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WOMEN OF SURREALISM

CONVERSATION WITH BARBARA HEPWORTH

WOMEN OF SURREALISM

BY GLORIA ORENSTEIN



Remedios Varo, *Encuentro*, 1959



Leonor Fini, *La Gardienne a l'Oeuf Rouge*, 1955

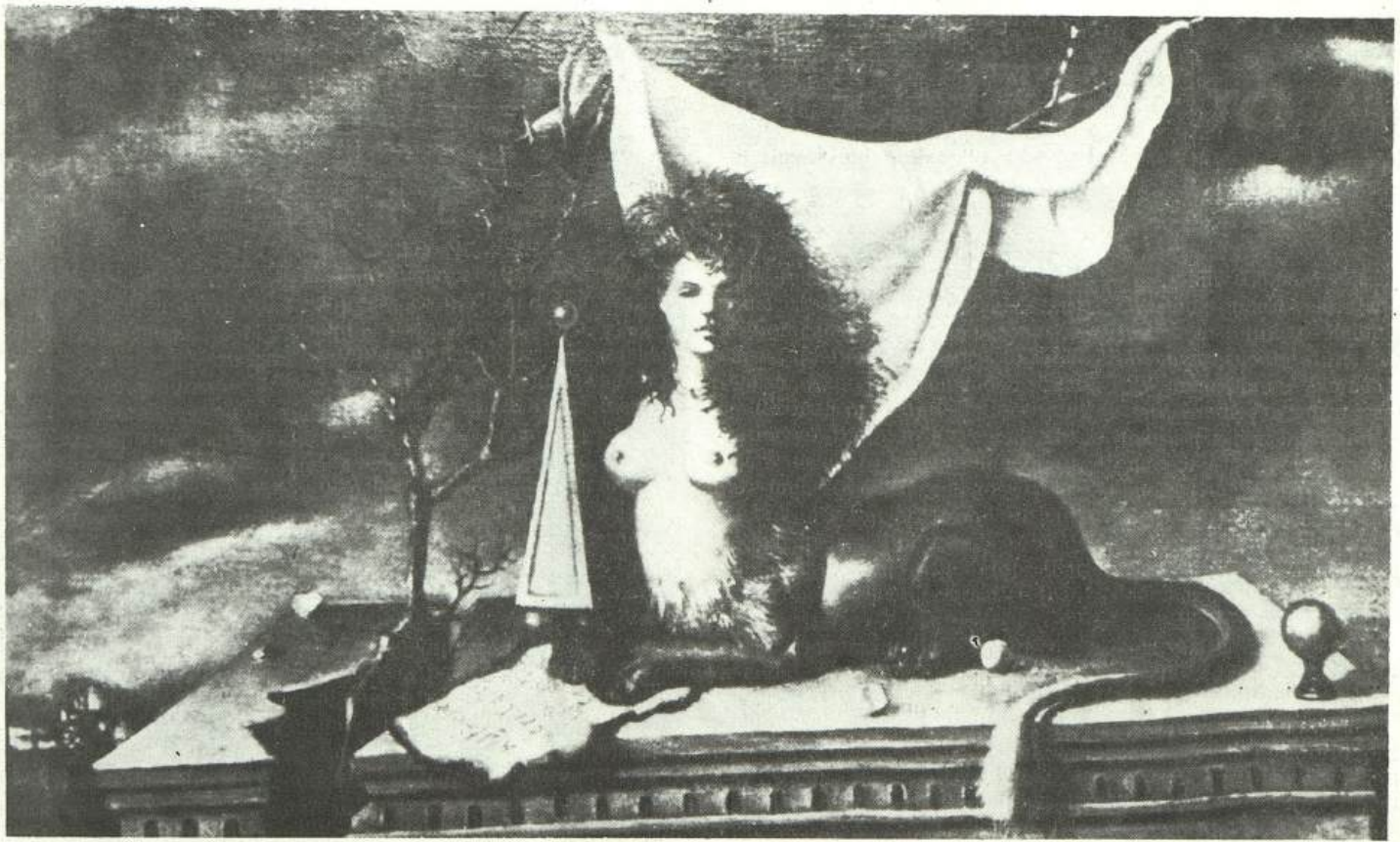
The history of the Surrealist Movement in art and literature has been frequently analyzed, repeatedly documented, but only partially told. We are all now familiar with the radically innovative ideas introduced by André Breton in his **SURREALIST MANIFESTOS** of 1924 and 1929, and with the individual works of such writers as Aragon, Eluard, Artaud, Desnos, Péret, and of painters such as Ernst, Dali, Tanguy, Miro, Lam, Magritte, Matta and countless others whose genius and vision contributed to opening a new chapter in twentieth century art history. Yet this history remains incomplete until the individual works of such women artists as Léonor Fini, Leonora Carrington, Meret Oppenheim, Toyen, Remedios Varo, Elena Garro, Joyce Mansour, Jane Graverol, Dorothea Tanning and many others become accessible on an international scale through exhibitions, monographic studies and translations, and until their own interpretations of the spirit, themes, and techniques of Surrealism are given their rightful place alongside the canons of thought that until now have been the only official version we have had of the meaning and importance of Surrealism.

