

***Moguls, Matrons, and Aristocracy:***

***An Exploration of Salvador Dalí's "Society Portraits" from the 1940's Through the 1960's***

By Rev. Robert Keffer, OSB

**What is the Society Portrait?**

How do art critics and historians define the society portrait? The first definition that might come to mind may be pejorative: a slick, glossy and flattering depiction of an unattractive person, who happened to be blessed with money and pedigree. Many would consider the society portrait a hack job; something the artist creates to pay the bills and/or to gain *entré* into a higher level of society. This criticism has been applied especially to the portraiture styles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the continuation of their style to the current time: portraiture that is academic/realist, and follows mainly the techniques of John Singer Sargent and his imitators. Current revisionist criticism, however, will show that the society portrait can and often does have lasting artistic merit. Consider, for instance, the famous *Portrait of Consuelo, Duchess of Marlborough and Her Son, Lord Ivor Spencer-Churchill* (1906), by Giovanni Boldini. Grace Glueck in her *New York Times* article, "Society Portraits of Giovanni Boldini", considers this famous work nothing more than "a frothy meringue... an almost erotic tableau in which a beautiful small boy sprawls against the slender body of his vivacious mother, who is regally ensconced on a Louis XV settee, and clad in a long splash of shimmering satin."<sup>1</sup> However, Ms. Glueck, in the same article, states that Boldini could also do work of real character with "his vibrant 1897 rendering of a world-weary Whistler, for instance, lounging against a chair back, his head supported by an eloquently 'artistic' hand and a wonderful self-portrait of 1911 in which, his portly little body half-turned to the viewer, he seems to regard with jaded eyes a rogue's gallery of subjects visible only to him."<sup>2</sup>

Boldini aside, history refutes the theory that the society portrait has always been and always will be empty flattery and vain show. From Ingres and John Singer Sargent to Lucien Freud and Andy Warhol, the genre of the society portrait occasionally does offer us phenomenal works of art. Works as varied as the *Portrait of Comtesse d'Haussonville* (1845), by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and the *Portrait of Queen Elizabeth II* (2002), by Lucian Freud are both society portraits, according to the ideals of their era, place of conception and artistic standards of portraiture at the time. Modern and Contemporary art society portraiture can include such diverse artists as Ivan Lee Lorraine Albright, in his *Portrait of Mary Block* (1957), and Kehinde Wiley's, *Portrait of Barack Obama* (2018). In other words, the society portrait can have what art critics call "presence", expressed in a variety of styles<sup>3</sup> but still within society portrait parameters. The "society portrait" as defined in this paper is then: a portrait commissioned by a notable individual with the intention of conveying the subject's

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<sup>1</sup>Art; "Society Portraits of Giovanni Boldini," Grace Glueck, *The New York Times*, November 23, 1984

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> I use examples such as Albright's *Portrait of Mary Block*, 1957, to show that the society portrait may follow the realist/traditional format, but not succumb to formulaic flattery.

accomplishments and contribution to society, all the while depicting the individual as physically recognizable, regardless of the artists' style.

With this in mind, Salvador Dalí and his portraiture created from the 1940s through the 1960s must be included in the lasting society portrait canon of artistic and historical merit. Dalí's society portraits have been the least appreciated of his works, with the aforementioned criticism being thrown at them for decades. Past evaluations of Dalí's portraiture considered this oeuvre of the artist as nothing more than slick, uninspired moneymakers that enabled Dalí to gain attendance to the upper crust and, through them, support his lavish lifestyle. This pejorative opinion may have had a certain relevance through the waning years of Modernism, where "real art" could only be non-objective, two dimensional, or deconstructionist. In the current Post-Modern and Transitional Millennial periods, though, changing tastes and new considerations (along with a new appreciation of realism and figurative art), allow a contemporary audience to view Dalí's portraiture in an entirely new light.<sup>4</sup> What emerges is a body of work that is startling in both craftsmanship and audacity of conception. Past negative associations of kitsch no longer apply in our current era of Post-Modern Revisionism, with reinterpretations of the kitsch/camp idiom, and reevaluation of realism and figurative art. Indeed, Dalí was way ahead of the game with his proclamation, "Instead of reaction or revolution, RENNAISSANCE!"<sup>5</sup>

The Dalí society portraits now attract for the very reason they used to repel. Their kitsch quality is humorously appealing, affirming Dalí's often tongue-in-cheek approach to people of renown. Their slick surface quality and high coloring gain acceptance with a new appreciation of 1950's Kodachrome photography, Technicolor films and critical recognition of the Pop Surrealist and Low Brow art movements' visual vocabulary. The Dalí portrait subjects themselves, while largely unknown to a contemporary audience, stare out at us, not with Warhol-like emptiness, but with genuine presence. As such, Dalí's subjects inspire further research into their elegant, erudite and sometimes scandalous lives. Today's younger generation is often fascinated by celebrities who have fallen into the dustbin of time. Through Andy Warhol, the current younger generation may know Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Chairman Mao; but there, further exploration of the subjects' historic existence tends to stop. Warhol's subjects remain in the realm of Halloween costume and commercial icon, seldom inspiring a deeper and more critical exploration of the subjects themselves. Dalí's work, on the contrary, does inspire us to know more. These works, with their very audacity of image, purposefully over-the-top color schemes and costuming, command attention. Dalí's portraiture then, must enter the ongoing gallery of twentieth and twenty-first century celebrity, conveying an elegance of lifestyle and sense of self now only imagined. They can offer the contemporary viewer a strength of presence seldom encountered in current public personas, and can even familiarize us with the delicious scandal of a

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<sup>4</sup> When Dawn Ades of England's University of Essex, a leading Dalí scholar, began specializing in his work 30 years ago, her colleagues were aghast. "They thought I was wasting my time," she says. "He had a reputation that was hard to salvage. I have had to work very hard to make it clear how serious he really was."

"The Surreal World of Salvador Dalí Genius or madman? A New Exhibition May Help You Decide Stanley Meisler," (*Smithsonian Magazine*, April, 2005)

<sup>5</sup> *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, Salvador Dalí, (New York: Dial Press, 1942), p. 398

bygone era. Instead of the proverbial “fifteen minutes of fame”, Dalí’s portraiture offers a timelessness rarely encountered in much of the contemporary canon of art of portraiture.<sup>6</sup>



*Leda Atomica*, 1949,  
Collection of the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí

### Historical and Artistic Inspiration Found in Dalí’s Society Portraiture

Scholars of Dalí’s work will affirm Dalí’s own words that the artist mainly was inspired by three great painters of the past – Raphael Sanzio, Diego Velazquez, and Johannes Vermeer. The spirit of the “Divine Raphael” appears repeatedly in the many depictions of Gala – as the Virgin Mary with child in *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1950), as Leda in the *Leda Atomica* (1949), and as Raphael’s own *La Fornarina* (c.1520), in *Galarina* (1945).<sup>7</sup> From Ghostly tables to lace-maker Rhinoceros horns, the “Sphinx of Delft” is present in Dalí’s work as well. The glowing otherworldly light of Vermeer’s *View of Delft* (c.1660-1661), as well as the stunning blue and yellow harmonies found in both *The Milkmaid* (c.1660), and *The Art of Painting* (c.1666-1668), permeate Dalí’s finest pieces, and will inspire the best in his society portraiture. So important was Vermeer’s influence that Dalí himself, in discussing painterly craftsmanship, stated that, “I should likewise be prepared to let my right ear...be removed provided that I might learn the exact formula of the mixture, which composes the ‘precious juice’, in which this same Vermeer...dips his

