

Dreaming in Doubles A New Portrait of Gala Dalí

Salvador Dalí's (1904-1989) *The Dream* (1931), acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art in 2001, belongs to a group of paintings that the artist completed during his early involvement with the French Surrealist group [figure 1]. The Surrealists were particularly interested in Sigmund Freud's theories about dreams and the unconscious, which has led scholarship on *The Dream* to focus mainly on how the bust in the foreground symbolizes the act of sleeping, while the elements in the background represent the contents of a dream fraught with sexual anxiety and paternal conflict. This paper will assert, however, that *The Dream* is also one of Dalí's first portraits of his wife, Gala Dalí. His other depictions of her, as well as photographs of the couple, provide both visual and conceptual links between Gala and the central bust in this work. By choosing to portray Gala as the centerpiece of his psychological exploration of erotic angst, Dalí simultaneously identifies her as both the pinnacle of his anxiety, as well as its antidote. Examining *The Dream* in a wider context, the paternal struggles seen in the background may also relate to the artist's identification of patriarchy as the root of political oppression. Thus, viewers can read the tension between male and female forces as symbolic of the growing political unrest felt internationally during the early 1930s.

Born Elena Ivanovna Diakonova (1894-1982), Dalí's muse was renamed Gala by her first husband, Surrealist poet Paul Éluard (1895-1952), when she came from her native Russia to France in 1916 to marry him (Bradley, 1998: 57-58). Éluard became involved with the French Surrealist group that formed in Paris in 1924, so Gala was already well acquainted with the movement when she first encountered Dalí. She met the painter during the summer of 1929, when she and Éluard came to visit Dalí during his usual summer sojourn in Cadaqués, a small town on the Mediterranean coast of Catalonia. During this time, Dalí was suffering from uncontrollable bouts of hysterical laughter caused by his own hallucinations. Dalí developed an immediate fascination with both Gala and her husband, both of whom he perceived as endowed with "self-assurance" and "luxuriousness," compared to what he termed his own "provincial" persona (Dalí, 1976: 89). He became particularly infatuated with Gala's sophistication and began courting her. The artist's interest was returned, and despite Gala's marriage, her relationship with Dalí commenced that summer in Cadaqués. When Éluard returned to Paris, she stayed behind with Dalí, helping him to manage his hysteria and becoming his lover. By the fall, Gala was living with Dalí in Paris, inaugurating their life-long companionship. The two were legally married in 1934, and remained together until Gala's death in 1982.

During the summer they met, Dalí was filled with mixed emotions. He was both elated as his feelings for Gala grew, but simultaneously mortified at the possibility of having a physical relationship with a woman. Prior to his relationship with Gala, the artist had never slept with a woman, although he likely had an affair with poet Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) during the mid-1920s. Comparing the writings of Lorca and Dalí, however, along with those of their close friend, the filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), elicits ambiguity as to whether or not the relationship between Dalí and Lorca was physically consummated (Rojas, 1993: 151-157). Given Dalí's relative sexual inexperience, particularly with women, the impending physical encounter with Gala propelled him into a state of fear.

The anxieties that came with Dalí's nascent relationship with Gala are represented in *The Dream*. Haim Finkelstein and Michael R. Taylor have both identified the central bust as Medusa, highlighting how the flowing hair resembles snakes that emanated from Medusa's head (Finkelstein, 1996: 104; Taylor, 2004: 152). This mythological gorgon was known for turning men to stone with her glance, and was also interpreted by Sigmund Freud as a symbol for castration (Freud, 1922: 264-265). Given these associations, she was a particularly apt vehicle for Dalí's apprehension about interacting sexually with women. No scholars to date, however, have identified the bust as Gala. Based on an examination of portraits and photographs, however, she is likely represented by the bust.

In *Portrait of Gala* (1931) [figure 2], Dalí pasted a photograph of his lover's face to a decorative piece of cardboard, and painted blue-green hair stemming from her head in the same curving style as on the bust in *The Dream*. This demonstrates that the artist connected Gala directly with the motif of the flowing blue hair. Further, an undated photograph by Philippe Halsman portrays Dalí painting Medusa on Gala's forehead, revealing that he associated her with this mythological figure and suggesting that he would likely have painted her in such a guise [figure 3]. Paul Éluard, who remained in contact with the couple, also referred to Gala as, "the woman whose glance pierces walls," a phrase that further connects her to the theme of the mythical gorgon (Éluard in Descharnes, 1979: 28).