The Surrealists' quest was for total knowledge. It was an endeavor to unify all areas of human experience and to bring to light the discoveries made in the vast domain of human consciousness that logic and abstract thought do not even begin to encompass. Through exploration of the dream, trance states, simulated states of insanity, and through the techniques of games, automatic writing and painting, as well as an investigation of many branches of the Occult such as Alchemy, Magic, and Telepathy, the Surrealists sought to bring to this world a vision of a vaster reality in which the subjective and objective aspects of human experience would no longer be dissociated.

Breton defined his ultimate goal most precisely in his **SECOND**

MANIFESTO OF SURREALISM when he stated that "There is every reason to believe that there exists a certain point in the mind at which life and death, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived in terms of contradiction. Surrealist activity would be searched in vain for a motive other than the hope to determine this point." (1)

Surrealism can be credited with having made the strongest case for releasing art from all constraints and for recognizing the validity of utilizing the powers of the imagination and intuition as instruments of knowledge and in the search to expand the sources of human experience and to enrich the vocabulary of the communicable. Yet, despite all this, Surrealism would be inadequately described if the love relationship between man and woman were omitted from our definition. For, above and beyond the ideal of total revolution both in art and in life, the Surrealists were committed to LOVE as a means of creation, as a form of artistic expression, and as a path towards revelation. "The true Revolution for the Surrealists," writes Maurice Nadeau in his **HISTORY OF SURREALISM**, "is the victory of desire." (2) In the **SECOND MANIFESTO OF SURREALISM** Breton states: "The problem of woman is all that is marvelous and troubling in the world. And it is so to the very degree to which a non-corrupted man must be able to put his faith not only in Revolution, but even more so in love..." "Yes, I believe, and have always believed that renouncing love, whether authorized or not on any ideological pretext is one of the rare inexpiable crimes that a man gifted with any intelligence can commit in his lifetime." (3) Further on, in his **PROLOGMENA TO A 3RD MANIFESTO** he continues: "The problem of the relationship between man and woman must be totally revised without



Leonor Fini, *Petit Sphinx Gardien*, 1948

Lise de Harne and Francis Ponge.

I had the privilege of meeting Léonor Fini and discussing the nature of her imagery with her. She told me that she works directly from the unconscious, but that her intuition leads her to the discovery of archetypal symbols that are alchemically correct. In the series of paintings "The Guardian of the Phoenixes" and "The Guardian with the Red Egg" her imagery, which had been intuited, turned out to have precise alchemical significance. The Egg is the name of the alchemical vessel of transformation or the alchemist's oven. It is the vessel in which spiritual transformation transpires, and as the symbol of the female, it indicates that woman is also the universal vessel of creative, spiritual rebirth. The conclusion of the alchemical process is the production of the philosopher's stone which is red and represents the unification of opposites and the integration of the conscious with the unconscious. It is a symbol of totality. When linked with the phoenix (who is reborn from his own ashes) as it is in her paintings, it suggests a parallel between alchemical transmutation and spiritual creation. Léonor Fini presents the Alchemist as woman, and identifies the womb as the alchemistic retort in *LA DAME OVALE*, whose title is inspired by Leonora Carrington's book of short stories. *THE SPINNERS* and *THE SEAMSTRESS* also depict the archetypal feminine principle or the Great Mother, who weaves the web of new life as she creates the fabric of the child within her body. Her feminine sphinxes such as *SPHINX AMALBURGIA*, *SPHINX PHILAGRIA* AND *PETIT SPHINX GARDIEN* posit woman as the embodiment of the total life enigma and of the universal mystery. Marcel Brion in his study "Léonor Fini et Son Oeuvre" (9) elucidates the meaning of the images of skulls and skeletons in her paintings. According to Brion, they represent the most durable and interior part of the body — its mineral essence. In this sense they are the objective correlatives of the psychic interior, or the spiritual essence, which is the theme of most of her work. When this theme is associated with that of the sphinx, it conveys the durable permanence and mystery of the psychic world, which is ultimately our only eternal essence.

Leonor Fini's world is a Matriarchy. Her love of cats in both her paintings and her life is partially related to worship of the Goddess, for in Egypt the cat was linked with the moon and sacred to the Goddesses Isis and Bast. Bast was, in fact, a cat-headed Goddess. The cat also evokes the world of sorcery and witchcraft.

Yet, Léonor Fini's women are often unexpectedly bald, for she leans towards the ideal of the Androgyne. She is in favor of a world that does not worship virility. She has said about her painting *LE FAIT ACCOMPLI* where "in a cafe full of girls the outline of a man is drawn on the ground in chalk in the same way that police mark out the position of a dead body" (10) that "It is in this outline that the witch rebels against all the social opacity of men." "I am in favour of a world where there is little or

no sex distinction." (11) This theme is echoed in *CAPITAL PUNISHMENT* which is a symbolic castration. In *MORGENSTUNDE* the masculine presence is intrusive and threatening. Her universe depicts love of humanity in its most ideal and at the same time in its most sensual aspects. This does not exclude the physical love of women for each other. *PHAEBUS ASLEEP*, *THE CONVERSATION*, *ALONG THE WAY*, and many other paintings of recent date explore frankly and openly the theme of lesbianism with lyricism and sensuality. Leonor Fini was a precursor of the Women's Movement in her conscious and intelligent exploration of themes relating to woman's identity in her art and in her life. By delving into the female psyche to unlock the symbols that the unconscious reveals, she has shown that individual autonomy enhances woman's intuitive contact with her inner being; that, in fact, the ideal of the "Femme Enfant" would have been detrimental to the discovery of a certain kind of knowledge that only experience and maturity can interpret and communicate in art.



Leonor Fini, *La Peine Capitale*, 1969.

Leonor Fini's painting *LA CHAMBRE NOIRE* of 1939 includes a full portrait of Leonora Carrington (standing), a dear friend of hers, and another Surrealist artist who has extended her interest in the theme of woman in her art to a commitment to women in life by becoming one of the originators and leaders of the Women's Liberation Movement in Mexico.

Leonora's art is born of a deep inner necessity to refine our perception of that point referred to by Breton at which contradictions cease to exist, by putting us in contact with the multiple realms and levels of our experience through a visionary process. In order for us to evolve we must become seers of the unknown. Leonora's art thus probes and delves into the unexplored and uncharted vistas of the imagination, searching for the new horizons that we discover when we are in touch with our psychic powers and with a fuller knowledge of our interior and the beings both mythical and archetypal that inhabit it.

She was born in Lancashire, England in 1917, and studied art in England, Italy and France. Rebellious against her family who considered it anathema for a woman to become an artist, Leonora left home at eighteen and went to Paris to live and paint in freedom. There she was a student of Amedee Ozenfant, and was soon introduced to the Surrealist artists and writers with whom she has worked closely ever since her first participation in the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1938 in Paris.

Her name became associated with that of Max Ernst with whom she lived in France for several years until he was taken prisoner in 1940. Her book of short stories *LA DAME OVALE* was illustrated by Ernst, and published in Paris in 1939. Its Spanish translation was published in Mexico in 1965.

During the war she fled to seek refuge in Spain, where she suffered a mental breakdown and was interned in a psychiatric hospital in Santander. The torment and anguish of this experience as well as the incredibly rich universe of oneiric, mythic and visionary imagery that emerged from this psychic voyage inward were recaptured in her narrative *DOWN BELOW*, which was first published in the Surrealist review *VVV* of Feb. 1944. (12) Intuitive knowledge of the need for woman to be given her rightful place in our religious and human systems was revealed to her within the context of this experience. In *DOWN BELOW* she relates:

"I felt that through the agency of the Sun I was an androgyne, the Moon, the Holy Ghost, a gypsy, an acrobat, Leonora Carrington and a woman. I was also destined to be, later, Elizabeth of England. I was she who revealed religions and bore on her shoulders the freedom and the sins of the earth changed into knowledge, the union of Man and Woman with God and the Cosmos, all equal between them. . . . The son was the Sun and I the Moon, an essential element of the Trinity, with the microscopic knowledge of the earth, its plants and creatures. I knew that Christ was dead and done for and that I had to take His place, because the Trinity minus a woman and microscopic knowledge, had become dry and incomplete. Christ was replaced by the Sun. I was Christ on earth in the person of the Holy Ghost." (13)

Leonora's vision is both psychologically and alchemically precise, for the symbolism of the Holy Ghost, according to Erich Neumann's study "The Great Mother" represents alchemically the supreme spiritual principle, and psychologically the archetype of the Great Mother. The experience thus symbolically signifies the need to recognize and reintegrate the supreme value of the spiritual wisdom inherent in the feminine principle as a prerequisite for individual growth, for personal transformation, and for human evolution.

In the early 1940's she made her way to the United States and there joined the other self-exiled Surrealist artists, where she participated in their exhibitions and contributed to the Surrealist reviews *VIEW* and *VVV* which originated in New York. In 1942 she moved to Mexico and has lived there ever since. She is married and the mother of two grown sons.

Leonora's fantastic mural "El Mundo Mágico de los Mayas" (B) (14) can be seen in the Chiapas exhibit of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. It is based upon her observations made during several extended visits to Chiapas, where she gained an intimate knowledge of the people who are today the descendants of the Mayas. Her mural is also a visual interpretation of the imagery of the "Popol Vuh," which is the Mayan Bible. It combines an imaginative depiction of the magical beliefs of their culture with the legendary, mythical, and marvelous elements of Mayan civilization in a poetic evocation, which brings out the affinity between the magical beliefs of the Mayas and those of the Surrealists. According to Mayan tradition, man has two souls — one immortal, that survives him after death and passes on to the other world; the other mortal, which takes the form of an animal and lives in the mountains. Knowledge of one's mortal soul (or souls — for some men had several) was revealed during sleep through the dream. Thus, for both the Mayans and the Surrealists, the oneiric element which provides the link between our sleeping and waking lives is the key to discovery of knowledge about that point at which our subject and objective experiences are unified in a vaster totality.

