

Press release

Transgressing Venus the new exhibition of the Dalí Theatre-Museum

The sculpture *Venus de Milo with Drawers* of the Dalí Museum confronted to its American homonymous, exhibited as a digital loan in a holographic creation

Figueres, 27 October 2022.- The Dalí Theatre-Museum presented today the new temporary exhibition entitled ***Transgressing Venus. Dalí is classic, Surrealist and Pop Art!*** The event was led by Montse Aguer, director of the Dalí Museums, and Laura Bartolomé, curator of the exhibition and of the Dalí Foundation. One of the interesting aspects in this exhibition is the way the sculpture *Venus de Milo with Drawers* is shown. This work of art belongs to the Art Institute of Chicago's permanent collection. This institution has lent it to the Dalí Foundation as a digital loan. In order to present it together with the Dalí Foundation's *Venus*, a hologram has been produced and is shown thanks to a transparent LG OLED screen. This technical solution aims at paying tribute to the holograms Dalí produced in the seventies in collaboration with the Nobel Prize in Physics Dennis Gabor. Apart from the 2 sculptures on show, one physical and one digital, the exhibition includes a painting, 3 drawings, 1 piece of workshop material, 15 photographs, 3 leaflets, 2 magazines, 2 books and a fragment of the film entitled *Autoportrait mou*.



Salvador Dalí in his workshop in Portlligat, 1968. © Melitó Casals, "Meli"/Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2022. Image rights of Salvador Dalí reserved

Dalí as nexus between Classicism, Surrealism and Pop Art

The exhibition, which can be seen from today until next Autumn, allows us to see Dalí's most important subject matters concerning the *Venus de Milo* and the importance of this Hellenistic sculpture throughout his artistic career. It also analyses Dalí's interpretation of it in the sixties, placing it as a precedent for Pop Art. As Montse Aguer points out, together with the obsession for the painting *Angelus* by Millet, *Venus de Milo* serves Dalí to develop his paranoid critical method of interpretation of reality. *Venus de Milo with Drawers* is one of the pieces incorporated by Dalí to his Theatre-Museum.

A last-generation technology for a digital loan

The bronze statue of *Venus de Milo with Drawers* that belongs to the Dalí Foundation is exhibited inside a glass case confronted to its American homonymous. This one as a holographic creation that is shown thanks to the emerging technology of an OLED transparent screen. This type of screen allows to show holographic images with high resolution, brightness, and contrast. The device is one of the first units of this pioneering technology, which is expected to evolve exponentially in the near future. High resolution images have been granted by the Art Institute of Chicago. The holographic technic has been produced by a company called tururut Art Infogràfic and the OLED screen provided by LG firm.



Left, *Venus de Milo with Drawers* from 1964, belonging to the Dalí Foundation, is confronted to the American one from 1936. Work's copy: © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/VEGAP, Figueres, 2022. Picture's copy: © Salvador Dalí, The Art institute of Chicago

With this digital loan, the Dalí Foundation wants to express its commitment with introducing technology in the exhibition premises, with preservation and conservation of original works of art and sustainability regarding international work loans.

Transgressing Venus. Dalí is Classic, Surrealist and Pop Art!

In his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, the artist states: “My Surrealist glory was worthless. I must incorporate Surrealism in tradition. My imagination must become classic again”. Most probably, he refers retrospectively to the end of 1936, when his fame as an artist grew considerably in Europe but especially in the USA. *Time* magazine published a portrait of him by Man Ray on its December cover. This image surely becomes the symbolic starting point of a new beginning that separates him from the surreal environment of Paris and also from Europe.

Jennifer Cohen, assistant curator of Research of the Art Institute of Chicago, states: “Dalí invested himself with the responsibility of spearheading a second renaissance, which would call upon the enduring qualities of classical art, while embracing the inventions of psychoanalysis. In his autobiography, a related illustration titled ‘New Flesh’ punctuates a section describing his turn to classicism, where he writes, ‘I had now to begin to fight for a thing that was “important.” This important thing was to render the experience of my life “classic,” to endow it with a form, a cosmogony, a synthesis, an architecture of eternity”. In addition to these psychologically resonant assemblage-based objects, he was crafting ‘new flesh,’ an ambition with range far beyond Surrealism.

