

The Dalí Museum Student Surrealist Art Exhibit

“The Surreal Self: Personal Symbols, Stories and Portraits”

Hillsborough County
March 14 – April 26, 2026

Initiated in 1985, this annual juried art exhibition presents work by Hillsborough County middle and high school students that explores ideas and visions similar to those of Salvador Dalí and the Surrealists. This year's theme is “The Surreal Self: Personal Symbols, Stories and Portraits.”

To explore and visually represent aspects of his own identity, Salvador Dalí employed a variety of creative techniques throughout his life like his creation of symbols with personal meaning, his purposeful and sometimes fabricated storytelling, and his ability to isolate and represent small portions of his identity in portraiture.

Dalí's perception of himself was continuously evolving as he came across new ideas, people and places. He was especially fascinated by the work of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Freud was the first to explore the idea that all images have symbolic meanings derived from personal experiences. In Dalí's work, it is common to see personal symbols like his famous melting watches, which the artist used as representations of how he felt about the passage of time. Beyond symbols, Dalí also referenced physical locations with personal meaning, like the rocky forms of the Catalan coastline where he grew up, in his creation of surreal landscapes.

As an artist, Dalí had the ability to construct versions of himself to share with others. One instance of which is our greatest primary resource, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. In this autobiography, Dalí wrote that “the difference between false memories and true ones is the same as for jewels: it is always the false ones that look the most real, the most brilliant.” Reality, to Dalí, was not necessarily set in stone, but fluid.

The stories shared by Dalí in his art and his writings often toed the line between fiction and reality, though they are rooted in his own personal experiences. Each of his self-portraits explores a different side of his identity, portraying himself at various stages of life. In *Self-Portrait (Figueres)*, teenage Dalí depicts an older version of himself shrouded in darkness, while in *The Hallucinogenic Toreador* he appears in his favorite blue sailor outfit from childhood and in *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus* he emphasizes his revitalized religious devotion later in life.

With this theme, students are challenged to represent themselves with the techniques used by Dalí to shape and present his own version of self. The Dalí Museum invites students to portray themselves through personal symbols, stories and portraits, founded in reality or the otherwise fluid methods of Salvador Dalí.

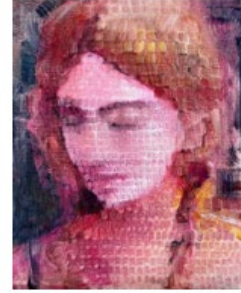
Examples of winning art from 2025 SSAE exhibits



