

Introduction

Leonora Carrington and the international avant-garde

Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra

Over the course of her extensive artistic and literary career, Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) took part in numerous interviews. While generally amenable to discussing her life and work, she patently refused to explain it. A late interview with the curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist provides a striking, almost comic example of her resistance to answering questions about the origins and influences of her art. ‘Can you tell us more about the recurrence of horses?’ he asks. ‘I can,’ she replies, trotting out a formulaic and self-cancelling reply. ‘I used to ride a lot. My mother was Irish and it is well known that the Irish have a tradition with horses. This is a logical reply and I don’t think it’s really true. I don’t think it is that simple, but I don’t really know.’¹ The interviewer’s attempt to locate a subjective origin for Carrington’s artistic themes and motifs swiftly arrives at a dead end. Her self-cancelling response is nonetheless revealing. In the negation of simple explanation, that is, we learn something of Carrington’s artistic process: not the ‘meaning’ of individual works or motifs, but the experimental form and force of her long career as an artist. Carrington’s career is marked by an experimentation rooted in difficulty, mystery, and the openness to uncertainty and non-knowledge, a commitment she articulates at the very moment she seems most obdurately to be flouting the terms of the interview: ‘I don’t think it is that simple, but I don’t really know.’

Carrington’s resistance to interrogation is far from curmudgeonly. For her, the ‘difficulty’ at the basis of her answers constitutes a fundamental aspect of the creative process; to reduce art to a set of hermeneutic codes or artistic influences was an absurdity – or, worse yet, an act of violence, a violation of the mystery of art. ‘Do not psychoanalyze my paintings,’ she orders another interviewer; ‘if you continue I will go on strike.’²

As a polymath who experimented in a breathtaking variety of media – including sculpture, textile, cinema, theatre, poetry, painting, writing and cooking – Leonora Carrington is also one of the most powerful, if under-recognised, intellectual figures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Spanning over three quarters

of a century, her work draws from what both Anna Watz and Ara H. Merjian describe in their contributions to this volume as a 'dizzying' array of cultural reference points; and yet, more profoundly still, her work also offers tools for working through these systems of reference, in ways that are by turns wickedly funny and deeply moving. Delving into the misty recesses of ancient knowledge, Carrington's work shares no less actively in the creative energy and polemical intensity of avant-garde movements throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Her body of art and writing is at once anachronistic and resiliently contemporary, offering a profound rejoinder to the crisis in knowledge-production we face in today's world of information systems and diminishing faith in the sustainability of art. A champion of the participatory, experimental nature of artistic practice, she also commented on the ungovernability of artistic meaning. As she wrote in a 1976 artist's statement:

Writing and painting are alike in that both arts – music as well – come out of fingers and into some receptive artifact. The result, of course, is read, heard or seen through the receptive organs of those who receive the art and are supposed to 'Be' what all these different persons perceive differently. Therefore it seems that any introduction to art is fairly senseless since anybody can think or experience according to who he is. Very likely the introduction will not be read anyhow.

Once a dog barked at a mask I made; that was the most honourable comment I ever received.³

Recalling the ancient Cynics in both its accord with nature and its allusion to doglike (*kynikos*) judgement, Carrington's dismissal of the value of instruction characterises her strong autodidacticism and distance from established schools of writing and art. That said, she was intimately involved in the life of experimental artistic movements throughout her career – a paradox this volume explores in depth. Far from an isolated or reclusive artistic loner, Carrington worked collaboratively in virtually every artistic medium, publishing illustrated books in France, designing stage sets and writing plays in Mexico, and contributing to collective artistic groups in New York, Mexico City, Paris and Chicago throughout her life.

'Of all the artists I have ever met and known, Leonora has crossed more frontiers and passed over more mountain ranges than any other, and sailed across more deeps.'⁴ So writes the English poet Edward James, Carrington's friend and patron, in 1976. James was referring not only to the vast geographical distances travelled by the artist-writer over the course of her long career, but to the alternative terrains of her experience as well: from her field research into pre-Columbian myth to her encounters with madness; from experiments in new media to explorations in hermetic literature and occult wisdom. However peripatetic this intellectual odyssey may have been, Carrington's work left a profound and lasting impression on the literary and artistic movements with which she came in contact. Her singularity as a writer and artist of imaginative virtuosity is matched only by the breadth of her affiliations with the international avant-garde.

As the first comprehensive examination of Carrington's writing and art, this volume situates Carrington in an international as well as intellectual context. The chapters collected here examine the manifold intersections and resonances of Carrington's work in its relations to vanguard and experimental movements throughout the world, from surrealism to second-wave feminism. In addition to studying the histories and concepts of avant-garde movements throughout Europe and the Americas, *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde* will provide a resource for readers interested in Carrington's works beyond the merely introductory survey of her life and basic themes. Carrington's audience has expanded radically in the years since her death, and continues to develop as her work becomes increasingly canonised as both 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' in the fields of literature and art. As we mark her centenary (2017), Carrington's place as a major figure in the history of modern art, literature and thought comes increasingly into view, and this volume contributes to her continued, if posthumous, rise in global recognition.