Venus de Milo with Drawers is a plaster statue that recalls, on a reduced scale, the original work, which has been displayed in the Louvre Museum of Paris since 1821. Dalí transgressed the classical reference by perforating the body of Venus with six drawers that can be opened and closed. These are elements which, as he himself declares, can only be understood through psychoanalysis: “Because the only difference between immortal Greece and the contemporary era is Sigmund Freud who discovered that the human body, which was purely neoplatonic in the time of the Greeks, is now full of secret drawers that only psychoanalysis can reveal”. Is it possible that his desire to transgress was a response to an intention to accommodate the ideal of the classical world to the reality of his present, which is to say, that of the 1930s?



Installation with *Venus de Milo with Drawers* at the exhibition *Salvador Dalí 1939*, Julien Levy Gallery in New York

Eric Schaal © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2022


Drawers are part of his most genuine iconography. They already appear in his 1929 paintings. The hatch, however, in 1936, coinciding with the creation of this sculpture which the artist places in the context of the Spanish Civil War. In his *Unspeakable Confessions*, we read: “The chaos in Spain undid me, and the monsters of civil war found their way on to my canvases [...]. My paranoia-critical system was going full blast. In the depths of despair, I continued to paint, turning vertigo into virtue. I produced the *Vénus de Milo aux tiroirs* (Venus with Opening Drawers) ...”. Regarding this statement, Laura Bartolomé wonders if “the artist conceived the drawers as enablers for exploring the subconscious of a society that, far from the classical ideal embodied by the *Venus de Milo*, had been plunged into civil war?”.

The presence of the two keys with the *Venus de Milo with Drawers* in 1939 at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York is probably ephemeral. In fact, there is no sign that they were part of the work of 1936, and neither are they found again later. Transitory addition to an already finished work is a practice that Dalí engaged in during the 1930s. The result of this is an ephemeral work that only exists for the duration of its public exhibition. For study purposes, this particular creation is identified as a version of, or variation on the original work, which is to say the *Venus de Milo with Drawers* of 1936.

lukewarm telephones are disgusting, and to demand telephones that are as cold, green and aphrodisiac as the augur-troubled sleep of the cantharides. Telephones as barbarous as bottles will free themselves of the lukewarm ornamentation of Louis XV spoons and will slowly cover with glacial shame the hybrid decors of our suavely degraded decadence.

Man has the right to demand the trappings of a queen for the “objects of his desire”: costumes for his furniture! for his teeth! and even for gardenias! Hand embroidered slipcovers will protect the extreme sensibility of “calf’s lung railway tracks”, colored glass with Persian patterns will be introduced into automobile design to keep out the ugly raw light of diurnal landscapes. The color of old absinthe will dominate the year 1941. Everything will be greenish. “Green I want you green” — green water, green wind, green ermine, green lizards swollen with sleep and gliding along the green skin and the dazzling décolletés of insomnia, green silver plate, green chocolate, green the agonizing electricity that sears the live flesh of civil wars, green the light of my own Gala!

In the nightmare of the American Venus, out of the darkness (bristling with dry umbrellas) the celebrated taxi of Christopher Columbus. Within, Christopher Columbus in person is proudly sitting. He is soaked in a persistent and dripping rain. Three hundred live Burgundy snails crawl up and down his motionless body and in the hollows of his livid face. On the breast of Christopher Columbus one may read this enigmatic sign: Am I back already? Why, with his index finger, does he point toward Europe? Why is he accompanied by the invisible ghosts of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor? Why is a somnambulistic Spanish girl attached to the steering-wheel of his de luxe Cadillac with golden chains? HERE ARE STILL MORE IMPENETRABLE DALIAN MYSTERIES, HEAVY WITH OBSCURE AND FAR REACHING SIGNIFICANCE. BUT ONE THING IS CERTAIN: A CATALAN, CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, DISCOVERED AMERICA. AND ANOTHER CATALAN, SALVADOR DALI, HAS JUST REDISCOVERED CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. NEW YORK! YOU WHO ARE LIKE THE VERY STALK OF THE AIR, THE HALF CUT FLOWER OF HEAVEN! YOU, MAD AS THE MOON, NEW YORK! I SEE YOU WON BY THE SURREALIST “PARANOIA-KINESIS”, YOU MAY WELL BE PROUD, I GO AND I ARRIVE, I LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART.



