

**A look at *The Christ*
and *The Basket of Bread***

Front cover

Salvador Dalí painting *The Christ* in the Portlligat studio, 1951
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Works by Salvador Dalí

© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2023

Salvador Dalí, *The Christ*, 1951

© CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection, 2023

Pere Vehí Archives, Cadaqués

The image of Salvador Dalí

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The Dalí Theatre-Museum: the biggest surrealist object in the world

The Dalí Theatre-Museum, inaugurated in 1974, incorporates the remnants of the old theatre in Figueres, the Municipal, and is widely regarded as Salvador Dalí's last great work. Everything in it was conceived and designed by the artist to offer us as visitors a truly unique experience and lead us into his uniquely captivating world. Salvador Dalí defined his Theatre-Museum as the largest surrealist object in the world, designed as a space that would provide a surreal, theatrical experience.

In 2023 the oil painting *The Christ*, from 1951 ^(P667), travelled from the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow to the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres for the first time. The Loggias space has been adapted to present an exhibition centred on this major work, the process of its creation and the landscape in which it is set, a landscape without which it would not achieve its full meaning.

At the same time, and for only the second time since the opening of the Theatre-Museum in 1974, another Dalí painting, *The Basket of Bread*, from 1945 ^(P607), has been moved from its place of honour in the Treasure Room to introduce and explain *The Christ*. The air of mystery, the technique, the palette of colours and the religious significance of bread are elements that the two works share.

With this educational publication, families and education centres will learn more about the creative process of *The Christ*. The suggested activities are tailored to different educational levels and have been designed to address each of the different aspects of Dalí's artistic process.



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Did you know that you can visit the Dalí Theatre-Museum, wherever you are? Simply by scanning the QR code below you can take our virtual tour and explore the different rooms of the museum. Take note of the names of the rooms and find out why they are so called.

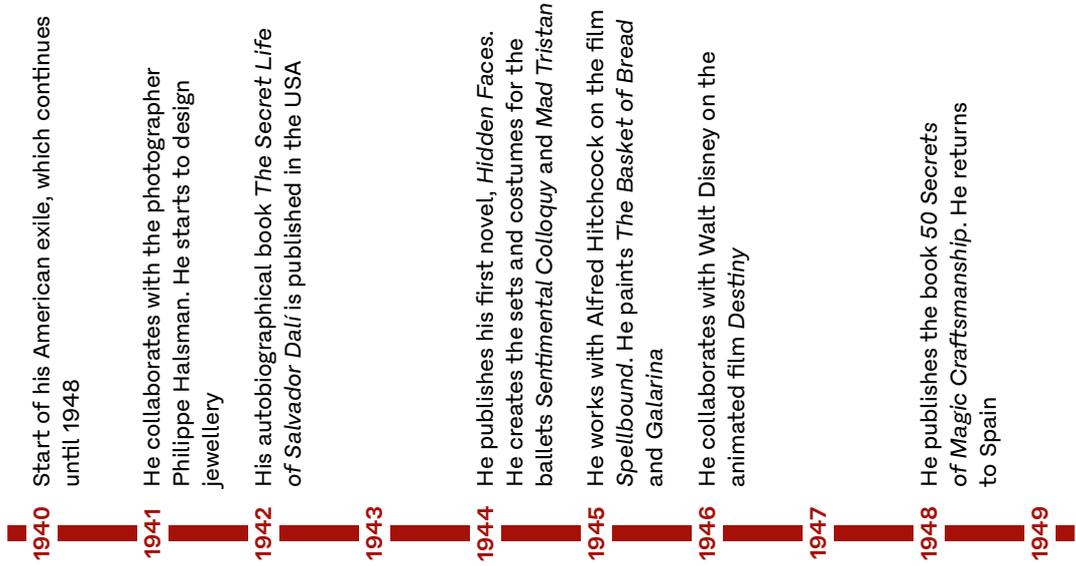


Have you noticed that the works in the Dalí Museum are not exhibited in any particular order. Dalí wanted the visitor's experience to be like a surrealist dream... in every sense! In this guide we will talk about a painting that Dalí regarded as his greatest treasure, *The Basket of Bread*. Find which room it is in.