However beloved as an eccentric, Leonora Carrington figures centrally in modern art and literature. Though once marginalised in literary and art history as a 'muse' of the surrealist movement, her relations with working artists and her artistic productivity had long since galvanised her reputation as an artist and writer of great depth and consequence, albeit one who shunned the spectacle of artistic celebrity. Born in England in 1917, she participated in the surrealist movement in Paris during the 1930s, escaped from Nazi-occupied France through Spain and Portugal during the Second World War, and then lived in Mexico City from 1945 until her death in May 2011. With a career spanning over three-quarters of a century, she was at once an English writer, a French surrealist and a Latin American artist and author who was very much part of the 'Boom generation' of Magical Realists. Her work features strongly in feminist literary and art criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, and her novels and stories have been collected and published in English, French and Spanish, as well as in other languages around the world. Her work has recently been taken up anew by younger generations of artists and writers, some of whom – such as the novelist Chloe Aridjis and the visual artist Lucy Skaer – are represented in this collection. *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde* is the first major scholarly study of Carrington's impact on modern art and literature as a whole, focusing on her interaction with international avant-garde movements such as surrealism and Mexican groups such as Poesía en Voz Alta. This book seeks to open up new directions in the study of Carrington's work for future generations of scholars, artists and writers in the twenty-first century.

As with other radical artists, the life of Leonora Carrington has acquired a mythic quality. In 1938, twenty-one year-old Carrington, who had joined the surrealist group in Paris the previous year as a young English art student, took up residence in the village of Saint-Martin d'Ardèche with her lover, the surrealist painter Max Ernst. This relationship has often figured in histories of surrealism and

modern art as either the origin or end-point of Carrington's significance to experimental art. Indeed, the story of her career is all too often bound up in the biographical details of her relationship with the older painter, a relationship they each thematised in iconic paintings from this period. Though memorialised as idyllic respite from the rigours of 1930s anti-fascist politics, the mutual creativity of this period of 'creative partnership' also testifies to the immanent catastrophe their fantasy life held temporary at bay. The majority of Carrington's published stories from this period – 'The House of Fear,' 'The Oval Lady,' 'The Debutante,' 'A Man in Love,' 'Uncle Sam Carrington' – all end abruptly and inconclusively, their protagonists fleeing the scene at the height of the story's conflict, even occasionally in mid-sentence. Such sudden departures point to an intellectual and political environment that is threatening rather than romantic or emancipatory. In Carrington's writing and art, intellectual freedom and imaginative fancy are motivated constructions. Populated with a menagerie of monstrous figures and an unsettling aura of anxiety, Carrington's fictional universe resists the very flight into fantasy to which its absurdities beckon. Like the zoomorphic figures Carrington and Ernst famously developed as their mythological alter-egos – Carrington as a wild horse, Ernst as the 'bird superior' Loplop – the pre-war short stories give objective form to fears whose sources, and whose consequences, might otherwise remain beyond comprehension.

It is for this reason, we propose, that Carrington's work has found such generative purchase in the artistic, literary and intellectual movements to which she contributed throughout her long career. Beginning in the early 1950s, as her painting began receiving major public recognition in Mexico, Carrington engaged in literary and artistic collaboration with major intellectuals of the mid-century generation, most notably Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Elena Poniatowska, Salvador Elizondo, Juan Soriano and Juan García Ponce, along with her closest friends and collaborators, the artists Remedios Varo and Kati Horna. She participated in the *Poesía en Voz Alta* theatre group in 1956 and 1957, designing the costumes and set for Paz's sole theatrical work, an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rappacini's Daughter*, as well as publishing several plays of her own. In the early 1960s, she participated in the short-lived but influential journal *S.NOB*, which situated emergent experimental writing, film and visual art from Mexico in dialogue with European avant-garde movements. In this work, as in her earlier 'surrealist' period, she develops artistic strategies for both addressing and imaginatively resisting the historical conditions of post-revolutionary Mexico; her collaborative work of this period looks at once to modern European culture and to the pre-Columbian cultures of the Americas to forge a haunted vision of Mexican modernity. It is to this hybrid intellectual project that younger experimental artists, such as the Chilean-born filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky (discussed in Chapter 7 by Abigail Susik), turned in their own efforts to stay true to the promise of artistic experimentation into the 1960s and 1970s. Likewise, after the publication of her two novels, *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974) and *The Stone Door* (1976), Carrington was taken

