

WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE

SURREALIST MOVEMENT



LEONA CARRINGTON. *Self-Portrait*. c. 1937

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THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

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In addition, I want to express my appreciation to Pete Pantaleo for installation assistance; Jay Strivey, Acting Technical Director, Fine Arts Center, for exhibition lighting; Joyce Chen, Karl D'Amico, Ophelia Lopez, Selena Wright, Art Gallery Assistants; Laura Gelfand, Susan Mathisen, Annemarie McNamara, Alda Serrao-Feliciano, Gallery Interns; and Mary Balduf, Gallery Secretary, for their help with the exhibition.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

All of the artists in the present exhibit were included in major international Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s and 1940s. In the past thirty years, however, the work of women Surrealists has rarely been shown in the United States. The aim of this exhibit is to introduce a new generation to the work of these extraordinary artists.

We are grateful to The Institute for Research in History and to guest curator, Whitney Chadwick. For their patient assistance we thank Evelyne Jesenof, Diane Zabawski and Dr. Paul LeClerc and his staff, especially Katherine Curtis, Hattie Sungala and Antoine Goupil. Charlotte Mayes of the Jeffrey Hoffeld Gallery, acted as a valuable consultant to the exhibition, as did Mary-Anne Martin and Stephen Miller. Finally, we owe special thanks to the lenders, who have provided expertise and enthusiasm as well as works of art.

Katherine B. Crum
Director, Baruch College Gallery
City University of New York

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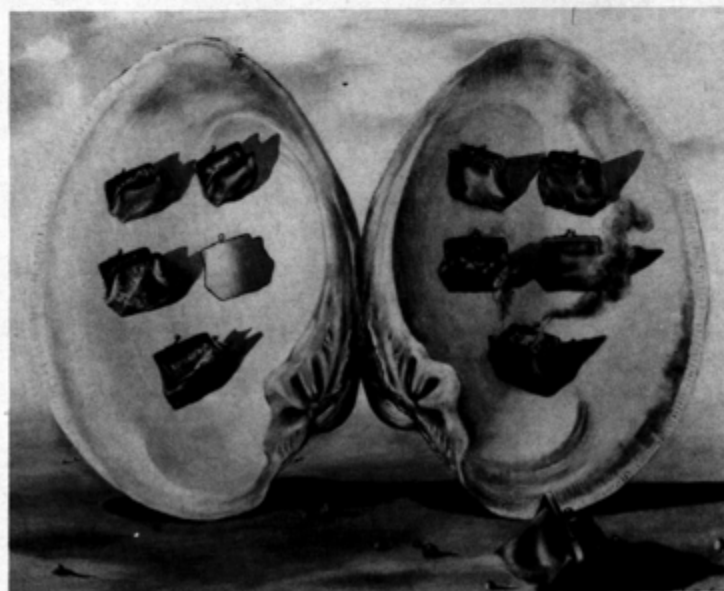
JACQUELINE LAMBA *In Spite of Everything, Spring, 1942*

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LEONOR FINI. *Composition with Figures on a Terrace*. 1939



DOROTHEA TANNING. *Reve de luxe*. 1944

In 1929 a young American from Poughkeepsie, New York, knocked on the door at the Paris studio of Man Ray and announced that she had come to be his student. Lee Miller and the French painter and illustrator Valentine Hugo, who met the Surrealists around 1928, were the vanguard of an international group of young women attracted to what was then the most radical literary and artistic movement in Europe. Although women have remained active members of Surrealist groups to the present day, the current exhibition focuses on those who discovered Surrealism prior to World War II and who contributed work to the international Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s and 1940s: Eileen Agar, Emmy Bridgwater, Leonora Carrington, Ithell Colquhoun, Leonor Fini, Valentine Hugo, Frida Kahlo, Jacqueline Lamba, Lee Miller, Meret Oppenheim, Alice Rahon (Paalen), Valentine Penrose, Kay Sage, Dorothea Tanning, Toyen, and Remedios Varo.

