Double Deceptions: Salvador Dalí’s Stereoscopic Paintings and the Influence of Gerrit Dou

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The Dutch painter Gerrit Dou is considered central to Salvador Dalí’s interest in stereoscopy during the 1970s. In this essay, I contend that Dalí serendipitously misperceived a stereoscopic endeavour in Dou’s work based on available art historical sources that led to his own innovative double paintings. Dalí’s stereoscopic images, especially those incorporating incongruent subjects, derive in part from this misreading of Dou’s artistic motivations and explore the potential of binocular rivalry to force mind/eye relationships into active and unnatural determinations of reality through illusion. Steeped in themes of doubling, the stereoscopic paintings further the artist’s challenge to traditional painterly perception pursued previously through his paranoiac-critical method and contribute to the legacy of the ‘double’ in Dalí’s art, biography and personal mythology.

Salvador Dalí’s encounter with the work of the Dutch Baroque artist, Gerrit Dou (1613-1675) in the late 1960s and early 1970s played an essential role in the realisation of his innovative stereoscopic paintings. Inspired by a self-proclaimed ‘discovery’ of unacknowledged stereoscopic experimentation in the Dutch artist’s oeuvre, Dalí transformed a decade-long curiosity with photographic stereoscopic effects into a rigorous painterly pursuit that persisted for a decade. Although Dou’s position as an important catalyst for Dalí’s stereoscopic work is widely recognised, a critical assessment of the extent of the Dutch artist’s influence and the art historical accuracy of Dalí’s revelations has not been undertaken. In this essay, I suggest that close examination of the visual resources available about Dou in the 1960s and 1970s, coupled with recent scholarship on the Dutch artist’s life and work, demonstrate that Dalí serendipitously misinterpreted a stereoscopic endeavour that led to his own productive optical experiments during the 1970s. Guided by this misconstrued precedent, the artist produced double-paintings in the 1970s that reflect his exposure to Dou’s work, including potential misreadings that may have contributed to his attempts at surpassing standardised stereopsis to toy with the disruption of comfortable optical synthesis in binocular vision. The result of these examples is a visual discord suggestive of a psychic condition reminiscent of, but distinct from, the paranoiac-critical method that further supports the artist’s lifelong pursuit of the ‘perfect simulacrum.’

Invented by the physicist Sir Charles Wheatstone in the 1830s, stereoscopic images provide the optical experience of an image in relief by presenting a scene to each eye from slightly differing perspectives. By angling mirrors, altering focal distance, or crossing the eyes, binocular fusion results in stereopsis - depth perception - although in the case of a stereoscopic image the illusion of depth perception is incomplete because the accommodation of focus is never truly resolved. In 1961, decades after his departure from surrealism, Dalí took an interest in stereoscopy after he experienced its effects in postcards that employed the Fresnel lens system. According to the artist’s close friend Robert Descharnes, after his initial contact with the postcards Dalí began to experiment with the use of photographs viewed through a stereoscope with mirrors and employed Roger de Montebello (brother of Philippe) who successfully created a revised version of Wheatstone’s original stereoscope for the artist. Although these postcards sparked
the artist’s curiosity, it was not until a decade later after exposure to the work of Gerrit Dou that he began to read scientific documents on stereoscopy and experiment in earnest to produce stereoscopic paintings. In order to achieve an illusionistic effect, Dalí worked out the appropriate perspective differential through photographs that were then projected on to canvases, and along with the aid of a Fresnel lens produced ‘twinned paintings’ that served as the images for his stereoscopic experiences. Famously describing his surrealist imagery as ‘hand-painted dream photographs,’ acknowledging their verism and the fact that they were to be conceived as ‘documentations’ of psychic activity, Dalí’s experiments and technical knowledge allowed his stereoscopic paintings to conjure ‘real’ illusions within the experience of stereoptic depth perception. These new works manifested a similar verism and psychic presence for the artist, who described them as ‘photography in three dimensions and in colour of the superfine images of concrete irrationality, entirely made by hand,’ and labelled them examples of ‘metaphysical hyperrealism.’

