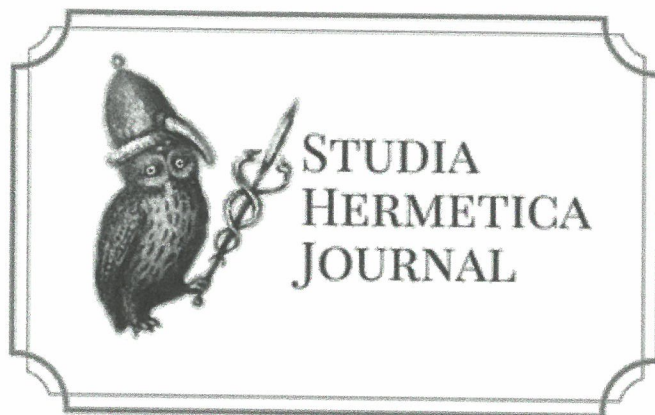


LEONORA 1917

Leonora Crompton

LEONORA 1917

Monográfico especial, dedicado a
conmemorar el centenario del nacimiento de
Leonora Carrington (1917-2017).



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Leonora 1917

- “Leonora1917”, Introducción de Mar Rey Bueno 3
1. “Leonora Carrington’s Feminist Alchemical Vision and Extrasensory Perception: My Magical Journey of Friendship with Leonora Carrington (1971–2011)”, Gloria F. Orenstein 6
2. “Leonora Carrington. Una mirada hecha de alma”. Juncal Caballero Guiral 30
3. “Leonora Carrington’s Esoteric Symbols and their Sources”[”] M.E. Warlick 56
4. “El sortilegio de la repetición o cómo invocar la revolución a través de las palabras”. Julia Salmerón 84
5. “Leonora Carrington y Remedios Varo: alquimia, pintura y amistad creativa”. María José González Madrid 116
6. “Con tus propios ojos, Leonora. Realidades mentales y mundos exquisitos”. Eleonora Vergara 145
7. ““Armada de locura”: mi viaje a Leonora Carrington”. Mar Rey Bueno 175

M. E. Warlick

Leonora Carrington's Esoteric Symbols and their Sources

Abstract: Leonora Carrington's paintings reveal her diverse interests in a variety of occult traditions including Irish Folklore, classical and Mexican mythology, alchemy, witchcraft, magic, astrology, the Kabbala, tarot, and Tibetan Buddhism. In interviews and biographical accounts, she, and those authors who knew her personally, often identified many of the esoteric publications she researched to learn more about these traditions, including those of E.A. Grillo de Givry, Kurt Seligmann, Robert Graves, G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, Gerald Gardner and C. G. Jung. This paper examines the visual symbols illustrated in some of these texts in order to establish the range of her transformations of visual source material. Many of these symbols lent their traditional esoteric meanings to her paintings, but the freedom with which she transformed and blended these symbols in her paintings reveal her very personal adaptations and combinations of found imagery. In her complex combinations of esoteric symbolism, her paintings reflect the structure of esoteric publications during the mid-twentieth century, which likewise presented a multitude of esoteric traditions, while pointing to deeper spiritual powers that could be unlocked through their contemplation. Her use of these symbols stemmed from her own ritual practices and reveal the power she infused into her work to activate the unconscious.

Key Words: Leonora Carrington, painting, esoteric symbolism

Leonora Carrington's paintings, sculptures, and literary works have received increasing attention in recent decades, adding evidence to the vitality of Surrealism in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly among its women artists. Scholars have documented the wide range of esoteric themes she wove into her art, including Irish folklore, classical and Mexican mythology, alchemy, witchcraft, magic, astrology, the Kabbala, tarot, the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, and Tibetan Buddhism[1]. In interviews and biographical accounts, she often shared the vast range of her research into these topics, citing the many books she read for inspiration. Drawing upon her substantial knowledge of these many esoteric disciplines, she adapted and combined their teachings and traditional imagery in very personal ways. Her son, Gabriel Weisz Carrington, warned against relying too heavily upon these sources to explain her art and remembered with disapproval a scholar who asked for a guided tour of her library in order to help interpret her work[2]. He emphasized that his mother's art was always the result of her imaginative transformations and blending of these traditions, an observation with which this author thoroughly agrees. Still, it is a worthwhile task to look again at these sources to gauge the extent of her inventions and to determine how esoteric publications in the early to mid-twentieth century reflected her themes and the ways in which she combined them.

Details in her art often mentioned, but more difficult to trace and analyze, are the many symbols and diagrams drawn from these traditions, such as magic circles, alchemical and astrological glyphs, and geometric diagrams. These symbols seem to bring magical power to her work. Her son Gabriel also related a fictional conversation with his mother, in which he asked:

...if she would agree with me that painting in many circumstances is a ritual approach to managing invisible worlds, as an invocation, and a way to pacify forces that have been unleashed, or angered. She might retort with 'What do you mean?'[3]

His posed question and her imagined response raise important issues concerning the role of these traditional symbols within her art as well as her abiding insistence not to be deciphered or analyzed too narrowly. This paper proposes that such symbols, rather than serving merely as marginal decorative elements in primarily figural or landscape compositions, exist as important components to infuse magical power into her imagery. Gloria Orenstein

recognized this kind of power in her symbols stating: "...her paintings become talismans and amulets bearing special powers designed to unlock hidden energies in the viewer"[4]. She compares Carrington's art to Gurdjieff's theory of objective art, in which the artist intentionally creates ideals and feelings to convey, although the viewer receives those ideas and feelings according to his or her own level of understanding. This paper will support such attempts to unveil her art as deeply esoteric, and to understand more fully Carrington's magical practices within her art and within the context of twentieth century views of the artist as magician[5].

Carrington's connection to Surrealism began in 1936 when her mother gave her a copy of Herbert Read's, *Surrealism*, one of the earliest surveys of the movement[6]. Among its many reproductions, an illustration of Max Ernst's *Two Children Menaced by a Nightingale* (1924) provoked in her a reaction of deep recognition. That same year the Surrealist exhibition at the New Burlington Gallery launched a broader exposure of the movement among English artists. The following year in June 1937, Ursula Blackwell Goldfinger, a friend from Amédée Ozenfant's Academy in London where Leonora was studying painting, arranged a dinner so that she could meet Ernst. They fell in love and she moved to Paris to begin a passionate romance that lasted for three years until the Nazi invasion of France forced their separation from a home they had created in Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche in the south of France.

Their relationship has also been the focus of much scholarly attention, ranging from occasional portrayals of Ernst's repressive control of a reluctant femme-enfant to more nuanced recognition of their mutual collaborations and reciprocal creative inspiration[7]. Leonora always credited Ernst as a powerful influence early in her career, but, understandably, she grew tired of the continuing emphasis placed on her personal and artistic relationship with him, at the expense of deeper investigations into her own later works. Indeed, her art changed very dramatically after she moved to Mexico in 1943, where she became part of a dynamic surrealist outpost with other exiled Europeans. Nevertheless, while her early relationship with Ernst remains a vital, but not overwhelming, aspect of her career as a whole, it bears reviving in this context to help analyze her artistic appropriations of esoteric symbols.

Appropriation was basic to Ernst's working methods as he often reproduced found imagery in many of his early paintings. In one of his earliest alchemical paintings in Paris, "Of This Men Shall Know Nothing" (1923), he directly reproduced a diagram of the relationship between the sun, the moon and the earth during various angles of a solar eclipse which he found in a book on *The Heavens* by Amédée Guillemin[8]. In the late 1920s and 1930s, he constructed his three collage novels by combining found nineteenth-century wood engravings, a method he also used in the late 1930s to illustrate Carrington's short stories. In *La Dame Ovale*, for example, he replaced a woman's head with a caterpillar to illustrate "La debutante" and for "L'ordre royale", he superimposed fluid conical diagrams above a human figure[9]. These human hybrids of insects and diagrams forecast some of the figural characters in her later works in which humans often have their heads replaced by butterflies or diagrams, as in her "Portrait of Madame Dupin", 1947. Ernst's collaged fusion of a horse and a magpie for her story, "La dame ovale", echoes Carrington's painting, *Femme et Oiseau*, c. 1937, showing the close parallels between their images at the time, as do the many painted and sculpted horses, mermaids and horned creatures that decorated their home in Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche.

