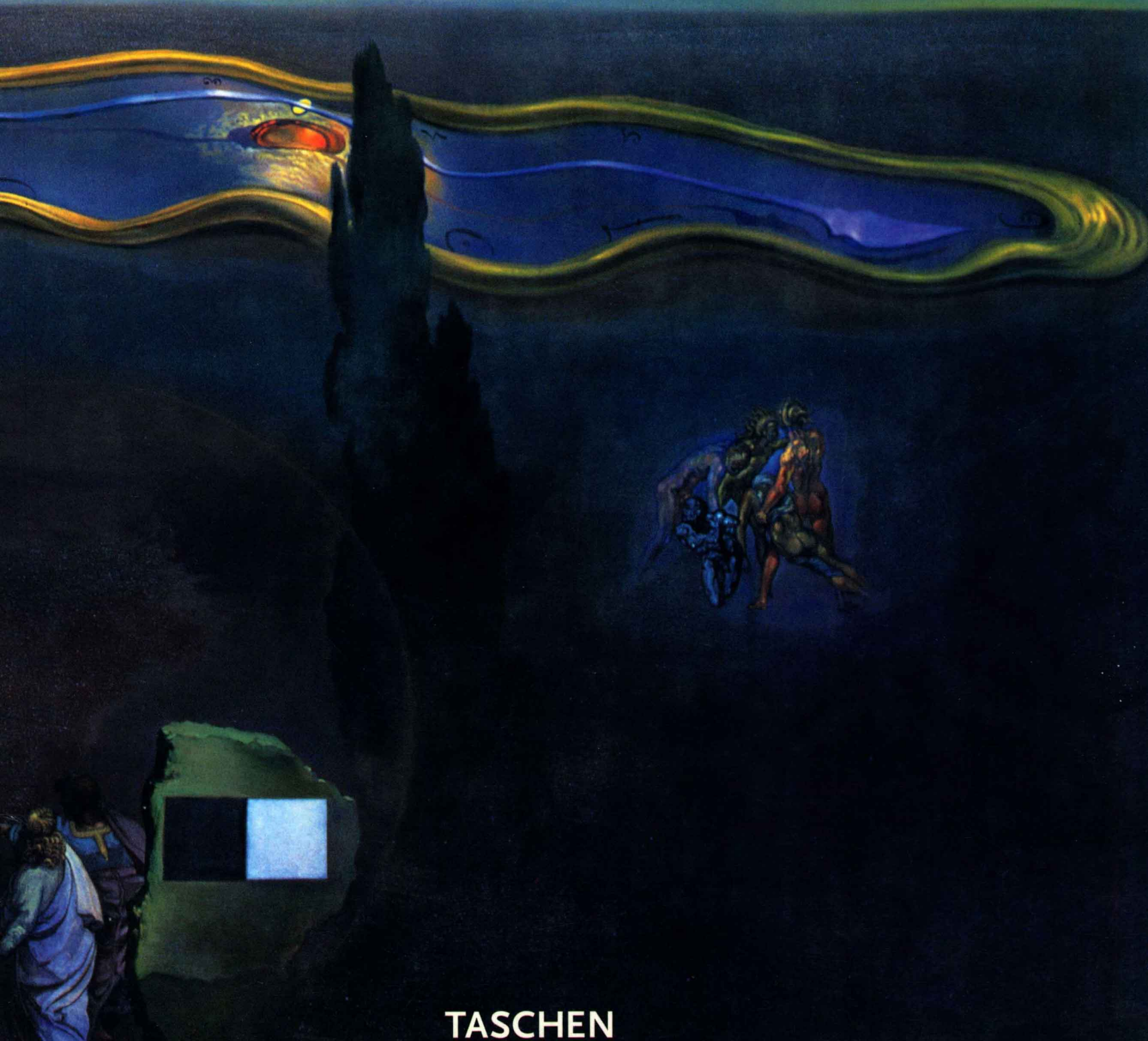


# DALÍ

Robert Descharnes · Gilles Néret



TASCHEN

Robert Descharnes · Gilles Néret

# SALVADOR DALÍ

1904 – 1989

**TASCHEN**

KÖLN LISBOA LONDON NEW YORK PARIS TOKYO

120

ILLUSTRATION PAGE 2:

*Poetry of America (The Cosmic Athletes)*, 1943

Poésie d'Amérique (Les Athlètes cosmiques)

Oil on canvas, 116.8 x 78.7 cm

Fundación Gala-Salvador-Dalí, Figueras

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Hohenzollernring 53, D-50672 Köln

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Cover design: Angelika Taschen, Cologne

Translation: Michael Hulse, Cologne

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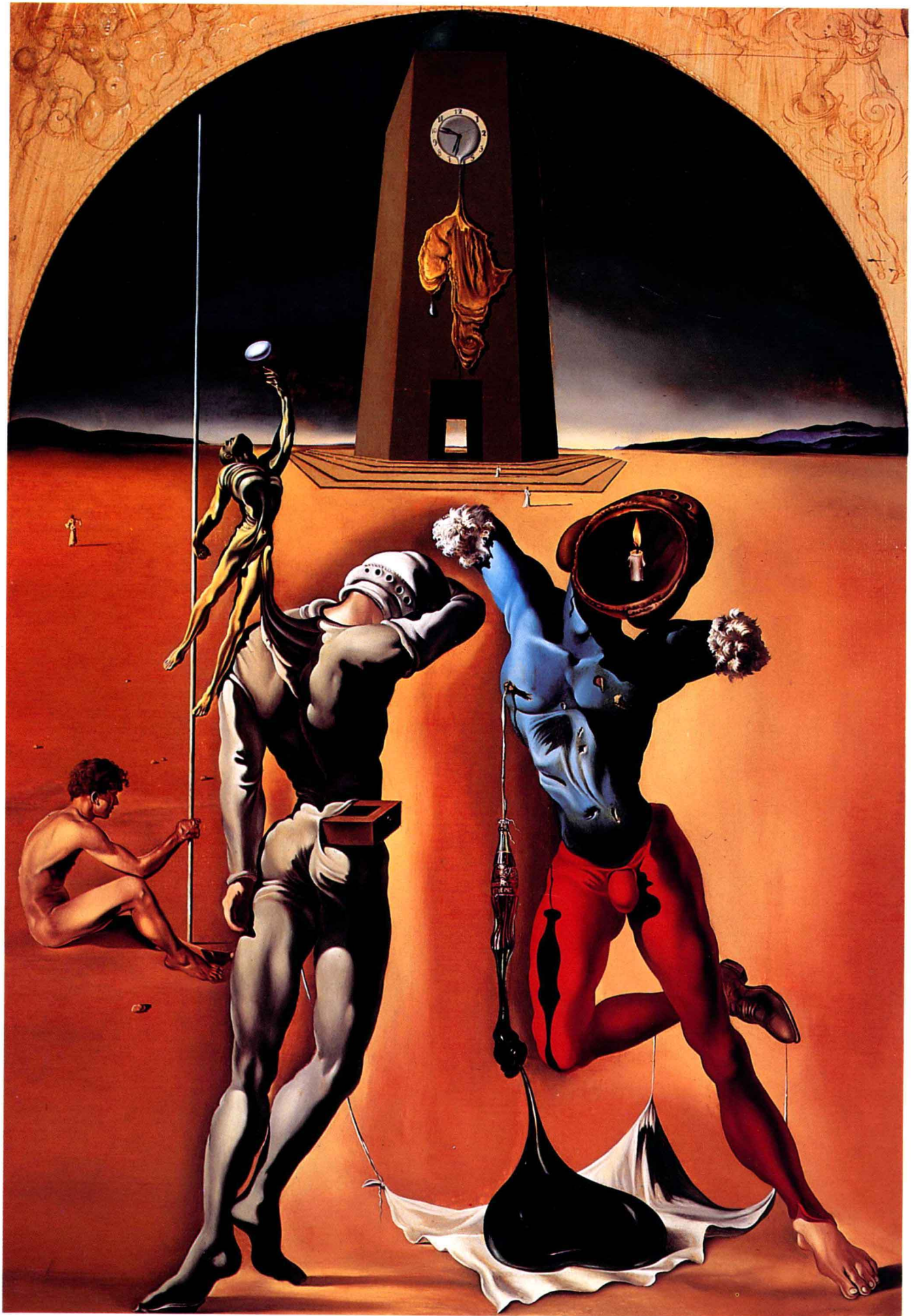