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<sup>6</sup> “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes”, Program for a 1968 exhibition of Andy Warhol’s work at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden. *The Sixteenth Minute, Life in the Aftermath of Fame*, Jeff Guinn, Douglas Perry, (Jeremy P. Tarcher, Penguin), 2005, p.4

<sup>7</sup> “Raphael yearned to paint like the ancients and exceeded them.” *50 Secrets of Master Craftsmanship*, Salvador Dalí, Translated by Haakon M. chevalier, (Dover Publications, Inc. New York, 1992), p. 17



*Portrait of Mrs. Eric Phillips, 1953,*  
Private Collection

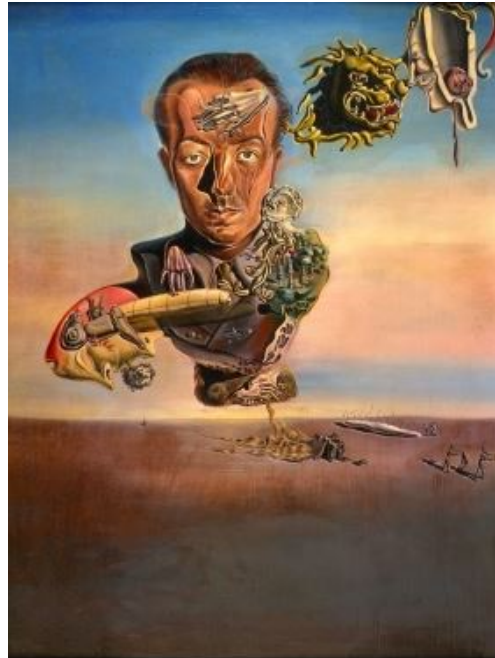
exquisitely rare brush.”<sup>8</sup> The atmospheric grays and mysteries of space/time found in Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656), frequently appear in Dalí’s oeuvre, and are often literally depicted, as in Dalí’s, *Velasquez Painting the Infanta Margarita in all of His Glory* (1958), and *Portrait of Juan de Pareja, Assistant to Velasquez*, 1960 (Portrait of Juan de Pareja Repairing a String of his Mandolin).<sup>9</sup> Hence, Raphael’s grace of form, Vermeer’s qualities of light and color, and Velasquez’s mysteries of composition and atmosphere are guidelines to the best of Dalí’s society portraiture. Dalí nods in reverence to other artists as well. In his portraiture, one finds an Ingres-like precision in the rendering of cloth and jewels, as in the *Portrait of Berthe David-Weill* (1952), as well as the hyper-realistic craftsmanship of Ernest Meissonier and fluid paint handling of Mariano Fortuny, in the *Portrait of Mrs. Eric Phillips* (1953). All of these elements come together to produce a startling hybrid – at once harmonious and dissonant, mysterious and blatantly descriptive, ethereal and comically garish. Glaring contradictions and jarring juxtapositions are no stranger to Dalí, in both his work and in his life. It is the tension that arises from these seemingly unrelated elements that give the portraits much of their appeal. The Dalinian society portrait consists of three parts that, at initial observation, do not seem to belong together. First, are the subjects themselves; second, is the surrealist, dream-like background; and third, is the connection between subject and background, often achieved via a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. *50 Secrets of Master Craftsmanship*, p.13

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. *50 Secrets of Master Craftsmanship*, p. 28 Dalí, with the Comparative Table of Values After Dalinian Analysis Elaborated During Ten Years, will give the highest marks to Velasquez, Vermeer and Raphael in all categories.

*paranoiac-critical* optical illusion.<sup>10</sup> Past critics may have derided the surrealistic backgrounds found in Dalí's portraiture as perfunctory, having no real connection with the subject matter. While it is true that not every portrait by Dalí is a masterpiece, at his best, Dalí enables his subject to step into the recesses of his own mind, and into the endless plains of Catalonia and the silvery harbor of Port Lligat. Rather than a poorly painted canvas backdrop as is found in Victorian Daguerreotypes, both subject and background exists in a harmonious, but unsettling world of the surrealist imagination.<sup>11</sup>



*Portrait of Paul Éluard, 1929,*  
Private Collection

### Time Period, Style, and Development

Early Dalinian portraiture does not fit into the category of society portrait formulated and featured in this paper, even if those works depicted society figures of the time. The early portraits belong to a different genre in style and purpose, more an example of artistic development and experimentation as with *Portrait of my Father* (1925); or, they were the beginning of paranoiac-critical concepts and Dalinian symbolism as found in (*Portrait of Paul Éluard*, Dalí, 1929). Along these lines, the many portraits of Gala should be considered with their own separate genre, whether religious, mythological or classically inspired. Gala, as muse and frequent subject (and not a patron with a commission), serves more as an inspiration for exploring surrealist situations, mythological applications to the

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<sup>10</sup> "the spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectifications of delirious associations and interpretations." An example of this in Dalinian portraiture would be the *Portrait of Mrs. Anne Woodward* (1953) where the pose of her silhouette is found in reverse in the background rock formations.

surrealist genre, or simply as a subject for figurative and academic study.<sup>12</sup> Portraits of the later Nuclear Mystical period, such as *Portrait of My Dead Brother* (1963), also are in a different category. Hence, the portraits included in the society portrait genre described in this paper, are those actually



*Portrait of Frank Brian Mercer, 1973,*  
The Royal Society, London

commissioned by patrons, and fall into the time frame from approximately 1932 with the *Portrait of the Vicomtesse de Noailles*, to 1973 with the *Portrait of Frank Brian Mercer* and *Portrait of Eva Suero Talkish*. It is with these works that one will find that hybrid of Vermeer, Raphael and Ingres mentioned earlier.

This defined category however, cannot and should not be entirely separated from Dalí's other works and development during these same years. The main influence (along with the principal time frame) for Dalí's society portraits would occur with Dalí's post-World War II return to classicism and the subsequent Nuclear Mystical religious works. The surrealist cum mystic would declare that "if a Renaissance of mystical painting as not yet begun, it is due to the fact that...today's artists paint nothing, in other words what is non-figurative, non-objective, non-expressive, non-non-no no no no."<sup>13</sup> During the conflicts of World War II, Dalí lived in the United States, and it was in this New World that Dalí experienced his mystical transformation into the new man – a man of Classicism, Renaissance principles, and renewed Catholic Faith.

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<sup>12</sup> The paintings, *Portrait of Gala with Two Lamb Chops in Equilibrium upon Her Shoulder* (1934), *Leda Atomica* (1949), *Lapis-Lazuli Corpuscular Assumption* (1952), and *Gala Nude from the Back Looking into an Invisible Mirror* (1960) serve as examples; while, it can be argued that Gala in *Galarina* (1945), acts as a springboard for the subsequent society portraits of the next decade.

