



Atavism-Vegetables

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Les Dinners de Gala* Exhibit
Where: International Museum of Art & Science, 1900 Bicentennial
When: Through June 12. Hours: Tues.-Wed., 9am-3pm; Thurs., 9am-8pm, Fri., 9am-5pm; Sat. 10am-5pm; Sun., 1-5pm
Contact: 956-682-0123 or www.imasonline.org. General admission is charged.

Foodsmiths Beware!

Did you know that the great Surrealist artist, Salvador Dalí, wrote a cookbook? Yes, in 1973 his *Les Dinners de Gala* - a reference to his wife - was published. Although the "cookbook" genre may be an understatement of its contents, it does contain serious recipes. The book's contents range from discussions of the grotesque shapelessness and immorality of spinach to the masterful tool that is the human jaw.

Along with the cookbook, Dalí produced a print portfolio inspired by each of the twelve cookbook chapters and *Les Dinners de Gala* portfolio exhibition is currently being featured at IMAS. Displayed along the wall of the Cardenas Gallery, it features Dalí's photolithographic prints that offer wildly surrealistic takes on some of Dalí's favorite meals. Dually identified as lithographs by IMAS and photolithographs on the accompanying title cards, various mediums and techniques have been unified through the inked surface. Oil painting, photography, reproductions, illustrations and etching all seem to play a part in these fantastic images, including a surprising use of appropriation. Although viewers may be confused by the posted titles that are written in French with some often-dubious English translations, a Dalí quote that relates to the dining experience makes up for it. Chapter headings from the cookbook precede the specific recipe title. A few unrelated Dalí prints from the museum's permanent collection are also exhibited on the facing wall.

Dalí's Surrealist style was unique in that it not only tapped into the unconscious mind, most successfully when referencing Freudian psychology that was popular during Surrealism's formative years, but in his exceptional painting virtuosity. One of Dalí's

signature tricks is to visually confuse the viewer. This happens throughout this body of work. "Vegetables" is from the Atavism chapter, which, we are told, is "ancestral characteristics in an organism after several generations of absence." Although the configuration of the print appears to be a serving platter heaped with food, close inspection reveals scenes from the Hieronymus Bosch Northern Renaissance painting, "The Garden of Earthly Delights." We also find a cartoon style from a bygone time, urns, and a bit of forest. The canapés being pedaled by crayfish would have done Bosch proud.

What makes this portfolio important for me is the intertwining of artistic styles, art history, personal angst, and humor all tossed together with Dali's style and imagination. His obsessive themes of eroticism, death, decay, and Freudian psychology are here, too.

The print, "Exotic Dishes," includes a specter of death, a brain filled with late Renaissance figures writhing in decadence, a dash of sado-masochism with a bound entree ready for roasting, and a rather disgusting mound sprouting two bird's heads. I preferred his "Fish and Crustaceans" print that references fellow Surrealist Rene Magritte's mermaid - a fish head with the body of a woman - supported on a bed of crayfish and garnish on French neo-classical pottery.

In reference to his culinary preferences and distaste of spinach, Dali has stated, "I only like to eat what has a clear and intelligible form. If I hate that detestable degrading vegetable called spinach it is because it is shapeless, like Liberty."

And it's those clear and intelligible forms that are best used to trick the perceptions of the delighted viewer in *Les Dinners de Gala* portfolio.

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