The angularity of the bust's nose and the sharp, protruding chin do not seem to match Gala's more rounded facial features. In *Portrait of Gala with Turban* (1939) [figure 4], although it is a later depiction, Dalí has however endowed his wife with a jutting chin and angular nose more similar to the bust's facial structure in *The Dream*. Also, *Paranoiac Metamorphosis of Gala's Face* (1932) [figure 5] shows the artist creating facial sketches composed of various objects that stretch elements of his wife's face. If Dalí stretched her facial features in this drawing, it is conceivable that he could have done so in *The Dream* as well. The characteristics of the face in the upper right hand quadrant of the drawing particularly match the stretched nose and chin of the central bust in *The Dream*.

Dalí's use of Gala's portrait in *The Dream* foregrounds her role as an instigating force behind his erotic angst. Textual evidence from his autobiographic work, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí*, supports this notion. When reflecting on their early physical contact in Cadaqués, the artist wrote, "I took her in my arms [and] the silence became terrifying with nothing but the whistling of the wind against the shards of slate" (Dalí, 1976: 92), Dalí linked his terror to a fear of sexual inadequacy, explaining how, "the possession of a woman [...] would lead to the revelation of my impotence. I was getting prepared for the recoil of my shame." Overall, he faced his growing love for Gala with trepidation. He contrasted his fond thoughts of her with an intense anguish that he felt when they were together, writing, "As soon as I was actually with her, her eyes, her voice, her smile, swept away my fancies. Once more I was headlong into love and fear" (Dalí, 1976: 92).

The apprehension evoked by her voice and smile particularly inform how Gala's mouth is depicted in *The Dream*. Her mouth is absent, with ants swarming in its place, likely a representation of aversion to female sexuality. Dalí had previously linked the female genitals to the mouth in *The First Days of Spring* (1929) [figure 6]. On a figure depicted at the bottom of the canvas, slightly left of center, he painted a vulva in place of a mouth. Dalí also linked the

mouth with sensual pleasure in writing, describing the “orgasmic oral delights” he felt as a child when drinking out of the same cup as a young female friend (Dalí, 1976: 60-61). Adding the swarming ants to the mouth of the bust in *The Dream* evokes a fear of, or shame in, such pleasure. For Dalí, ants would become a symbol of death and decay originating during his childhood when he found ants festering in the wound of an injured bat (Taylor, 2004: 152). This association between the mouth and the female genitals, paired with the idea of decay, reflects the anxiety Dalí experienced during his early relationship with Gala.

In addition to the obstructed mouth, the eyes of the bust that dominates *The Dream* are also closed. Michael R. Taylor and William Jeffett have previously interpreted these closed eyes as representing a state of sleep. Jeffett expands on the idea that Dalí depicts the bust as sleeping, positing that the objects and figures in the background are from her dreams (Jeffett, 2006: 352). Additionally, it is possible to view the eyes as absent, or even mutilated, especially when considered in relation to Dalí’s 1929 film, *Un Chien Andalou*, created with Luis Buñuel. In the opening scene, a woman’s eye is mutilated, which foreshadows the subconscious, inner-journey that will follow in the film. Similarly, the bust’s absent eyes in the *The Dream* can be interpreted as a symbol for examining one’s inner thoughts. Based on this interpretation, the subsidiary figures can be seen as emerging from the subconscious imagination of the central bust. Re-examining *The Dream* as a portrait of Gala, however, I propose that the figures and architectural elements in the background represent the sexual anxieties that Gala in part intensified, and thus she can be interpreted not only as the dreamer, but as a part of Dalí’s nightmare.