Ten years earlier at the age of ten, c. 1927, Carrington had designed animal hybrids for a childhood story she had written, "Animals of a Different Planit (sic)"[10]. On a sheet illustrating a winged, horned reptile striding on the long legs of a horse she explained that all of these animals were discovered by a man called Youbitus who had journeyed to Starvinski, a planet far beyond Neptune[11]. A few years later, while studying in Florence, she created a notebook of drawings. The title page, "Florence 1933: A Collection of Extracts" contains bats, a spider and two books, one with the title, "Black Sorcery" and the other, held by a monkey and more difficult to see, is entitled "Magic"[12]. Her interest in alchemy began while she was studying with Ozenfant inspired by his emphasis on the chemistry of art materials. She began collecting books on the alchemy in used bookstalls around London[13]. Clearly these glimpses into her early works indicate that her explorations of hybrid figures, magic and alchemy predated her association with Ernst, although their time together undoubtedly encouraged these interests which would grow and transform in her later works.

In terms of appropriating images, several of her early paintings retain close similarities to her chosen artistic precedents, including her Portrait of Max Ernst, 1937, which she based on “The Hermit” major arcana tarot card, designed by Pamela Colman Smith for the Waite Rider deck[14]. Carrington adapted her source by expanding the arctic landscape of the original and added a frozen white horse in the background. Much like Colman Smith’s “Hermit”, Ernst commands the center axis of the image and carries an illuminated lantern. Carrington’s 1946 painting, “Amor che move il sole et l’altre stelle” is based on Dante’s Paradiso of his Divine Comedy[15]. Formally, it bears a close comparison to William Blake’s Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car, 1824-27, a work owned by Tate Britain. Carrington’s painting “The Temptation of St. Anthony” (1947), which she submitted for Albert Lewin’s International Art Competition for The Private Affairs of Bel Ami retains close similarities to Hieronymus Bosch’s St Anthony which she had seen in the Prado in the midst of her harrowing escape through Spain[16]. She retained the saint’s seated pose beside his pig, and created a stream flowing from a vessel in the background. To those basic details, she gave the saint two additional faces and added five small women spreading the robe of a crowned woman to his left, while to his right an androgynous figure dressed in crimson watches over a boiling cauldron as crows circle overhead. The formal parallels found in these comparisons dissipate in her later works because, as has been noted by many scholars, her later works become imaginative mixtures of many traditions. While these early paintings demonstrate a closer adherence to visual sources than would be found in later works, they demonstrate nevertheless the inspiration she drew in her formative years from found visual imagery.

Many things contributed to the changes in her work from the late 1940s and into the 1960s, including influences found in her new home of Mexico with its pre-Columbian myths and exotic landscapes, her close circle of artist friends, including Remedios Varo and Kati Horna[17]. Many new publications on esoteric subjects became available in those years. Earlier in Paris, she would have known E. A. Grillo de Givry’s *Le Musée des sorciers, mages & alchimistes*[18], a text that inspired many surrealists and was one of the first publications to reproduce images drawn from a myriad of occult paths, including scenes of monstrous devils, demons, witchcraft, alchemy, astrology, physiognomy, tarot, chiromancy or palmistry, divining rods and diagrams of

talismans and magic circles. Evidence has grown of the extensive interest in esotericism among the surrealists throughout the movement and the continuing development of these interests in surrealism's later years[19].

Carrington met Kurt Seligmann in Paris but they reconnected in New York in the early 1940s when he published some of the images from his growing collection of esoteric imagery in the surrealist journals *View* and *VVV*. He and Carrington were both involved in the First Papers of Surrealism exhibition in 1942. In the catalog, Carrington's drawing "Brothers and Sisters Have I None," appeared on a page of the catalog, entitled "L'ame soeur" (soul sister) celebrating the androgyne[20]. In her drawing below (Fig. 1.b), an entangled male and female couple stands fused within a circle as they ride upon two galloping horses, while floating scissors to the left threaten to sever the circle. A diagram to the right contains a circle sectioned into ten parts and tethered above to a tropical landscape, a winged moon and a rectangular kite. Above her drawing are the words *Séraphita-Séraphitus*, a reference to Balzac's influential nineteenth-century novel about an androgynous angel who inspires a young man and a young woman both to fall in love with her/him. At the top left is a drawing of another embracing man and woman (Fig 1.a), representing the fusion of the opposites of water and fire, a drawing based on an image that would later be reproduced by C.G. Jung in *Psychology and Alchemy*[21]. Throughout the rest of the catalog are details from paintings by Bosch and Brueghel, alchemical emblems, automatic writing by the medium Hélène Smith's and a tarot card, probably from Seligmann's collection. Like the "alternative" portraits of the artists reproduced in the catalog, these traditional images are provocative and disruptive, and they demonstrate the prevalence of occult imagery within surrealist circles in New York in the early 1940s[22]. Kurt Seligmann published some of these same illustrations that had been included in Grillo de Givry's *Musée* in his *Mirror of Magic*, 1948, along with many others. He reproduced alchemical and witchcraft images, hermetic geometric diagrams of man and the heavens, more talismans, magic circles, versions of the Sephirot/Tree of Life of the Hebrew Kabbala, and tarot cards, whose influence on Carrington's paintings will be examined below.

Carrington claimed that reading Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* in 1948, was "the greatest revelation of my life"[23]. Goddess imagery inspired many of

her paintings after this time, such as “And Then We Saw The Daughter of the Minotaur”, 1953, in which the violent beast of the Minoan labyrinth is replaced by a graceful long-horned cow who examines crystals beside a larger ethereal creature clothed in white. Carrington’s two sons stand beside the table, while a Balinese dancer appears in the distance. In “Feret Race”, 1950-51, Carrington transforms the labyrinth into a garden maze in which white nude women walk, run, chase, and follow the playful animals.

Carrington also translated Gerald Gardner’s *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, 1959, for her friend Remedios Varo[24]. Varo drafted a letter to Gardner in which she explained the interest in his work that she shared with Carrington:

I have just read your book, which I find vastly interesting. A friend of mine, Mrs. Carrington, has been good enough to translate it for me, as I am unable to read or speak English...As you know, there is much activity in the field of witchcraft in this country, but these practices are nearly always limited to medical applications or the elaboration of love potions... But this... is not what interests us... I, Mrs. Carrington and some other people have devoted ourselves to seeking out facts and data still preserved in isolated areas where true witchcraft is still practiced.[25]

These comments suggest Varo’s and Carrington’s growing interest in the ritual aspects of witchcraft. Varo was also strongly influenced by the teachings of P.D. Ouspensky and G. I. Gurdjieff[26]. It is difficult to determine if Varo met Gurdjieff in Paris, and Carrington never met him, but they shared an interest in his teachings especially as disseminated by Ouspensky. Both women associated with their followers in Mexico City. It should be noted that the publications of Graves, Gardner and Ouspensky were only sparsely illustrated, but the ideas expressed in these books were profoundly influential in their paintings.

Carrington’s “Three Women around a Table”, 1951, suggests her friendship with Varo and Horna, as astral forces descend upon the three women from a waning gibbous moon above[27].

