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Anis Shivani

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THE ESSENTIAL SALVADOR DALÍ

Anis Shivani

Figure Standing at a Window (1925)

The peaceful bay, at the window where she leans,
chastity in white, how we spend the summer,
before greater talents intrude, and we turn around.

Venus and a Sailor (1925)

Already the diminutive male, the sailor in her lap.
Kiss the vague image, not the lips themselves,
kiss only the painted profile, not the substance of man.

Woman at the Window in Figueres (c. 1926)

She is embellished by the fabrication of the town.
The balcony is a hothouse of gigantic suggestion.
Back turned to us, she contemplates the victory
of the mind never at rest, even in private lacemaking.
The town grows sturdier, the mountains sink down,
and the ability to concentrate is a jest to be coined.

Senicitas (1927–28)

I perceive the beginnings of healthy paranoia
in your rendition of the limbless body, attacked
by spatters of red worm-fests, clouds of blood-anger,
shimmerings of a heady transvestitism beyond sex.
Lorca, of course, died of a shot to his headstrong heart.
All the bloodless submerged lactation in the world
won't give us our genitals back. The body floats
awkwardly, more male than female, in the synergy
of the corpse moments before it revokes license
to conjure possible monsters, donkeys of the head.

The Wounded Bird (1928)

Breton dreamed of the bird that fell into the sea,
turning into a cow before dying. Your rough sand
extinguishes the fire of the heart, the bird a footprint
simplified like all death: the fall greater than the climb.

The Unsatisfied Desire (1928)

I wouldn't call it castration. Only a simple question,
about the origins of masturbation, that spun out of
control. The hand that embarks on accusation,
when the vagina is not looking, is the body's way
of claiming presence. The sea is too wide, too calm,
for argumentation to succeed. I dread the pink tokenism.

The Spectral Cow (1928)

Again the dream of Breton reversed for the inane.
How may a cow dream of its impending transference
from symbol of rectitude to betrayer of tradition?
I see it stripped of its flesh, not yet groaning,
so far removed from the fallen bird, it claims land.

The Great Masturbator (1929)

The style of sleep is bloat. The crotch hot and impotent,
ready to be sniffed. The grasshopper sings immortal
energy. The head inclines to the earth, snout-standing,
perversely ill. What fear then of women as they battle
phallic offensiveness? One sleeps through sex just as easily.

The Architechtonic Angelus of Millet (c. 1929)

We permit prayer to turn our hearts into stone.
Where is the female of the species to warn of soliloquy?

The Catalanian landscape, heart-weary of dull potato farming,
observes the cosmic battle of the worn female,
pushing her conditional phallus out to the face.

The Invisible Man (1929–32)

All men are hoary constituents of leftover architecture.
Always the face bleeds into the ruins of buildings,
legs denote presumptuous waterfalls that no longer slide,
and the jug woman looks away, not interested in guarding
the pieces coming together moment to moment, fatedly.

Chocolate (c. 1930)

“Beauty will always be edible.” Jug, urn, in any case the spout
dribbles on the apple, affront to man in mode of devotion.

Paranoiac Face (c. 1932)

I would say the puzzle is in the unmaking of the human face.
We sit over our faces like huts in Africa puzzling animate cool.

Solitude (1931)

We avoid looking into the face of the rock for all we’re worth.
Welcome the shell, protected from useless talk, the calumny
of socialization. Would you throw your own wife over the cliff?

The Persistence of Memory (1931)

Gala protects you from the harsh outside (your crustacean shell)
so you can grow soft, supersoft, on the inside, invisible to all?
The truth is, watches are soft only in the way rocks are soft,
their interior harmony a question mark to spatial discord.
The clocks, if you note, must be wound before there is time.

The Dream Approaches (1932)

Take a blank canvas. Insert a coffin, women's genitalia, a naked man on the beach with flames swirling on his back, a cracking tower, dark cypresses, and the symbolism screams death of interpretation. Once Freud put the apparatus in place dreams lost their thrill.

Necrophilic Spring Flowing from a Grand Piano (1933)

Music calls us to our death. On one side, the cypress tree, spouting from the hole in the piano, calling back to childhood, on the other side, the pool of death. Music calls us to death.

The Triangular Hour (1933)

Your soft watch is becoming harder? Classical man watches in feigned ignorance, unable to turn back to look at the plain.

The Angelus of Gala (1933)

You fear humble peasants praying over the potato harvest as a "monstrous example of disguised sexual repression"? You think the female would rather devour the poor male? Fierceness in sexuality is a copout for you, Dalí, let it go.

Hairdresser Depressed by the Persistent Good Weather (1934)

Blocks of time, free of watches, yield unseen possibilities. The primitive behind the hairdresser will yet wring joy from Western cities, weather forecasting the new thrill.