The timeline: what was happening when Dalí was painting?

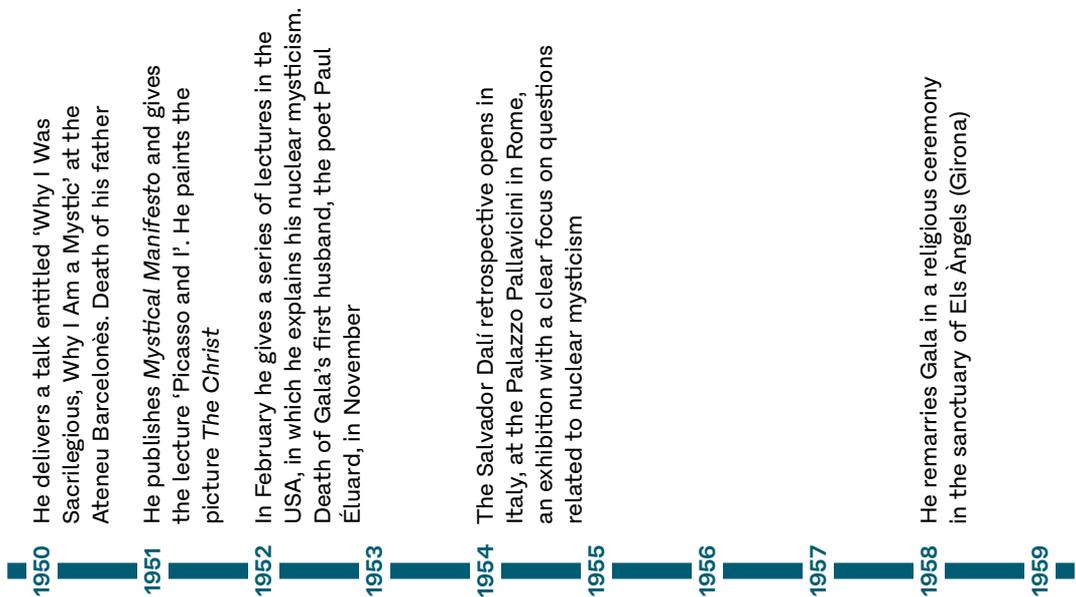
The 1940s

The American period



The 1950s

Mysticism and the world of science: towards a nuclear mysticism



The journey of *The Christ*

1951: He paints *The Christ* and exhibits it in London, at The Lefevre Gallery.

1952: He exhibits *The Christ* in Madrid, at the Sala de la Sociedad Española de Amigos del Arte, and in Barcelona, at the Museo de Arte Moderno, during the I Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte.

This same year the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow acquires *The Christ*.

1954: Dalí includes *The Christ* in his first retrospective in Italy, in the Palazzo Pallavicini in Rome.