Leonora's most important personal exhibitions apart from the International Surrealist Exhibitions from 1938 to the present include her first American show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York in 1948, various shows in Mexico City, a retrospective at the Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno in Mexico in 1960, and a retrospective at the Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura in June 1965. She also had an important exhibition at the IX Bienal de Sao Paulo in Brazil in 1967.

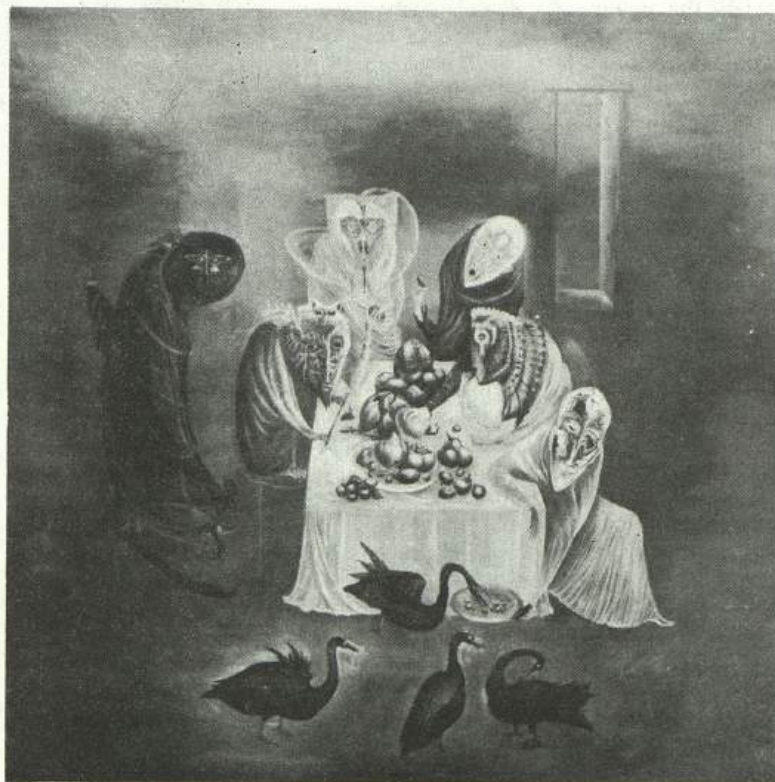
Her paintings attest to her deep involvement in the study of Alchemy, Magic, Tibetan Tantrism, Zen, the Kabbalah, and other domains of the Occult. She has spent many years in a Gurdjieff group, has studied with Suzuki and other Zen masters, and has lived with the Tibetans in Canada studying the Tantra. She is also greatly influenced by the themes and imagery of Fairy Tales, Nursery Rhymes and Mythology.

In his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" André Breton observed that Surrealist research and alchemical research had analogous goals. For the Alchemist, the process of transforming base metals into gold was concomitant with another transformation — that of the Alchemist himself, towards the ennoblement of his soul in his quest for spiritual enlightenment. In this sense all of Leonora's paintings are an alchemical process in which visionary knowledge is revealed and through which psychic evolution can transpire.

A watercolor "The Godmother" is directly inspired by the Nursery Rhyme "Goosey Goosey Gander, Whither dost thou wander?" The query immediately opens the door to speculation about the nature of the worlds we inhabit. Suddenly the invisible becomes manifest. The central being with the invisible face shows no differentiation between the five senses, and it also contains the seventh. It is blue for the earth, (the Blue Planet), for the sky; it is "Baraka", the life essence, and Prana. Anti-Being is contrasted with Being in the image of the beasts chasing each other in the endless karmic circle around the Being whose black monkey face is the Black Sun. It is said that in order to reach true illumination one must see through the Black Sun. This symbolism parallels the alchemical imagery of transforming black primal matter into gold.

In "The Lepidopterus" or "The Butterfly People Eating a Meal" the Black Swans are suggested by the refrain of the Bards' song "I am the Black Swan, Queen of them all." Their food is red, for the Britons of the Stone Age painted the food for the dead, red. A meditation on the meaning of the song releases all the latent imagery revealing the deeper significance of the words. For the Black Swan is also the secret sign of the Goddess of the Old Religion to which all women belong. The Swan is being fed food for the dead because the Old Religion has been buried, but by eating this food it is being revived and the power of the Goddess is being resurrected. The Black Swan is also equivalent to the Black Sun through which enlightenment is attained. The egg of the Black Swan is the Philosopher's Stone.

"Who Art Thou Pale Face?" represents a 'Chimera' or fantastic being who has just laid an egg. The Being's Black Sun face is located in its Solar Plexus, which represents the essential self. It is invisible. The egg signifies mythological procreation, a new birth, the piercing through to a new dimension, and the Philosopher's Stone.



