

Dalí and Duchamp: Self-Reflection and the Mother's Body

By Miguel Escribano

The friendship between Salvador Dalí and Marcel Duchamp began around 1930 and continued until Duchamp spent his final summers close to Dalí in Cadaqués, from 1958-68.¹ For nearly forty years, they enjoyed a long and mutually beneficial dialogue at the margins of Surrealism, eventually arriving at approaches to art that Dalí considered *mystical* and Duchamp *antiretinal*, but that might both come under the heading of *ontological*— they shared a concern with the perceiving self. A comparison of the artists' parallel, contemporaneous treatments of a particular theme reveals how psychoanalysis, philosophical reflection and the methods and meanings of religious art variously contributed to their respective positions.

The representation of the female body lurks in almost every cranny of art history, as presence or absence, through gradations of beauty, sensuality and eroticism, and beyond these to meanings in secular and religious contexts. Despite Christianity's purported focus on a male God and his Son, for example, the Virgin Mary is essential to its visual mythology of birth, death and salvation. But at the foundation of these extended meanings is the essential significance to each individual, that one particular maternal body defined our existence in the world as mortal beings. We shall focus on two contrasting works that were both essentially reflections on the self, but with these concerns embodied in representations of the female body – the sexual, maternal and mortal female body, as physically and psychically defining the parameters of the self. Dalí painted *Assumpta Corpuscularia Lapislazulina* in 1952, during the period from 1946 to 1966 in which Duchamp worked on *Étant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage*. We can trace our speculations, as well as the artists', back to

Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, or *Large Glass* (1915-23), which Dalí later told André Parinaud belonged "to another planet."²

For twenty years, Duchamp worked on his construction *Étant donnés*, in which he staged a confrontation between the viewer and the prostrate body of a woman – possibly dead, definitely naked. Duchamp manipulates the viewing experience to bring the focus of its exposition of the female body back onto the viewer, who is obliged to furtively peep through holes in a door to see it, aware of the possibility of being observed in turn. The viewer confronts his or her own horror and fascination, provoking thoughts and fears of death and desire, origins and end.

In 1952, while Duchamp worked on *Étant donnés*, Salvador Dalí painted his *Assumpta*, in which he also depicted a mother's body, using his wife Gala as model for the Virgin Mary's assumption into Heaven. Dalí's altarpiece is a two-dimensional surface which leaves us separated from its depicted space, yet despite its formal dissimilarity to Duchamp's work, similar concerns are addressed. It too is concerned with visualising our origin and end in the mother's body.



Inside view of Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage* (1946–1966), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Salvador Dalí *Assumpta Corpuscularia Lapislazulina* (1952), Colección Masaveu, Oviedo

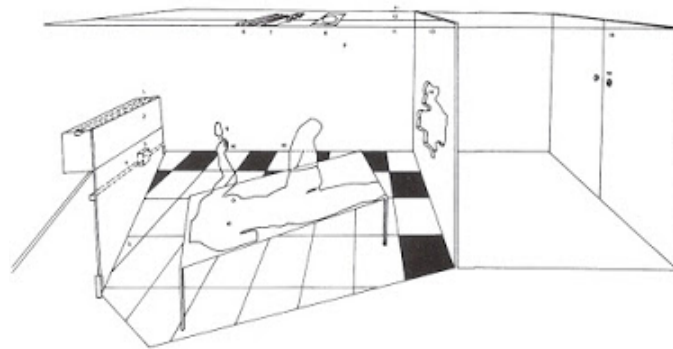
Dalí's Mannerist elongation of the maternal body in the *Assumpta* questions the viewer's perceptions of reality, albeit in a different way to *Étant donnés*. Dalí's difficulty in imagining the maternal body, the harbinger of sexuality and mortality, was evident in his earliest Surrealist paintings, or with experiments in anamorphic distortion of the 1930s. It was manifested in disfigured bathers he painted in 1928, and in the soft recesses stamped with the words "ma mère ... ma mère" of the *Enigma of Desire* (1929), revealing the horror of the womb that Dalí described in 1967:

a woman's sexual organs will always be for me an obscure cavern where body fluids abound, from which children and embryos emerge, and which contain soft traps. Like Leonardo, I persist in trying to draw it without ever being able to put an end to the confusion caused by its forbidden aspects and uncertainties.³

When Duchamp first visited Dalí in Cadaqués, in 1933, they likely discussed such phobic visualisation of the female body, consolidated by the end of that year in theoretical writings in which Duchamp had a hand. Man Ray also visited, and took photos of the "soft" architecture of Barcelona that illustrated Dalí's article 'On the terrifying and edible beauty of *modern style* architecture', published alongside 'The Phenomenon of Ecstasy'.⁴ In these and other texts of the 1930s, Dalí traced the visualisation of woman through the history of Western art – as sexual, mortal, maternal, evil, hysterical or ecstatic. By 1952, then, Dalí and Duchamp had long participated in reflections on such "terrifying" aspects of the female body as hard and soft, womb and tomb.