<sup>13</sup> *Manifeste Mystique*, Mystical Manifesto, Salvador Dalí, (Robert. J. Godet, Paris, 1951)





*Portrait of Dolores Suero Falla, 1955,*  
Collection of Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz

The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States coincided with this spiritual renewal, and in fact was partially the cause of it. Dalí would recount that the “atomic explosion of August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945 shook me seismically. Therefore, the atom was my favorite food for thought.”<sup>14</sup> It is during this period and subsequent years that one finds the nuclear acid, yellow-green sky of the *Leda Atomica*, and the clear colors (especially the yellow and blue harmonies), and the meticulous paint surface quality in the best of his society portraits. This is made evident by a comparison of Dalí’s, *Dalí, nude, entranced in the contemplation of five regular bodies metamorphosed in corpuscles, in which suddenly appears Leonardo’s “Leda”, chromosomatised by the face of Gala* (1954) with say, the *Portrait of Dolores Suero Falla*, (1955). Gone for the most part are earlier Dalínian motifs – grasshoppers, scatological references etc. being replaced by clear bright planes of color and carefully depicted drapery and jewels. This brings up the criticism that the Dalí society portrait is merely formulaic, hence easy to toss off for quick money. However, a set formulaic approach to Dalí’s portraiture was entirely appropriate. This allowed Dalí to show off his skill with facial features and flesh tones, to create an inner glowing light from indirect glazing techniques, and to manifest the subject’s definite presence via careful drawing and fine craftsmanship.

## The Subjects

Who were the subjects that Dalí sought out, and in turn sought him out? Dalí never made a secret of his snobbery, and in fact considered it one of the qualities of his superior personality. Many people wanted to know Dalí’s recipe for social success. To one young man who asked, Dalí replied: “Then you

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<sup>14</sup> *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí* (as told to Andre Parenaud), trans. Harold J. Salemsen, (New York, William Marrow and Co., 1976), p. 216

must become a snob. Like me...For me, snobbery - particularly in Surrealist days - was a downright strategy, because I... was the only one who moved in society and was received in high-class circles.”<sup>15</sup>

True snobbism for Dalí was creating envy between opposing parties – the Aristocracy and the Bohemians and back again while the artist flowed easily between the two. American aristocracy was a new thing, though, presenting Dalí with a different form of conquest. It was not a titled elite based on hereditary Medieval bloodlines or Bohemian counter-cultural aesthetics, but an upper class founded on business acumen, star quality and inherited wealth. Beautiful and stylish women abound in Dalí's oeuvre, less so men. While Dalí might mock his subject, as in his painting of Hollywood mogul, Jack Warner, he did respect genuine men of science, arts and letters such as Chester Dale, Sir James Dunn and Arthur Clarke Herrington.<sup>16</sup> With women, due to their own feminine beauty, elaborate costume, and sparkling jewelry, Dalí was usually flattering and perhaps more inspired than with his male subjects.

Dalí was a man of complicated and to this day not clearly defined sexuality. Most contemporary critics will agree that Dalí was bisexual. He was however, a man of his era and could never be fully honest about the subject. Even so, if we concur that Dalí was bisexual (with a certain amount of Gay/Queer sensibility and Male Gaze) we have a better window into his depiction of female subjects.<sup>17</sup> In Post-World War II high society, women did not have to be necessarily intelligent or career oriented; but, beautiful, stylish, witty, and influential. Women offered Dalí the *eternal feminine* and all the mysteries it contained. Certainly, a beautiful gown and glowing jewelry, the later perhaps designed by the master himself, convey more surface interest than a grey flannel suit, no matter how accomplished the male subject might be.

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<sup>15</sup> *Salvador Dalí*, Robert Decharnes, Gilles Neret, (TASCHEN, 1994)

<sup>16</sup> *Portrait of Chester Dale and His Dog Coco* (1958), *Portrait of Sir James Dunn* (1948), *Sunrise; Portrait of Sir James Dunn* (1958), and *Portrait of Arthur Clark Herrington* (1958)

<sup>17</sup> The concept of the Male Gaze was first used by the English art critic John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*, a series of films for the BBC aired in January 1972, and later a book, as part of his analysis of the treatment of the nude in European painting. It soon became popular among feminists, including the British film critic Laura Mulvey, who used it to critique traditional media representations of the female character in cinema and coined the phrase.

*A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, edited by Sharon L. James, Sheila Dillon, (Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2012), p. 75. It is my own theory that a bisexual male can convey both sexual attraction and non-physical sensuality in the depicted female subject, along with a Gay/Queer sensibility of feminine fashion, jewels, make up, etc.





*Portrait of Mrs. Harold McCormick, 1941*

It is an irony of contemporary art criticism that a male homosexual artist might paint the most sensual images of women.<sup>18</sup> The beautiful woman as subject is given the artist's own sense of anima/drag power and luxuriousness. This is not a matter of negative or positive sexual stereotypes but of sexual identity sensibilities. The Dalinian woman can rise to the level of pop Madonna, or tarot card archetype; descend to become a Kali-like demoness; or even fall into a clueless self-deprecating mockery - all the while unbeknownst to the subject herself. As always, it is hard to know when Dalí is being flattering or merely mocking. A good example is the shrewish face of Ann Woodward in, *Portrait of Ann Woodward* (1953) or in the lost work, *Portrait of Mrs. Harold McCormick* (1941), where Mrs. McCormick looks like an embarrassed schoolgirl among the phallic elements of the bust's base and the gaping orifice in the sky.<sup>19</sup>

### The Categories of Dalinian Society Portraits

This paper will divide Dalí's society portraits into several subject categories, with select examples for each. These categories are as follows: The Thespian, represented by *Richard III* (1955); The Mogul, with the *Portrait of Colonel Jack Warner* (1951); The Benefactor, personified by the *Portrait of Chester Dale with His Dog Coco* (1958); The Technicolor Goddess represented with the *Portrait of C. Z. Guest* (1958) and the *Portrait of Rosemary Chisholm* (1961); and finally, The Aristocrat with the *Portrait of the Princess Archil Gourielli, Helena Rubinstein* (1943), and *Portrait of the Prince Archil Gourielli* (1954). Why these categories? This division is a way of understanding the subject's own sense of

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<sup>18</sup> Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, and the Heterosexual Male Artistic Gaze can oftentimes become convoluted and prejudicial when thought of in rigid concepts and categories. Here, I refer simply to the fact that most beautifiers of women: fashion designers, hair stylists and makeup artists (certainly in Dalí's era), were homosexual men.

<sup>19</sup> This lost work is pictured and recorded in the *Fundacio Gala-Salvador Dalí, Catalogue Raisonné* of Paintings.

identity, along with Dalí's subsequent interpretation of who they really were. The categories are themselves archetypes that not only define Dalí's various patrons, but serve as a springboard for expression on the artist's part. Sometimes Dalí and his subject are in agreement with each other; but, at other times, Dalí's portraits may be a mockery of themselves, no matter how subtle. For instance, Jack Warner may have thought of himself as personifying the self-made man, but Dalí pictures him as a con man on the make. Nonetheless, he remains an example of the American financial mogul. The American socialite, Mrs. C.Z. Guest, indeed was stylish, powerful and beautiful, and Dalí's painting confirms the fact; while Anne Woodward, although in high society, was never really accepted as part of the group, particularly after the scandal of her husband's murder/death. Woodward's is an unflattering portrait, but Dalí depicts her with the same visual elements that he used in the *Portrait of C.Z. Guest*. Prince Gourielli and Helena Rubenstein are a bit more complex, even though they both fit into the category of Aristocrat. Helena Rubenstein was just as much a financial mogul as she was a princess, while her husband, Prince Gourelli was an aristocrat with neither land nor power. Their marriage filled a mutual need – one for money, the other for old world status, so they emerge as Dalínian Aristocrats – both becoming a type of titled *Cadavres Exquises*.<sup>20</sup>

### The Dalínian Categories of Portraiture: The Thespian



*Richard the Third, 1955*

Collection of the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí

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<sup>20</sup> I refer to this technique of surreal automatism to elaborate on the fact that both Helena Rubenstein and Prince Archil were constructed from many different identities.

