

3 Ways Sleep and Dreams Influenced Salvador Dali

By Paige Towers • May 11, 2016 at 6:29pm

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The highly eccentric, mustachioed Surrealist painter, Salvador Dalí, would have been a whopping 112 years old today. *clap clap* Besides the aforementioned (and extraordinary) lip hair, Dalí is remembered best for his commentary on the relativity of space and time — for instance, his painting, " " and its melting pocket watches, remains his most notorious work. But Dali was also quite invested in the world of rest and dreams. In honor of the surrealist master's birthday, here are three ways sleep influenced his art.

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The Persistence of Memory

1. He honed his ability to remember dreams

When Dalí first began his artistic career, his style was much more traditional and realistic. (Just take a peek at his 1926 painting, " The Basket of Bread ". While it certainly conveys a ridiculous amount of technical skill, it doesn't resemble the

work of the artist we know and love today) It wasn't until later that Dalí began to leave realism behind and inhabit the more mindbending, nontraditional methods. And the unique perspective he brought to art was in part inspired by studying that notorious dreamlover Sigmund Freud.

Through Freud's methods,

(he referred to it as entering a "paranoid state" and it took advantage of hypnagogic and liminal dreaming states). After he mastered the ability, he began to manifest upon the canvas characters and settings that had come to him during slumber. Once he was able to vividly interpret the images that appeared in his dreams, he was able to insert them into his artwork.

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Dalí devised a way of remembering his dreams

Dali's The Persistence of Memory

2. He strived to fuse the dreaming and real worlds

Because the images present in Dalí's paintings were often taken directly from his subconscious — and because Dali's subconscious was, objectively, a dark and terrifying place — his resulting paintings were incredibly striking and bizarre. He would often first create a real world setting, such as a desert or field, then insert what he had witnessed while asleep to infuse it with the surreal.

It was through this practice that his most recognizable dreamlike figures were born — the distorted, bloated and stretched people, the mythological creatures that resembled real animals (or the other way around). Dalí also painted objects that were mixed and melded together to become something new entirely. His dreams resulted in paintings like “ Le Sommeil” (“Sleep”)

, in which a stretched, saggyeyed face is propped up on stilts in a sunbaked patch of earth. While the face is so obviously dreamlike, the positioning of it in the desert landscape makes it exist within reality.

Unsurprisingly, “Le Sommeil” confused viewers when it debuted and continues to do so today. Yet it illustrates how Dalí deftly blurred the line between dreams and reality in a way that left viewers endlessly intrigued.

3. He helped Hitchcock create a famous dream sequence

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Given Dali's infatuation with the dream world, he was the go to expert in
doing the realm justice. He was also quite interested in film and theater.
Thus, in 1945, director Alfred Hitchcock recruited Dalí to construct the
dream sequence for his psychological thriller "Spellbound."

An error occurred.

Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

In a 1962 interview, Hitchcock explained that he wanted to "convey the
dream with great visual sharpness and clarity." And although some of Dali's
ideas were initially a little too... out there

for Hitchcock (Dali's suggested covering an actress with
thousands of ants, among other things), they did manage to compromise. As
the final sequence displays, Dali's influence is unmistakable.

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