Leonora Carrington "Lepidopterus" or "The Butterfly People Eating a Meal" 1969



Leonora Carrington "Who Art Thou Pale Face?" 1959

Her Women's Liberation poster specifically rejects the traditional Biblical interpretation of Eve because woman's procreative powers are negated. By describing Eve as born of Adam, the Bible relegates woman to a position which is both inferior and subservient to that of man. Leonora's poster depicts the rising of the New Woman or the Goddess resurrected. She is identified with the power of the serpent or the concept of Kundalini. Through Yoga, this power or energy rises up through the chakras of the body until it reaches the third eye corresponding to illumination. The New Woman (on the right) who through this psychic evolution attains higher knowledge, returns the apple to Eve (on the left) and thus refuses to accept the false role that the Bible conferred upon her. The rise of the New Woman is also concomitant with the reflowering of Planet Earth through birth control, which would restrict the size of the human population so that all species might have a chance to survive. Since the process of psychic evolution is a kind of interior alchemy, the green of the poster reminds us of the Emerald Tablets of Hermes Trismetistus.

These touchstones to the interpretation of Leonora's paintings, by pointing out the depth and multidimensionality of her symbolism, show why her art, which is felt to be so mysterious, is also experienced as being somehow deeply familiar. For she paints the exact portrait of an archetypal, essential and universal self, one that we encounter in our dreams, our visions, our myths, our legends, and in our plunges into the territory of the human psyche. Her art is a kind of magic that while making the invisible visible, also fulfills the Surrealists' desire to make the imaginary real.

Her other written works include the Plays "Pénélope" (C) (15) "Une Chemise de Nuit de Flanelle" (D) (16), and "L'Invention du Môle" (E) (17) and the short stories "White Rabbits" (F) (18), "The Sisters" (G) (19) "La Debutante" (H) (20), "L'Homme Neutre" (I) (21), "Waiting" (J) (22), "The Seventh Horse" (K) (23), and "Et In Bellicus Medicalis Lunarum" (L) (24). Her unpublished works include a recent novel and short stories for children.

As stage designer she has done the sets and costumes for the Mexican productions of Ionesco's "Exit The King," Shakespeare's "The Tempest," Octavio Paz's "Rapaccini's Daughter," and her own play "Pénélope," which was directed by Alexandro Jodorowsky. She has also collaborated with Jodorowsky on a play "The Blue Prince." Jodorowsky is familiar to film audiences as the director of EL TOPO.

The female symbol of the Egg is prevalent in both her paintings and her plays. However, as the egg is also the name of the alchemist's oven, in her work this symbol has a double meaning. For, when the symbol of woman is identified with that of alchemical transformation, it suggests that in woman lies the hope for the creation of a new race of humankind.

In a recent unpublished play "Opus Siniestrus", the Egg is used in this way. The play, which is a Surrealist opera-fable for our planet, is a total-theatre spectacle expressing a radical protest against the destructive aspects of contemporary civilization and a plea for the redirection of our psychic energies towards more humanitarian goals. Leonora's belief in the need for women to undertake the task of interior evolution and psychic liberation extends the original formulation of the goals of the Surrealist Movement which were "to transform the world, change life, and remake from scratch human understanding," and gives them renewed value within the context of a more complete commitment to the total transformation of humankind.

No discussion of Leonora Carrington's work would be complete if it failed to mention her sense of humor. She would never have written about herself as I have done. In fact, when asked to present an autobiographical sketch for one of her expositions, this is how she depicted her birth.

"In the early part of the latter nineties I was born under curious circumstances, in a Eneahexagram, mathematically. The only person present at my birth was our dear and faithful old fox-terrier Boozy, and an X-ray apparatus for sterilizing cows. My mother was away at the time snaring crayfish which then plagued the upper Andes and wrought misery and devastation among the natives. etc." (M) (25)

The charm of Leonora's humor is that while mocking every conceivable human institution and seeing the absurd and the ridiculous in all forms of social and political pomposity, she criticizes everything with a pervading sense of humility, and is always the first to find humor in herself, as well. She is one of the few women whose works are included in André Breton's ANTHOLOGIE DE L'HUMOUR NOIR. Leonora's cosmic humility comes from the fact that she sees mankind as just one species among many that inhabit our earth. She feels that in a deeper sense we are really sisters and brothers of the plants and animals with whom we share our terrestrial abode, and that we are intimately related to the sun, the moon, and the planets whose celestial courses affect our lives. She firmly believes that we must learn to revere nature in order to permit all forms of life to flourish not only on our planet, but in the entire universe. From this cosmic point of view, our vain pretensions to power over other beings and over all forms of organic and inorganic life are an insane form of suicidal hysteria. Her humor is caustic, satirical, or sardonic, because she criticizes the petty gods we worship. But her paintings remind us that true devotion should be reserved for the realm of the human spirit, which has only begun its evolution, and that in terms of what we have yet to learn about human consciousness and our place in the universe, we are like Pithecanthropus or Cro-Magnon Man. We are only beginning to be awakened. Leonora's personality and art express her total commitment and devotion to the development of human faculties to their highest potential. Here is a most inspiring example set for us by an artist whose concerns are truly planetary and universal.

