

16. Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion

Ink on Paper

1954

Private Collection

Salvadore Dali

Spanish

1904-1989



Painting Highlights: The most noticeable object in this painting is the huge, soft watch that is melted over a boxy structure. The watch has started to break apart and pieces of it are scattered all over the painting. The background is a peaceful blue sky with white, fluffy clouds and a calm sea bordered by steep sculptural cliffs. There are two insects in the painting. The insects may symbolize the fragile limits of time. The soft watch exploding may symbolize the end of time. The soft watch itself is a surreal symbol which addresses the unimportance or the irrelevance of time during the process of a dream. The soft watch exploding addresses nuclear physics, and in particular Einstein's theory, time is relative. So in the exploding clock we can see time disintegrating. Dali labeled this post-WWII art "Nuclear Mysticism", which depicts images of material disintegrating. Dali's atomic approach to art covered a multitude of techniques, from molecular structural precision to the gelatinous viscosity of the primeval soup. The nuclear bombing at Hiroshima in 1945 profoundly affected Dali. This painting resembles two earlier paintings by Dali: "The Persistence of memory" (1931) and "The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory" (1954). Both paintings use the ordinary pocket watch which has been changed into something else and placed in an unnatural setting. The first painting was a pre-war, pre-nuclear bomb painting and the second one is post-war. Recognizing that matter was made up of atoms which did not touch each other, he sought to replicate this in his art at the time, with items suspended and not interacting with each other. He described the atom as his "favorite food for thought". *Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion*, was also painted post-war, the soft watch itself has exploded, just as a bomb explodes. Dali was greatly distressed by the destructive effects of several wars during his lifetime and these feelings seem to be expressed in this painting.

Artist Highlights: His name was Salvador Domingo Felipe Jacinto Dali Domenech, 1st Marques of Pubol. He was born to a wealthy family in Figueras, Northern Catalonia, Spain (where he also returned and died at age 85). His older brother, also named Salvador, had died at age 3, 9 months before Dali was born. Dali's father told him he was his brother reincarnated. Dali spent his summers in the fishing village of Cadaques, Spain. In His early childhood, Dali enjoyed painting colorful pictures of the houses, boats, trees and people of Cadaques. His first public art show was at age 15. His mother was very supportive of his art interests. When he was 17, his mother died of cancer and his father married her sister. Dali never recovered from her death. His paintings reflected the sadness he felt after her death. Dali studied art at the Royal Academy of fine Arts in Madrid starting in 1921, he believes his teachers were inferior. In 1922, he discovers Sigmund Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams" and joins the Surrealists. This is when his art changed. In His paintings, the conscious world gives way to a timeless, placeless, dreamlike universe with its own meaning. He is suspended from school in 1923 and imprisoned for one month for political subversion. Back home in Figueras, Dali begins to develop his personal style: use of apparatus - contrived objects and weird machines precariously propped by stilts, defying gravity, Women as objects, fantasy landscapes, putrefacto (Dali term) rotting things indicating a rebellious revulsion for conventional thinking. He again changed painting style when he meets his wife and muse Gala. From 1940-49 Dali and Gala travel to the US where they became celebrities. He paints for advertising firms and Hollywood studios with Alfred Hitchcock and Walt Disney. Post WWII he returns to Spain, creates exquisite surrealist jewelry and begins to investigate new ideas combining Catholic mysticism with physics. His eccentric manner and attention-grabbing public actions sometimes drew more attention than his art. At the end of his life, Gala who had become obsessed with money, locks Dali in his studio for hours to force him to paint. Although Gala had several affairs, Dali to the end worshiped his wife. The Dali Theater Museum in his home town of Figueres was his largest single and final project starting in 1975.

Dali has a way with dissecting reality and was the first artist who said effective expression to man's complexes and unsatisfied desires. "My genius is unlimited in scope, and painting is only a small part of it."

Presentation Ideas: Where does the painting take place? What happened to the watch? Why is it bent? What does it resemble? How does the watch make you feel? What kind of sounds would you be hearing if you were sitting near the watch?