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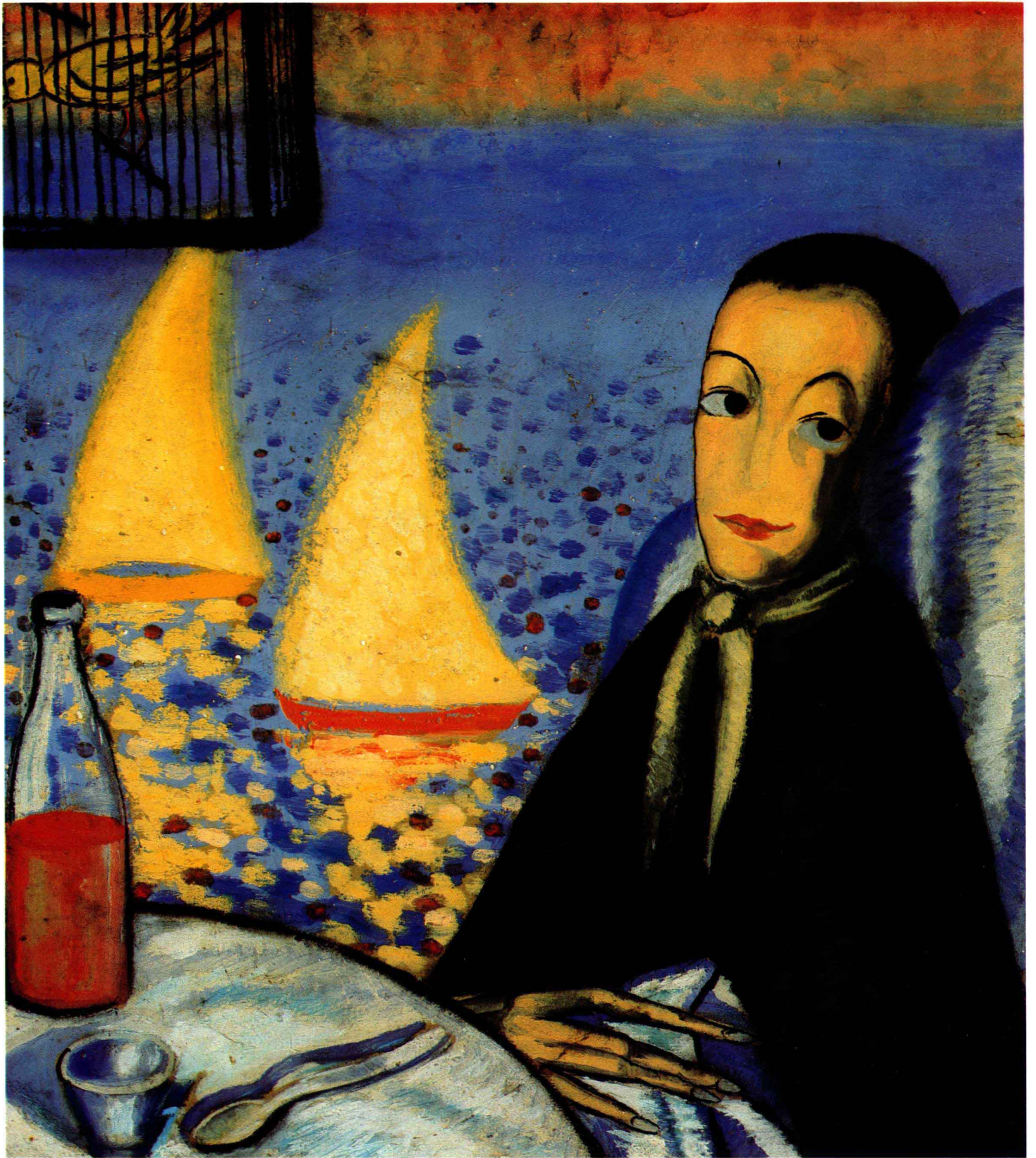
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# The Dandy and his Mirror

“A dandy,” wrote Charles Baudelaire, “must be looking in his mirror at all times, waking and sleeping.” Dalí could easily have become the living proof of Baudelaire’s dictum. But the literal mirror was not enough for him. Dalí needed mirrors of many kinds: his pictures, his admirers, newspapers and magazines and television. And even that still left him unsatisfied.

