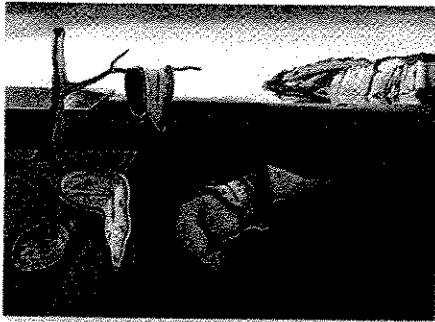
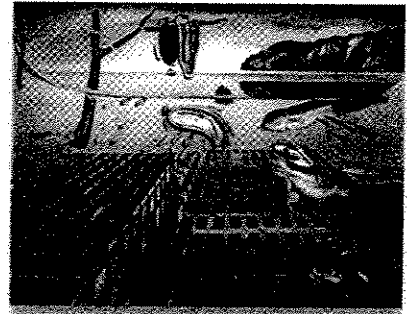


Analysis of The Persistence of Memory

What is *The Persistence of Memory*?



The Persistence of Memory or *La persistencia de la memoria* is a painting by artist Salvador Dalí. It is also known as Droopy Watches, Melting Clocks or Soft Watches. Dalí, a noted surrealist famed for his beautiful paintings, created the picture in 1931. *The Persistence of Memory* quickly became one of his most



prominent works, [a sort of “sequel” to Droopy Watches—*The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*—was created by the same artist in 1952-1954, (see right)]. *The Persistence of Memory* has been owned by many different museums throughout time, and will be moved around in the near future to various art exhibits throughout the world. It is owned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

The upper right hand corner of the picture contains cliffs. These are said to be in remembrance of the cliffs of Port Lligat, which is where Dalí spent most of his life. Spain was where the painting was not only created, but where Dalí was born and did most of his work. *The Persistence of Memory* was done with oil on canvas, and is 24.1 cm x 33 cm in dimension. Oil on canvas is the medium of this painting.

Why did Dalí paint *The Persistence of Memory*?

The Persistence of Memory can be seen as “a landscape, a still-life, and a self-portrait.”

The Persistence of Memory is a landscape; its cliffs in the upper-right-hand corner represent the cliffs characteristic of northeast Spain. The rest of the painting, however, does not offer much in the way of clues as to other details of the area represented—for example, we have no idea as to the climate of the space symbolized.



Clocks shown drooping over tree branches, tables, and washed up on a beach can represent the passing of time in a slow, undefined manner. However, the ants and fly on the two left-most watches can



symbolize death, decay and fear. The closed pocket watch looks as if it has died—the multitude of ants on this particular watch brings to mind the human being’s natural fear of death and the unknown. These elements of the painting make it appear more nightmare-like than merely dream-like.

On the concept of the watches in the painting, Nathaniel Harris has said that Dali’s picture brings to mind “the seemingly universal human preoccupation with time and memory.” Leonard Shlain has also pointed out the sand, on which the largest clock has washed up, and the remarkable shape of the ants crawling over the closed watch—hourglasses. “Sand, hourglasses, and watches”, he says, “all connect below the threshold of awareness till the viewer’s mind swings around to focus on the very nature and meaning of time.”

We can see evidence of still-life in the tree on the table. This tree may symbolize hope—though it is, on the contrary, quite dead-looking and out of place.



Another aspect of the picture comes in the form of the watch washed up on the sand. Upon looking closely at this clock, we may interpret its odd shape and long eyelashes as that of a human face. This is likely a self-portrait, (a picture an artist makes of his or herself). It shows that no one is immune to memory and the passage of time, like, (as some might say), “sand through an hourglass”.



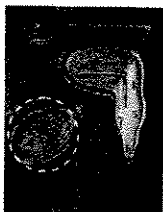
These are all reasonable theories as to what Dali may have been thinking when he created this picture, as well as what he may have meant by the many details within.

What Elements does *The Persistence of Memory* Include?

