LEONORA CARRINGTON

IN THE VIKTOR WYND MUSEUM OF CURIOSITIES, FINE ART AND NATURAL HISTORY

With contributions from Gabriel Weisz Carrington, Susan Aberth, Marina Warner, Homero Aridjis & Viktor Wynd

SEPTEMBER 2016 – DECEMBER 2016
THE VIKTOR WYND MUSEUM OF CURIOSITIES, FINE ART & NATURAL HISTORY

15 JULY – 2 SEPTEMBER 2016
LEEDS COLLEGE OF ART

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SPONSORS FORWORD

Hendrick’s Gin Has Created a Cocktail to Imbibe Whilst Wondering Through The Exhibition

The Carrington

Combining Gin, Pink Grapefruit Juice, Angostura, Mint, Mezcal & Cucumber to give a smoky, but animal, taste.

It is an absolute pleasure to be able to be associated with Leonora Carrington’s insight into, and bringing to the surface of, the world of spirits that exist everywhere but only normally talk to us through our organ called fantasy, or pop up and say hello in dreams. It is a mirror-pool of our own insides and the nature of the world around us, which is to say that they are the same things. And if this exhibition helps you to slow down and hush, in order to hear their whispers, then we hope they call with all the cheeky wisdom and beauty you are able to receive, and more. We like do all we can to help in this regard, and so offer our modest assistance to slip into the lovely world of Leonora’s – The Carrington. X

David Piper
Global Ambassador for Hendrick’s Gin
A long-term dream of mine has not only been to work with Viktor Wynd but to curate his impressive collection of Leonora Carrington artworks. This collection is macabre as it is unique, bringing together little-known prints and drawings which detail the surrealist bestiary of Carrington’s imaginative universe (explored further by Marina Warner), as well as four early canvases from Carrington’s pre-surrealist period (analysed in-depth by Susan L. Aberth). An anecdote by Wynd and short story by Carrington’s son, Gabriel Weisz, further nuance the visual narratives under consideration.

Until now, this collection has never been shown together. Leeds College of Art is delighted to host this special congregation, a major part of its Leonora Carrington/Lucy Skaer research exhibition (15 July – 2 September 2016). The artworks included in this catalogue will tour subsequently to The Viktor Wynd Museum in London.

We would especially like to thank Viktor Wynd for his enthusiasm, generosity and support in realising this exhibition as well as Susan L. Aberth, Gabriel Weisz Carrington, and Marina Warner for their erudite contributions to this catalogue. The photography is by Chris Renton and the catalogue has been designed by D&M Heritage Ltd. Further grateful thanks and acknowledgement to: Chloe Aridjis, Jonathan P. Eburne, Sean Kissane, Lynn Lu, Steve Lucas, Wendi Norris, Jeffrey Sherwin, Lucy Skaer, Samantha Sweeting, and colleagues at Leeds College of Art.
Two wolves greeted Leonora; she came out of her residence, a place that had an enormous collection of clocks all of which were protected by bell jars. Each clock had a conversation with its neighbours. So the noise was quite impressive, and time consuming.

The two wolves led her to the forest, there were red bark trees, which were very tall, and a delicate jasmine and oak like perfume pervaded the wood. A black peacock asked Leonora if she had already been born. Leonora was a bit puzzled by the question, but since it could be a very profound or else a very stupid question, she hesitated. ‘I have just been born in this place’. ‘Good’ answered the ebony peacock and gave her a glittering knowledge stone.

The wolves led her to a very large cave, although they didn’t proffer a sound, Leonora could understand each one of their thoughts. They wanted her to paint a mural over one of the walls. Through mind words they told her that she was very well-known among all animals in this forest and that it would make them very happy if she could grant them that favour. So Leonora picked a few underground flowers, those that glow in the dark, and are saturated with intricate pigments, was given a wolf bristle brush and started work on her mural. Although the place was pitch black, she brought out her glittering stone. Image ideas flashed in her mind and she set them in the mural. Unseen castles, built by long forgotten architects guided her hands. Oblong shapes growing from shallow cubes and elliptical channels grew on the background. Shadows materialised into edifices. Creatures only seen in magical boxes walked, ran or
glided in this magnificent dimension.

