



Fig. 1. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus* Pavilion, Façade at Night, World's Fair, 1939

DREAM OF VENUS



Fig. 2. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939
Weingrow Collection



“THERE IS ONLY ONE
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A
MADMAN AND ME.

THE MADMAN THINKS HE IS
SANE.

I KNOW I AM MAD.” ~ SALVADOR
DALÍ¹

Dalí's *Dream of Venus*: The Surrealist Funhouse of the 1939 World's Fair . . .



Fig. 4. Eric Schaal, Detail of Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939

THE NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR OF 1939

"On 30 April 1939, not long before the Second World War broke out, a new world fair opened in New York. Intended as a final effort to overcome the Great Depression, the fair was presented largely as a platform for the future and was heralded under the slogan of 'the world of tomorrow.' After ten years of hardship, the fair offered visitors a dazzling spectacle of shining technology, unexpectedly streamlined architecture and magical attractions. Conceived as an expression of the triumph of industrial progress and the capitalist order, it announced a new era, the age of technology, which the war interrupted for a short time. On offer were washing machines and dishwashers, the miracle of television, which broadcast live for the first time to mark the opening of the event, the first colour photographs from Kodak, synthetic fabrics such as nylon, etc. In short, a world of comforts and modern conveniences, technological luxuries and new forms of entertainment. In other words, a world of merchandise. The fair was divided into three main sectors. Firstly, there was the Central Theme, based on the proposal of the 'World of Tomorrow.' Secondly, there was the States Area, where 33 states and 58 countries were represented. Germany and Spain, which had just emerged from its civil war, did not take part, while the presence of Japan, Italy and the USSR was curious, bearing in mind that the fair aimed to promote democracy as a form of government and way of life. Lastly, the Amusements Area, conceived as an added extra to the main area and purpose of the fair. Dali's pavilion was located in the Amusements Area."²



Fig. 5. Salvador Dalí, Detail of Sketch for Exterior of the *Dream of Venus Pavilion*, World's Fair, 1939



Fig. 6. Eric Schaal, Entrance of the *Dream of Venus* Pavilion, 1939

"Salvador Dalí spent considerable time in New York in the 1930s, cultivating an audience and a market. These efforts culminated at the 1939 World's Fair in a giant Surrealist folly containing a grotto with erotic all-female tableaux vivants, some of them staged underwater. His pavilion, the *Dream of Venus*, was an astonishing realization of what Dalí had termed the "terrifying and edible beauty" of surrealist architecture, then unprecedented on American shores. Entered through a spread-leg archway, it contained such features as a ceiling of inverted umbrellas and a new version of the artist's famous *Rainy Taxi* (1938). Its bulbous, writhing façade, riven with holes and cracks, opposed the polished, streamlined Art Deco architecture of the national and corporate pavilions of the fair's optimistic 'World of Tomorrow.'"³

“Enter here men of all kinds and races, victims of reality, you who have the thirst for dreams.”⁴



Fig. 7. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus, Interior*, 1939

As visitors entered the pavilion, they were warned that what they were about to see would be not only unsettling, but even disturbing. Dalí's focus and main objective was to stage the dreams of Venus. He displayed the goddess "lying on an ardent couch, consumed by the fever of love, dreaming burning dreams."⁵

THE "WET" ZONE

The "wet" part of the pavilion represented Venus's dream of water. "There was a large number of objects inside the tank: a piano with a woman's body for the keyboard, clusters of telephone earpieces, typewriters, fireplaces, mummified cows and seaweed turned into chains, etc. As these objects were made of flexible rubber, it is to be supposed that they undulated rhythmically, as did the 'living mermaids wearing crustacean flippers and little else' that swam underwater, playing the piano, making phone calls, using the typewriter, lighting the fire and occasionally milking the cow. The immersed girls, swimming against a backdrop of a painted underwater Pompeii (Gradiva again?), 'wear the scanty clothing that Dali has designed, consisting of corsets and fishnet stockings from the last century.'"⁶



Fig. 8. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939



THE DRY ZONE

For Dalí, the “dry” part expressed the primary theme of the pavilion: the Dream of Venus. “There was a ten-meter-long couch upholstered in red satin on which a girl lay, acting the part of the sleeping (that is to say, dreaming) goddess. Next to her was another girl, a finger raised to her lips, making gestures to visitors, indicating to them that they should not wake the goddess. A large mirror reflected and so duplicated the image.”⁷