A distinct sense of apprehension can be discerned when comparing subject matter in the background of *The Dream* to similar imagery in other works, and to Dalí’s own statements. The man sitting upon the volute, for instance, represents feelings of guilt related to masturbation, as well as a fear of castration. A very similar statue, with a cross-legged man sitting on top, appeared one year earlier in *The Hand* (1930) [figure 7]. An analysis of this prior painting can provide insight into the meaning of the figure in *The Dream*. In the earlier work, the seated man holds out his hand, which is extremely inflated. His thumb loosely touches the forefinger, and the other three fingers curve inwards as well, creating a circular shape that represents masturbation. Furthermore, the man in *The Hand* has a bleeding face and has defecated on himself. The defecation suggests that he is afraid of, or disgusted by, the act of onanism, and the blood falls down his face like tears, denoting shame. Sigmund Freud’s Oedipus theory adds complexity to the blood dripping from the face of the seated figure. Oedipus ultimately blinds himself as a punishment for killing his father and marrying his mother, so the blood on the figure’s face can be interpreted as coming from self-inflicted blindness (Freud, 1913: 18-20). Said blood may additionally reference masturbation, as Dalí noted in his childhood diary that he feared blood loss due to frequent masturbation (Gibson, 1998: 337). The presence of a woman’s visage in this work, also surrounded by flowing blue hair, specifically connects the artist’s onanistic anxieties to the central bust in *The Dream*.

The shame represented by the seated man in *The Dream* is further exacerbated by the small bust that looms over his hunched shoulders, a likely representation of the image of a father. Finkelstein and Dawn Ades explain that Dalí commonly represented a paternal character with a bearded man he identified as William Tell (Finkelstein, 1996: 97; Ades, 2004: 136). *The Dream*’s small bust shares the same gray hair and beard as Dalí’s depictions of this legendary

character in paintings such as *William Tell* (1930) [figure 8] and *The Old Age of William Tell* (1931). Dalí modified the legend of William Tell, where Tell shoots an apple from his son's head in order to gain their freedom from prison. He augments the violence in the tale to create a father figure that represents a wide gamut of emotional and physical abuse, including castration. The struggle between father and son is particularly apparent in *William Tell*, where Tell holds a pair of scissors signifying castration, and the man in the bottom left quadrant points at him in fear. Ades notes that this interaction represents mutual accusation and guilt, thus emphasizing the tension between father and son (Ades, 2004: 136). Applying Freudian psychoanalytic ideas to understanding this paternal character also evokes the Oedipus complex, where father and son compete for the mother's love. Viewing the small bust in *The Dream* as William Tell thus augments the feelings of guilt relating to sexuality with a violent, paternal presence.

To the right of the man sitting on the volute, two embracing figures further represent the shame felt by the son due to the presence of the father. The man on the left has gray hair and a beard, which again likens him to William Tell. William Rubin posits that Dalí based these embracing men on Giorgio de Chirico's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1927) (Rubin, 1977: 226). In both embracing pairs, the figures have the smooth, featureless quality of mannequins, and one lowers his head. De Chirico's work references the Biblical story where a son returns home and repents for having wasted his inheritance. Dalí's allusion to *The Return of the Prodigal* thus links the embracing men in *The Dream* to a different sense of guilt. Further evoking remorse, a man to the right of the embracing pair hides his head as he leans against the red wall. The way that he shields his face parallels the man on the volute, again reinforcing the motif of shame.

By bringing Gala to the foreground amidst these representations of sexual anxiety, Salvador Dalí identifies her as the pinnacle of these feelings. In contrast to the trepidation he felt toward sex, however, his use of Gala's portrait can also be viewed as a vehicle through which Dalí tried to confront his fears. Examining the image paradigmatically, it is relevant to consider why the artist has portrayed Gala's face in the foreground of this painting instead of his own. In his earlier depictions of erotic angst, such as *The Lugubrious Game* (1929) and *The Great Masturbator* (1929)—which were painted during the summer when the couple met—Dalí used his own face as a focal point (Jeffett, 2009: 173; Fanés, 2004: 116). Dalí could easily have depicted his own portrait in the foreground of *The Dream*—there was ample precedent—but instead chose to depict Gala.