One common aspect of the two artists' consideration of vision and representation is that of revelation – literal and mechanically enacted in Duchamp's work, metaphorical and implicit in Dalí's. Philosophical revelation for Duchamp, mystical for Dalí. Despite differences in the ways that they set up the works in question, both had recourse to established symbolism and

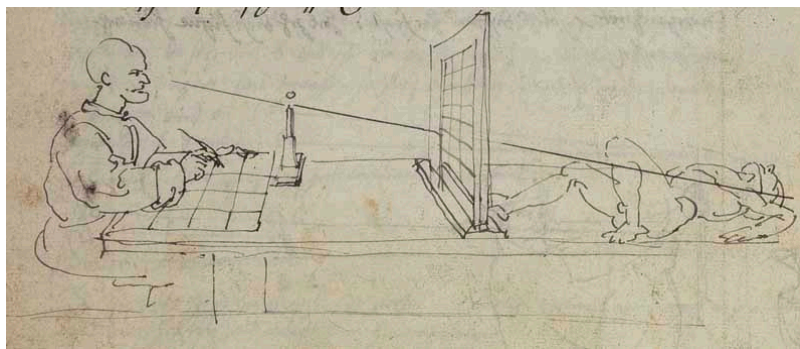
to traditional techniques of geometric composition. In the *Assumpta*, the strictly controlled perspective of Dalí's *Christ of St. John of the Cross* is interjected within the flowing forms of the Virgin's expansive body, while Duchamp's construction also makes a knowing reference to traditional composition – Jean François Lyotard's "isometric representation" of *Étant donnés* gives an idea of Duchamp's use of perspective, especially when juxtaposed with its precursor, Dürer's woodcut, *Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman* from *The Painter's Manual*. The latter was designed to serve a practical purpose for artists, but our modern mindset impels us to look beyond the mechanics of representation to question the image of the moustachioed artist shooting his male gaze from its phallic prop at a suggestively posed woman. We should temper these thoughts with the fact that they were not essential to Dürer, who drew another version in which a reclining man's genitals are regarded with similar disinterest. This is a helpful reminder of the detached nature of Duchamp's speculation on the origins of the self in the female body.



Jean François Lyotard,
Reconstruction and isometric representation of Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage*



Albrecht Dürer: *Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman*
Woodcut: ca. 1600, from *The Painter's Manual*

