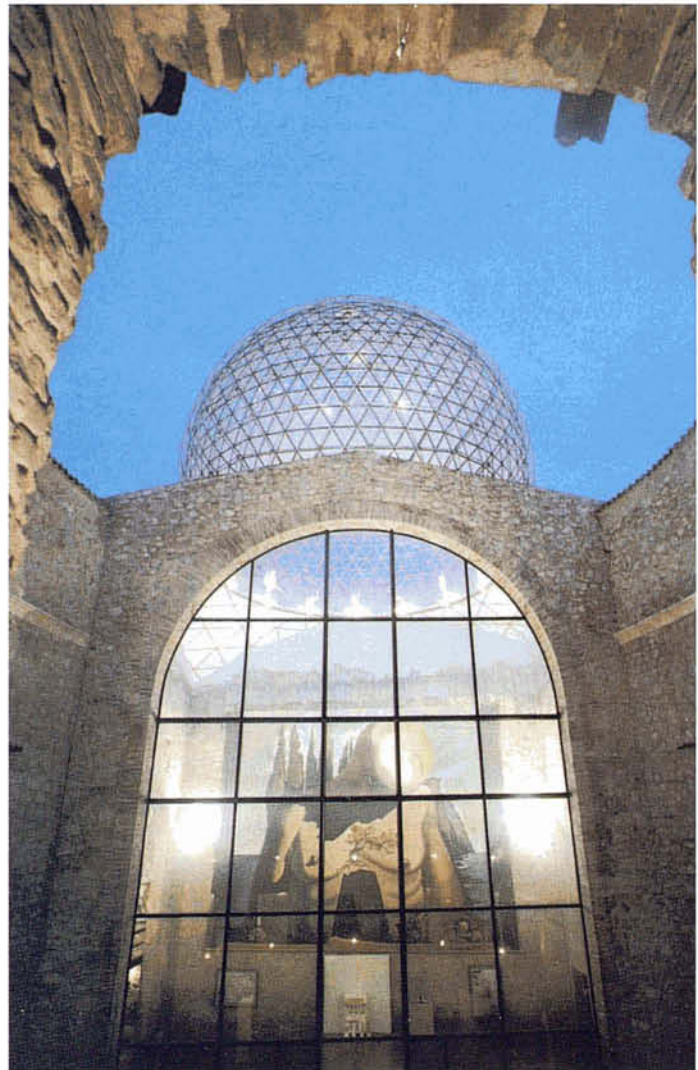


THE “TEATRE-MUSEU DALÍ”



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DALÍ MUSEUM. FIGUERES.

THE DALÍ MUSEUM BECOMES A GAME FOR THE VISITOR, AN ENIGMA TO BE UNRAVELLED, A SET OF STIMULI WAITING TO BE DECODED. IT IS A SURREALIST MUSEUM AND A THEATRE FOR THE SPIRIT; IT IS AT ONCE OBSCENE AND INNOCENT, UNIVERSAL AND YET ROOTED IN THE EMPORDÀ, SCIENTIFIC AND HAPHAZARD.

VICENÇ PAGÈS JOURNALIST

Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) achieved something which few other artists have been able to do: to design and build his own museum in his home town. This explains many of the peculiarities of Dalí's unmistakable "Teatre-Museu", in Figueres, the second most popular museum in Spain, with up to 4,000 visitors a day in summer.

The idea of building the museum was made known in 1961, when the painter was a respected artist who spent half his time in New York and the other half in Cadaqués, and there were still no paintings of his in Figueres.

The museum was to have an important symbolic value from the start. The decision to house it in the former Municipal Theatre –a neo-Classical building which had been in ruins since the civil war– was not, according to Dalí, the result of chance: in the first place, because, as he himself admitted, he was an eminently theatrical painter; secondly, because the building stood opposite the church where he was baptized; and thirdly, because it was there that he had first exhibited his paintings, at the age of fourteen. The importance Dalí placed on the "Teatre-Museu" is reflected in the fact that one of his last wishes was that he should be buried there.