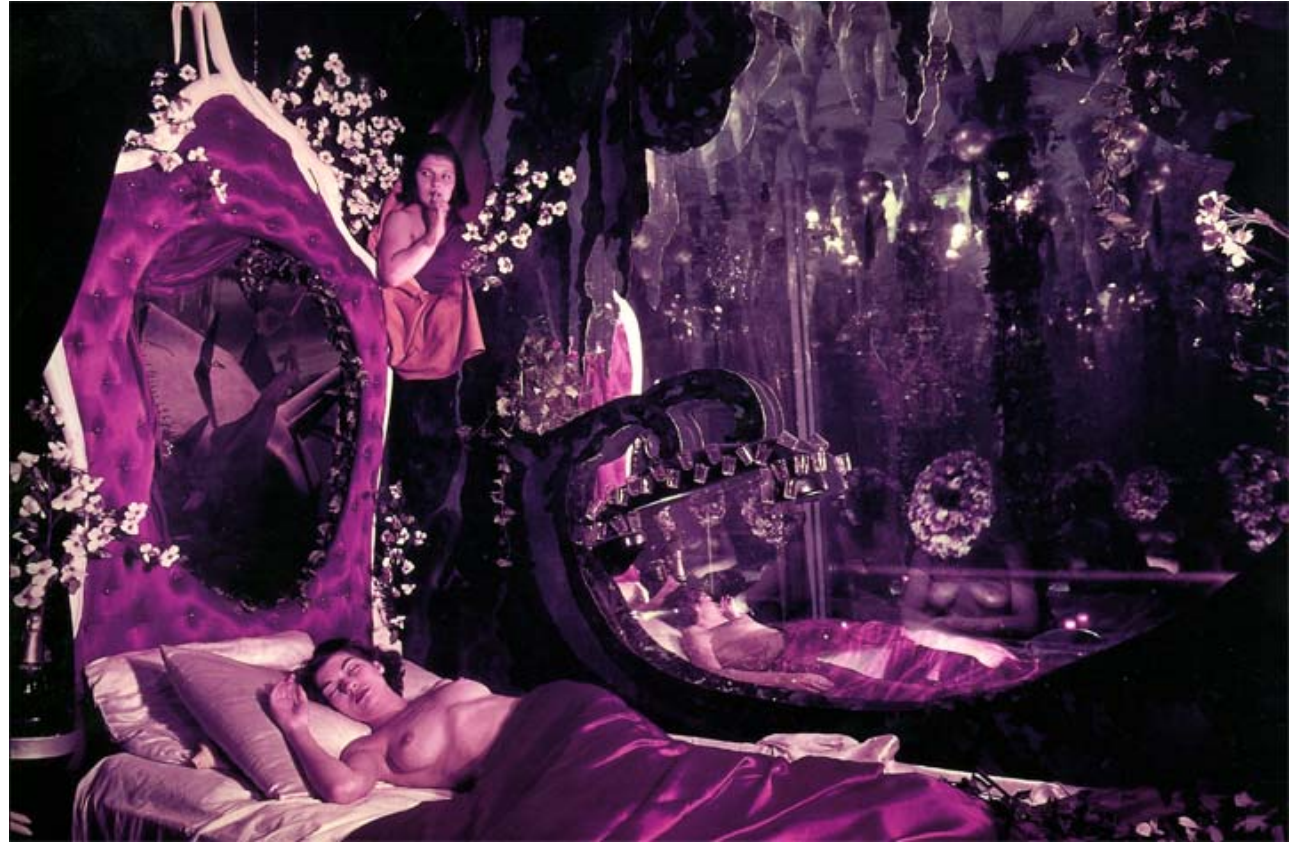


Fig. 10. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939



“Painted on the other side were enchanted beaches, soft watches and groups of giraffes, their necks in flames.”⁸

The Weingrow Collection contains a group of six publicity photographs for Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus* pavilion by Murray Korman, in which Dalí assumed the role of art director. These are the only explicitly extant prints (four are reproduced throughout this presentation). While Korman's stark, theatrical style is apparent, Dalí was the innovator for these images, conjuring up the incongruous poses and costumes that provocatively promoted the *Dream of Venus* and surrealism. Dalí was fascinated by fashion, as evidenced by his collaborations with designers such as Elsa Schiaparelli, and brought his ideas from that realm to these photographs. Most of the women are wearing what could be described as Dalí-designed bathing suits that take the form of strategically placed lobsters, seashells, and crustaceans.