28 May

Art Goes to School Report Worksheet

ARTIST: Salvador Dali **NATIONALITY:** Spain

DATES: May 11, 1904 - January 23, 1989

FAMOUS WORKS: Persistence of Memory, The Basket of Bread (early work) (1926)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES: Attend San Fernando Academy of Art in Madrid; one manshow in Madrid 1925. Part of the Surrealis Movement later work was more classical. Worked in all forms of media

NAME OF REPRODUCTION: Melting Watch Soft Watch at the moment of explosion clock Explosion

DATE: 1954 **SIZE:** _____ **MEDIUM:** Painting

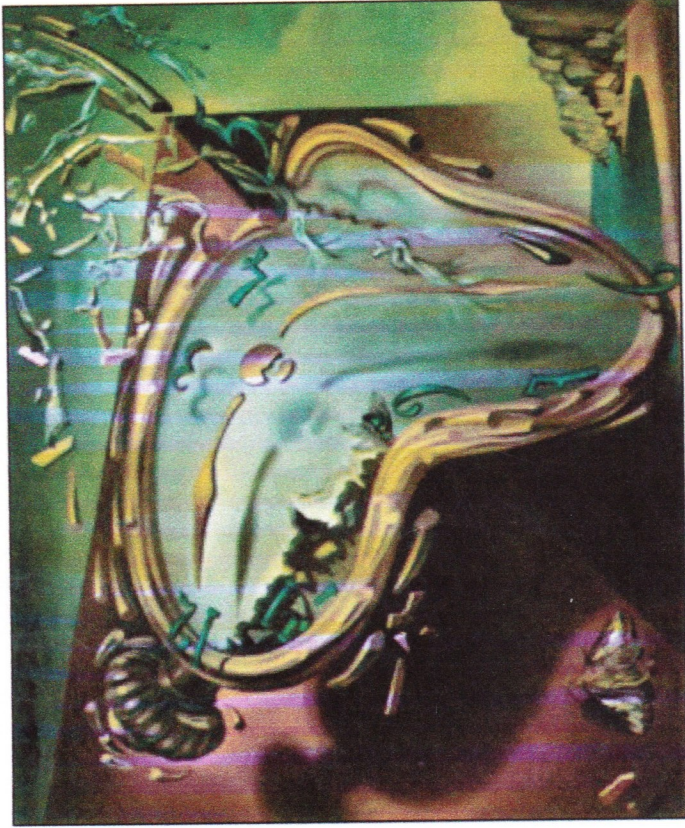
PRESENT LOCATION: Private collection

INTERPRETATION: _____

melting watch can mean/sympolize irrelevance of time
soft and hard surfaces Painting is also a study
of disintegration over the use of atomic weapons
A LOT of Freud influence too!
later in career made sculptures with "melting" clock.

PRESENTATION IDEAS: Discuss a real object/distortion
"meaning" of painting/artwork of the artist

Cabinet Makers - clean lines/shapes compared to the fluid lines



Artist: [Salvador Dalí](#)

Created: c.1954

Dimensions (cm): $7\frac{3}{4}'' \times 5\frac{1}{2}''$
19.1 x 14.0

Format: Ink on paper

Location: Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA

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["Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion"](#)

by [Salvador Dalí](#)



Salvador Dalí was one of the great artists of the surrealist movement. He had an extraordinary gift for artistic expression and thrived on the acquisition of knowledge, absorbing influences both from other artists and from contemporary philosophy and science. Men such as Sigmund Freud deeply influenced his way of perception and the way he painted.

Soft Watch at the Moment of First Explosion, (also known as The Melting Watch, Clock Explosion, or simply Explosion) is an example of this surrealist movement. Created in 1954, Dalí used the presence of a dreamlike quality and ghostly appearance to accentuate the mysterious and unexplainable in his painting.