Carrington’s other influential source into the 1960s was the work of Carl Gustav Jung. Jung’s study of esoteric traditions spans back to his youth, but his interest in alchemy was sparked in the late 1920s, when Richard Wilhelm asked him to write an introduction to his translation of a book on Chinese alchemy, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. Jung’s *Psychology and Alchemy* grew out of two major studies that he subsequently published in the *Eranos-Jahrbuch* in 1935

and 1936. These lectures were published in English as *The Integration of the Personality*, in 1939 and 1940. Jung then expanded the material and published German versions in 1944 and 1952, with English versions in 1953 and 1968[28]. It is not clear which edition Carrington may have read, but she certainly acknowledged his influence on her work.

While Freud was a major influence on the first generation of surrealists in Paris, Jung's influence on both male and female artists who joined the movement in the 1930s and 1940s was prevalent. As the study of alchemy has grown over the past forty years, Jung has been criticized due to his ahistorical approach to the alchemical texts and images he discussed and to the way he interpreted that material almost exclusively in light of his own psychoanalytic theories[29]. Nevertheless, *Psychology and Alchemy* is a text filled with visual imagery, with alchemical woodcuts, engravings and manuscript illuminations, integrated with Christian images, tantric mandalas, astrological diagrams, and Egyptian art. Jung saw a parallel between the masculine and feminine roles of alchemical characters and the mind, which he described as the masculine animus, aided by a feminine anima or creative spirit. He placed a special emphasis on the alchemical feminine, including an engraving of Maria Prophetissa[30], one of the earliest alchemical philosophers, to which Carrington later devoted a painting, "The Chrysopeia of Mary the Jewess"[31]. He reproduced many details from the late seventeenth century *Mutus Liber*, a silent book containing only full page engravings, which contain rare depictions of a female alchemist working beside her male partner at every step of the laboratory work[32].

Criticism of Jung could be extended to Mircea Eliade's *The Forge and the Crucible*, first published in 1956[33]. Eliade compared alchemy to prehistoric and tribal metallurgy to explain the ritual and magical qualities they shared. He illustrated the text with alchemical woodcuts from the *Rosarium philosophorum* series, 1550, and several alchemical engravings from Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens*, 1617. To establish precedents for alchemy's mystical treatment of physical matter he discussed practices spanning the Iron Age, Babylonian, Chinese, Indian, African, and Siberian cultures. His assumptions concerning the universality of the practices of such "primitive" cultures are not supported by today's anthropologists nor by contemporary historians of science

and alchemy. Nevertheless, his invocations of the magic of early shamanic approaches to metallurgy can provoke the artistic imagination in ways that most academic studies of the history of alchemy cannot.

More examples of mid-century publications could be added to those that Carrington claimed had influenced her. It is important to recognize that while ideas and symbols from these publications can be identified in her work, this should in no way diminish admiration for her imaginative transformations of her discoveries. At the same time, it can be asserted that her art deeply reflects these publications for their representations of alchemy, magic, and other esoteric disciplines with her ahistorical mixing and matching of widely diverse traditions. That is to say, the structures of many of these publications are paralleled by the inventiveness of her combinations of these widely varying traditions.

Providing some specific examples may help prove this point. One of the more interesting paintings of the 1950s is “Ab Eo Quod” (Fig. 2), 1956, which Aberth called her most hermetic painting[34]. The inscription embroidered on the rectangular tapestry at the front of the painting is taken from a passage that Jung incorrectly credited to Marsilio Ficino, “Ab eo, quod nigram caudam habet abstine, terrestrium enim deorum est,” or “Keep your hands from that which has a black tail, for it belongs to the gods of the earth”[35]. In the dream that Jung was interpreting, there was a round table indicating wholeness. Carrington’s table is square, but the dark creature beneath, whose tail entwines around the chair, can represent a shadow figure that Jung explained in the same passage exists between the ego-consciousness and the anima, or personified unconscious, stemming from “painful or regrettable” experiences. Jung was largely concerned with identifying the anima as a feminine aspect of the male psyche. Carrington seems to have interpreted this dark creature, and similar dark figures in other paintings, with her own dark shadow stemming from experiences in the asylum in Santander, to recognize and conquer.

Rather than trying to use this painting to psychoanalyze the artist, it is more productive to see how many symbolic elements are combined within. There are alchemical elements including the large egg on the table, which represents the “Philosophic Egg,” or alchemical vessel. While this term is often used in

alchemical texts, visual representations in alchemical texts of a large egg are less frequent. One exception is an engraving that first appeared in Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* of a soldier, representing the planet Mars, standing by a furnace about to attack a large egg on a square table with his sword. This illustration was reprinted in Seligmann's *History of Magic*, as were two images of the alchemical rose (Figs. 3.a,b), which in Carrington's painting floats above, dripping milky white drops to the table below[36]. Throughout the painting Carrington incorporated the colors of black, white and red, which relate to the three major stages of the alchemical work. Grillo de Givry had included a color plate representing these three colors on hybrid creatures - black eagle/serpents and white eagle/lions or griffins - placed in a landscape below a small hill that contains a tree with red fruit (Fig 3.c). Blackness or Nigredo is the first stage which is one of destruction and putrefaction, a stage that Carl Jung, and Herbert Silberer before him[37], had interpreted psychoanalytically as a psychological stage of introversion in which one faces and conquers the dark aspects of the unconscious, a color most appropriate for the black creature beneath the table. Whiteness, or albedo, is a state of purification that is attained after repeated washings of the physical matter in the vessel, and it is related to feminine perfection in alchemy and to the production of silver. The final stage of redness or rubedo is a passionate stage of the sexual union of alchemy's personified characteristic of physical matter, masculine Sulphur and feminine Mercury, the Sun and the Moon. Their union produces the transformational Philosophers' Stone, a catalyst that enables further transformation. The red wine in glass vessels on the table and the red walls in the back of the room suggest this stage is imminent.

The drawings on the back walls have received less attention in the literature, but they bear examination in terms of this alchemical interpretation. At the upper right side, two faces are fused back to back, one dark and bearded and one lighter with longer hair. They resemble the heads of the many alchemical androgynes, a vertically joined half-male half-female figure that represents the conjunction of Sulphur and Mercury and the production of Silver and Gold. At the same time, a comparison could be drawn to an illustration that Eliphas Lévi included in his *Histoire de la magie*, entitled the "Magical Head of the Zohar" (Fig. 3.d)[38]. In this illustration, two male heads are fused horizontally, light and dark, above and below, the sky and the water, a division that could also be

interpreted as the division and fusion of conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind.

In the middle of the back is a horned goat who stands on its hind legs beside a tree. This detail can be compared to another illustration from Seligmann, of a shell plaque found on a lyre that was discovered at Ur (Fig. 4.e). It tells the tale of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu, a wild man and master of the animals. The lower three registers of the plaque contain a parade of standing animals who bring offerings of food and musical instruments. On the bottom register is a standing goat, and a bearded man with a scorpion tail, another hybrid that appears in Carrington's "El Rarvarok", 1963. References to the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt in her work deserve deeper analysis than can be offered here.

Another source to suggest for these drawings on the back wall of "Ab Eo Quod", are the symmetrical drawings of Haitian vodou called *vêver*, many of which were reproduced in Louis Maximilien's *Le voodoo haïtien*, 1945 (Fig. 3.f)[39]. As explained in the text, *vêvers* are designs traced on the ground or at the foot of a central pillar using wheat flour or ashes, as emblems to invoke both Christian and African deities to attain the desired goal of a ritual. Dr. Pierre Mabilie wrote the preface to this text[40]. Mabilie was a medical doctor with interests in psychoanalysis, the occult, anthropology and sociology. He lived in Haiti in the early 1940s, where he established the Haitian Bureau of Ethnology, fighting to preserve vodou traditions against the Catholic Church's campaign of repression[41]. He became a close friend of Carrington soon after she moved to Mexico in 1943. Mabilie encouraged her to write the experience of her mental breakdown during her confinement in the Santander asylum before she escaped to New York. After her first English account was lost, she dictated a French version to Mabilie's wife, Jeanne Megnen, and from which excerpts were translated back into English and published in *View*, under the title 'Down Below'[42]. Carrington transforms the *vêver* designs in this painting, but she preserves their symmetry. Their inclusion suggests an intentional invocation, not to vodou deities, but rather as a means to gather personal power to enact psychological transformation. Moths, butterflies and other insects, which have traditionally represented the transformation of the human soul, here underscore

the desire for a metamorphosis to release the hidden powers of the unconscious mind.

Including such ritual symbols of incantation raise the question of her own ritual practices of which there are anecdotal glimpses. Alejandro Jodorowsky offered a startling account of her ritualistic encounters with him in the early days of their friendship[43], as they collaborated on the production of her play, *Penelope*. Later in 1963, while working on her mural “*El Mundo Mágico de los Mayas*” commissioned for the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, Carrington traveled to Chiapas. There, Gertrude Blom, a Swiss anthropologist, introduced her to two *curanderos*, or healers, from the village of Cinecantan, who shared with her their healing remedies and allowed her to attend their ceremonies[44]. Gloria Orenstein related her conversations with Carrington, including the synchronistic magic of their first meeting, and her subsequent meeting with a female shaman, Ellen Marit Gaup-Dunfjeld, from Lapland, or rather Samiland, as Carrington had told Orenstein that the inhabitants of Samiland were the most magical people in the world[45].

Observing the mixing of hermetic traditions in this painting suggests ways in which other paintings by Carrington might be approached to decipher the often enigmatic combinations of symbolic systems she employed throughout her career. Following the 1968 repression by the government of student protests, she left Mexico and spent much of the 1970s and 1980s living in New York and Chicago. This was a period in which the New Age revival brought many reprints of older occult literature and newer publications onto the market. In New York, she often visited the Kristine Mann Library, founded in the 1940s by the Analytical Psychology Club of New York and open to the public. Its holdings are dedicated to Jungian studies, including the areas of theology, alchemy, mythology, symbolism, the arts, anthropology, psychoanalysis and general psychology[46].

In her paintings of these later years, she returned to many of the same themes of the 1950s and 1960s, in which relationships to traditional esoteric imagery can often be identified. Alchemy was an abiding presence, signaled by the colors, black, white and red, and the inclusion of glass vessels, bellows, and fires reminiscent of the alchemical laboratory. Earlier, she painted tributes to

alchemists in “The Garden of Paracelsus”, 1957, “The Chrysopoeia of Mary the Jewess”, 1964. Other esoteric tributes include “The Burning of Giordano Bruno”, 1964, the Renaissance Hermeticist, and “The Persian magician Zoroaster Meeting his own Image”, 1960[47]. Alchemy reappears in later paintings, such as Cornelia and Cornelius, 1973, in which a red man and blue woman bath together, in a scene reminiscent of the Rosarium philosophorum series of images in which a male king and female queen, representing Sulphur and Mercury, the Sun and the Moon, meet, bath together, and make love to celebrate their “Chemical Wedding.” Their sexual encounters are suggested in “Sol Niger”, 1975, where a black sun is in bed with a gold partner, and in “The Lovers”, 1987, another ritual bedroom scene.

Witchcraft is signaled by the appearance of bubbling cauldrons as in “The House Opposite”, 1945, and in the pagan celebration, Samhain, 1951. Magic circles are found in widely different contexts, as encircling the floor under the “Bath of Rabbi Loew”, 1969, the man who fashioned the Golem of Prague. Another magic circle is divided into eight sections beneath a white robed figure holding a black rose in The Ancestor, 1968, and another inscribed on the floor under a boiling cauldron in Grandmother Moorhead’s Aromatic Kitchen, 1975. The Hebrew Kabbala and its diagram of the ten Sephirot appears more or less intact in her painting Yahweah or in a completely abstracted form in The Polyhedron of Hod, 1965. The “Hanged Man”, a Major Arcana card from the tarot deck was part of her stage design for her play Penelope, 1975[48]. In the design on the back wall the “Ace of Clubs”, a severed hand holding a trimmed branch is placed above an adaptation of the “Ace of Coins”. Seligmann illustrated models for all these images on a single page of six tarot cards from a nineteenth century deck[49]. It was rare for Carrington to copy models so closely. Other tarot images like the Hierophant, pour Dauphine, 1958, shows minimal relation to the traditional tarot card of a Pope or High Priest, called the Hierophant in more modern decks, nor do the cards that float around a small table in “Playing Tarot”, 1995, in which four people and three cats, all sainted by halos, determine their destinies. Another divination ritual is found in “Casting the Runes”, 1951, also without a link to traditional runes. Celestial images of the sun and moon are found in many paintings, while more abstracted astral forces descend from the heavens upon the creatures below. In the “Song of Gomorrah”, 1963, she includes a band at the bottom of the painting with accurate glyphs of the seven

ancient planets, and associated magical symbols to draw down their celestial powers.

The flexibility of these images as well as her unusual combinations and repetitions of traditions, and the variations that can be identified from close borrowings to significant transformations of these symbols throughout her career points to the importance of the source material she was using. Texts by Grillo de Givry, Kurt Seligmann, Gerard Gardner, G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky gave rise to the abundance of scholarly and more popular occult literature today. The use of these esoteric traditions by Jung and his followers, while criticized in some contemporary academic circles, certainly resonated with a number of artists at mid-century. In the introduction to Jung's *Man and His Symbols*, first published in 1965, the coordinating editor, John Freeman, explained why he had need to take over the project to bring a greater clarity to Jung's ideas than could be found in Jung's professional publications in order to make them understandable to the lay reader.

Those who have limited themselves to living entirely in the world of the conscious and who reject communication with the unconscious bind themselves by the laws of conscious, formal life. With the infallible (but often meaningless) logic of the algebraic equation, they argue from assumed premises to incontestably deduced conclusions. Jung and his colleagues seem to me (whether they know it or not) to reject the limitations of this method of argument. It is not that they ignore logic, but they appear all the time to be arguing to the unconscious as well as to the conscious. Their dialectical method is itself symbolic and often devious. They convince not by means of the narrowly focused spotlight of the syllogism, but by skirting, by repetition, by presenting a recurring view of the same subject seen each time from a slightly different angle – until suddenly the reader who has never been aware of a single, conclusive moment of proof finds that he has unknowingly embraced and taken into himself some wider truth[50]

Carrington said that she never expected her paintings to sell, and so it is unlikely that provoking any pre-determined viewer response was an aspiration of her work. Still, when examining the scope of her paintings from the 1950s until her death in 2011, similar patterns emerge of the recurrence of hermetic themes, the repetition of motifs in changing contexts and the sense that her aim is to awake the unconscious. Her images are mutable and multi-valent, mixing hermetic

traditions and their symbols and then distilling their essence within dreamscapes of the unconscious.

Her painting, “The Naked Truth” from 1962 (Fig.4), offers some final insight into the relationship of printed texts to her work. On the left of the painting, three patriarchs sit at a long table in a library listening to a lecture given by a fourth patriarch who reads a book in front of them. At the bottom center a white parrot rests on two closed books near a small dark vessel that could just as well be a dung beetle, and two dark fish-tailed seals. It is difficult to determine if the parrot is protecting the books or simply using them as a convenient perch. This detail provokes comparison to Barnett Newman’s famous quip “Aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds”[51]. One could restate his sentiments for Carrington to say: “Books on esoteric traditions are for the artist as ornithological books are for the birds”. Still, these books are placed directly below a tree, the source of paper, filled with white spirits. At the right, a young naked woman stands within a circular trellis skirt beside a castle reading a book. Another open book lies at her feet. She seems to suggest a different interpretation of value of such texts, as a unicorn’s horn sprouts from her head to indicate the mystical insights she is gaining. The message conveyed by this nude woman is that inspiration can be gained by shedding any preconceptions that might blind us to the truth. Carrington’s sources nourished and guided her understanding of the history of esoteric traditions. For viewers of Carrington’s paintings on their own journeys of self-discovery, revisiting the sources that she used and examining the ways in which Carrington transformed their symbols into her paintings, may open doors to new insights of both conscious and unconscious enlightenment.