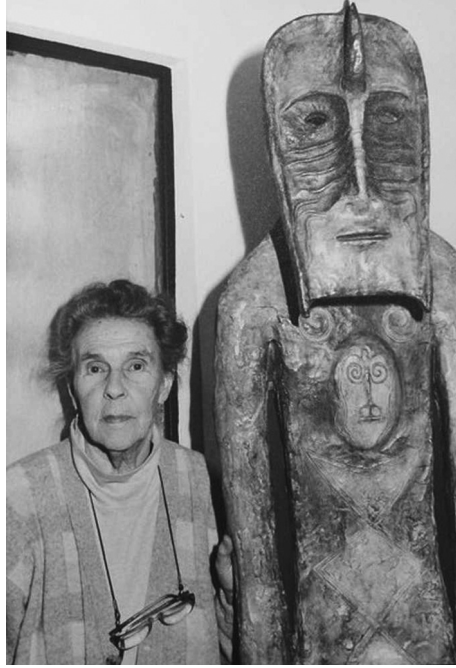


Figure 0.1 Leonora Carrington, *Ing*, 1994. Oven sculpture.

up as a major figure in feminist and particularly ecofeminist scholarly discourse, thanks in particular to the work of Gloria Feman Orenstein, Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, Whitney Chadwick, Susan Rubin Suleiman, Georgiana Colville and Marina Warner.

Such pioneering scholarship on the art and literature of Leonora Carrington emerged at a pivotal moment in the feminist reclamation of overlooked intellectual women and the corresponding revision of literary and artistic canons; her visual art gained renewed critical attention in the 1970s, and a large body of her short stories was republished in the late 1980s. Such activity was followed swiftly by Suleiman's *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (1990) which discusses *The Hearing Trumpet* as an exemplary avant-garde text; in particular, Suleiman attends to the novel's 'feminist intertextuality,' describing Carrington's allusiveness in terms adapted from Hélène Cixous' famous essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975/76), which renders women's writing explicitly avant-garde in both its visionary aspiration and transformative political potential.⁵ The fact that many of the chapters in the present volume extend from a comparable view of Carrington's work is testimony to the endurance of Suleiman's critical reading.

As if reflecting the biographical mythmaking of her years in France, much of what we know about Carrington herself comes to us through anecdote. Such

anecdotes are deceptive, often reducing the artist to a mere specimen of idiosyncratic behaviour; yet they nonetheless offer a telling series of snapshots of Carrington's artistic relations, as well as her sense of the ungovernability of artistic practice. In 1950, the surrealist poet André Breton reflected on his early encounters with the artist, describing her eyebrow-raising 'exploits by which she no doubt means to "don and remove the mask that can save [her] from the hostility of conformism."' In his *Anthology of Black Humor* (1950), he writes of one such episode, wherein 'The respectable persons who invited [Carrington] to dine in an elegant restaurant a dozen or so years ago have still not gotten over their embarrassment at noticing that, all the while taking part in the conversation, she had removed her shoes and was patiently slathering her feet with mustard.'⁶ Carrington's gastro-nomic proclivities famously extended to her interest in experimental recipes. We learn of their culinary inventiveness through a variety of sources. Remedios Varo recorded in her notebooks a series of 'recipes and advice for scaring away inopportune dreams, insomnia, and deserts of quicksand under the bed' she concocted with Carrington during their long and productive friendship. The instructions for one such recipe, which called for 'a kilo of horseradish, three white hens, a head of garlic, four kilos of honey, a mirror, two calf livers, a brick, two clothespins, a corset with stays, two false mustaches, and hats to taste' included the following instructions:

Put on the corset and make it quite tight. Sit down in front of the mirror, relax your nervous tension, smile and try on the mustaches and hats according to your taste (three-cornered, Napoleonic, cardinal's hat, imitation with lace, Basque beret, etc.) . . . Run and pour the broth (which should be very reduced) quickly into a cup. Quickly come back with it in front of the mirror, smile, take a sip of broth, try on one of the mustaches, take another sip, try on a hat, drink, try on everything, taking sips in between and do it all as quickly as you can.⁷

As much a Fluxus-like set of directives as a witch's brew, such evidentiary traces of Carrington's (and Varo's) creative practices offer a tantalising glimpse of an artistic life that functioned independently of any singular attachment to medium. In an interview later in life, Carrington recalls other such culinary experiments with Varo, explaining that 'on one occasion, we prepared tapioca, which we painted with octopus ink and made our guests believe it was caviar. Having fun, we afterwards called the funerary home, Gayosso, to give a good end to our costly caviar. Another time, we tried to make a dish out of an English cookbook from the seventeenth century but it turned out horrendous.'⁸ Alejandro Jodorowsky recalls a similar preparation of tapioca-caviar, whereby she served the 'delicious pseudo-caviar' to her guests in chamber pots.⁹ Much has been written about the significance of such recipes, and especially about their resonance in Carrington's written and painted work with regard to the connections between culinary arts and other forms of domestic activity in her imaginative universe.¹⁰

Other anecdotes concerning Carrington's luminous or erratic behaviour abound. In his autobiography, the Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel describes meeting the artist in New York during the war;

[Leonora had] just gotten out of a psychiatric hospital in Santander where her English family had put her. Separated now from Max Ernst, Leonora apparently lived with a Mexican writer named Renato Leduc. One day, when we arrived at the house of a certain Mr. Reiss for our regular meeting, Leonora suddenly got up, went to the bathroom, and took a shower – fully dressed. Afterward, dripping wet, she came back into the living room, sat down in an armchair, and stared at me. 'You're a handsome man,' she said to me in Spanish, seizing my arm. 'You look exactly like my warden.'¹¹

Was Carrington unhinged, Buñuel seems to ask, or merely acting out? Such questions fuel much scholarly interpretation to her art as well, owing largely to the explanatory function of *Down Below*, her autobiographical narrative of the incarceration at Santander to which Buñuel alludes. More telling than any such interrogation of her psychic condition, however, is the affective intensity of the anecdotes themselves, which disclose a degree of abjection and wit far beyond the petty naughtiness of an eccentric artist.

In his own memoir, Jodorowsky recounts a far different story about Carrington's interactions with Buñuel:

She had a mythic reputation among Mexican painters; she was an incarnation of the most extreme surrealism. During a party, Luis Buñuel, seduced by Carrington's beauty and emboldened by the notion that she had transcended all bourgeois morality, proposed (with his characteristic bluntness) that she become his mistress. Without even waiting for her answer, he gave her the key to the secret studio that he used as a love nest and told her to meet him at three o'clock the next afternoon. Early the next morning, Leonora went to visit the place alone. She found it tasteless: it looked exactly like a motel room. Taking advantage of the fact that she was in her menstrual period, she covered her hands with blood and used them to make bloody handprints all over the walls in order to provide a bit of decoration for that anonymous, impersonal room. Buñuel never spoke to her again.¹²

Here, Jodorowsky portrays Carrington's tendency to 'act out' as both an aesthetic gesture and a political act. What it meant to have 'transcended all bourgeois morality' bore little in common with Buñuel's interest in sexual conquest; we instead witness, if only at a remove, the profound commitment implicit in Carrington's concern for 'decoration.'

According to his reminiscences, Jodorowsky's own personal encounter with Leonora's blood was ceremonial rather than sexual. During their first meeting in Mexico City, Jodorowsky demonstrated his mime and dancing techniques at the artist's request. Afterward, Carrington whispered to him:

'Silence. Let us not disturb the mystery.' Then, walking on tiptoe in order to avoid making noise, she left and returned with two glasses of tea and some biscuits. She sipped

the drink, which was sweetened with honey, then she lifted her tunic, which covered her down to her ankles, and showed me a small wound on her calf. With the teaspoon, wearing the childlike expression of a sorceress, she scraped the scab away from the wound and let the spoon fill with blood. She brought it carefully over to me without spilling a drop, emptied the red liquid into my glass, and bade me drink it. I sipped it with the same slowness and attention I had learned in the Japanese tea ceremony. Then, rummaging in an oval box, she pulled out a small pair of scissors and cut my fingernails as well as a lock of my hair. She put them all in a tiny sack that she hung around her neck.

‘You will return!’ she said.¹³

Jodorowsky had approached Carrington as a spiritual teacher, on the advice of their mutual friend Ejo Takata, a Zen monk living in Mexico City. ‘She doesn’t know any koans,’ Ejo explains, alluding to the parables and paradoxes used for training meditation in Zen Buddhism, ‘but she has resolved all of them.’¹⁴ In place of the erratic behaviour described by Breton and Buñuel, we find instead a series of invented rituals to be met with reverence, the solution to unknown mysteries.

Gloria Feman Orenstein, a friend and scholar of Carrington’s work, has described a number of their early meetings in similar terms:

And so we went on many little trips. I was completely disoriented. It was an enchantment and it was all magical. I didn’t have any fear, even if we did exorcisms or whatever. I put my trust in her. We didn’t do a lot of rituals like that, though. During one visit we went to a faith healer somewhere in the countryside who used eggs for healing. It was very interesting to see what she did, hear her prayers, to watch people and hear what they had come for. Leonora had a lot of faith in it and was very excited. Of course, we also went to the witch’s market – she would go from stall to stall and show me poisons and magical herbs – she loved it.

Once she said that I should return to Mexico the next year and she would have built a gypsy caravan, and we would travel all over Mexico together in that gypsy caravan. I loved her dream of a wandering gypsy life, and I believed in it. The next summer when I called Leonora to tell her that I had bought my ticket and was ready for our adventure, she was shocked. What adventure was I talking about? I reminded her of the gypsy caravan, and she just burst into a fit of laughter. ‘Oh Gloria, you couldn’t have taken me seriously.’¹⁵

Such anecdotes bear witness to Carrington’s capacity for reverence, as well as her equally strong capacity for irreverence. The question of whether or not we should take such stories ‘seriously’ is a fraught one, however, as Gabriel Weisz reminds us in Chapter 8, as in his sterner admonishment of ‘anecdote-hunters’ in a recent catalogue essay.¹⁶ Rather than offering us keys to explaining the meaning of her works, or clues to the inner workings of her psyche, such stories instead demonstrate the profound interactivity of Carrington’s life: that is, her relations – whether playful, searching, desperate, or ceremonial – with her fellow artists and intellectuals. Our aim in this volume is thus to shift the focus of such interactions away

from the merely anecdotal, and to offer instead more grounded analytical attention to her works and the intellectual relations within which they circulated. Heeding her own rebuke against psychoanalysing the artist, the chapters here trace the historical and conceptual resonances of her body of work. As Carlos Fuentes writes in his preface to a 1965 exhibition catalogue of Carrington's work, 'Art is not visible; art makes visible. And the great artist – Leonora Carrington – is she who can make things visible without sacrificing mystery.'¹⁷

Spanning continents as well as decades, Carrington's artistic career connects avant-garde artistic movements that have too often been considered incompatible. In particular, her involvement in both the surrealist movement and the *Poesía en Voz Alta* and *S.NOB* groups demonstrate the continuities among rather than the categorical separation between the ideas and participants of such movements. Numerous European surrealists visited or emigrated to Mexico City (as well as elsewhere in Latin America) during and after the Second World War; and numerous Latin American writers lived in Paris (as well as elsewhere in Western Europe) before, during and after the war. Even so, the relation between French surrealism and the Magical Realism of the Americas has often been considered antagonistic or even wholly discontinuous, curiously mirroring the legacy of colonial relations between Europe and the New World. Writing in 1949, the novelist and radio producer Alejo Carpentier famously defined 'the marvelous real' in terms that rejected the surrealist movement's ideas about the marvellous, a central preoccupation of the earlier movement defined in Breton's 1924 *Manifesto* as that which 'partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us.'¹⁸ Carpentier maintains the fragmentary nature of any such revelation but utterly discards the European context naturalised by surrealism in favour of an indigenous, post-colonial Americanist imaginary. Accusing the surrealists of bad faith, Carpentier writes that 'the marvelous invoked in disbelief – the case of the surrealists for many years – was never anything more than a literary ruse, just as boring in the end as the literature that is oneiric "by arrangement" or those praises of folly that are now back in style.'¹⁹ The very terms of his polemic illustrate, of course, the dialectical continuity between such tendencies; Carpentier certainly is not making a claim for isolationism. Yet rather than simply heeding the forceful rhetoric of his dismissal of the earlier movement (in which he participated obliquely as a friend and collaborator of Robert Desnos and other 'excommunicated' surrealists in the early 1930s), Carpentier's note about 'disbelief' stresses the driving pressure of strong commitment, of good faith, even of wide-eyed belief, in the experimental practices of any avant-garde. By contrast, the formulaic imitation of so-called radical gestures or motifs, the tired rehearsal of vanguard political platitudes, remains an ever-looming horizon for any experimental artistic movement. The key was to remain steadfast in one's commitment to keeping mystery alive, as Fuentes notes.

Leonora Carrington regularly insisted that she never formally 'belonged' to the surrealist movement; nor did she ever fully reject it. Likewise her status as

a 'Magical Realist' is belied less by her Englishness than by the informal nature of that category. By 1965, the curator of an exhibition of her work at the Institute of Anglo-Mexican Culture could write that Carrington had become a Mexican artist, adding that it would be more accurate to say that the artist inhabited a country of her own design.²⁰ More strongly than her formal belonging (or non-belonging) to any artistic movement, Carrington's affiliation with avant-garde movements had more to do with the shifting demands of the present – that is, the immediate exigencies of art, myth, knowledge and story – than with the historical demarcations that separate one artistic movement from another. In this respect, Leonora Carrington reveals much about the very nature of international avant-garde activity itself: experimental art and thought demanded persistent reflection on the vicissitudes of modern life, a persistence that characterised not only the everyday life of so-called historical avant-garde groups – the Zurich of V.I. Lenin and Dada; the Paris of surrealism and existentialism; the Buenos Aires of *Sur*; the Mexico City of *Poesía en Voz Alta* – but also its attention to the unfolding present of the contemporary. Experimental aesthetic and political movements continue to form and develop throughout the world; Carrington's work demonstrates, in its own involvement in such groups, a perpetual renewal of good faith that nevertheless retained its capacity for irony, distance and wit. In his 1965 catalogue essay, Fuentes praises Carrington's 'ironic enchantment,' describing her as achieving a kind of synthesis between ancient and modern, Europe and America, and singling out most of all 'a perpetual desire perpetually frustrated and enriched by the accidents of fable and the exigencies of the imagination.'²¹ Carrington may have looked to ancient traditions as sources of hermetic wisdom, but she steadfastly refused to capitalise on aesthetic fads or succumb to nostalgia.

Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde offers a cross-disciplinary exploration of the intellectual, literary and artistic currents that animate the relationship between Carrington's work and experimental art movements. The volume features chapters from major scholars of modern literature and art, each dealing with a major focus in Carrington's career, as well as its relationship with modern art and literature throughout the western hemisphere. The volume also features two shorter experimental essays by Aridjis and Weisz, and concludes with a collaborative visual essay by Aridjis, Francesco Manacorda and Lauren Barnes, curators of the recent exhibition *Leonora Carrington: Transgressing Discipline* at Tate Liverpool (2015).

