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# Leonora Carrington: "Wild Card"

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## Abstract

The Artists in Exile surrealist group portrait of 1942 arguably marks a moment of recognition and inclusion for Leonora Carrington as well as, paradoxically, her moment of "exoticization" and temporary exclusion from Anglo-American criticism at large. The existing literature on Carrington is already unfairly weighted towards her early career in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when indeed she would go on to produce radical and challenging paintings, sculptures, novels, tapestries, plays, set designs and costumes well into her nineties. So why another reading of Carrington's

wartime output? For one, it is useful to present a clearer timeline of her movements and locations, and secondly, it is necessary to review her intermedial contributions to the surrealist magazines of this period. This paper will propose that Carrington was, in fact, at the heart of the avant-garde during this period, a point which has provided fertile ground for future-feminist revisionary commentaries such as Marina Warner, as well as more recent historiographies and creative reinterpretations by Lucy Skaer. A reconsideration of Carrington's output from this wartime interlude in New York City, including her short story "White Rabbits" (1941) and her Untitled etching for VVV Portfolio (1942), provides insights into her instinctual avant-garde senses of liminality and transgression as well as evidencing the profound respect and acknowledgement her peers held towards her.

**Keywords:** Leonora Carrington / Lucy Skaer / feminism / historiography / revisionary criticism / VVV magazine / View magazine

You told me Leonora Carrington was an expert in liminal space. What's liminal space? I'd asked you. Ha, you'd said. It's kind of in-between. A place we get transported to.

— Ali Smith, 2012



Fig. 1. Hermann Landshoff, Artists in Exile group photo of Surrealists, New York, 1942

The Artists in Exile surrealist group portrait of 1942 offers a curious document in the field of Leonora Carrington studies. For one, it expands the surrealist category to include fellow avant-gardists such as Piet Mondrian and Fernand Léger as an act of wartime solidarity.<sup>1</sup> In the grand tradition of surrealist group portraits, the photographer, Hermann Landshoff, composed his sitters idiosyncratically. Arranged in three rows, the portrait includes usual suspects such as Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst and André Breton. Carrington sits cross-legged and sage-like on the floor, having recently arrived in New York after surviving her wartime trials and tribulations in France and Spain. She nods significantly in the direction of Frederick Kiesler, while the child-like squeeze around her knees seems to disrupt the formal choreography exhibited by others in this portrait. One might say that she acts as a kind of wild card in this surrealist deck, although she is certainly not the only woman to be perched among so many creative men—Peggy Guggenheim and Berenice Abbott are also included in the group portrait. The owner of the apartment in which the photograph was taken (440 East 51<sup>st</sup> Street), Guggenheim is also noteworthy as an early champion of Carrington's work.<sup>2</sup> Carrington's pose is youthful and self-assured; she is welcome and accepted in this wealthy art collector's gathering of friends and colleagues, and clearly a valued member at the epicenter of the surrealist movement during this fragile wartime moment abroad. But, as in her infamous adolescent reading of Aldous Huxley at Ascot, Carrington was already looking beyond aristocratic patronage and the novelty façade of the safe haven of surrealism abroad.

This portrait arguably marks a moment of recognition and inclusion for Leonora Carrington as well as, paradoxically, the moment just prior to her "exoticization" and what might be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as her half-century obscurity from Anglo-American criticism. Many of the artists and writers featured in the Exile portrait would stay only a few brief years on the East Coast, sheltered and patronized by gallerists and dealers like Guggenheim and Julien Levy, before returning to Europe after the war. Carrington went another way; shortly after these photographs were taken she would continue her transatlantic journey, traveling southwest to Mexico City where she would practice for most of the rest of her life until her death in May 2011.<sup>3</sup>

The existing literature on Carrington is already unfairly weighted towards her early career in the late 1930s and early 1940s, even though she would go on to produce radical and challenging paintings, sculptures, novels, tapestries, plays, set designs and costumes well into her nineties. Indeed, this earlier portfolio is perhaps the one pocket of her oeuvre which is already well represented in public museum collections such as the Tate in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So why

another reading of Carrington's wartime output? For one, it is useful to unpack her very particular iconography and to demystify her activities during this chaotic period of international upheaval. This can be partially achieved through archival means, by reviewing her intermedial contributions to the surrealist magazines and exhibition catalogs of this period. Following her initial collection of short stories written in France, her published stories and artworks made in New York have become canonized as her primary surrealist thought-forms. In secondary terms, it is also useful to extract the contemporary significance of such historical material, in order to understand the effect of Carrington's sense of forecasting and liminality on subsequent generations. Here I will revisit Carrington's East Coast caesura (1941–42) through the lens of contemporary reinterpretations.