*Richard the Third* (1955), (Portrait of Laurence Olivier in the Role of Richard the Third) is one of Dalí's better known portraits, not only because of its high quality, but also due to its connection with the film, *Richard III* which, regarding Dalí, "has become emblematic of his amicable relationship with the film industry..."<sup>21</sup>This film was a 1955 British Technicolor adaptation of William Shakespeare's historical play of the same name, with Sir Laurence Olivier in the leading role. The portrait was originally considered for the film's publicity and poster, but a simpler version was chosen instead.

The portrait is a double image – literally and figuratively. Olivier's face, divided in two, represents both actor and the role. Even if Dalí had depicted Olivier in a more traditional manner, the portrait would still be dualistic, with actor/subject depicted playing a particular role. As it is, the portrait features three degrees of separation – the depicted role of the subject, the subject himself and painting as object viewed by another person.



*Invention of the Monsters*, c. 1937  
Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago

One finds the split face image in Dalí's earlier work, *Invention of the Monsters* (c.1937). In this painting Dalí and Gala's faces merge into one, while on their right a personage splits like the wings of a butterfly, with an actual butterfly depicted in the painting. In the background, a figure with a cat-like double mask bows before a bust with a double equine-like face.<sup>22</sup> Dalí's depiction may refer to both the natural person and his/her monstrous double, which could apply easily to an actor playing a role.

<sup>21</sup> "Crazy Movies that Disappear," Elliot H. King, *Dalí and Film*, ed. Matthew Gale, (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2008), p. 215. *Richard III*, Technicolor film produced and directed by Sir. Laurence Olivier, (London Films, 1955)

<sup>22</sup> "...Cat angel equals divine heterosexual monster. Hourglass equals metaphysical monster. Gala and Dalí equal sentimental monster. The little blue dog is not a true monster." From a letter by Dalí to the Art Institute of Chicago"; ([Art Institute of Chicago Website, Surrealism](#)), April 23, 2021

Richard III, in both role and history, proves to be a complex character, either hero or villain depending on one's interpretation.

Sir Laurence Olivier himself led a duplicitous life - rumored to be bisexual, along with the emotional turmoil over his affair and failed marriage to actress Vivian Leigh. Olivier, already married with a son, began his tumultuous affair with Leigh in the 1930s. As both parties were already married, this caused a great scandal. Finally, free to marry in 1940, Leigh's extreme emotional instability increased, placing a constant strain on Olivier and their relationship. The couple finally divorced in 1960. In the early 1960s, Olivier wrote that he hoped Leigh would be able to "find happiness" now they were free of each other. "I want to say thank you for understanding it all for my sake," reads Olivier's letter addressing their divorce. "You did nobly and bravely and beautifully and I am very oh so sorry, very sorry, that it must have been much hell for you."<sup>23</sup>

In this portrait Dalí gives his usual attention not only to facial characteristics, but to jewelry, costume and background as well. Equestrian figures in the background are found on the jewelry details, and the painting features some Dalínian ants in the foreground. All in all, this portrait shows an actor of great character and determination who, despite the emotional tragedy of his marriage, played a complex role worthy of surrealist interpretation by the master of the genre.

### The Technicolor Goddess

Dalí, in explaining his Paranoiac Critical Method, once described his paintings as "hand colored, dream photography."<sup>24</sup> Hand coloring of photography and film eventually would develop into the process of *Technicolor*, the most widely used color process in Hollywood from 1922 to 1952. But during the time period of Dalí's early works, hand coloring of photographs, even the hand coloring of certain films, was the norm. These photographs had a particular quality similar to the qualities found in classic indirect painting techniques. In classic painting, the painter would complete a finished grisaille, (the subject matter in tonal greys), then the artist would glaze with thin veils of color, re-working lights, darks and highlights as needed. Hand colored photographs differ, though, from Renaissance masterpieces in that the result often had a lipstick or magic marker quality – candy-like tints strictly differentiated into their various areas. Hand colored photography can lack what artists refer to as local color. While Dalí certainly did convey a sense of atmospheric grey and local color in works such as *The Ghost of Vermeer of Delft, which can also be used as a Table*, (1934), his later color schemes are sharp and distinct – indeed hand colored in the best sense of the term. Rather than being flat and amateurish, Dalí's hand coloring became sharp and clear, almost blinding. This effect would increase in later works, which move from the effects of hand colored photography, as found in his *Leda Atomica*, to full blown Technicolor garishness. Dalí's atmospheric inspiration originally was

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<sup>23</sup> Laurence Olivier's Steamy Love Letters to Vivien Leigh see *Light of Day* (*The Guardian Website*, April 24, 2021)

<sup>24</sup> "Here is one of Dalí's 'hand-painted dream photographs' titled, "The Persistence of Memory." (This painting can be seen in MOMA.) *Hand-Painted Dream Photographs*, Katie Ronsivalle, (*Time Journal*, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019)

founded in the meteorological conditions of Port Lligat, which are both Mediterranean and coastal. In his tome on technique, "50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship", Dalí stated that an artist should only live in conditions as are found in Port Lligat, and that is why there are no colorists of merit from Scandinavia, Russia, and other northern climes.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, these color and atmospheric techniques are strikingly similar to what is found in Hollywood color films at the time. In Dalí's portraits of women this is quite evident – with Snow White flesh tones, clarity of aqua seas and azure skies, and the yellowish glow of landscapes and pearl jewelry.



*Portrait of C.Z. Guest, 1958*  
Private Collection

In the *Portrait of C.Z. Guest, 1958*, the viewer confronts a Technicolor Madonna of severe countenance, sharp distinction of garment colors, coming storm atmospheric effects, and glowing, ghostly pallor. The immediate comparison, especially due to the frontality of image, might be a Byzantine or Medieval Madonna, and this certainly is a just assessment. But here, the comparison stops, as the viewer enters into a Vermeer-like luminosity, an Ingres-like crispness, and finally an Alfred Hitchcock Technicolor unsettledness as found in the Hitchcock films, *Vertigo* (1958) and *The Birds* (1963).<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Guest was one of the great beauties of her era, personifying both a patrician sternness and WASP delicacy of features and coloring so required at the time of American upper-crust women. Mrs. Guest was not only a great beauty, but a woman of incomparable taste and style:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., *50 Secrets of Master Craftsmanship*. The white of snow is simply blinding, and it is for this reason...the Russian painter is the worst colorist of all. 1. Pg. 64

<sup>26</sup> *Vertigo*, (Produced and Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount Pictures, 1958); *The Birds*, (produced and directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Universal Pictures, 1963)



“A muse to artists like Andy Warhol and Salvador Dalí, C.Z. Guest was one of the first true fashion icons...named in the International Best Dressed List Hall of Fame in 1959.”<sup>27</sup> Dressed by the likes of Mainbocher and Chanel, she was ironically both desirably imitable and impossible to imitate. Some things are only obtainable by birth, breeding and uniqueness of character. Hence, in this portrait, she is the Goddess Madonna of taste and style – setting the standards that all women should aspire to, but very few were able to obtain. At once, example and unrealistic goal; she remains aloof, with a bemused stare, forever enshrined in color, taste, and the skies of Port Lligat, transferred to an American country equestrian estate.