Once Leonora finished her work the two wolves gave her a box. ‘Don’t open it till you are back at your place and never wear it in front of people’. Leonora glided through the fog. The peacock asked her: ‘Have you died?’ ‘Not in this world King of the Darkened Feathers and cobalt voice’. ‘Good’ answered the ebony peacock and gave her a kiss.

When Leonora reached her place, she climbed the staircase to her room and opened the box. She brought out a hat made of volcanic mirrors. The wolves of her mind explained that when she wore this hat she would understand all the secrets that people tried to conceal from her or from any other person. Leonora climbed into her bed and went to sleep; her firefly body was visible from a distance.
If you believe in the occult adage ‘like attracts like’ then you can begin to understand the internal logic of The Viktor Wynd Collection. When a young and precocious Mr. Wynd encountered Leonora Carrington’s extraordinary writings they left an indelible impression on his imagination that changed the course of his creative life.1 The work of Carrington, whether written or visual, can indeed have an unexpected effect as they exert a mysterious and even spellbinding pull, underneath her customary mantle of wicked humour. The works Mr. Wynd has amassed range widely in date, medium, and subject matter; yet reveal a quirky playfulness shared by both collector and artist.

Extremely rare are four paintings dating from 1935-36 when Carrington was attending art schools in London, first the Chelsea School of Art and then the Ozenfant Academy. Although displaying some of the technical clumsiness of student work, they are fascinating for what they can tell us about the artist’s early interests, as well as the development of her style. The two still lives appear to be close in date, and are perhaps class assignments. Still Life has the obligatory flowers and fruit and struggles a bit with brushstroke, perspective, and arrangement, nevertheless it has a charming naiveté and a shade of blue the artist would come to favour. Still Life with Creature displays a more interesting selection of objects – odd things brought incongruously together and displayed on a carpet. Significantly the centre of the
composition holds a leather-bound book, foregrounding her dual love of the visual and written arts, lifelong pursuits. A silver chalice with top, half an orange, and an unidentified fruit surround the book, while to the left a quasi-indistinguishable black shape, with prolonged scrutiny, appears to have a bird’s profile (a stuffed hen?). In the lower right is a crowned brass figurine, kneeling with arms spread as if welcoming us to view the work. This amusing and grotesque piece of Victorian bric-a-brac is reminiscent of the little goblins and fanciful creatures found in her boarding school sketchbooks and in a series of watercolours she did in 1933 titled Sisters of the Moon. Equally, it foretells the many fantastical characters that will parade through a lifetime of her artwork with an enigmatic yet comical sense of determination.

A small landscape, Hazelwood Hall (1935), depicts the estate her family inhabited after vacating Crookhey Hall, her legendary childhood home. The view is from the back, looking in on the gardens and skeletal greenhouses. There are many elements to this youthful exercise that would come to fuller fruition later such as the careful play between the wild and the cultivated, the transformation of mundane domestic spaces into fairytale settings, and there is also the slightly melancholy air of an outsider looking in. But by far the most prophetic of the paintings is Hyena in Hyde Park. One can imagine the eighteen-year old Carrington, new to and alone in the noisy city, traveling to the stables in Hyde Park to watch the familiar and comforting scene of people riding. These black and white horses, their elegant profiles in full gallop, look more like carousel horses dancing up and down than real horses in a posh London neighbourhood. As if to reinforce that sense of unreality, an androgynous figure stands to the right in an odd striped costume, accompanied by a hyena, Carrington’s favourite animal in the zoo. The androgynous figure, the white galloping horse, and the hyena are all characters in her famous Self Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse) executed but a few years later in 1937-38 and now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. If we were to compare the two paintings we would see that there is a tremendous leap in sophistication within a very short time and for this Carrington owes a debt to the teachings of Amédée Ozenfant and to the surrealist milieu she would soon find herself in as Max Ernst’s companion. As Hyena in Hyde Park amply demonstrates, Carrington had a fully formed vision prior to moving to Paris and meeting André Breton, but her involvement with the surrealists propelled her to express herself with less conformity and greater complexity.
The drawings, etchings, linocuts, intaglio prints that comprise the rest of this collection remind us of how deep Carrington’s commitment was to the rigors of line on paper. Again, it was thanks to Ozenfant’s relentless discipline that Carrington came to master the pencil and pen. When the artist executed the Untitled etching for the surrealist journal VVV in 1943, she had been reunited with her teacher who had also left war-torn Europe for New York City. It is clear that Carrington and Mr. Wynd share a love of animals, for here we can see badgers, whales, snakes, cats, tapirs and a few hybrid creatures as well. Mysterious caves, mediums falling into trances, women cooking, and kabalistic conjuring, some of the artist’s favourite subjects, abound in this collection. No doubt Leonora Carrington would have delighted in The Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, Fine Art and Natural History, a surrealistic compilation of strange fact and fiction. Fortunately, Mr. Wynd was able to meet the great lady herself and the photograph that chronicles this encounter appropriately shows them seated at her humble kitchen table. For this was no ordinary piece of domestic furniture, as one can readily see in the series of etchings of a badger with mediums at a séance table – but Carrington’s own private portal to other dimensions.