Dalí's use of Gala's portrait in place of his own reflects the way that he began to conflate their identities. Fiona Bradley suggests that Dalí perceived his wife as an alter-ego, an identification supported by his biographical texts (Bradley, 1998: 57). When the artist describes his feelings towards her during their formative years, he explains that, "To live with Gala became an obsession to me. To digest her, possess her, assimilate her, [and] melt into her" (Dalí, 1976: 99). He further characterizes Gala as an imaginary childhood imaginary friend, who he named Galushka: "Galushka was in a way my enchanted double, a perfect image of myself that I could love, re-create, adore, till my eyes streamed sublime tears" (Dalí, 1976: 64). Conceptualizing Gala as his doppelgänger reinforces the notion that he perceived her as an alter-ego. Revisiting Taylor and Jeffett's idea that the figures in the background are elements of the

central bust's dream, it is possible to view Gala not only as a pinnacle of his fear, but as a medium through which Dalí confronted his own nightmarish dread.

In his writing, Dalí specifically referred to how Gala acted as an antidote for his emotional turmoil. He devoted an entire chapter of *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí* to the subject of how she transformed his life. He describes how his new love, who was nearly ten years his elder, saw him for who he truly was, as a man filled with “an abysm of terror, of fright, a child of genius lost in the world” (Dalí, 1976: 27). He further explicates how she became a saving grace for him: “Gala was always there to explain my attitude to me, bring me back to normal, return me to my paintbrushes, and turn my haunting obsessions into genius,” emphasizing how she “drove the forces of death” away (Dalí, 1976: 97). Again referring to Dalí's conflation of their two personalities, he describes poetically the intimate way in which Gala helped him confront the world, writing, “Gala is the one who devours for me, my teeth being very small and feeble” (Dalí in Descharnes, 1979: 98). Relating this quote specifically to *The Dream*, Gala's face, in the guise of Medusa, can be seen as “devouring” the sexual anxieties that dominate the background. The prominence of her visage amidst such angst-filled imagery represents the courage that Dalí associates with Gala.

Looking at it more carefully, the bust of Gala can further be viewed as a baptismal font, an association that adds to the notion that her presence in his life saved him from his fears. The same medusa-like bust in the foreground of *The Dream* also appeared in *The Font* (1930) [figure 9]. In this earlier painting, water flows from the top of the figure's head, identifying it more clearly. The bust in *The Dream* contains lighter blue coloring at the top, suggestive of water flowing as well. Gala's depiction as a baptismal font foreshadows Dalí's later, more spiritual portrayals of his wife. In paintings such as *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1950) [figure 10] or *Saint Helen at Port Lligat* (1956), he portrays Gala as a traditional religious figure. He attributed her with the quality of purity, particularly associated with the Madonna, writing that her “purity has been patiently refined thousands of times over” (Dalí, 1986: 181). Reading *The Dream* in light of this later, more mature characterization of his muse helps explain how *The Dream* represented Gala's role in helping him through his emotional turmoil.

When *The Dream* was exhibited at the First International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936, its presentation was overshadowed by an incident that provides an excellent example of the Gala's calming effect on the artist (Taylor, 2004: 152). While delivering a lecture on the subject of “Authentic Paranoiac Phantoms,” Dalí wore a deep sea diving suit. A few minutes into the lecture, the artist began to suffocate. Dalí acted hysterically until Gala intervened and unscrewed the bolted down helmet. In a photograph from the event, Dalí can be seen, fully recovered and holding the helmet in one hand, while pointing to the central figure in *The Dream* with the other [figure 11].

The dual meaning behind his use of Gala's portrait and her role as his alter-ego reflect Salvador Dalí's interest in the double image, which he defined as a single image that represents two objects (Dalí, 1930: 283-225). Rather than portraying a literal double image, Dalí evoked a conceptual double image in *The Dream*. A prime example of a literal double image in Dalí's work can be found in *Paranoiac Woman-Horse* (1930), where the central object is meant to represent both a woman and a horse. As explicated above, Gala's portrait in *The Dream* represents how she intensified his sexual neuroses during their early relationship, while

concurrently helping the artist to combat them. By embodying both of these roles conceptually, this portrait theoretically parallels Dalí's notion of the double image.