This article will propose that Carrington's wartime artefacts and shape-shifting memorabilia have provided fertile ground for future revisionary commentaries, historiographies (e.g., Suleiman 173; Lusty 5; Watz 90–104) and contemporary creative practices in the work of Skaer (2006), Smith (2012), and Miéville (2016). A reconsideration of Carrington's output from this wartime interlude on the East Coast, including her short story "White Rabbits" (1941) and her Untitled etching for VVV Portfolio (1942), as well as several drawings and at least three paintings, provides insight into her instinctual avant-garde senses of liminality and transgression, and evidences the ongoing conceptual awareness of her art forms and the profound respect and acknowledgement that her peers held towards her. As Terri Geis reminds us (<http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/9847#text>), women were better represented in VVV than any other surrealist magazine at the time (Sawin 306; Rosemont 120). It is vital that the broader fields of modernist studies, art history and literary criticism continue to be reminded of Carrington's importance until this becomes recognized as fact. Patricia Allmer nuances the very mechanics of critical oversight and reveals a troubling and deliberate process of obfuscation, especially within academic criticism. In doing so, Allmer emphasizes how inaccurate it is to believe that surrealist women, particularly Carrington, were "rediscovered," as this belittles their true impact and ongoing importance (366). Rather, it is necessary that we analyze why figures like Carrington were, for a time, unfairly dismissed from intellectual and cultural history when they were clearly an integral part of the historical avant-garde scene, and are now proving a lively or even integral presence within contemporary art and literature. Carrington's legacies are certainly proving informative, if not vital, to a new generation of creative practice.

Down Below (1944) is already widely documented and acknowledged as a key text that encapsulates this transitional moment in Carrington's history (Lusty 42; Eburne 226). Marina Warner explains how this rich narrative account, in which Carrington



details her alleged descent into madness, was lost, then subsequently transcribed and translated. Such processes are typical of Carrington's publication history (xxiv). Yet, this text will not be my focus here. Instead, I wish to unhinge previous readings and suggest alternatives in order to reimagine and re-present Carrington's early 1940s work in the contemporary sphere. While her biographical displacement from Santander to New York was no doubt disquieting, it would be surely too reductive to view the latter as a sanctuary. In isolating Carrington's New York output of 1941–42 from her broader oeuvre, one sees that she presents imagery that depicts a traumatized subject. However, given the liminality of this moment, it could be misleading to interpret this entire body of work as located only in the "down below" of her psyche. Rather there is something more resilient about Carrington, and the resulting work offers an ambiguous mode of afterlife with Anubis breeding at the helm.

The Glasgow-based contemporary artist Lucy Skaer (b.1975) has referred to Carrington as the "wild card" in her practice (<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/transcendence-image>) ("Transcendence"; Carey-Thomas 33), an anomaly or force of disruption that encourages viewers to rethink their visual categories:

In the installation that I made I'd been wanting to break the logical links of my work. As you make a body of work a logic emerges that you are using and I think at some point you have to disrupt that in order to move forward or move sideways, and I needed a way of doing that, so my visit to Leonora Carrington became a kind of backbone for me being able to disassemble the logic of my own work while citing it within the historical context of her, not of her own work but of the existence of her. (Lucy Skaer)

A strange sense of anachronism occurs in this sense of coexistence, an eccentric overlapping of time periods which is very in-keeping with surrealist principles; contemporary artists doing art history. It strikes me as deeply telling that of particular interest to Skaer's thinking should be the very drawings and etchings made by Carrington during her liminal wartime moment (personal correspondence, 29 January 2018).



Fig. 2. Leonora Carrington, Untitled (The Dogs of the Sleeper) from VVV Portfolio, 1942. © Estate of Leonora Carrington / ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018.