Above all, the chapters in this volume focus on Carrington as a major artist and writer in her own right. At the same time, our interests are far from monographic: our aim is to discuss Carrington's international reach, offering new insights into avant-garde writing and art in general. The scholarly literature dedicated to Carrington's work remains limited, beyond a handful of exhibition catalogues and a small, if important, corpus of scholarly essays on individual works. The Mexican journalist and writer Elena Poniatowska published a biographical 'novel' of Leonora

Carrington's life (2011) which has recently been translated into English (2015). Beyond three major recent retrospective exhibitions (at the Gallery Wendi Norris in San Francisco, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, and the Tate Liverpool, the last of which is represented in this volume), there exists only one monograph on Carrington's work currently in print: Susan L. Aberth's *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (2004). The present volume examines Carrington's broad contribution to twentieth-century art and thought, showing how her works illuminate the intersections between European and Latin American experimental literature, art and philosophy. Our collective aim is to demonstrate how the intersections between these fields and periods can be expansive rather than restrictive. The fields of modernist literary studies and art history continue to expand both professionally and pedagogically, and the significance of women artists and writers within the field remains an insistent demand in both scholarly work and the classroom. In Leonora Carrington we witness an artist who not only 'transgresses discipline' on the order of the various forms and mediums in which she worked, but also transcends the scholarly categories of art history and literary criticism, modernism and postmodern, Europe and the Americas. In her work we find our own prerogatives as readers and viewers 'frustrated and enriched by the accidents of fable and the exigencies of the imagination.'

The twelve chapters of this volume proceed in roughly chronological order, beginning with a brief experimental contribution by the Mexican-born, London-based novelist **Chloe Aridjis**, which speaks to the anecdotal quality of scholarship on Carrington, and the eccentricities of the artist herself. Aridjis spent many years as a close family friend of Carrington, and this text captures some of her unique insights. The volume proceeds through an examination of the artist's student years, her work in the 1930s and during the Second World War, and her post-war career in the Americas. In addition to examining her interactions with and responses to her contemporaries, later chapters also address the reception of her work by French and American feminists, her prowess as a storyteller, and her influence on practising artists and writers today.

In Chapter 2, longstanding Carrington scholar **Susan L. Aberth** focuses on Carrington's early art education. As an unconventional and rebellious young woman, Carrington's education was chequered with numerous expulsions and untimely departures. This included private schools in England, France and Italy, as well as the art schools she attended in London (most notably the Ozenfant Academy). During this impressionable moment, she was also exposed to prominent museum collections in Florence, London, Paris and Rome, which had a significant impact on her development as an artist. This chapter fully investigates the trajectory of her exposure to the arts, in both educational institutions and in museums, from her early childhood up until 1941, ending with her exposure to the works of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel at the Prado Museum in Madrid and the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon. Although she viewed these works during one of the most difficult time periods in her life (notably during

her mental breakdown), their influence would impact her work throughout her ensuing artistic career.

Ara H. Merjian continues this narrative with his overview in Chapter 3. Here key concerns include Carrington's affiliation with Renaissance imagery, particular apocalyptic depictions and their relevance to the avant-garde during the Second World War. Carrington's literary dimension comes to the fore, as does her own nightmarish descent during this moment. This is followed in Chapter 4 by **Natalya Lusty's** lucid pairing of Carrington's wartime memoir *Down Below* with the anthropologist, physician and writer Pierre Mabilles's key surrealist work, *Le Miroir du Merveilleux* (*The Mirror of the Marvelous*, 1940). Here Lusty argues that Carrington's acquaintance with Mabilles in Mexico City in 1943 was especially formative, not only because he provided encouragement and support for this text (*Down Below* was narrated to and transcribed by Mabilles's wife, Jeanne Megnen) but because Carrington increasingly adopts an ontology that reconciles the self and the world, experience and knowledge through the hermetic framework of the microcosm and the macrocosm, which forms the centre of Mabilles's *Mirror of the Marvelous*.

In Chapter 5, set in the context of avant-garde Mexico, **Tara Plunkett** considers a little-known theatrical script written in collaboration with Remedios Varo, circa 1956. *El santo cuerpo grasoso* (*The Holy Oily Body*) is an exceptional example of the creative collaboration that existed between the two artists. Set in an imaginary kingdom populated by human/animal hybrids and flora and fauna reminiscent of its Mexican heritage, the play takes a traditional narrative of courtly romance and turns it on its hybrid head. This discussion not only sheds light on an obscure avant-garde text, but elucidates the complex relationship between Carrington and surrealism, and the extent of her collaborative working relationship with Varo. The play offers a deliberate commentary on female creativity and intellectual comportment.