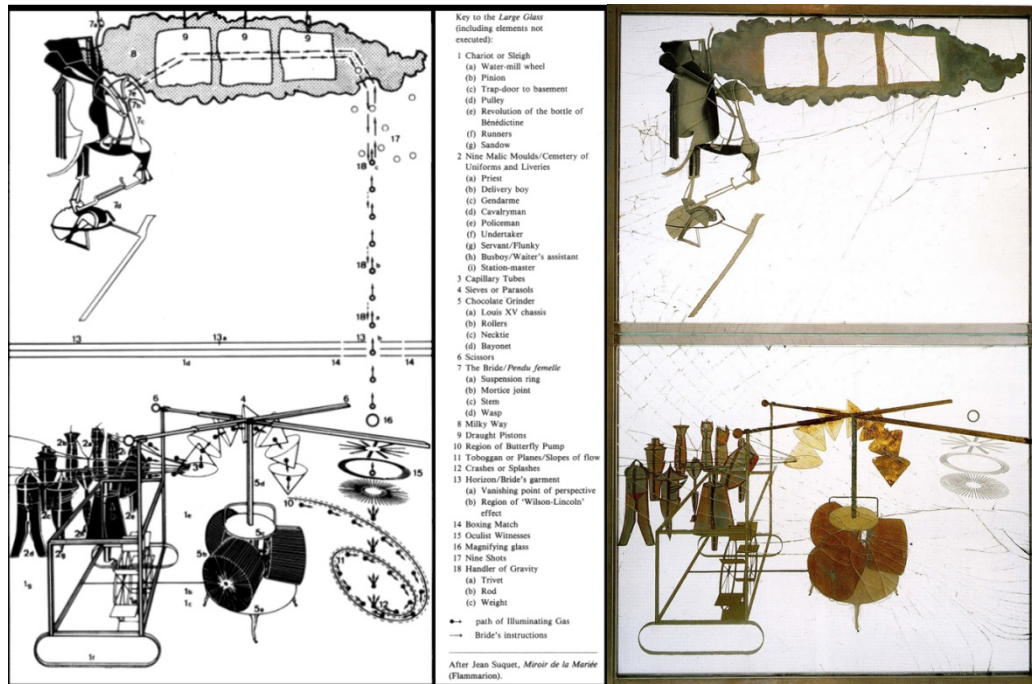


Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München holds a copy of Dürer's own copy of the 1525 Manual, with an inserted loose leaf with a hand written text and sketch by Dürer.

Duchamp's construction locks the observer into an awkward, voyeuristic viewing experience, as the focus of attention oscillates between the staged scene spied through a peep-hole – of sex, of death, or both – and consciousness of the space behind the viewer's back. This is contemplative, ontological reflection – navel-gazing, figuratively and literally. It also highlights Duchamp's philosophical attitude, bringing to mind Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of the gaze, especially as developed by Jacques Lacan. The experience of seeing oneself seeing oneself – of awareness of *being* in Merleau-Ponty's "scopic field" – were linked by Lacan to the "mirror stage" of development, with the legacy of loss of the original mother-child relationship lingering as the "scopic relation" underlying aesthetic experience.⁵ Despite not mentioning Dalí or Duchamp, it is hard to believe Lacan did not

have Dalí in mind in 1964 when he spoke on ‘Anamorphosis’, for example, or *Étant donné*s when he considered the scopic field. Lacan’s algebraic explanations of the psyche even echo Duchamp’s diagrammatic approach.

The specular, scopic relation to the female body had already formed the theoretical scaffold for another of Duchamp’s major works, the *Large Glass*, where the “bride” is invisible – the prism through which everything else is perceived. This work was back in focus in 1954 when Michel Carrouges published his essay ‘Les Machines célibataires’, providing an unexpected link between Duchamp’s diagram of sexual-mechanical function, failure and frustration and Dalí’s mystic vision of ascendancy to Heaven. In September 1950, Carrouges had published ‘Le coeur surréaliste’ in the religious journal *Études carmélitaines*, annoying André Breton and aligning himself with Dalí – the article that followed Carrouges’s was ‘A propos de la Madone de Port-Lligat de Salvador Dalí’ by Michel Tapié.⁶ This magazine had been a unique and fascinating forum for a discussion of theology and psychology since the early thirties, and had produced issues dedicated to asceticism, mysticism, and other subjects of interest to Dalí, who contributed ‘Reconstitution du corps glorieux dans le ciel’ in 1952 – a description of his *Assumpta* according to the pseudo-scientific doctrine of “nuclear mysticism” that he was shaping.



The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)
 Marcel Duchamp 1915-1923
 created from Duchamp's notes by Jean Suquet (includes parts never completed).

(Courtesy of Jean Suquet).

Duchamp, as usual, was able to remain on the margins of these factions. While he had no doubt discussed the “playful physics” of his *Large Glass* with Dalí, and probably appreciated Dalí’s pseudoscientific proposition of nuclear mystic vision, he maintained his respect for Surrealism. Asked about his “antiretinal attitude” on completing *Étant donnés* in 1966, Duchamp explained that he was reacting against “too great an importance given to the retinal. Since Courbet, it’s been believed that painting is addressed to the retina [...], except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat.”⁷ He looked back to when “all painting had been literary or religious: it had all been at the service of the mind.” Indeed, Duchamp already advocated the antiretinal as he embarked on *Étant donnés* in 1946.⁸ Perhaps he even expressed himself in similar terms when he spent several months with Dalí in Arcachon in 1939-40, while they waited to escape France for the USA, and Duchamp was

one of the few artists from Paris with whom Dalí remained on good terms. This was the time at which Dalí declared his intention to reclaim the art of the past for Surrealism, and to personally “become classic”. Dalí was taking stock of himself and his disintegrating relationship with the Surrealists, and he and Duchamp were both engaged in projects of self-reflection: Dalí was writing his *Secret Life*, and Duchamp compiling his *Boîtes-en-Valise*, providing the opportunity to discuss the construction and meaning of the *Large Glass*.

