be accessible to everyone. Located on Fisherman's Wharf, the Salvador Dali exhibit is a collection of beautiful and thought provoking

pieces, mean to be enjoyed by all.

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