

SLEEP : DALI

Forms

Sleep by Salvador Dali is an incredibly thought provoking piece of art. Of course, Dali is well known for producing works that seem to be very abstract, so this painting is no exception to his style and aligns well with the Dali brand.

The main feature in the painting is the abnormally shaped head in the center of the painting that is supported by stilts and has a relatively small blanket covering a portion of the back of it. The head takes up about 40 percent of the entire canvas and is undoubtedly the center piece. The rest of the form in this painting comes from the background. On the left side of the painting going off the edge of the canvas there is a dog sitting in standard fashion with the exception that his head is also being held up by a stilt. There is a shadowy figure behind him that is only halfway on the canvas making the viewer uncertain about his function. Finally, there is a house of stone in the background that you can see under the supported head as well as a small simple boat on the left side near some vague mountains. The rest of the canvas' space is blue starting at the top which flows gradually into a white in the middle of the painting, and finally dark, almost black shading at the bottom. All of these elements seem vague and meaningless but ultimately each component is relevant and unify the painting as a whole.

Theme

The theme in this painting is that while sleeping humans become numb to a reality that they know for the majority of their life and slip into a dream world of infinite possibility with the support of the subconscious mind. This message becomes clear after taking the overall unity of the painting, as mentioned above, into consideration. The head is large and supported by the stilts to make it clear that the human brain and subconscious mind keep vital functions in the body working while we sleep. The rest of the details act as further support of this message Dali is expressing to the viewer.

Content

The smooth and gradual use of shading and lighting in this picture give the viewer a sense of vagueness. They act to show the viewer that in the dream world anything is possible and we don't necessarily know the meaning or purpose of what we see in our dreams. The soft fusion of blue, white, and black in the background keep the viewing thinking. They don't force you to think and leave your mind open to wander where it wants just as you do in a dream. Also, the flow and smooth shading of the tan color used on the face, stilts and all other objects in the painting give great unity to this painting, while also individually expressing themselves. In dreams we often don't question what happens and everything seems unified. At the same time however we seem to be able to comprehend the uniqueness of all the elements in our dreams. Ultimately, the smooth curving and flowing lines, the blend value from light to dark, the color, and finally space all add to the meaning of this painting. Dali is showing that our dream world is unconsciously supported by our physical world. The stilts and blanket only take up a small amount of space in the painting but are vital to the meaning just as our physical world is to our dream world. Beyond that, Dali uses flowing color and shading with seemingly random elements such as the dog to express the unique openness and freedom of thought that we experience in the dream world.

Work of Art?

This painting is for sure a work of art. It expresses something that is deeply woven into human life, and is executed in classic Dali fashion. The seemingly ambiguous elements in this painting all unite wonderfully despite their initial meaninglessness. As mentioned, this painting uses minimal color and smooth transitions to leave the viewer thinking which is exactly what happens in our dreams. Dali did well to express the duality of reality in this painting, and is it as work of art however I wouldn't call it a masterpiece.