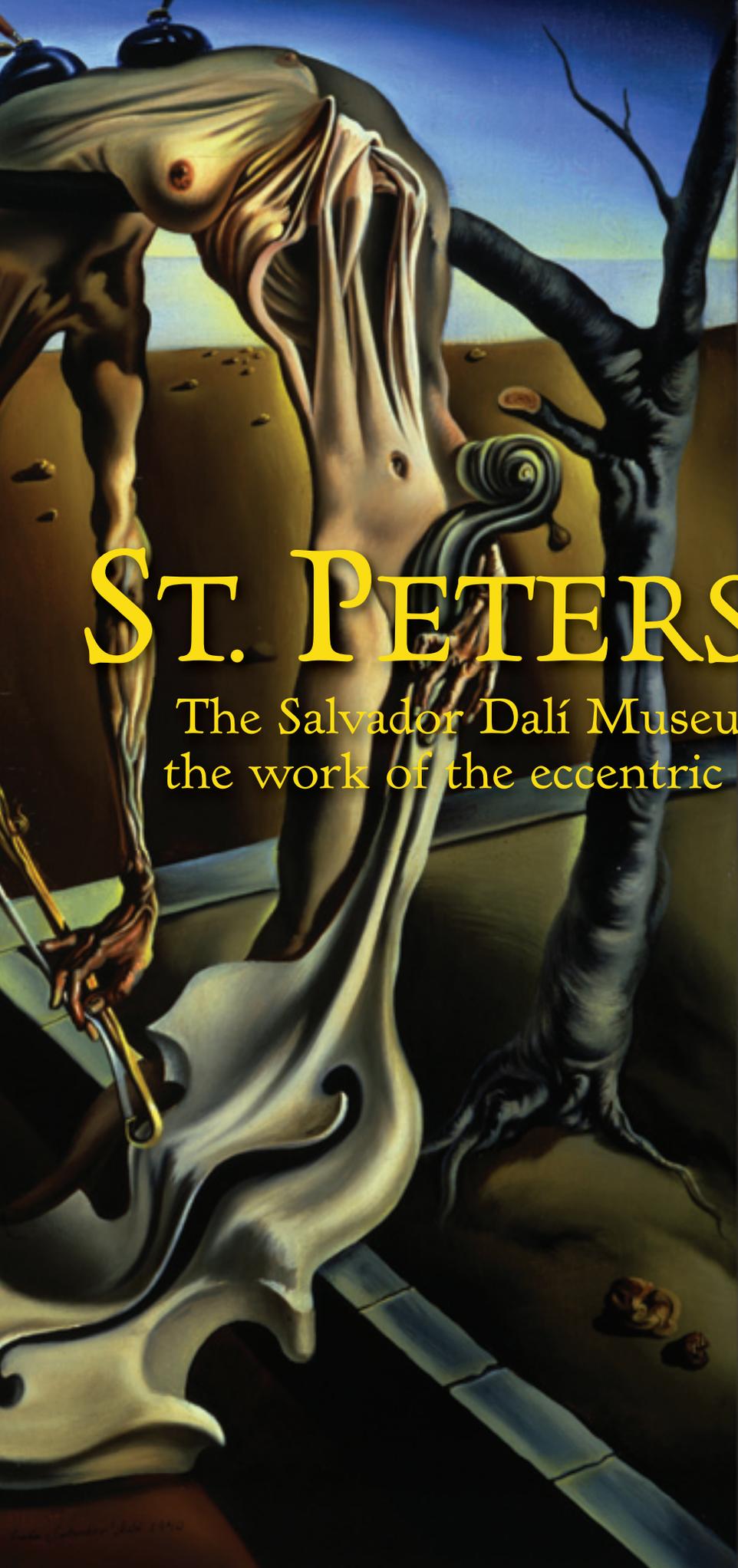
A surrealist painting by Salvador Dalí. The scene is set in a desolate, cracked landscape under a pale, hazy sky. In the foreground, a large, blue, draped form, possibly a woman's dress, flows across the ground. To the right, a large, yellow, bulbous shape, resembling a foot or a piece of fabric, is covered in a dense pattern of small black dots and a large, dark spider. In the background, a golden, winged figure, possibly a Pegasus, is perched on a tall, twisted, blue structure. Two small, skeletal figures are visible in the distance. The overall composition is highly detailed and evocative of Dalí's style.