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Illustrations



Fig 1.a. The Marriage of Water and Fire, illustrated in C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, 2nd ed. [1968], Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 147.

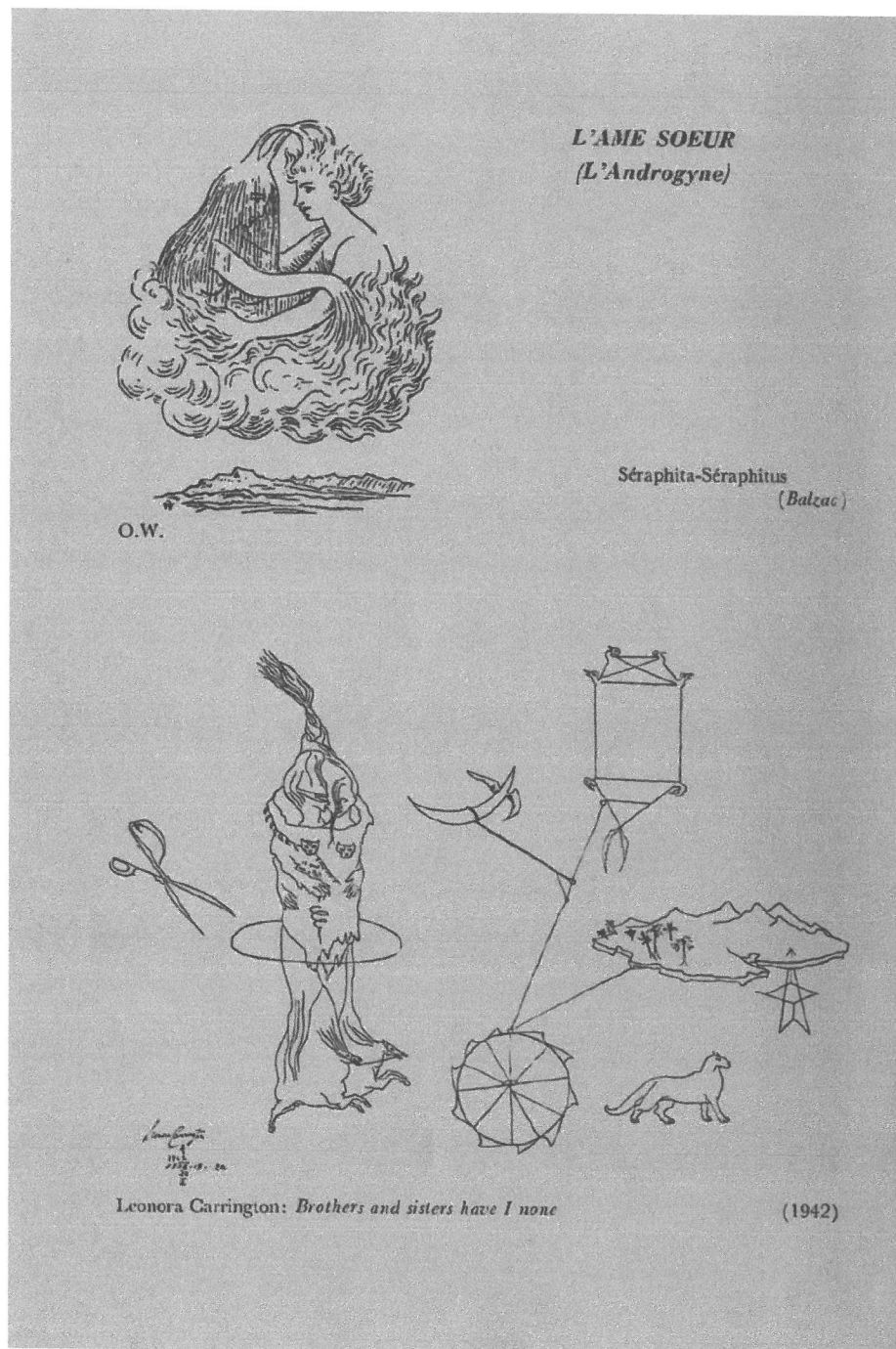


Fig. 1.b. Leonora Carrington, "Brothers and Sisters have I none," drawing on paper reproduced from a page entitled "L'ame soeur," in André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, *First Papers of Surrealism*, exh. cat., 14 October-7 November, New York, Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, 1942, n.p. © [2017] Estate of Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Fig. 2. Leonora Carrington, *Ab Eo Quod*, 1956, oil on canvas, 71 x 61 cm, 28 x 24 in., private collection, © [2017] Estate of Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

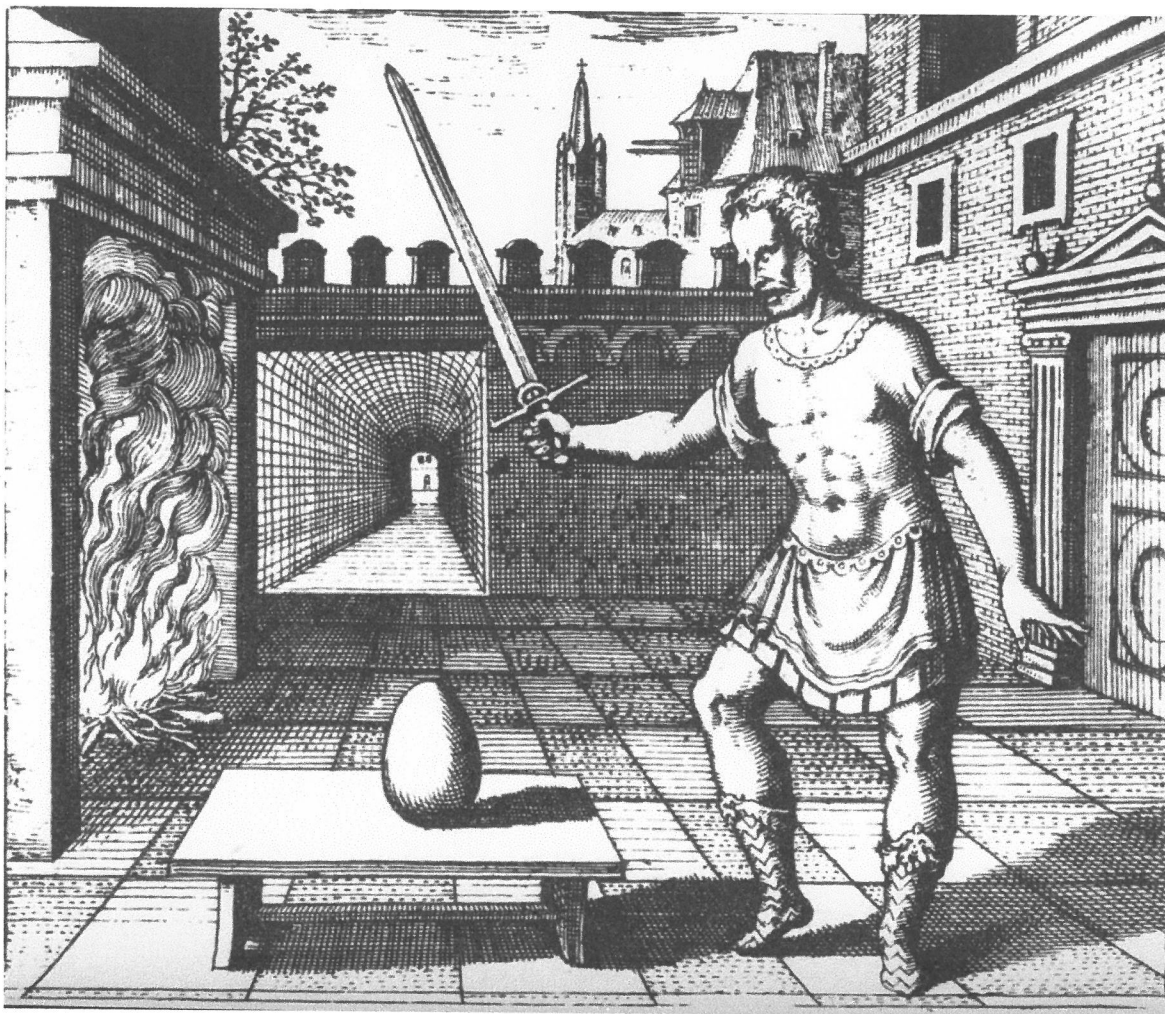


Fig. 3.a. Mars and the Philosophic Egg, reproduced from Kurt Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1948, p. 160.