In this portrait the viewer is exposed to a dichotomy of elegantly simple day-wear; and, a Technicolor eye dazzling version of the very same outfit.<sup>28</sup> The glowing autumnal print of the dress glows like the most metallic of brocades, and even the beige cardigan emits a subtle inner light. The pearl parure hold its own with any by Vermeer and her dressed coiffure is at once both sensual and ascetic. Here, Mrs. Guest is the perfect example of American patrician good taste – basic but well-tailored clothing, a carefully groomed but simple hairstyle, expensive but subtle jewelry, and very little make-up. This style, distinctly English in inspiration was America’s answer to aristocracy of blood, quiet money, an unmistakable breeding that does not need to prove itself. However, the portrait goes beyond a mere fashion plate – it is Dalí’s unmistakable genius that elevates Mrs. Guest to a sacred Icon, a Madonna granted the power of judgement over the parvenu arriviste and the downright tacky interloper.

With this celestial position as arbiter of taste and privilege, the *Portrait of C.Z. Guest* can be compared to Andy Warhol’s numerous portraits of famous women, as in this case of *Turquoise Marilyn* (1962), and *Red Jackie* (1964). Marilyn Monroe was the definitive construction – a Hollywood tragi-comic creation based on an aspiring girl from the wrong side of the tracks. She is indeed the empty icon that Warhol intended, a parody of herself – a smear of lipstick and eye shadow with no self underneath, or at least a self that had long been killed off. With Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, one finds a woman born into social status and class expectations – fulfilling the ultimate debutantes’ dream of marrying the future president of the United States. Jackie, though expected to remain the perpetual widow, rebelled with her strange marriage to Aristotle Onassis and her new role as Queen of the Jet Set. “Jackie Kennedy” might remain a Warhol empty icon, while Jacqueline Onassis escaped into a new form of personhood.<sup>29</sup>

Here the comparison with Warhol ends. For C.Z. Guest is no empty icon. This portrait is not an absence of self, but an overwhelming triumph of self – “I radiate, therefore I AM.” There is no insecurity, no self-doubt and no victimization. She is both law and judge, arbiter and executioner of

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<sup>27</sup> “C.Z. Guest, One of America’s Classic Beauties and First Fashion Icon Award Winner,” (*A.G. Nauta Couture; All About Fashion Website*, (May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, viewed April 19, 2021)

<sup>28</sup> After extensive research, I was unable to find the designer of the dress depicted in this portrait.

<sup>29</sup> *Red Jackie* (1964), was based off of a portrait by the official photographer for the Kennedy presidential campaign, Jacques Lowe. For these portraits, he cropped the hair, and changed the angle of the head to bring the composition more closely into line with the Marilyn portraits he produced in the same year.

Georg Frei, Neil Printz, and Sally King-Nero, eds. *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné, Warhol Paintings and Sculptures 1964-1969* (New York; London: Phaidon, 2004), p. 27



beauty, style and breeding. The Warhol icon of emptiness is never found in Dalí's portraiture, for always some personality emerges, even if given presence from only the painter's own ego.



*Portrait of Rosemary Chisholm, 1961*  
Private Collection, Cincinnati

While less known than the portrait of Mrs. Guest, the *Portrait of Rosemary Chisholm* (1961), is equally as intriguing. Here the eye is teased by sensual silvery hues, porcelain-like petals and pearls, and "perfect" skin and hair coloring - more cosmetic advertisement than real humanoid skin. While not as strong and iconic as the portrait of Mrs. Guest, nonetheless the subject has presence. The deliberate low positioning of the figure is unsettling, even with the unification of composition via eye movement - traveling up to the cloud formation and back down to the gardenia/jasmine flower. While Mrs. Guest is authoritarian, Mrs. Chisholm is simply beautiful, almost phantom-like; an apparition of silvery perfection. This very artifice gives the portrait both its camp appeal and ethereal presence.<sup>30</sup> If there were a cross-cultural comparison that could be made, it would be to equate Mrs. Chisholm with the actress Kim Novak in her double role as Madeline Ester and Judy, in Alfred Hitchcock's film, *Vertigo*. In the film, Madeline, with whom Jimmy Stewart's character falls in love, is already a ghost, (she has been murdered). She is also a fake - with the rather common Judy play-acting the ethereal, already deceased Madeline. As in the movie with Madeline, Mrs. Chisholm may not be remembered for intellectual or business accomplishments. She will be remembered though as a silvery phantom

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<sup>30</sup> "This is a suavely ridiculous painting, a wet dream of a sophisticated portrait (just the right combination of sex and enigma), engineered to appeal to the last holdouts of café society, with their chrome-plated cocktail shakers and shimmering-silk interior decors. I am not convinced that the Portrait of Mrs. Chisholm is so bad that it's good. But Dalí's deracinated glamour does earn my grudging respect."

"THE PICTURE: So Bad; Why Salvador Dalí's Paintings are the Junk Food of Art, Jed Pearl," (*The New Republic*, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

staring out at us for all eternity, a personification of beauty, from an era when being beautiful was enough and class and taste were as natural for some as eating and breathing was for others.

One of Salvador Dalí's most famous collaborations was with Alfred Hitchcock for the dream sequence of the movie, *Spellbound* (1945).<sup>31</sup> Hitchcock was drawn to Dalí because of the sharp clarity of his work, which he felt was more indicative of the dreamscape (as opposed to the usual fuzziness of filmed dream sequences). Hitchcock would affirm that, "Dalí's work is very solid and very sharp...All dreams in the movies are blurred. It isn't true. Dalí was the best man for me to do the dreams because that is what dreams should be".<sup>32</sup> Although Dalí did not work with Hitchcock on any other film projects, (in this case *Vertigo*) either Dalí's vision had a lasting influence on the director, their artistic concepts were strikingly similar, or perhaps it was all just coincidence. Whatever the case, the comparison between the *Portrait of Mrs. Chisholm*, and the Madeline/Judy character of the film is uncanny.

Kim Novak, the female lead in *Vertigo* was one of the famous "Hitchcock Blondes", along with the likes of Eva Marie Saint, Grace Kelly and Tippy Hedren. Hitchcock had an affinity for the cool, WASP, blonde woman of exquisite tastes – removed from the common heard, sensual but unapproachable; wraithlike, and sometimes literally a ghost, as was Ms. Novak's character in *Vertigo*.<sup>33</sup> The comparison between Mrs. Novak and Mrs. Chisholm is obvious – the same coloring, the same attention to coiffure and dress, the same sensual iciness, and most importantly, the sharpness of focus and Technicolor richness. Art imitates life; and certainly Hitchcock's films influenced fashion and even women's concept of what they should be. More than an accident of style and far-fetched comparison between a Dalí portrait and a Hitchcock film, the *Portrait of Mrs. Chisholm* stands as an archetype of her era, elegant, groomed, sensual and yet irreproachable. She represents that ideal that unites Hollywood and Spain, the muse of both the great Hollywood director and the Spanish artist.