Since 1933, Dalí had been included in shows in the USA that often placed him alongside works by Bosch, Breugel and others, leading up to ‘Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism’ at the MoMA, 1936-37, which also included Duchamp. Dalí’s inclusion in the ‘Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme’, organised by André Breton and Paul Éluard at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1938, was a swan song, and the rupture with the Surrealists was complete by 1939. With Breton denouncing Dalí’s paranoiac-critical method as “a game of amusement akin to the *crossword puzzle*”, and calling for a return to automatism, Dalí was defiantly attuned to Duchamp’s call for an art at the service of the intellect.⁹ When Dalí returned to Spain in 1948, he declared his intention to paint exclusively religious art, having recognised that the themes explored by psychoanalysis that had informed his Surrealism were already present in the classical tradition.

While in the USA, the theories of Carl Jung and especially Otto Rank seem to have provided a more positive framework for the visualization of the mother than Freud had done, incidentally reinforcing Dalí’s appreciation of certain aspects of Christian art. In 1950, in terms and in the context of religious imagery relevant to Dalí’s interests, Erich Fromm described the fundamental difference between Freud’s concept of “religious experience” – one of “independence and the awareness of one’s powers” – and that of Jung, which focused on “the feeling of dependence and powerlessness at the core of religious experience”.¹⁰

Fromm gives ascendancy to Jung's conception of religion that panders to a need for dependence instilled already in the foetus:

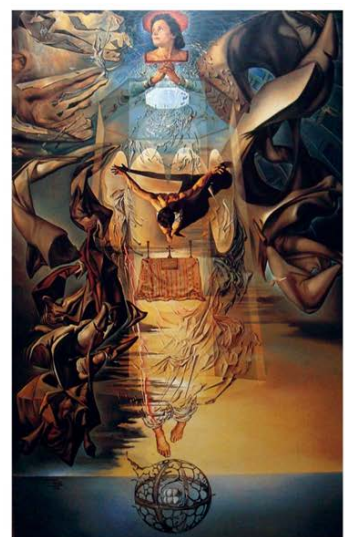
The infant after birth is still in many ways part and parcel of the mother, and its birth as an independent person is a process which takes many years [...] As long as man is related by these ties to mother, father, family, he feels protected and safe. He is still a foetus; someone else is responsible for him. ¹¹

Fromm's description of Jung's "individuation" process appears to match the progression of Dalí's self-representation, from the pathetic, foetal *Masturbator* in the *Enigma*, limply attached to its memories of its lost mother, to the figure of Christ ascending to Heaven within his mother's body; Jung called individuation a "philosophical, spiritual and mystical experience," conceived metaphysically as the incarnation of the God concept within the self.¹²

Even more important to Dalí was Rank's theory of the *Trauma of Birth*. Already in 1929, during the rapid development of his distinctive Surrealist method and style, Dalí's paintings of obvious Freudian stamp were soon complemented by the influence of Rank. Dalí may have become aware of the *Trauma of Birth* during his visit to Paris that year, and absorbed the theory by the time he exhibited there in November. The aesthetic of the hard and the soft of the *Enigma*, for example, with its pathetic whimper for a lost mother, is a visualised essay on the psychological effects of our origins in, traumatic expulsion from, and desired return to the earthly paradise of the womb.

In an interview in early 1952, Dalí included his intrauterine life among his memories, describing the trauma of his birth as empirical fact, establishing his desire for reparation as a motivating factor for that summer's master painting, the *Assumpta*.¹³ This completed a set of paintings that narrated a cycle from the womb, through death and return to the intrauterine paradise, following on from the *Madonna of Portlligat* (1949, 1950) and *Christ of St John of*

the Cross (1951). Not only has the Virgin Mary ascended to heaven, but her immortal, virgin son has been reabsorbed into the intrauterine paradise within her, annulling the effects of both sexuality and mortality. Reinforcing the autobiographical emphasis of these paintings, Dalí mythologised his return to live in the womblike bay of Portlligat at Cadaqués as a return to the intrauterine paradise. Gala may have represented Dalí's mother in these paintings and in his affections, but the *Assumpta* is essentially about his real mother Felipa, who died when he was sixteen.



Salvador Dalí *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1949)
The Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Salvador Dalí *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1950)
Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan

Salvador Dalí *Christ of St John of The Cross* (1951)
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow

Salvador Dalí *Assumpta Corpuscularia Lapislazulina* (1952)
Colección Masaveu, Oviedo

Dalí acknowledged his debt to Rank in a chapter of the *Secret Life* titled ‘Intra-Uterine Memories’, written with the benefit of conversations with Anaïs Nin during a stay with Caresse Crosby, after arriving in the USA in 1940. Rank had analysed Nin in Paris after breaking with Freud in 1926 as a result of his controversial theory, which shifted emphasis onto the original bond with the mother, calling many of Freud’s precepts into question. Dalí wrote, “It seems increasingly true that the whole imaginative life of man tends to reconstitute symbolically by the most similar situations and representations that initial paradisiacal state.” Birth, Dalí explained, is expulsion from paradise, and death is a return to the womb. Alongside Leonardesque drawings of foetuses, Dalí illustrated the chapter with Raphael’s womblike *Madonna of the Chair*, a reproduction of which Felipa had hung by his childhood bed.



Raphael Sanzio, *Madonna della Sedia* (c.1513-4), Palazzo Pitti, Florence

Understanding Christian imagery as a reflection of a psychologically desired state of affairs, the approval of the doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in 1950 was a welcome and timely event for Dalí. Jung, too, welcomed Pope Pius XII's approval of the doctrine with a congratulatory note; his belief in archetypal pairs of opposites left the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit lacking a fourth aspect that Mary provided to his satisfaction.¹⁴ The patriarchal church had taken nearly two thousand years to accommodate the mother in its mythological structure of heaven.¹⁵

Until the Assumption was accepted, the awkward question of Mary's death or immortality was left unresolved in the dominant iconography and apocryphal account of the Dormition of the Virgin.¹⁶ This is the scene painted by Mantegna and hanging in the Prado that fascinated Lorca, as Dalí remarked in 1950.¹⁷ The hesitant ambiguity in depictions of Mary “sleeping” seems to correspond to psychological resistance to contemplating the death of the mother. The Assumption, on the other hand, bears an unequivocally reassuring message – Mother is alive and well, and living in heaven!



Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506)
The Dormition of the Virgin, ca 1461. tempera on panel 54 × 42 cm. Prado Museum

Having remarked on Dalí's recollection of Mantegna's panel in 1950, it is worth stopping to consider whether he might have pointed the way for Duchamp to consider this painting during his elaboration of *Étant donnés*, either at this time or in earlier discussions. There are certainly elements of the composition common to both works: the reclining woman – perhaps dead, perhaps alive; the chequered floor; the landscape background with running water or *chute d'eau*; the lit candles and incense burner that recall the *gaz d'éclairage*. We might even wonder whether Duchamp could have seen the grieving apostles as frustrated bachelors around a bride.

In 1951, only five months before he announced his forthcoming *Assumpta*, Dalí gave his talk 'Picasso y yo'.¹⁸ He outlined his differences with Picasso, and thanked him for revealing

the ugliness of pure materialism, thereby opening the way for mystical painting. Dalí seems to be following in the slipstream of Duchamp, who had already explained his differences with Picasso in the Sweeney interview published in 1946, in which he summed up his development from the cubistoid *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1911) to the *Large Glass* (1915-23). Unlike Picasso, he had wanted painting to serve his purposes, away from the “physical emphasis [which] Courbet had introduced [...] in the nineteenth century.”

Dalí had followed Duchamp a long way from his own early obsession with Picasso in the early 1920s, but it is interesting to note one common influence on Cubist materialism and on Dalí's nuclear mysticism – El Greco. Intriguingly, we might also detect his presence in Duchamp's *Large Glass*. El Greco's influence on Cubism had to do with the visual impact of his paintings on Picasso, who was more interested in their writhing planes of colour as an accumulation of instances of passive vision of physical rather than spiritual space, than in their meanings. But El Greco's paintings were also emotionally charged theological discourses that could be deciphered on their own terms, and the simultaneity of multiple viewpoints that interested Picasso was not the same as the unique, subjectively experienced simultaneity of mystic vision that Dalí sought, and that Father Bruno de Jésus-Marie, editor of the *Études Carmélitaines*, described in 1949, in his book on El Greco and Sts. Teresa and John of the Cross.¹⁹ It was Father Bruno who brought to Dalí's attention the unusual perspective of a crucified Christ in a drawing by the Spanish mystic poet, St. John of the Cross, which had inspired Dalí's *Christ* in 1951, while Dalí formulated his thoughts as a 'Mystical Manifesto' specifically against materialism.