The Moment of Transition (1934)

Our first bones will have been observed by the woman in white, as we enter the new destiny of wherever villages turn to ruins.

Allegory of an American Christmas (1934)

America, Dalí, is new only in the sense that a cracked egg is.
I expect any moment for the north to turn gold too, in memoir.

Autumnal Cannibalism (1936)

War starts with soft slicing of the knife of one stone figure into the other. Soon the pieces of meat devour us. Who is father, who the son, only the rocks, which will outlast us, know for sure.

Lobster Telephone (1936)

It is better not to answer the phone if you think it might be Hitler.

The Burning Giraffe (1936–37)

“The masculine cosmic apocalyptic monster” has been in the news again. Woman loses features. We will die for the strip of meat.

The Invention of Monsters (1937)

Premonition of war is the surrealist’s first line of resistance.
A few months before the Anschluss, prophecy is a dead man’s only game. One head becomes two, everything twins.
While we sit counting butterflies, war doubles every silence.
The figures washing in the water look like horses from far,
the bust of the woman watched by the angel and the cat is horse and woman. Something terrible waits for us, we foretell.

The Metamorphosis of Narcissus (1937)

Those were the days when reflection repaid manifold.
There is no such pool of water left in the world, Dalí!

Sleep (1937)

"Held up by the crutches of reality," you would have it, sleep as the heavy monster, but where do the crutches come from? We dream the crutches as props of reality, we sleep into the dog-mind, we succumb to separation.

Impressions of Africa (1938)

To concentrate on what is before us, we lose the outside. Small conspiracies in dark lands are being hatched, peasants strum handmade guitars. Don't put yourself out, Dalí, bad news has a way of finding its means.

Invisible Afghan with the Apparition on the Beach of the Face of García Lorca in the Form of a Fruit Dish with Three Figures (1938)

The death of Lorca interlocks apparitions for you, Dalí, but the world counts him a romantic hero, whole, like an urn.

Philosopher Illuminated by the Light of the Moon and the Setting Sun (1939)

The same American Christmas egg, now in the shape of an eclipsed dark moon? The philosopher studies his fingernails, rocklike in emotion. The egg has cracked.

The Enigma of Hitler (1939)

Chamberlain did answer the phone, Hitler on the other end. I would hang my umbrella too, paint swastikas on the backs of all my wet nurses, if their backs were soft enough, like Hitler's.

Daddy Longlegs of the Evening...Hope! (1940)

Softness has become liquidity. I posit your dead tree figure,
the inkwells standing for female breasts, as mimetic scorn.
Must your phalluses always be held up by crutches?
Induced impotence, Dalí, is the first principle of war.

*Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate,
a Second before Waking Up (1944)*

In dreams we float, we're told, because the air of reality
is too thin to anchor us. The moment before waking, with
the bayonet and the tigers aimed at the ethereal romanced
body, is also the moment of the end of carefree schooling.

*My Wife, Naked, Looking at Her Own Body, Which Is
Transformed into Steps, Three Vertebrae of a Column,
Sky, and Architecture (1945)*

No ordinary wife, Gala, evoked of stone and metal, classical
architecture personified, perfect shape of the back, all that you,
self-declared impotent, would consider the constituents
of a woman able to hold you in her cage, backbone to backbone.

Inter-Atomic Balance of a Swan's Feather (1947)

"The atom was my favorite food for thought." Pity, after
Hiroshima suspension would never be seen as mere freezing,
giving you license to shatter the swan into head, foot, feather.

Dematerialization Near the Nose of Nero (1947)

So you've become a classicist after all, Dalí? Is Nero coming
together, head with bust, or splitting apart? How can your
surrealism reconcile with atomic force, the greatest splitter?
The thing to do is to stuff pomegranates in open cubes.

Raphaelesque Head Exploding (1951)

Inside the Madonna's head, the Pantheon, the shapes clear
despite the splitting, the ubiquitous rhinoceros horn,
now in the service of illuminating religious devices.

Design for the Costume for The Woman of the Future (1953)

At least I am now the crutch-holder for the elongated head.

The Sacrament of the Last Supper (1955)

This ascension is mystical in the sense that an atomic bomb is.

The Dance (The Seven Arts, Rock 'n' Roll) (1956)

"I love anything that is dionysic, violent, and aprodisiac."
Dalí, you tire me. What happened to your impotence?

Tuna Fishing (1966–1967)

The battle has been deflected from man to fish. How I long
for lobster telephones, Hitler on the other end! Do you now
believe in finitude? Energy melts the personified universe.

Profile du Temps (1984)

One last time, your soft watch, now almost bronzed with
solidity, the bottom so close to melting we can taste it.