Scout Pytlak
Prosciutto Mary



Peyton Lilly
Cycle of Perspectives



Mia Hipolito
Molecular Dispersion



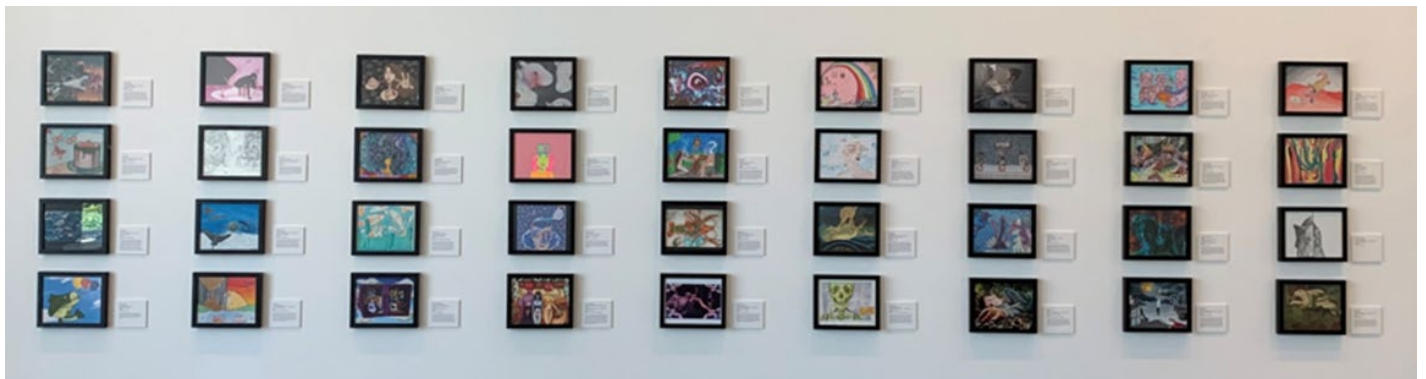
Casey Biggs
Tree of Life



Izabella Foisy
The Deal



Julia Chemisov
*Obsession:
The Birthplace of Madness*



Artwork **must be exactly 8x10** because of the grid layout and frame sizes

*Note the piece in the bottom center that is not 8x10, showing white on top and bottom; artwork that is not exactly 8x10 will be disqualified upon receipt

Artist Statements

To encourage students to reflect upon their creative processes and to articulate their artistic decisions, we ask them to consider the questions below as they write their artist statements. Students should limit their responses to 50-75 words addressing some of the following:

- What inspired you?
- How did you respond to the exhibit's theme?
- How did you respond to Salvador Dalí's work?
- What element/s of your work connect with the "surreal self"?
- What Surrealist techniques did you use?

Details:

- Artist statements are not required for the initial jurying process, but if the artwork is selected for the exhibit, **the statement must be submitted using the online form emailed to all teachers of students with accepted work.**
- Artist statements are **due by Sunday, March 1.**
- Artist statements are required for the awards judging process, but scoring remains based on the merit of the artwork in accordance with the scoring rubric.
 - **Works that do not include artist statements will not be considered for awards.**
- Artist statements may not exceed 80 words.
- Artist statements will be printed **exactly as they are typed**; museum staff will not edit them.
- Students are encouraged to have a teacher or parent proof their writing in addition to inputting their text at [Grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com), a free proof-reading resource, to ensure their artist statement is free of spelling and grammar errors.

Please advise students that artist statements will appear on display to the public alongside their artwork – please do not include private information

Resources

The Dalí Museum created three videos to support students and teachers as they prepare for the Student Surrealist Art Exhibit.

Surrealism: The Big Ideas

11-minute introduction to Surrealism. The video reviews the history and goals of the movement, and explains Dalí's relationship to the broader group. Consider it Surrealism 101.

How to Make Surrealist Art

9-minute film featuring nine exhibit-winning Pinellas art teachers who provide inspiration and ideas for students to create their own surrealist art. The video introduces surrealist techniques including dislocation, transformation and symbolism, and presents prompts to try in the classroom.

Why Teach Surrealist Art?

6-minute film featuring exhibit-winning Pinellas teachers who explain to their teacher colleagues why the Student Surrealist Art Exhibit is an essential part of their curriculum.

These videos as well as online galleries of previous Student Surrealist Art Exhibits can be found at TheDali.org/ssae. Additional teaching resources can be found at TheDali.org/Educator.

Hillsborough County Exhibit Dates (March 14 – April 26, 2026)

Fr. Feb 6	Digital submissions due to Hillsborough County Schools Art Office
Fr. Feb 13	Dalí final selection of artwork for display
Tu. Feb 17	Art Office notify art teachers of accepted artwork
Fr. Feb 27	Selected artworks due to the Hillsborough County Public Schools Art Office, 901 East Kennedy Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33602 (all artwork MUST be exactly 8"x10") Entry Form must be taped on back of artwork
Su. Mar 1	Student artist statements (50-75 words) and label information must be submitted using form emailed to all teachers with accepted work
Mo. Mar 2	Artwork picked up at Hillsborough County Schools Art Office by Dalí
Sa. Mar. 14	Exhibit opens
Tu. Mar 17	Awards judging & teacher notification
Tu. Mar 24	Reception at The Dalí, 6:30-8:30 PM
Su. Apr 26	Last day of exhibit
First Week of May	Artwork returned to the Hillsborough County Schools Art Office

