

# Gala and Salvador Dalí

From the moment Salvador Dalí met Gala in 1929, desire, reverence and anxiety became inextricably united in his works: mapped across objects and landscapes through the artist's distinctly masochistic ability to 'distribute libido across the whole scene... [recognising] no distinction between the animate and inanimate'.<sup>1</sup> They had met while Gala was holidaying with her first husband, Paul Éluard, in Dalí's summer home of Cadaqués, Spain. At 35, Gala was a prominent and polarising figure within the Surrealist circle. She was renowned for her sexually adventurous streak and had never enjoyed motherhood. She left the inconsolable Éluard (who she had married at the age of 23) and their daughter, almost immediately after.

At 25, Dalí's inexperience and alleged gynophobia contributed to an intense anxiety around consummating his relationship with the woman who would be his wife. This aspect of Gala's presence can be traced throughout his works thereafter, both as a literal subject and through various symbolic forms: monstrous genitalia, a distorted marsupial torso, a rock crawling with ants in the shape of a vulva, and most tellingly, a recurrent Madonna. This symbolism renders a limitless sublimation of Dalí's love and desire, which had a distinctly abject flavour — occupying the murky space in which attraction, horror and worship overlap. Theirs was a complex, lifelong partnership in which Gala is acknowledged as a driving force, with Dalí even signing his works with her name: 'I had just found my kindred spirit. [...] Gala listened to me. She adopted me, I became her newborn, her child, her son, her lover — the man to be loved'.<sup>2</sup>

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*Portrait of Gala, c 1937*  
Private collection, courtesy  
of The Mayor Gallery, London