Committed to nothing less than the complete overthrow of bourgeois values and the reintegration of conscious and unconscious mental powers, Surrealism promised psychic liberation to poets and painters of both sexes. Desire fueled the artistic imagination. Sex became a mode of creativity, and love a means of transcending the duality of the sexes: "between poetic emotion and erotic pleasure the difference is only one of degree," wrote poet and Surrealist leader Andre Breton in 1932. No artistic movement since Romanticism has celebrated the idea of woman as passionately as did Surrealism during the 1930s and 1940s, and no early twentieth-century movement enjoyed the participation of as large and active a group of women. Yet the role of the woman artist in the Surrealist movement was a complicated one.

Young women of the 1930s owed their relative freedom to pursue artistic training and independent lives as much to the previous decade's demand for social and sexual emancipation for women as they did to the Surrealist "revolution." Indeed, the popular image of the "new woman" was that of a sophisticated, autonomous being who had benefited from the social changes initiated by the women's suffrage movement and the first World War.

In 1929 Breton defined "the most marvellous and disturbing problem in all the world as that of woman," he himself having rejected the image of the "new woman" as too wordly, too tough, too closely associated with the literary establishment against which Surrealism was in revolt.¹ He replaced it with an image of magical, ethereal, and childlike womanhood derived from such diverse sources as Romantic and Symbolist literature, Freudian psychology and American films. Male Surrealists would remain haunted by an image of woman simultaneously ethereal and yet capable of crystallizing man's erotic desires, propelling him into a radical creativity that could liberate him from the bonds of reason and logic.

Women artists associated with the movement struggled with the often incompatible roles of muse and artist. They confronted the difficulty of transforming the image of woman from object to subject through artistic conventions established according to male traditions, and the frustration of reconciling their own

social and sexual emancipation and the demands of mature creativity with the crippling image of the *femme-enfant* or woman-child. Breton's vision of the "free and adored" woman wasn't much help for the woman painter, Colquhoun later commented.² Other women were equally ambivalent about the true place of women in the Surrealist universe. Fini refused to join the movement officially and submit to Breton's authority, although she exhibited with the group during the 1930s and 1940s; Kahlo often said that Breton and his circle "thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't."³

Removed from the formulation of Surrealist theory, and younger and more inexperienced than their male colleagues,⁴ women artists nevertheless made unique and vital contributions to the movement. Rejecting the image of woman as Other, and with it the language of erotic violence and hallucinatory juxtaposition characteristic of the work of male Surrealists, many turned to their own realities as source and subject. Dazzling self-portraits poignantly reveal an often difficult search for creative models that could reconcile, in true Surrealist fashion, the polarities of dream and waking, conscious and unconscious thought, past and present. In Kahlo's self-portraits the abstract, generalized and objectified female image of desire created by male Surrealists yields to a personalized eroticism painful in its detailed specificity and derived from the reality of a life of physical pain and emotional loss. Carrington's *Self-Portrait* (circa 1938) replaces the erotic object of desire with magical animals that serve as symbolic intermediaries between the unconscious and the natural world. In paintings such as Fini's *Alcove* and Tanning's *Jeux d'Enfants*, images of self-conscious femininity — derived from cultural expectations that are male in origin and contained in images of luxuriant hair,