So one Christmas he took a walk in the streets of New York carrying a bell. He would ring it whenever he felt people were not paying enough attention to him. “The thought of not being recognised was unbearable.” True to himself to the bitter end, he delighted in following Catalonian television’s bulletins on his state of health during his last days alive (in Quiron hospital in Barcelona); he wanted to hear people talking about him, and he also wanted to know whether his health would revive or whether he would be dying soon. At the age of six he wanted to be a female cook – he specified the gender. At seven he wanted to be Napoleon. “Ever since, my ambition has been continually on the increase, as has my megalomania: now all I want to be is Salvador Dalí. But the closer I get to my goal, the further Salvador Dalí drifts away from me.”

He painted his first picture in 1910 at the age of six. At ten he discovered Impressionist art, and at fourteen the *Pompier*s (a 19th century group of academic genre painters, among them Meissonier, Detaille and Moreau). By 1927 he was Dalí, and the poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, a friend of his youth, wrote an ‘Ode to Salvador Dalí.’ Years later Dalí claimed that Lorca had been very attracted to him and had tried to sodomize him, but had not quite managed it. Dalí’s thirst for scandal was unquenchable. His parents had named him Salvador “because he was the chosen one who was come to save painting from the deadly menace of abstract art, academic Surrealism, Dadaism, and any kind of anarchic ”ism“ whatsoever.”<sup>1</sup>

If he had lived during the Renaissance, his genius would have been recognized at an earlier stage and indeed considered normal. But in the twentieth century, which Dalí damned as stupid, he was thought provocative, a thorn in the flesh. To this day there are many who misunderstand the provocativeness and label him insane. But Dalí repeatedly declared: “... the sole difference between me and a madman is the fact that I am not mad!”<sup>2</sup> Dalí also said: “The difference between the Surrealists and me is that I am a Surrealist”<sup>3</sup> – which is perfectly true. And he also

“Every morning when I wake up I experience an exquisite joy – the joy of being Salvador Dalí – and I ask myself in rapture what wonderful things this Salvador Dalí is going to accomplish today.”

*The Sick Child (Self-Portrait at Cadaqués),*  
c.1923

*L’enfant malade (Autoportrait à Cadaqués)*  
Oil and gouache on cardboard, 57 x 51 cm  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds Morse,  
Loan to the Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg (Fla.)

claimed: "I have the universal curiosity of Renaissance men, and my mental jaws are constantly at work."<sup>4</sup>

Dalí's fame spread worldwide. The Japanese established a Dalí museum. Interest in his work grew constantly during his lifetime. And all the while Dalí was Dalí, provoking the world with surreal inventiveness and his own bizarre personality. At his death he left a vast body of work – which had occasionally been obscured from view by the artist himself while he was alive. During the terminal stages of modern art, nihilistically pursuing its reductive, self-destructive course, Dalí was one of the few to propose a way out. A great deal of work remains to be done before his proposal is fully grasped.

The alternative he proposed begins with the great Old Masters and takes us via the conquest of the irrational to the decoding of the subconscious, deliberately including recent scientific discoveries. Writing in 1964, Michel Déon acutely observed: "It is tempting to suppose we know Dalí because he has had the courage to enter the public realm. Journalists devour every syllable he utters. But the most surprising thing about him is his earthy common sense, as in the scene where a young man who wants to make it to the top is advised to eat caviar and drink champagne if he does not wish to fret and toil to the end of his days. What makes Dalí so attractive is his roots and his antennae. Roots that reach deep into the earth, absorbing all the earthiness (to use one of Dalí's favourite notions) that has been produced in four thousand years of painting, architecture and sculpture. Antennae that are picking up things to come, tuned to the future, anticipating it and assimilating it at lightning speed. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that Dalí is a man of tireless scientific curiosity. Every discovery and invention enters into his work, reappearing there in barely changed form."<sup>5</sup>