One “wild card” produced during this era was Carrington’s untitled etching for VVV portfolio, part of the fundraising campaign for the magazine, and produced at Atelier 17—another hive of exiled surrealist activity. This etching features unruly iconography and strange compositional techniques that both characterize and disrupt understandings of her New York output. Unpacking such enigmatic imagery and layout is no easy task. As if to confound interpretation still further, the etching includes almost indecipherable mirror writing that reads: “9 June 1942, 10, 14, 16, 2, 7, to study the numbers seven and nine, the dogs of the sleeper.”<sup>4</sup> Writing on Carrington’s visionary imagination, Tere Arcq points out the kinds of Celtic sorcery associated with the numbers “3, 5, 7 and 9,” claiming that “incantations repeated three, five, seven or nine times consecutively increased the creative activity between the hemispheres, which in turn could bring about the desired effects of the magical act” (25). Carrington accompanies her mirrored words with curious patterns and clusters of canines and equestrian imagery. One constellation presents a giant belly or cauldron full of creatures which vary between wolf-horse exquisite corpses and horse-like dogs. The two species appear to be merging monstrously as if part of a pseudo-scientific experiment. Psychiatrist Salomon Grimberg claims that this etching “is painful to look at” (Leonora 61). Unlike many of Carrington’s surrealist colleagues, she was no fan of Freud, yet this image could be interpreted alongside

the very same fairy tales that haunted the dreams of Freud's "Wolf Man" (1913) such as "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats." Here multiple wolves replace the traditional goats or little girls swallowed up inside this heaving stomach. The predator becomes victim; in this domain nothing is safe. Yet, more optimistically speaking, the belly could represent a pregnant moment of anticipation. Many of the animals peculiar to Carrington's universe are known to have large litters. Elsewhere in the composition, a child-like paper-chain of hound outlines are strung together on a lead. Towards the right, an irrepressible guard-dog wrestles with being tethered to a tree that has transformed into its tail.

Metamorphosis is everywhere in Carrington's realm, and presents an alternative mode of thinking. Indeed, such unsettling imagery may be seen to operate on a much more conceptual basis. Skaer's *Leonora* (2006) represents the younger artist's ambivalent encounter with her "wild card" as a multimedia installation or topographical inquiry, comprising, amongst other objects, a short 16mm film portrait of Carrington, *The Joker*; a mother of pearl in-laid mahogany table, *The Tyrant*; and a large drawing comprising tiny black spirals, *Death*. Here, the Tarot also becomes a means of esoteric curation for Skaer, and the very arrangement of Skaer's artworks in installation format could be said to evoke (or reflect) Carrington's disembodied wartime compositions.



Fig. 3. Lucy Skaer installation view at The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2008. Mixed media. Photo Ruth Clark. Courtesy the artist. Copyright The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.  
Source: Ruth Clark

Many have also made links between Carrington's own compositions, noting how similar motifs appear in a painting made the same year, *Green Tea (La Dame Ovale)* (1942) suggesting that the etching may have operated as a sketch for the painting (Grimberg, "Travelling" 87) as well as being a key cipher in Carrington's overarching visual grammar. Such imagery operates like a surrealist version of Egyptian hieroglyphics, suggesting that an archaeological imagination was crucial to Carrington at this moment: an alignment of the self with something more ancient, and an attempt to rewrite the very bedrock of language for a post-apocalyptic reader. Towards the right-hand side of Carrington's painting, a guard-dog with multiple swollen teats is tethered to an orchard tree alongside a small pony. To the left of the painting, a purple cauldron is brewing four stags or reindeer, much like the prominent, "pregnant" belly in the etching. Such clusters of animals become recurrent motifs for Carrington during this period, exaggerating her well-known reliance on the horse as an alter-ego, towards a sense of unpredictability, of going wild. Arcq has suggested that Carrington's insistence on this fantasy bestiary could be related to some form of witchcraft in dialogue with Kurt Seligmann (29) who appeared with Carrington in the aforementioned *Exiles* portrait. In the upper right-hand corner of the etching are two further clusters of creatures: a double-headed dog body, an ouroboros scenario of the animal that consumes its own tail, and a hound-like, furry bat hanging horizontally and defying the laws of gravity alongside the sum " $9 + 2 + 1 = 13$ ," a total that is potent with meaning for the superstitious.