Meret Oppenheim's "Fur-Lined Teacup and Saucer," originally entitled "Le Déjeuner en Fourrure" is probably the surrealist object that is most familiar to the American public. Born in 1913 in Berlin, Meret spent her childhood in Switzerland, and studied at the Ecole des Arts at Metiers in Bale. In 1932 she left for Paris to enroll in the Academie de La Grande Chaumiere. In the same year Arp and Giacometti visited her studio, and were so impressed with her work that they spoke about her to André Breton. She soon began to exhibit her work with the Surrealists Ernst, Dali, Magritte, Tanguy, Man Ray, and Miro at the Salon des Surindépendants in Paris. In contrast to Léonor Fini, Meret Oppenheim regularly frequented the meetings of Breton's group and identified closely with the Surrealists in her life as well as in her art. She feels very fortunate to have met the Surrealists so early in her career, for they always encouraged her and accepted the kind of work that she was doing. If she didn't frequent them during the last few years before Breton's death, it was merely because their increasingly dogmatic opinions began to bore her. In 1936 she modeled for Man Ray, created the Fur-Lined Teacup and had her first personal exposition in Bale. The catalogue of the exhibition was prefaced by Max Ernst. In 1937 she returned to Bale and experimented in the creation of fantastic furniture, shoes, belts, and gloves.



Inaugural feast organized by Meret Oppenheim at the International Exposition of Surrealism, 1959-60.

Between 1944 and 1956, approximately, Meret's artistic productivity declined, for she went through a troubling period of questioning and self-doubt that is so familiar to many women artists. Little by little, through a careful Jungian analysis of her dreams, her self-confidence returned, and in 1958 she began to paint, sculpt, and exhibit her works again. In December 1959 she created the inaugural feast at the International Exposition of Surrealism in Paris. The image of a woman served up as a sumptuous meal, an object of beauty to be consumed, combines black humor with a sense of the unexpected in a critique of conventional society and its treatment of women. In 1960 she had an exhibition at the Galerie Schwarz in Milan; in 1965 she took part in the Surrealist Exposition in Brazil, and between 1966 and '68 has had exhibitions in Paris, Belgrade, N.Y., Rome, Turin, Cologne, Brussels, and Israel. When I met her in 1972 she had just opened a studio in Paris. Meret's story is exemplary for women, because it renews our faith in the ability of the creative spirit to reemerge triumphant after a period of self-doubt. As I wrote these words, I received in the mail an announcement of Meret Oppenheim's current exhibition at the Galerie Suzanne Visat in Paris. A presentation of her work by Alain Jouffroy praises her renewed ability to provoke and shock us into the discovery of astounding new images by her refusal to conform at any moment to any esthetic formula, moral code, or philosophical system. Meret's sculptures are "objets porteurs d'idée" (objects bearing an idea). Every idea comes to mind dressed in its own form — this is what art is about. Since each new idea presents itself in an entirely new form, it takes a certain amount of time for it to be understood by the contemporary public. The concept of the "multiple", according to Meret, defeats the purpose of the "objet porteur d'idée." The only time that the multiple would be justified, would be if the concept of mass reproduction of the object were inherent in the artist's original conception. This would be the cause for the design of statuettes of Gods, Goddesses and of Saints. Meret's newest objects remind us that the Surrealist spirit of invention is never exhausted.

Remedios Varo was a dear friend of Leonora Carrington, and one Surrealist artist that I regret not having been able to meet. She died quite suddenly and unexpectedly in October 1963. Remedios was born in 1913

in Cataluna, Spain, and came to Paris to flee the Civil War. There she joined Breton, Ernst and Leonora Carrington, and married the Surrealist poet Benjamin Péret. They settled in Mexico, and although she separated from him and remarried, she remained permanently in Mexico. After her death the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico gave her a complete retrospective exhibition in 1964, and published an important book of her works in 1966. Intellectually and spiritually she seems to resemble Leonora Carrington; both women were engaged in a search for revelations which would enable them to decipher the occult significance of the great mysteries. Yet Remedios' pictorial universe is almost a scientific explanation of the marvelous, whereas that of Leonora is a revelation of the mystery without any attempt at explanation. For Remedios, too, woman is the Alchemist. But here, in *PLANTA INSUMISA*, we see the female scientist herself, rather than her alchemical symbol. In letters to her brother, Remedios has given her own explanation of the imagery in her paintings. In *ARMONIA*, for example, she explains that the woman is trying to uncover the invisible thread that unites all things. When all the objects are in their correct places on the metal staff, a harmonious music will be produced. The figure on the wall represents "le hasard objectif" or objective chance that intervenes in all discoveries. *THE FLAUTIST* shows her interest in esoteric theories, for the musician is constructing an octagonal tower of stones which are levitated by the vibrations produced by the music. The octagonal tower symbolizes the esoteric theory of octaves. The other half of the tower is sketched in, because although it is not yet built, it already pre-exists in the imagination of the creator, and is potentially real. The tower symbolizes ascent in the spiritual sense. Remedios' imagery makes the impossible appear plausible; she reveals the secret connections between spirit and matter, between the tangible and the intangible, the abstract and the concrete. The voyage of exploration is aided by a fantastic array of vehicles adapted to suit the needs of the voyager, depending on whether it is inner or outer reality that is being explored. In *VAGABUNDO* the outfit of the vagabond can be hermetically sealed at night. It can even be locked with a key. It comes fully equipped with its own propellers and wheels, and is furnished with a library, a living room and a kitchen, all integral parts of the outfit of this