SURREALISM IN

Daddy Longlegs of the Evening—Hope! was the first Salvador Dalí (inset) painting purchased by A. Reynolds and Eleanor Morse. The couple went on to own some ninety paintings by the artist, which are now housed at St. Petersburg's Salvador Dalí Museum.



ST. PETERSBURG

The Salvador Dalí Museum showcases the work of the eccentric Spanish artist

by Beth Luberecki

After Cleveland industrialist A. Reynolds Morse and Eleanor Reese got married in 1942, they bought themselves a wedding present. Bypassing more traditional gift ideas like jewelry or furniture, they instead opted for a piece of art, and a unique one at that.

The painting they chose wasn't a picturesque landscape or an elegant portrait, but rather an image featuring a spider, ants, and limp figures against a barren backdrop. It was Salvador Dalí's *Daddy Longlegs of the Evening—Hope!*, a painting the Morses were drawn to after seeing a show of Dalí works in Cleveland.

With the purchase of *Daddy Longlegs*, the Morses began a lifelong friendship with and admiration of Dalí, and over the next forty years they amassed the largest private collection of Dalí works in the world. As their collection grew, the Morses realized they had to find a per-



manent home for it. They wanted to keep it all together, and though many U.S. cities and museums expressed interest, none of them was willing to accept all of the artwork and archival information the Morses had obtained.

That's when the city of St. Petersburg, Florida, stepped up to the plate. After St. Petersburg attorney James W. Martin read an article in the *Wall Street Journal* titled "U.S. Art World Dillydallies over Dalí," he convinced local leaders to throw the city's hat into the ring. Both the city and the state of Florida ponied up the necessary funds, and in 1980, the Morses' collection, including more than ninety paintings, moved to the Sunshine State.

Housed in a former marine warehouse on Bayboro Harbor, the Salvador Dalí Museum opened its doors to the public in 1982. Since then it has attracted art aficionados, Dalí devotees, and curious visitors from around the world. More than 210,000 people visit the museum each year, some making a special trip to St. Petersburg just to see the collection.

So why is Dalí such a draw? "He is certainly a spokesman for our time in regard to the influences that his work embodies," says Joan R. Kropf, deputy director, collection and facility, for the Salvador Dalí Museum. "Dalí seemed to absorb a lot of the twentieth century...so he's very much like an art history lesson in and of himself."

"He had a very unique perspective, and I think people find that intriguing," says Judith B. Powers, director of the Pinellas County Cultural Affairs Department. "I think they also find it intriguing when they come to under-



"People find it intriguing when they come to understand that in his earlier years, his work was really quite traditional and exquisite and beautifully rendered, and [they see] how...his perspective on things changed throughout his entire career."

—Judith B. Powers



Early works by Dalí (top left) were influenced by many artistic genres, such as the Old Masters—style *Girl's Back* (top right) or the impressionistic *View of Cadaqués with the Shadow of Mount Pani* (bottom).



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Born in 1904 in Figueres, Spain, Salvador Dalí began painting when he was just a child and later attended the San Fernando Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid. Early works, like *View of Cadaqués with the Shadow of Mount Pani* and *Girl's Back*, demonstrate how he was influenced by a variety of artistic styles and genres, everything from impressionism to the works of Old Master painters. “Dalí tried every style of painting,” says Michael Manning, a docent at the Salvador Dalí Museum.

By the end of the 1920s, he had begun experimenting with surrealism, a cultural movement whose members drew on dreams and memory for artistic inspiration. “They had all read Freud; it was very Freudian,” says Manning. Dalí is probably best known for the work he did during this period, and he described his surrealist works, like the well-known *The Persistence of Memory* with its melting watches, as “hand-painted dreams.”

In 1940, Dalí and his wife and muse, Gala, left war-torn Europe and moved to the United States. His classical period began around this time, and he painted a series of large canvases with scientific, religious, or historical themes. These are some of the most dramatic pieces of the museum’s collection, and visitors love to take on the challenge of searching for the double image in *The Hallucinogenic Toreador* or deciphering the various components contained within *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus*.

The variety and complexity of the Dalí oeuvre are just some of the reasons why people become so enamored of the artist. Manning didn’t know much about Dalí

until he started volunteering at the museum about ten years ago. “But I immediately got the Dalí bug,” he recalls. “The more you learn about Dalí, the more interesting he gets.”

