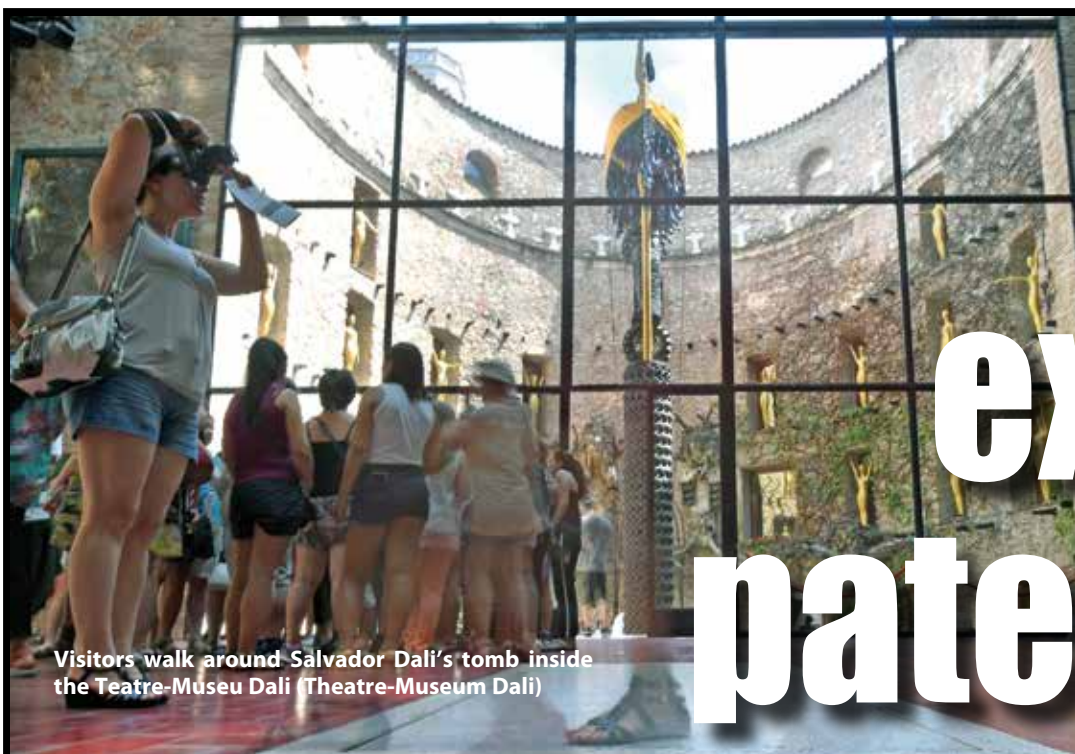


Dali to be exhumed in paternity case



Visitors walk around Salvador Dali's tomb inside the Teatre-Museu Dali (Theatre-Museum Dali)

Figueras

Salvador Dali's remains are to be exhumed from his Spanish hometown in an effort to test a fortune teller's claims the renowned surrealist is her father.

The artist's body is buried in the elaborate museum of his work Dali designed himself in the northeastern Spanish town of Figueras, where he was born over 110 years ago.

Pilar Abel, a 61-year-old who long worked as a psychic in Catalonia, says her mother had a relationship with the artist when she worked in Cadaques, a picturesque port where the painter lived for years.

If Abel is confirmed as Dali's only child, she could be entitled to a slice of at least 25 per cent of the huge fortune and heritage of one of the most celebrated and prolific painters of the 20th century, said the woman's lawyer Enrique Blaquez.

Upon his death in 1989 at age 84, Dali's estate was estimated to be worth 136 million dollars (118 million euros), according to his lawyer at the time.

It included at the time hundreds of paintings as well as several properties in Catalonia as well as merchandising rights.

The Salvador Dali Foundation -- which manages the late artist's estate -- tried unsuccessfully to fight off the exhumation with a court appeal.

Authorities will begin removing the over one-tonne

Dali's estate was estimated to be worth 136 million dollars

A child touches Salvador Dali's tombstone inside the Teatre-Museu Dali (Theatre-Museum Dali) in Figueras



slab covering the tomb of the eccentric artist, who died with no known child heirs, after visitors have cleared out for the day from the Dali Theatre-Museum.

Forensic scientists will take DNA samples in the form of bone or tooth fragments directly from the grave where Dali was buried and they will then be sent to Madrid to undergo the necessary tests.

The museum, a top tourist site that drew over 1.1 million visitors last year, will be covered in some places with cloth to prevent drones from capturing images of the exhumation, which is expected to take several hours.

The Salvador Dali Foundation will provide details of the exhumation at a press conference on Friday at 8 am (0600 GMT).

'Saddened'

Abel has already provided a saliva sample for comparison, with results expected within a matter of weeks.

"I just want to know the truth. I am very positive, very happy," Abel told reporters at a Madrid hotel on the eve of Dali's exhumation.

In an interview last month, just days after a court ordered the exhumation, Abel said her grandmother first told her she was Dali's daughter when she was seven or eight years old,

and her mother admitted it much later.

Abel is from the city of Figueras, like Dali, and she said she would often see him in the streets.

"We wouldn't say anything, we would just look at each other. But a glance is worth a thousand words," she said.

Spain's Culture Minister Inigo Mendez de Vigo said he was "saddened" by the exhumation but he stressed that the court order must be obeyed.

Notoriously eccentric, Dali's life was marked as much by the genius of his work as by his own extravagances.

A question has always hung over his sexuality, with some claiming he was a closet homosexual who preferred to watch others having sex rather than taking part.

But according to Abel's lawyer Blaquez, his affair was "known in the village, there are people who have testified before a notary".

Dali and Gala

Born on May 11, 1904 in Figueras to a bourgeois family,

If Abel is confirmed as Dali's only child, she could be entitled to a slice of at least 25 per cent of the huge fortune and heritage of Salvador Dali

Dali developed an interest in painting from an early age.

In 1922 he began studying at the Fine Arts Academy in Madrid, where, despite being expelled twice, he developed his first avant-garde artistic ideas in association with poet Federico Garcia Lorca and the filmmaker Luis Bunuel.

Soon he left for Paris to join the surrealist movement, giving the school his own personal twist and rocketing

to fame with works such as "The Great Masturbator."

Returning to Catalonia after 12 years, he invited French poet Paul Eluard and his Russian wife Elena Ivanovna Diakonova to Cadaques.

She became his muse -- he gave her the pet name Gala -- and remained at his side for the rest of her life.

They never had children and she died in 1982, seven years before Dali's death.



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