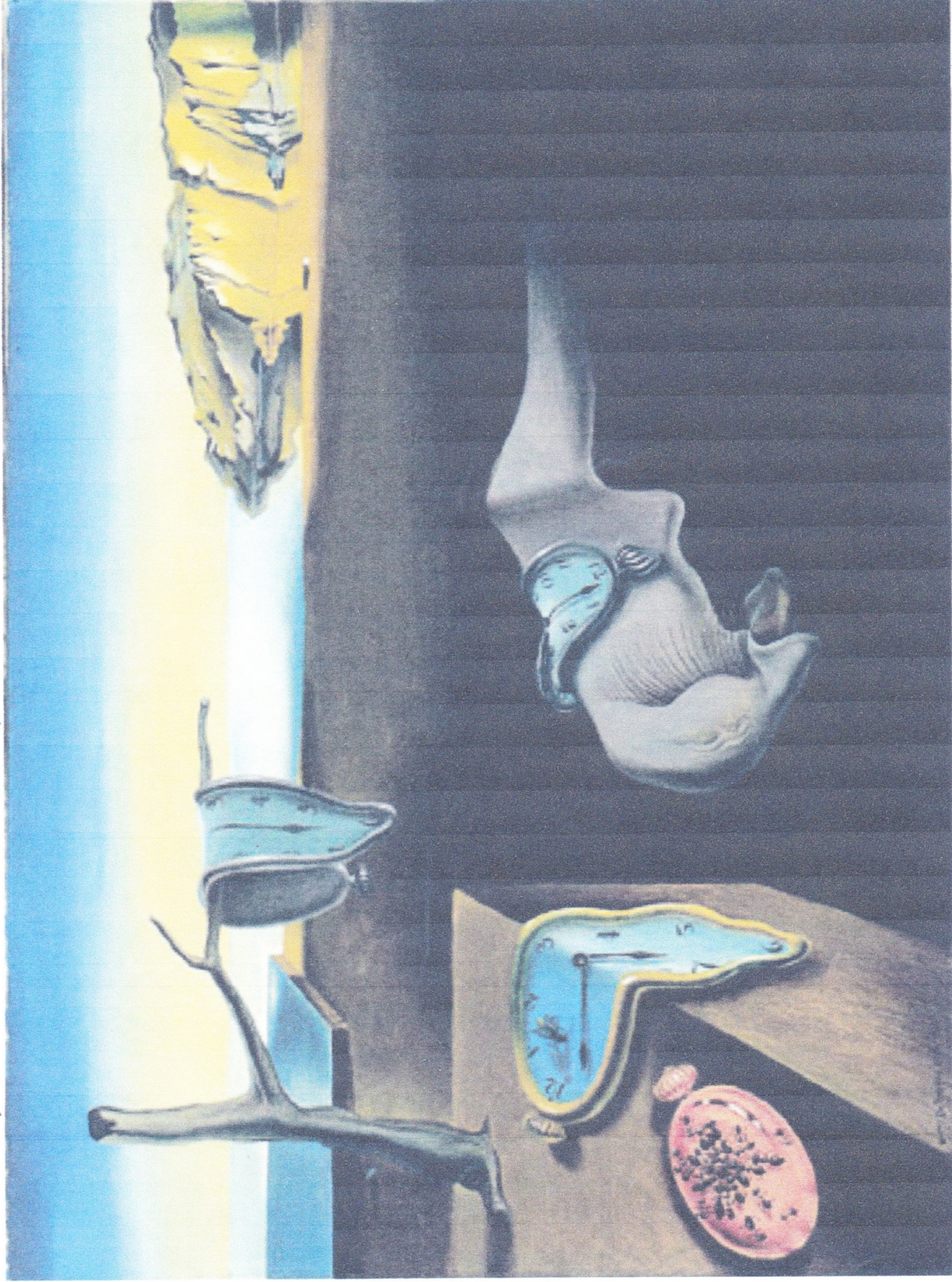
Surrealism rejects logic, reason and natural order. It uses techniques such as dreamlike or ghostly qualities, juxtaposition (a method for rejecting harmony in their work) and incorporates surreal objects and subject matter. Dalí uses these same techniques in his painting Soft Watch at the Moment of Explosion to intrigue his viewers and provoke thought.

In his painting, Dalí assimilates shadowy outlines of objects and uses the dreamlike quality in the way the watch twists and its broken pieces unexplainably float above it. Also, the ghostly way the watch drapes over one edge of the box as if melting. The watch seems to be pulling apart and stretching. It may denote Dalí's *beliefs* ^{that} *time* passing brings eventual destruction.



