

DALÍ. THE CHRIST OF PORTLLIGAT

Dalí Theatre-Museum, Figueres
25th October 2023 – 30th April 2024



Salvador Dalí painting *The Christ* at his studio in Portlligat,
1951

Ricardo Sans Condeminas

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How does Dalí manage to be groundbreaking with a religious and classical icon? What enigmas are hidden behind one of Dalí's most iconic works?

The exhibition *Dalí. The Christ of Portlligat*, which can be seen at the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres from 25th October 2023 to 30th April 2024, aims to decipher the transgressive aspects used by the artist through a religious and classical icon. Dalí poses conceptual and technical challenges that this exhibition wants to unravel: on the one hand, he seeks answers to universal questions such as the meaning of existence, sacrifice, and the afterlife. On the other hand, he wants to technically solve a painting that portrays a specific point in his life. He suggests innovative composition and perspective with a disturbing symmetry, with an enigmatic light and a model that meets the canon of classical beauty, in a nostalgic setting that is the landscape of Portlligat.

1. *THE CHRIST: CROSSROADS OF THE SACRILEGIOUS DALÍ AND THE MYSTICAL DALÍ*

The painting entitled *The Christ* is a good example of Dalí's thinking and his experience of the late 1940s and early 1950s. While still living in the United States, the artist changed his sources and references drastically, without abandoning the surrealist postulates. The impact of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki "seismically shook" him.

Dalí's interest in Freud turned to Heisenberg and modern physics. Quantum mechanics shook up the accepted theories of the day. Dalí believed that the avant-garde was to blame for the chaos that resulted in the Second World War.

To regain order, he wanted to return to Classicism. He sought a balance that he could only obtain by looking at the Renaissance artists' technical mastery and by delving into mysticism. The emblematic painting *The Christ* is the point where opposites meet and harmony occurs between Dalí's past –which he defined as "revolutionary and sacrilegious"– and a new mystical period.

Unlike Velázquez or Zurbarán, Dalí suggests subtle elements of sacrifice. There is no blood or crown of thorns. There is no explicit suffering but there is a strong dramatic power. A Christ whose face cannot be seen is floating on a dark background, an image that conveys a great feeling of loneliness. Is he suggesting a parallelism between Christ's sacrifice for humanity and his own to save modern painting from chaos?

2. THE CHRIST AND ITS CREATIVE PROCESS

In the same way that Dalí wrote down a concept on a piece of paper, he also did so graphically, like brainstorming, with sketches and drawings. This exhibition shows several examples of these preliminary studies.

Transferring the model to the painting

In the treatise *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, Dalí explains how he transfers images to the canvas. The Foundation owns preparatory material for the Christ painting, a selection of which will be shown.

Once the composition was decided and the elements that represent the sacrifice were outlined, Dalí started looking for beautiful models. For the Christ, Dalí chose a film specialist who would give the mortal body great beauty, Russ Saunders. The model dubbed actors such as Gene Kelly in *Singing in the Rain* and *The Three Musketeers*, among many others.



3. THE CHRIST IN THE LANDSCAPE OF PORTLLIGAT

Dalí's *The Christ* stands on the peaceful Portlligat bay (close to Cadaqués village), where the sun's first rays break out at dawn. Without the landscape of the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula, sometimes gentle, often wild, Dalí's work would not achieve its full meaning.

Dalí himself described how he felt about living in Portlligat, where he and his wife Gala built a house from a number of fishermen's huts: "It was there that I learned to be poor, to limit and hone my thought to acquire the efficacy of an axe, where blood tasted of blood and honey tasted of honey. A life that was hard, without metaphor or wine, a life with the light of eternity".



The house in Portlligat was designed specifically to respond to a primary need: painting. Dalí extended those humble walls looking for the best light, the best orientation so that the landscape penetrated through the windows and was embodied in paintings such as *The Christ* and many other works executed between 1930 and 1982.

THE EXHIBITION

The Christ will be on display at the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres, from 25th October 2023 afternoon to 30th April 2024. It is a unique occasion since the work has not been seen in Spain since 1952, when it was exhibited in Madrid and Barcelona.

Tickets to visit the exhibition, within the Dalí Theatre-Museum route, are now on sale on the website <https://tickets.salvador-dali.org/en/>

On 25th October afternoon, a landing page will be launched with specific contents about the exhibition at <https://exhibitions.salvador-dali.org/en/>



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