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**In CRUCIFIXION (CORPUS HYPERCUBUS), Salvador Dalí reveals a spiritual side that is not what we expect of his flamboyant public persona.**

*Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), CRUCIFIXION (CORPUS HYPERCUBUS) (1954). Oil on canvas. 194.5 x 124 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

# Prayer in a Fourth Dimension

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

Best known for his Surrealist paintings, the Spanish artist Salvador Dalí returned to themes of religion—his mother was Roman Catholic, his father was an atheist—science, and philosophy during the last forty years of his life. The *Corpus Hypercubus*, renamed *Crucifixion* when it became part of the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1955, is one of the artist's most famous paintings from this later period.

When Dalí was born, his parents named him in memory of a recently deceased brother. The brother, Salvador, had been only twenty-two months old when he died. This had a profound effect on the artist as a child. His early understanding of himself was as “a reply, a double, an absence,” Dalí reported in 1970.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his life, then, in many respects he imagined an alternate reality, a virtual life.

Dalí was considered a successful Surrealist painter between 1922 and 1948. However, the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, inspired him to take his art in a new direction. “The atomic explosion of 6 August [1945] shook me seismically,” Dalí wrote. “Thenceforth, the atom was my favourite food for thought.”<sup>2</sup> During World War II he had lived in New York City. When he returned to Europe in 1948, he completed his disassociation from the Surrealists and reinvented himself and his art.

In an essay “Mystical Manifesto” (1951), Dalí introduced the concept of “nuclear mysticism,” his new theory of art that combined religion, mathematics, science, and Catalan culture in an attempt to revive classical values and techniques. The next year he did a lecture tour in America to promote nuclear mysticism.

*Crucifixion* (*Corpus Hypercubus*) exhibits many elements of the new theory. Dalí employs a traditional Christian motif of Christ's crucifixion being meditated upon as in a vision, yet the cross is formed by an unfolding octahedral hypercube (a four-dimensional cube). The artist's metaphysical, transcendent cubism is based on the *Treatise on Cubic Form* by Juan de Herrera (c. 1532-1597), the architect and builder of Philip II's royal palace in Madrid. It is also influenced by the *Ars Magna* of the Catalonian philosopher and alchemist Raymond Llulle (1232-1315). Dalí's wife, Gala, stands on the “human level” of the

painting. The bay of Port Lligat, where Dalí had purchased a house and lived most of his adult life, can be seen in the background. An appreciative Christian reviewer of that day wrote of this painting: “critics of religious art have viewed with comprehension and approval what appears to be a sincere effort to express traditional values in forms consistent with modern art. Dalí offers this *Crucifixion* as ‘an affirmation of the reality of prayer in a...perplexed atomic age.’”<sup>3</sup>

Through the artwork of his later years, Dalí was able to come to terms with his own “surreal” tendencies and his belief in God. His use of mathematics and science furthered that discovery and investigation. The later works reveal a spiritual side of the artist that is not what we expect of his flamboyant public persona.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

1 Salvador Dalí, *Dali par Dali de Draeger* (Paris, 1970; English translation, 1972), 92. See also, Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* (New York: The Dial Press, 1942).

2 D. Ades, *Dali* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 174.

3 George A. Cevasco, “Dalí’s Christianized Surrealism,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 45:180 (Winter, 1956), 437-442, here citing 440-441.

4 For more information on the artist’s later works, see the exhibition “Dalí: The Late Works,” August 7, 2010 – January 9, 2011, at the High Museum in Atlanta, GA; and Michael R. Taylor, *The Dalí Renaissance: New Perspectives on His Life and Art After 1940* (Philadelphia Museum of Art and New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008).

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