The journey of *The Basket of Bread*

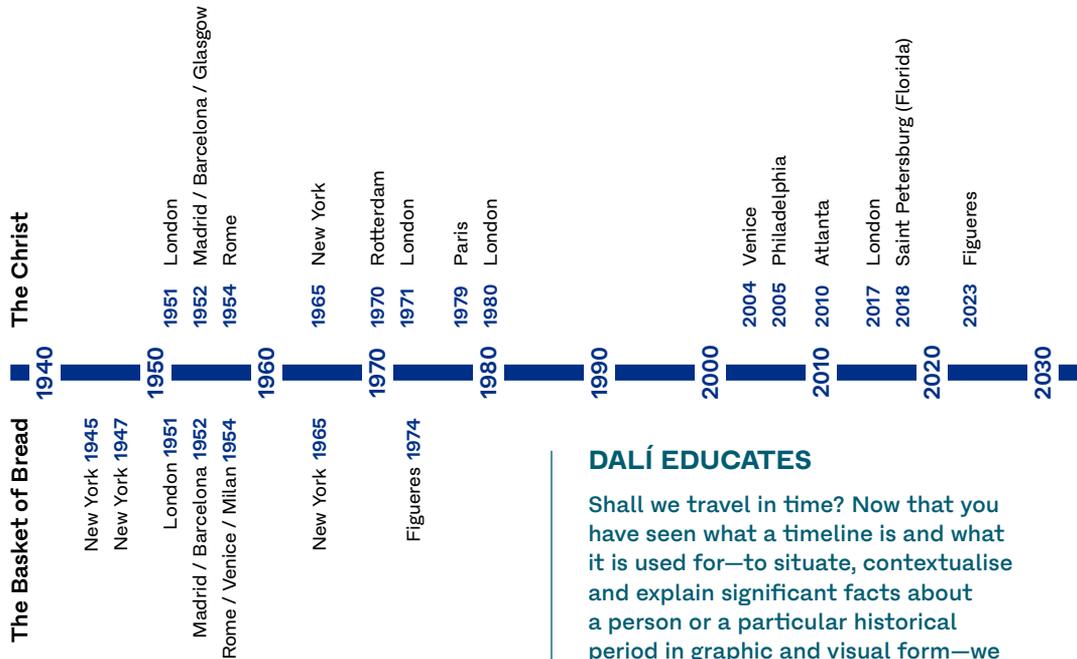
1945: He paints *The Basket of Bread*.

1951: He exhibits *The Basket of Bread* in London, at The Lefevre Gallery.

1952: He exhibits *The Basket of Bread* in Madrid and Barcelona together with *The Christ*.

1974-2023: *The Basket of Bread* is installed in the Dalí Theatre-Museum.

Cities in which *The Christ* and *The Basket of Bread* have been shown



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Shall we travel in time? Now that you have seen what a timeline is and what it is used for—to situate, contextualise and explain significant facts about a person or a particular historical period in graphic and visual form—we suggest that you draw up a timeline for Gala, Salvador Dalí’s wife, his model and muse. You can select the details of her biography that you find most interesting and combine them with important paintings by Salvador Dalí in which she appears as a model.

Feel free to consult the website of the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, where you will find a complete biography of Gala, and the Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings by Salvador Dalí.



Did you know that...?

Dalí worked with artists and professionals in a wide range of disciplines (art, fashion, film).

There are works by Dalí in most of the world’s great modern art museums.

The acquisition of *The Christ* caused a lot of controversy in Glasgow, and was extensively reported in the press.

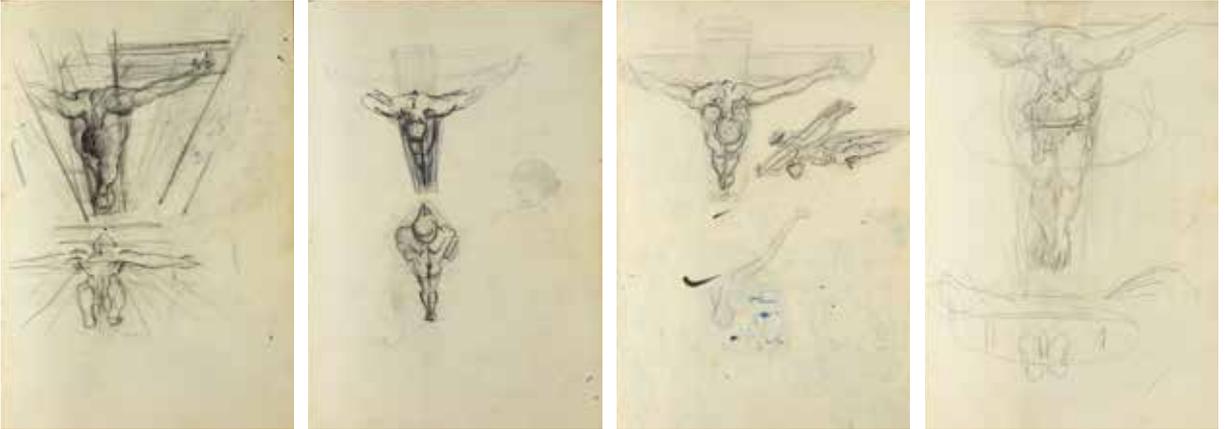


Salvador Dalí
The Christ, 1951
Oil on canvas
204,8 x 115,9 cm
P 667
Kelvingrove Art Gallery
and Museum, Glasgow