Dalí’s stereoscopic paintings took liberties with his photographic reproductions, and complicated relations of scale and perspective took centre stage and dominated as illusionistic spectacles, overshadowing ‘irrational’ content that appears, if anything, gimmicky and contrived. For example, in Dalí Lifting the Skin of the Mediterranean Sea to Show Gala the Birth of Venus (1977), a landscape of disparate scales, proportions and dream-like subject matter exists in a stereoscopic context. No longer bound by photographic limitations, Dalí presents the act of lifting the skin of the sea as a stereoptic illusionistic ‘trick’ (a subject he represented in perspectival two-dimensional illusions in the early 1950s and 1960s). This emphasis on ‘metaphysically hyperreal’ depictions of illusionistic space is also present in Dalí’s Hand Drawing Back the Golden Fleece in the Form of a Cloud to Show Gala the Dawn, Completely Nude, Very, Very Far Away Behind the Sun (1977), where he performs the illusionistic feat of ‘breaking through the physical horizon,’ complicating levels of illusionism and deception with regard to human perception. In order to achieve these painterly effects that moved beyond the photographic record, Dalí might have either combined different sets of stereoscopic photographs into painted composites or measured the images on each of the paired canvases to achieve a close approximation of the exact differentials necessary for the optical effect to occur. However lacklustre the content, Dalí was able nevertheless to produce painterly illusions that broke through the measure of the observable by providing the necessary optical information and binocular program to advance an illusionistic reality.

Double Vision

Dalí had a lifelong fascination with illusionism that began early in his childhood. In an oft cited passage in his autobiography, The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí (1942) he describes viewing an ‘optical theatre’ while at the residence of his schoolmaster in Figueres, Señor Esteban Traytor Colomer. This toy version of a stereopticon was the artist’s first of several encounters with optical phenomena before entering the surrealist group. As Sophie Matthiesson outlines in the exhibition catalogue for the retrospective at the
National Gallery of Victoria, Australia in 2009, Dalí’s interest in three-dimensional illusionism influenced his itinerary during a trip to Paris in April 1926 with his aunt and sister. Only two months before his expulsion from the Madrid Academy of Art, Dalí’s destinations included Versailles, The Musée Grévin, and the studio of Picasso, and in all three cases interest in illusionism was among the principal reasons for the visits. As Dalí later recalled, a portion of his attraction to Picasso’s analytic cubist work was that it captured ‘the three dimensions of Velásquez.’ Both Versailles and the Musée Grévin contain, as Matthiesson points out, rooms with mirror effects, something the artist would again take seriously as an artistic interest during the 1960s and 1970s.

Dalí’s inventiveness with optical illusions and anamorphosis during his association with surrealism is well documented, most notably by Dawn Ades and Peter C. Sutton in the catalogue, Dalí’s Optical Illusions, for the exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1999. Ades cites Dalí’s attempt to overcome the persistent virtual nature of phantoms of the psyche as leading to ‘one of the most sustained investigations into the relationship between vision, perception, and representation in the twentieth century.’ As Ades describes, this ironic yet telling aspect of his artistic program focused on a desire not to create the illusion of reality, but rather the reality of illusions.

The myth of the ‘double’ or the ‘twin’ in Dalí’s biography and art is well established, beginning with the now almost legendary tale of his older brother, also named Salvador, who remained a constant phantom presence during the artist’s formative years through parental nostalgia. Artistically, as early as 1931 Dalí began signing his works of art ‘Gala/Dalí’ as an expression of his unity with his wife, who he claimed provided the necessary inspiration, temperance and catalyst for his artistic personality and creativity. This pattern of ‘twinning’ in Dalí’s surrealist work, first identified by Fiona Bradley, provides an early example of the artist’s interest in the fusion of pairs and he proceeded to associate Gala/Dalí with a wide-range of mythological and art historical female/male pairings: the couple in Jean-François Millet’s Angelus, William Jensen’s Norbert Hanold/Gradiva, Helen and Pollux, Castor and Pollux, and Narcissus and his reflection and/or sister. Dalí may have also pursued twinnings in the context of nuclear mysticism, with Gala as Virgin and Dalí as ‘newborn’ Son, as well as self-portrait twinnings through surrogate objects with iconographic associations to Christian redemption and resurrection. Building on this evidence, it may be that Dalí’s persistent desire to seek a structural language of associative character-pairs through paranoiac content influenced his later interest in stereoscopy, where binocular fusion performs the perceptual reconciliation of two images into a three-dimensional illusionistic optical singularity. This connection between ‘doubling’ in Dalí’s surrealist work and his later stereoscopic paintings was first suggested by Ades, who remarked that the artist’s 1937 painting, The Metamorphosis of Narcissus, as well as a series of double images in his Mae West Room in the Dalí Theatre and Museum in Figueres, Spain, may be early indications of his interest in the presentation of identical pairings and optical fusion. The latter work is particularly germane since it achieves the exact opposite effect of the later stereoscopic work - transforming a three-dimensional space into the illusion of a two dimensional image, further complicated by the transcription of the objects into the impression of the face of Mae West.
Beginning in the early 1930s, Dalí extended his illusionistic capabilities by incorporating anamorphosis into his hyperrealistic paintings of dreamscapes and personal psychic dramas, and also inventing the paranoiac-critical method, where unstable visual information served as a means to, as he claimed, spontaneously explain 'the irrational knowledge born of delirious associations by giving a critical interpretation of the phenomenon.' This controlled simulation of a paranoiac state allowed Dalí, according to Ades and Bradley, to destabilise 'the interpretation of visual clues' and reinterpret objects whose identity was already conventionally established. But to present these paranoiac experiences in an observable visual representation took considerable artistic talent and skill, as the Wadsworth exhibition and catalogue revealed.

