

Innovation and Best Practice for International Standards on Sculpture Study and Management

STUDY CASE NO. 1

RETROSPECTIVE BUST OF A WOMAN, SALVADOR DALÍ, 1933

FUNDACIÓ GALA-SALVADOR DALÍ

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STUDY CASE NO. 1

1. Description of the artwork/s
2. Challenge
3. Approach
4. Application of BISS Standards
5. Conclusion
6. Literature (optional)

1. Description of the artwork/s

Fig. 1 & 4 RETROSPECTIVE BUST OF A WOMAN

Artist	Salvador Dalí
Date	1933
Material / Technique	Painted porcelain, bread, corn, feathers, paint on paper, beads, ink stand, sand, and two pens
Dimensions	73.9 x 69.2 x 32 cm
Edition / Numbering	---
Inscriptions	On the back: BOTTAUX M DE CHEVEUX / BREVIT SGD / RUE CROIX DES PETITS CHAMPS
Owner	The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest and gift of Philip Johnson (both by exchange)
Location	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fig. 2 UNTITLED. «RETROSPECTIVE BUST OF A WOMAN» WITH THE «SHOE HAT» BY ELSA SCHIAPARELLI AND SALVADOR DALÍ (Fig. 2)

Artist	Salvador Dalí
Date	1938
Material / Technique	Assemblage
Dimensions	Unknown
Edition / Numbering	---
Inscriptions	---
Owner	---
Location	Lost/Ephemeral Work

Fig. 3 RETROSPECTIVE BUST OF A WOMAN DEVoured BY ANTS AND SPOONS

Artist	Salvador Dalí
Date	1939
Material / Technique	Assemblage
Dimensions	Unknown
Edition / Numbering	---
Inscriptions	---
Owner	---
Location	Lost/Ephemeral Work



Fig. 1. Photo by Man Ray, *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*, 1933, Centre Pompidou © Man Ray 2015 Trust / VEGAP, 2024



Fig. 2. Photo by André Caillet , *Gala with Elsa Schiaparelli's shoe hat inspired by Salvador Dalí design*, 1938, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Image Rights of Gala and Salvador Dalí reserved. Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2024



Fig. 3. Photo by Eric Schaal, *Retrospective Bust of a Woman devoured by the Ants and the Spoons*, 1939, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Eric Schaal © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2024



Fig. 4. *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*, 1933 (present State), The Museum of Modern Art, New York
©Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2024

2. Challenge

The goal is to label *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*, created by Salvador Dalí in 1933, and the subsequent variants of the same, after being submitted to changes of an ephemeral nature by the artist himself. These variants, which take advantage of the first creation and materials, were presented in exhibitions during the 1930s. Are we in front of the same artwork or rather of different variants of the same artwork? The sculpture was subsequently reconstructed in the 1970s, recovering its former appearance with the use of renewed materials.

3. Approach

Dalí created *Retrospective Bust of a Woman* in 1933 and presented it at the Galerie Pierre Colle in Paris the same year. He identified this work as a sculpture-object. Originally, this was an assemblage of different elements on a painted porcelain bust: bread, corn, feathers, painted paper, beads, ink stand, sand, and two pens. The first state is known to us from period photographs, one of them taken by Man Ray (Fig. 1). The current state of the work, today conserved at the Museum of Modern Art of New York, is the result of a reconstruction process presumably started in 1970 and subsequently continued (Fig. 4).

The point is that soon after 1933, Dalí modified this sculpture and proceed to introduce some changes. The earliest of these variants has been documented thanks to a 1934 photograph by Carl Van Vechten. The work does not include the 1933 loaf of bread, one of the most idiosyncratic elements of the original work. In addition, the work is listed as *Bust of Woman Devoured by Ants* in the catalogue of the *Surrealist Objects & Poems* exhibition held at the London Gallery in 1937. Thanks to a photograph published in *Sketch* on 1 December 1937, and to other photographs conserved in the National Galleries of Scotland, it is now possible to identify precisely the changes introduced into this work at this venue: a new zoetrope with the image of a bust of a man, a change of inkwell, and a different loaf of bread. It seems likely that some of these changes were occasioned by the need to replace perishable elements of the 1933 creation.