From the idea to the painting: the process of creation

The Preliminary Studies

Before starting work on a painting, Dalí worked on the idea or concept he wanted to develop for quite some time. In the same way that he would note down a concept in writing, he might also record it in graphic form, in a kind of brainstorming, in sketches and drawings: he would try out different shapes, distributions of the elements, possible compositions and so on. All these drawings are a small sample of what Dalí imagined before painting *The Christ*.



Notes for *The Christ* with the frontal position and another figure reflected in a horizontal position. Pere Vehí Archives, Cadaqués



The Search for a Model

From the sketches, once Dalí had decided on the composition and the elements are almost defined, the search began to find the models he would use to create the final painting. In *The Christ*, Dalí used not only his imagination but also photographs, figures and elements from classic artworks. However, for the figure of Christ, he chose as a model the film stuntman Russell Saunders.

Weiman & Lester. Original copy of a photo from the session with the model Russ Saunders

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On the website of the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí you will find all the pictorial work created by the artist, in what is known as the *Catalogue Raisonné*.



Taking *The Christ* as a reference, look for the following elements in the works that Salvador Dalí painted during the 1950s:

- A cross
- A boat
- The sea
- A fisherman
- Clouds
- An angel
- Bread

The Search for a Model

Dalí was fascinated by painters such as Velázquez and Vermeer. For him, these masters were like idols to be followed. One way that Dalí had of letting us know what he liked and whom he admired was by copying these figures and using them in his own work.

Do you admire some famous person? Imagine that you had to create a picture in which at least five people appear. Who would they be? Make a collage with your favourite place or landscape in the background and then add on pictures of your heroes or idols. You could choose people from different fields that interest you: sports, music, cinema, theatre, TikTok, YouTube, influencers...

The more surreal the composition the better!

For the fishermen on the seashore, Dalí took for models certain characters from the works of painters he admired, such as Velázquez and Le Nain.



Salvador Dalí. *The Christ*, 1951. Detail of the characters in the painting

On completing the search for the right models and studies for the light and colour and having chosen the composition and distribution of the elements that were to make up the work, Dalí transfers these models to the canvas, moving from the idea to the definitive creation of the painting. In the book he wrote to give advice to young artists, *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, Dalí explains in great detail how to transfer these prior images to the blank canvas.



A page from Velázquez with the reproduction of a sketch gone over in pencil
Postcard of *Paysans devant leur maison*, Louis Le Nain, 1641
Model for the fisherman, 1951. Pencil and pen and ink on tracing paper.

Here is a small sample of the preparatory material used for the painting *The Christ* conserved by the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí.



Black and white photograph of model Russ Saunders



Preparatory material used for the painting *The Christ*

Did you know that...?

One of the techniques Dalí used was to mark out the silhouette of a figure with a punch and then transfer them to the canvas.

Dalí took figures and elements that he found especially interesting in works by other artists he admired and included them in many of his paintings.

Dalí would spend years thinking, sketching, imagining and planning a work, and he used small sketchbooks so as not to forget any of his ideas.

The space of creation: the studio and the eternal landscape of Portlligat

Salvador Dalí's representation of Christ takes an unusual and surprising perspective, due in part to his interest in the Spanish mystics, and specifically John of the Cross. The geometry of Dalí's composition is carefully calculated, with the figure of Christ elevated above the bay of Portlligat, the landscape that inspired Dalí and stayed with him all his life.