Considering that Dalí again pursued sustained and intense research and work on optical illusionism decades later, it is worth asking what relationship Dalí’s paranoiac-critical method and its emphasis on multivalent imagery might have to the production of the stereoscopic paintings in the 1960s and 1970s. Such unstable and fluctuating visual fields in his paranoiac works present viewers with an experience of reality suggestive of not just illusion but also delusion - where a subjective psychic process is channelled to viewers visually by a sophisticated painterly language that disrupts the security of perceived subject matter. Through use of overlapping, the exploitation of the edges of forms, positive and negative space, and shifts from light to dark, Dalí creates illusionistic effects that, as Marc LaFountain describes in Dalí and Postmodernism, 'do not together make anything in particular, even though they appear to do so (e.g., a “face”),' and thus comprise 'Phantom meanings.'

The importance of the paranoiac-critical method to this paper lies in its representational strategy that provides the optical catalyst for a delusional experience. Visual evidence in Dalí’s later stereoscopic work demonstrates an artistic attempt (only moderately successful) to further exploit the painterly ability to conjure optical illusions beyond a standard stereoscopic effect. Based on a misconstrued precedent in Dou’s work, I suggest that Dalí may have intended to provoke contradictory spatial illusions simultaneously rather than in continual flux. Although reminiscent of the paranoiac-critical method, this later approach is more optical than critical, focusing on a sensory experience of multivalent visual imagery without the subsequent stage of self-critical analysis, and thus only partially mirroring its earlier surrealist manifestation. Dalí’s progression towards ‘delusional’ stereoscopy is supported by the fact that he was already actively seeking new optical effects in his paintings that would facilitate paranoiac experiences for viewers in the late 1960s. In a reprint of his 1969 Art News article, ‘De Kooning’s 300,000,000 birthday,’ on 31 August 1971, Dalí discusses his famous painting The Hallucinogenic Toreador (1969-70), indicating that it was his initial attempt to produce a structure of repetitive imagery with connections to optical phenomena and his paranoiac-critical method: ‘I have used accumulations of an obsessive single image such as the Venus de Milo to obtain an hallucinogenic structure able to provoke for the spectator any kind of concrete image. This work is the first optical application of my paranoiac-critical method.’

Whether due to a lack of success with his stereoscopic experiments, deficiency of his earlier critical drive, or the result of his growing obsession with René Thom’s work on catastrophe theory and his return
to religious and artistic precedents in the 1980s, at present there is no substantial evidence to suggest Dalí intended to incorporate a self-reflective, analytic stage in these later paintings. Nevertheless, these examples provide an important chronological bookend to the continued presence of doubling/twinning in Dalí’s art and biography and offer a glimpse into a fascinating optically-based psychic experiment that remained, unfortunately, underdeveloped and unfinished.

**Dalí and Dou**

In a commonly cited anecdote, Dalí gained a renewed interest in stereoscopy after observing the work of the Dutch Baroque painter, Gerrit Dou, during a visit to Paris in 1969. With his then companion Amanda Lear, Dalí attended an exhibition of Dou’s work at the Petit Palais and Lear, after later reviewing a book on the artist, remarked with curiosity about his penchant for producing ‘close, but not identical, copies of his works.’ Intrigued, Dalí suggested that Dou might have experimented with stereoscopy, stating that no one ‘had ever noticed this before because no two of his paintings had ever been exhibited side by side.’

According to Antonio Pitxtot, Dalí noticed that two paintings by Dou, entitled The Mousetrap, differed only slightly in their dimensions and therefore deduced that the Dutch artist did indeed intend the two paintings as a binocular exercise in stereopsis. Proceeding to investigate the relationship of Dou’s ‘close copies’ in earnest, Dalí claimed the Dutchman as ‘the first stereoscopic painter.’

Lear and Dalí most likely reviewed Dou’s work in Wilhelm Martin’s 1913 text, Gerard Dou: des meisters Gemälde, the only source available that presented the mousetrap paintings together (the book is also preserved in Dalí’s personal collection).

