

Shotgun Review

Leonora Carrington: *The Talismanic Lens* at Frey Norris Gallery

by Lani Asher

Leonora Carrington: The Talismanic Lens, showing at the Frey Norris Gallery in San Francisco, offers a taste of the brilliance of the English-born painter Carrington who has made her home in Mexico for over 50 years. The exhibition includes eleven oil paintings, several gouaches, watercolors, drawings and spans forty-five years of her career. Carrington is 90 years old and is one of the last surviving surrealists. She was part of a magical circle of ex-patriot artists, many part of the surrealist movement that found refuge in Mexico after World War Two and included Remedios Varo, Benjamin Péret, Luis Buñuel, and Wolfgang Paalen. Carrington reluctantly calls herself a surrealist because "I didn't have time to be anyone's muse. I was too busy rebelling against my family and learning to be an artist."



Bird Bath

Surely Carrington's personal history influences her work. Carrington is a writer as well as a painter and draws from the Celtic fairytales her Irish mother told her as a child, the Italian painting she studied at boarding school, the experience of motherhood, and her friendships with other artists. As a young woman she went to live with a married Max Ernst in France. When he was taken prisoner as an enemy combatant, she had a nervous breakdown. Afterwards, they both arrived separately in New York, Ernst as Peggy Guggenheim's husband, and Carrington with a Mexican diplomat who became her first husband and later took her to Mexico.



Untitled

The modest but beautiful sampling of her work featured in this show is able to transmit the truth and power of Leonora Carrington's alchemical painting. Her personal language of signs and symbols: handwriting in reverse, (that can be read in a mirror), animals that serve as guides and spirits, and the themes of cooking, eating, and magic can be found throughout the gallery. Inspired by Whitney Chadwick's seminal book *Women and the Surrealist Movement*, Raman Frey and Wendi Norris started collecting Carrington's work as well as other artists from this circle several years ago. An introduction by art historian Susan Aberth to Leonora Carrington led to a personal friendship with Carrington that shows in the love and care taken with this lovely show. Her son, the poet and professor, Gabriel Weisz-Carrington suggested the title. Weisz-Carrington as well as art-historian Ara Merjian contributed essays to a 60-page catalogue that accompanies this show.

Leonora Carrington: The Talismanic Lens will be on view at the [Frey Norris Gallery](#) through March 30, 2008

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