The artist painted *The Christ* in his only permanent studio, at his house in Portlligat. This studio space, thoroughly immersed in the landscape, was and is a central and recurring element in Dalí's life and work. At each of his creative stages that landscape, as a scenographic or central element, takes on a slightly different meaning yet remains an eternal landscape that defines Dalí and gives him an ultra-local character that is, at the same time, universal.

For Dalí, this was his little corner of peace and serenity, the landscape that had been such an inspiration to him since he was very young, whether as the epicentre of his painting or the backdrop to his surrealist compositions.

In his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, he explains what the landscape means to him: "That thing which is called and which I call a "landscape," exists uniquely on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and not elsewhere. But the most curious of all is that where this landscape becomes best, most beautiful, most excellent and most intelligent is precisely in the vicinity of Cadaqués, which by my great good fortune (I am the first to recognize it) is the exact spot where Salvador Dalí since his earliest childhood was periodically and successively to pass the 'esthetic courses' of all his summers."¹

From 1908 on, the Dalí family would spend the hot summer months in the little town of Cadaqués, first in a converted stable and later in a house by the Es Llaner beach. It was from this year on that Dalí took the landscape of Cadaqués as the main source of inspiration for his work.

Subsequently, Portlligat was to become his home and his studio. This was the place where he and Gala would settle, the landscape that would see the birth of his love for the woman who was to become his muse, the rocks that would shape his paintings, the idealized landscape that he would always carry with him. Even in American exile, during times of war, he would continue to paint Cadaqués from memory.

¹ Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. Dial Press, New York, p. 127.

Did you know that...?

Salvador Dalí spent the spring and summer in Portlligat. During the autumn, the winter and part of the spring he stayed in hotels in Paris and New York.

When Dalí left Portlligat for the winter, he invited the local fishermen to paint the outside doors of the house with the paint left over from the maintenance of the boats. When the artist returned to Portlligat, he found some magnificent works of art, produced by the spontaneous intervention of the fishermen!

The little pavilion by the pool in the Portlligat garden is the same shape as the packaging of a radio which Dalí bought!



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Cadaqués / Portlligat / Cap de Creus

For Dalí this area was synonymous with many things. List the many meanings this landscape had for the artist. (Examples: inspiration, love, home, youth, maturity, work, art, family, friends, food, sea, mountain, rocks, purity, serenity, privacy...)

In the painting *The Christ* we recognise the landscape of Portlligat. Imagine that you are inside the picture:

- In which part would you place yourself?
- What can you see?
- How do you feel?
- What can you smell?
- What can you hear?



Ricardo Sans Condeminas
View of *The Christ* in Dalí's Portlligat studio at night in 1951

Ricardo Sans Condeminas
Salvador Dalí painting *The Christ* in the Portlligat workshop, 1951

Photographer unknown
Salvador Dalí on the beach at Portlligat, 1954



Salvador Dalí. *The Christ*, 1951. Detail of the landscape

Towards a nuclear mysticism

As the historical events of the first half of the 20th century shook Europe to the core, Dalí also undertook, at the end of the 1940s, a profound reformulation of his thinking, as his interests and concerns ranged across Freud and modern physics and the disintegration of matter to arrive at nuclear mysticism, at which point his attention focused on the new atomic theories.

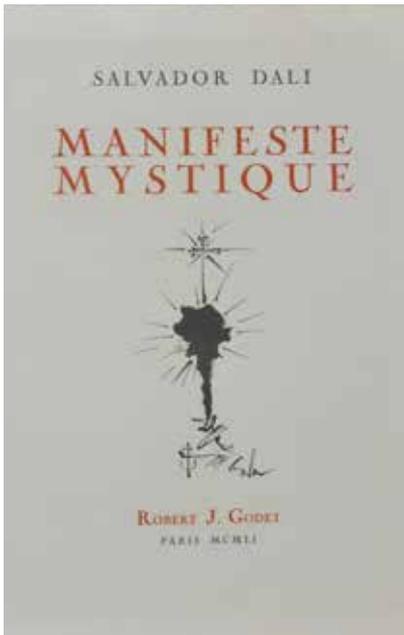
The artist announced this shift in artistic orientation in a lecture, in 1950, and in his *Mystical Manifesto*, published the following year, which clearly reflects his interest both in science and in religious themes. The first works to embody this new stage are *The Madonna of Portlligat*, from in or around 1950 ^(P660), and *The Christ*, about which he declared: “I want my next Christ to be a painting containing more beauty and joy than anything that will have been painted up to the present.”²