Endnotes
Leonora Carrington experienced a similar revelation, albeit at a younger age, when she first read James Stephens’ The Crock of Gold (1912). This fantastical tale of Irish magic and encounters with the fairy folk opened her eyes to what was really going on in the world around her, confirming in a soulfully deep way what she always knew to be true. Over a lifetime of interviews Carrington would credit Ozenfant with teaching her the rigours of drawing.
Tea with Carrington

Viktor Wynd

Primarily as a writer, Leonora Carrington has influenced me more than anyone else. When I was sixteen, my brother threw me a copy of Carrington’s The Seventh Horse and Other Tales and the world never looked the same again. Where before there had been gritty characters written by Sterne, Surtees and George Borrow, painted by Constable and Turner, there was now a universe of dreams, of shifting shapes and the shadows of clouds, mental landscapes and porous air; a world of dreams, darkness and magic that I never imagined existed outside my own head. Through her, I became interested in the surrealists, the dadaists and the Italian primitivists.

In 2008 I nervously accepted a longstanding invitation from my oldest friend, the Mexican novelist, Chloe Aridjis, to take tea with Leonora Carrington at her house in Mexico City and spent an afternoon listening to tales of Max Ernst before the war, a talking jackdaw and Edward James’s obsession with washing his hands in buckets of Eau de Cologne. Alejandro Jodorowsky had sent his love to his old friend and collaborator - this elicited the response ‘Where is he now?’ Answer ‘Paris.’ A sniff, and ‘Lucky Paris’ was the sole reply.

Since then I have been slowly building up a collection of Carrington’s work. I know this is silly and I should have just stuck to ones that I have somewhere to hang (at present I have space for two but own around 35), but collecting is addictive, a psychological condition, a disease, and I can never resist more, so when the opportunity came recently to acquire her etching from the 1943 VVV portfolio published by the surrealists in
exile in New York it was only ever going to be a question of yes, and the itch to acquire more I am sure has not had its final scratch. Indeed, on the day this catalogue goes to press I seem to have acquired three more. One day it would be nice to hang them all up and look at them together, one day…

A variation of this text was first published in The Independent: RADAR (7 March 2015).
During one of the many moments of clairvoyance that Leonora Carrington relates in her memoir, Down Below, the artist describes how she sought ‘through gentleness an understanding between the mountain, my body, and my mind…’ and how she talked to animals ‘through the skin, by means of a sort of “touch” language… I could draw near animals where other human beings would put them to precipitate flight’.1

Leonora always brought into play a most wonderful menagerie of familiars, but her subjects differ from the tradition of surrealist fantasy because they aren’t the ‘Poetical Animals’ of Thomas Browne – dragons or manticores, or even grylli out of Hieronymus Bosch and medieval bestiaries. Hers are real animals, transfigured into characters – lovers and allies and alter egos to whom she feels very close. A she-hyena becomes the Débutante’s friend and ally, in the early short story of that title,2 and Igname the wild boar has a furious love affair with Virginia the heroine of another tale, ‘As They Rode along the Edge’.3 Above all, it’s horses who (one has to use ‘who’ not ‘that’) dominate her passionate attachments. The creaturely, the furry, the stinky exercise a powerful fascination: Carrington’s universe is saturated with smells and textures and it’s worth imagining them when looking at her art; she returns again and again with a kind of voluptuous attraction and repulsion to animal warmth, pelts, lairs and dens. For her, this is evidence of their deeper involvement with the life principle itself and with nature, the ultimate source of wisdom. ‘The matter of our bodies’, she once said, ‘like everything we call matter, should be thought of...
as thinking substance’. Badgers, with their gamey stench and famously messy habits, are one of the species that qualifies for this loving identification and, as the artist began to think about her life ebbing, Badger begins to appear more often, a friendly companion and avatar. In three prints of dream voyages, Badger seems to be taking the role of Anubis the Jackal (another stinky, irresistible creature), a psychopomp taking her/us over to the other side. To press home the sense of the animal’s mediumistic powers, Badger manifests a shadow side and helps turn tables to see spirits.

