The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

BLOG POST: 2026.05.04

The Dali Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida

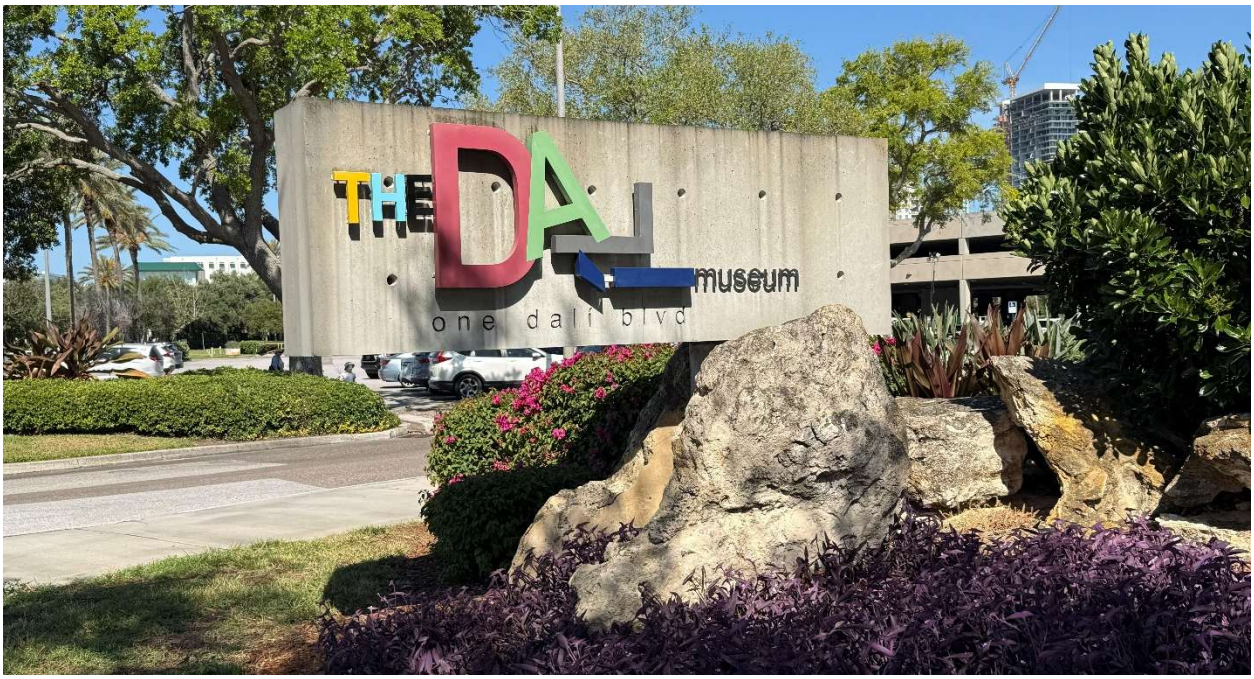


There is a series on The Smithsonian Channel called *How Did They Build That?* I've watched several episodes, and one of them showed the phases of this building, from conception through completion. I didn't really pay attention where it was, though. I figured it'd be in Europe somewhere.

But, as I searched my way around Florida's Gulf Coast, googling "What are the coolest sights to see in…," a picture of this structure popped up. I didn't fully make the connection right away, but with it being "just up the road" from Sarasota, I knew my camera needed to meet it.

I had a Dali poster in my college room. It had a melting clock in it. The poster did, not my room. Other than that, I never knew much about the artist. He was a big deal for quite a few years, I knew that much, and his art was considered quite freaky, and I was a fan of freaky things back then (still am, I suppose).

But I did not really come here to immerse myself in Dali's genius; it was the building itself that intrigued me.



This iteration of The Dali Museum opened on 1/1/11, and provided a far more secure home for his masterpieces than the old marine warehouse nearby that had housed them since 1982. The design is eye-catching – especially the bulging glass atrium that wraps around and over one wall (see photo, page 1) -- and the structure itself boasts 18" thick concrete walls.



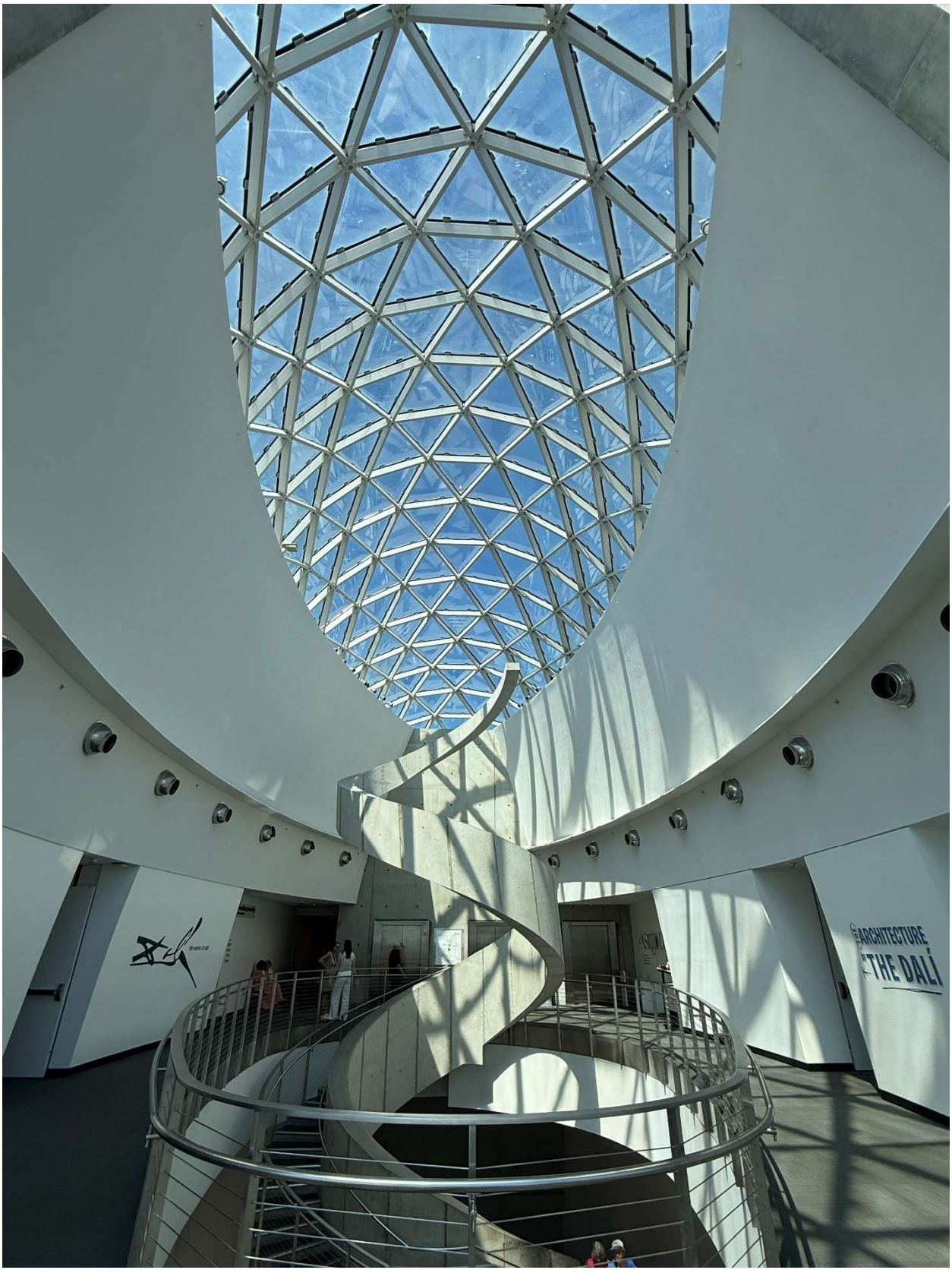
In a major hurricane, as my tour guide explained to me, the glass is probably a goner, but everything inside would be bunkered away behind hefty steel doors. All the art is on the third floor, so flooding is not a worry. If the waters get that high, the city of St. Pete is going to have bigger problems than waterlogged artwork.

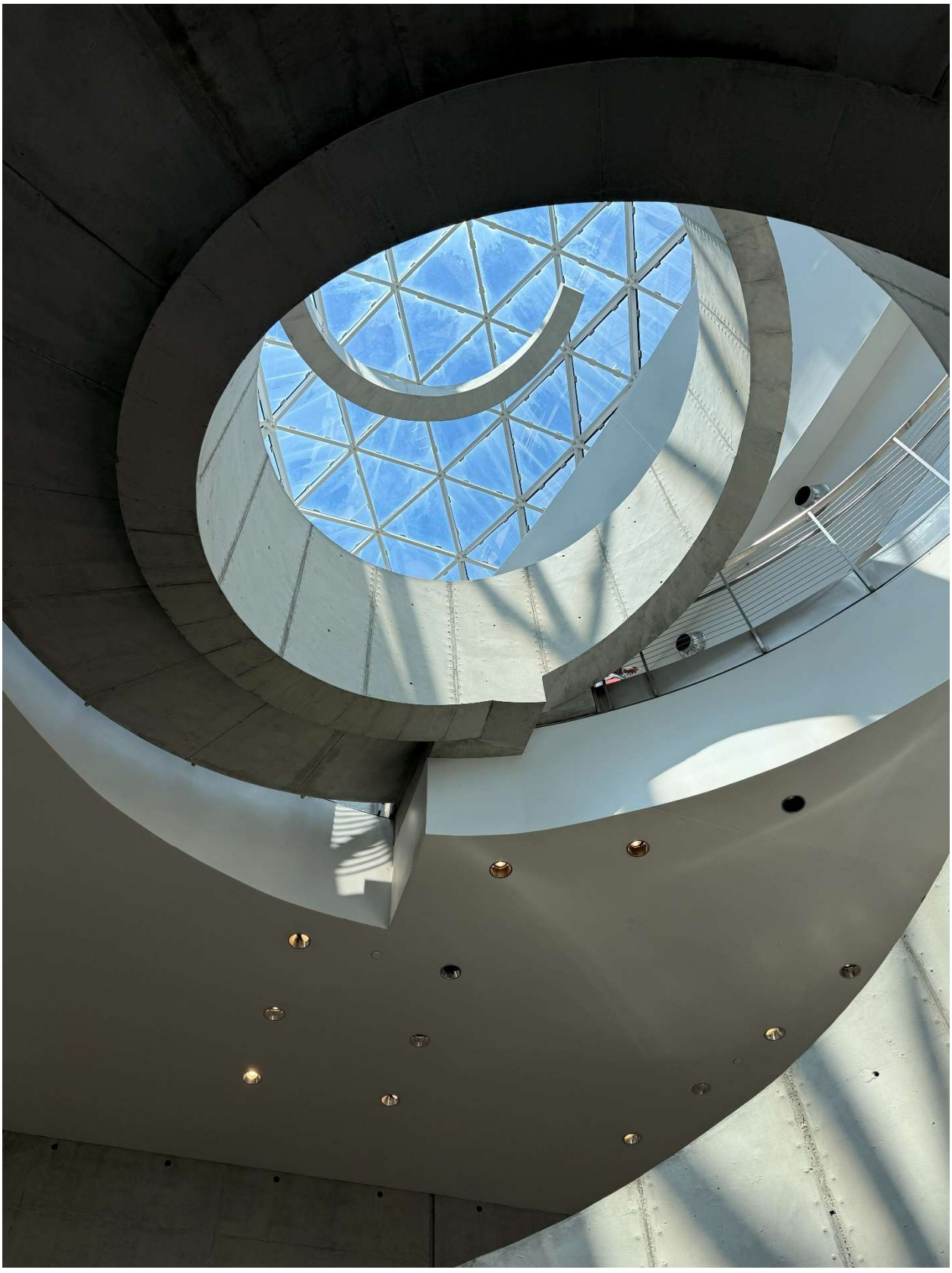


There are more than 1500 panes and no two are exact same size and shape.

What clicked the connection in head with the TV show was the spiral staircase. I definitely remembered the way it just spiraled off to nothing under all that glass.



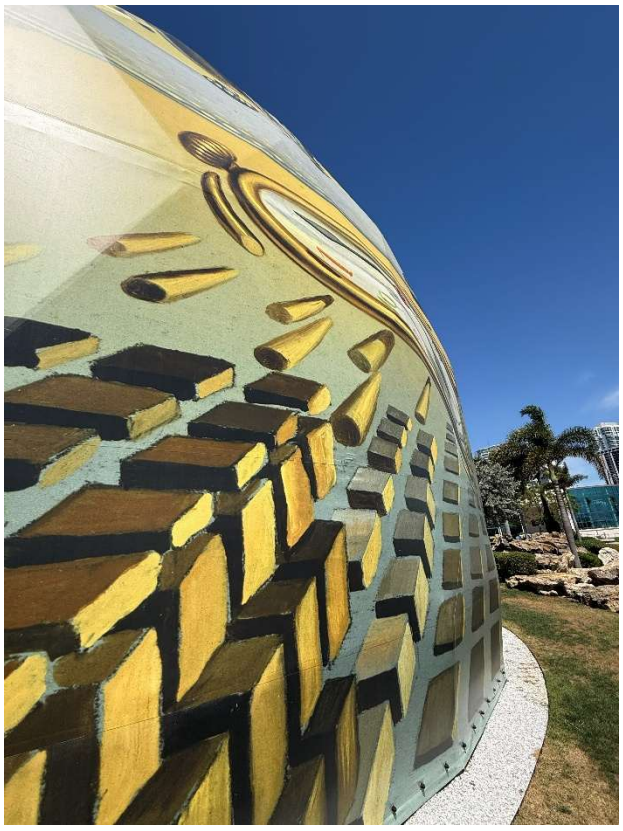

ARCHITECTURE
THE DALÍ



It was a Monday morning, so there was almost nobody at the museum. The 10:30 tour that I had signed up for, in fact, consisted of me and my guide, Marliss, a 21-year veteran of the Dali docent staff. She knew every last detail of everything, and since I was the only guest, it was much more like a conversation than a practiced spiel.

That almost-an-hour-long tour took me right up to my next scheduled event: the immersive experience in the Dali Dome (below).



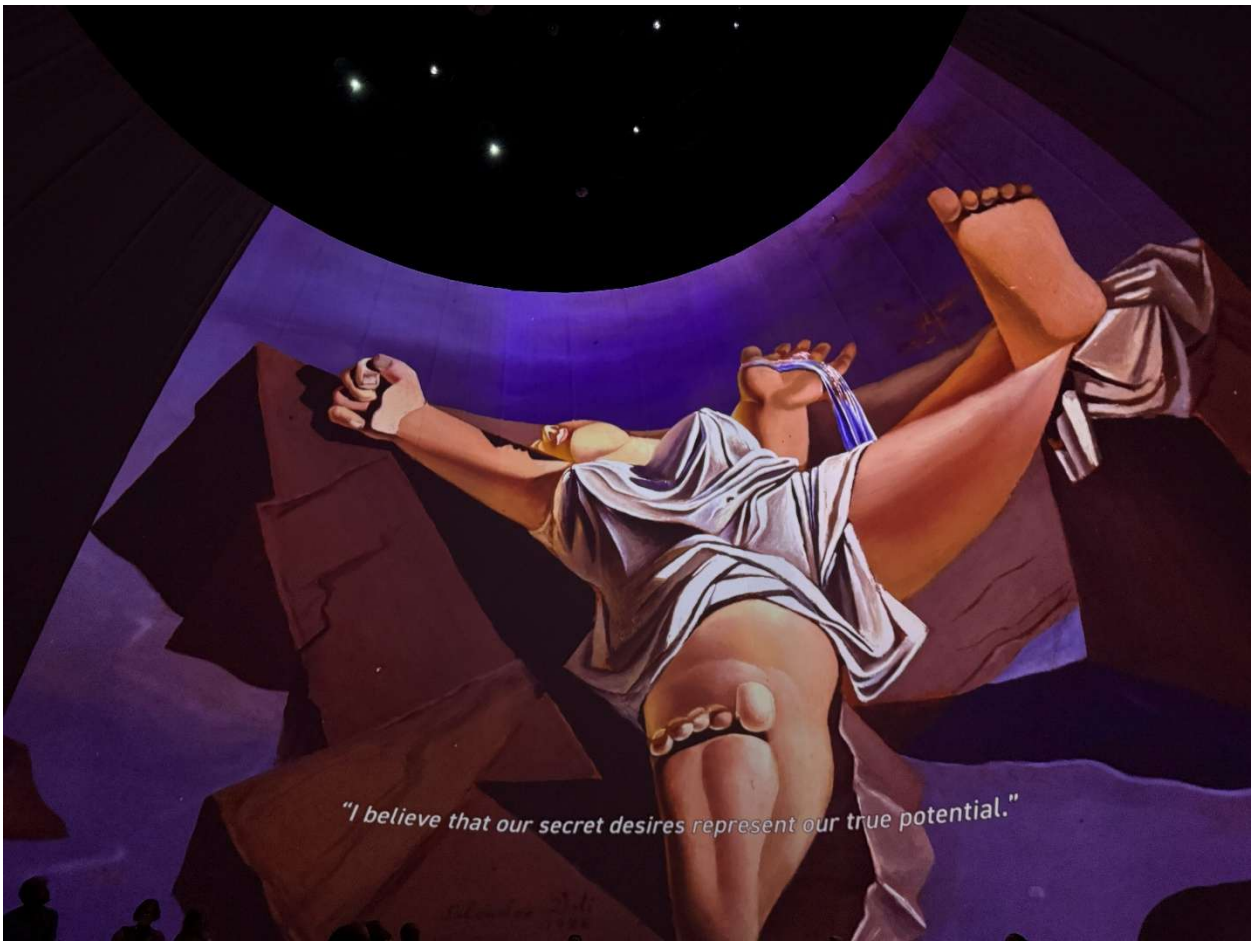


The dome is a separate structure set off from the museum proper. I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into – bizarre art all around me – but it was more in-depth than just that.



There were rows of chairs around the inner circumfrence of the dome, but we were told that we could sit anywhere we wanted. Several people opted for the floor, near the center, for a more balanced 360-degree view.

Much of the early part of the show dealt with Dali's beginnings. Yeah, OK, but not the kind of stuff you need an immersive dome for.


"I believe that our secret desires represent our true potential."


"After each dive into the depths of my subconscious I emerge stronger and more alive than ever. I



The floor was often part of the display as well.







I didn't know any of these paintings. The only things that I recognized were the melting clocks. For people who knew them all, this must have been blow-away stuff – especially all the parts where the still paintings were somehow converted into moving animation.



The first one or two, I just took it as it was. Then I realized, hey, Dali did not paint *moving* paintings. Somebody extrapolated his scenes and produced lead-ins and folllow-ups to make minute-long movies of the bizarre still scenes. They tried to imagine the sequence that might have been in the artist's mind: what caused this odd scene to be, and where might it have gone from there. Almost as if the painting was a mere **point** on a curve, and the producers were trying to show **an arc**. I was very impressed by that.

The dome show was narrated the whole time, but not about any interpretation of the art we were seeing. We were told about his adult life, his rise to prominence, his embracing of his role as an art superstar, some of his beliefs (for instance, he did not seem to believe that he would ever physically die), and even his distinctive mustache.





So, that show lasted about an hour. Then, it was time to enter to the extensive vault to see the actual art.

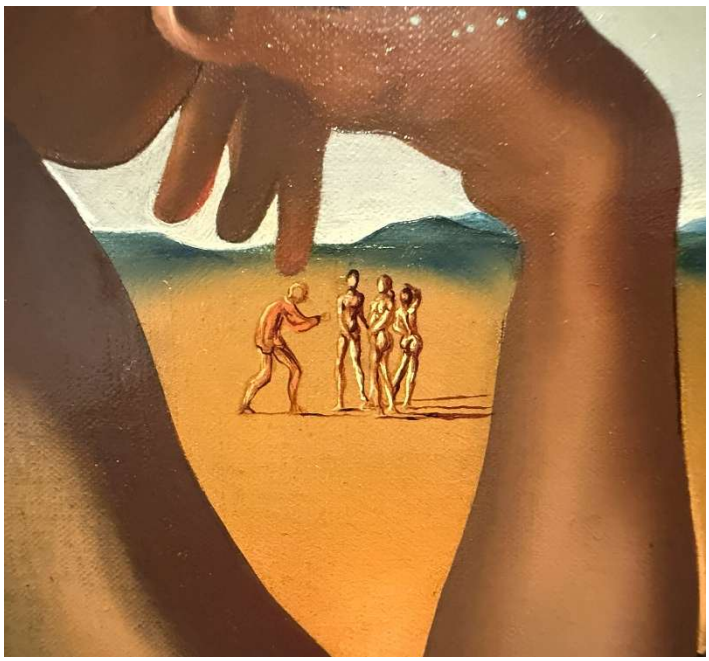
Some of them were enormous! His largest work was actually a stage for a surrealist ballet – a what?? – and was 100 feet wide by 65 feet high. I saw a few that were easily 15 feet tall, but most of them were the size you'd expect for framed art.

Some were downright tiny, especially the few jewelry pieces that were on display. They were maybe an inch across. I don't know if he made the pieces or designed them or what.

What entertained me the most was taking a large painting and exploring it for tiny details. For example:



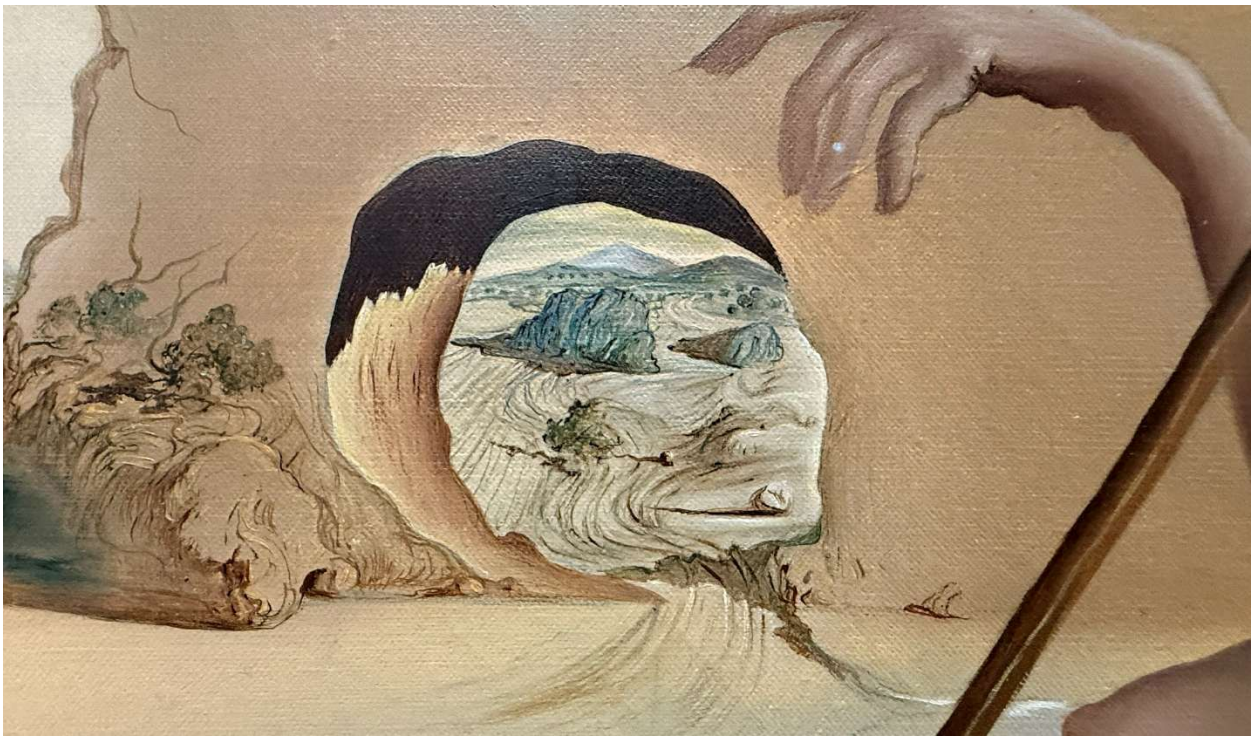




And that strange central face is not really a face. He seemed to do that a lot.

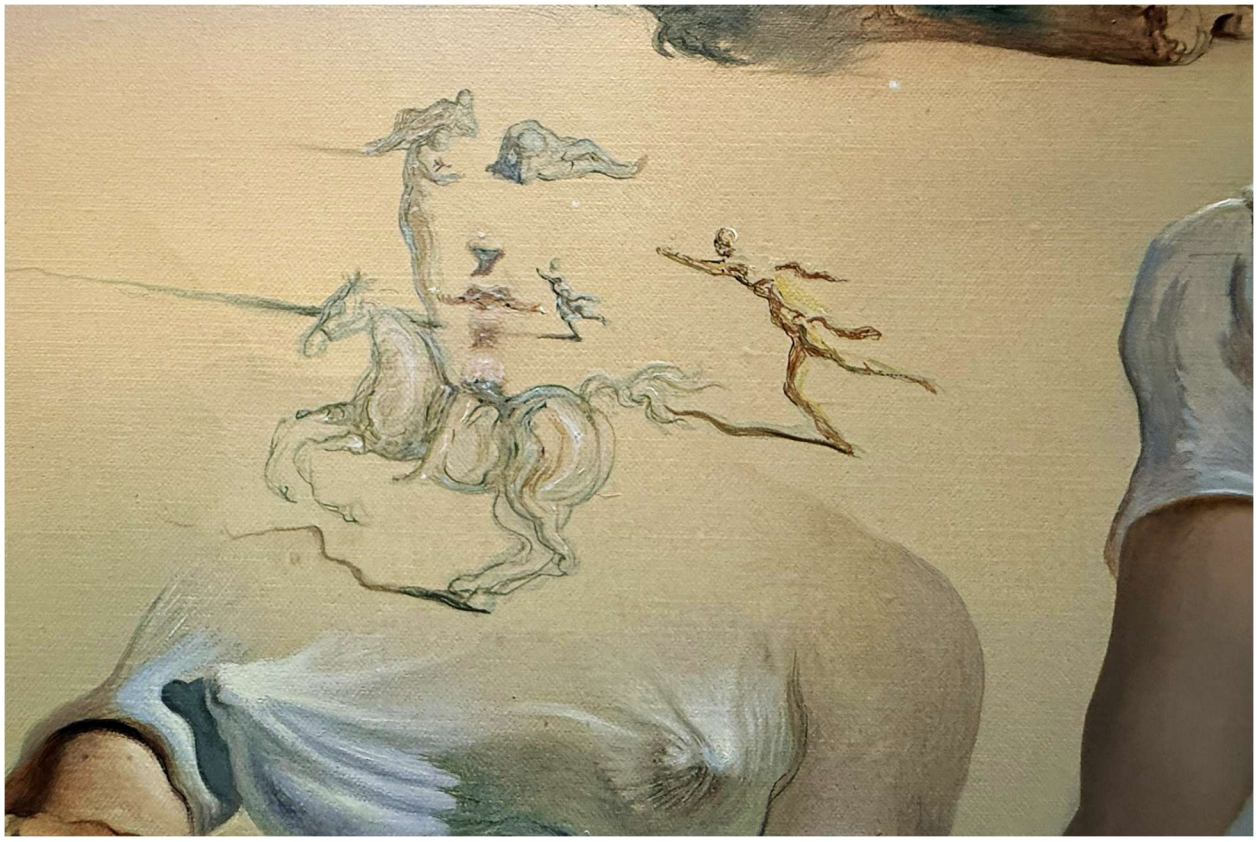


This hole-in-the-rock was what you assumed was a head (see next page):

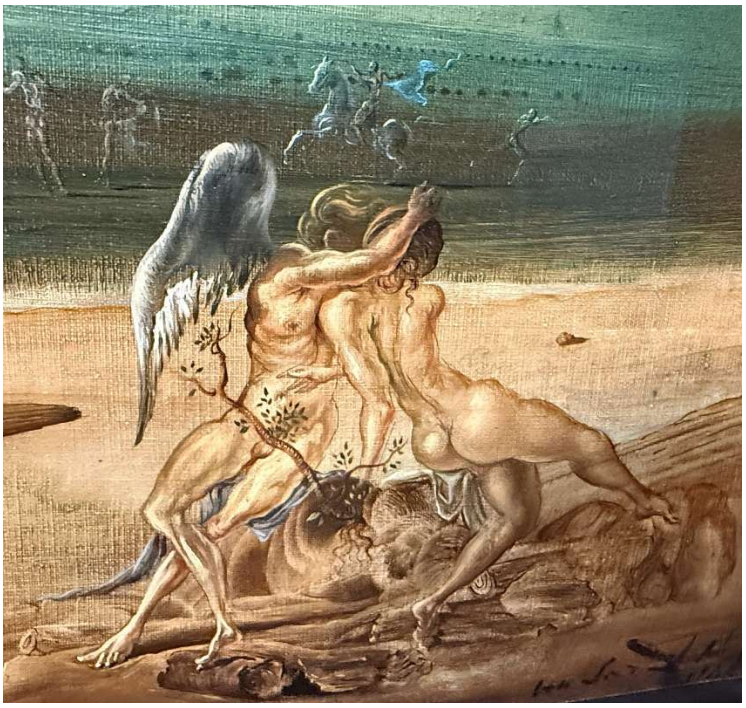




And the other wraith’s head is really a bunch of figures:



Yeah, it was pretty entertaining. I still open some of these images in my photo editing app and zoom way in to see some of the minute details. I found this taking up a couple of square inches in the bottom corner of a very large painting:



No idea what it "means" or symbolizes but it's intriguing. A Garden of Eden scene perhaps? Dunno.

Dali once said, "People love mystery, and that is why they love my paintings." Maybe he's right. Trying to figure it all out is at least half the fun. And half the fun of *that* is knowing that you never actually will.

So, I came for the building and loved it, but I left with a better appreciation for the artist and art.

And isn't that what a museum should do?