

SALVADOR DALÍ

APPRENTICE PAINTER



DALÍ THEATRE - MUSEUM
FIGUERES

«Les belles formes, ce sont des plans droits avec des rondeurs. Les belles formes sont celles qui ont de la fermeté et de la plénitude, et où les détails ne compromettent pas l'aspect des grandes masses.»¹

1. "Beautiful shapes are straight planes with curves. Beautiful shapes have both firmness and fullness and in them the details do not compromise the appearance of large masses."

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Pensées*, Editions de la Sirène, Paris, 1922, p. 76.

INTERPRETATION OF *FIGURE IN PROFILE*

In January 1922, the year in which Dalí joined the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, Galeries Dalmau in Barcelona² organised a widely publicised group exhibition by the Association of Catalan Students. At this exhibition, for the first time, the young Dalí exhibited eight works, one of which, *Market*,³ received the university chancellor's award.

It was not until 14 November 1925, however, that the artist, who was only twenty-one years old, held a solo exhibition of paintings and drawings at Galeries Dalmau. These works combined two aspects that would alternate and complement one another throughout his career and that arose from his bold and critical analytical approach towards all types of conventionality: a return to order and tradition, and a search for the most avant-garde trends. Ninety-two years have passed since his works were first shown at Galeries Dalmau, until the time visitors to the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres again have had the chance to view one of the oils from the original exhibition—the least known of them all—entitled *FIGURE IN PROFILE*.⁴

The press of the time covered the exhibition by this *apprentice painter*⁵ in great depth. All observed in Salvador Dalí the simultaneous presence of the strong cubist influence of the avant-gardes and a style that referenced tradition and, specifically, Ingres. We are very much aware that Dalí kept both the pictorial and written work of the latter firmly in mind—particularly the book *Pensées*—. Three quotes that the painter included in the exhibition catalogue are in fact taken from this book in which Ingres reflects on painting

2. The organiser, the art dealer Josep Dalmau, introduced the avant-garde movements in Catalonia and promoted the most interesting Catalan artists of the time. He was, as Dalí described years later in his autobiography *The Secret life of Salvador Dalí*, the "Barcelonian patriarch of the advance-guardism and who looked as though he might have just stepped out of a painting by El Greco."

3. *Market*, c. 1921, location unknown, cat. no. 359.

4. *Figure in Profile*, 1925, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, cat. no. 147.

5. As his father, Salvador Dalí Cusí, described him in the notebook where he kept press cuttings and wrote comments about his son's exhibitions and journey towards becoming an established artist.

6. Salvador Dalí, André Parinaud, *The Unspeakable confessions of Salvador Dalí*, William Morrow, New York, 1976, p. 56.

and expresses some artistic concepts that Dalí was working with at that time. Throughout the exhibition we can therefore clearly observe the influence of the works promoted by the magazine *Valori Plastici* and of which Dalí was a great admirer.

Dalí himself later referred to this initial period of constant experimentation, so evident in the Dalmau exhibition: “I at the time was painting Cadaqués landscapes, my father, my sister, everything that could be a subject for my frenzied brush. I was paying close attention to Chirico’s paintings, through the magazines. I was contributing to Barcelona’s *Gasetta de les Arts* and *L’Amic de les arts*; and one book was always at my bedside, Ingres’ *Thoughts*. I decided I would take some essential notes out of it as preface to my first one-man show, at the Dalmau Galleries, Barcelona, in November 1925. [...] This tribute to the beauties of craft and tradition corresponded exactly to my own ideas. This is the basis on which one can afford to be a genius. [...] The critics, who are always laggards and unaware of truth, were nevertheless enthusiastic.”⁶

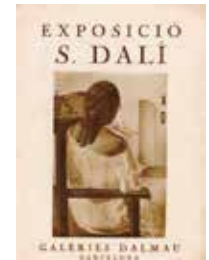


Landscape of Cadaqués, c. 1921



Seated Girl, 1925

In this first solo exhibition, Dalí presented seventeen oils and five drawings. Six of the paintings exhibited were portraits of his sister Anna Maria, almost always with her back to the viewer: *Seated Girl*, *Figure Seen from the Back*, *Girl at a Window*, *FIGURE IN PROFILE*, *Portrait of My Sister* and a sixth oil painting with the same title. He also presented other portraits—such as *Portrait of My Father*, *Portrait of Ramoneta Montsalvatge* and *Portrait of Maria Carbona*, the latter two friends of the Dalí family—, accompanied by works chiefly featuring the landscape, specifically *Landscape of Cadaqués* and *Empordà Landscape with Figures*, as well as the works *Figure at a table* and *Venus and Sailor (Homage to Salvat-Papasseit)*. In cubist style the artist exhibited *Pierrot Playing the Guitar (Cubist Painting)*, *Siphon with Small Bottle of Rum (Cubist Painting)* and *Still Life* (unidentified). The exhibition catalogue closes with another *Still Life* that we have also been unable to identify.⁷



The exhibition catalogue at the Galleries Dalmau, 1925

7. The works mentioned can be viewed online in the Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings by Salvador Dalí: <http://www.salvador-dali.org/catalog_raonat/index.php>.

