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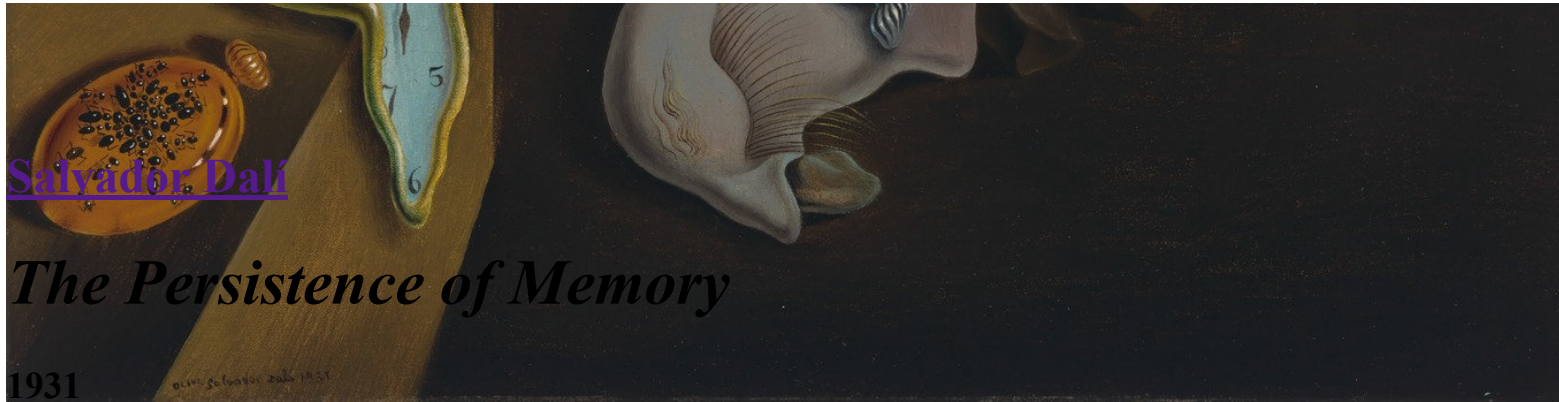
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[On view](#)

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

9 1/2 x 13" (24.1 x 33 cm)

Credit

Given anonymously

Object number

162.1934

Copyright

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Department

Painting and Sculpture

This work is on view on Floor 5, in a Collection Gallery, with [12 other works](#) online.

Salvador Dalí has [42 works](#) online.

There are [2,321 paintings](#) online.

Dalí rendered his fantastic visions with meticulous verisimilitude, giving the representations of dreams a tangible and credible appearance. In what he called "hand painted dream photographs," hard objects become inexplicably limp, time bends, and metal attracts ants like rotting flesh. The monstrous creature draped across the painting's center resembles the artist's own face in profile; its long eyelashes seem insectlike or even sexual, as does what may or may not be a tongue oozing from its nose like a fat snail.

Gallery label from 2015

Additional text

Time is the theme here, from the melting watches to the decay implied by the swarming ants. The monstrous fleshy creature draped across the paintings center is an approximation of Dalí's own face in profile. Mastering what he called "the usual paralyzing tricks of eye-fooling," Dalí painted this work with "the most imperialist fury of precision," but only, he said, "to systematize confusion and thus to help discredit completely the world of reality." There is, however, a nod to the real: The distant golden cliffs are those on the coast of Catalonia, Dalí's home.

Gallery label from *Dalí: Painting and Film*, June 29–September 15, 2008

The Persistence of Memory is aptly named, for the scene is indelibly memorable. Hard objects become inexplicably limp in this bleak and infinite dreamscape, while metal attracts ants like rotting flesh. Mastering what he called "the usual paralyzing tricks of eye-fooling," Dalí painted with what he called "the most imperialist fury of precision," but only, he said, "to systematize confusion and thus to help discredit completely the world of reality." It is the classical Surrealist ambition, yet some literal reality is included too: the distant golden cliffs are the coast of Catalonia, Dalí's home.

Those limp watches are as soft as overripe cheese—indeed "the camembert of time," in Dalí's phrase. Here time must lose all meaning. Permanence goes with it: ants, a common theme in Dalí's work, represent decay, particularly when they attack a gold watch, and become grotesquely organic. The monstrous fleshy creature draped across the painting's center is at once alien and familiar: an approximation of Dalí's own face in profile, its long eyelashes seem disturbingly insectlike or even sexual, as does what may or may not be a tongue oozing from its nose like a fat snail.

The year before this picture was painted, Dalí formulated his "paranoiac-critical method," cultivating self-induced psychotic hallucinations in order to create art. "The difference between a madman and me," he said, "is that I am not mad."

Publication excerpt from The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999

Provenance Research Project

This work is included in the [Provenance Research Project](#), which investigates the ownership history of works in MoMA's collection.

Galerie Pierre Colle, Paris. 1931

Julien Levy Gallery, New York. Purchased from Pierre Colle, by 1934

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchased from Julien Levy by an anonymous friend of the Museum as a gift, 1934

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Provenance Research Project

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