Line— There is definitely evidence of line usage in this painting. An example of this element is seen in the self-portrait clock, (mentioned above), in the center of the picture. Smooth lines separate the odd shape from its surrounding beach, giving the figure a soft, languid feel. Other evidence of similar line structure can be seen through the other soft watches in the picture, such as the one lying on the table. This type of smooth contour is contrasted by the sharp lines of the scenery in the background.



Shape— Two types of shapes are organic and geometric. Geometric shapes are simple. Some examples are triangles and rectangles. This painting has some geometric shapes. For example, the table upon which the tree sits is a prism derived from a rectangle. The closed orange pocketwatch is an oval. The blue slab in the background also appears to be a thin rectangular prism.



The Persistence of Memory also incorporates more complex than geometric shapes. The picture includes the drooping watches, the painting, the tree sitting atop the table, as well



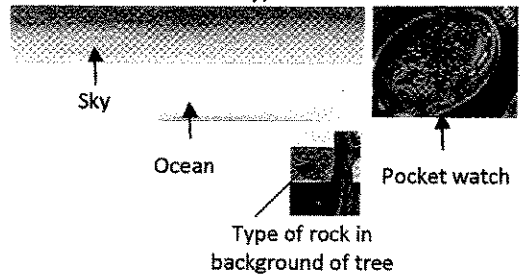
some organic shapes. These are examples of organic shapes within odd shapes in the middle of the painting, as the cliffs in the background.



There appears to be more organic than geometric shapes in this painting.



Color— Though warm colors, (reds, oranges and yellows), are visible in the mountainous part of Dali's painting, most of the color scheme is dominated by cooler shades, (greens, blues and violets), particularly of the duller variety. The usage of these types of colors allows the viewer to see the painting as a dark and somewhat depressing scene. A complementary color is defined as colors opposite each other on the color wheel. Examples of complementary colors in this painting are shown in the faces of certain watches and their outlining borders, (blue and orange). The orange in the closed pocket watch is also contradicted in the sky, the ocean, and the blue slab of what could be a type of rock.



Intermediate colors are defined as colors that come between primary and secondary colors. These include blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, yellow-green, and yellow-orange.

Texture— Texture is what a surface looks or feels like. This element is very important in *The Persistence of Memory*. In the upper right hand corner, where Dali has painted cliffs reminiscent of his home country, jagged lines suggest a rough and rugged object. This use of texture also gives the cliffs a majestic quality. The ocean below is shown as smooth and glassy, with the reflection of the mountains upon it. The

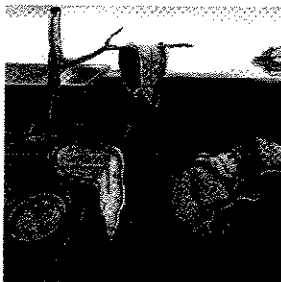


table is wooden-looking, as lines cross-hatch upon its surface.

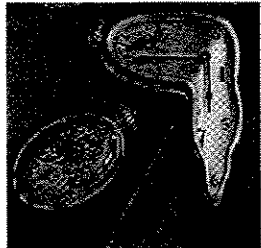


A tree growing out of this table appears brittle and grey, as it is narrow and somewhat weak-looking.

Quite importantly, the watches are given a watery, flowing quality, nearly like a fabric. The center-most watch is given a fold, as if it is draped over the odd shape in the middle, (other evidence of draping and folding can be seen in the other two open clocks, by the squiggly border lines and shadowing).



Value— Value is how light or dark an area is. Contrasts of tone are definitely used throughout this particular Dali painting. For example, the odd shape in the middle of the picture, (which has theoretically been determined to be an artist's self portrait), stands out because it is a light grey, while its surrounding area is darker. The droopiness of the clock on the table stands out because of the object's bright yellow border contrasting dramatically with its dark background, (the table). A closed

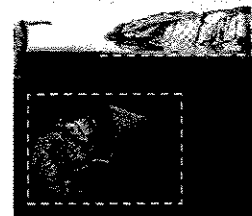


orange watch upon a dark brown backdrop offers a remarkable distinction in value as well. Contrast in this painting allows important components of the picture to be noticed by the viewer.