Fig. 12. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939
Weingrow Collection

Murray Korman was best known for creating glamorous images of aspiring and established entertainers; his photographs were commonly used in promotions. In the context of the *Dream of Venus*, Korman's work has been contrasted with Horst's photographs, which are situated in a more artistic realm. Korman has been characterized as a publicity photographer and his studio "more mass than class."⁹ Yet Korman put his study at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City to good use by creating memorable, and sometimes sensual, photographs of many of the top entertainers of the mid-twentieth century, such as Josephine Baker, who is pictured here in a classical pose, loosely draped and heavily bejeweled.¹⁰ Korman's popular appeal and distinctive lighting were joined with Salvador Dalí's imaginative, esoteric, and startling expressions to create an intriguing set of images for the *Dream of Venus*.



Fig. 13. Murray Korman, *Josephine Baker in "En Super Folies,"* 1937



“Moving to New York; for the Fair, Dalí runs around in photo studios in Queens doing shots for publicity purposes that had no other function. Dalí again, with the lobster symbol, dressing the nude model, who seems to me to be posing as if she were lifeless or mannequin-like. Even stranger Gala joins Dalí in the contrast between nude and clothed. It’s very striking and reminds me of some of those Lucas Samaras portraits of the ’70s, where he peeks in at the side—he can’t resist being in the photo himself—even though it’s supposed to be a portrait of somebody else.”¹¹

Fig. 14. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939
Weingrow Collection

There was no shortage of interest among other photographers besides Murray Korman in Dalí's well-publicized project. "Black-and-white and color photographs by Horst P. Horst, George Platt Lynes, Eric Schaal, Carl van Vechten, and others document the architectural space as well as the artists who created it, and the actors and models who swam and sunbathed throughout."¹²



Fig.15. George Platt Lynes, Photograph for the *Dream of Venus*, 1939



Fig. 16. Carl van Vechten, *Portrait of Salvador Dalí*, 1939



Fig. 17. Horst P. Horst with Salvador Dalí, Photograph of Model with Swimsuit Painted on the Image, 1939

Progressive Symbols

"The first thing you saw as you came down the boardwalk and into the Fair was its dominating symbols, the Tylon and Perisphere, the former a triangular spire fifteen stories high, the latter a gigantic globe a city block across. . . .

"They did not spring suddenly from the brains of their designers, the architectural firm Harrison and Fouilhoux. They belonged to a continuous tradition in modern art. . . .

"The two gleaming structures were of course male and female symbols. Inside the female globe, the designers had gestated their vision of the World of Tomorrow. They called it Democracy, and it was the most popular exhibit at the Fair." ¹³



Fig. 18. Architects Harrison and Fouilhoux, *Tylon and Perisphere*, New York World's Fair, 1939



Dalí's intuitive ideas were not aligned with the measured geometry of modernist structures, as exemplified by the Trylon and Perisphere; however, he related to the tension between their gendered forms.

As a commentary, he borrowed the fair's main symbol as a prop in one of the Dream of Venus publicity photographs by Murray Korman. In it, Dalí both emphasized the phallic aspect of the Trylon by angling it in front of the Perisphere (a view not often photographed) and diminished its size and significance by having one of his "Venus" models tower above it—and symbolically the entire fair—in a provocative and thoughtful pose.

Calling into question the progressive thematic stance of the fair, and after having had to negotiate the controversial content of his pavilion, Dalí published his infamous *Declaration of Independence of the Imagination and the Right of Man to His Own Madness*.

Fig. 19. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939, Weingrow Collection

“Contemporary press remarked that the pavilion ‘shrewdly combine[d] Surrealism and sex,’ delighting the organizers of Dalí’s Dream of Venus pavilion, who believed that it would do more to advance the understanding of Surrealism in America than ‘a dozen high-brow exhibitions.’”¹⁴

“Filled with nude women, mermaids, melting clocks, and underwater dreamscapes, it was a sexually charged creation that served, for most visitors of the World’s Fair, as an introduction to the Surrealist Movement by its most famous figure.”^{15, 16}



Fig. 20. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939
Weingrow Collection



Notes

Christine Trotter

Fig. 21. Eric Schaal, Dressing Room of the *Dream of Venus* Pavilion, 1939

1. ThinkExist, s.v. "Salvador Dalí," http://en.thinkexist.com/quotation/there_is_only_one_difference_between_a_madman_and/220677.html (accessed December 5, 2005).
2. *Dalí: Mass Culture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; Barcelona: Fundació "La Caixa"; Figueras: Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, 2004), 123.
3. Lewis Kachur, "Annals of Surrealism: Dalí's Folly," *Art In America* 91, no. 10 (2003): 70-1, 73, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1248/is_10_91/ai_109667927 (accessed December 8, 2005).
4. Passage from an audio recording of a woman's voice that was intended to simulate Venus, calling out to the visitors of the pavilion. Stephen Kinzer, "Memory Persists in a Dalí Pavilion Revisited," *Arthur*, <http://www.arthurmag.com/magpie/?p=141> (accessed December 5, 2005).
5. *Dalí: Mass Culture*, 119.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 117.
10. Murray Korman began his studies at the Cooper Union at age 16 in 1919. After his first year of "freehand," he was promoted to third year. Institutional records show he attended until 1921. His occupation was listed as "painter." I would like to thank Ellen Dorsey, Associate Registrar, Office of Admissions and Records at the Cooper Union for providing this information.
11. Lewis Kachur, "Surrealism and the Cyborg: Mannequins and Body Doubles," *ArtLab 23* 1, no. 1 (2002), <http://www.artlab23.net/issue1/LewisKachur.html> (accessed December 8, 2005).
12. Queens Museum of Art, *Salvador Dalí: Dream of Venus*, under "Exhibitions, Artists," <http://www.queensmuseum.org/exhibitions/dali.shtml> (accessed December 5, 2005)
13. Jeffrey Hart, "The Last Great Fair," *New Criterion* 23, no. 5 (2005), <http://www.newcriterion.com/archive/23/jan05/worldsfair.htm> (accessed December 5, 2005).
14. Queens Museum of Art, *Salvador Dalí: Dream of Venus*, op. cit.
15. Paul Menchaca, "QMA Exhibit Looks at Dalí's 'Dream of Venus'" *Queens Chronicle*, June 26, 2003, http://www.zwire.com/site/index.cfm?newsid=8717282&BRD=2731&PAG=461&dept_id=574995&rfi=8 (accessed December 5, 2005).
16. For additional visual information on the *Dream of Venus*, see Medicus Collection: *New York World's Fair, 1939-40*, Reel 2, Part I, 1939, 18 min., 28 sec., Kodachrome; from Internet Archive, under "Moving Image," "Prelinger Archives," "Amateur Films," http://www.archive.org/details/Medicusc1939_2 (accessed December 8, 2005).

Illustrations

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2. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939, Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 1/4 in. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
3. Photograph of Salvador Dalí. Courtesy of Brian Sewell Art Directory, <http://www.briansewell.com/artist/d-artist/salvador-dali/salvador-dali-biography.htm> | (accessed December 5, 2005).
4. Eric Schaal, Detail of Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*, 23.
5. Salvador Dalí, Detail of Sketch for Exterior of the *Dream of Venus* Pavilion, World's Fair, 1939, tempera, pencil, and paper on illustration board, 30 x 30 in. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*, 88. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY
6. Eric Schaal, Entrance of the *Dream of Venus* Pavilion, 1939. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*, 13.
7. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*. Courtesy of Amazon, © Eric Schaal Estate, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/156898359X/ref=nosim/103-0798604-7303859?n=283155> (accessed December 5, 2005).
8. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*. Courtesy of Amazon, © Eric Schaal Estate, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/156898359X/ref=nosim/103-0798604-7303859?n=283155> (accessed December 5, 2005).
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10. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*, 19.
11. Eric Schaal, Salvador Dalí's *Dream of Venus*, Interior, 1939. Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus*, 101.
12. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939, Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 1/4 in. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
13. Murray Korman, *Josephine Baker in "En Super Folies,"* 1937. Collection of the Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
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15. George Platt Lynes, Photograph for the *Dream of Venus*, 1939. David Cohen, "From Critical Paranoia to Uncritical Banality: 100 Years of Salvador Dalí and 25 of Jeff Koons," *Art Critical*. Courtesy Art Critical, © Eric Schaal Estate, <http://www.artcritical.com/DavidCohen/SUN52.htm> (accessed October 5, 2005).
16. Carl van Vechten, *Portrait of Salvador Dalí*, 1939, Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten collection, [reproduction number, e.g., LC-USZ62-54231], under "Portraits by Carl Van Vechten," "Salvador Dalí," <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/vanvechten/index.html> (accessed October 5, 2005).
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20. Murray Korman with Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus*, 1939, Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 1/4 in. Courtesy of the Howard L. and Muriel Weingrow Collection of Avant-Garde Art and Literature at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.
21. Eric Schaal, Dressing Room of the *Dream of Venus* Pavilion, 1939. Courtesy of Amazon, © Eric Schaal Estate, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/156898359X/ref=nosim/103-0798604-7303859?n=283155> (accessed December 5, 2005).