**Declaration of the Independence of the
Imagination and the Rights of Man
to His Own Madness**

WHEN, IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN CULTURE IT BECOMES NECESSARY FOR A PEOPLE TO DESTROY THE INTELLECTUAL BONDS THAT UNITE THEM WITH THE LOGICAL SYSTEMS OF THE PAST, IN ORDER TO CREATE FOR THEMSELVES AN ORIGINAL MYTHOLOGY WHICH, CORRESPONDING TO THE VERY ESSENCE AND TOTAL EXPRESSION OF THEIR BIOLOGICAL REALITY, WILL BE RECOGNIZED BY THE CHOICE SPIRITS OF OTHER PEOPLES — THEN THE RESPECT THAT IS DUE

Dalí

Salvador Dalí. *Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and the Rights of Man to His Own Madness*, 1939

Shortly after Salvador Dalí presented this sculpture at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1939, he created the *Dream of Venus*, a pavilion for the New York World's Fair. He planned a façade featuring a large Aphrodite with a fish head. After the Fair's organising committee eventually refused to allow Dalí to use this image, it became one of the reasons that led him to publish his manifesto, *Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and the Rights of Man to His Own Madness*.

Some years later, in 1964, Dalí did a limited edition in bronze of the *Venus de Milo with Drawers*. It is probable that he agreed to replicate the sculpture in response to a growing demand for the work to be shown in international exhibitions. In fact, the *Venus de Milo with Drawers* has been part of almost all the Dalí retrospectives: in Japan the same year (1964), then in New York (1965), Amsterdam (1970), and also the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1979).

As a new touch, Dalí added a fur pompom to each of the six drawers of the 1939 Venus. The precise intention that led him to introduce these elements—which, however, represent a new transgression—is unknown. Whatever the case, Dalí added the pompoms to all the casts except one, namely that reserved for the Dalí Theatre-Museum, which is identified with the inscription 'Exemplaire Gala Dalí'. It is highly likely that, with this gesture, he wanted to distinguish this cast from the other bronzes, thus turning it into a certain kind of unique work.

Jennifer Cohen interprets the pompon addition in the following way: "This addition brought a range of historical and contemporary references to the object's classical subject, not only recalling Meret Oppenheim's *Object* (called *Lunch in Fur* by André Breton) and the ermine fingernails of Dalí's Bonwit Teller mannequin with a head of roses but also anticipating the artist's later illustrations for Leopold Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* in 1970.

Fittingly, this historical leap, according to Cohen, was made "through an intervention that might be described as a fashionable adornment, suddenly making Dalí's 1936—from the additive procedures of the surrealist object to its interpretation in shop windows—relevant once again and transforming the fragile and aging work to meet its moment in the visual culture of the early 1960s".

In November 1964, Dalí appeared before the Spanish national TV cameras to present the project of his future museum, declaring that he would fill it with 'the most shocking examples of what is now called Pop Art. For example, on one of the balconies there will be six sculptures of the Venus de Milo, all of them, of course, with their respective drawers more or less sunk into their visceral depths.' Although, in fact, this particular project never came to fruition, it is yet another example of the sculpture's conversion into Pop and its overlapping with his museum, his last great work. Moreover, in *Autoportrait mou de Salvador Dalí*, a film shot by Jean-Christophe Averty in 1966, Dalí declared before the camera that his *Venus de Milo with Drawers* is 'a lesson for Pop artists'. In his Prologue to *Gaudí, the Visionary*, which was originally published in French in 1969, he even identifies his Venus as a forerunner of Pop Art.

At the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres, visitors starting to walk through this space after leaving the Mae-West room find a particular series of works. These include the *Retrospective Bust of a Woman 1933/1976-1977*, one of Dalí's main surrealist objects; the niche with the *Venus de Milo with Drawers 1936/1964*; an installation devoted to Millet's *The Angelus* and, accordingly, to Dalí's paranoiac-critical method; the reconditory reserved for *Poetry of America* a painting from 1943 in which Surrealism is still pointedly present. Yet, without a doubt, the most surprising thing is his anticipation of Pop Art, approached with his representation of a Coca-Cola bottle. on the other side of the semicircle, visitors cross a space devoted to Moses and Monotheism, a clear tribute to the work by Freud.

The blending of classicism, surrealism, psychoanalysis, and Pop Art that Dalí might have organised in this space is the same as that which he condenses in his *Venus de Milo with Drawers*. And all of this endures in his particular Olympus, his Dalí Theatre Museum, his last great work of art which is also the repository of his immortality.

Digital publication

The digital publication includes texts by Montse Aguer, Laura Bartolomé and Jennifer Cohen of the Art Institute of Chicago. IT can be downloaded from the Dalí Foundation's website in 4 languages: Catalan, Spanish, French and English. There is also a specific section on the website devoted to this show: [Transgressing Venus - Dali exhibitions \(salvador-dali.org\)](http://salvador-dali.org)

Mounting

The exhibition can be seen today 27 October until next Autumn in the Logies Room at the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres.

The design of the show is by Pep Canaleta of 3carme33. Graphism is by Alex Gifreu.

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