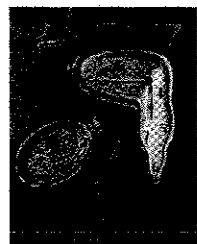


Space— *The Persistence of Memory* shows space because it does not seem flat to the person looking at it. It appears to have depth—clearly, the cliffs are in the background, because they are glowing with gold and yellow shades. The color choices of these cliffs demonstrates aerial perspective, (aerial perspective “deals with the effect of distance on colour and tones”). The mountains look farther off in the distance because of color choices.

Size is also important when determining space. The same cliffs are painted smaller than the large eyelash-donning shape near the center of the picture. The cliffs are shown tinnier, and the drooping shape is shown larger—this size difference allows the viewer to make a reasonable conclusion; that the cliffs are in the distance, while the latter shape, (as well as several others, such as the tree and several other watches), are in the foreground.



The artist also uses overlapping to demonstrate space. For example, the tree overlaps the ocean. We can therefore come to the conclusion that the tree and the clock hanging off of it are in front of the ocean.

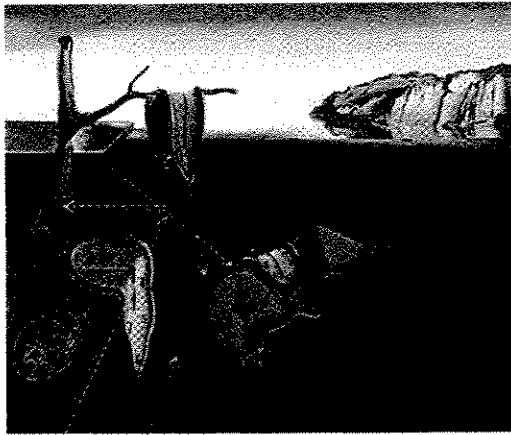


Perspective is demonstrated through the three dimensional table, to the left side of the painting. It gives the area space, as it looks solid and touchable. The table leads our eyes through the painting, giving it depth. This particular table also appears solid because of the shadowing used. The clocks and tree leave shadows on the table. We feel that the light source in this painting must be coming from the right, because most of the shadows are projected on the left. Shadows are similarly used with the background cliffs,



to give the appearance of rocky and jaggedness.

What is the Center of Interest of *The Persistence of Memory*?



The center of interest of a painting is where the eye is held within that painting. The center of interest within this Dali work is the large droopy shape in the middle, with the clock hanging over it. It is the center of interest because it is painted large, and with great contrast to its background, ensuring it is noticed. Also, if we follow the angle of the table's edge up and along the tree, we can observe the soft watch hanging off of it—this clock appears to be pointing down, towards the limp figure. What's more, is that many of the objects found in this painting are pointing towards the odd shape—such as the

bottommost edge of the table, as well as the corner of the slab of rock in the upper left hand corner. These details make it quite impossible for us to miss the center of interest of the painting.

Is *The Persistence of Memory* Naturalistic, Semi-Abstract, Abstract or Non-Objective?

This painting could be considered both abstract and naturalistic. Naturalism is defined as something that is actually seen by the artist. The artist then attempts to duplicate the thing he or she sees, (complete duplication is a physical impossibility). In the case of this picture, the golden cliffs in the background are something that the artist, Salvador Dali, had truly seen and experienced during his lifetime. He represented them in a lifelike fashion within this painting.

Much more of this picture, however, is abstract. When an artist uses abstraction, he or she is using what the artist knows to be true, but is rearranging what he/she sees into something that allows their artistic expression to be exposed. In this case, Dali, who was well known for his surrealist drawings, paintings and sculptures, (surrealism is the expression of dreams and fantasy), took an object that we all know of, clocks. He then drooped them over his scene to represent something different than just watches. When we look at this picture, we can see into the mind of the artist, and experience what he was feeling upon creating it.

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