8. Anna Maria Dalí,
*Salvador Dalí visto
por su hermana,*
Juventud, Barcelona,
1949, pp. 105
and 111.

FIGURE IN PROFILE was acquired for 500 pesetas by the pharmacist and family friend Joaquim Cusí i Furtunet. It was not exhibited again until it was auctioned at Bonhams in London on 2 March 2017, when the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí purchased it. The only record of the painting hitherto encountered is a black and white reproduction published in the magazine *Atlántico* in 1929.



Portrait of My Sister, 1925

The central figure in the painting is the artist's sister, Anna Maria, his main model until Gala arrived in 1929. Anna Maria wrote about the moments of close rapport with her brother: "My brother painted countless portraits of me during that period. Many of them were mere studies of curls and of a shoulder always uncovered. He painted patiently, tirelessly, and posing for him did not tire me at all, as I have never been bored by staying still and silent." She continued: "During the hours that I modelled for him, I never tired of looking at that landscape which has forever been a part of my life. He always painted me close to a window [...]."⁸

Anna Maria's words come to life in this work, in which she is portrayed with calm and corporeal realism in the centre of the scene and focal point for the artistic composition. The simplicity of design and approach to the room's empty spaces evoke a peaceful atmosphere. The three-quarter view of the girl's profile and the direction of her gaze yield gentle movement and guide the viewer's full attention towards the top left quadrant of the work, where the landscape of Cadaqués is visible through the window. The landscape can clearly be identified as Es Sortell, an area near the home of the Pichots, a family of artists to whom the Dalís were very close. It shows the characteristic bridge connecting it to the adjacent island, which Dalí could see from the window of his studio at his father's home in Es Llaner. The landscape through the window is calm, shaped with geometric precision and the result of detailed, metaphysical observation.



Figure at a table, 1925

This clear, infinite space of sea and rocks visible outside the window was painted with a bright, diffused light that gently illuminates the figure of the girl, leaving her back and delicate curls over her bare



Venus and Sailor (Homage to Salvat-Papasseit), 1925

shoulder in the shadows. It appears to be a winter's day in which time has been diluted by the landscape's serenity and in the calm emanating from the figure, whose face, neck, shoulder, arm and hands, legs and lap are all delicately illuminated. The composition, in which empty space plays a key part, is meanwhile elegantly balanced by the pale grey light that enters vertically from the right to yield a silence that envelops the figure. The Italian metaphysical style of painting is fully apparent in the robustness of the elements, their separation in space, the secret dialogue established among them, the play and convergence of the perspectives, the geometric form of the shapes and the light created by the warm tones reminiscent of Giorgio Morandi.



Portrait of Maria Carbona, 1925



Girl at a Window, 1925

As in many of the portraits of his sister from the same period, the figure is portrayed with her back slightly turned to the viewer, revealing her face in profile. Seated, with her legs crossed and hands resting in her lap, she reclines in a chair with a distinctly cubist feel to it. Here, the light is not frontal but instead originates from the background, from the window and from the top of the canvas.

The softness of colour intensifies in the zone emphasised by thicker brushstrokes that texture the landscape with sky blues, whites and ochres; in the white and bluish greens of the window frame, and in the flesh and pink tones of the figure and her dress. In contrast, the room's shadows are painted predominantly in dark colours, greys and browns applied with a thin, diluted pictorial layer that is almost transparent in the area of the buttocks.



Portrait of My Father, 1925

FIGURE IN PROFILE, a portrait and representation that transcends the strictly real, distils the wisdom of the masters and a vehement desire to experiment. The painting reveals a purposeful distance from the enthusiastically colourful palette of impressionism and, rather, resembles the approaches of cubism and the magazine *Valori Plastici*, all framed in the essential, eternal and future iconic landscape of Cadaqués. This portrait points to the future Salvador Dalí and like the other four oil paintings owned by the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí that accompany and complement it in this exhibition, exemplifies Salvador Dalí's learning period with absolute clarity.



Pierrot Playing the Guitar (Cubist Painting), 1925

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#AnnaMariaDali



FUNDACIÓ
GALA-SALVADOR DALÍ

C O V E R I M A G E

Salvador Dalí, *Figure in Profile*, 1925

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