Identifying the bust as Gala Dalí's portrait takes on additional meaning when considering how the male/female tension in *The Dream* may also have mirrored the political unrest felt across Europe during the early 1930s. James Thrall Soby argues that Dalí's depictions of human neuroses reflect the anxieties felt at the time on an international scale (Soby, 1941: 30-31). While Soby does not apply his claim to any specific paintings by Dalí, it is possible to re-examine *The Dream* in terms of the broader political climate during which it was created. Around the time that Dalí painted *The Dream*, in 1931, he was already engaging in revolutionary discourse, as evidenced through a speech on the subject of "Surrealism at the Service of the Revolution" that he gave at the Sala Capcir in Barcelona (Jeffett, 2009: 65). Further, as Robin Adèle Greeley explains, based on a series of discussions with psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in 1930, Dalí began to view "paranoia as a (mal)function of the individual in relation to society, that is, a psychic reaction to social structures" (Greeley, 2001: 475-476).

In 1933, Dalí wrote a letter to Surrealist leader André Breton explicating his views on political oppression (Greeley, 2001: 475). In this correspondence, Dalí identified patriarchal authority as behind the oppressive forces of capitalism, fascism, and communism alike. This connection between political tyranny and patriarchy was likely forming in his mind as early as 1931, however, due to the turbulent climate in Europe. The Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, became the second largest political party in Germany during 1930, and eventually controlled the country in 1933 (Divine, 1969: 102). Hitler's intention to repudiate the Treaty of Versailles was especially threatening to surrounding countries, such as France, weakened by the Stock Market Crash of 1929. In addition to such international turmoil, there was upheaval surrounding the Spanish elections of 1931 foreshadowing the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 (Carr, 2000: 205-242). Given this context, Dalí's decision to overpower the paternal drama in the background of *The Dream* with Gala's portrait reflects not only his growing distaste for patriarchy in the familial and social realm, but also in the political sphere. The relevance of Gala's portrait, then, expands beyond the personal realm. As Gala become a salve for Dalí's personal trauma, he also began to depict the feminine as a mitigating force in the face of masculine political aggression.

Dalí's depiction of William Tell in *The Dream* again subtly links the painting with the artist's distaste for patriarchy in the political realm. In 1930, one year earlier, Dalí created a portrait of Lenin in the guise of William Tell, titled *The Enigma of William Tell* [figure 12]. Here, Dalí awkwardly portrayed the Communist Leader with both his characteristic cap and his right buttock so elongated that they must be supported by crutches. Greeley psychoanalyzes this image, noting how Dalí makes "the great communist appear paradoxically phallicly overpowering but ridiculous and unmanly. Rather than portraying Lenin as the revered leader of the Bolshevik revolution, Dalí evokes him as a bourgeois father figure who provokes Oedipal anxiety and disgust" (Greeley, 2001: 470). Returning to *The Dream*, Dalí's inclusion of William Tell among the symbols of paternal struggle can be identified as subtle references to his opinion that patriarchy is the root of political oppression.

According to Finkelstein, Dalí directly sets Gala in opposition to William Tell, and thus to political oppression, in his 1931 poem "Love and Memory." Dalí begins this poem by establishing a barren setting that is "civilly debased" and "predisposed to colonial influences"

(Dalí, 1931: 162). Although Dalí does not mention a specific political situation or group, he establishes the negative forces of colonial oppression as the setting for “Love and Memory.”

Dalí places William Tell in the moral wasteland of “Love and Memory,” characterizing him as particularly vicious, “William Tell / rage in his heart / his teeth biting into the cloth / encircling / like a girdle / a rather long / loaf of bread ” (Dalí, 1931: 169). By comparing Tell to a “girdle,” Dalí emphasizes the oppressive political force that he represents. On the other hand, Gala counterbalances the forces of oppression represented by Tell and the “colonial” setting. The artist describes her as existing outside of the turmoil depicted in the poem, writing, “Gala / you are not included / in the circle / of my relational objects / your love is beyond / the comparative and beggarly notions / of human feelings” (Dalí, 1931: 168). Her presence in “Love and Memory” provides an antidote for oppressive masculine politics in the same way that it overpowers the paternal aggression in *The Dream*. Comparing these two works reveals how Dalí not only considered Gala in relation to his internal issues, but began to consider the feminine in relation to the broader problems of society as well.

While initially *The Dream* may appear to depict a sleeping bust, with elements of her dream, re-examining this work as a portrait of Gala adds many new personal and political dimensions to the painting. Understanding it as her portrait reveals how Gala served numerous complex roles in Dalí’s life. In one sense she was formidable, while she also served as his saving grace. Although the iconography creates an atmosphere of tension, examining in detail how this portrait fits within Dalí’s pictorial and textual bodies of work allows the viewer to glean multiple interpretations; in that sense it becomes a metonym for Dalí’s marriage and his *oeuvre*.

