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Course

Date

The Critique of Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*

Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* is an iconic and timeless work of art that many probably know. The original has been preserved at the New York Museum of Modern Art. The oil painting is 9½ inches by 13 inches. A surrealist artwork depicts a blue sky slowly fading into whites and yellows, reminiscent of a sunrise or sunset. A sea or an ocean lies ahead and to the right of the painting sits formations of rock not unlike those in the Grand Canyon. In the foreground of the picture are the main figures. A wooden table sits on the left side of the painting, with a dead tree with one remaining branch sitting atop it. Besides the dead tree, there is a pocket watch-like object on the table, and just beside it is a deflated clock. Another deflated clock hangs on the tree's branch. Finally, there is one more deflated clock laid above an ethereal and surreal-looking figure who seems to be asleep or perhaps even dead. The figure is white in color, reminiscent of a phantom, and has an eye, eyelashes, eyebrow, and what seems to be a nose, but no other human-like features are present.

Dali's use of color for everything else besides the three clocks and the ghostly figure is dark and heavy. On the other hand, the colors he uses for the central figures are very light. This naturally leads our eye to them, and it could be conveying that these figures are the dream-like elements that always appear in surrealist works of art. It is important to note that the pocketwatch's color also stands out against the darker tones of the painting's environment since



it has a strong copper/bronze tone. Imagery juxtaposition can be seen between the rigidness of the background and the ethereal and almost transparent nature of the clocks and the unknown figure.

Dali's use of colors blends the unconscious with the conscious, and this is conveyed through the lightness of the dream-like central figures seamlessly blending in with the dense and worldly browns, blacks, and blues of the barren land and the water. Deserted landscapes found in Dali's painting can be interpreted as a state of limbo; thus, whatever is happening is not in real-time but perhaps in a dream or the unconscious psyche. Surrealist artists desire to convey what goes on in the depths and highly symbolic parts of the human mind, such as dreams. Dali has successfully depicted a scenario from his own psyche, or perhaps he is depicting an idea he has of the collective's unconsciousness. This is up for debate. Regardless, the work does not fail to be enigmatic yet beautiful, two elements that make a surrealist artwork intriguing.