

Daydream Believers

By Bill Levy

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Brad Morse walked with a senior docent into the Dali Museum's exhibition hall and smiled at the assemblage of veteran staff members standing in front of a red curtain.

“My parents who founded this museum would have been so excited that we are unveiling a new Dali today. We don't know much about this painting, except it's been declared authentic by our art historians, it was donated by someone with the initials W.M., and it's titled 'Daydream Believer.' The only reference to this work in Dali's writings is a note that it was inspired by a chance encounter in Hartford, Connecticut.”

Morse pushed his remote and the curtain rose, revealing a small painting. “We assume that the winged figure in the center and in all the scenes is Metatron, the Archangel of Life, who appears to be rescuing a myriad of famed heroes. We have no idea who the slight, dour man is, but he is always at Metatron's side.”

December 1934 – Hartford, Connecticut

After his flamboyant discourse on Art at the Wadsworth Atheneum, thirty-year-old Salvador Dali left his wife to deal with the adoring aficionados and reporters, and ambled out alone into the quiet New England cold. He stood on the art museum's walkway in his cape and turban, staring up at the life-sized bronze statue of American's Revolutionary War hero, Nathan Hale. Dali breathed in the brisk December air and rapped his walking stick against the base of the eight foot pedestal. Then he heard a sigh. He glanced to his left and saw the young man hunched over on a wooden bench.

The man looked up at Dali. “You’re, you’re him.”

“I’m him.”

“I’m, I’m a nobody. Your painting with the four melting clocks inspired me to withdraw into one of my daydreams. My father had a Swiss watch and. . .”

“What did you dream?”

“I, I was in the Swiss Alps dodging pikes and rescuing William Tell from his arch-enemy, Gessler.”

“Did you save him?”

“I’m, I’m always successful in my dreams.”

“That’s wonderful! Give me two hours a day of activity, and I’ll take the other twenty-two in dreams. I believe that one day it will have to officially be admitted that what we have christened reality is an even greater illusion than the world of dreams.”

“That, that would make me very happy.” The man peered up at the Nathan Hale statue and, abruptly, his eyes widened and then closed, while his fingers and feet began fidgeting. Several minutes passed before he opened his eyes.

“How did you do?” Dali inquired.

“I, I arrived just in time to save Schoolmaster Hale from getting hung by the British.”

“How often do you have these daydreams?”

“Whenever I, I get stressed or when the perfect stimulus hits me.”

“I envy you,” Dali said, twirling his waxed moustache. “You have such a vivid imagination.”

“Nah, I’m, I’m just a pitiful, boring nebbish who uses fantasy to get by.”

“What’s a nebbish?”

“Someone with no backbone, no confidence. Someone easily bullied or manipulated. A, a loser.”

“A man who creates such dreams is no loser.”

“You’re, you’re the one with the imagination the way you captured the subconscious on canvas in your *The Persistence of Memory*. You have enormous ingenuity.”

“Not really. My inspiration for that painting was French Camembert cheese; I had hallucinations after eating too much of it.”

Suddenly, the young man’s eyes closed, and his fingers and feet began to fidget again. After several minutes, he opened his eyes.

“Where were you this time?” Dali asked.

“I, I was in France in 1430 saving Joan of Arc,” the young man, Walter Mitty, explained.

He stared at Dali. “And, and why are your eyes closed? Are you having your own daydream?”

“No. I’m imagining a multi-dimensional surrealistic tribute to heroic martyrs throughout the ages.” Dali eyed his companion, and then pulled a small sketch pad and a pencil out of his cape. “Please write down your address, Señor Mitty. When I finish this painting, it will be yours.”