For someone interested in coincidence and the interrogation of the very notion of "the image," Skaer has noted the importance of this particular iconoclastic etching by Carrington to her thinking, describing its effect on her as follows:

I like that it has a physical domain, in that the elements seem like they exist (are tied together) but there is no clear orientation or purpose. In that way it seems to challenge representation, making a world that seems only just to gel in to something that we can accept. (correspondence with the author)

While the medium of etching certainly allows for this compositional structure, it is the irrational contents which seem to question stable understandings of representation. The etching can be read a nonsense rhyme in its own right, an incongruous, disrupting device; an image which very much operates along the lines that Skaer herself wishes to achieve—a disorientating force which dislodges the viewer into a more visionary spectrum. Moreover, this etching was recently included in a selective and intimate exhibition of Carrington's writing, *Houses Are Really*



Bodies, curated by Helen Nisbet at Cubitt Studios in London (28 April–4 June 2017), suggesting this etching's ongoing significance to contemporary curatorial and conceptual practice.

Carrington was an early contributor to the two surrealist journals that were launched during the New York wartime period: the four-issue VVV, edited by David Hare, and the longer-running View Magazine, edited by Charles Henri Ford. Her published writing includes a short piece written in homage for the special Max Ernst issue of View (April 1942), "The Bird Superior," accompanied by a reproduction of her Portrait of Max Ernst (1939), a diminutive painting which was recently acquired by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. The American novelist Henry Miller wrote a letter to View's editor in May 1942 singling Carrington out for praise: "I like View more and more. Especially...Leonora Carrington's story" (Ford 31). Shortly afterwards, her short story "Waiting" appeared in the inaugural issue of VVV (June 1942), and, in the same issue, Carrington contributes her scoring to a surrealist game "Concerning the Present Day Relative Attractions of Various Creatures in Mythology and Legend." The horse-like unicorn is, perhaps unsurprisingly, her first choice, with the hound-like werewolf a close second, again consistent with her choice of animal imagery at this historical juncture. Her presence in these magazines would be felt even after her departure to Mexico. In March 1943, a reproduction of Green Tea was included in VVV issues 2–3, as well as her short story "The Seventh Horse," featuring a fairy tale transformation of foetus into foal. Then "Down Below" made its first published appearance in VVV issue 4 in February 1944, with eclectic illustrations including her drawing Vers L'inconnu (Into the Unknown)—another loaded title in this context.

In Carrington's wartime fairy tale, "White Rabbits" (1941), which was also later published in View, the typical brownstone architecture of Manhattan is mentioned as the setting and vantage point from which the protagonist speaks: "This is not the way that I had imagined New York" (73).<sup>5</sup> Across the alley, significantly in "the house opposite" (75), the neighbors breed a carnivorous variety of rabbits on rotten meat.<sup>6</sup> Here the cute, cuddly, and benign variety of hedgerow creature found in the English childhood nursery tales of Beatrix Potter and Lewis Carroll, are transformed into ravenous beasts while the neighbors turn into otherworldly, glittering creatures made of stardust, a raw statement on societal upheaval and urban capitalism. It continues themes of rabid biting and black humor which appear in a series of crosshatched drawings torn from a perforated sketchbook, such as Do you know my aunt Eliza? (1941) and He is in rolicking humour (1941). A wild card in this sequence is I am the Amateur of Velocipedes (1941), a peculiar drawing which features a nude female figurehead driving a tandem, a Liberty-like figure heralding



Carrington's arrival into America. The title suggests that the rider is an unlicensed novice at this surrealist mode of transport, a metaphor for instability but also for ambition towards complex mechanics. This image can be found collaged within the text of in China Miéville's recent novella, *The Last Days of New Paris* (2016), a rewriting of surrealist post-war history, demonstrating Carrington's hold over the creative imagination as well as art historical discourse. After his fictional encounter with Carrington's "Vélo," Miéville's protagonist, Thibaut, carries a "playing card" in his pocket, one of the real-life Marseille tarot deck.