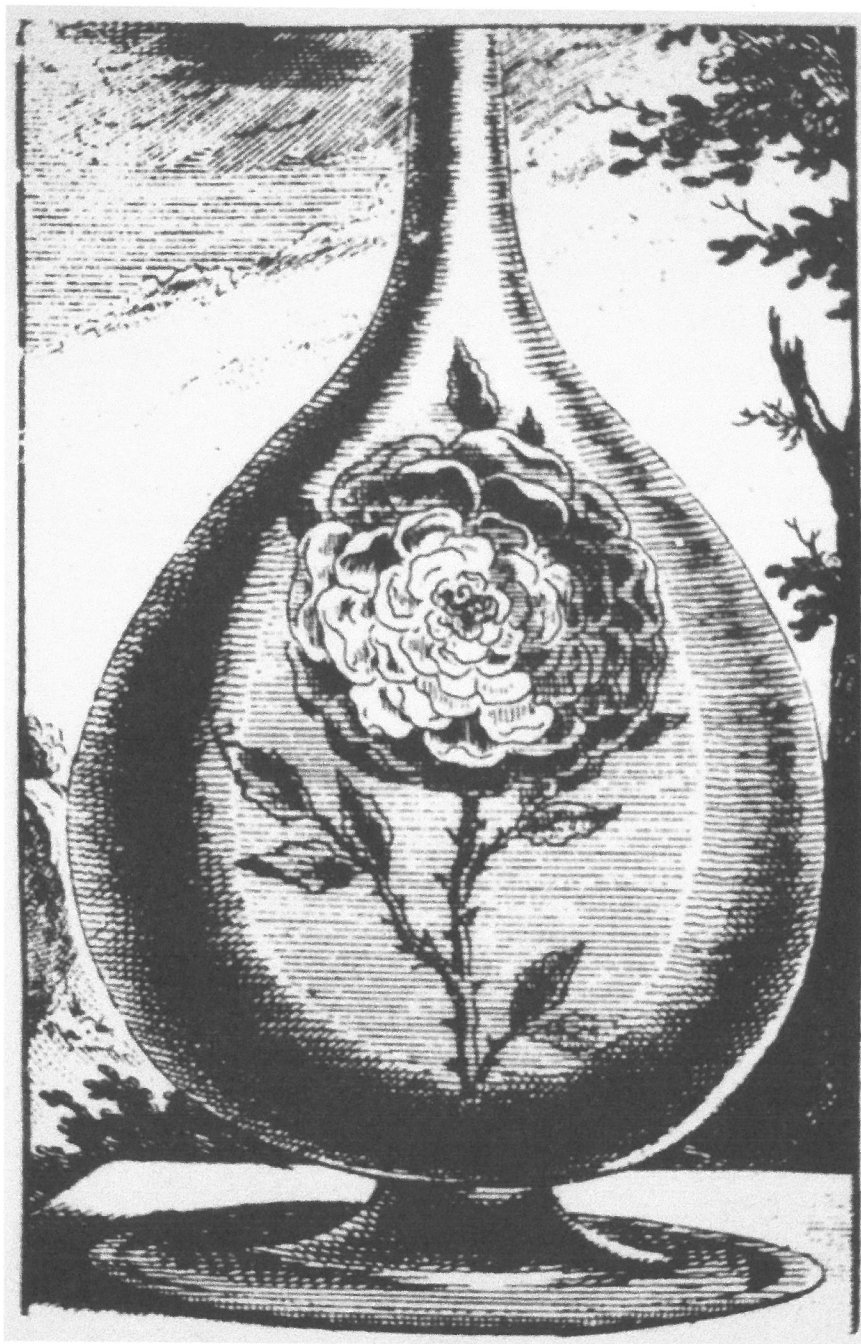


Fig. 3.b. The Specter of the Rose, reproduced from Kurt Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1948, p. 461.



Fig. 3.c. Symbolism of the Operations of the Philosophers' Stone, reproduced from E.A Grillot de Givry, Musée des sorciers, mages & alchimists, Paris: Librairie de France, 1929, color plate opposite p. 388.

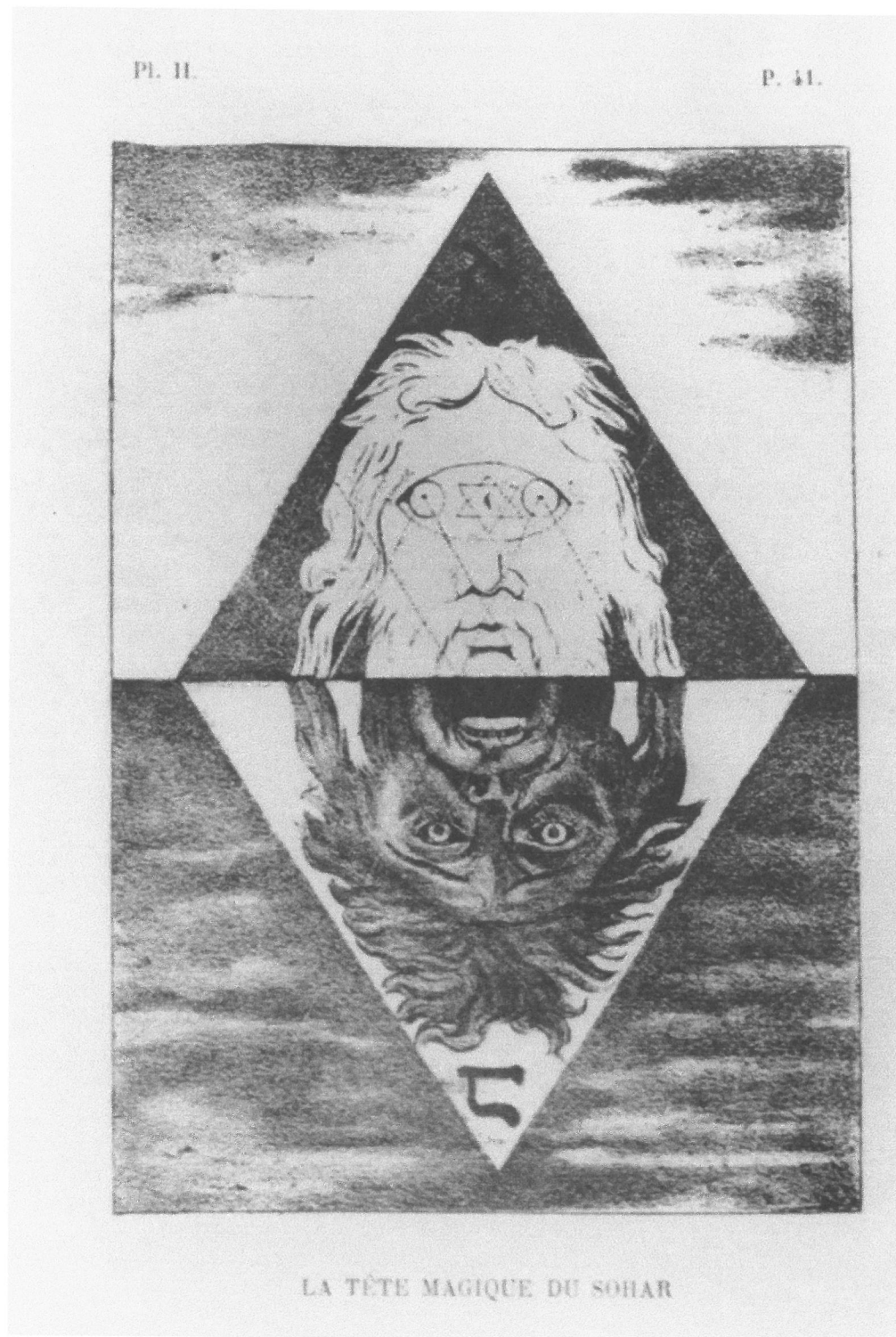


Fig. 3.d. The magical Head of the Zohar, reproduced from Eliphas Lévi [Alphonse Louis Constant], *Histoire de la magie*, Paris, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922, plate II.