File:The Persistence of Memory.jpg

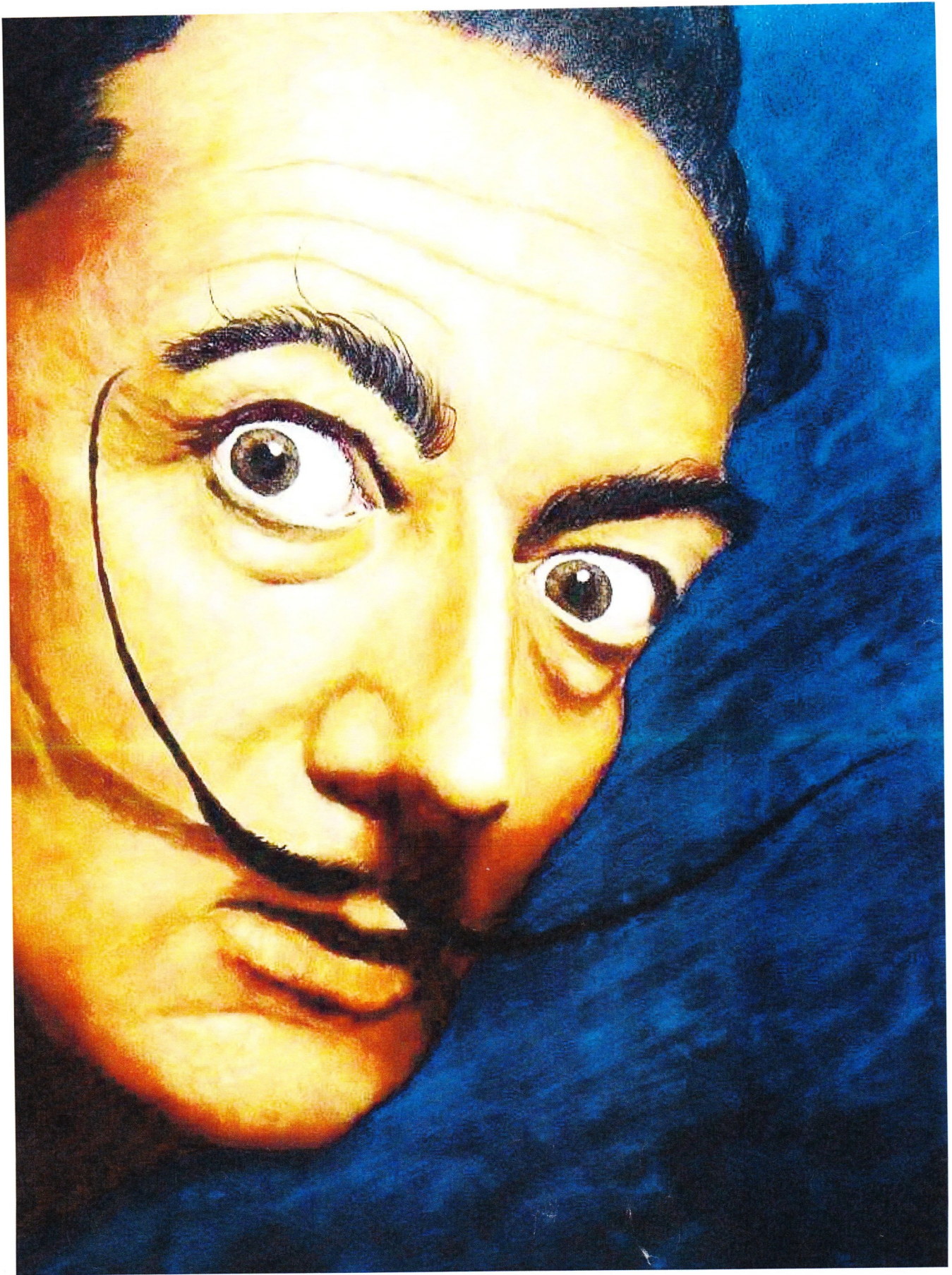
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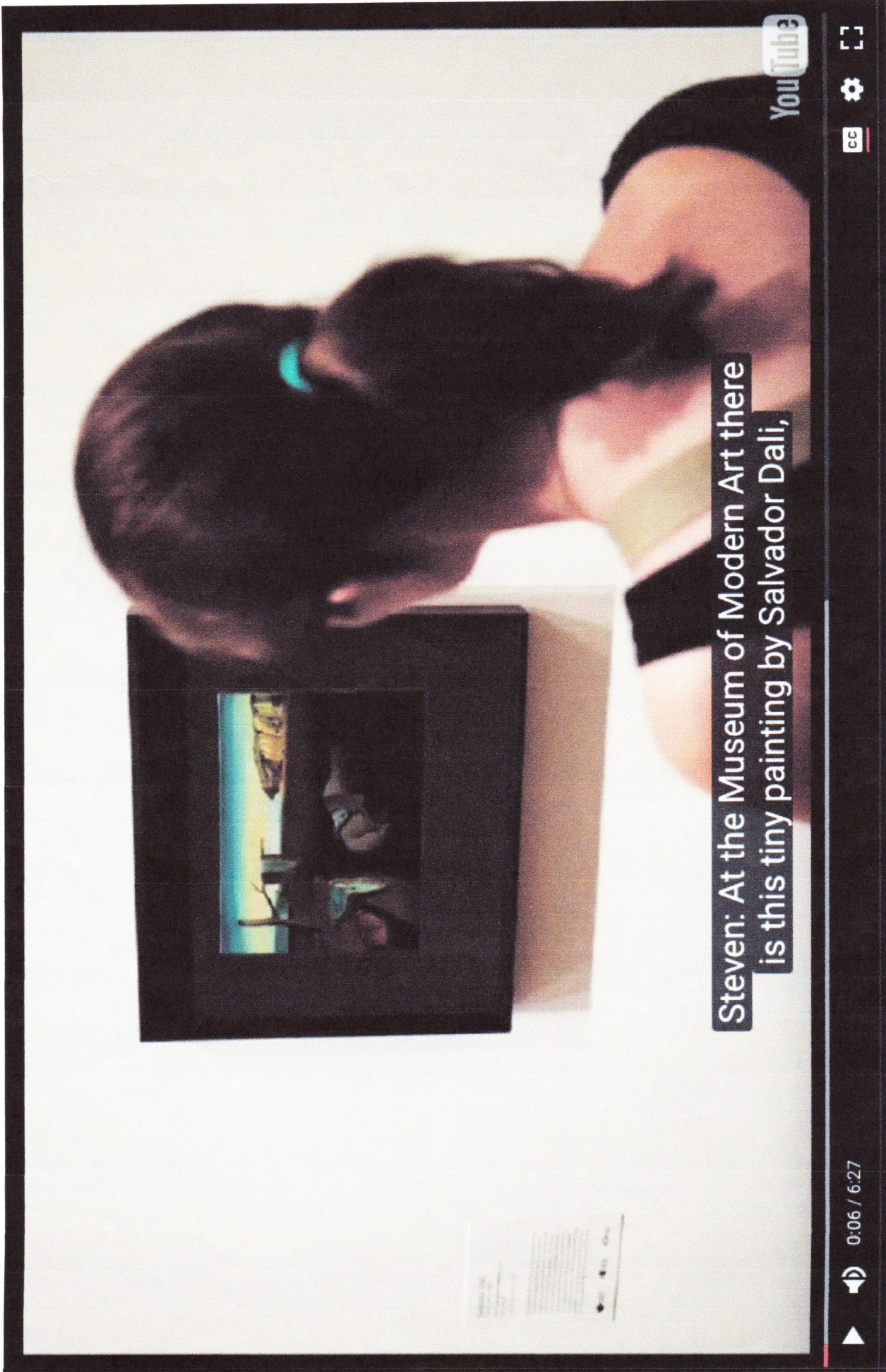


File:DisintegrationofPersistence.jpg

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Steven: At the Museum of Modern Art there is this tiny painting by Salvador Dali,

CAN YOU BELIEVE HOW SMALL THIS PAINTING IS?!