Further work by Carrington made during her New York moment was included in the important *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition curated by Duchamp and Breton at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion on Madison Avenue (14 October–7 November 1942). Duchamp is credited in the catalog for "his twine," a now notorious curatorial tactic, which he deployed to complicate the exhibition experience, conjuring a disorientating web throughout the gallery spaces. The cerebral qualities of Duchamp are rarely compared with Carrington's elaborately narrative and painterly imagination, but I would insist they are present in Carrington's practice, as Skaer's undoing of "the image" enables us to understand. The *First Papers* catalog features the same font, wartime rationing paper stock and endpapers, and the same black and white reproductions as the surrealist magazines and other avant-garde ephemera of the period. The cover, designed by Duchamp, depicts close-ups of stone and Swiss cheese, a homemade moonscape suggesting the "alien" topography in which the exhibitors find themselves. The decorative typography for the title "First Papers" features foliage that hints at the possibility of fresh starts and new beginnings. Inside the catalog, Carrington has a page to herself opposite an explanation of the "compensation portraits" (Sawin 226; Hopkins 51), where Picasso, Breton, David Hare, Rene Magritte and Alberto Giacometti are once again grouped together due to their exiled "circumstances" (First). Here Carrington's presence could be read as overruling that of her male counterparts. On her page, her "compensation" passport photograph, an appropriation of Walker Evans's *Sharecropper's Wife* (1936), is used to introduce a reproduction of her painting *La chasse* (*The Hunt*) (1942), an artwork once owned by Matta (Grimberg, "Travelling" 93). Writing on such "compensation portraits," David Hopkins has previously made links between Carrington in 1942 and conceptual artist Sherrie Levine in 1981, arguing that Carrington becomes a "symbolic avatar" for Levine (67). Carrington similarly operates as a symbolic avatar or trickster figure for Skaer, who was amused to learn that she had also recently titled an installation *La chasse* (2018).<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 4. Leonora Carrington, *La chasse*, 1942. © Estate of Leonora Carrington / ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018.

Carrington's *La chasse* is set in a mountainous landscape in which Egyptian mummies rest amongst craters and a volcanic topography. Above this, a flying carpet carries four figures, possibly the souls of the bound mummies below. One of them is a dead ringer for the bound figure in *Green Tea* painted the same year, tempting to read as a self-representation for the artist herself, securely embalmed, en route to an afterlife of sorts. Towards the right hand side of *La chasse*, a floating island is carried by three of her horse-dog homunculi. This detail brings to mind Carrington's known interest in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which her protagonist reads in her short story "The Debutante" (1937) while a hyena attends the coming out ball in her place (Lusty 28–29). A key image in the third part of Swift's novel is the floating island of Laputa in the land of Balnibarbi: "The reader can hardly conceive my astonishment, to behold an island in the air..." (140). This land is defined by Swift as an irrational place where the learned inhabitants are very knowledgeable of mathematics and music but incapable of applying this knowledge to practical ends. Laputa thus lends itself as an ideal site for the illogical, surrealist imagination to colonize. Breton too was fascinated by Swift as well as by the imaginary possibilities of castles in the sky, or "Fata Morgana," which Breton explored in a poem of the same title (1940)—not necessarily as a whimsical vehicle for escapism, but rather as a surrealist coping mechanism to deal with the wartime reality at hand. Marina Warner helpfully discusses the history of Fata Morgana as a phantasmagoric "meteorological wonder" or castle-like apparition in the clouds created by the bad fairy, Morgan le Fay, to lure sailors to their watery deaths (*Phantasmagoria* 101). Carrington iconography nods to the literary airborne terrains of Swift and Breton, but suggests that a transportation to another domain is physically imminent.



Fig. 5. Leonora Carrington, *Artes 110*, 1942. © Estate of Leonora Carrington / ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018.

Again Carrington extends her own imagery in a painting known as *Artes 110* (1942), where the landscape has ruptured into an airborne archipelago. The broken palace turrets on the floating island towards the left of the painting have been compared shrewdly by Susan Aberth to “The Tower card in the major arcana of the Tarot” (“Animal” 251). Again, this is a semantic system utilized by Skaer—in her Leonora cycle, all the components are titled with subheadings taken from tarot cards: The Joker, The Tyrant, Death. Moreover, in *Artes 110* a sense of otherworldly topsy-turvydom associated with the fool or trickster figure is at play. A giant porcupine or echidna serves as a majestic carrier of isles extracted straight out of mythology, though Carrington, like Angela Carter, can also be seen to demythologize expectations (Carter 38).