Dalí elaborated on his mystical method in an interview in February 1952, confirming the influence of the sources towards which Father Bruno had directed, or redirected him. Dalí qualified the objectivity of his “delirious” process, saying that he painted only what he saw

but, like St. John of the Cross, he saw what he wanted to see.²⁰ Like Duchamp's "playful physics", this is *playful theology*. The grand title of Dalí's Assumption honours, tongue-in-cheek, the disciplinary triumvirate that rules over the painting: Religion (*Assumpta*), Science (*Corpuscularia*) and Art (*Lapislazulina*). Dalí found such pseudo-scientific taxonomies both fun and productive, and said in 1976, "I can realise delirious syntheses that at times lead to nothing, but that are like a game for me. While scientists are serious people and serious people are, often, asses."²¹

As mentioned, it is possible that El Greco had already influenced Duchamp at the time he was shifting his Cubism away from Picasso's materialist concerns. Dawn Adès has remarked that Duchamp's *Large Glass* "hark[s] back to a sacred iconography of visions of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, depicted in a heavenward ascent above clouds and male worshippers."²² The iconographical standard for depicting Mary's ascent from earthly to heavenly domain was well established, but Duchamp's specific model seems to have been the *Assumption of the Virgin* by El Greco, which he could have seen in Chicago after he moved to the USA in 1915, while he was planning the *Large Glass*. Its binary structure represents the Virgin afloat in a cloud of predominantly feminine angels, ascending over a crowd of male apostles, forlorn beside an empty sarcophagus with feet not unlike those of Duchamp's chocolate grinder.²³



Domenikos Theotokopoulos, El Greco, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1577/79, Chicago Art Institute

If Duchamp had indeed used El Greco's *Assumption* as a compositional and thematic model for the *Large Glass*, it would be fair to assume that Dalí would have known this by 1952. We might wonder then if Dalí in turn took the *Large Glass* as a model for his own *Assumption*. There are certain formal similarities – the top-bottom division of the composition; the sweeping movement up the left hand side from an approximately circular shape at bottom centre, through odd, brown shapes, before pointing towards top-right; the skylight in the vault of Heaven where Duchamp has a trinity of windows; there is even a cross in the *Large Glass* where Christ's is invisible.



In any case, rather than the Chicago *Assumption*, it seems that Dalí was inclined to use a model closer to home. Dalí's composition more closely resembles El Greco's *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* in the Museum of Santa Cruz, Toledo, which Dalí and his friends visited in the 1920s, and which Dalí no doubt revisited after 1948, on his return to Spain. Rather than the denial of Mary's mortality of an Assumption, then, Dalí's chosen model would emphasise the denial of her sexuality. Dalí might have been further convinced of the suitability of El Greco's paintings of the majestically soaring Virgin as a model for his image of intrauterine return in the *Assumpta* by a recently published essay by Aldous Huxley. In 'Variations on El Greco' (1950), Huxley makes an observation, in hybrid, mystical-psychoanalytical language, that El Greco's

peculiar treatment of space and form tells a story of obscure happenings in the subconscious mind – of some haunting fear of wide vistas and the open air, some

dream of security in the imagined equivalent of a womb. The conscious aspiration towards union with, and perfect freedom in, the divine Spirit is overridden by a subconscious longing for the consolations of some ineffable uterine state.²⁴



El Greco
The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception
Museum of Santa Cruz, Toledo.

If El Greco's soaring Virgin provided an apt model for Dalí's depiction of mystical return to the intrauterine paradise, another religious image which Dalí, and indeed Duchamp, could easily have been familiar with, enacts reabsorption into the mother in a way that follows Dalí's 1949-52 narrative, while evoking Duchamp's mechanical metaphors. Shrine Madonnas, when they are closed, show Mary with the Christ Child in her lap, but open up to reveal scenes from the mysteries of salvation represented within her body.²⁵ The 15th century

Vierge Ouvrante illustrated here is in the Musée de Cluny museum of Medieval Art, a short distance from the Hôtel Meurice, where Dalí stayed when he was in Paris.

The mechanically enacted progression from birth to intrauterine return of the *Vierge Ouvrante* matches the life story that Dalí staged in three acts between 1949 and 1952. Birth (the *Madonna of Portlligat*) is evoked by the mother-child dyad of the Christ Child on the Virgin's lap. Death (*Christ of St. John of the Cross*) is revealed when the shrine Madonna is opened, in the form of a Crucifixion. Intrauterine return (*Assumpta Corpuscularia Lapislazulina*) is enacted when the Christ is closed away again within his mother's body.