In the case of this trio of Badger etchings, it’s also significant that Carrington often depicts faces in profile to show one ringed or prominent eye, or portrays her subjects with unmatched eyes, such as a pit bull with a black patch over one eye in Bird Seizes Jewel (1969), or the mysterious doctor of hidden learning in The Ancestor (1968). Her Badger, particularly in the etching, Medium Sinks into Trance and Badger Shadow Appears, displays his uncannily but naturally bespectacled eye, and I am reminded that André Breton writes that Carrington once told him, ‘The task of the right eye is to plunge into the telescope, while the left eye interrogates the microscope’.4

Carrington’s pursuit of a mystical surrealism was deeply felt and cultivated over a long life of apprenticeship to different ways of inner exploring (from psychoanalysis to Tibetan Buddhism). ‘All religions are real’, Carrington once commented. ‘But you have to go through your own channels – you might meet the Egyptians, you might meet with the Voodoos, but in order to keep some kind of equilibrium it has to feel authentic to you’. In the midst of this serious quest, her unique imagination was always also mischievous, her wisdom playful and funny, her Badger guides are beguiling friends, rather than stern or earnest gurus. Carlos Fuentes rightly called her art ‘ironical sorcery’.5 Ironical sorcery doesn’t quite catch it, though, because it misses Carrington’s deep connection to the rueful humour of the fabulist tradition – and its animal mediums found in fables from Aesop to Kafka, Lewis Carroll, Beatrix Potter, and J. R. R. Tolkien.

I count it among my most cherished memories that when Leonora was living in New York in 1987–88, I saw her almost every day. We would go for long walks all over the city and I was able to see with her eyes and to hear her talk in her deep, warm, funny old fashioned English voice, as she ranged over scores of subjects. The apartment she rented was a small dark single room basement, but it was she wanted. She disliked being above ground,
she said, and wanted to work on the same table where she ate, and mix her paints in her kitchen (‘Painting is like making strawberry jam – really carefully and well’, she told me.) Although in her paintings, her subjects are often airborne – as they are in the table-turning scene from the Badger series – she would never take an aeroplane and travelled between New York and Mexico on the bus. But it strikes me now that she needed to feel she was living in the safety of a burrow; she was making it her den, and I could not have been happier to be drawn in.

Notes
Quotations from Leonora Carrington come from conversations that took place from 1987 to 1988 in New York. I am very grateful to the artist for this time spent with her, and the inspiration she gave me.

Endnotes
The Sunday afternoon I arrive at Leonora Carrington’s house on Chihuahua Street, I have the feeling I am between two Mexicos: the Mexico of the 1940s, where she and her husband, Hungarian photographer Emerico “Chiki” Weisz, settled along with many other artists and writers fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe, and the feverish Mexico of the beginning of the twenty-first century, embodied by the typical Colonia Roma neighborhood where Carrington has lived for more than sixty years, and which, in keeping with the rhythm of growth of the city, has filled with congested avenues, dives, minor universities, an assortment of schools, brothels and funeral homes. Across the street from her house lies the rubble of a building that pancaked in the September 1985 earthquake. More than twenty years later the ruins have come to look more like the imaginary prisons of Giambattista Piranesi than an involuntary mausoleum of a collapsed middle-class apartment building — now inhabited by alcoholics, drug addicts and a surreptitious human fauna that slips over and under slabs of concrete and through improvised doors and windows. Leonora has warned me not to stare, for it could get her into trouble: “You’ll go away, but I live here.” The problem, however, is that staring is irresistible: amidst the debris, these inhabitants have created a veritable installation out of beds, kitchen furniture, scarecrows, television antennae and tricolored flags, among which stray dogs and black cats come and go.
“Who’s there?” Leonora asks from behind the metal door. When my wife Betty and I identify ourselves, she opens it. A fragile but erect woman appears, her somewhat wrinkled face still beautiful and distinguished. Once inside, we find ourselves in an icy vestibule, and while she goes to turn on the bulb in the small hallway (she doesn’t like to leave the lights on “when nobody’s there”), we admire her latest creations: bronze sculptures of nagas, Lady Godiva, the Sphinx and other fantastical beings sprung from Hindu, Mayan or Celtic mythologies, placed here and there as if unimportant. “I made my first sculpture when I was six, when I used to play with mud,” she says; and here is the last one, created more than eighty years later.

Swathed in a baggy grey sweater and shawl, Leonora leads us to the kitchen. There is no living or dining room in her house -- the dimly lit rooms are occupied by her creations. On the first floor is an abandoned sofa, and some of her paintings still hang over her husband’s austere bed.

She offers us tea, tequila or scotch, and takes advantage of our presence to smoke a cigarette. Postcards of artworks, many featuring cats, and photographs of the British Royal Family, including the Queen Mother and Princess Diana, are taped to the wooden cabinets and the refrigerator. Medicine and cereal boxes share the table with mugs, plates, and envelopes of tea and sugar. Abruptly, flaunting her dark humor, she turns to me and says, “Tell me some gossip about politicians, the more horrible, the better.” But when I’ve barely begun she interrupts. “I don’t want to hear any more.” It’s the same with stories about cruelty to animals -- she loves them passionately. “There are many animals I like,” she says. “Human beings are not top of the list. In fact, they are lowest in my preferences. Human beings are terrible beings who commit murder and I’m very sad to think I am one of that species.”

One of the three great Surrealist female painters who worked in Mexico --- along with Frida Kahlo (born and died in the Mexico City neighborhood of Coyoacán, 1910-1954) and Remedios Varo (Anglès, Girona, Spain, 1908-Mexico City, 1963, who reached Mexico in December 1941 with the French poet Benjamin Péret) --- Leonora Carrington prefers other subjects of conversation and avoids talking about her art. But she never tires of recalling her English past: “The only person who was at my birth was our dear, faithful old fox terrier Boozy, and an x-ray machine to sterilize cows. My mother was away at the time, laying traps for lobsters that were
infesting the high peaks of the Andes." She thus evokes her arrival into the world on April 6, 1917 in Clayton Green, Lancashire, in northern England.

She considers it the poorest taste when people ask her about her relationship with Max Ernst; when I did so once in front of Chiki, she replied in annoyance, “Would you like me to ask you about your erotic life in front of your wife?” Nevertheless, the story is so well known that it no longer seems to belong to her private life.

Leonora was introduced to the German artist in London in 1937 by her friends Ursula and Erno Goldfinger, a Hungarian architect. “I already knew who Max was, because my mother – and this is a very strange thing --- had given me Herbert Read’s book about Surrealism for Christmas. Two Children Menaced by a Nightingale/Deux enfants menacés par un rossignol [the image on the cover] had made a huge impression on me.” Before long she and Ernst were living together in Paris in an apartment on the rue Jacob. In the summer of 1938, the couple moved to an abandoned farm in Saint-Martin-d’Ardèche and began to sculpt winged sirens, minotaurs and fantastic creatures on the walls and ramps, creating a large bas-relief on the outside of the building. Leonora is also a writer and her first books, The House of Fear /La Maison de la Peur (1938) and The Oval Lady (1939) were illustrated by Ernst.

Two of the most significant paintings from those days have survived: Leonora’s Portrait of Max Ernst and Max Ernst’s Leonora in the Morning Light. “It was a very happy time in my life, until the war broke out,” Leonora recalls. In 1939, Ernst was interned by the French authorities as an “enemy alien” in a camp at Largentière and then transferred to another in Les Milles, near Aix-en-Provence. After his release he was arrested and interned again the following year, this time as a “suspicious person.”