Reminiscent of the mythological creature questionnaire in *VVV*, Breton’s editorial selection in the *First Papers* catalog, “On the Survival of Certain Myths and on Some Other Myths in Growth or Formation” (1942), includes a reproduction of an ink drawing by Carrington. Her contribution to this section is entitled *L’Ame Sœur* (*L’Androgene*) (*Soul Sister, Androgyny*), proving that Carrington was viewed by Breton as a “sister” or ally, not as a daughter or love interest but as his professional equal. On the facing page is a Puvis de Chavannes reproduction and quotations by Alfred Jarry and Balzac. Once again, Carrington is in good company, positioned at the core of surrealist art and literary heritage. Her featured illustration is another

"wild card," Brothers and sisters have I none (1942), an artwork later owned by Breton ("Travelling" 93). The title borrows from a famous identity riddle "brothers and sisters have I none, but that man's father is my father's son" (Aberth, Leonora 53). Such playful titles echo Carrington's interests in childhood nursery rhymes. Indeed, a limerick by her beloved nonsense writer, Edward Lear, opens the First Papers catalog, demonstrating that an active interest in children's literature was a commonality among the surrealists of the exiled group. Carrington's drawing is constructed pictorially as a series of skeletal outlines, a pictogram which again lends the image a floating spatial logic. It features two figures, their hair entwined and their bodies bound together as conjoined twins. A pair of menacing scissors positioned alongside their embrace threatens to sever their fraternal bond, an iconoclastic gesture which will undo the comprehensibility of the image. The siblings stand on tiny prancing horses, and have a striped feline head at each breast. On the left-hand side, beneath the cat's head and above its claw, tiny mirror writing is legible when reflected as follows: "time was, time is, time is past"—a historical contemplation on anachronism or reversed chronology, and familial estrangement brought about during this moment of social upheaval. To the right of these figures is a schematic arrangement including a wheel, a delicate birdcage, a winged horn, a desert island with palm trees, and one of her ubiquitous, patrolling guard-dogs. One wonders if this image functions as a treasure map or a reconfiguration of a geographical compass? Skaer likewise speaks of her pilgrimage to meet Carrington in Mexico City in 2006 as being the result of a "whim and some late-night internet booking" ("Transcendence"). In fact, much of Skaer's account (<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/lucy-skaer-drawing-close>) is about this prospect of being in transit and in questioning the city-hopping and international lifestyle of contemporary artistic practice (Leaver-Yap). In turn, Skaer's gesture serves to deromanticize Carrington's own historical exile to Mexico.



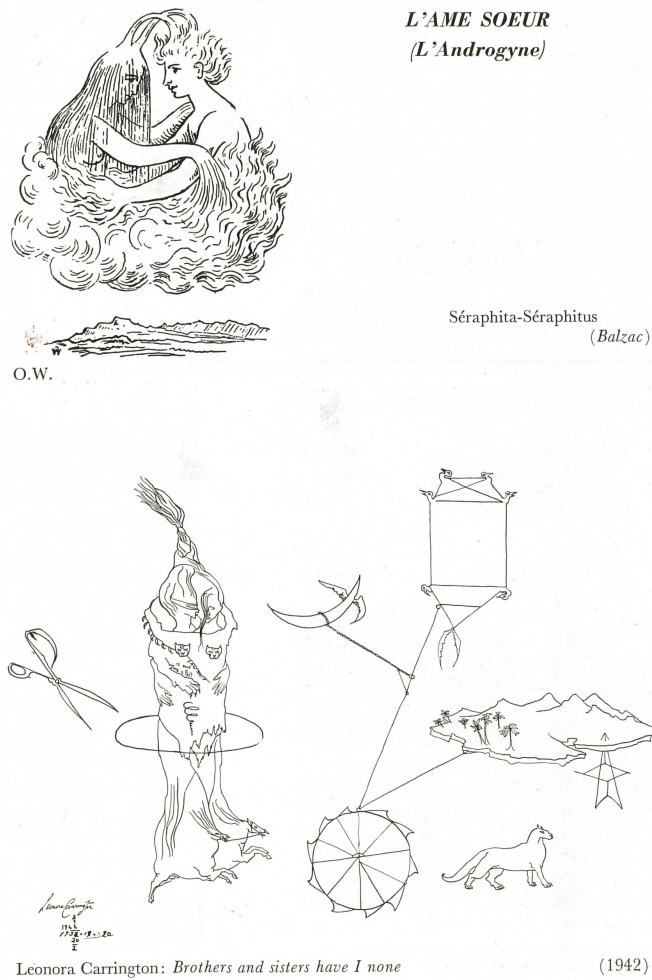


Fig. 6. Leonora Carrington, *Brothers and Sisters Have I None*, 1942. © Estate of Leonora Carrington / ARS, NY and DACS, London 2018.