The examples illustrated here are two of the more outstanding variants. The first variant is the one that can be identified thanks to a 1938 photograph by André Caillet. In this image Gala is posing next to a *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*, and both she and the sculpture are wearing the *Shoe Hat* designed by Schiaparelli and Dalí (Fig. 2). On this occasion, the bust appears without the trappings of the first object-sculpture, thus emphasising its creative impact on the world of fashion. The second variant is *Retrospective Bust of a Woman Devoured by Ants and Spoons* (Fig. 3). Thanks to a photograph by Eric Schaal, we know that Dalí placed the head of the bust between the jaws of a shark on the occasion of an exhibition at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York. In this new variant, the zoetrope is a depiction of men with umbrellas, and the artist also attached spoons, a snail and a broken eggshell to the shoulders and breasts of the bust.

None of the above variants was fixed by the artist, but all were probably intended to be ephemeral works. On each occasion that the artist presented a new creation on the existing bust, the previous work was automatically cancelled. On the information currently available to us, we know that the porcelain bust is always the same, thus excluding the possibility of these

being essentially different artworks. This poses a problem in cataloguing the work, as it open to question whether the 1933 original should still be considered a unique work, and how the different variants should be identified and labelled.

What is most important is that after all these variations, it seems clear that the artist's intention was to preserve the first 1933 state of *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*. When it was presented at the retrospective exhibition at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 1970, and even if some of the elements had been restituted, none of the variations in the 1939 variant were retained: rather, this was a recreation of the 1933 work, with new elements, such as the loaf of bread and the inkwell.

4. Application of BISS Standards

Labels to be applied to *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*:

- ✓ Authorised Unique Work
- ✓ Reconstructed Work

Labels to be applied to the each of the variants of *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*:

- ✓ Authorised Variant
- ✓ Ephemeral Work

5. Conclusion

The combination of the two BISS standards labels, the first pertaining to the creation of the artwork by the artist, the second to the durability/conservation of the artwork, permits a clearer and more accurate identification of *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*. On the one hand, there is an authorised unique work, created in 1933 and subsequently reconstructed in 1970 and since, which can now be catalogued as both an authorised unique work and an authorised reconstructed work. On the other hand, there is a series of ephemeral variant versions of the single 1933 bust, which Dalí presented during the 1930s as new creations or new artworks. These are to be labelled as authorised variants and, due to their temporary nature, as authorised ephemeral works. The last is to emphasize their ephemeral existence and no longer conservation upon the express wish of the artist. This double labelling also serves to identify a specific process of creation employed by the artist and to make this more intelligible to the spectator.

6. Literature

- Laura Bartolomé Roviras, "Understanding the original sculpture of Salvador Dalí by way of Retrospective Bust of a Woman". In *Salvador Dalí - Retrospective Bust of a Woman - 1933/1976-1977*, Fundació Gala Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2015, p. 22-61.
- "Cat. no. OE 14 Buste de femme rétrospectif". In [Catalogue raisonné of sculpture and three-dimensional work by Salvador Dalí](#).

- “Cat. no. OE 21 Untitled. Version of «Retrospective Bust of a Woman»”. In [Catalogue raisonné of sculpture and three-dimensional work by Salvador Dalí](#) Laura Bartolomé Roviras, “Understanding the original sculpture of Salvador Dalí by way of Retrospective Bust of a Woman”. In *Salvador Dalí - Retrospective Bust of a Woman - 1933/1976-1977*, Fundació Gala Salvador Dalí, Figueres, 2015, p. 22-61.
- [work by Salvador Dalí](#).
- “Cat. no. OE 32 Bust of Woman Devoured by Ants”. In [Catalogue raisonné of sculpture and three-dimensional work by Salvador Dalí](#).
- “Cat. no. OE 33 Untitled. «Retrospective Bust of a Woman» version with the «Shoe Hat» by Elsa Schiaparelli and Salvador Dalí”. In [Catalogue raisonné of sculpture and three-dimensional work by Salvador Dalí](#).
- “Cat. no. OE 34 Retrospective Bust of a Woman Devoured by Ants and Spoons”. In [Catalogue raisonné of sculpture and three-dimensional work by Salvador Dalí](#).