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Salvador Dalí, Time and Revisiting Our Art

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The Persistence of Memory - Salvador Dalí, 1931, 24 cm × 33 cm, Oil on canvas

Time lends perspective. And its passage profoundly effects how we see, and interact with, our previous creative work.

This is vividly illustrated in the work of an artist whose name has become almost synonymous with the portrayal of emblems of time, Salvador Dalí.

The Persistence of Salvador Dalí in the Collective Memory

Ask anyone to name an emblematic image of Dalí's, and they will inevitably answer, 'melting clocks'.

Although he was to use the image of melting clocks in various subsequent paintings, the clocks first appeared in the work entitled "The Persistence of Memory" painted in 1931 when Dalí was only 27 years old.

This painting has indeed proved persistent in many people's memories becoming one of Dalí's most representative works as well as being one of his most enigmatic.

The painting emerged out of a time when Dalí's personal life was undergoing stressful change as well as being a turbulent political time in Spain with, in 1930, the end of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (begun in 1923) and the establishment of the Second Republic on 14th April 1931.

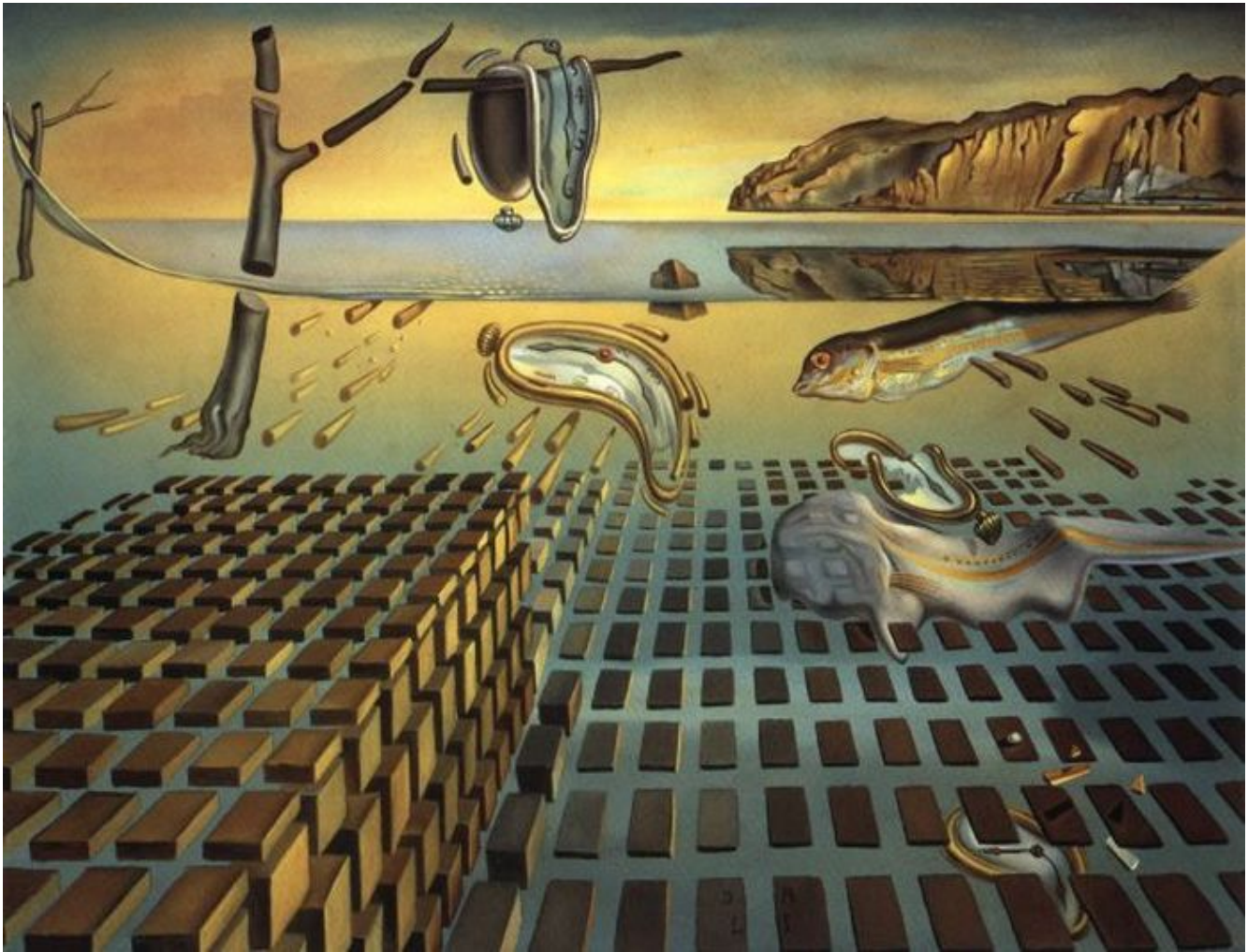
At this time in his artistic trajectory, landscape had become a major protagonist in Dalí's work. The Persistence of Memory is no exception, delineated as it is by the sea's horizon at sunset along with a rocky outcrop on the right.

The Relativity of Time

In this work, Dalí gives us a vision of nature as austere and even sterile, whilst also imbuing it with an eternal quality. Each 'melting' clock shows a different time, suggesting the relativity of time and evoking one of man's most artificial and abstract worries – that of trying to control time via the hands of a clock.

He cleverly counterpoints the infinite nature of landscape with objects that constantly

remind us of the ephemeral nature of everything, vindicating the absence of artificial time, without which we might savour more thoroughly, the eternal nature of things.



The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory - Salvador Dalí, 1954,

25.4 × 33 cm, Oil on canvas

The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory

Twenty-one years after painting *The Persistence of Memory*, Dalí created another work inspired by it, called the "*The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*" (1952-1954), now in the collection of the Salvador Dalí Museum in Florida.

Using many of the same elements as the original, *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* represents the significant changes that Dalí's life and art underwent after World War II. The two paintings link not only the two halves of Dalí's career, but the two halves of a century as well.

Above and below

The painting shows two levels, one above and another below water. Dalí's childhood landscape of Cadequés is floating above the water giving the feeling of distance and isolation, and many of the objects have started to fall apart.

This painting reflects the interest that Dalí developed after the first atomic explosion in 1945, in all things atomic: Cubic plains of bricks hover, parallel to each other with nothing binding or holding them together. The bricks represent how matter breaks down into atoms, and the horn-like object behind the bricks serves as a metaphor for the atomic bomb, and man's potential to destroy both humanity and the order of the cosmos itself. This idea of annihilation is further emphasised by the dead fish.

The first painting was based in a politically and personally turbulent time but Dalí was young and took a rather playful approach to his subject which he tempered with his deep love for his native landscape.

By the time he revisits the painting, however, Dalí himself has become irrevocably affected by the passage of time and despite his right wing views, his deepening preoccupation for the future of humanity has become evident.

With this pair of paintings he has left us with a kind of parenthesis around twenty years of important European history which seems to wonder at the validity of the direction it took.

- What work have you created that it would be interesting to revisit?
- What has changed in your perspective and technique since creating the piece, that would make a new 'version' interesting/challenging/exciting to work on?

Obsessed about time?

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