To fully understand what Dalí was all about, visitors should be sure to take a tour of the museum offered by Manning or another of the site’s docents. “You really can’t do Dalí without taking a tour,” says Manning. “If you don’t, you miss an awful lot.”

“A lot of people have this impression of Dalí as just being sort of a crazy madman, and they come away sometimes after they’ve gone through a tour seeing that it’s not crazy stuff that he’s painting,” says Kropf. “It’s based on his homeland, it’s based on his Spanish heritage, it’s

based on science, mathematics, religion. There are a lot of things here that appeal to different levels. If you like impressionist works, Dalí did impressionist works. If you like paintings that are over thirteen feet tall, we’ve got those.”

In addition to its acclaimed permanent collection, the museum also plays host to special exhibits from time to time. Through June 1, it will be showcasing the exhibit *Dalí & Film*, which explores the relationship between the artist’s paintings and his film projects. Works on view from the Salvador Dalí Museum and from collections around the world include the Dalí/Disney animated short *Destino* and paintings like *The Persistence of Memory* and *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, which are normally displayed at New

Dalí’s Basket of Bread (top) was one of his first works to be seen in America; The Hallucinogenic Toreador (bottom) is one of many Dalí paintings featuring double images.





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York’s Museum of Modern Art and London’s Tate Modern, respectively.

Previously at the Tate Modern and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the exhibit will head to the Museum of Modern Art after its stint at the Dalí Museum. “It’s an interesting show,” says Kropf. “And here it is in Florida. People should take advantage of the ability to see somewhat of a blockbuster show.”

Dalí, who died in 1989, was known for his eccentric personality almost as much as for his artwork, and that’s another element that draws people to both the artist and the museum. With his trademark cape, walking stick, and exaggerated, upturned mustache, he made for a flamboyant figure who inspired everything from admiration to curiosity to disdain. “I don’t know what would become of me without my extraordinary, fabulous capacity for invention, which enables me to survive in spite of everything,” Dalí once said.

Though Dalí is no longer with us, his legacy certainly lives on, at least if the activity level at the Salvador Dalí Museum is any indication. Large tour groups, many featuring school-age children, soak up the tidbits and tales shared by docents. Shoppers browse the wares in the museum’s expansive and popular gift shop, which trades in all kinds of Dalí-ana, everything from books to T-shirts to home

decor. And the museum’s archival library provides information for researchers and others looking to further the understanding and appreciation of the artist.

The facility is also a valuable asset for the region’s tourism sector. “Eighty percent of the people who go through there are tourists, and a huge percentage of those are international [visitors],” says DT Minich, director of tourism for Pinellas County. “Any time we’re overseas in any of our key international markets, people know about the Dalí Museum.”

And having this kind of world-class museum on Florida’s Gulf Coast also adds a great deal to the area’s artistic landscape. The museum brings “instant recognition to your community, because the name Salvador Dalí, or just Dalí alone, is a name, or a brand almost, that is known around the world,” says Powers. “If people know the Dalí is in St. Petersburg, then they think something must be happening there, because that’s a pretty sophisticated art scene...It really raises the visibility of all of the cultural institutions in the community.”

The visibility of the Dalí Museum itself will soon be increased when a new site for the museum is completed in 2009-2010. The new location at the Progress Energy Center for the Arts on downtown St. Petersburg’s waterfront will give the

museum more room for its permanent collection, special exhibits, and archival material. It will also allow the gallery to be housed on the third floor, rather than on ground level as it is now, so that the artwork will be out of harm’s way in the event of a hurricane with flooding. Plans call for the architecture and design to reflect Dalí’s spirit and his vision of a museum with “walls that breathe and pulse imperceptibly.”

“When they open the new facility, we’re going to be telling the world about that,” says Minich. “We’ve got so many other great, unique museums right in the downtown area, but the Dalí Museum really is kind of the cornerstone, the granddaddy of everything.”

The Salvador Dalí Museum is located at 1000 Third Street South in St. Petersburg, Florida. For more information, call 727-823-3767 or visit www.salvador dali museum.org.

Beth Luberecki is a Venice, Florida-based freelance writer and the features editor of Times of the Islands and RSW Living.

Dalí (top left) was known for both his colorful personality and his respected artwork like *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* (top right) and *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus* (opposite), both of which can be seen at the Salvador Dalí Museum (bottom right).



DALÍ IMAGE AND ARTWORK COURTESY OF THE SALVADOR DALÍ MUSEUM; MUSEUM EXTERIOR PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN NOEL