After Carrington's death in 2011, Skaer returned to Mexico City and took a series of photographs of Carrington's street, Chihuahua, and front door, 194, which were then screen-printed with diamond and moon-shaped lozenges and entitled *Harlequin is as Harlequin Does* (2012). As with the *Exiles* portrait, this series conveys a sense of Carrington's mischievous and unsettling status. Once again, Skaer characterizes Carrington, envisaging her as *The Fool* or *The Joker*, which is considered a very powerful if ambiguous card in tarot, representing the innocent vessel, the beginning of one's life journey, as well as serving as a wild card, a device which cannot be pinned down. Moreover, in medieval times, an equivalent, the court jester, was

positioned beyond the law and outside the order of things. Both are highly akin to the instinctual way Carrington operated, especially during the liminal wartime moment, transgressing expectation at every opportunity and remaining beyond conventional art historical taxonomies as a result.

As a "wild card," Carrington presents us with a coded and conjoined literary and visual language which seeks deliberately to confound and flummox. That is not to say her work is meaningless, rather that her artworks and writings are deeply imbued and contemplative artefacts, marked by an international crisis. She herself becomes a shape-shifter during this period. Her New York output comprises a constellation of sketches, paintings, conceptual games, and short stories characterized by their ambiguity, and produced during a brief, year-long moment of reflection before diving into her next adventure surrounded by the multifaceted imagery of Latin America. Within this body of work, there is an emphasis on gravity-defying vehicles as well as death and the underworld as complex metaphors for exodus or the departure lounge of the imagination. Today Carrington's afterlife has been extended through her continued presence in the practice of contemporary artists whose perspective enables an unmooring of fixed meanings, while presenting a strong case for Carrington as a force in contemporary art.



Fig. 7. Lucy Skaer, Harlequin is as Harlequin Does, 2012. Screenprint on photograph.

When read through the conceptualism of contemporary artists and writers, it seems likely that the appeal of Carrington's playful grammar is that it is cryptically encoded (Aberth, Leonora 7), and seeks to dislodge comprehensive readings and easy insights. Lucy Skaer's sense of Carrington as a "wild card" becomes a useful tool in this semantic game or critical excavation. Through artists like Skaer, we can begin to tease out the cerebral Carrington—a curious conflation of the magical and the conceptual, someone who embodies the historical avant-garde as well as legacy and fate. In closing, I would suggest that often the most convincing critiques and reinterpretations of Leonora Carrington have been made by contemporary artists, curators and fiction writers, artist-histories which do not pin down but rather expand the sense of Carrington's reach.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Samantha Kavky also highlights this image and notes its collage-like, collegial approach "in which artists representing antithetical movements sit side by side to form a community based on circumstance rather than affinity" (209).

<sup>2</sup> Peggy Guggenheim famously included Leonora Carrington's work in her Art of this Century exhibition 31 Women (1943).

<sup>3</sup> During the war, the Mexican government provided a temporary sanctuary for European refugees—places to practice radically and experimentally without the threat of misinterpretation as "degenerate" artists (Warner xxx). However, it is also important to note that at this time, surrealism was still mostly represented by male



artists in Europe, and Carrington was somewhat distant from the group except from occasional visits and a handful of likeminded émigrés. In Mexico, she struggled alongside Muralists and a slow process of recognition.

<sup>4</sup> The etching is sometimes referred to as *The Dogs of the Sleeper*. Mar Rey Bueno believes (<http://www.thecult.es/item/26612-los-perros-del-durmiente.html>) the title may refer to a Christian allegory, "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus," which would mean the cauldron-like form is actually a sealed cave.

<sup>5</sup> At the time, Carrington was living on West 74th Street (Aberth, Leonora 52).

<sup>6</sup> *The House Opposite* (1945) would later become the title of one of Carrington's diminutive visual narratives demonstrating her ongoing capacity for self-quotation.

<sup>7</sup> Skaer unknowingly titled a recent body of work *La chasse* (2018) after a medieval hunting manual for *The Green Man* curated by Tessa Giblin at Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh (26 July–6 October 2018).

<sup>8</sup> As well as mining its arcane imagery, Carrington designed her own deck of tarot cards, completing them in the 1990s. In his book, *The Way of Tarot: The Spiritual Teacher in the Cards*, Alejandro Jodorowsky claims that on his quest for eternal life, he encountered Carrington in Mexico: "When I realised that Leonora used the symbols of the Tarot in her work, I begged her to initiate me" (5–6). Moreover, Jodorowsky claims that Carrington gifted him a deck made by occultist Arthur Edward Waite (6).

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