Dalí painted *The Christ* as the conclusion of a moment of transformation and the culmination of his desire to become a classic and the ‘saviour’ of modern painting. He was to do this by incorporating religious characters and episodes in his work, together with the reinterpretation of key scientific issues of the time, atomic theory and quantum mechanics. However, *The Christ* is not the work that most fully exemplifies this change. Rather, it is the painting that links the two stages, serving as a transition and helping us to understand the vital moment in which the artist found himself. In his creative process, Dalí remained faithful to the position expressed in his treatise on painting, *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*: to become a Classical Artist.

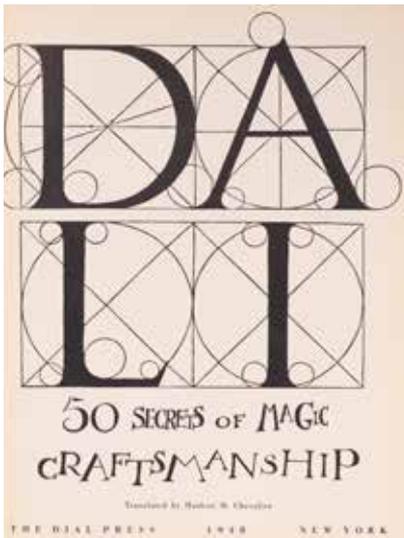


Salvador Dalí. *The Madonna of Portlligat*, 1950
Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka (Japan)

2 Salvador Dalí, *Mystical Manifesto* (1951). In: Salvador Dalí, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida, 2017, p. 363. Edited and translated by Haim Finkelstein.



Salvador Dalí. *Mystical Manifesto*, Robert J. Godet, Paris, 1951



Salvador Dalí. *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*, Dial Press, New York, 1948

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But what is nuclear mysticism?

The concept of nuclear mysticism has to do with the unique vision that Salvador Dalí developed, somewhere between nuclear physics and the Christian tradition, along with his new mystical inspiration. This new attitude was to be a fundamental part of his new artistic language, a fusion of science and religious mysticism. The detonation of the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, was the catalyst for his new artistic and vital vision.

This was the beginning of a new stage of Dalí's evolution towards artistic maturity, coinciding with his stay in the United States (1940–1948). He sought to paint the new era of modern physics using the recipes of the great masters of the past whom he most admired. Dalí explains the principles of this new synthesis between nuclear mysticism and classicism in his *Mystical Manifesto*, published in 1951. The study of the atom alongside his obsession with geometry, perspective and the proportions of the classical world (such as religious elements and objects floating in space) would henceforth form a new artistic language.

In Dalí's *The Christ*, we are presented with Jesus Christ on the cross, but in suspension: instead of the nails that normally support him, Dalí's Christ seems not to touch the cross and the shadows suggest the levitating body.

In addition to this fascination with the atomic world, the composition bears witness to the artist's superb handling of proportion here. Like the great classical masters, Salvador Dalí wants to achieve perfect, harmonious proportions and at the same time surprise us with an unusual perspective. The artist, strongly attracted to mathematics and geometry, wanted to turn his painting *The Christ* into an icon of modern classical painting, in terms of the composition and distribution of the elements.

To develop the composition, Dalí made a series of preliminary studies which show the geometry of the painting. Working with basic shapes, he determined the position of Christ, the cross, the horizon and the vanishing points. The result is a work of extraordinary beauty.