Entry Requirements

- Up to **6 entries per teacher** & one work per student. If two teachers submit the same student, only one will be chosen for consideration.
- Finished **work must be 8"x10"** to fit frames and cannot be thicker than ½." If work does not fit into frame, the work **will be disqualified**.
- While we cannot accept **3D objects** nor clay reliefs due to fragility, photographs of 3D pieces are encouraged. They will be judged on the merit of the photograph first and on the merit of the object second (see photo of a winning 3D object on page 2).
- **Artwork must be original** - no digital reproductions (unless documenting a 3D piece). Digital reproductions of oil paintings or drawings will not be accepted.
- Any work found to be **plagiarized** will be disqualified and removed from the exhibition.
- **AI-generated images are not allowed** (e.g., DALL-E, Midjourney) for this exhibition due to possible ethical issues with copyright, plagiarism or fair use; however, students may use AI-powered tools within an art teacher-approved application (e.g., Adobe Photoshop, Procreate) to assist during the ideation and editing process of creating original digital art, photography, mixed-media work, etc. If AI-powered tools are used, the application(s) must be listed using the online artist statement form.
Check your students' sources and observe their work processes.

Exhibit Details

- Exhibit website: **TheDali.org/ssae**
- Open to all middle and high school students in Hillsborough County, Florida
- Teachers must submit student artwork; **students may not submit their own artwork**
- 120 works will be selected (based on wall space)
- The Dalí Museum **will frame selected work in 8"x10" frames**
- PLEASE NOTE: The exhibit is held in The Dalí Museum Raymond James Community Room and is always free to visit. **Please call before visiting the student exhibit as the Community Room occasionally closes for Museum programs and private events.**

Suggested Surreal Techniques to Consider:

Juxtaposition	Metamorphosis	Collage
Displacement	Dreamlike settings	Levitation
Double images	Dislocation	Transparency
Transformation	Symbolism	Scale distortion

Accepted Artwork Checklist:

- ✓ Original and exactly 8"x10" (or 10"x8")
- ✓ Entry form attached (page 9)
- ✓ Student and Guardian Agreement (online form)
- ✓ Artist statements submitted online (online form)

Judication Guidelines:

- **Theme:** Artwork appropriately addresses the exhibition themes
- **Originality:** Artwork exhibits an original approach to process, concept and subject matter
- **Expression:** Artwork communicates an aesthetic vision or style and visual expression of critical thinking
- **Skill/Technique:** Artwork exhibits technical competency
- **Completeness:** Artwork exhibits thoughtful use of space and equal treatment to all elements of artwork

Judication Scoring Rubric

Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows strong evidence of integration between the theme and the visual work. Shows strong use of innovation and creativity. Communicates a strong personal and/or original message. Shows strong application of the design principles and excellent technical use of media to express ideas. Shows strong use of space and is fully finished.
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows good evidence of integration between the theme and the visual work. Shows good use of innovation and creativity. Communicates a good personal and/or original message. Shows good application of the design principles and good technical use of media to express ideas. Shows good use of space and/or is predominantly finished.
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows little evidence of integration between the theme and the visual work. Shows little use of innovation or creativity. Communicates limited personal vision or original message. Shows limited and/or inconsistent application of the design principles. Novice in use of space and/or is partially unfinished.
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows no evidence of integration between the theme and the visual work. Shows trite and/or simplistic approaches. Communicates no personal or original message, and/or is direct copy of copyrighted photographic resources. Shows no understanding of the design principles and/or very little or no technical competence or control of media. Shows poor use of space and/or elements appear to be rushed or unfinished.

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The Dalí Museum Education Department thanks you for your participation.

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Entry Form (required)

ACCEPTED ENTRY FORM: STUDENT SURREALIST ART EXHIBIT

On this sheet, **indicate the orientation** of the work by drawing arrows pointing to the top of the work or with a description such as “the clouds go on the bottom”

Attach to back of artwork

Student Name	
Title of Work	
Teacher Name (First & Last)	
Teacher Email	