

LEONORA **CARRINGTON**
R E V E L A T I O N





FRONT COVER

Leonora Carrington

The Giantess (The Guardian of the Egg)

1947

Tempera and oil on wood

119.6 × 69.5 cm

Private collection

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VEGAP, MADRID, 2023

Lee Miller

Leonora Carrington,

Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche, 1939

Lee Miller Archives,

East Sussex, England

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The artistic universe and multi-faceted personality of Leonora Carrington (Clayton-Le-Woods, Lancashire, 1917 - Mexico City, 2011) constitute an exceptionally rich terrain. Her figure grows with every new research project and exhibition, revealing connections with some of the most relevant issues in today's world.

Carrington was born into a wealthy family in post-Victorian England. As a child and teenager she was passionately interested in fairy tales and folk legends. The stories told to her by her mother and nanny (both of Irish origin) nourished an imagination that would soon manifest itself in the form of markedly fantastical writing of her own and an early interest in painting. After being expelled from various Catholic schools due to her irreverent attitude Carrington studied art, first in Florence then in Paris and in London with Amédée Ozenfant. Her earliest works are remarkably inventive creations featuring hybrid animals and powerful female figures that combine different mythological worlds. Her encounter with Surrealism when she visited *The International Surrealist Exhibition* (New Burlington Galleries, London, 1936) was a crucial and defining moment as it was here that she discovered a world to which she knew she had long belonged. The personal and creative relationship that she embarked on with Max Ernst the following year confirmed that epiphany.

Carrington ran away from her family and in 1937 she and Ernst went to Paris, the centre of Surrealist debates soon threatened by looming war. At that period Carrington interpreted her own family story in works such



Leonora Carrington

Down Below, 1940

Oil on canvas

40 × 59.7 cm

Mia Kim Private Collection

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as *The Horses of Lord Candlestick*. In 1938 she and Ernst moved to the small town of Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche in the south of France where a 17th-century farmhouse surrounded by vineyards gave them the space to develop their respective visual iconographies in a type of *gesamtkunstwerk*. At the same time Carrington began to publish her first books, illustrated with collages by Ernst and including *The Oval Lady* and *The House of Fear*. The outbreak of World War II truncated this fertile creative period and after Ernst was arrested as an enemy alien and sent to a prison camp, Carrington was forced to flee towards war-torn Spain in 1940. She was sexually abused in Madrid then forcibly interned in a psychiatric clinic in Santander where she was treated with a powerful drug that suppressed patients' willpower. This experience gave rise to her profound and deeply felt memoir *Down Below*, as well as to numerous drawings.

Like many of the intelligentsia of the period, Carrington managed to escape to New York, arriving in 1941 where she re-encountered some of her fellow Surrealists. The time spent in the clinic had been traumatic but it had also allowed her to forge a freer visual vocabulary based on veiled autobiographical references which she applied at this period to works now considered classics, such as *Green Tea*. From this point



Leonora Carrington

Green Tea, 1942

Oil on canvas

61 × 76.2 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of Drue Heinz Trust (by exchange) 2019

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onwards Carrington would be a lifelong exile but she also became more significantly involved in the projects that figures such as Marcel Duchamp and André Breton were launching in New York, including the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* and the magazines *View* and *VVV*. Carrington never returned to Europe.

In 1943 she moved to Mexico, another completely unknown destination but one that became her permanent home. There she established contacts with a more diverse and welcoming colony of artists who had fled the war and with whom she shared that trauma and an instinct for survival. This new “family” consisted of artists such as her future husband, the photographer Emerico “Chiki” Weisz; the photographer Kati Horna and her husband, the Spanish artist José Horna; and the painter Remedios Varo and the poet Benjamin Péret, whom she had known in Paris. In their company and in a climate of collaboration and mutual support Carrington was able to focus on new artistic concerns that reflected earlier obsessions. In the present exhibition these themes which emerged



Leonora Carrington

The House Opposite, 1945

Tempera on panel

33 × 82 cm

West Dean College of Arts

and Conservation, Chichester

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in her work from the mid-1940s are presented in thematic and transversal sections: the reinterpretation of her childhood and the literary imagery that nourished it in parallel with her experience of motherhood, motifs that are most fully expressed in the key work *The House Opposite*; her focus on the forgotten, ancestral figure of the White Goddess, giving rise to a personal interpretation of feminist thinking and summarised in the totemic figure of *The Giantess*; her return to forgotten, heterodox forms of wisdom and spirituality, from alchemy and magic to the tarot; her commitment to the world of animals which made her a pioneer of ecofeminism; and her interest in Mexico's living mythologies, the origins of her large-scale mural *The Magical World of the Mayas*.

This is the first exhibition in Spain to be devoted to Leonora Carrington. It aims to reconnect the visiting public with the artist through a new viewpoint and to locate her within the Spanish and European context in which she underwent the experiences that most changed her life. This was a part of the world which Carrington abandoned physically but one that she would always remember when she looked back with an ambivalent nostalgia at her native England or when she confronted the traumatic ghosts of rootlessness, exile and illness; a universe which continued to nourish her creative output over the years through her processes of elaboration, illumination and slow and constant "revelation". ■

Curators

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Dates

11 February to 7 May 2023

Opening times

Mondays (except public holidays):

2 pm to 8 pm

Tuesdays to Saturdays:

11 am to 8 pm

Sundays and public holidays:

11 am to 7 pm

Last entry 30 minutes
before closing time.

Visitors must leave the galleries
10 minutes before closing

Ticket prices

Standard: 5 €

Reduced: 3 €

Free entry: Mondays
(except public holidays)

Guided tours

7 €

Times and booking: [on this website](#)

Audio guide

Spanish and English: 4 €



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