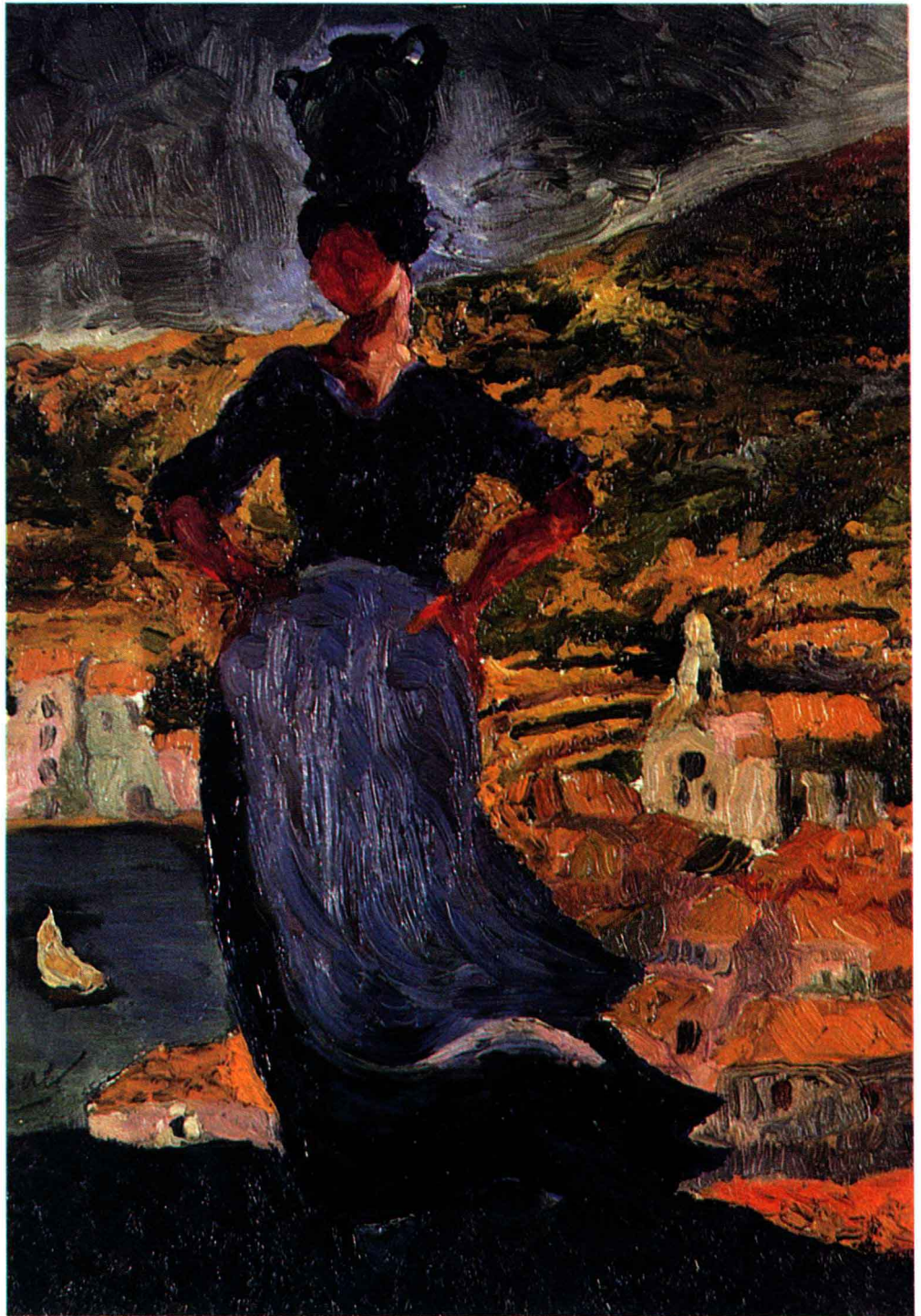
Dalí was a Catalanian and proud of it. He was born on 11 May 1904 in Figueras, a small town in the province of Gerona. Later he was to celebrate his birth in his own inimitable fashion: "Let all the bells ring! Let the toiling peasant straighten for a moment the ankylosed curve of his anonymous back, bowed to the soil like the trunk of an olive tree, twisted by the tramontana . . .

Look! Salvador Dalí has just been born!