Fig. 1. Shell Plaques of a King of Ur
(Courtesy of The University Museum, Philadelphia)

Fig. 3.e. Shell Plaques of a King of Ur, reproduced from Kurt Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1948, p. 22.

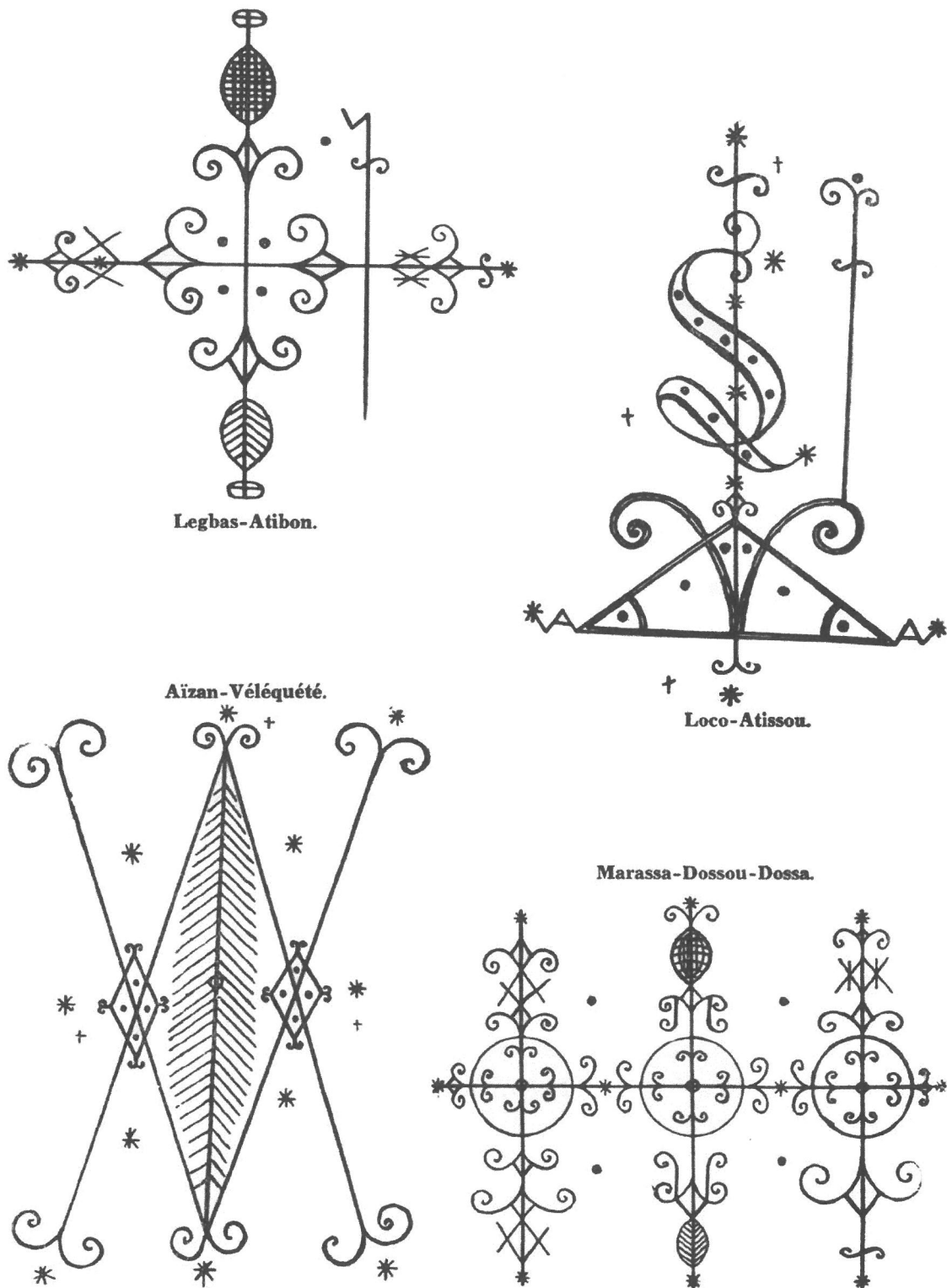


Fig. 3.f. Vêver Vodou Symbols, drawings reproduced from Louis Maximilien, *Le Vodou Haitien*, Port-Au-Prince, Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1945, between pp. 42-43, figs. 1-4.

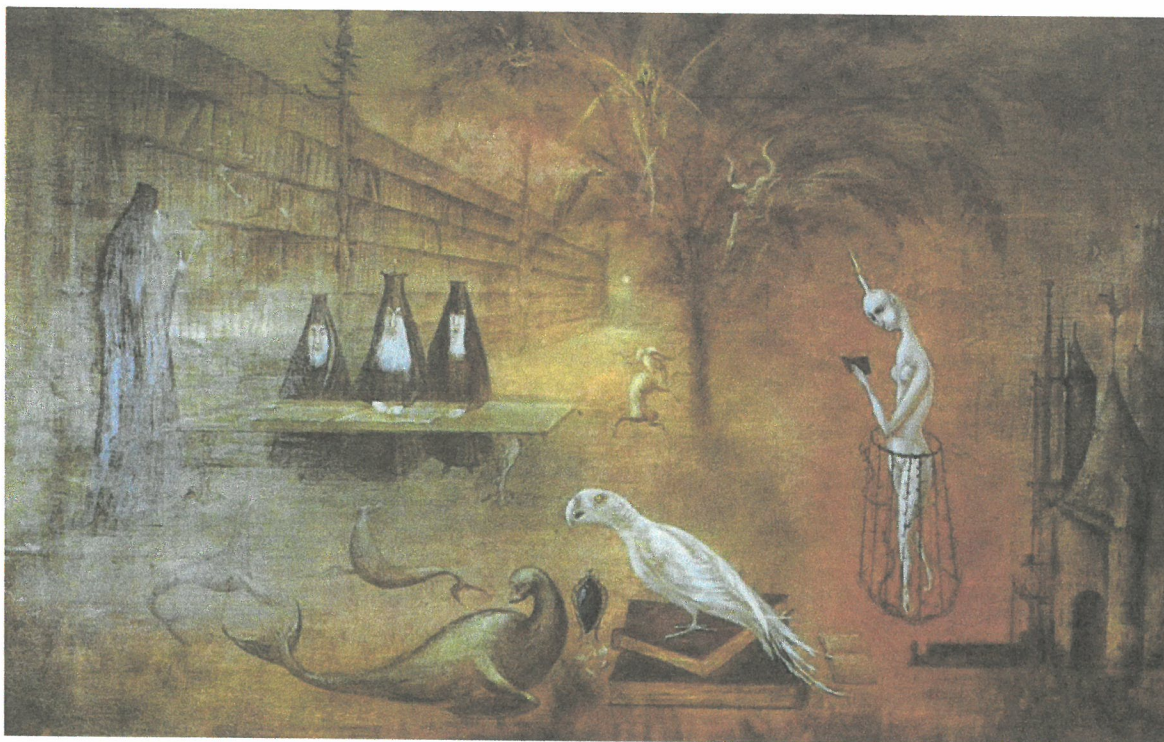


Fig. 4. Leonora Carrington, *The Naked Truth*, 1962, oil on panel, 20 1/16 x 31 7/8". Private collection. © [2017] Estate of Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Notes

[1] Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Lund Humphries, 2004. Aberth's extensive bibliography includes early articles by Janice Helland, Whitney Chadwick, Gloria Orenstein, Juan García Ponce, Salomón Grimberg and others, who helped establish the litany of her esoteric sources.