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<sup>31</sup> *Spellbound*, Film, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, produced by David O. Selsnick (Selznick International Films, Vanguard Films, United Artists, 1945)

<sup>32</sup> *Film Profiles: Alfred Hitchcock*, undated interview by Philip Jenkinson of BBC TV, cited in Nathalie Dondol-Poupard, *Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On: Hitchcock and Dalí, Surrealism and Onericism*, in Guy Cogeval and Dominique Paint (eds.) *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences*, (exh. cat., Montreal Museum of Fine Arts 2000), p. 156

<sup>33</sup> "The Hitchcock Blonde represents a restructuring of the submissive, domestic female popular image of the time. While she fits the physical appearance of the classic model, she operates as a modern woman with a simmering sexuality and emotional complexity hidden beneath a clean wardrobe, aloof perfection and hairspray. The blondness of her mane only amplifies her duality: an iciness stored within the buttery innocence of flawless style. Her sex appeal is indirect; she is a cool exterior with an inner fire." "What Is A 'Hitchcock Blonde'? How Did the Term Develop?" Jeff Saporito, (Website: *The Take*, April 24, 2021)



*Portrait of Colonel Jack Warner, 1951*  
Syracuse University Art Collection



*Portrait of Mrs. Jack Warner, 1944*  
Morohashi Museum of Modern Art

### The Hollywood Mogul and his Wife: Portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Warner

Dalí's *Portrait of Colonel Jack Warner* and *Portrait of Mrs. Jack Warner*, meant to be hung as a pendant, are separated by seven years, with Mrs. Warner's portrait painted first in 1944 and Mr. Warner's following in 1951. No two portraits could be so different. Mrs. Warner's is flattering and features one of Dalí's finest landscapes. Mr. Warner's portrait is unflattering and comic. Jack Warner's portrait is more in line with the developed "Society Portrait" style of Dalí, with the brighter colors and slicker surface quality; while Mrs. Warner's portrait, though only separated by seven years, is more of Dalí's neo-classical style of the 1940's. Regardless, Mrs. Warner looks like a goddess in a Dalínian dream, while Jack Warner appears more like a shifty used car salesman with a ravenous pet dog. It is said that Jack Warner hated this portrait so much that he hung it in the dog kennel; and, perhaps one cannot blame him.<sup>34</sup>

Mrs. Warner's portrait is glowing and highly detailed and has the typical strong triangular composition of subject, cloud formation, and ruins. Mrs. Warner is lovely in her red gown and glowing green brooch, her hair just windblown enough to add movement to the scene. The color scheme is united by local color of bronzes and earth yellows. All in all, we can say that this is one of Dalí's most successful and flattering depictions. As such, it serves to be the perfect foil for Colonel Warner's portrait.

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<sup>34</sup> Ironically, Dalí would make "a proposal to Jack Warner to make a documentary about his book, *50 Secrets of Master Craftsmanship*. "My very dear friend, I have never wanted to take advantage of our great friendship...but I have recognized the truly sensational cultural and pedagogic possibilities of realizing a short documentary on the subject, with myself as protagonist".

Ibid. "Why Film?" Dawn Ades, *Dalí and Film*, pg.30

Ibid. *Dalí and Film*, King, pg. 215

Mr. Warner's painting is immediately comical and mocking, and a bit too revealing of character for comfort. While the painting shows a bit of the lavish gardens of the Warner estate, Mr. Warner does not seem to be the Lord of the Manor, but a smarmy, disreputable gate crasher, an uninvited guest who made his way into an elite private party. Even the beloved pet dog is wolfish and hungry-eyed, his attention focused on something outside the line of vision. Mr. Warner's toothy grin, receding hairline, and predatory raised eyebrow may have been true to nature, but giving these elements such emphasis is purposely unflattering; and one cannot but understand Mr. Warner's negative reaction to the painting.

Jack Warner was no doubt a phenomenal man – in creativity, vision and sheer business ruthlessness, but his philandering, radical right-wing political views and estrangement from his son reveal a man of selfish drive and ambition. In one sense, he is no different from the typical American robber baron of the previous generation, such as Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie or Henry Clay Frick. However, while these individuals were able to transform themselves into American aristocracy, Warner and his ilk, despite their money, remained Hollywood types and could never escape the undercurrents of anti-Semitism in the American business world. Not only was Warner a Jew, but his money was made through the entertainment industry. This put him into an entirely different class than the banker, oil-man or railroad tycoon. Perhaps this is why Dalí emphasizes him as a parvenu outsider. Or, in the best Dalinian tradition, perhaps the artist simply did not like Jack Warner's looks and pretensions, and, as oftentimes was the case, simply had the last laugh.

### **The Benefactor, Portrait of Mr. Chester Dale**



*Portrait of Chester Dale, 1958*  
National Gallery of Art, Washington

From the world of Jack Warner's Hollywood to the *Portrait of Mr. Chester Dale and His Dog Coco* (1958), is a ninety-degree about face. Chester Dale represents the cultured scion of established money, hence the archetypal patron and benefactor. Making his wealth on the New York Stock Exchange, Dale was an avid art collector and art benefactor bequeathing his vast collection to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., including Dalí's *Sacrament of the Last Supper* (1955). When he was twenty-seven, Chester Dale married Maud Murray (1876–1953), who introduced him to the collecting of modern art. Under her guidance, Dale thrived on forging financial deals and translated much of this energy and talent into building his vast art collection.

In this portrait, the viewer is confronted with a haunting frontal image – a man elegantly dressed, accompanied by his faithful dog, set in a stormy seascape, with a lighthouse tower in the background. On the bottom of the painting is the inscription, "Pour Chester Dale et Coco / Mon Pape Innocent X de Velasquez / Salvador Dalí, 1958". This inscription gives the secret to the unsettling aspect of the painting – the juxtaposition of the face of Chester Dale with the face of Pope Innocent X, as depicted by Diego Velasquez.<sup>35</sup> To combine two faces in one image, referred to as a binocular fusion, face fusion, or in Dalinian terminology, "physiognomic synchronism", can result in either tackiness or an artistic *tour de force*. It is much easier when the two faces involved have some similarities, as in the case with Chester Dale and Pope Innocent X. In this portrait, Dalí claimed to have invented physiognomic synchronism, but this technique "had been used by great masters for centuries. Lucien Freud and Philip Pearlstein both continue to use it in their portraits today without mentioning it and there are probably several others too."<sup>36</sup>

Innocent X (1574 – 1655, born Giovanni Battista Pamphili) was head of the Catholic Church and ruler of the Papal States from 1644 to his death in 1655. Innocent X was one of the most politically shrewd pontiffs of the era, greatly increasing the temporal power of the Holy See. Clearly, as observed in the famous Velasquez portrait, Innocent X was a man who made one tremble in his presence. The juxtaposition of Innocent's intensity with Chester Dale's paternal kindness does make for an amusing and startling tension. The similarities between the two portraits can be seen in the eyes, brow wrinkle and in the slightly upturned mouth; with the first, conveying a "how dare you" image, and the second an amused, grandfatherly gentleness. Chester Dale does not wear his own "wardrobe of office" (a three-piece business suit) while in the Velasquez portrait Pope Innocent is officially garbed, and sitting on the papal throne. Hence, one portrait is official, the other non-official and relaxed. In the portrait Dale sports a smoking jacket, but is still dressy with a white satin necktie and pearl stickpin. Mr. Dale is not ready to spring at his viewer as his Pope Innocent, but is comfortably relaxed on a type of rock-constructed easy chair. The inclusion of the dog, Coco, adds to the comfortability and domestic casualness of the scene. Coco looks out at us warily, but is safely contained in his master's arms. Dale's elongated chin is even more exaggerated in this painting (to further connect the two faces), which not only adds to the subject's rock-like solidity, but gives the subject a Halloween mask

<sup>35</sup> *Portrait of Innocent X*, Diego Velasquez, 1650.

<sup>36</sup> Dalí's "Physiognomic Synchronism", Simon Abrahams, Website: *EPPH Every Painter Paints Himself; Art's Masterpieces Explained* (2010)

like humor - *a la* Fred Gwynne, playing Herman Munster, in the famous 1960s TV series, *The Munsters*.<sup>37</sup>

The effective combination of the two visages, one paternal and the other accusing, plus the ominous coloring of the sea and sky gives this portrait a strikingly tense presence. According to Simon Abrahams in his book, *Face Fusion, Every Painter Paints Himself*, "face fusion is just one of the many methods by which poetic artists turn a portrait of someone else into a representation of themselves. Chester Dale is therefore not just a rich American in Dalí's portrait but a visual descendant of a Spanish master (Velasquez) with whom Dalí himself closely identified, one artist as representative of another."<sup>38</sup> Compared with the aforementioned Jack Warner portrait, Chester Dale emerges as a genuine man of means, a king of his empire, a connoisseur of beauty and culture; while kind and paternal, like the Velasquez pope and Catalan surrealist submerged underneath, not to be taken lightly.

## The Aristocrats:

### Portraits of Prince Archil Gourielli-Chkonია and Madame Helena Rubenstein

Dalí's portraits of *Portrait of the Prince Gourielli* (1954), and *Princess Artchil Gourielli*, 1943, (Portrait of Princess Gourielli, Helena Rubinstein) serve as an example of Dalí's love of the aristocracy, his desire to be part of it, and the painful reality that the dying breed of European aristocrat depended more and more on capitalist lucre to maintain relevance and support his/her lifestyle. Dalí had no problem with the conundrum of birth not equaling wealth. He made no secret of his love for the almighty dollar, and yet considered himself a cut above the average businessman, or for that matter the average human being. His siding with the fascist regime of Francisco Franco (enabling his return to Spain) and his re-conversion to Roman Catholicism are both steeped in aristocratic longings. While never granted a title by the Vatican, he did succeed in getting a title, under King Juan Carlos I, as the *Marques de Dalí de Pubol*.

Both Dalí and Prince Archil were more cardboard cutout royalty; an operetta variety of aristocracy, rather than *Noblesse d'epee*. Although of petty noble birth, the Prince Archil claimed Gourielli blood through his grandmother being descended from a Gourielli princess. After the Revolution of 1917 émigré Russian aristocracy found a home in American café and Hollywood society. Despite issues of Georgian anti-Semitism, Prince Archil had no problems procuring a marriage to the cosmetic tycoon, Helena Rubenstein, who was of Polish-Jewish descent.

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<sup>37</sup> *The Munsters*, Television Sit-Com, NBC Universal Television Distribution, aired 1964-1966

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, *Face Fusion*





*Princess Artchil Gourielli*, 1943  
Private Collection

*Princess Artchil Gourielli*, (1943) depicts the subject's face as highly polished, alluding to the cosmetic base of both beauty and money. In reality, Helena as was not a beautiful woman by the standards of the time. She was stout and bosomy, and this is conveyed in the painting by her rather squat rock-like upper torso, especially when compared with both the elongated Dalinian nude on her right and the breast shaped rock on her left. Although Rubinstein was seventy-three when the portrait was painted, "Dalí has rendered a more youthful representation of her in this picture that bears a close resemblance to his own wife, Gala. This choice reinforces the surrealist idea of a non-literal portrait, which relies on symbolism and atmospheric effects to convey information about the subject. In this way, Rubenstein's youthfulness represents the immortality of her character as well as the accomplishments of a cosmetics pioneer."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Impressionists and Modern Art, Evening Sale*. Sotheby's Catalogue Property from the Helena Rubenstein Foundation, May 3, 2011, New York)



*Portrait of the Prince Gourielli, 1954*  
Private Collection

With the *Portrait of the Prince Gourielli*, it is noteworthy that Dalí painted the Georgian prince clad in a traditional Georgian man's wear, "Chakura", whereas in the background he depicted Georgian mythical hero, Amirani, the proto-type of Prometheus, as the legend says, chained to the Caucasus cliff. In addition, in the background a church can be seen, which indicates that Georgia is a Christian country, and the ships that possibly tell the story of the Argonauts that came for the golden fleece in Georgia. Far in the right side of the artwork a snow-covered peak is painted that also demonstrates Georgian landscape, in particular the Caucasus Mountains.<sup>40</sup> Although Prince Archil never had power in his native land, the trappings of historical aristocracy in this painting serve to maintain the delusion of old world status. Empowered by Helena Rubenstein's money, the Prince is guilty of more cosmetic delusion and trickery than any of Madame Rubenstein's clients. Indeed, the painting does convey a cardboard cutout dress up type of effigy, revealing the shaky truth underneath. As such, this painting represents the actuality of Dalí's own aristocratic pretensions. During Dalí's lifetime, due to war and political revolution the noblesse lost what money and power they had. It was now necessary to search out capitalist *Avida Dollars*.<sup>41</sup> Dalí, like Prince Archil, did maintain the title and lifestyle of the aristocrat, and made no secret of the capitalist lucre needed to maintain it.

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<sup>40</sup> "Georgian Prince Painted by his Friend Salvador Dalí," (Georgian Journal, *Culture*, January 2017)

<sup>41</sup> I use Andre Breton's famous anagram for those of noble birth who admitted that obtaining wealth via marriage or other means was necessary.

## Conclusion

Susan Sontag in her essay "Notes On Camp", defines camp as seeing "everything in quotation marks. It is not a lamp, but a 'lamp'; not a woman, but a 'woman'." To understand camp in objects and persons is to understand Being- as -Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater."<sup>42</sup>

Yesterday's kitsch/camp is often tomorrow's high art; and, Dalí's work falls into this on many occasions. The most recent example of this has been the reevaluation of Dalí's religious works, among them *The Sacrament of the Last Supper* (1955). The religious works were always popular with the general public, but hated by critics and even some theologians for their realism, pious pretensions, and going against the grain of what was the acceptable art of the era; namely, non-objective two-dimensional abstraction.<sup>43</sup> Today's generations of viewers first may be attracted by the "camp" appeal of Dalí's religious works – their large size, the meticulous craftsmanship, the lurid coloring and above all the weirdness of subject/object juxtaposition. For some, these works of Dalí actually do inspire religiosity and always have. But for many people, even the most diehard of critics amongst them, the religious works re-emerge with an audacity that is camp in sensibility, but to their credit, fall into the Post-Modern, and even Transitional Millennial concepts of visual art: "Although his mode of representation remained largely traditional due to his resolve to cast himself in the line of succession from the Old Masters and nineteenth-century art *pompier* painters, his later ideas did not supplant earlier pre-occupations but elaborated upon them, permitting him to engage fruitfully with contemporary art's experiments and at the same time declare himself a descendant of the Renaissance."<sup>44</sup>