In Chapter 6, **Anna Watz** takes a more theoretical and political approach to the question of feminism in Carrington's work by examining another of the artist's lesser known texts, the novel *The Stone Door* (written in the mid-1940s, but not published until 1976). Carrington's frequent references to myth, alchemy and magical practices tend to be misread in terms of goddess-worship and a celebration of innate female powers. In contrast to such essentialist readings, Watz argues that an examination of the utopian dimensions of Carrington's experimental treatment of both gender and literary form in *The Stone Door* discloses a far more nuanced understanding of how gender is constituted, articulated, and performed. In its combining of parody, critique, contradiction and utopian vision, Watz suggests that *The Stone Door* anticipates the 1970s feminist avant-garde – most notably the model offered in Cixous' 'Sorties' (1975).

Returning to the scene of the Mexican avant-garde, **Abigail Susik** examines in Chapter 7 Carrington's association with new waves of activity in the 1960s. After a period of collaboration with Octavio Paz, Varo and others in the Poesía en

Voz Alta group (as discussed by Tara Plunkett in Chapter 5), Carrington joined the young group of experimental writers, artists and filmmakers involved in the short-lived but influential magazine *S.NOB*, a humorous effort to suture an evolving Mexico City-based avant-garde into the history of earlier and contemporary European movements alike. Slightly older than her Latin American collaborators, who included the writer Salvador Elizondo and the artist Juan Soriano, the expatriate Carrington became something of a figurehead for the *S.NOB* group's project. As received by a younger and mostly male Mexican cohort, Carrington was both a model for and collaborator with a Mexican artistic milieu that sought to distil a trans-temporal and transnational genealogy of radical aesthetic experimentalism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Carrington's intellectual relationship with Jodorowsky, which emerged as a signal collaboration of this period.

The contribution to the volume by **Gabriel Weisz**, Carrington's son, continues with a maternal review of and reengagement with children's literature. Chapter 8 thus offers an intimate portrayal of his late mother's writing and illustrations, with focus on a recent compilation perhaps written for an imaginary extension of himself and his brother Pablo. *Leche del sueño* or *Dream Milk* is a small collection of stories that were not meant for children in general, rather they were meant for imaginary children. Children in this sense became metaphors which were used to communicate something special to her listeners. The tales we find in this collection were not *for* children specifically but rather 'about' children as the protagonists. These tales served as maps to navigate the inner lands of the imaginary. Carrington also illustrated each text. However, the first section of this exposition alludes to the history of children's literature at large, and how Leonora chose an alternative route from more conventional stories. The second part of this chapter considers her work as an avant-garde painter in contrast to the drawings found in *Leche del sueño*.

Jonathan P. Eburne's Chapter 9 offers an overview of Carrington's mature career from the perspective of her investment in 'ancient' wisdom and universal histories. Extending from her work with the surrealist movement through her late work in Mexico City, it studies Carrington's consistent recourse to antiquity – both in her own self-portraiture as an old woman or crone, and in her body of references and allusions to classical, early modern, and primordial stories and myths. Such poetic wisdom offers a counterpoint to the ultra-modernity of post-war political reinvention and neo-avant-garde return alike. Even so, Carrington's hermetic and universalising interests are in keeping with the deep archive of much experimental art and poetry of the avant-garde, from René Daumal's investigation into the methods of G.I. Gurdjieff in *Mont Analogue*, through the deep time of pre-Columbian history and religion explored by other magical realists. Eburne's chapter highlights the ethical and political thrust of Carrington's interest in hermetic wisdom and other forms of 'alternative' knowledge; extending Merjian's, Watz's, and Lusty's studies of her war-era work, it focuses in particular on her novels *The Stone Door* and *The Hearing Trumpet*, which function as

commonplace-books for Carrington's research over the three decades leading to their publication in the mid-1970s.

The corporeal and potentially impactful nature of Carrington's practice is then taken up by **Janet Lyon** in Chapter 10, which innovatively readdresses Carrington's output in relation to the critical field of disability studies. For Lyon, Carrington's fluid sensorium is a key component in her refusal of conceptual boundaries: a character may smell life in death, or perceive her own internal phosphorescence, or experience the scalding of lips as sexual joy. Of particular interest in Lyon's chapter is the fact that the reordering of perception integral to Carrington's work bears a striking resemblance to the sensoria associated with disability. Autism, for instance, frequently entails neural hypersensitivity to stimuli and, notably, a foregrounding of smell, touch and taste as primary senses. Blindness produces an altered sensorium that profoundly expands the perceptive capacity of the senses. Amputation produces new modes of touch and proprioception, including phantom limb pain. Thus, Carrington's fiction and art speak to a world in which disability has no purchase, and indeed where heightened and altered sensoria sweep away the ground of neurotypicality.

Catriona McAra's Chapter 11 brings creative interpretations of Carrington's work out of the 1980s Virago publishing period and into the early twenty-first century. For rarely is it noted that Carrington worked in the first decade of this century and the last decade of her life. Focusing on the experimental media of performance and installation, McAra uses the work of contemporary artists including Lucy Skaer, Lynn Lu and Samantha Sweeting to highlight the notion of embodied anachronism in quoting 'Carrington' herself as a medium to be worked 'in' and 'through.' In doing so, McAra's chapter refers to some of the central concerns of Watz and Weisz's regarding Carrington's innate feminism and the miscommunication of avant-garde historiographically.