It is important to recognise that to this day no firm scholarly evidence exists that Dou engaged in stereoscopic pursuits. It should be noted, however, that a great deal of interest in optics and the microscope took place in Holland during his lifetime, and Dou addressed themes of artistic illusion and deception in the subject matter of his paintings. Dalí’s misperception likely resulted from the formatting of Dou’s images in Martin’s text. The book contains eight pairings of paintings on adjacent pages with identical titles, (including Mousetrap), identical visual subjects and only slightly differing dimensions (Figs. 1 and 2).
Fig. 1: Photograph of two-page spread in Wilhelm Martin’s *Gerard Dou: des meisters Gemälde* (1913), displaying two versions of *Die Mausfalle* c. 1645-1650. (Photo: author)

Fig. 2: Series of collaged double-page spreads of Dou’s paintings in Martin’s text, 2012, (Photo, collage: author).
It is likely Dalí misperceived their display next to one another in the text as further reinforcement of his initial assumption about Dou and stereoscopy. As Ronni Baer, a leading Dou scholar, points out, it is now recognised that one of the two mousetrap paintings bore a false signature, and although many of his compositions are known in more than one version it was extremely rare for Dou to copy himself. At the time however, Dalí and Lear were not privy to this information and the misattributions would have suggested that Dou made numerous close copies with varying dimensions. How interesting that Dalí began an endeavour that would occupy a portion of his painterly production for almost a decade based on the probable assumption that Dou was practicing stereoscopic experiments, deduced from the placement of nearly identical works in a published text with slightly varying dimensions. With his considerable enthusiasm for ‘doubling’ and his exposure to the Fresnel postcards a decade earlier, along with the close dimensional aspects of the reproduced paintings in Martin’s text, such an encounter and conclusion could be easily reached, despite what we now know about Dou’s work.

The earliest surviving example of Dalí working in a stereoscopic format after his exposure to the Fresnel lens in 1961 is a watercolour entitled, Patient Lovers (Stereoscopic Face in the Ampurdan Plain), 1970 that contains slightly incongruent imagery. Depicting two slightly different paranoiac faces on single sheet of paper, the work is most likely a prototype for the separate stereoscopic paintings that follow and suggests that Dalí may have been experimenting with less complicated sketches before facilitating the stereoscopic viewing process through more complicated mechanical devices. More likely, Patient Lovers is a rudimentary approach to stereopsis where the simple placement of a finger in front of the eyes aligned at the seam between the two images produces a crude three-dimensional effect. If Patient Lovers was produced late in 1970, it may be that Dalí’s interest in Dou and stereoscopy was rekindled by his subsequent exposure to the artist’s paintings when he attended the opening of his first European retrospective exhibition in Holland on 21 November 1970 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.

Considering Dalí’s penchant for re-formulating and re-interpreting Old Master works of art throughout his career, Dou’s reputation for incredible detail and tightness of painting may have also attracted the artist’s attention and led to additional influence beyond the stereoscopic assumption. Compositional and subjective references to one of Dou’s most well-known works in the collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen appear in a painting Dalí made not long after his visit to the Netherlands. Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalised by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors (1972-73) is strikingly similar to Dou’s A Young Woman at her Toilet (1667), sharing not only a sequence of figures ‘looking’ at one another through the presence of a mirror but also an angled rather than direct room construction, a typical Baroque element. (Figs. 3 and 4).

It is worth noting that the two chairs in Dou’s painting, positioned perpendicular to one another, are fused into one compositional ‘track’ in Dalí’s work. This is fascinating, as it presents another twist on the stereoscopic concept through a compositional metaphor: Dalí produces two paintings of similar composition with a fusion of two lines of sight from a potential artistic precedent. Additionally, the canvas in front of Dalí
'doubles' as a second, sequential mirror in the 'track' and the position of both figures, parallel to the window of his studio, echoes the position of the empty chair in Dou’s painting. Interestingly, Dalí portrays himself 'at work' in paintings during this decade more often than any other time in his career. This could be linked to the popular Dutch Baroque convention of depicting the 'artist in the studio,' especially considering his specific interest in Dou’s work and longstanding enthusiasm for the work of Johannes Vermeer (especially prominent in the 1930s and 1950s). The viewer’s position behind the artist in the aforementioned Dalí painting is almost certainly a nod to Vermeer’s famous example, *The Art of Painting* (c. 1666-1673).
Fig. 4: A Young Woman at her Toilet, 1667, Oil on panel, 75.5 x 58, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.
While the influence of the Dutch Baroque on Dalí’s stereoscopic work is usually cited through his specific exposure to Gerrit Dou at the end of the 1960s, the artist did have earlier direct contact with Netherlandish art. He and Gala visited the Netherlands in 1962 for two days and their trip included stops at Mauritshuis to observe Vermeer’s View of Delft, c. 1660-1661, the Museum Het Prinsenhof, the tomb of Antoni van Leeuwenhoek at the Old Church and the site where Vermeer painted his famous panorama.40 The visit to Leeuwenhoek’s tomb is especially interesting, as he is widely recognised for his experiments and advancements in microbiology and pioneering use of the telescope, an indication that Dalí’s enthusiasm for optics remained potent after the initial encounter with the Fresnel lens postcards. In The World of Salvador Dalí, published the same year, Dalí mentions the convex mirror in his bedroom at Port Lligat as related to Vermeer, declaring a connection between two of the sites he visited during his trip: ‘The fabulous mirror with which it is said that Vermeer observed his world reflected in order to paint it must have existed, as at the same period in the same city of Delft there existed the first microscopes invented by Leeuwenhoek.’41 The landscape, history, and culture of the Netherlands were also inspirational: ‘The country, the light, the way Vermeer painted it. And Delft itself: well, that’s exactly like Port Lligat, my town on the Costa Brava, the place where I live. No, the Netherlands is beautiful. I would like to have an exhibition here some day, who knows - but that will probably take some effort.’42

Subjective Incongruence and Binocular Rivalry

Unfortunately, a significant portion of Dalí’s subject matter during the 1960s had turned away from intensely surrealist or even earnest religious content to more self-laudatory images displaying the artist ‘in action,’ often showcasing his painterly talents and celebrating his continued dedication to Gala as his primary subject and muse, usually through a smattering of subject matter rehashed from previous decades. But while the more standard stereoscopic examples may fail to inspire in content, evidence suggests that Dalí intended even greater optical outcomes and here the previous references to the paranoiac-critical method and ‘doubling’ return as relevant precedents. In a series of stereoscopic paintings from the 1970s, Dalí employed varying palettes and depicted different, but closely associated scenes in each of the two paintings involved in stereopsis. The artist’s ultimate destination with this endeavour is unknown (and may have been something he too did not grasp). One possibility is that he was toying with the mind’s response to conflicted visual information in the stereoscopic act, hoping that it might fuse two non-identical images into a wholly new, synthesised product, perceived but not tangible. As Elliott King notes, this was the case with Dalí’s stereoscopic colour experimentation where he advanced on the process of optical colour mixture, employing a perceptual ‘palette’ where two colours could blend optically to form a new colour when each painting ‘mixed’ through stereopsis.43 In her 1985 autobiography, My Life with Dalí, Amanda Lear recalls that Dalí spoke of this effect: ‘Do you realise that one can create colours which don’t exist, colour which the brain is only imagining? You paint a sky in blue-grey tones on the right and on the left you paint the same
thing using pale-pink and apricot shades. These two skies superimpose in your brain and you see a viable image of an extraordinary amethyst and eau-de-Nil tint which does not exist.\textsuperscript{44} King locates evidence of this process in works such as \textit{Battle in the Clouds}, 1979 where Dalí ‘imposes’ two tones, blue and yellow, through dual painted images and also identifies the effect in the view out the window in \textit{Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalised by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors}, 1972-73.\textsuperscript{45}

Several of Dalí’s stereoscopic works from the later 1970s also experiment with incongruent subject matter, including \textit{Patient Lovers, The Chair}, 1975 and \textit{Battle in the Clouds}, 1979. It may be that by presenting non-identical design elements in each painting Dalí wished the mind to do ‘battle’ between two available possibilities and fluctuate unresolved between them in a psychically active, three-dimensional illusionistic version of what occurred paranoiacally via a two-dimensional surface in his earlier surrealist examples. But that would run contrary to the essential program of stereoscopic experience. It therefore is more likely and more interesting to consider that Dalí was striving to produce distinctly new content through a process similar to that of his stereo-based optical colour mixtures, where two separate three-dimensional illusions provide visual information for viewers to produce a new fusion-subject perceived by the psyche without a tangible counterpart. It is curious to note that Martin’s text reproduces additional paired paintings that, while nearly identical, contain overtly visible variations not unlike those in Dalí’s more incongruent stereoscopic works. It may be that these additional sets of images, viewed by Dalí in Martin’s book on Dou additionally inspired his later experiments (Fig. 5). These pages in Martin’s book also recall the paranoiac pairing of imagery and structural design of Dalí’s famous reproduction included in \textit{Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution} in 1931, titled ‘Communication: paranoiac face’ (Fig. 6). Even though this earlier visual juxtaposition served to demonstrate the delusional interpretation of the original image by the artist, one based on a snapshot of an African village and the other (importantly here) a close approximation by Dalí informed by his recent observation of cubist paintings by Picasso, their vertical placement is prototypical of these later stereoscopic double-paintings where two paired images with slight variations in visible subjects disrupt facile optical synthesis.\textsuperscript{46}
Fig. 5: Collage of double-page spreads in Martin’s text with incongruent subject matter, 2012 (Photo, collage: author).
The most interesting example of this tactic is *Athens is Burning! The School of Athens and the Fire In the Borgo*, 1979-1980 one of the last stereoscopic paintings Dalí produced (Fig. 7). The two paintings share a general design based on the curving arches of the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican where both frescoes by Raphael are originally located. Dalí painted the general figural compositions of these two works...
into his right and left paintings, rendering them with less detail and speckled by Divisionist brushstrokes that transcribe Raphael’s original versions into confusing art historical stylistic anachronisms. Ades suggests that these ‘confetti’ colours may harken back to Senor Traite’s optical theatre which Dalí described as containing ‘varied iridescences.’

Fig. 7. Athens is Burning! The School of Athens and the Fire In the Borgo, 1979-1980, oil on panel, 32.2 x 43.1 cm (in two components), Fundación Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueras.

Imposed onto these representational scenes are a series of layered rectangular opaque planes of colour slightly modified in each painting based on the stereoscopic differentials required for binocular vision. What makes this work so intriguing is not just the incongruent aspects of each image that cause a perceptual discord in the stereoptic experience, but also the fact that it presents three legacies of painterly illusion since the Renaissance within this experience: linear perspective in Raphael’s two frescoes, pointillism and its later evolution into the ‘push/pull’ of pure colours à la Hans Hofmann, and the introduction of stereopsis by Dalí. These three illusionistic ‘codes’ (to appropriate E.H. Gombrich’s terminology) force a complicated optical tension while also imposing incongruent subject matter where, as Ades states, the ‘classical harmony of the School of Athens fresco, a vision of the wise and learned in conversation is interrupted dramatically by the fresco of the Fire in the Borgo.’

David Lomas has identified Dalí’s penchant for ‘simulation and the simulacral’ and his willingness to ‘embrace simulation at the expense of authenticity’ in his art and his personality and in this circumstance the artist appears to play the game one more time. Illusion is simulation, and with each successive phase of artistic ‘code’ we draw, historically, that much further away from a facile and secure Modernist relation between copy/original or illusion/reality and that much closer to the introduction of a hyperreal simulation that questions or undermines this relationship. Or, put in more general terms, Dalí’s painting is a prescient art historical concession to the eventual conditions of post-structuralism brought forth through sensory play. The fact that this stereoscopic experience is painted, and not photographic, distances it that much further from an ‘authentic’ referent, and it is made especially difficult by the fact that what is presented is not rationally conceivable within tangible observation.
To further complicate the matter, the Raphael frescoes are re-painted by Dalí and therefore several stages removed from the ‘original’; this remoteness from referents is something Lomas posits as a common modus operandi of the artist.\textsuperscript{51} Ironically, in hindsight Dali’s misperception that Dou created stereoscopic work is also symptomatic of this condition, albeit abstractly, since the work responds to an original that never actually existed.

**Conclusion**

To suggest that Dalí was ‘misled’ by art historical inaccuracies and design decisions reflected in the layout of a monograph would be too strong an accusation. Rather, working with the historical and primary materials available at the time, the artist produced a plausible theory based partly on scientific and art historical knowledge and partly on his typical ‘Dalínian’ paranoiac process of approaching the visible. Even if the artist had found out that his hypothesis was ‘inaccurate’ it is doubtful he would have recanted. As he declared in *Ten Recipes for Immortality* (1973), ‘Mistakes are almost always of a sacred nature. Never try to correct them. Rationalize them, understand them thoroughly. After that it will be possible for you to sublimate them.’\textsuperscript{52} As stated earlier in this essay, Dali’s final destination with his stereoscopic paintings that perform disruptive perceptual exercises is not entirely clear. Yet, his attempts are an impressive exploration of the potential of binocular rivalry to force mind/eye relationships into an active and unnatural determination of reality through illusion. Beyond the influence of Gerrit Dou and Dutch Baroque art generally that spurned his stereoscopic interest into these painterly actions, the late optical work contributes another layer to the legacy of the ‘double’ in Dali’s art, biography and personal mythology. ‘You’re well aware,’ the artist declared to Alain Bosquet in 1969, ‘that the profound structure of my personality is binary: I’m double-headed and twofold. There are two Dalis ...’\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 407.
Ibid. In the 1960s-1970s Dalí collected and experimented with a wide range of 3D equipment, from simple red/green polarised glasses to stereoscopes (many of these remain scattered throughout his home and studio at Port Lligat), and also pioneered the artistic use of holography. I would like to thank Elliott King for first bringing this latter visual evidence to my attention.


See *Dali at the Age of Six, when he Thought he was a Girl, Lifting the Skin of the Water to see a Dog Sleeping in the Shade of the Sea*, 1950 and *Hercules Lifts the Skin of the Sea and Stops Venus for an Instant from Making Love*, 1963. Descharnes discusses a similar ‘trick’ in *Dali’s Hand Drawing Back the Golden Fleece in the Form of a Cloud to Show Gala the Dawn, Completely Nude, Very, Very Far Away Behind the Sun* (1977), 403.


Mattisson notes that the artist ‘rigged up a Fresnel lens into which he could see as he painted the two nearly identical scenes.’ Matthiesson, 295.


For a full account of these endeavors, see *Dali’s Optical Illusions*, ed., Dawn Ades, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2000.

Matthiesson, 279.


Ibid.


Ibid., 17.

Interestingly, David Lomas points out that Dalí was himself a simulacrum, since his brother (the original) was no longer present. Lomas, 204.


22 Dalí first conceived the general idea for this illusionistic puzzle in a two-dimensional work in gouache on newspaper dating 1934–34, and the concept was later transcribed into a three-dimensional installation at the Dalí Theatre Museum by the Catalan architect Oscar Tusquets under the artist’s supervision. Eric Shanes, *The Life and Masterworks of Salvador Dalí*, New York, Parkstone Press International, 2010, 156.


25 It would be wrong to suggest that Dalí relinquished interest in painting with illusionistic impulses in the interim decades, as is evident in his continued exploration of perspective, sacred geometry and trompe l’oeil. Additionally, the artist’s ‘paranoiac-critical mysticism’ during the 1950s maintained an interest in optical illusion, albeit generated (according to the artist) from mystical/divine inspiration. See Wallis, ‘Holy Toledo!’, 2008. However, his earlier surrealist pursuits and stereoscopic endeavours are linked by a mutual attempt to surpass what is visually presented (in the literal sense).

26 Marc J. LaFountain, *Dalí and Postmodernism: This is Not an Essence*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, xii-xiii. See also Lomas, ‘Simulacra and the Order of Mimesis,’ (note #1).

27 Dalí, ed., Ades, 2004, 532-533. Interestingly, Dalí’s article also makes reference to the microscope.


30 In a conversation with Montse Aguer, Antonio Pitxot stated, ‘Dalí was convinced that this was not simply a copy, but that the two pictures were intended to be viewed together. Their corresponding differential of 12 to 15 cm is the focal distance of a pair of binoculars.’ ‘Dalí’s Permanent Provocation,’ Antonio Pitxot in conversation with Montse Aguer, in Ades, *Dalí’s Optical Illusions*, 63.


Ian Gibson recounts Amanda Lear’s description of the events leading to Dalí’s determination that Dou was experimenting with stereoscopy. Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997, 592-593. Gibson suggests that the painting Lear and Dalí observed at the Petit Palais could be *Maid servant at Window*, based on the fact that it contains a golden ewer (Lear and Dalí use the term ‘water jug’) similar to the one Lear describes seeing in a painting by Dou in the exhibition. Lear states, ‘I was particularly taken by a very realistic still-life, in the centre of which a golden water jug brilliantly reflected the light on its polished metal surface.’ Amanda Lear, *My Life with Dalí*, Beaufort Books, 1986, 199. As Lear notes (and Gibson also recounts), a book on Dou purchased at a bookshop on the rue du Mont-Thabor after the exhibition failed to contain the image. (Lear 200) Two important pieces of evidence emerge that are worth brief elaboration. First, Gibson turns to Dalí’s Gowan’s Art Books (his collection kept from his childhood) to locate a possible match for the painting at the Petit Palais. Indeed, *Maid servant at Window* contains a golden ewer, but Lear describes the work as a ‘very realistic still-life,’ rather than a genre painting. *Maid servant at Window* depicts a woman emptying a water jug out of the window of a domestic interior. Also worth noting is that the golden water jug in *Maid servant at Window* is not positioned at the centre of the composition. While these facts are not enough to call the identification into doubt, Lear
additionally notes that the painting they observed at the exhibition was not in the book, yet it contained ‘a great many of his pictures’ that were painted twice. She goes on to state of the numerous paired paintings that there ‘was one in Leningrad, for example, which was almost an exact replica of one in Holland.’ Martin’s text contains, as I have written in this essay, many examples of nearly identical works, including a set of nearly identical paintings of a nude woman, entitled Naked Woman, that are labelled as St. Petersburg and Leiden, respectively. (See Martin, 142) Martin’s text also includes two versions of Maidservant at Window on the same page as paired subjects (Martin, 121), and while that also steers the identification away from that painting, the text does contain a painting with a water jug as a central component of a still-life (Martin, 145). Although in Martin’s text it is simply entitled, Still Life (1663), the painting is often labelled ‘The Silver Ewer.’ Despite the title’s emphasis on silver, rather than gold, the ewer depicted is the central subject of the painting and its surface contains much gold ornament. If, based on the painting’s striking visual similarities to her description, it is the one Lear described seeing it does present an inconsistency with the above argument.

33 I would like to thank Ronni Baer for providing me with this fact via email correspondence, 18 April 2010. In addition, it is worth noting that Elliott King has expressed similar doubts about the validity of Dou’s supposed experimentation with stereoscopy. See Catalog entry no. 247 in Dalí. ed., Dawn Ades, Philadelphia, Rizzoli, Inc., 2005, 414.


35 See note 33. The copy that bore a false signature (Breslau, Wroclaw) was lost during WWII.

36 According to Robert Descharnes, Dalí’s 1946 cover for Vogue’s Christmas issue is a stereoscopic image. This presents a curious and intriguing intrusion to the chronology outlined in this essay. There is little doubt that the symmetrical (and slightly variable) imagery in the cover is established to induce a stereoscopic effect, creating a woman’s face. Why the artist was led to create this image at this time remains uncertain.

37 Félix Fanés, Dalí and Mass Culture, Figueres, Fundación Gala-Salvador Dalí, 2004, 482. I would like to thank Lewis Kachur for this information. In addition, photographs in the appendix illustrate Dalí observing Dutch Old Master paintings by Pieter Paul Rubens. My thanks to Helmy Frank, Library, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen for identifying the paintings.

38 The Lady at Her Dressing Table was, and still is, in the collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen where Dalí’s own exhibition was staged, and he could have viewed the painting during the November 1970 visit.

39 Prior to this period, Dali generally preferred more direct, frontal views into interiors with less dynamic spatial effects.

40 An appendix added to the catalog Dalí and Mass Culture by the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen entitled, Dalí in Holland includes a section labelled, ‘It’s all Dalí’ that contains this information. Fanés, Dalí and Mass Culture, 463. Again, I would like to thank Lewis Kachur for providing this important biographical information.

41 Descharnes, The World of Salvador Dalí, 105.

42 Fanés, Dalí and Mass Culture, 463.

43 King, Salvador Dalí: The Late Work, 47.

44 Lear, My Life with Dalí, 201.

45 King, Salvador Dalí: The Late Work, 47. This process also appears in the works, The Sleeping Smoker, Gala’s Foot, 1974, The Chair 1976 and The Eye of the Angelus, 1978. It should also be noted that
King recognizes the incongruent subject matter of this work as well. Michael Scroggins also explores the effects of binocular rivalry in these paintings in his essay, 'Binocular Rivalry and Luster.' See: https://michaelscroggins.wordpress.com/explorations-in-stereoscopic-imaging/retinal-rivalry-and-luster/

46 Ades, Dalí's Optical Illusions, 25. Also worth noting is the fact that during the 1960s and 1970s when he was at work on his stereoscopic endeavours, Dalí produced work in two-dimensions that resolved dual identities, such as Mao Marilyn, a fusion facial portrait combining Marilyn Monroe and Chairman Mao Zedong that ran on the cover of Vogue magazine (1971–72), and Velázquez to Hippy-Dali (undated). The resolution of dual identities might be argued present in paintings such as The Angelus of Gala, 1935 and Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalized by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors, 1972-73.

47 Ibid., 185.

48 Ibid., 184. Scroggins identifies the tension between optical fusion and rivalry: 'In Athens Is Burning! The School of Athens and the Fire in the Borgo (1979-1980), Dalí incorporated both simple stereoscopic rendering with the floating rectangles and extreme binocular rivalry with his modified versions of the Raphael paintings The School of Athens (1509-1510) and The Fire in the Borgo (1514). The binocular rivalry makes it difficult to free view as the eye is continuously drawn across the scene in an attempt to fixate upon disparate points thus breaking the stereoscopic fusion created by the floating rectangles.' See note # 45.


51 Ibid., 202.


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