[2] Gabriel Weisz, "Shadow Children: Leonora as Storyteller," in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde*, ed. Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017, pp. 126-140, esp. p. 132.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Manifestations of the Occult in the Art and Literature of Leonora Carrington," in *Literature and the Occult* ed. Luanne Frank, Arlington, University of Texas at Arlington Press, 1977, pp. 216-233.

[5] For example, Evan R. Firestone, *Animism and Shamanism in Twentieth-Century Art*, London, Routledge, 2017.

[6] Herbert Read, *Surrealism*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1936.

- [7] See Aberth's bibliography, *Leonora Carrington*, citing Whitney Chadwick, Susan Rubin Suleiman and Julotte Roche. See also M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2001, pp. 156-171.
- [8] Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, pp. 72-75.
- [9] Leonora Carrington, *La Dame Ovale*, Paris, G.L.M., 1939.
- [10] Susan L. Aberth, "An Allergy to Collaboration': the early formation of Leonora Carrington's Artistic Vision," in Eburne and McAra, *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde*, pp. 20-56.
- [11] Illustrated in Seán Kissane, "The Celtic Surrealist," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, exh. cat., Dublin, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013, pp. 44-73, here p. 69.
- [12] Aberth, "An Allergy to Collaboration," pp. 29-30.
- [13] Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, p. 23, citing Whitney Chadwick.
- [14] Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, pp. 162-163.
- [15] Kissane, "The Celtic Surrealist," pp. 54-55.
- [16] Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, pp. 70-71.
- [17] Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead and Teresa Arcq, *Surreal Friends*, Farnham, Surrey, Lund Humphries, 2010.
- [18] Paris, Librairie de France, 1929. See also M.E. Warlick, "Surrealism and Alchemy," in *Art and Alchemy: The Mystery of Transformation*, exh. cat. Düsseldorf, Museumpalast, Munich, Hirmer, 2014, pp. 158-171, esp. pp. 164-165.
- [19] Patrick Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism*, trans. Jon E. Graham, Rochester, VT, Inner Traditions, 2014 and Tessel M Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2014.
- [20] André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, *First Papers of Surrealism*, exh. cat., New York, Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, 1942, n.p. Carrington actually had three brothers so her title may refer to the laboratory creation of the Philosophers' Stone, born in the laboratory of its parents, the chemical principles Sulphur and Mercury, male and female, Sun and Moon.
- [21] The drawing is signed O.W, initials not identified in the text. Jung's source was Niklas Mueller's *Glauben, Wissen und Kunst der alten Hindus*, a book first published in 1822, and so this image was probably reprinted elsewhere. Jung's influence will be addressed below
- [22] Later in the catalog, Carrington's 1942 painting of *La Chase* was reproduced with a portrait identified as Carrington which was actually Walker Evan's depression era photograph of Allie Mae Burroughs.
- [23] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, New York, Little Brown and Company, 1985, p. 186.

- [24] Gerald B. Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, London, Aquarian Publishing, 1959. She may also have known his earlier *Witchcraft Today*, London, Rider and Company, 1954 and 1956.
- [25] Teresa Arcq, "Mirrors of the Marvellous: Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo," trans. Michelle Suderman, in Raay, Moorhead and Arcq, *Surreal Friends*, p. 106. There has been some debate whether Varo actually sent this letter, but elsewhere in her papers she had his address, and so current opinion is that she did send a copy of this draft.
- [26] Tere Arcq, "In Search of the Miraculous," in *Five Keys to the Secret World of Remedios Varo*, Mexico City, Artes de México, 2008, pp. 19-90.
- [27] Stefan van Raay, "Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Norna," in *Surreal Friends*, pp. 8-27, illustrated on p. 9.
- [28] The publishing information is summarized in the editorial notes to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 12, Bollingen Series XX, ed. Herbert Read, et. al., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. vii-x.
- [29] Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," in *Secrets of Nature*: eds. William R Newman and Anthony Grafton, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2001, pp. 385-431, esp. pp. 401-408.
- [30] Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 160.
- [31] Gloria Orenstein, "The Chrysopeia of Mary the Jewess: Leonora Carrington's Surrealist Alchemical Tractate," *Cauda Pavonis* 19.2, Fall 2000, pp. 1-8.
- [32] Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, pp. 3, 66, 242, 259, 261, etc. The German version reproduced these images from the *Mutus Liber* published in La Rochelle in 1677. The English version used a later version from 1702, which varies in artistic quality but not in alchemical details.
- [33] It was originally published in French by Ernest Flammarion. The English translation appeared in 1962 from London, Rider and Co.
- [34] Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, pp. 82-93.
- [35] Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 177, fn 117.
- [36] Seligmann, *History of Magic*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1948, figs 62, 216, 248, pp. 160, 437, 461
- [37] Herbert Silberer, *Problems of Mysticism and Its Symbolism*, trans. Smith Ely Jelliffe, 1917. Reprint, New York, Samuel Weiser 1970.
- [38] Eliphas Lévi [Alphonse Louis Constant], *Histoire de la magie*, Paris, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922, plate II.
- [39] Louis Maximilien, *Le vodou haïtien*, Port-au-Prince, Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1945, pp. 41-51.
- [40] Mabilie, "Preface," in *Maximilien, Le vodou haïtien*, pp. ix-xxii.
- [41] Terri Geis, "'The Old Horizon Withdraws': Surrealist Connections in Martinique and Haiti – Suzanne Césaire and André Breton, Maya Deren and André Pierre," in Patricia Allmer (ed.) *Intersections: Women*

Artists, Surrealism, Modernism, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016, pp. 173-189. See also Natalya Lusty, "Experience and Knowledge in Down Below," in Eburne and McAra, eds., *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-garde*, pp. 57-71.

[42] Leonora Carrington, "Down Below," *VVV*, no. 4, February, 1944, pp. 70-86.

[43] Alejandro Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky*, trans. Joseph Rowe, Rochester, VT, Park Street Press, 2008, pp. 24-42.

[44] *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years 1943-1985*, exh. cat., San Francisco, The Mexican Museum, 1991, p. 23.

[45] Gloria Feman Orenstein, "The Methodology of the Marvelous", *Symposium* 42.4, Winter, 1989, pp. 328-339.

[46] www.junglibrary.org

[47] Whitney Chadwick credited Frances Yates' biography *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 1964 as inspiring Carrington's painting of Bruno and many of the diagrams in her paintings during this period. "Pilgrimage to the Stars: Leonora Carrington and the Occult Tradition, in Leonora Carrington, exh. cat. London, Serpentine Gallery, 1991, pp. 24 -33, esp. p. 32.

[48] Carrington designed the set and costumes and wrote the play, staged by Alejandro Jodorowsky. Her design and a photograph of the completed set are illustrated on p. 145 in Alyce Mahon, "She Who Revealed: The Celtic Goddess in the Art of Leonora Carrington," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, pp. 126-153.

[49] Seligmann, *History of Magic*, p. 410.

[50] John Freeman, "Introduction," in Carl G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1964, p. 14.

[51] www.barnettnewman.org/artist/chronology, 1952.