The volume concludes with a visual essay from the curators of the recent Tate Liverpool exhibition *Transgressing Discipline*. Curated in three sections, their contribution presents a spatial view of Carrington's creative output, demonstrating her traversal among a broad range of media from paintings and sculpture to tapestry and costume design, among others. The images are accompanied by a series of epithets and testimonials from the artist herself – some published, some hitherto unseen – which help to conjure the innumerable domains, concepts and configurations of Leonora Carrington's artistic career.

Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde addresses Carrington's pivotal role in avant-garde art and literature around the world. Whether or not the notion of an 'avant-garde' remains fashionable or unfashionable as a descriptive term for aesthetic radicalism, Carrington's work, as well as her relations with other artists and intellectuals, demonstrates a profound commitment to modes of artistic creation that demanded both an altered life and a transformed world. Unlike the shock-troops of Futurism or the young renegades of the Dada and surrealist movements, she did not subscribe to the tradition of publishing manifestos and ascribing

militant rhetoric to her experimental practices. Though we find no shortage of references to earth-shattering transformation in her work – the apocalyptic conclusion of *The Hearing Trumpet* comes immediately to mind – such articulations are largely figural rather than rhetorical, and often tongue-in-cheek as well. Even so, the chapters in this volume demonstrate the urgency as well as the playfulness with which Carrington interrogated and invented upon the relationships between art, politics, the ‘praxis of life’ and the forms of historical determination we consider to be the guiding priorities of any vanguard artistic movement. In a rare but significant statement, Carrington sums up the stakes of her vanguard commitments as a radical inclusivity:

There are so many questions, and so much Dogmatism to clear aside before anything makes sense, and we are on the point of destroying the Earth before we know anything at all. Perhaps a great virtue, curiosity can only be satisfied if the millennia of accumulated false data be turned upside down. Which means turning oneself inside out and to begin by despising no thing, ignoring no thing.²²

For Carrington, the avant-garde commitment to artistic and political experimentation had less to do with the so-called shock of the new than with the urgency of ‘turning oneself inside out’ in order to comprehend, and to love, all things.

Notes

- 1 Hans-Ulrich Obrist, ‘An Approach to a Reality That We Do Not Yet Understand’ (interview with Leonora Carrington), in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. Seán Kissane (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 154–168; 155.
- 2 Sylvia Cherem, ‘Eternally Married to the Wind’ (interview with Leonora Carrington), in *Leonora Carrington, What She Might Be*, ed. Salomon Grimberg (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2008), 17–44; 27.
- 3 Leonora Carrington, ‘Commentary,’ in *Leonora Carrington: A Retrospective Exhibition*, ed. Edward James (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations, 1976), 23–24; 23.
- 4 Edward James, ‘Introduction,’ in *Leonora Carrington: A Retrospective Exhibition*, 11–22; 11.
- 5 Susan Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 141–180.
- 6 André Breton, *The Anthology of Black Humor* (1950), trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), 335.
- 7 Remedios Varo, notebook, cited in Janet A. Kaplan, *Remedios Varo: Unexpected Journeys* (New York: Abbeville, 1988), 95.
- 8 Cherem, ‘Eternally Married to the Wind,’ 40.
- 9 Alejandro Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky*, trans. Joseph Rowe (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2008), 38.
- 10 See for example Katharine Conley, ‘Carrington’s Kitchen,’ *Papers of Surrealism*, 10 (2013): www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal10/acrobat_files/conley_final.pdf, accessed 25 June 2015.
- 11 Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel*, trans. Abigail Israel (New York: Knopf, 1983), 181.
- 12 Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky*, 25–26.

- 13 Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky*, 29.
- 14 Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky*, 23.
- 15 Terri Geiss, 'Leonora Carrington in the 1970s: An Interview with Gloria Feman Orenstein,' *Nierika*, 1:1 (29 June 2012), 16–25; 21.
- 16 See Gabriel Weisz Carrington, 'A Celtic Window,' in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. Kissane, 12–15; 12.
- 17 Carlos Fuentes, 'Leonora Carrington o el sortilegio ironico,' in *Leonora Carrington 1955/1965* (Mexico: Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura, 1965), n.p.
- 18 André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 3–47; 16.
- 19 Alejo Carpentier, 'On the Marvelous Real in America,' in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. and trans. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 75–88; 86.
- 20 Martin Kiek, 'Prefacio,' in *Leonora Carrington 1955/1965*, n.p.
- 21 Fuentes, 'Leonora Carrington o el sortilegio ironico,' in *Leonora Carrington 1955/1965*, n.p.
- 22 Carrington, 'Commentary,' in *Leonora Carrington*, ed. James, 23–24.