

**#26 February 2018 Cameraderie
Salvador Dali (1904-1989)**



Dali by Philippe Halsman

The artist Salvador Dali posed for and collaborated in the composition of a number of notable photographs. This article is about Dali himself, his art, and a photograph of Dali that mimics his art. There is actually a famous photographer involved, but he is not the main focus today. (I will write about Philippe Halsman more fully another time, including his 37-year friendship and collaboration with Dali.)

Dali was a flamboyant person in every way—his appearance, his art and its symbolism, his public presentation and self-promotion. See Halsman’s photo of him at the top of this article. It is from their joint book, *Dali’s Mustache*.

Dali’s biography is readily available in Wikipedia, and many websites about Dali, should you wish to read further.

Dali was intensely interested in injecting science and math into his work. One of his notable artistic effort was to model in art the concept that atomic and sub-atomic particles do not actually touch each other (like billiard balls), but are separated by space (the Rutherford model) and keep their positions and relationships due to electrical and atomic forces. Dali expressed this very notably in his famous “Leda Atomica” painting, using his wife Gala as his model, as he frequently did. Dali himself wrote:

Dalí shows us the hierarchized libidinous emotion, suspended and as though hanging in midair, in accordance with the modern 'nothing touches' theory of intra-atomic physics. Leda does not touch the swan; Leda does not touch the pedestal; the pedestal does not touch the base; the base does not touch the sea; the sea does not touch the shore...

Leda Atomica by Dali, 1949



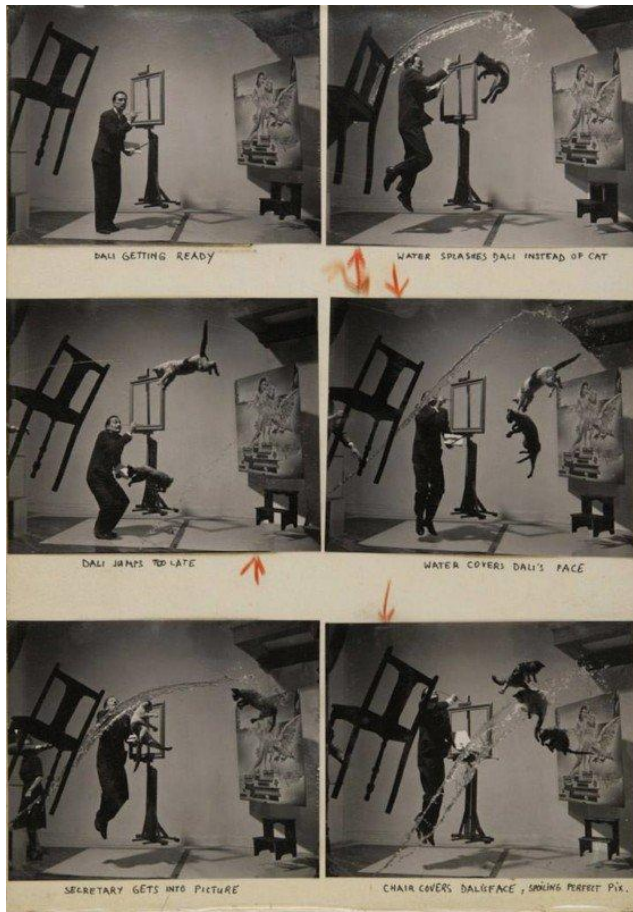
Now enters Halsman, collaborating with Dalí, seeking to make a kindly satire of “Leda Atomica” with Dalí himself in the photograph, titled “Dalí Atomicus.” Now we have the same concepts of nothing touching anything else. Dalí paints “Leda Atomica” but does not touch the painting. He does not touch the floor. The paintings do not rest on the easels, and the easels do not rest on the floor. Water is suspended everywhere. And three cats fly through the scene—I suspect they are references to Schrodinger(?!).

The amount of work that went into this image is incredible. All the solid floating objects were suspended by wires on a lighted set. Dalí had to leap in the air for every trial shot. Helpers had to simultaneously toss a bucket of water into the scene, and hurl three live cats as well. There were 26 takes made in order to get a satisfactory image.

Dalí Atomicus by Philippe Halsman, 1948



Here are some of the shots that did not work:



Here is a cute article about re-creating the image:

<https://petapixel.com/2017/11/08/photographer-recreates-iconic-photo-dali-atomicus/>

The recreated “Dali Atomicus” is by photographer Karl Taylor. Note the replacement of the cats by a toaster with art popping out of it, and Dalí’s soft watch in the stream of water.