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Figures



Figure 1. Salvador Dalí, *The Dream*, 1931, oil on canvas, 96 x 97 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art



Figure 2. Salvador Dalí, *Portrait of Gala*, 1931, oil and collage on cardboard, 13.9 x 9.2 cm, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí



Figure 3. Philippe Halsman, Photograph of Gala and Salvador Dalí, 1948



Figure 4. Salvador Dalí, *Portrait of Gala with Turban*, 1939, oil on canvas, 56 x 50 cm,
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid



Figure 5. Salvador Dalí, *Paranoiac Metamorphosis of Gala's Face*, 1932, india ink on paper, 29 x 21 cm, Figueres, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí



Figure 6. Salvador Dalí, *The First Days of Spring*, 1929, oil and collage on panel, 49.5 x 64 cm,
The Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 7. Salvador Dalí, *The Hand*, 1930, oil and collage on canvas, 41 x 66 cm, The Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 8. Salvador Dalí, *William Tell*, 1930, oil and collage on canvas, 113 x 87 cm, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

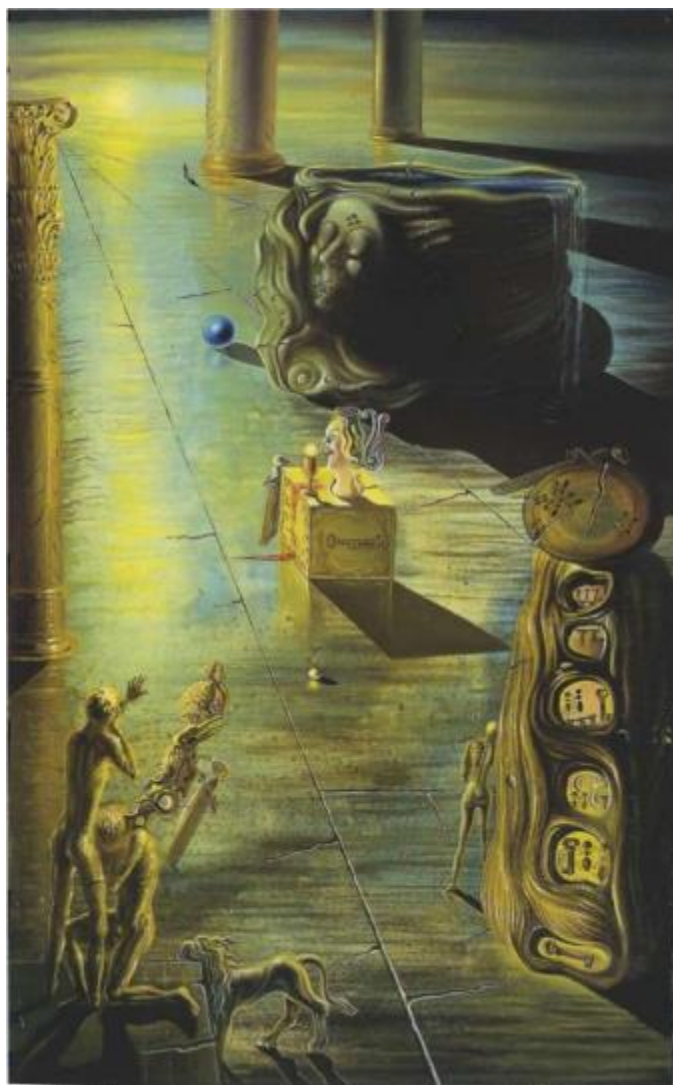


Figure 9. Salvador Dalí, *The Font*, 1930, oil and collage on board, 66 x 41 cm, The Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 10. Salvador Dalí, *The Madonna of Port Lligat*, 1950, oil on canvas, 366 x 244 cm, Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan



Figure 11. Dalí and Gala in front of *The Dream*, with Paul Éluard and Roland Penrose (1936), Graphic Photo Union.



Figure 12. Salvador Dalí, *The Enigma of William Tell*, 1930, 301 x 346 cm, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden