

Exhumation of Dali's remains finds his mustache still intact

July 21 2017, by Hernan Munoz And Aritz Parra



Visitors stand near the tomb of Salvador Dali inside Dali Museum Theatre in Figueres, Spain, Friday, July 21, 2017. The samples of hair, nails and two long bones removed overnight from Salvador Dali's embalmed remains could open a judicial battle for the artist's estate if genetic tests prove that he had fathered a girl decades ago. Forensic experts removed on Thursday night the biological samples from a crypt in Figueres, in a sensitive operation that involved pulleys lifting a 1.5-ton stone slab. (AP Photo/Hernan Munoz)

Forensic experts in Spain have removed hair, nails and two long bones

from Salvador Dali's embalmed remains to aid a court-ordered paternity test that may enable a woman who says she is the surrealist artist's daughter to claim part of Dali's vast estate.

Officials said Friday that the artist's mummified remains were so well preserved that even his famous mustache had survived the passing of time and remained in "its classic shape of ten past ten," referring to the hands on a clock.

Dali, who once said "surrealism is me," is considered one of the founding fathers of the artistic movement. His works in paint, sculpture and cinema, among other disciplines, are shown in museums all over the world and sought by private collectors.

The artistic genius was buried in the Dali Museum Theater in the northeastern Spanish town of Figueres, his birthplace, when he died at 84 in 1989.

The exhumation that began Thursday night followed a longstanding claim by Pilar Abel, a 61-year-old tarot card reader, who says her mother had an affair with Dali in his hometown.

In June, a Madrid judge finally ruled that a DNA test should be performed to find out whether her allegations were true.

Forensic experts opened the artist's coffin in a sensitive operation that involved using pulleys to lift a 1.5-ton stone slab.



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Lluis Penuelas Reixach, the secretary general of the Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation, said Dalí's remains—including his mustache—are well preserved and mummified after an embalming process was applied 27 years ago. He spoke Friday during a press conference in Figueres.

According to judicial authorities, only five people —a judge, three coroners and an assistant— were allowed to oversee the removal of the samples out of respect for the remains and in order to avoid any

contamination.

Representatives of the foundation, which manages Dali's estate on behalf of the Spanish state, said Friday the evidence backing Abel's claims weren't enough to justify the intrusive exhumation. They vowed to continue a legal battle to nullify the paternity test.

Dali and his Russian wife Gala had no children of their own, although Gala had a daughter from an earlier marriage to French poet Paul Eluard.



Workers bring a casket to the Dalí Theater Museum in Figueres, Spain, Thursday, July 20, 2017. Salvador Dalí's eccentric artistic and personal history took yet another bizarre turn Thursday with the exhumation of his embalmed remains in order to find genetic samples that could settle whether one of the founding figures of surrealism fathered a daughter decades ago. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Abel, who for a while made her living by reading tarot cards on local television, was born in Girona, a city close to Figueres. She said she pressed for the exhumation because legal proof of Dali's paternity would honor the memory of her mother.

If proved right, Abel could claim one-fourth of the painter's estate, according to her lawyer, Enrique Blanquez. There are no current estimates of the exact value of that—but it's certainly a fortune.

If she is proved wrong, the Dali foundation will seek financial compensation for the costs of the exhumation.

Either way, minimizing the disruption to the museum's operations and to the rest of Dali's remains is a priority for the foundation, according to its secretary.



In this photo taken on Wednesday, July 19, 2017, Pilar Abel, poses for a

photograph after a news conference in Madrid, where she claimed to be the daughter of eccentric artist Salvador Dali. 61-year old tarot card reader, Abel claims that her mother had an affair with Salvador Dali while working as a domestic helper in the northeastern Spanish town of Figueres, where the artist was born and lived with his Russian wife Gala. After two decades of court battles, a Madrid judge granted Abel a DNA test to find out whether her allegations are true, and the exhumation is scheduled to begin Thursday night. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

"It's important for Salvador Dali to be returned to rest in the interior of his museum's dome," Penuelas said.

During a press conference this week, Abel explained how her grandmother told the family secret when Abel was still young. Years later, she said her mother confirmed the story.

The foundation and the museum in Figueres took steps to make sure no images of the exhumation were made public. Before work in the crypt began on Thursday, mobile phones were put in a deposit and a marquee was installed under the museum's glass dome to prevent any photography or video being taken from drones.

The biological samples will travel to a forensic laboratory in Madrid for analysis, a process that could take weeks.



In this file photo taken on Nov. 4, 1942 Spanish surrealist painter, Salvador Dalí is pictured in New York. Dalí's eccentric artistic and personal history took yet another bizarre turn Thursday, July 20, 2017, with the exhumation of his embalmed remains in order to find genetic samples that could settle whether one of the founding figures of surrealism fathered a girl decades ago. (AP Photo, File)



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