What is true for the late religious works is also true for Dalí's portraiture. Among the younger generation of artists, Dalí is more popular than ever, with no radical quality division of the earlier works from the later works. Most of the portraits are in private collections, and hence, not well known. For those portraits that are more visually accessible to a contemporary audience (when looked at with a fresh eye and today's sensibilities), these works go beyond the first impressions of camp, period identification, and craftsmanship to arrive at the undeniable presence of subject matter. Dalí's men and women are "there", not to be ignored. As with all artist's works, some Dalinian portraits are masterful, some are better than others and alas, a few are mediocre. But even in mediocrity there is appeal of careful painting and undeniable painterly glow. In a world of larger and brighter artworks, (consider recent blockbuster, Art Basil Miami exhibitions) smaller pieces of

<sup>42</sup> Notes on Camp, Susan Sontag, *Anglais*, (Penguin Classic 2018), No.10, p.4

<sup>43</sup> The depiction of Jesus did not impress the Protestant Theologian, Paul Tillich: 'A sentimental but very good athlete on an American baseball team... The technique is a beautifying naturalism of the worst kind. I am horrified by it!' Tillich added it all up: 'Simply junk!'" "Misunderstood Masterpiece: Salvador Dalí's 'The Sacrament of the Last Supper'" (*America Magazine*, Anthony Novak, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

<sup>44</sup> "Dalí after 1940, From Surreal Classicism to Sublime Surrealism," Elliott H. King, *Salvador Dalí, The Late Work*, (High Museum of Art, Yale University Press, 2010), Pg.13

painterly quality stand out. And more often than not, the viewer is curious to know just who this Dalinian subject was: what did they do to warrant being a member of this surrealist pantheon of notables? Here the aforementioned categories of Thespian, Mogul, Goddess, Patron and Aristocrat apply. Upon viewing the portraits, there is no denying C.Z. Guest as a woman of power and beauty, or Chester Dale as a man of means and taste. The viewer wants to know more about them.

This is the total opposite effect and intention (when viewed through a contemporary lens), of Warhol's portraiture compared with Dalí's work. Warhol, in using the silk screen process allowed for Factory re-production of images. Dalí's paintings are one of a kind. It is true that Liz, Jackie, Marilyn and Elvis are made known to subsequent future generations, where without Warhol they most probably would have been left to the sands of time. But Warhol's personages are known only as images, and not necessarily as people. They emerge today as Warhol originally intended - empty icons, images of self without a self; fifteen minutes of fame, that upon re-viewing are granted another fifteen minutes of fame. In Dalí's portraiture, even the most historically obscure are given center stage and their "self" shines through. The viewer questions, "who was she; who was he", above and beyond the surrealist touches and fine craftsmanship (albeit admitting that these qualities add to our questioning); and as such, the Dalinian portrait holds its own.

As far as painterly excellence, it would be more apropos to compare Dalí with Lucien Freud than with Andy Warhol. In the *Portrait of Elizabeth II* by Freud, there are no society portrait tropes, but the rough and raw brushstrokes that Freud is famous for. And yet, we observe not a travesty or deconstruction of the Queen, but the Queen herself, at least as current generations know her. The realist revival in figurative art of the past decades does remain a gadfly to many critics who still hold the gospel of Clement Greenburg and his school.<sup>45</sup> Neo-Academic Realists such as the late Nelson Shanks, and patrons and champions of Neo-Academic Realists such as Fred Ross of the Art Renewal Center Website, are usually dismissed by the blue chip art world as either neo-con cranks or simply illustrators, and as such seldom taken seriously.<sup>46</sup> Although Shank's portrait of *Princess Diana of Wales* (1994), or *Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher* (1999), match the Sargent/Academic tradition, they are more than mere fireplace portraiture. How Dalí would have handled these two women is an interesting speculation. But comparing Neo-Academic Realists with Dalí's work, one must include as well the Low Brow Art of Robert Williams and Mark Ryden. Dalí's work does not define good taste or bad taste; they go beyond these categories into a whole new realm; which has always been part of the absurdist "feral" aspects of surrealism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ...all kitsch is academic; and conversely, all that's academic is kitsch. For what is called the academic as such no longer has an independent existence, but has become the stuffed-shirt "front" for kitsch." Art and Culture, Critical Essays, (Clement Greenberg, Beacon Press Boston, 1961), pg.11

<sup>46</sup> Studio Incamminati School of Contemporary Realist Art, founded by Nelson Shanks, 2002 (Nelson Shanks, American portraitist, 1937-2015) *Website, Art Renewal Center, ARC* (founded by Fred Ross, 1999)

<sup>47</sup> Robert Williams: Slang Aesthetics, Sketch Movies Sizzle-Doc, (Steve "Sketch" Vallino Via YouTube, April 22, 2021)

The contemporary viewer confronts the Dalinian portrait with a particular procedure made up of four steps. First, one is struck by the visual appeal of glowing colors and old master meticulousness. Secondly comes the smirk – we cannot help but laugh a bit at these images, despite ourselves. They enter our visual and mental field, not as a muted historical personage, but loudly and garishly, like someone's eccentric mother-in-law blasting in late at a cocktail party. Thirdly, in connection with the last step, the viewer appreciates the retro/camp elements of dress, jewels, etc. and the unabashedly eye candy appeal. Finally, the viewer wants to know who this person was. The subject of a portrait by Dalí is not just another museum effigy, let alone a Warhol icon of emptiness, but remains forever a



*Portrait of Mon Ling Yu Landegger, 1964*  
Collection of Mrs. Mon Ling Yu Landegger

celebrity in their own field and life. These steps of the viewer's observation are the obvious process for Dalí's best work reviewed in this paper. But even lesser known portraits; works with less technical and imaginative bravura go beyond being just another old corporate or city hall portrait. In works such as *Portrait of Jonathan and Ann Green* (1963), and *Portrait of Mon Ling Yu Landegger* (1964), Dalí's audacity of a boy in an amusement park-like space seat and a woman in a Chinese cocktail party, beehive hairdo, will not let us forget, through their very absurdity and earnestness of presence, that they are indeed "there."

Further appreciation of Dalí's portraiture will depend on two possible scenarios – the portraits leaving private collections and being accepted and shown by museums and galleries, and the impetus of Dalí public collections, scholars and foundations making the collection of Dalí's portraiture better known and appreciated to the general public. This very well could add to a reevaluation of the genre of figurative portraiture in contemporary art. From the ultimate deconstruction through Modernism and Post-Modernism, portraiture may re-arise as a vehicle not of mindless flattery, but a genuine re-

appreciation of personhood. This new appreciation could serve as a revival of Humanism, where portraiture once again becomes a reflection of the soul; as found in the best of Rembrandt, an affirmation of status and accomplishment as found in Ingres and even the knowing smirk of caricature found in Hogarth and Daumier. Portraits may once again have presences and purpose, with the human person no longer a deconstructed relativist exercise in futility, but a real life presence with a soul, present for the ages to come.

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