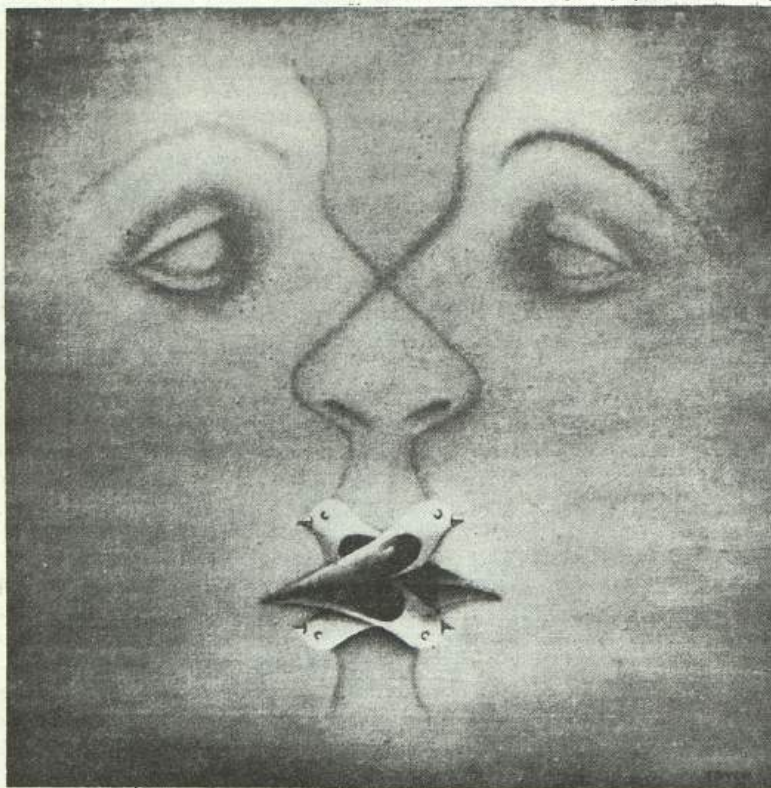


Remedios Varo, *Armonia*, 1966

astronaut of psychic spaces. Remedios' sense of humor and mystery combined are visible in PAPPILLA ESTELAR and ENCUESTRO. She depicts woman as alchemist, voyager, inventor, scientist, explorer and cartographer of a world that intersects with our own in imperceptible ways. She is searching for the lost key to explain the ties between the worlds which penetrate our own and those worlds we have yet to discover.

Another Surrealist woman of Mexico is the playwright Elena Garro. She was born in Pueblo, Mexico in 1920, and studied theatre at the university. An early marriage to the Surrealist poet Octavio Paz ended in divorce, and she turned to writing for the theatre. The female protagonist of most of Elena Garro's plays is in search of "le merveilleux." Her quest is often thwarted by the male protagonists, whom she must initiate to the sources of the Surreal. Her triumph is seen in EL ENCANTO TENDAJON MIXTO. Here woman represents pure magic, and is a guide who initiates men to respond to mystery and enchantment. She leads three men away from "el camino real" to an encounter with a vaster, multidimensional reality. Her little shop reflects the golden rays of the light of the alchemists, for she is the poetess/alchemist, who opens the world of the imagination to men so that they may embark on a voyage towards illumination and inner vision. This new female Surrealist protagonist of Elena Garro's theatre revolts against conventional interpretations of banal reality and becomes a Seer as a result of claiming her autonomy and independence. Her most important plays on this theme are found in the collection UN HOGAR SOLIDO. (12) (26)

Another artist whose work is of capital importance in the history of the Surrealist Movement is TOYEN (Maria Cernisova). She was born in Prague in 1902, and participated in revolutionary and avant-garde activities in Czechoslovakia. She belonged to the group DEVETSIL, and had her first exhibition with them in 1923. From Abstract art she evolved to Surrealism, and in 1933 was one of the main founders of the Czech Surrealist group whose other artists were Jindrich Styrsky (her husband),



Toyen, *Ils se lèvent à la pointe du jour...*, 1950

and Karel Teige. The group received Breton and Eluard enthusiastically when they attended the International Surrealist Exhibit in Prague in 1935. In 1938 Toyen had her largest personal exhibition in Prague. During the war her works were banned, and in 1947 she left for Paris and eventually renounced her Czech nationality after the coup d'état in 1948. She is one of the few women artists to whom Breton has devoted a chapter in his book SURREALISM AND PAINTING, which has just been published in English. Toyen's imagery, particularly in her drawings of the '30's and '40's describes the remains of an exterior universe that has been devastated by war and an interior landscape haunted by fear. Opposed to these images of terror are her images of love. Later, themes that are closer to the inspiration of the other Surrealist women, such as THE CLAIRVOYANTE (1958) begin to reappear. Since Toyen comes from Prague, the magical city of the Alchemists, it is natural that her titles such as "AT THE GOLDEN WHEEL" evoke resonances of the alchemists and their search for illumination.

Bona de Mandiargues has written to me that she recently spoke out against the myth of the Femme-Enfant on a program about Surrealism on French radio. She writes: "It seems to me that every self-respecting artist

is born a child — and dies a child; but that the 'woman-child' is merely a doll, a pin-up, or a strip tease artist." Bona is the niece of the Italian artist Filippo de Pisis. She was born in 1926 in Italy and owes her origins and Surrealist roots to Ferrare "the metaphysical city" where the esoteric movement was born. When her father died in 1946, Bona went to live permanently with her uncle, de Pisis. In 1950 she married the Surrealist writer André Pieyre de Mandiargues, and began to participate in the meetings of the Surrealist group in Paris. She writes that Surrealism incarnated for her the love that she sought. It was the living symbol of freedom, yet at times denied her personal freedom, until she had passed through the trials of initiation which permitted her to freely enter their world. Then she discovered the pleasure of writing dreams, of reading all the writers that the Surrealists loved, of talking for hours in the cafe with Aragon, Elsa, Eliza and André Breton, and of loving all the art that the Surrealists love, particularly the Italian Renaissance; she owes to Surrealism the fact that it permitted her to discover "la clé des champs."

Writing about the situation of women artists in Europe, her husband, André Pieyre de Mandiargues remarks that "in France and Italy the situation of women in the art world, like in marriage, is still under the domination of a sort of Napoleonic Code." He adds that a society "imbued with the principle of masculine superiority treats women in a manner similar to the way witches were formerly treated by the Church. They don't burn women artists," he admits, "they don't torture them either — not in their carnal body at least, but their activity is relegated to a shadowy zone and they are oppressed with a sort of malediction or more precisely excommunication that separates them from the vaster public which deprives them of the warm approbation that they need as much as all other artists." (27) He is alarmed and terrified by the vast number of women artists who have ended in psychiatric hospitals because their work has been totally ignored.

Bona's technique evolved from the influence of de Chirico to a use of the technique of "Décalcomanie" created by Ernst and Dominguez. Later, after trips to Egypt and Mexico, she began to explore assemblages, collages, and sewn tableaux, which use bits and pieces of materials and textures to evoke images drawn from the subconscious in a style resembling Art Brut. Bona's works are done when she feels possessed by a certain frenzy or when she is in a state of intense inspiration. These works seem to emanate vibrations to which certain people respond in mysterious ways. Some of the people who have purchased her paintings have confessed to being drawn to a certain corner of a huge exhibit by her work. They responded to some unknown force within them, and were totally unfamiliar with the artist and unable to explain the nature of the power these works exerted over them.

Dorothea Tanning is an American artist from Illinois, whose career became closely linked with that of Max Ernst whom she married after meeting him in New York in the early forties. Her first personal exhibition was held at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York in 1944. Since then her career has blossomed and her works have evolved from imagery of the dream world depicting solitude, unfulfilled wishes, frustrations of a puritanical childhood, and maternity, to abstractionism. Despite the understandingly overwhelming influence of Max Ernst on her early work, she has nevertheless succeeded in creating a personal style and in speaking for women in her art by depicting their desires and anxieties within the Surrealist esthetic. Her paintings MATERNITY I and MATERNITY II show the dehumanization of woman overwhelmed by the consequences of unquestioning acceptance of the dictum that "biology is destiny." Although she is an American artist, the only study I have found of her work is by Alain Bosquet, in French.

Janè Graverol was born in Brussels. Her father was an illustrator (Pre-Raphaelite), and frequented Verlaine and other artists and writers of his time. She attended the Beaux Arts Academy in Brussels and had her first exhibition at 18. In 1948 she wrote to Magritte, and in 1949 met the Belgian Surrealists Magritte and Scutenaire. In 1952 she met Paul Nougé, who has written "Portrait d'Après Nature" about her work. She founded a group called TEMPS MELES in collaboration with André Blavier, and since 1952 they have been publishing the review TEMPS MÊLÉS. Her main influences have been those of Magritte, Nougé, and Marcel Marien. She combines a fine sense of humor with a kind of melancholic nostalgia within the Surrealistic vein of the 'insolite.' She painted the famous tableau "La Goutte d'Eau" which is at the Musée de Beaux Arts in Liège and is a group portrait of the principal Belgian Surrealist writers and artists. Her most important personal exhibitions have been in Holland ('57), Leopoldville ('57), Buenos Aires ('58), Geneva ('61), Nassau ('63), Washington ('63), and throughout Belgium. Her pictorial images are often related to her titles in a humorous way, disclosing hidden 'jeux de mots' or 'double entendres.' THE MEMORIAL OF ST. HELENA illustrates her wit and tongue in cheek asides to the viewer. It depicts the dream of apotheosis of the dinosaur, as he would dream it if he were the Napoleon of dinosaurs. The analogy between the dinosaur and man is not without relevance, but it makes its statement through a subtle wit rather than through violent overstatement.