The progress of the work and the transport of his paintings from abroad was closely followed by Dalí. The construction of the large, stained-glass dome, and his mural *Palau del Vent* took up a lot of his time. It can honestly be said that he started the house by the roof. Overjoyed with the work, in 1973 he proclaimed, "I shall make of Figueres a museum rich with spiritual antiputrefaction". The "Teatre-Museu Dalí" was finally opened in 1974 amidst general scepticism: in view of his declarations that he didn't intend to restore the building and that photographic reproductions were preferable to the originals, a lot of people doubted that the museum would actually contain any of his work.

Antoni Pitxot, director of the "Teatre-Museu" from the start, has respected the artist's wishes over and above commercial or museum criteria. One example of this is the absence of any catalogue of the works contained in the museum, since, as Pitxot says, "it was

intended to be an open museum, and a catalogue would limit it".

This makes the museum a game for the visitor, an enigma to be unravelled, a set of stimuli waiting to be decoded, in short, a text. The original building, a three story theatre that devoted the same amount of space to the stage as it did to the stalls, with unexpected passages, rooms and corners, offers the visitor the chance to *discover* its creator. According to the route you follow, according to the details that catch your eye, according to the drawings or sculptures you choose to ignore, your *interpretation* of the museum, in other words, Dalí's personality and work, will be different. However, in a text without references, the visitor may feel he is intruding, as if he had suddenly found himself in somebody's private house rather than a public museum.

The "Teatre-Museu" contains a dozen of Dalí's most valuable paintings, apart from other pieces of particular interest. Amongst the most representative are *La cistella de pa* (1945), which shows the artist's technical mastery; *Autoretrat tou amb tall de bacó fregit* (1941), an example of antipsychological painting, "because instead of painting the soul I've painted the wrapping, the glove"; and *Leda Atòmica* (1949), one of the countless portraits of Dalí's muse, on this occasion painted as a mathematical composition based on the golden section and the Divine Proportion.

Not all the works in the museum are by Dalí. There are two sections devoted to Antoni Pitxot and Evarist Vallès, both artists from the Empordà region, and work by other artists, such as El Greco, Fortuny and Meissonier. Not all are paintings, however, since along the way we can find ready-mades by Marcel Duchamp, a *Venus de Milo* chest of drawers, and examples of pop art, amongst a range of sculptures and performances which baffle the visitor, who is kept in the dark as to their dates, times, and even, sometimes, the artist responsible.

Amongst the museum's entertainments are the various machines which the public can see in action for a token sum. These include a collapsible Christ and a Cadillac with dummies that get showered when a coin is introduced. You can also use a coin-operated telescope to look at the famous painting

Gala mirant el mar Mediterrani, which, from a distance of twenty metres, becomes a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. These mechanisms are a way of making fun of the stuffiness of most museums, and, by making the visitor pay, they bring to mind the entertainment of a fair booth.

The fun of playing is also present in the Mae West Hall –where the furniture represents parts of the actress's face–, in the stereoscopic ideas and in the many double vision effects and other optical phenomena with which Dalí –a "precision madman", as he described himself– experimented in his paintings. The museum's different halls and passages also present the topics that so obsessed him: the rhinoceros horn, octopuses, the *Angelus* of Millet, the moustache-shaped fork, deoxyribonucleic acid, and many more.

Apart from the art collection and the performances, the museum includes a series of homages and curiosities which are difficult to classify, items of great sentimental value to Dalí, which come as a great surprise to the visitor: a bed with feet in the form of fish, attributed to Napoleon III; a bidet which is supposed to come from the famous brothel of Chabannois; a robot-mummy made from printed circuits; a complete toilet stuck on the ceiling; a life-size plaster model of a sardana band; a boat on top of a column of lorry wheels; a full-scale reproduction of Michaelangelo's *Moses*... The museum's two courtyards in particular are examples of total chaos: there are so many objects, sculptures and pictures on the ground, on the walls and even fifteen metres up, that it is impossible to take them all in. Faced with this apparent confusion, it is obvious that Dalí was more concerned with exhaustiveness than with coherence, and that unbounded imagination is not really something that can be communicated. The "Teatre-Museu Dalí" is a surrealist museum and a theatre for the spirit. It is more like a storehouse for ritualistic objects than a personal art gallery. Like the drawings by Dalí on the first and third floors, it is at once obscene and innocent, universal and yet rooted in the Empordà, scientific and haphazard: the impossible account of a fascinatingly rich and complex artistic life. ■