It is on mornings such as this that the Greeks and the Phoenicians must have disembarked in the bays of Rosas and of Ampurias, in order to come and prepare the bed of civilization and the clean, white and theatrical sheets of my birth, settling the whole in the very centre of this plain of Ampurdán, which is the most concrete and the most objective piece of landscape that exists in the world."<sup>6</sup>

Salvador Dalí's Catalanian roots were the key to a major aspect of his work. The Catalanians are reputed to believe only in the existence of things they can eat, hear, feel, smell or see. Dalí made no secret of this materialistic and culinary atavism: "I know what I'm eating. I don't know what I'm doing." A fellow-Catalonian Dalí liked to quote, the philosopher Francesc Pujols, compared the spread of the Catholic church to a pig fattened for the slaughter; Dalí, on the other hand, adapted St. Augustine in his own typical fashion: "Christ is like cheese, a whole





*Portrait of Hortensia, Peasant Woman from Cadaqués, c.1918-19*

Portrait d'Hortensia, paysanne de Cadaqués

Oil on canvas, 35 x 26 cm

Private collection

mountain range of cheese!"<sup>7</sup> An orgiastic sense of food is present throughout Dalí's work: in *Soft Watches*, which derived from a dream of runny camembert (a metaphysical image of time, devouring itself and all else, too); in various versions of *Anthropomorphic Bread* (p. 65), in *Ordinary French Loaf with Two Fried Eggs Riding without a Plate, Trying to Sodomize a Heel of a Portuguese Loaf* (p. 64), in *Fried Eggs on a Plate without the Plate* (p. 71), in *Gala with Two Lamb Chops Balanced on Her Shoulder* (p. 75), in *Cannibalism of the Object* (p. 118), *Ghost of Vermeer van Delft, Usable as a Table, Dynamic Omelettes with Fine Herbs* or even in a picture on the subject of the Spanish Civil War which Dalí titled *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* (p. 109).





*Triple Portrait of García Lorca, 1924*  
done by Salvador Dalí  
in the “Oriente” Café in Madrid

Of course, Dalí’s Catalanian atavism was not expressed in terms of edibles only. We see it in the presence in his pictures of the Plain of Ampurdán, which he was very fond of and declared to be the loveliest scenery on earth. The stretch of Catalanian coastline from Cape Creus to Estarrit, with Cadaqués midway, provided Dalí with the landscape settings of his most famous paintings, lit with the Mediterranean’s unmistakable light. The rugged crags and cliffs were the origin of Dalí’s predilection for the worn and primeval: for fossils, bones, anthropomorphic objects, and the other twilit atavisms that dominate his output.

For Dalí, the centre of the world was in Catalonia – to be exact, at Perpignan railway station. “Do you suppose there are landscapes suitable for paintings all over the earth, simply because it is round? A round face isn’t all noses, is it? There are very few landscapes.”<sup>8</sup> To Dalí’s way of thinking, Catalonia was the earth’s nose, the point everything was focussed upon. In Dalí there was much of the paradigmatic Catalanian envisaged by Francesc Pujols: “When Catalonia is the queen and mistress of the world . . . when people take a close look at the Catalonians, it will be like looking at the very blood of Truth, and taking their hand will be like touching the hand of Truth . . . Because they are Catalonians, they will be repaid everything, wherever they may go.”<sup>9</sup> Dalí liked to apply these phrases to his own life, and was indeed quite relentless in doing so.

It seems fair to say that Dalí’s love of money was a Catalanian trait, one that harked back to Phoenician ancestry. It was not for nothing that André Breton anagrammatically dubbed him “Avida Dollars.” Money held a magical attraction for him. In *Les passions selon Dalí* (1968) Dalí wrote: “To a mystic such as myself, Man is an alchemical substance meant for the making of gold.”<sup>10</sup> He quite openly confessed that he delighted in accumulating gold through his art.