The possibility that Dalí knew this *Vierge Ouvrante* at the time he was painting his *Assumpta* raises the question of whether its mechanical revelation of its meaning-laden contents might have played a part in Duchamp's construction of *Étant donnés*, with its enactment of revelation of content – Duchamp's transportation from Cadaqués to

Philadelphia of a particular door through which to see the work might acknowledge Dalí's complicity. There are other precedents of such mechanical revelation in Western art, and intriguingly they, too, are ones familiar to Dalí. There is a similar act of concealment and revelation in the viewing experience of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* in the Prado, where Dalí knew it well. When closed, the doors of Bosch's work show the Earth as a transparent womb, titled the *Creation of the World*. Opened, it counters those soft, circular origins with a jagged narrative of man's genesis, the corruption of his flesh through desire, and his death. Like the shrine Madonna, it repeats the narrative cycle for the viewer each time the doors are closed and opened again. A similar experience, but with the added element of awkward voyeurism invoked by Duchamp, was constructed by Jacques Lacan when he commissioned André Masson to interpret Courbet's *Origin of the World*, which he acquired in 1955, on a panel which concealed the painting itself. This showed a naked, reclining woman at an angle similar to that of the dummy in Duchamp's work, and similarly decapitated by the picture frame.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these possible antecedents of *Étant donnés* is a description by Palomino of his experience of viewing a *Christ Crucified* by Zurbarán concealed in a dimly lit room in the Dominican friary of San Pablo in Sevilla, where the moribund, semi-naked body of Christ could only be seen through a grille. Dalí must have read Palomino's treatise on art while preparing his own *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship* in 1947-8, and certainly by the time he painted his Christ. Dalí might then have shared his thoughts on Zurbarán's staged scopic experience with Duchamp early in the evolution of *Étant donnés*.

We have looked through a peep-hole onto the fertile dialogue between Dalí and Duchamp, and speculated on some of the fruits of their interaction. Dalí might have suggested ways for Duchamp to construct the mechanical and literal revelation of meaning in *Étant donnés*. Duchamp seems to have helped steer Dalí's metaphorical and mystical

revelation of meaning in the *Assumpta*. These speculations on origins and end in the maternal body were nicely illustrated for us in Adès and Jeffet's juxtaposition of the *Large Glass* and the *Christ of St John of the Cross* in the Dalí-Duchamp exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, 2017-18, which allowed us to see Dalí through the prism of Duchamp, staging the intrauterine return of Christ to his mother's body.



This photo was taken at the Royal Academy by the author.

Notes

- ¹ Dalí honoured Duchamp by making his *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935-41) the chronological culmination of his collection of art displayed in the Teatre-Museu in Figueres, which runs through El Greco, Gérard Dou, Ernest Meissonier, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, Marià Fortuny, and Modest Urgell.
- ² Duchamp began to think about the *Large Glass* in 1913, and exhibited the work in 1926. He compiled notes in the *Green Box* in 1934. Dalí recalled helping Duchamp compile the more extensive *Boîtes-en-Valise* in 1939-40. Duchamp included a hand-colored print depicting the upper half of the *Large Glass* in the *Boîte-en-valise* owned by The MoMA in New York, and it is not unreasonable to assume that this was prepared and discussed in Dalí's company, in Arcachon.
- ³ Pauwels, Louis with Salvador Dalí — *The Passions According to Dalí* (St. Petersburg, Florida: The Salvador Dalí Museum, 1985 [1968]) 60.
- ⁴ *Minotaure*, 3-4, 12th December 1933, 'On the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of *Modern Style Architecture*', pp. 69-76, 'The Phenomenon of Ecstasy', text, p. 76, collage, p. 77.
- ⁵ These philosophical reflections form the basis of Jacques Lacan's study of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "scopic field" and the "scopic relation" in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York, London: Penguin Group, 1977 - seminar originally delivered in 1964.
- ⁶ In the volume titled *Le Coeur*, of the *Études Carmélitaines*, published by Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 20th September 1950. Carrouges compared Proust's concept of love as "the fruit of chance" to Breton's "objective chance".
- ⁷ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 43.
- ⁸ James Johnson Sweeney, interview with Marcel Duchamp, in the *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art XIII*, no. 4-5, 1946, 19-21.
- ⁹ André Breton, 'Des tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste', *Minotaure*, Paris, nos. 13-4 (May 1939).
- ¹⁰ Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Bantam, 1967 [Original German, 1949]). Fromm compares Freud's and Jung's conceptions of religious experience. Dalí could have read the book in English translation from 1950.
- ¹¹ Fromm, 77.
- ¹² C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (2nd ed., tr. R. F. C. Hull. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989 [1938]) 157, 294.
- ¹³ Alberto L. de Lamela, 'Con Salvador Dalí en las regiones del subconsciente', New York; *El Diario de Nueva York*, 13th – 15th February 1952, in Mas, 114-9.
- ¹⁴ In 'A Psychological Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity' in *Collected Works of Carl G. Jung*, 2nd ed., vol. 11, Bollingen Series XX. Princeton University Press.
- ¹⁵ A condensed chronicle of the relevant theological concepts, particularly as they fed depictions of the Virgin Mary within the Western tradition of art, will leave intact the ambiguity that seems essential to Dalí and Duchamp's interest in these matters.

The Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven as a deity in his own right has been Christian dogma since the Council of Nicaea in 325. However, the question of Mary's status on her Assumption ("taking up") into heaven has been more problematic, with her scriptural significance relying on her mortality as a human. Despite this, she was fast-tracked to Heaven, past the Economy passengers waiting in line for Judgement Day. Orthodox churches, with their embrace of mystic aspects of Christianity, have been content with apocryphal narratives of Mary's Dormition, or "falling asleep", since they appeared as early as the 3rd century. For centuries, Christian art celebrated this miraculous resurrection and ascent to heaven, fuelled by the cult of Mary that flourished especially from the Middle Ages.

The Roman Catholic Church, intrinsically and for historical reasons, was obliged to dogmatically define the Assumption, and when the Council of Trent (1545-63) was unable to do so, the debate was carried on through and beyond the Reformation, in theological controversy and in

art. Eventually, in 1950, Pope Pius XII devised an official doctrine for the Catholic Church which still left open the question of whether Mary had actually gone through a bodily death: Mary, "having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory."

The question of Mary's sexuality is intertwined with this debate on her mortality – the problem being Original Sin. The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception concerns whether or not Mary was tainted at birth, not the question of her conception of Jesus, dealt with by the Doctrine of Incarnation. Again, its definition by Pope Pius IX in 1854 hardly clarifies the matter for a rational thinker. It declares that Mary, rather than being cleansed after the fact, was absolved from Original Sin from her very conception, through her pre-redemption by Christ.

We might wonder whether Dalí and Duchamp were amused that these questions caused endless chin-stroking at Councils of the Church's "bachelors", even reminding them of circular discussions presided over by Breton as the "Pope" of Surrealism.

- ¹⁶ Mary was found "sleeping" by the apostles, who placed her in a tomb from which she disappeared. *The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary*, probably by St. John the Theologian, viewed at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf08.vii.xlii.html?highlight=st.john#highlight>
- ¹⁷ 'To Spain, guided by Dalí', *Vogue* (New York, 15th May 1950), 54-7, 91.
- ¹⁸ 'Picasso y yo', 11th November 1951. Dalí's written version of the talk was published in *Mundo Hispánico*, no. 46 January 1952, 37-42.
- ¹⁹ Father Bruno's book, *Three Mystics: El Greco, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila* (1949), might have been the catalyst for Dalí's renewed interest in the mystics. John was imprisoned and tortured in Toledo in 1577-8 by his superiors in the calced Carmelites, whose Order he had been given permission to reform. El Greco, who was just a year older than John, had just arrived in Toledo.
- ²⁰ Alberto L. de Lamela, 'Con Salvador Dalí en las regiones del subconsciente', New York; *El Diario de Nueva York*, 13th – 15th February 1952, in Mas, 114-9.
- ²¹ Jean-François Fogel and Jean Louis Hue, 'Les mandales de Dalí', Paris; *Le Sauvage*, October 1976, in Mas, 261-76.
- ²² Dawn Adès, 'Surrealism, male-female', in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), 174.
- ²³ *La Asunción de la Virgen* by El Greco, in the Chicago Art Institute, was his first commissioned work in Toledo, for the Cistercian Convent of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, and was painted in 1577, the year of St. John of the Cross's imprisonment in the city. Duchamp had first painted a free-standing chocolate grinder in 1913, before moving to the USA, but he had already worked as a librarian and could have seen reproductions of the El Greco.
- ²⁴ Aldous Huxley, 'Variations on El Greco,' *Themes and Variations*, 1950. In *On Art and Artists*, 226-38.
- ²⁵ The oldest extant shrine Madonna, the *Madonna of Boubon*, is dated around 1200. This Madonna type originated in women's convents, inspired by medieval mysticism and Cistercian spirituality and flourished in France, Spain and Germany. Lists of extant *Vierges Ouvrantes* can be found in Gudrun Radler, *Die Schreinmadonna*, 1990, pp. 51-123. This information was collected from the website maintained by *The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio, on 20/1/2011*.

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