We propose an activity in which you will discover the geometric composition of *The Christ* yourself, by way of the series of basic shapes that you will find by scanning this QR code:



La cesta de pan, 1945

This painting presides over the Dalí Theatre-Museum's Treasure Room. So named by Salvador Dalí himself, its ceiling, walls and floor are lined with red velvet, simulating a casket in which to store jewellery.

In the catalogue of the exhibition *Recent Paintings by Salvador Dalí*, held in 1945 in the Bignou Gallery in New York, Dalí wrote:

"I painted this picture during two consecutive months, four hours each day. It was during this period that the most staggering and sensational episodes of contemporary history took place. This painting was finished one day before the end of the war."³



Salvador Dalí
The Basket of Bread, 1945
 Oil on plywood panel
 33 x 38 cm
 P 607
 Dalí Theatre-Museum, Figueres

3 *Recent Paintings by Salvador Dalí*, Bignou Gallery, New York, 20 November - 29 December 1945

Did you know that...?

Bread is a recurring element in Dalí's work, endowed with multiple meanings. Sometimes it can have a religious association, sometimes it suggests sex or food, and it can even be an article of clothing such as a hat!

Dalí made the longest loaf of bread in history. It is listed in the Guinness Book of Records.

The artist also designed an entire set of furniture made entirely of bread!

Dalí gave this painting to Gala as if it were a jewel. In this way he ensured that it would always be in her private collection.

Going into the kitchen was one of the few things that his parents had forbidden Dalí as a little boy. He would wait outside the door for hours until he saw a chance to run in and snatch some food, to the astonishment of the maids.

Dalí said that his painting *The Basket of Bread* was a total enigma.

Dalí always travelled with *The Basket of Bread* in a suitcase, which everyone knew contained the famous painting.

Watch the video!



The dialogue between *The Christ* and *The Basket of Bread*

In 1945, with the exhibition *Recent Paintings by Salvador Dalí* at the Bignou Gallery in New York, the artist surprised public and critics alike with the presentation of his latest paintings, which revealed two very different lines of work: on the one hand, his interest in nuclear physics and, on the other, the intention announced in 1941, to become a classic.

The Basket of Bread is one of the most representative paintings of this period, a work in which Dalí opts for classicism, taking the Renaissance as a specific starting point, and for realism, in the most photographic sense. This work is also a first step towards *The Christ*. As Dalí explained: “I painted the *Christ of St. John of the Cross* in the manner in which I had already painted my *Basket*

of Bread, which even then, more or less unconsciously, represented the Eucharist for me.”⁴

Both paintings share a precise technique, photographic realism and a chiaroscuro to establish a play of light and shadow, enhancing their volume and sense of mystery. Both are also related to classic subjects or genres in the history of European art: the still life and the representation of Christ on the cross. *The Basket of Bread* is a representation of “mystical beauty”, as expressed by Dalí himself, which will guide us towards *The Christ*.

EDUCA DALÍ

Dalí said that bread had always been one of his great obsessions. As a food which is hard on the outside and soft on the inside, it was, in his opinion, the perfect combination.

Do you know any other things which feature in Dalí’s work that are like bread, hard on the outside and soft on the inside?

According to Dalí, the painting *The Basket of Bread* was the total enigma. A simple piece of bread can tell us many things.

We invite you you try to imagine everything that can be hidden behind a crust of bread.

Arrange your group or family into three subgroups. Imagine that *The Basket of Bread* is a still from a film and that the three subgroups have to script the whole story.

Each subgroup has five minutes to imagine: a) what happened, b) what is happening now, and c) what will happen.

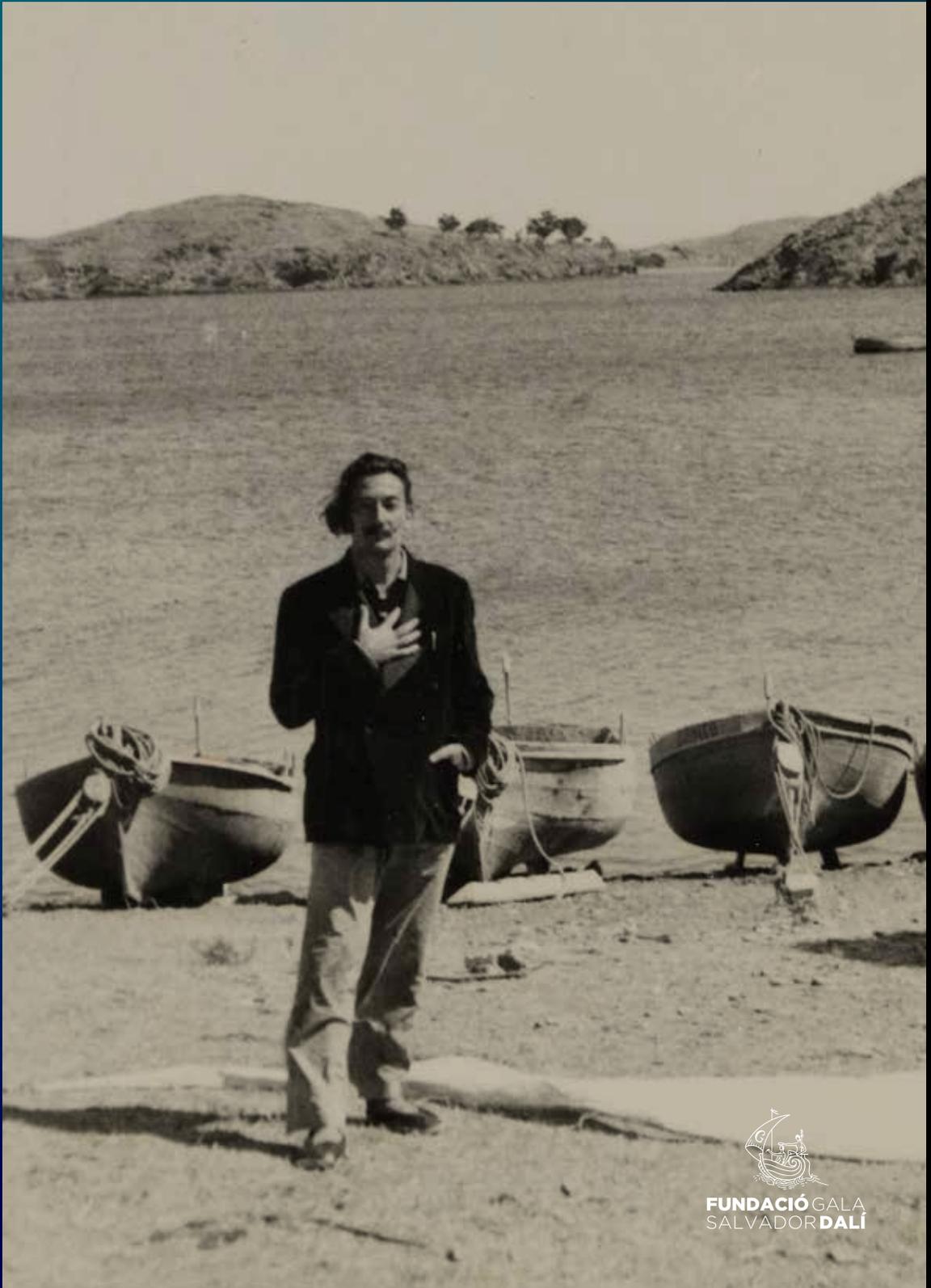
Group 1: What story might have happened before the basket of bread was put on the table?

Group 2: What is happening when the bread basket is on the table?

Group 3: What will happen next?

In your subgroup, write your part of the story. Explain it to the rest of the subgroups. Could you create a joint story together? Feel free to be imaginative and make your stories as surreal as possible!

⁴ *Picasso and I*, in 1951. A. Reynolds Morse, *Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí: a preliminary study in their similarities and contrast*, The Salvador Dalí Museum, Cleveland, Ohio, 1973, p. 53



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