Leonora remembers this harrowing period of her life in her memoir En bas [Down Below], a chronicle of madness worthy of Artaud. “I begin therefore with the moment when Max was taken away to a concentration camp for the second time, under the escort of a gendarme who carried a rifle (May 1940). I was living in Saint-Martin-d’Ardèche. I wept for several hours, down in the village; then I went up again to my house where, for twenty-four hours, I indulged in voluntary vomittings induced by drinking orange blossom water and interrupted by a short nap. I hoped that my sorrow would be
diminished by these spasms, which tore at my stomach like earthquakes. I know now that this was but one of the aspects of those vomitings: I had realised the injustice of society. I wanted first of all to cleanse myself, then go beyond its brutal ineptitude. My stomach was the seat of that society, but also the place in which I was united with all the elements of the earth. It was the mirror of the earth, the reflection of which is just as real as the person reflected.” (This last reference reminds me of her ability to write with both hands at once, forwards and backwards. “Yes, I'm ambidextrous, like madmen. But now I’m more mad than when I was in the madhouse,” she jests.).

After Max’s arrest, Leonora travelled to Spain with two friends in a small Fiat. “I was choked by the dead, by their thick presence in that lacerated countryside. I was in a great state of exaltation... convinced that we had to reach Madrid as speedily as possible... In the political confusion and the torrid heat, I convinced myself that Madrid was the world’s stomach and that I had been chosen for the task of restoring this digestive organ to health,” she writes in Down Below.

When penning the narrative of her journey through madness, Leonora, always honest with herself, worried about lapsing into fiction, of tainting autobiography with invention. In the 1973 reprint of Down Below, Jean Schuster wrote: “How to describe delirium without getting lost in the scream that should describe it? The greatest ones, Nerval, Artaud, weren't able to do it.” And I sometimes wonder how Leonora Carrington has been able to survive the deliriums of reason and the harassment of the fantastical creatures of her own world and those of others, to remain serene and keep on painting. At the age of 56, she wrote to her publisher Henri Parisot, “I'm an old lady who has lived a great deal and has changed --- if my life is worth something, I'm the result of time.” She often said she didn't know whether she invented the world she painted or if that world invented her. “Probably the latter,” she concluded.

In 1941, she suffered a mental breakdown in Madrid. Her father, one of the main shareholders of Imperial Chemicals Industries, arranged for Leonora’s former nanny to take her to Lisbon, from where she would be sent on to South Africa to be interned in a sanatorium. But while at a tea dance in Madrid that same year, Leonora recognized Mexican diplomat, poet and journalist Renato Leduc, who had been introduced to her by Pablo Picasso in Paris years earlier. She learned that Leduc was also on his way to Lisbon, and once she arrived there, Leonora managed to escape her keeper and ask for asylum at the Mexican Embassy, where Leduc was working. In Lisbon -- yet on Mexican territory, the ambassador assured her --, Leonora married Renato Leduc in order to leave Portugal. That year, she sailed for New York with a group of Mexican diplomats and refugees of various nationalities fleeing the war on one of the last passenger ships departing from Europe. On arrival, she quickly took up with many other exiled artists and writers.

In 1943 she moved to Mexico with Leduc, where she was granted citizenship. “A twist of fate, your coming to Mexico,” I said. To which she replied, “Well, fate was that monstrosity of Hitler.” Leonora soon became part of a circle of Surrealists living in Mexico City: Remedios Varo and Benjamin Péret, Kati and José Horna, Wolfgang Paalen and Alice Rahon, among others. After divorcing Leduc, Leonora married Emerico “Chiki” Weisz in 1946 and had two sons, Gabriel and Pablo. Shortly before he died, Chiki told me, “Leonora is the woman I wanted to be with, because she was the same then as she is now, very artistic and authentic. I met her at Remedios and Benjamin’s house while she was married to Renato Leduc. We moved into this house in the Roma when Pablo was born. Péret found it for us, and we’ve stayed put ever since. I never wanted to go back to Hungary. It was terrible for me, an anti-Semitic country, and as a Jew I was persecuted. My mother rented a third-floor apartment with windows facing the street, and one day we saw a parade of young Nazis singing, “Good times will come when the knife is dripping with Jewish blood.” Afterwards they killed two of my brothers, my cousins too, and almost the entire family.”

From his arrival in Mexico City until his death in 2007, Chiki never left the city, while Leonora spent two long periods in Chicago and New York: the first in 1968 after the murder of students in Tlatelolco a few days before the Olympics were about to begin in Mexico City, when her name appeared on a list of intellectuals (supplied by writer Elena Garro, former wife of Octavio Paz) supposedly conspiring against the government; and the second time after the 1985 earthquake. “When the sniffer dogs that an international agency had flown in to locate survivors in the ruins were instead sold as pets Carrington felt she couldn’t stand living in Mexico anymore,” said English writer Marina Warner.

Most probably Carrington’s closest friendship was with Remedios Varo, a
refugee from Franco’s Spain, who along with many other Spanish refugees found asylum in Mexico thanks to the generous policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas. Leonora and Remedios discussed philosophy, religion, painting and literature, they designed clothing and hats for plays, cooked inedible dishes with strange ingredients they found in Mexican markets and sent each other messages every day. In addition to “sharing the feeling that both were especially inspired by strange internal faces, that they had been elected for a psychic spatial voyage,” according to Janet Kaplan in Unexpected Journeys, there were influences of form and subject matter by Carrington on Varo. Around that time, André Breton called Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo “the most beautiful beams of light” in postwar painting.

Always a great reader of books about the Gnostics, the Celts, Tibetan Buddhism, the Kabbalah and science, Leonora is well acquainted with the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the I Ching and Alice in Wonderland (every once in a while reciting “Jabberwocky” in unison with Betty), and delights in horror stories, M.R James being a favorite, and detective novels. “I would like to have a resident policeman,” she jokes.

Leonora Carrington repeatedly told me that, “Old age is filled with fears, fear of death, fear of growing old,” but even then there was room for the fantastic and for humor. When Betty asks her whether there was anywhere she would still want to travel, out of that longing for the North she sometimes couldn’t hide Leonora answers laconically, “Lapland.”

“My ambition is always less and less,” she affirms, as she leads us through an outside passage and up the back stairs to her studio on the roof to show us the clay models that would soon be turned into bronze sculptures. “Whoever says that old age is idyllic doesn’t know what being old is like.”

Hours have gone by, and getting on eight she accompanies Betty and me to the door. The lights are now shining on the billboards erected on the ruins across the street; dogs and cats scamper towards the busy avenue. When we say goodbye I realize that at her ninety years, Leonora has created a woman faithful to herself. For although she has said, “Dreams disappear with the years,” in her case the dreams are still there.

Leonora Carrington, the last great Surrealist artist, spent her final years on Chihuahua Street in the company of Yeti, a white Maltese terrier. At 10 p.m.
on Wednesday, May 25, 2011, seven weeks after her ninety-fourth birthday, she died of pneumonia at the ABC Hospital in Mexico City. She was buried in the British Cemetery.

Whenever we spoke about death and the possible existence of an afterlife, Leonora invariably declared, “We don’t know anything.” When I asked her if she believed in reincarnation she replied, “Who would I like to have been in a past life? I don’t know, maybe an animal… something with wings… a bat.” As for what might be published about her, she said, “What do I care what they write about me when I’m not here anymore.”

HOMERO ARIDJIS

One of Latin America’s greatest living writers, he is a pioneering environmental activist, two-term president of PEN International and former Mexican ambassador to Switzerland, The Netherlands and UNESCO. Many of his 48 books of poetry and prose have been translated into a dozen languages and he has been awarded important literary and environmental prizes in Mexico, France, Italy, USA, and Serbia. The Child Poet was published this year by Archipelago Books.
PRINT SALES

For mysterious reasons, understandable only to those suffering from the psychological condition common referred to as ‘collecting’ Viktor Wynd has acquired duplicates of the following prints that he would like to sell:

The Memory Tower, page 42: £7,000 framed.

Untitled Print page 76: £780, unframed

Untitled Print, page 78: £780, unframed

A rather Charming Monoprint, not illustrated £1,100

Other works may be available from time to time please contact Mr. Wynd directly by emailing his secretary: Beatrice de Montevideo on: info@thelasttuesdaysociety.org for more information

LEONA CARRINGTON: IMAGE CREDITS