The fact of his birth in Figueras made Dalí a Catalanian – that is to say, a Spaniard of a particular kind. He was proud of being Spanish, and was delighted by Sigmund Freud’s comment when they met: “I have never seen a more complete example of a Spaniard. What a fanatic!”<sup>11</sup> In his *Journal d’un génie* Dalí declared: “The most important things that can happen to any painter in our time are these: 1. To be Spanish. 2. To be called Gala Salvador Dalí.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1904 (when Dalí was born) Catalonia’s Golden Age of trade had made it a wealthy province. The Catalonians are a proud people, given to pomp and display, and hoped to make Barcelona the Athens of the 20th century. Picasso was then twenty-three years old and making his way, while Antoni Gaudí, Catalonia’s remarkable and idiosyncratic architectural genius, was at work on the last of the great cathedral, the Sagrada Família.

Dalí’s father, Salvador Dalí y Cusí, came from Cadaqués, a fine fishing town positioned (in Lorca’s words) “at the still point where the scales of sea and mountains came to rest.” Dalí senior was an authoritarian, though his views were liberal. He had a notary’s practice in Figueras, some twenty miles from his birthplace. The young Salvador was adored and spoilt by his parents, and always got his own way. Everything was his for the asking – with a very few exceptions, among them access to

*Portrait of the Cellist Ricardo Pichot, 1920*  
Portrait du violoncelliste Ricardo Pichot  
Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 49 cm  
Private collection, Cadaqués







the kitchen. Dalí was to recall: “When I was six, it was a sin for me to eat food of any kind in the kitchen.” He would lay in wait for moments when he could steal away to enjoy his forbidden pleasures, “and while the maids stood by and screamed with delight I would snatch a piece of raw meat or a broiled mushroom on which I would nearly choke but which, to me, had the marvelous flavour, the intoxicating quality, that only fear and guilt can impart.

“Aside from being forbidden the kitchen I was allowed to do anything I pleased. I wet my bed until I was eight for the sheer fun of it. I was the absolute monarch of the house. Nothing was good enough for me. Behind the partly open kitchen door I would hear the scurrying of those bestial women with red hands; I would catch glimpses of their heavy rumps and their hair straggling like manes; and out of the heat and confusion that rose from the conglomeration of sweaty women, scattered grapes, boiling oil, fur plucked from rabbits’ armpits, scissors spattered with mayonnaise, kidneys, and the warble of canaries – out of that whole conglomeration the imponderable and inaugural fragrance of the forthcoming meal was wafted to me, mingled with a kind of acrid horse smell. As I said, I was a spoiled child.”<sup>13</sup>

Evidently Dalí’s childhood can account for a number of things in his later life and work. He himself offered an explanation for the astonishing extent to which his parents indulged him: “My brother died at the age of seven from an attack of meningitis, three years before I was born. His death plunged my father and mother into the depths of despair; they found consolation only upon my arrival into the world. My brother and I resembled each other like two drops of water . . . Like myself he had the unmistakable facial morphology of a genius. He gave signs of alarming precocity . . . My brother was probably a first version of myself, but conceived too much in the absolute.”<sup>14</sup> At times we intuit in Dalí’s life and work the presence of this brother whom he never knew and who in fact died nine months – the duration of a pregnancy – before Salvador Dalí’s birth.

In spite of his liberal attitudes, Dalí’s father would not so readily have accepted that his son was to be a painter if friends, particularly the Pichot family, had not encouraged the youth in his wish. Dalí later recalled the decisive role the family played in his life: “My parents had already undergone the influence of the personality of the Pichot family before me,” he wrote in *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. “All of them were artists and possessed great gifts and an unerring taste. Ramón Pichot was a painter. Ricardo a cellist, Luis a violinist, Maria a contralto who sang in opera. Pepito was, perhaps, the most artistic of all.”<sup>15</sup> The Pichots would give concerts by moonlight, and would not shy from hauling their grand piano up onto the cliffs. “So if I paint grand pianos on cliffs or by cypresses, it is by no means a fantastic dream vision,” Dalí noted; “they are things I have seen, things that have made an impression on me.” It was when Dalí saw pictures Ramón Pichot had painted that he decided to become a painter. “But the paintings that filled me with the greatest wonder were the most recent ones, in which deliquescent impressionism ended in certain canvases by frankly adopting in an almost uniform

“At the age of six I wanted to be a cook. At seven I wanted to be Napoleon – and my ambition has steadily grown ever since.”

*Portrait of my Father, 1920–1921*  
Portrait de mon père  
Oil on canvas, 90.5 x 66 cm  
Gift from Dalí to the Spanish state