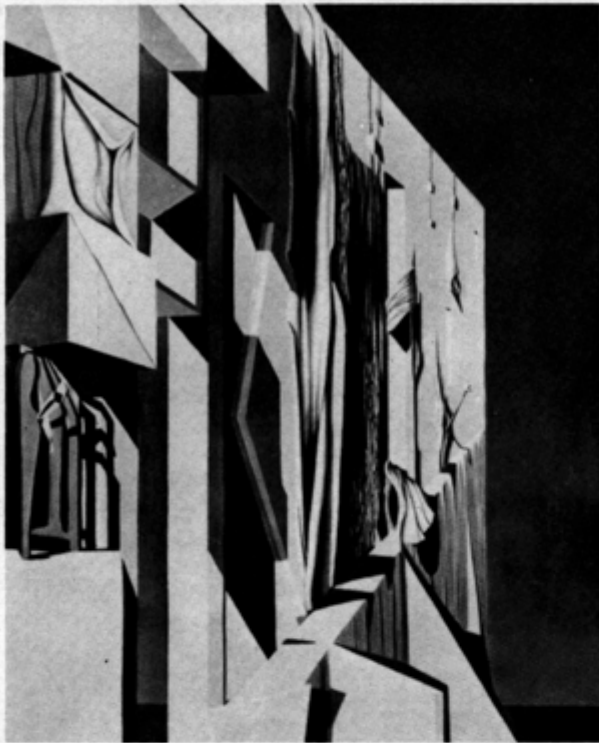
elaborate costuming, and exotic jewelry — coexist with a more private, often hermetic identification of the female body with images drawn from nature.

Reliance on thematic and iconographic material drawn from nature became another way of asserting women's claim to aspects of experience that they believed lay outside rational and masculine control. Nowhere in Surrealism is nature more powerfully realized as a metaphor for psychic reality than in the paintings of Kahlo, Sage and Toyen. The parched and cracked earth ironically reflects Kahlo's infertility, the cool, slate-like surfaces and deserted architectonic scaffoldings of Sage's work create a sense of place at once desolate and charged with unspecified poetic meaning, while the barren and defoliated landscapes of Toyen's work of the late 1930s and early 1940s testify to the inhumanity of a world at war. Even Miller, the woman whose own image functioned as a quintessential erotic focus in Surrealism, based her own photographic work on disquieting images of nature. The interaction of nature and human sensibility characterizes the work of members of the English Surrealist group, including Agar, Bridgwater, and Colquhoun. Remarkable for their precision and clarity, works like Fini's *L'Ombrelle* and Tanning's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* introduce the principle of metamorphosis that lies at the heart of the Surrealist vision, of nature charged with latent energy. Bleached bones, skeletal umbrellas and dead, dry flowers convey natural cycles of generation and decay.

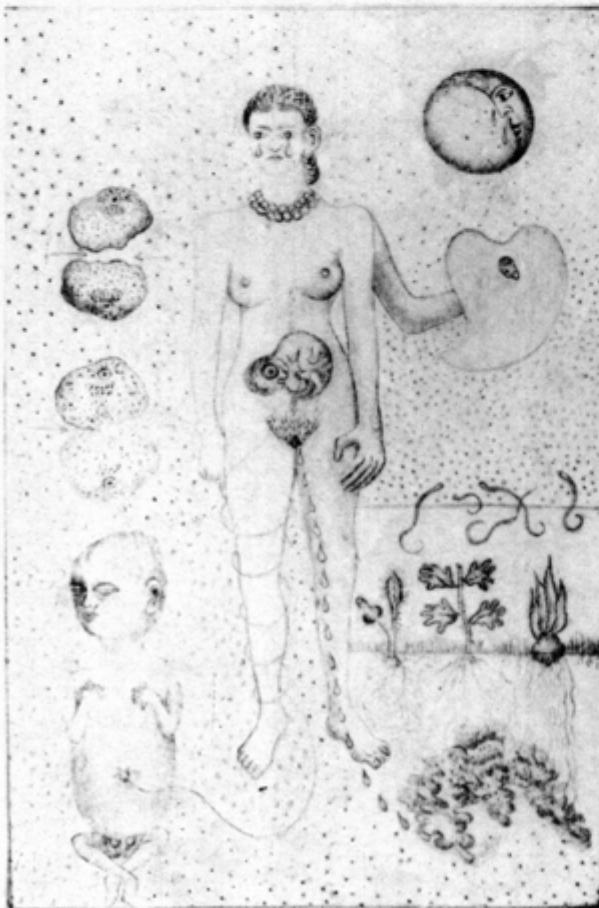
The work of these artists has a narrative thrust not always evident in the more disjunctive work of their male colleagues, and it is significant that the women associated with Surrealism



TOYEN. *Parmi les ombres longues*. 1943



KAY SAGE *Three Thousand Miles to the Point of Beginning*, 1947



FRIDA KAHLO *Frida and the Abortion*, 1932

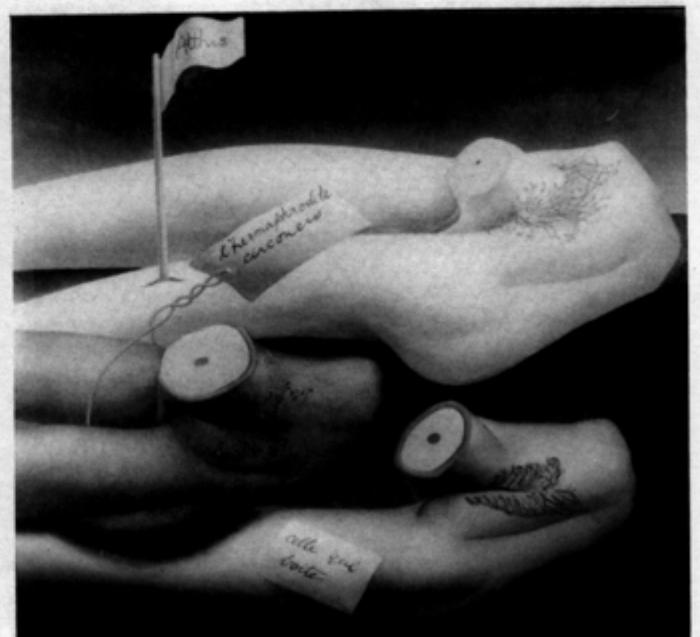
published plays, novels, short stories or poems as well as producing paintings, photographs and objects. Hugo is well known today as the illustrator of Paul Eluard's poetry; Penrose's collages were originally included in *Dons des Feminines*, one of her major poetic works. For them the female heroine exists, not as the sexual object of male desire, but as a being possessing magical powers. In the stories and paintings of Carrington, Varo, Fini, Colquhoun and others, women initiate secret rituals, cook magic brews, tend alchemical fires, and oversee the cauldrons of fertility and inspiration. Conceiving of painting as an instrument of alchemical transformation and a means of scientific investigation of the natural world, many of these artists pursued meticulous working methods, building up their surfaces with tiny brushstrokes. Varo often worked on a painting for months at a time. Colquhoun and Lamba, on the other hand, explored the divinatory aspects of automatism.

Out of this commitment to linking the image of the female subject to creative sources located in nature and the unconscious grew a rich vocabulary of images that spoke directly to the artists' lives as women. Their exploration of the personal sources of artistic creation marks a milestone in the development of twentieth-century painting and has validated the path taken by many women artists in later generations.

Whitney Chadwick

NOTES

1. "Second Manifeste du Surrealisme," in *La Revolution Surrealiste*, 12 December 1929.
2. Interview with Ithell Colquhoun, Cornwall, June 1983.
3. Cited in H. Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York, 1983), p. 250.
4. See my *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston, New York Graphic Society Books), p. 11 and *passim*.



ITHELL COLQUHOUN *The Pine Family*, 1941

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width.

EILEEN AGAR (b. 1904)

Bacchus and Ariadne. c. 1937
oil on sheet metal, plaster, board,
21 x 32
Gordon Onslow Ford, Inverness, California

Ma Muse. 1936
collage, 6½ x 8¼
The New Art Centre, London

Triumph of the Tree Trunk. 1944
gouache, 10¼ x 13¾
The New Art Centre, London

Wild Birds. c. 1933
metal and wood construction, 14½ x 4¼
Zabriskie Gallery, New York

EMMY BRIDGWATER (b. 1902)

Brave Morning. c. 1942
oil on canvas, 24 x 32
Blond Fine Art, London

LEONORA CARRINGTON (b. 1917)

The House Opposite. c. 1947
egg tempera on panel, 13 x 32½
The Trustees of the Edward James
Foundation, Sussex, England

Night, Nursery, Everything. c. 1947
oil on masonite, 21½ x 23¾
Private Collection

Self-Portrait. c. 1937
oil on canvas, 25½ x 32
Collection: Pierre Matisse

ITHELL COLQUHOUN (b. 1906)

The Pine Family. 1941
oil on canvas, 18 x 20
Whitford & Hughes, London

LEONOR FINI (b. 1918)

The Alcove: Interior. c. 1939
oil on canvas, 36 x 27¾
The Trustees of the Edward James
Foundation, Sussex, England

Composition with Figures on a Terrace. 1939
oil on canvas, 38¾ x 31¼
The Trustees of the Edward James
Foundation, Sussex, England

L'Ombrelle. c. 1947
oil on canvas, 20¾ x 17¾
The Trustees of the Edward James
Foundation, Sussex, England

L'Europa. 1939
oil on canvas, 9 x 7
Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts, New York

VALENTINE HUGO (1897-1968)

Portrait du facteur Cheval. c. 1931-32
oil on canvas, 28½ x 35
Selma and Nesuhi Ertegun, New York

FRIDO KAHLO (1910-1954)

Frida and the Abortion. 1932
lithograph, 12½ x 9½
Private Collection

Self-Portrait, Very Ugly. 1933
fresco, 10¾ x 8¾
Private Collection

Tree of Hope. 1946
oil on masonite, 22 x 16
Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts, New York

JACQUELINE LAMBA (BRETON) (b. 1910)

Behind the Sun. 1943
oil on canvas, colored pencil, 24 x 26
Private Collection, courtesy of
Jeffrey Hoffeld & Company

In Spite of Everything, Spring 1942
oil on canvas, 42 x 60
Private Collection, courtesy of
Jeffrey Hoffeld & Company

LEE MILLER (1908-1977)

Roumania—Cart. R 0241. c. 1937
photograph exhibition print from
original negative 16 x 12
Lee Miller Archives, England

Egypt—Wall. E 1898. c. 1937
photograph exhibition print from
original negative 16 x 12
Lee Miller Archives, England

Nile Flood Plain. E 0778. c. 1937
photograph exhibition print from
original negative 16 x 12
Lee Miller Archives, England

Monastery of Wadi Natrun. E 0502. c. 1937
photograph exhibition print from original negative
Lee Miller Archives, England

MERET OPPENHEIM (1913-1985)

A Minute without Danger. 1934
oil on canvas, collage, 32 x 25¾
Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts, New York

VALENTINE PENROSE (1898-1978)

Dons des feminines. 1951
collage, 11 x 8½
Collection of Peter Selz, Berkeley, California

Dons des feminines. 1951
collage, 7¾ x 12¾
Selma and Nesuhi Ertegun, New York

ALICE RAHON (PAALEN) (b. 1916)

La gente del tecolote. 1961
oil on canvas, 27½ x 36
Marjann Balter, New York

City of Reason. 1948
oil on canvas, 13 x 43
Private Collection, New York

KAY SAGE (1898-1963)

Butterfly Machine. 1942
collage, ink and watercolor on paper, 15 x 10¾
The Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, Connecticut
Gift of the Estate of Kay Sage Tanguy

Margin of Silence. 1942
oil on canvas, 18 x 15
The Albany Institute of History and Art
Gift of the Estate of Kay Sage Tanguy

Near the Five Corners. 1943
oil on canvas, 16 x 13
Henry Sage Goodwin, Avon, Connecticut

*Three Thousand Miles to the
Point of Beginning*. 1947
oil on canvas, 36 x 28
Mr. and Mrs. Lee Ault, New York

DOROTHEA TANNING (b. 1912)

Eine kleine Nachtmusik. 1946
oil on canvas, 16¼ x 23
Private Collection, England

Guardian Angels. 1946
oil on canvas, 48 x 35
New Orleans Museum of Art: Museum Purchase
through Kate P. Jourdan Fund

Jeux d'Enfants. 1942
oil on canvas, 11 x 7
Private Collection

Asleep in the Deep. 1947
oil on canvas, 8 x 11
Private Collection

Reve de luxe. 1944
oil on canvas, 16 x 20
Yale University Art Gallery,
Gift of Thomas F. Howard

TOYEN (MARIE CERMINOVA) (1902-1980)

La Maison Solitaire. 1937
oil on canvas, 26¾ x 28¾
Societe Consulta, Paris

Parmi les ombres longues. 1943
oil on canvas, 20 x 35
Selma and Nesuhi Ertegun, New York

Illustration from *Tir*. 1939-1940
ink on paper, 11 x 16¾
Societe Consulta, Paris

Illustration from *Tir*. 1939-1940
ink on paper, 11 x 16¾
Societe Consulta, Paris

REMEDIOS VARO (1908-1963)

Double Agent. 1936
oil on canvas, 8 x 6½
Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts, New York

Geologo Mutante. 1962
oil on canvas, 23½ x 20½
Richard J. Woods, San Francisco

Illustrated books and manuscripts

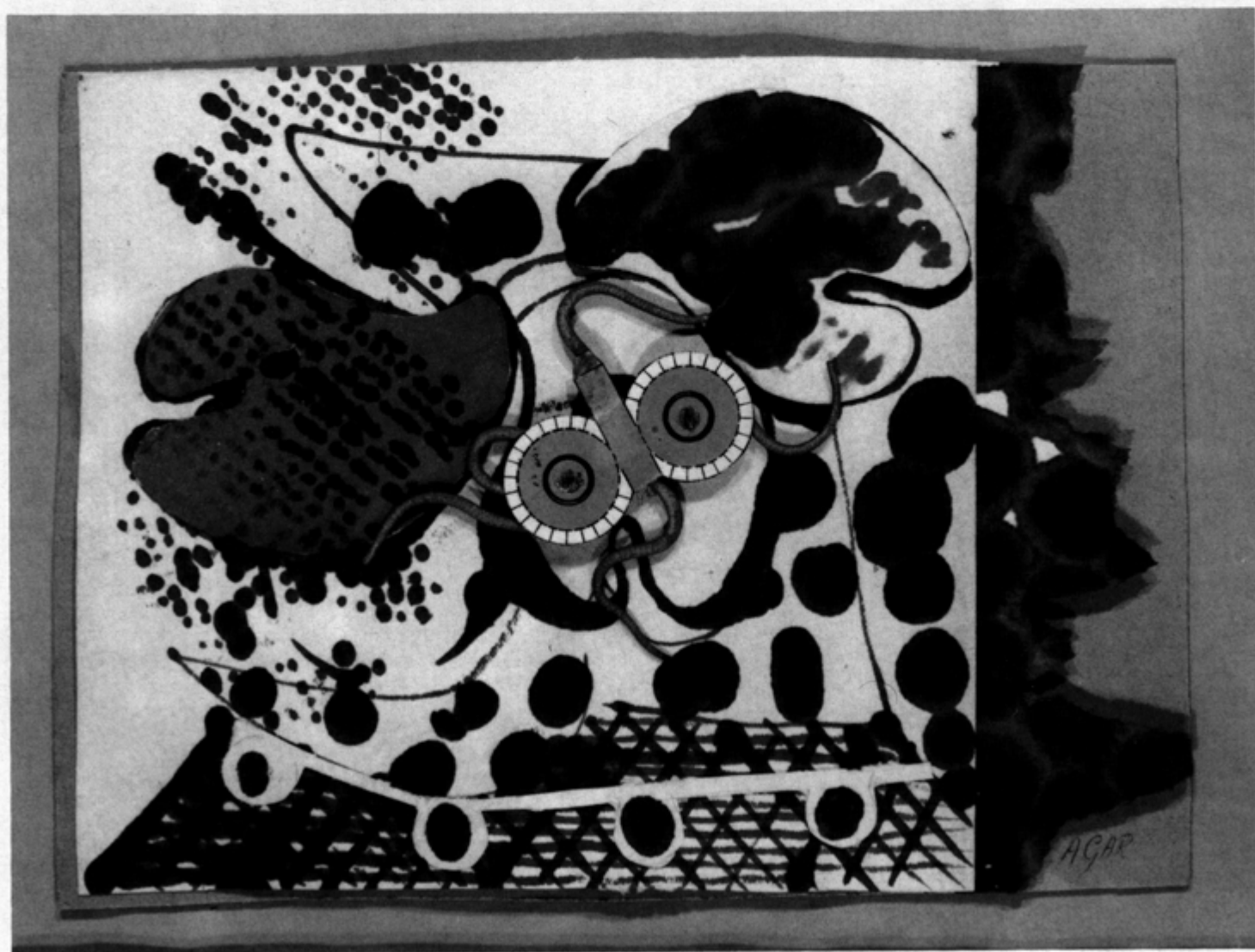
Leona Carrington. Letter dated January 6, 1944. Private Collection

Leonor Fini, illustrator. Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*. [Italy]: n. pub. [1944]. Collection of CFM/Zukerman/Shivers, New York

Leonor Fini, illustrator. Jean Genet, *La Galere*. Paris: Privately printed, 1947. Collection of CFM/Zukerman/Shivers, New York

Valentine Hugo, illustrator. Paul Eluard, *Les animaux et leurs hommes: Les hommes et leurs animaux*. Paris: Gallimard, n.d. The Museum of Modern Art Library

Valentine Hugo, illustrator. Arthur Rimbaud, *Les poetes de sept ans*. Paris: G.L.M., 1939. The Museum of Modern Art Library



EILEEN AGAR. *Ma Muse*. 1936

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PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

- 1975 FACULTY EXHIBITION
 1976 MICHELLE STUART
 RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
 ARTS EXHIBITION)
 SALVATORE ROMANO
 1977 MEL PEKARSKY
 JUDITH BERNSTEIN
 HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION
 OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
 1978 LEON GOLUB
 WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
 JANET FISH
 ROSEMARY MAYER
 THE SISTER CHAPEL
 1979 SHIRLEY GORELICK
 ALAN SONFIST
 HOWARDENA PINDELL
 ROY LICHTENSTEIN
 BENNY ANDREWS
 1980 ALEX KATZ
 EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
 ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
 OTTO PIENE
 STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
 1981 ALICE NEEL
 55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
 JOHN LITTLE
 IRA JOEL HABER
 LEON POLK SMITH
 1982 FOUR SCULPTORS
 CECILE ABISH
 JACK YOUNGERMAN
 ALAN SHIELDS
 THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
 ANN MCCOY
 1983 THE WAR SHOW
 CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW
 CINDY SHERMAN
 THE FACULTY SHOW
 1984 BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS
 ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS
 NORMAN BLUHM: SEVEN FROM THE SEVENTIES
 EDWARD COUNTEY 1921-1984
 CARL ANDRE: SCULPTURE
 1985 LEWIS HINE IN EUROPE: 1918-1919
 FRANCESC TORRES: PATHS OF GLORY
 HOMAGE TO BOLOTOWSKY: 1935-1981
 FREEDOM WITHIN: PAINTINGS BY JUAN SANCHEZ/
 INSTALLATION BY ALFREDO JAAR
 ABSTRACT PAINTING REDEFINED
 1986 KLEEGER: METAL SCULPTURE
 TOBY BUONAGURIO: SELECTED WORKS
 YANG YEN-PING AND ZENG SHAN-QING
 EIGHT URBAN PAINTERS: CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
 OF THE EAST VILLAGE
 TV: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS